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The relationship between disability and inclusion policy and sports coaches' perceptions of practice

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored how disability-inclusive policies (e.g., the 7 Pillars of Inclusion and the Inclusive Swimming Framework) were enacted in practice by eight swimming coaches in Australia. The purpose of this study was to explore how these individual coaches experienced including disabled athletes within their practice and how they balanced elite- and mass-participation objectives. Coaches in this study worked in a variety of settings as either full-time employees of a swimming club, independent contractors, or employees of private schools that ran school and community swimming programmes. Theoretical concepts of policy enactment, drawn from policy sociology in education, guided the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with coaches. Participants reported coaching individuals competing at the state, national, and international level. Findings showed that coaches in this study ignored, adjusted, and re-worked official policies so they would fit with the contextual and cultural constraints of their organisations. Coaches were generally ambivalent towards people with disabilities; however, all were 'willing and able' to work with disabled athletes. Furthermore, findings indicated that the disconnect between coach development and inclusion policy development at Australian Swimming is effecting coaches, as these coaches did not see the promotion of inclusion as part of their coaching role. Therefore, it is posited that disability education should be included within broader coach education and development curriculum in line with broader governmental and Australian Swimming inclusion policy agendas aimed at improving participation of people with disabilities in sport. Implications for research, educators, and policy are discussed.

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Despite the existence of millions of people who experience disability in Australia, many still face systemic exclusion from sport (Commonwealth Government of Australia 2009, Darcy *et al.* 2011, Jeanes *et al.* 2018, Storr *et al.* 2020). Statistics that measure the participation rate for people with disabilities in sport in Australia are either unreliable or non-existent (Hammond *et al.* 2014, Hammond and Jeanes 2018). Previous research has found that people with disabilities face exclusion from sport at rates significantly higher than their non-disabled peers (Jobling *et al.* 2008, Darcy *et al.* 2011). In response, the Australian Government has developed several initiatives over the past 30 years that have sought to make sport, at all levels, more inclusive of people with disabilities (Hammond and Jeanes 2018, Jeanes *et al.* 2019, Spaaij *et al.* 2020).

Australia's biggest commitment to disability inclusion in sport is the Commonwealth (of Australia) Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) that specifically prohibits discrimination in sport by coaches based on disability. Under the DDA:

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(1) It is unlawful for a person to discriminate against another person on the ground of the other person's disability by excluding that other person from a sporting activity.

(2) In subsection (1), a reference to a sporting activity includes a reference to an administrative or coaching activity in relation to any sport.

(3) Subsection (1) does not render unlawful discrimination against a person:

(a) if the person is not reasonably capable of performing the actions reasonably required in relation to the sporting activity; or

(b) if the persons who participate or are to participate in the sporting activities are selected by a method which is reasonable on the basis of their skills and abilities relevant to the sporting activity and relative to each other; or

(c) if a sporting activity is conducted only for persons who have a particular disability, and the first-mentioned person does not have that disability.

(Commonwealth of Australia 1992, p. 29)

The DDA both define discrimination and sets the terms for when discrimination is permissible. The law is deliberately vague and positions coaches in a powerful role where they both have responsibility for selecting the methods by which athletes are grouped and what actions an athlete may be, reasonably, capable of performing. Moreover, contexts in which coaches practice (i.e., their own coaching cultures, biographies, material resources, environments, and external stakeholders) will mediate whom they decide to include and exclude.

In order to theorise how government influences coaching pedagogic rules and practices, I have drawn on Stephen Ball and colleagues' theory of policy enactment (e.g., Ball *et al.* 2012) to illuminate how the coaches in this study found themselves (in some cases unwittingly) becoming translators, interpreters, and mediators of sport policies and government legislation in local sporting clubs at both a conscious and latent level, often in abstracted ways (Jeanes *et al.* 2019, O'Gorman *et al.* 2020, Spaaij *et al.* 2020, Nichol *et al.* 2021). This study, therefore, extends knowledge and theory related to the policy-coaching nexus by understanding how broader disparate, abstract, assemblages of policy (e.g., Savage 2020) related to disability inclusion are enacted by these coaches (i.e., policies that coaches may not be consciously aware of, but are legally mandated to adhere to). Although coaching practice was not directly observed in this study, I was able to provide an insight into how policy discourses influenced coaches' perceptions of their practice. I am suggesting that we (as sport policy academics) not only examine how particular policies are implemented in a linear way but that we also consider the uncertain multitude of seemingly disparate policy discourses circulating in the coaching field and how these influence perceptions of pedagogic rules and practices in idiosyncratic but similar ways.

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Australian swimming coaches to inform the findings. The paper is structured as follows: Firstly, I outline the broader policy background and review the relevant literature. Secondly, I outline my theoretical framework and the methodological processes that underpinned the study. Thirdly, I describe the findings, which revealed that contexts in which coaches practiced had a significant impact on their pedagogical translation and interpretation of external policy texts. This meant that while coaches were generally ambivalent towards people with disabilities, all suggested they were 'willing and able' to work with disabled athletes. Finally, implications for policymakers and coach educators are discussed.

Policy background

Researchers have long written about how youth sport coaches play an essential role in realising the policy hopes and aspirations of government in relation to youth sports (Coakley 2011, 2016, Gould 2019). Over the last three decades, governments in Australia have developed a raft of policies that have sought to improve the experiences of people with disability in sport, increase the numbers of

people identifying as disabled participating in sport, and increase the numbers of medals won at elite disability sport competitions such as the Paralympics (Hammond and Jeanes 2018). While disability sport in Australia existed prior to the 1980s, it was not until 1981 that the federal government became involved, most likely as part of broader initiatives linked to the United Nations International Year of the Disabled Person (Hammond and Jeanes 2018).

In my history of governmental involvement in disability sport in Australia, I point to how the Fraser conservative coalition government formed the National Committee for Sport and Recreation for the Disabled (NCSRSD)(Hammond and Jeanes 2018). The committee was formed to

Make recommendations to the Minister on priority areas for development of sport and recreation for disabled people and on the allocation of funds so that disabled athletes could have opportunities like those of able-bodied athletes. (Hammond and Jeanes 2018, p. 434)

A key area identified for development by the NCSRSD was coach education and development (Hammond and Jeanes 2018). In the 1990s, in partnership with the now defunct Australian Coaching Council, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) funded Australian swimming to develop content on coaching disabled athletes in their coaching manuals and courses (e.g., Richards 1996) (Australian Sports Commission 1991, Goodman 1993).

In the 2000s, disability coach development was dropped from the mainstream swimming coaching curriculum and was developed as a stand-alone extension qualification for coaches specifically interested in the development of disabled (i.e., Paralympic) athletes (see Richards 2004). Despite disability coaching content being removed from mainstream coach development curriculum, during the 2000s and 2010s, Australian Swimming participated in several federal government-led initiatives (ProjectCONNECT and sportCONNECT) aimed at improving inclusion at the NSO, State Sporting Organization (SSO) and (local) club levels (Sailability NSW n.d.). In swimming, several audit tools were created to help clubs self-assess their inclusivity as part of their affiliation process with the state and national bodies (e.g., Go CLUB inclusion, and the Inclusive Swimming Framework) (Hammond 2019, Woods n.d.).

In short, the responsibility for developing inclusive coaching was transferred away from government and the national governing body to swimming clubs and the volunteers that ran them. A key problem here is that in Australia, coaches must be accredited by Australian Swimming to gain access to professional liability and personal indemnity insurance and access to official coaching and athlete areas at sanctioned swimming events. Coaches' remuneration in swimming also generally correlates strongly with qualification level. Thus, there is a strong incentive to attain accreditation. Arguably, removing disability-inclusive curriculum from coach education makes the inclusion of athletes with disabilities appear much more optional. In practice, it is then up to clubs to persuade coaches who train their swimmers to be more inclusive of athletes with a disability. At the same time, Australian Swimming is also arguably doing coaches a disservice by not making them aware of their obligations under the DDA as part of their sanctioned coach-education and accreditation activities.

Review of literature

This study builds on previous attitudinal research that has explored the link between attitudes and inclusive coaching practice in the context of the enactment of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (e.g., Conatser *et al.* 2000, 2002, Block and Conatser 2002). I follow Haegele (2019) to define inclusion as 'a social justice fulcrum' that 'involves adopting a broad vision of [sport] for all by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2005, p. 11). Thus, an inclusive coaching/sport philosophy implies that sporting clubs enact programming to ensure that all athletes, regardless of ability, can achieve their full potential (Haegele 2019).

At a broader level, studies exploring attitudes of disability-sport coaches have found that coaches are less likely to include disabled populations in mainstream groups (Conatser *et al.* 2000, 2002), that previous positive experiences of inclusion predict future involvement (Rizzo *et al.* 1997), and that professionals not supported by institutions are less likely to be inclusive (Conatser *et al.* 2002, Cregan *et al.* 2007, McMaster *et al.* 2012, Townsend and Cushion 2020, Townsend *et al.* 2020). Professionals not supported by institutions are less likely to be inclusive due to the role of social norms in quantitatively predicting inclusive coaching and teaching behaviours (Rizzo 1984, Rizzo *et al.* 1997, Conatser *et al.* 2002). Qualitative research into sports coaching has found that: (a) (generally non-disabled) coaches of disabled athletes were ‘typically successful, but not superior athletes who had begun coaching at the novice level before progressing to their current elite positions’ (Cregan *et al.* 2007, p. 347); (b) there was a lack of coach education (Cregan *et al.* 2007); (c) according to one of the few studies of what Paralympic athletes look for in coaches, Culver and Werthner (2018) found they wanted ‘adaptability, empathy, [and] openness’ (p. 5), without being ‘coddled by their coaches’ (p. 6); (d) ‘sport-specific formal learning opportunities’ were the preferred mode and model of coach education (McMaster *et al.* 2012, p. 226); (e) many coaches of athletes with a disability don’t identify as disabled themselves (Cregan *et al.* 2007; Duarte & Culver, 2014, McMaster *et al.* 2012); and (f) the coach–athlete relationship is essential (Cregan *et al.* 2007, McMaster *et al.* 2012). Townsend *et al.* (2020) summarise the status quo of disability-sport coaching eloquently when suggesting that disability sport is often pushed ‘into the background of the collective coaching consciousness,’ (p. 354) within sporting clubs and organisations.

Most research exploring the link between policy and coaching has been conducted from a quantitative perspective to assess the impact of particular policies on participation (Hammond *et al.* 2014), the uptake of fundamental motor skills (Williams *et al.* 2021), and injury prevention (Donaldson *et al.* 2011, May *et al.* 2013, Poulos and Donaldson 2015). Collectively, coaching policy research overwhelmingly highlights how context mediates the implementation of policy at the club level (Donaldson *et al.* 2011, Jeanes *et al.* 2018, Spaaij *et al.* 2020, Williams *et al.* 2021).

Relationship between policy and coaching

External groups and actors have an influence over the development and implementation of policy in community institutions such as schools (Ball *et al.* 2011, Maguire *et al.* 2014, Landi *et al.* 2021) and sports clubs (Spaaij *et al.* 2014, Jeanes *et al.* 2018, Skille and Stenling 2018, Kitchin *et al.* 2019). While clubs still have agency with regard to how they enact policy overall (Fahlén *et al.* 2014), external sporting organisations have limited influence over internal club policy agendas (Hammond *et al.* 2019, 2020, Williams *et al.* 2021). We also know that policies that re-enforce dominant discourses such as embedded notions of competition are more likely to result in the adoption of external policies (Kerr and Barker-Ruchti 2015).

Mainstream sporting governing bodies engage superficially with disability and inclusive sport (Howe 2007, Kitchin and Howe 2014, Jeanes *et al.* 2018, Townsend *et al.* 2020) and attempt to encourage coaches and clubs to meet both sport and social imperatives (Jeanes and Magee 2012, Fahlén *et al.* 2014) in line with broader legal mandates such as the Americans with Disability Act or the Australian DDA. Jeanes *et al.* (2018) found, for instance, that individual volunteers or champions of change are vital in establishing provision within clubs. A number of studies now have illustrated how policies driven by sport governing bodies tend to encourage clubs and coaches to focus on narrow forms of participation comprised of winning and elite success (Coakley 2011, Jeanes *et al.* 2018, Gould 2019).

In this paper, I build on the work of Jeanes and various colleagues (Jeanes *et al.* 2018, 2019, e.g., Hammond *et al.* 2020, Spaaij *et al.* 2020, Storr *et al.* 2020) to explore how coaches interpret, translate, and enact policies as pedagogic rules and practices, reflecting similar developments in physical education (Penney and Evans 1999, Penney 2013). In the following subsection, I discuss how I have

engaged with various bodies of education policy theory and argue for how these insights can potentially bring fresh perspectives to theorising the link between policy and practice in disability coaching.

Theoretical perspectives- policy enactment

Policy *enactment* is a suite of theoretical concepts developed by Stephen Ball and various co-authors (e.g., Ball *et al.* 2012, Ball and Junemann 2012) to understand the multiple facets of the policy-practice nexus. In *How Schools Do Policy*, Ball *et al.* (2012) developed the concept of enactment to challenge linear models and/or 'organismic metaphor(s)' (DeLanda 2006, p. 8) that characterise the public policy field. Enactment helps us as sport-policy and sport- management scholars to think about the ways

In which different types of policy become interpreted and translate and reconstructed and remade in different but similar settings, where local resources, material and human, and diffuse sets of discourses and values are deployed in complex and hybrid processes of enactment. (Ball *et al.* 2012, p. 6)

An assumption of enactment is that official texts are 'enacted in material conditions, with varying resources' (Ball *et al.* 2012, p. 21). In the professional domain of coaching, I argue policies are not enacted in political, cultural, social, and economic vacuums. Rather, policies are read 'against and alongside existing pre-standing commitments, values and forms of experience' (Ball *et al.* 2012, p. 21). For instance, coaches working in elite settings will elect to work with Paralympic pathway athletes and coaches with elite aspirations will want to work with athletes who show elite potential. In this study, I am explicitly exploring how individual coaches experienced including disabled athletes within their practice and how they balanced elite- and mass-participation objectives against the broader background of NSO policies (such as the 7 Pillars of Inclusion) that attempt to constrain coaches to be compliant with the DDA in abstracted ways.

Policy contexts

Ball *et al.*'s (2012) four *Contextual frames* are useful in thinking about how individual coaches enact policy in contexts in which they practice. As Penney (2013) has elucidated elsewhere, implementation or, what I conceptualise as enactment, is 'complex and contested' and 'plays out differently in different contexts' (p. 190). According to Penney (2013), the most pronounced point of difference between policy-implementation research and enactment research is the realisation that policies produced in textual documents by organisations (such as Swimming Australia) are never the final product in the policy process. They are 'subjected to (re)interpretation and adjustment as they are re-worked, adjusted (or discarded), and worked into practice' (Hammond *et al.* 2020, p. 574). Thus, policy enactment helps us to think through how 'official texts are read within and amidst particular professional, institutional, social, cultural, economic and wider policy contexts,' (Penney 2013, p. 190).

Ball *et al.* (2012) developed four contextual lenses to appreciate the complexities of how policies are enacted as pedagogic rules and practices are mediated by socio-cultural and political milieus (situated contexts, professional cultures, material contexts, and external contexts). Situated Contexts refers to factors related to 'place' (i.e., geography and history), reflecting the locale, club histories and membership base. Professional Cultures has been adapted to explore coaches' values, commitments, experiences, and 'policy management' in sporting programmes. Material Contexts refers to economic and financial constraints including staffing, budget, buildings, technology, and infrastructure. External Contexts or networks help us think about how external actors outside of the coach or sporting culture influences what is possible in practice (e.g., degree and quality of SSA and NSO support; pressures and expectation from broader policy context, such as GO CLUB inclusion, legal requirements, and responsibility). Thus, following others in health and physical education (e.g.,

Penney 2013; Penney & Evans, 2005) I have used Ball et al.'s (2012) contextual frames to explore the multiple ways in which policies are enacted at the micro-level and to think more carefully about how, for example, local resources or professional histories might mediate the 'possibilities and probabilities' (Ball 1993) for enactment.

Methods

This paper is derived from a broader qualitative study that examined the relationship between disability and inclusion policies and coaching practice and expands on work elsewhere published (Hammond and Jeanes 2018, Hammond 2019, Hammond *et al.* 2019, 2020). The Monash University Human Ethics committee provided ethical approval for the broader doctoral project. As mentioned elsewhere (e.g., Hammond *et al.* 2019, 2020), in the study that informed this article, I sought to take a poststructuralist perspective that focuses on multiple interpretations of phenomena, and do not claim universal (or positivistic) generalisation, but instead provide constructed insights from coaches that articulate how they conceptualise inclusion and disability in relation to their everyday practices. Following Smith (2018), I suggest when this work is read alongside the work of others, I would hope that generalisable insights may be yielded by sport scholars familiar with the policy area (such as the work of Jeanes and various colleagues) and that there might be some transferable generalisability where others can infer or translate our findings to other contexts: such as Adapted Physical Education (cf. Haegele 2019) or other national contexts (cf. Peers *et al.* 2020, Hammond *et al.* 2021).

This study is restricted to experiences of coaching from the first-person perspective of coaches; we cannot assume that the coaches have awareness of their own practice (Partington and Cushion 2013). It is important to recognise the data presented provides a limited, but contextually rich account of enactment of inclusion by coaches of athletes with disability, and that further research is required to extend the picture. The findings generate an important foundation for further research.

The study used criterion-based sampling for selecting coaches (Smith and Sparkes 2013). Coaches had to be accredited with the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association of Australia and had to derive some form of primary or secondary income from their coaching (i.e., professionals). The final criterion for participation was that coaches had coached an athlete with a disability within the last five years in swimming in this research, to minimise my exposure to confidential and identifiable data (i.e., names, addresses, and email addresses of potential participants), I liaised with Swimming Victoria (SV) and the Victorian branch of the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTAV) to recruit participants. I obtained formal written support from Swimming Victoria and the president of ASCTAV, and they advertised my study in their regular monthly e-newsletter. SV sent out fortnightly reminders over an eight-month period for people to take part in the study and advertised at coaching forums.

To advertise the study, I supplied the sport development officer (a representative from SV) with the research explanatory statement and a link to a Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) page emailed to participants. The Qualtrics page elicited responses from potential participants and provided me with a demographic profile of all who wished to take part (see Table 1 for summaries). Questions asked during screening included: qualifications, years coaching, years coaching people with disabilities, and if they would mind being contacted to discuss participation further.

Twelve ($n = 12$) coaches responded and only five ($n = 5$) were then able to be contacted and interviewed. One of the twelve coaches took part in the telephone conversation phase but dropped out before completing a face-to-face interview. To increase sample size, I purposefully sampled three additional coaches using publicly accessible information on coaching or swimming club websites; these additional participants were invited via email, which included the linked Qualtrics page.

In total, I recruited eight (8) coaches (five who identified as female, three who identified as male). Names have been pseudonymised to protect the identity of participants. Key demographic data about the informants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics and key information about participant coaches.

Coach	Position	Club (Pseudonym)	Accreditation	SWD Qualification
Sarah	Assistant Coach (casual)	Baltimore Swimming Club	Silver	No
Steph	Head Coach of private school programme (fulltime)	Fredrick School	Silver	No
Sue	Hybrid special school teacher/Coach (part time/self-employed)	Rockville Special School	Other*	N/A
Ben	Head Coach (fulltime)	Ocean City Girls' School	Bronze	Yes
Amelia	Assistant Coach (fulltime)	Salisbury	Silver	Yes
Catherine	Assistant Coach (fulltime)	Towson	Silver	Yes
Derek	Head Coach (self-employed)	German Town Dolphins	Silver	Yes
Greg	Head Coach (self-employed)	Crofton Park	Gold	No*

Interviews were generally between 90 and 120 minutes. A key reason why interviews were chosen as method was because I was primarily interested in how coaches' biographies mediated their perceptions of including people with disabilities as part of their role as coaches. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The process of analysis is represented in a simplified form below based on flexible qualitative data analysis techniques delineated by Sparkes and Smith (2013): (a) classifying which policies were enacted by coaches; (b) discourse analysis to illuminate multiple discourses of disability and inclusion in enactments and broader dataset; and; (c) identification of various network relationships between coaches and groups in the dataset.

To analyse the data, I identified the dominant policy narratives in the discussions documented in my interview transcripts as part of a broader doctoral research project (Hammond 2018). Following Ball *et al.* (2012), I conducted a deeper discourse analysis loosely informed by the work of Foucault (1980, 1991) writings on discourse and governmentality. I conducted this analysis of the entire data set following the flexible guidelines set by Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2010). Specifically, I identified when the coach discussed disability, a person with disability, an inclusion policy, or the DDA (i.e., problematisations) and then I examined the sequencing and performance of their accounts (i.e., by identifying technologies, subject positions, and subjectification). I connected those corresponding theoretical statements into themes that linked to Ball *et al.*'s (2012) enactment theory (i.e., situated contexts, material contexts, professional cultures, and networks) to construct my interpretation of the findings that are reported below.

Findings

Coaches in this study ignored, adjusted, and re-worked official policies so they would fit with the contextual and cultural constraints of their organisations. The organisations these coaches worked for were pay-for-play swimming clubs (Amelia, Catherine), pay-for-play after-school swimming programmes (open to the public) run by elite private schools (Greg, Ben Amelia, and Steph) coaches working as independent contractors running training programmes for swimmers registered at local swimming clubs (Sue, Derek). The independent contractors (Sue and Derek) might be considered what Coakley (2016) would understand to be as 'sporting entrepreneurs'. For instance, when asked, 'Are you aware of any inclusion and disability policies and does this have an impact on your practice?' seven of eight coaches (Sarah, Greg, Ben, Amelia, Catherine, Sue, and Derek) responded by suggesting that external inclusion and disability policies produced by Australian Swimming for example, the 7-Pillars of Inclusion or the Inclusive Swimming Framework) or the DDA had little impact on their practice. When asked explicitly about the 7-Pillars Catherine stated that she 'had heard of the 7 pillars ... but I couldn't tell you what they are or what I have heard it from'. Catherine's response was

typical of the coaches' interviewed. The following section discusses how the various contextual factors influenced the enactment of the DDA (and associated Australian Swimming policies) as pedagogic rules and practices according to coaches' accounts of their practice.

Contexts

Situated context

The situated context (e.g., the locale of coaches' facilities) impacted on coaches' conditions of possibility for enactment of disability and inclusion policies as pedagogic rules and practices. Greg, for instance, was a local school principal and had strong links to the community town. His first 'by chance' engagement with a person with a disability was with someone who, in his words, was 'a rural country kid' who went on to become a world record holder.

Jack was 12 when he joined the club, that would have been about 1996 and he just started, with the local school in [local area] and they thought, this kid can swim, [and encouraged him to] join a club? [He joined one of] our junior programmes and we were very lucky that I had an experienced assistant coach working at that level. She got him swimming nicely, then we realized that he was ready to step up to the harder training. In 2000, he was invited to represent Australia at the Sydney Paralympics. He didn't get selected for the team, he got invited to compete and he did well. So, we thought, let's target 2004. [. . .] I was very fortunate at the Australian open championships, in 2004, he swam a world record. [. . .] Yeah, so that was an important and fantastic experience that I will treasure . . . (Greg)

Greg ran one of two swimming clubs in his region, providing a monopoly over the provision of swimming in his region of Victoria. Therefore, Greg's story about Jack demonstrates how the situated context of the club has a strong influence on how disability and inclusion policies are enacted. Because Greg suggested he had 'a strong sense of social justice' the professional cultures in conjunction with the situated contextual frame helps to explain why his monopoly was not exclusionary. It meant, in practice, if the rural area that Greg practiced in did not have a coach with his inclusive attitude it may have led to less than inclusive outcomes. Arguably, if he was not as personally accepting of people with a disability and not as encouraging of disability swimming in his region, then people with a disability in his area may have had no avenue to take part in swimming (despite the legal mandate of the DDA). Therefore, to understand the complex process of enactment by coaches, we need to consider the interplay between multiple contextual frames. In the case of Greg, these were material and situated contexts.

Material context

Ball *et al.* (2012) defines the material context as the "physical" aspects' of a sporting club, 'the buildings and budgets, but also the levels of staffing, information technologies and infrastructure,' (p. 29) and draws our attention to how dependent clubs are on others to build, maintain, and lease pool space. In Sarah's interview, she suggested how the precariousness of pool space meant that people who, in her terms, had a 'massive disability' could not be included because they could potentially threaten the viability of the programme.

Sarah: If there was someone who had, you know, say a massive disability like [. . .] you know Ahmed Kelley [. . .] That would be challenging, because, you know [. . .] someone who really needed their own space . . .

Author: A whole lane? . . .

Sarah then went on to suggest that inviting a person with a 'massive disability' in an already crowded 50 m lane might be dangerous, suggesting the inclusion of such an athlete might be a 'safety hazard'.

Well, obviously if you've got too many people in a lane with someone who's going to take more time or can't control their limbs or whatever their issue is, you know, is it safe? To be putting a whole bunch of other athletes in there with them. I guess depending on how good they are to train with other people (Sarah)

Additionally, Sue often alluded to the difficulties of the material context, and its interplay with external context, in expanding her programme. She expressed her frustration with the city (external context) in the following excerpt,

I got angry because they wouldn't give me any time. I cannot get a good time slot at [the better local area pool accessible by transit] because [my special school] is so close will pay for the pool space ... I'm only asking for one lane, one hour, one day a week. [But they told me] that their program comes first! And mine would be a conflict of interest with their program! [It is disappointing] because there [were a] heap of lanes available at Thursday at 4 o' clock [...] Then they came back to me and they changed their minds ... 'Have those lanes been taken by someone else?' No ... but [they said that their] program might expand and [they] might need that lane ... That's what they said to me ... I said, 'until they expand can we have it?' ... And they said no ... They said either late at night or early in the morning ... I mean ... we are not getting up early in the morning ... now the poor [special school] kids only have my program over on Wednesdays at [other smaller, older, more remote local pool] in the traffic that is hard to get to ...

The above quote from Sue shows how there is an ideal pool available to expand her program. It is 50 m long, has free lanes early in the afternoon, and is accessible via public transit. However, her ability to utilise this asset is constrained by the external interests of the local government. Even though she is willing to personally subsidise her own programmes, it shows that there are deeper problems with the material contexts and inclusive provision that go beyond finance. Sue's experiences therefore prompt us to think about what Australian Swimming and other government can do when they are not responsible for the allocation, building, maintenance, and resourcing of local pools or the direct training and employment of coaches at the grassroots level that bear the brunt of most aspects of community service delivery (Booth, 1995; Stewart, Nicholson, Smith, & Westerbeek, 2004).

The relationship between the material, situated, external, and professional contexts was also pronounced when Ben suggested inclusion was not valued within his organisation. Ben's interview highlighted how his employer (an elite private girls' school) constrained his practice; management also limited the material resources available for being more inclusive (i.e., little finance is available for structural improvements of the facilities and coaching hours dedicated to improving the inclusiveness of the programme).

I would love to be as inclusive as I can, but am I going to source out more ways to be inclusive? Unfortunately, probably not. [It] is just a fact of the job, to be honest ... (Ben)

Not unsurprisingly and similar to what Storr *et al.* (2020) found in their research, Ben speculated that his employer (an elite private girls' school) would only be open to adapting the internal environment if they had, for example, a wheelchair user enrolled as a student at the school and/or if they received government funding to make changes to the built environment (Storr *et al.* 2020). Ben suggested that the school would be reluctant to change the school's infrastructure solely for an external user:

Say [we] had someone in a wheelchair come to the club and say, 'we want to train at your club', I guess with the knowledge I have now got I would probably talk to the school and see if there is a way we can get it or get funding or grants outside of the school to get it ... Umm ... But I don't know if the school would come to the party ... Umm, I just don't know ... I'm not saying they would or they wouldn't. I just don't know. (Ben)

The valuing of certain athletes over others was not restricted to Ben's club. Steph, another head coach at an elite private girls' school (like Ben), also spoke of how she was funded by her employer to attend age nationals to coach the one school swimmer who had qualified, but to coach her athlete with disability she had to pay her own way.

Steph: I went to nationals with Jodie [pseudonym for Steph's athlete with disability] the first year she was here, and I couldn't get any funding for that. I had to pay my own way for that. Whereas I went to nationals with Laura [pseudonym] fully funded.

Author: Laura is a school student?

Steph: Yeah, but it wouldn't have mattered one way or the other if Jodie had a disability or not, but if I had gone with a student who was not a [school] student I would have had to pay my own way. So, in terms of discrimination, the schools probably don't . . . I wouldn't say care, but worry too much about what you are doing as long as GSSA [i.e., the Girls Schools Sporting Association] swimming is doing well. So, the impact of what I am doing, is having an impact on school swimming, and what the school can then bring in to sell to the parent to bring them into the school . . . Just a bit of a different situation.

It was clear from both Ben and Steph's interviews that their employers- elite private girls' schools- looked after their interests first. Public swimmers were seen merely as extra people who could pay fees for the upkeep of the centre; these employers were apprehensive about funding coaches to participate in activities that did not necessarily align with the school's agenda (i.e., prioritising the swimming of their students).

Overall, I found a strong interplay between all the contextual frames. In the case of this study, one frame stood out as particularly influential – *professional cultures*. The emphasis on elite performance discourses within the social, political, economic, and cultural milieu in which the coaches in this study worked clearly framed their interaction with disability policy and discourse.

Professional cultures

Overall, many of the coaches in this study suggested that formal coach education was important to their development to some extent (Steph, Amelia, Greg, Ben, Catherine, Sarah, Derek), yet when prompted to explain how or why these courses influenced their practice, apart from naming concepts such as 'the psychology side of coaching' or 'physiology' few coaches could elucidate what they had learnt of broader disciplinary knowledge and how they applied psychological concepts presented in formal coaching courses to enhance their practice. Steph's responses to my questions were generally reflective of the broader sample. When I asked her what impact her silver licence had on her coaching practice, she offered the following representatively vague response:

Author: So, what about the qualifications you have done, so your bronze license and then to your silver license, have they had much of an impact [sic]?

Steph: Yes, because I had to read books . . . obviously there . . . go along and [you are] with peers and you have to learn another step up on what you've, you know, thought you've got . . . then there is another step and this is done this way, or again you learn something different. [. . .] but you've got all those other sides; how can I implement a dry land program? How can I, say, work on the psychology side of it, where do I go for the dieticians? Where do I go for good physiotherapists? And stuff like that . . . those types of courses are really good to . . . branch out in those different directions that perhaps I don't have a huge knowledge in myself.

Most coaches in this study suggested that they initially did not proactively seek to include people with disabilities in their regular programmes. Only Steph expressed a desire to gain further coach education in disability sport once she saw that some younger swimmers with a disability were coming up through the club. As she explains:

When I came across to [my current club], we had a number of younger kids within the club, coming through with SWD's and there was a couple of times where I filled in for those younger squads and I had contact with them . . . and I was thinking, 'oh god, what do I do here?' So when the opportunity came up to do the conference and the extension . . . I put my hand up to do it . . .

Steph was employed by a club that had material and financial security and was able to support the professional development of their staff, for example, by paying annually for Steph to attend a state and national level coaching conference. This meant she received funds to finance her attendance on a disability extension coaching course held at the national coaches' conference in Queensland. Amelia was the only non-head coach in the study that reported consistently receiving annual financial support to attend professional development without out-of-pocket expenses as part of her contract. This is quite rare, and as Dawson, Wehner, Phillips, Gastin, and Salmon (2013) have shown elsewhere in their study of the Australian coaching workforce, material barriers associated with coaching can make partaking in professional development difficult. Therefore, for Steph, the interplay between material and professional contexts allowed her to have more freedom regarding professional development choices. This helped her become a better coach of athletes with a disability at her club. It is worth noting that not all clubs have the material resources to fund annual, all-expenses-paid trips to Queensland, and this presents an issue when professional development for coaches is often constrained to one annual state and one national conference run by ASCTA.

Values and commitments are essential aspects of focus through the professional cultures frame. In this study, many of the coaches (Greg, Ben, Sarah, Amelia, Sue, and Derek) suggested they did not intentionally set out to coach athletes with a disability, as Amelia explains:

I didn't plan to coach kids with a disability ... it just sort of evolved and I have enjoyed it [...] I don't see that there is [sic] differences, you have got to be able to break it down to get across what you want to them ... There is no difference involved really in coaching them.

Elite sporting discourses influenced coaches in this study in implicit and explicit ways. In many ways, the professional cultures frame helps us to understand coaches' worldviews and how they are deeply enmeshed with high-performance logics and imperatives (DePauw 1997, Burke 2001, Townsend *et al.* 2020). For instance, Greg was the head coach at a champion regional swimming club where he had a decorated career coaching multiple Paralympians and Olympians. Through engagement with Shogan's (1999) ethics of high-performance sport, I gleaned much insight from Greg's responses. This shows us how certain discourses are arguably privileged and pervasive within Australian swimming coaches' professional cultures.

You've got to have standards, you've got to make those standards worthwhile, you know. Otherwise, it just becomes a bit ['tokenistic'], I think ... [...] that's what I'm trying to teach these kids. If you want to be good [i.e., a high-performance athlete], you've gotta live up to the standard, you can't talk the talk because you want it ... It doesn't mean you are going to be a national swimmer ... My kids have to do a minimum of 5 sessions, which is half of what they are doing at Baltimore. We're on a journey, and I've gotta over the next couple of years of coaching, try and raise the bar even further ... (Greg)

Greg also said that his lifelong aspiration as a coach was to '[develop] elite sportsmen'. His comments about 'standards' and his point regarding 'commitment'¹ also highlighted a value that is arguably used to maintain the high-performance sporting ethic within Australian swimming coaching (e.g. Zehntner 2016)

The emphasis on high performance and standards was also clear in Sarah's description of practices at her club. She explained how her club unashamedly diverts most of its resources to a small number of elite talented swimmers. In Sarah's quote below, discourses of performance were also conflated and linked with notions of 'commitment' and 'standards'. As Sarah explains:

[Anyone can join the club] as long as they're interested in still competing [in pool swimming], and if they don't want to compete then the squad is not right for them [...] Because, obviously, our training is focused on kids who wanna get in and compete [in pool swimming] so if they were not great at competitions but still wanted to do [...] and improve at competitions then it'd be fine.

Commitment, according to many of the coaches, was best expressed by their athletes' desire to compete in competitions run by Swimming Australia or the State Swimming Association (SSA) (e.g., National or State Pool Swimming Championships) and their attendance at several prescribed

training sessions per week. The data exemplified by Greg and Sarah aligns with what Shogan (1999) has previously described as the discipline of high-performance sport, which is inextricably linked to the professional cultures of swimming coaching examined here and elsewhere (Hammond 2019, Hammond *et al.* 2019, 2020).

Networks

Other external actors and groups beyond local networks also influenced coaches in this study. Initial involvement in swimming in Australia starts in 'learn-to-swim' schools that are run by various organisations, some of which also employ coaches who run competitive swimming squad training for swimming clubs (Green and Houlihan 2005). Several coaches in this study (e.g., Greg, Derek, Ben, and Sarah) noted the difficulty in recruiting swimmers for their programmes due to their reliance on learn-to-swim providers. Ben's story highlights how discourses of risk (Occupational Health & Safety) that came from the outside influence of school management helped to justify policies called for by the swim teachers, to end the inclusion of people with a disability in their programmes. According to Ben, the swim school programme at his school (his employer) used to have a 'special needs' programme that functioned as a 'specialist' swimming programme for people with disabilities. Ben suggested many people involved in this programme were, in his words, 'autistic and things like that'. Furthermore, Ben spoke of how the lessons were generally one on one but ended up ceasing due to the perception that the learn-to-swim school 'didn't have enough teachers qualified and comfortable to teach those students' (Ben). Moreover, Ben explained that the primary reason for the cessation of the programme was that 'the swim teachers just requested that they don't [teach people with a disability]' (Ben), thus putting the management in a precarious position as they could not staff the lessons for people with a disability and therefore demonstrating a complex interplay between the material and professional cultures, and the situated and network contextual frames.

The network frame also provided a concerning finding that coaches in this study overwhelming did not see it as not their role to engage in the broader policy process around the enactment of audit tools (GO CLUB inclusion and 7 Pillars of Inclusion). Furthermore, network perspectives (Ball and Junemann 2012; Penney *et al.*, 2014) help explain why coaches by themselves have very little influence over broader swimming organisational cultures. In part due to the fact these programmes are often conducted in partnership between several different groups and actors, including schools (i.e., who provide pool space), independent coaches, club councils, and so on. Therefore, Australian Swimming's key focus just on clubs is very limited, as clubs are only one part of a broader local assemblage (Leahy, 2012; Powell, 2015) of actors and groups that make swimming programmes possible and inclusive.

Discussion

Sporting governing bodies see the development of inclusion policies as a necessary and logical way of 'improving' their sport (Thomas and Guett 2013, Kitchin and Howe 2014, Kitchin and Crossin 2018). Echoing others' findings, I found that many of the attempts by coaches to include most people with disabilities were superficial (Kitchin and Howe 2014, Townsend *et al.* 2018, Spaaij *et al.* 2020). The contextual dimensions of pedagogical practice, and policy translation and re-contextualisation provided useful lenses for how contextual factors mediated the enactment of disability-inclusive pedagogic rules and practices.

Much of the disability and non-disability coach literature has emphasised how important professionals' biographies and histories are in guiding practice. Specifically, in disability coaching, biography is essential to gauging a coaches' willingness and competence to include people with a disability in mainstream settings (Cregan *et al.* 2007, McMaster *et al.* 2012). Similar to Stodter (2014), I found

(using Ball et al.'s (2012) professional cultures contextual framework) that coaches appeared to pragmatically adopt ideas gleaned from learning situations and policy and adapted them to suit their own contexts of practice.

The disconnect between coach education, learning, and policy development became very clear throughout this study. Coach education and inclusion policy have, over time, been developed in parallel, rather than together as they were when Australian swimming made its first foray into disability swimming in the early 1990s. Elsewhere, (e.g., Hammond 2019) I highlighted how coach education was critical to initial attempts at disability inclusion. However, disability coach education in Australian Swimming since the late-2000s has been optional for coaches. The specific reasons why disability coach education is no longer part of the mainstream coach education curriculum in swimming is unclear. One could speculate and suggest that the intensification of high-performance elite swimming culture over the last three decades led to the exclusion of content related to participation (including disability inclusion) (Zehntner 2016, Hammond 2019), but further in-depth studies with policy actors from the mid-2000s are required to fully understand Australian Swimming's decision-making process. Furthermore, the current disability extension qualification focuses on learning the rules and expectations around Paralympic competition and classification (Hammond and Jeanes 2018). In sum, there appears to be no coach education at present available in the mainstream syllabi that focuses on how coaches can better include groups of people who have historically been marginalised in Australian swimming subcultures. It would appear, that despite the success of elite teams at the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic games that there is an apparent and urgent need for Australian Swimming and the Federal Government to re-consider the role of coach education in Australian swimming (and Australian sport in general) to meet broader social inclusion imperatives (Jeanes et al. 2019, Spaaij et al. 2020, Storr et al. 2020). Further research into the current state and objectives of coach education in Australian Swimming is required and encouraged.

As I mentioned in the introduction, coaches are necessary agents of broader governing bodies such as NSOs, and these bodies apply several disciplinary instruments to produce compliant coaches in line with sporting and social agendas (Piggott 2012, 2013, Kerr and Barker-Ruchti 2015). This process could be broadly described as responsabilization (Green and Houlihan 2006, Fahlén and Stenling 2016), in that the sports governors (i.e. Australian Swimming) are taking a laissez-faire approach to incentivising and directing clubs to increase the participation of disabled people in the sport. This responsabilisation stands in contrast to a model in which Australian Swimming uses its own policy levers (i.e., coach education and accreditation) to improve disability sport provision. The absence of disability content and curriculum in coach education in Australian Swimming (Hammond 2018, 2019, Hammond et al. 2020) is concerning and marks an implicit shift in the responsibility of training and educating coaches regarding disability and inclusion. This absence of training leads to coaches being unaware of their responsibility to adhere to the legal requirements of the DDA and other legislation. It appears that while Australian Swimming has marginalised disability and inclusion content in coach education and development curriculum, it is now attempting to use GO CLUB and 7-pillars to drive organisational change at the club level. Coaches are not required to participate in these inclusion audits; however, as we have shown in this study, in-line with the DDA, coaches (see Ben's example above) are key gatekeepers in deciding who gets to participate in swimming and who does not. Thus, there appears to be an implicit expectation from Australian Swimming for club committees to persuade coaches to change their practice to be more inclusive of people with a disability.

It is important to remember that in this study, as in most of Victoria, swimming clubs do not commonly employ coaches. Coaches in this study were instead often employed by schools or were self-employed sport entrepreneurs who coach swimmers in their own programmes affiliated with swimming clubs. Based on this study's findings, if the sport of Australian Swimming does want coaches and clubs to be more inclusive of people with a disability, particularly in Victoria, more thought needs to go into the development of learning experiences that help coaches see themselves as key players within policy and as actors in promoting inclusive discourse (Penney et al. 2021).

It is important to note a key limitation of this paper and study and future directions. Firstly, the study only focuses on the implementation of policy by coaches based on their perceptions of their own practice. Given that coaches generally have poor awareness of their practice (e.g., Partington and Cushion 2013) future ethnographic field work is needed to gain a better sense of how coaches' pedagogic rules and routines reflects their interpretation of policy. It is hoped this study provides a springboard for the further development of theory through empirically rich studies of coaches and their practices in relation to government policies.

Note

1. As measured through the construct of attendance (i.e., sessions per week attended by athletes).

Author note

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