

## The School Sport Co-ordinator Programme: Changing the Role of the Physical Education Teacher?

### Introduction

Over the last decade or so, young people have increasingly become a focus of UK sport policy. Fueled in part by concerns such as the increasing levels of childhood inactivity and obesity, and the lack of international success in sport, a plethora of policy initiatives aimed at young people have been developed. Youth sport policy is what Houlihan (2000) calls a 'crowded policy space', such is the number of policies and initiatives that have been introduced in this area over recent years. This paper focuses on one of the more recent initiatives to be introduced - the School Sport Co-ordinator Programme - designed to increase sporting opportunities for young people by developing and enhancing links between school PE and sporting opportunities in the wider community<sup>1</sup>.

A central premise of the programme is the strategic development of networks and partnerships to maximize the quality, quantity and coherence of youth sport and PE opportunities. The underlying philosophy of the programme, reflecting the government's wider agenda, is one of social inclusion – to increase participation in sport for all young people, but particularly from those groups who have previously been under-represented (girls and young women; disabled young people; ethnic minorities, and those from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. However, it is important to point out from the outset, that, like other key initiatives aimed at raising standards in PE and sport, such as Specialist Sports Colleges<sup>2</sup>, not all schools have so far been involved<sup>3</sup>.

The programme is an example of the Government's attempts to produce 'joined up thinking' between departments - in this case between sport (the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and education (the Department of Education and Skills (DfES), as well as a number of other agencies<sup>4</sup>. However, it has only been since the 1990s that any major investment has been made into sport in schools, reflecting strong policy commitments from the Major and Blair governments (Collins and Buller, 2000). The latest government's strategy document for sport, A Sporting Future for All (DCMS, 2000), however, firmly establishes sport in education as a central element, and outlines a commitment to the development of the School Sport Co-ordinator Programme, to sit alongside, and extend, the work of the Specialist Sports Colleges. Schools are very much at the hub of the initiative, with PE teachers taking on the key management roles in the programme, rather than, for example, sports development officers. This brings to the fore, ongoing questions about the nature, development, and management of youth sport. For example, what is the best way to get (and keep) young people involved in physical activity and sport? What is the relationship between PE and sport? What is (or should be) the role of the PE teacher in developing youth sport? As historical accounts of the changing nature of PE, and its relationship to sport have shown (eg. Fletcher, 1984; Murdock, 1987; Kirk, 1992) these are not new questions. For example,

definitions of PE and the role of the PE teacher have changed over time, reflecting the shifting influence and strengths of educational and sport (and other) discourses at different periods in history. The success of the School Sport Coordinator programme rests on the development of partnerships between the different agencies involved in the delivery of youth sport. However, as Houlihan (2000, p.181) notes, depending upon the differing interests of different groups and organisations, young people can be seen variously as 'future or potential workers and citizens, health sector clients, elite athletes, consumers of leisure services'. Any new policy is introduced into a context in which there will be differing, and often competing, interests. How then will the School Sport Co-ordinator programme 'fit' into this existing policy context? How will the competing interests of sport and PE (and different personnel) be accommodated within this new policy initiative? And perhaps most importantly, what kinds of activities and opportunities will it subsequently offer to young people, and which young people will benefit?

Whilst it is too early in its implementation to assess some of these key questions through sustained empirical research, the programme is clearly an important new policy initiative in the area of youth sport and PE that requires critical evaluation. This paper has a more modest agenda and explores the perceptions of the teachers involved in the early stages of one School Sport Co-ordinator partnership about their new role. The implementation of any new policy relies on how individuals, at different levels of the policy process, interpret and make sense of that policy in their specific policy contexts. An exploration of the perceptions of SSCos of their new role provides some vital insights into the realities of implementation process at the 'micro-level'. This paper draws on these to highlight some of the broader, ongoing questions and issues being raised by the programme.

#### What is the School Sport Co-ordinator Programme?

The programme has six key objectives:

1. **Strategic planning:** to enhance PE and sports development for the school.
  2. **Primary Liaison:** to establish and develop linked PE and sports development programmes for local primary and special schools, particularly targeting the KS2/3 interface.
  3. **School to Community:** to build and support school/club links.
  4. **Out of school hours activities:** to develop and support out of school hours sports programmes.
  4. **Coaching and leadership:** to develop leadership, coaching and officiating programmes for senior pupils.
  5. **Raising standards:** to support schools in reviewing current PE and sport programmes in the light of SportsMark and Activemark requirements.
- (from the School Sport Co-ordinator Handbook, undated, Section 1/2).

Whilst these objectives aim is to increase sports opportunities for young people through co-ordinated PE and sport programme, the programme's underlying

principles are much wider than this. PE and sport are identified, in a very instrumental way, as valuable activities in the promotion of wider, social and educational goals. So, in the programme's outcomes (see below), PE and sport are seen as playing an important role in the promotion of social inclusion; helping to prevent youth disaffection, and in contributing to whole school improvement.

Outcomes:

The School Sport Co-ordinator programme should:

- Increase participation amongst school age children
- Increase participation by girls and young women, black and ethnic minorities, disabled young people and young people in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Improve the standard of performance by children across a range of sports.
- Improve motivation and attitude resulting in an increase in pupils' achievements in all aspects of their school life.
- Increase the number of qualified and active coaches, leaders and officials in schools, local primary schools and local sports clubs/facilities (School Sport Co-ordinator Programme Handbook, Section 1:2).

The structure of the programme reflects the philosophy of building partnerships, and revolves around families of schools. Each School Sport Co-ordinator *partnership* consists of a number of different schools working together, with (usually) a Specialist Sports College acting as the lead school. The Specialist Sports College works with between four and six local secondary schools, together with their associated families of primary schools. Diagram 1 below shows the preferred model for the operation of a partnership, although the programme is designed to be flexible to suit local needs<sup>5</sup>:

#### Diagram 1: The School Sport Co-ordinator Preferred Partnership Model

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The different roles of the personnel involved in a partnership are outlined below:

- Partnership Development Manager (PDM) - an experienced teacher, normally based at the Specialist Sports College, who is released from a teaching timetable for two or three days per week to act as the Partnership Development Manager (PDM) and lead its development.
- School Sport Co-ordinator (SSCo) - an experienced teacher from each of the partnership secondary schools is released from a teaching timetable for two or three days a week to act as a School Sport Co-ordinator (SSCo) to work with an identified primary teacher in each of their feeder primary schools.

- Primary Link Teacher (PLT) - a primary teacher responsible for PE in their school is released from their teaching timetable for approximately twelve days per year.

The School Sport Co-ordinator programme, with significant levels of financial and training support underpinning its implementation, offers a real chance for a 'step change' in the development and quality of school PE and sport, as well as opening up new career opportunities for PE teachers.

### The Research

This paper draws on data collected as part of an on-going study of the implementation and effectiveness of one partnership situated in the North of England, 'Northbridge' in a large, multi-ethnic local education authority (LEA), 'Collingham'. The names used in the paper are pseudonyms, and to protect anonymity, some individuals' details and situations have been changed. The different personnel and the roles they are undertaking are mapped below in diagram 2:

INSERT Diagram 2 The Northbridge Partnership

The first phase of the research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of their new roles, and the issues being raised for them as they began to implement the programme. In-depth interviews were carried out with the SSCos and the teacher with overall responsibility for the partnership, the PDM, during the first school term of its implementation. The interviews were taped with the teachers' consent, and transcripts returned to them to allow for any corrections or additions. Key themes emerging from the data were then identified. Observational data were also collected from the partnership meetings over this time, and from some of the training. Interview questions were structured around three of the key features of the scheme:

- Primary liaison;
- Developing school/club links
- Strategic development and the role of PE and sport in whole school development.

### Theorising policy and practice

In exploring the impact of any new policy initiative, the importance of *how* policy and practice is conceived is significant. Recent educational policy research has stressed the importance of recognising the multiplicity and overlapping nature of policy contexts and texts, and has drawn on the concept of discourse (eg. Ball, 1990; Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992). In PE, Penney and Evans' research on the introduction and implementation of the NCPE over the last decade and a half has been extremely influential in contributing to this body of work (eg. Evans and Penney, 1995a, 1995b; Penney and Evans, 1999).

Penney and Evans (1999, p.19) reject a traditional, hierarchical view of policy in which

policy is reified as an artifact, commodity or 'thing', made by certain individuals usually in the upper echelons of organisations, systems or the state, to be implemented by others in levels or sites 'below', thereby giving rise to 'practice'.

In such a conception, PE teachers become the last, and least important, link in the chain. Instead, Penney and Evans argue for a more conceptually sophisticated understanding of policy, whereby neither the making nor the implementation of policy is restricted to a single site, or an individual or a point in time. Policy, they argue, should be best seen as a *process*. This conception can accommodate the different numbers of sites in which a policy gets transformed or re-interpreted by different individuals - where 'slippage' occurs between the original and re-interpreted policy. The whole process of policymaking and implementation, therefore, is one in which there is the transmission of 'not one but rather a series of different policy texts', not least because in education, very often an individual has to respond to a policy through producing a further document addressing the policy and its implications at a more local level, and by doing so, transforming the policy into a 'new' or 'hybrid text' (Penney and Evans, 1999).

However, in talking about multiple and re-conceptualised texts emerging within the policy process, Penney and Evans (1999) stress that they are not just talking *written* versions of policies, but also about texts as spoken, mental or corporeal forms. They draw on the concept of *discourse* as a key tool to help explain how different values and interests get promoted and expressed through policy texts, and how others get marginalised or overlooked. Discourses are not simply sets of 'ideas' that can be accepted or dismissed, but as Penney and Evans (1999) note, are about language and meanings, about knowledge and power and their inter-relationship, and are about what can be said, and by whom. They are 'expressions of particular interests and values, they create and promote particular meanings and values' (p.24). Policy texts are, then, necessarily political, serving and promoting particular interests, whilst overlooking and subordinating other interests. Crucially for Penney and Evans,

..all texts contain multiple discourses, some of which will be more privileged than others. It is inappropriate to talk about a policy document expressing 'an' or 'the' official discourse of the government or organisation. ...the complexity of the policy process is such that texts always and inevitably represent and contain various discourses. Differences in the relative visibility of particular discourses, the privileging of some over others, is central to the notion of slippage in the implementation of policy...Of primary interest here is that policies do not exist in isolation. Rather, they arise from, and throughout the process enter and interact with, specific contexts (with particular economic,

political, social and ideological characteristics)...*Policy 'content' is both shaped by, and shapes the contexts in which policies are made and implemented* (Penney and Evans, 1999, p.24/5, my emphasis).

Whilst Penney and Evans are keen to establish a more 'fluid' conception of policy based on interactions between 'content and context', nevertheless, they also stress the inequities that exist in any policy process. Drawing on the work of Ball (1990), they stress that discourses are about what can be said, but also about who can speak and with what authority. So whilst their work has shown clearly the importance of attending to the capacities of individual actors, such as PE teachers, within specific contexts to *reinterpret* and implement the NCPE, it has also shown the *determining* influence of central government throughout the process, operating to control the degree to which 'slippage' occurs. The extent to which others can exploit and use marginalised discourses depends not only on discursive power, but also draws on institutional, positional and material power. So, for example, in the process of developing the first NCPE, Evans and Penney (1995b) research has clearly showed the respective power of individuals within central government arenas, compared to others involved in the process, in finalising the content of the first NCPE Orders (DES, 1992).

This paper draws on such a theoretical conception of policy – best conceived as a *relational activity* - a process by individuals both shape the organisational contexts in which they are located, and are also shaped by those contexts, and the political, social and cultural constraints inherent within them (Evans and Penney, 1998). Teachers' perceptions of their new roles as a school sport co-ordinators have also to be understood within the very different individual school contexts in which they are working, but also within a very changing local educational authority and wider sports context, which is the focus of the next section.

### The PE teacher as School Sport Co-ordinator: changing roles, changing identities?

The School Sport Co-ordinator programme was introduced into Collingham LEA shortly after it had re-organised its school provision from a three tier (first, middle and upper schools) to a two-tier system (primary and secondary schools). Many teachers' work lives and their professional identities were disrupted by this re-organisation - teachers had to move schools, adopt new roles and often with very little lead in time. At the same time as this upheaval, Sport England was in the process of implementing a new sports policy, the Active Sports programme, and as part of this, agreeing the introduction of the Northbridge School Sport Co-ordinator partnership.<sup>6</sup> The SSCos were recruited, therefore, in a huge period of upheaval and change for all teachers in the LEA. Since the School Sport Co-ordinator programme is still relatively new, and the job description somewhat vague, it was not surprising to learn that the SSCos were initially quite wary of accepting the role. None were initially prepared to take on the role on a full time

basis, although after one term, Ossie was persuaded to do this. All the secondary PE departments agreed to share out the role between different members of the department to support the nominated SSCo, and to enable them to retain some of their teaching. Having previously taught in middle schools, Neil and Ossie, recounted how it was their experience with younger children that had 'automatically' led them to be seen by others as 'ideal' for the post, specifically to overtake the primary liaison objective. Neil, one of the oldest teachers in the partnership at fifty years of age, admitted that it had '*rankled a bit*' and seemed like '*ageism and that sort of thing*' that he had struggled to be 'placed' early on in the reorganisation, and that it was only when the School Sport Co-ordinator programme had been introduced, that he had been offered a permanent teaching post, to include the SSCo role. Working with younger age children was also seen to be a positive attribute for the post for Carlton, who, although he was a newly qualified teacher in his first year of teaching, had had work experience and holiday jobs involving running sports camps for young children. Teaching experience was important in Rosie's transition into the role too, the only woman SSCo in the Northbridge partnership. Having taught for three years and being head of girls' PE, she had recently returned to teaching part time after an extended period of maternity leave. She was asked whether she would take on the role as one of the most experienced members of the department, and felt somewhat obliged to take the role. The transition into the SSCo role for these four teachers, based in secondary schools, had clearly been one of negotiation in very un-settled times within the LEA. None had actively sought out the role, although all were able to see the huge benefits that the programme could offer to their pupils and those of their feeder primaries. As will be seen later in the paper, for these SSCos, moving away from direct contact with pupils, a job for which they had been recognised and rewarded, was done somewhat reluctantly. Working with primary teachers, head teachers, and other adults involved in sports development as part of the SSCo role would present these SSCos with different challenges and require different skills, and like any change, was welcomed only cautiously.

In contrast, Nigel sought out his appointment to the post of SSCo role at the Sports College at the hub of the partnership. He saw the role as offering a chance to develop his experience and leadership skills and to aid his long-term career plan to become a head of department. Although he had only taught for three years, he felt that the SSCo post offered experience of '*a different area*' and it was particularly '*the key stage 2/3 transition<sup>7</sup> and having some more responsibility*' that attracted him to the role. However, like the others, he was still pleased that he was able to carry on with some of his teaching – in his words '*to have the best of both worlds*'.

Similarly, Terry, the PDM, had chosen to apply for the key management role in the partnership to give him a change in direction from his previous teaching post of head of a PE department in large upper school within the authority. Not wishing to become a head of year and develop his career via the pastoral side as

do many PE teachers, Terry had moved to Pickingdale sports college for a primary school link role '*for a change*' and soon after, applied for and got the PDM role, losing his teaching role altogether.

As these brief details show, the teachers involved in implementing the School Sport Co-ordinator programme in Northbridge are each very different, and bring different biographies, skills and experiences to the role. Working in very different schools, they have been recruited into the SS Co roles in different ways, and it is an appreciation of this background context that is important to understanding how they are currently making sense of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme. Their transition into the SS Co role needs to be understood within the changing context of this specific LEA. Like any major organisational change, the reorganisation of the LEA with its concomitant relocation of teachers into new roles in new schools, has undoubtedly impacted significantly on individuals. For many in the Northbridge partnership, their previous position and involvement in an established school community; their identities as a 'upper school teacher' or a 'middle school teacher', as well as their previous roles of responsibility, have all been disrupted. Their gender, and class, has also, no doubt, played a part in their previous positioning and identities within the profession as PE teachers (Flintoff, 1993; Brown and Rich, 2002). The teachers are now in the process of building new identities for themselves as SS Cos within the still emerging dominant discourses of the programme and their schools more broadly. Their early perceptions of their new roles are explored in the next section.

#### Partnership Building and Strategic Development

Developing collaborative partnerships in the current educational climate is not easy or straightforward for PE professionals, since the development of a 'market economy' in education. This was brought about by introduction of the Education Reform Act (ERA) in 1988, and subsequent education acts, and has meant that schools have been placed in competition with each other. Schools now have to compete with each other in an *inter-school* market for pupils, since budgets are almost overwhelmingly linked to student numbers (Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe, 1993). Penney and Evans (1999) has shown the introduction of market rules in education has also resulted in the development of an *intra-school* market. PE has had to compete with other subject areas for time, money and staffing and space for its delivery, and they argue that the introduction of a national curriculum and local management of schools has done little to shift the 'hegemony of the academic curriculum'. PE remains disadvantaged in the intra-school market, and PE teachers have often been seen as peripheral to the wider educational goals of a school. However, Penney and Evans go on to note that, ironically, given its low status as a school subject, PE has been seen as having particular marketing potential for some schools. Some head teachers have seen PE as an important selling point for schools. But they stress that it is a particular conception of PE – in which specific discourses, particularly those of sport and elite performance, assumed to be attractive to parents - that have been used. However, as Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe (1993) argue, the ways in which market



rules are played out in schools depends very much on the specific school and the personnel within it (including the senior management staff as well as the staff in the PE department), and the specific LEA context in which it is located, and the makeup of the consumers (the parents and pupils). There is no one educational market, rather a series of specific, local markets in which individual schools and individuals teachers are differently positioned to benefit or lose out. The schools in the Northbridge partnership are significantly different, not least in terms of the characteristics of their pupil intake; the quality and extent of their PE and sport facilities; their PE staff and the nature of support for PE offered by their head teachers. How then did the teachers at Northbridge perceive their new roles, and their abilities to build partnerships and overtake the objectives of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme within such a differentiated educational environment?

*Teachers working together within a competitive market?*

One of the features of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme is that it allows for flexibility and local control over the direction in which it develops. This, of course, is where 'slippage' or reinterpretation of the policy can occur. The SSCos were already working quite differently from each other, and were beginning to develop the partnerships that *they* felt were important in their local context. For example, Ossie admitted that, whilst he had missed his formal induction training (it has come in the first week of the new academic term and he felt he could not let his school down at that busy time), and had not received a copy of the SSCom Handbook providing the philosophy, aims, and structure of the programme, he had gone ahead and set up a number of sports events for his local primaries, based on what he felt was needed. For Ossie, this flexibility and being 'his own boss' was the most positive feature of the role. Despite admitting to spending much more time on his new role, he was nevertheless enjoying its flexibility and the opportunities it allowed him to shape its direction:

*well the best thing about the job is that I am in control – it is a very creative job, I like to think that I am a creative person and I come up with good ideas, and when I was moved into the secondary school I was relegated to the bottom of the ladder and that was hard, as I had been head of PE before, which is disappointing. I enjoy the authority and the creativity... you have not got bells, and you are not having to rush in and do registers and so on. I can plan my week which is good, and I can create time for admin, which there is a lot of ... (Ossie, SSCom).*

Similarly, Nigel felt positive about being in a creative, management position and being in control:

*I think that I have got the best of both worlds really ...because I have got my teaching...and I have got a bit more sports development work, and you are dealing with external agencies, and you are your own manager and you can get things up and going yourself... (Nigel, SSCo).*

Nevertheless, given the 'open-ended' nature of the posts, one of the most important early partnerships to develop in Northbridge was that between the PDM and the SSCos themselves. All the teachers at Northbridge suggested that one of the most positive aspects of their role so far, was meeting and working with teachers from other schools, and the wider perspective and support this offered to them as individuals. Teaching is a very private occupation. Teachers operate largely autonomously in their own classrooms or gymnasias, with very little chance to watch or work closely with other colleagues, and opportunities for in-service training and development are increasingly scarce. PE teachers in particular, have often been isolated and somewhat marginalised from the mainstream educational decision making in schools, a situation sometimes exacerbated by their physical location in school settings (Sparkes, Schempp and Templin, 1993). The interviews revealed the importance of the space and time for the teachers to meet, discuss the programme and work together as a team of PE specialists, both within the initial induction training, and the subsequent regular meetings of the SSCos:

*It has been good to see the ethos in the SSCos and we have come together and we appreciate right what can we do for each other ...everyone is more than happy to share ideas or support each other ...it is not we have got this and you can't see that... I have been quite surprised by that.....I think that there is still a competitive ethos and there needs to be but in terms of the staffing and provision, it is much more what we can do for each other now really, but that can only be better for the provision of sport...in the locality so it is definitely, that is one of the positives to come out... (Nigel, SSCo).*

*one of the best things about it [the training] was actually getting together. That was the first time, or the second time we had got together with the other SSCOs. You know you are stuck in your own school and not really knowing how the others are working it. (Rosie, SSCo).*

*...I am enjoying the liaison, working with adults, rather than just working with kids..It can be a lonely job, just you and the kids, coffee break, then you and the kids again (Ossie, SSCo).*

*I met about a dozen other PDMs [at the induction training] in a similar situation to me up and down the country and the sessions in*

*coffee and the lunch hours when we talked about how they were going to approach the job, compared to how I felt the job was going to be ...that was very helpful. (Terry, PDM).*

For these PE teachers, who have previously interacted with each other largely through competitive inter-school fixtures, the School Sport Co-ordinator programme offers opportunities for different kinds of interaction and staff development based on collaboration and cooperation. However, despite the collective support which individuals felt the partnership was offering, meetings were also spaces for disagreement, debate and positioning. Although there is too little space here to explore this in any detail, individuals made different contributions to the partnership meetings as they negotiated their new identities within the group. Although each SSCo writes their own development plan, the role of the PDM in coordinating the overall partnership plan, and ensuring both its quality and its financial viability, is a tricky one. Personalities and professional identities all play a part, and the role of the PDM in chairing the meetings and establishing a cooperative, supportive atmosphere within the partnership is an ongoing challenge. As Terry wryly noted of his role: '*PDM stands for Pig Din the Middle!*'. Whilst early indications from Northbridge suggest that partnership building between the PDM and the SSCos has clearly begun, it is important to note that the process is not straightforward, or the same for different kinds of partners. Some partnerships are easier to establish than others, and certainly after establishing links with each other, a lot of the initial work of the SSCos focused on the partnerships between the secondary schools and their feeder primaries, rather than with wider sports development agencies. As the discussion below indicates, the SSCos felt less confident (at least in these initial stages) about building these relationships than with their primary schools. This might have been the case for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the SSCos reported much of the initial training pointed towards primary liaison as a starting point for their work. However, it may also have reflected the operation of the educational market. Since secondary schools are in competition with one another for pupils, it is in their interest to develop strong links with their feeder primaries. It is probably also the case that the SSCos felt that they may have the necessary skills to work with other teachers in their subject area, although, as the section below explores, even these partnerships are not necessarily as straightforward as they might first appear.

### *Primary Liaison*

Part of the challenge of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme is to develop coherent and progressive opportunities for PE and sport for young people both within and between the primary/secondary phases. However, since teachers are trained to teach within a specific age phase of the schooling system and the philosophies and methodologies in primary education differ significantly from those of secondary education, it is not necessarily straightforward for secondary trained SSCos to work with primary colleagues. Opinions differed between the SSCos as to this challenge. For Neil, with many years of teaching experience in

middle school behind him, this element of the SSSCo role was 'nothing new', but as part of his everyday PE teacher role:

*I might sound a bit like blowing my own trumpet but I have not found it difficult at all. Now, I am older, I have more experience, I have the experience of working in a middle school, and working with younger kids, and I have seen the pressures that teachers can be put under....so I have been able to approach it in a different way. It is ..I have found that lots of things that are in there, are things that I have been doing anyway and I have had experience of...and so in a sense there is (sic) not a great deal of things that are new (Neil, SSSCo).*

Similarly, Nigel felt, as a professional, he should be able to achieve the programme's objectives with confidence, since there were many areas where he had already had experience:

*Er...I would like to think that I have a broad balance [of experience in the key areas of the scheme] in them all really...when you look at them all as a professional you can go in there and help out with eg, curriculum planning..you know, schemes of work, enhancing community and running clubs, out of school hours, coaching, leadership...that kind of thing...you know they are all intertwined...(Nigel, SSSCo)*

Nevertheless he was prepared to admit that he would have to work to build relationships with the primary teachers in his cluster. He recounted the reaction of some of the PLTs to his age and experience on their initial meeting:

*I know that when I met some of the PLTs, they said how old are you, how long have you been teaching and I took that as ..whoa, OK, as if they were saying well...who are you, you look a bit young to be doing this, what do you know... so I said, fair enough ...yeah....no, I said that I have just got to go out and prove my worth really...(Nigel, SSSCo).*

Although he didn't acknowledge it overtly in his interview, Nigel's gender could also be part of the resources on which he was able to draw in developing his 'reputation'. Other work has shown how male PE teachers' gendered identity plays a part in their positioning within the profession and in their pedagogy (eg. Evans and Williams, 1989; Brown and Rich, 2002). It is interesting to note how much less confident Rosie appeared to be about this aspect of her new role in comparison to the other male SSSCos, and readily admitted that she had 'a lot to learn' about working with primary schools:

*We found out quite a lot about primary education that we probably didn't know, and we were probably quite shocked at how little we knew about that..... it made you think that there is a lot to learn before I go into the primary school. Because you can't just go down there and say, right I am going to sort out your PE department, when you know nothing about KS1 or 2 PE! (Rosie, SSCo).*

She may, of course, simply be more self-reflective than Nigel and acknowledge the mutual learning process that needed to occur if she was to work effectively with her PLTs.

These comments highlight some of the challenges faced by the SSCos in working with their cluster primary schools. Specialist trained PE teachers may not necessarily be best placed to support the development of primary PE. For example, whilst it could be argued that they may have more specialised subject knowledge, they may struggle to apply this within a primary age setting. Similarly, there may well be mismatches between the *kinds* of subject knowledge required in primary schools to that which the secondary specialist can offer. The Key Stage (KS) 2 curriculum requirements are much broader (at least in some schools) than those of the KS3 curriculum. The curriculum at KS3 in many schools remains focused on a narrow range of competitive team games and sex differentiated programmes with weakness in dance and outdoor education (Clay, 1997). Also, some secondary PE teachers continue to be strongly gendered in their subject expertise and in their pedagogical strategies (Flintoff, 1995; Harris and Penney, 2002; Waddington, Malcolm and Cobb, 1998). Certainly, when some of the primary schools returned their initial audits of their provision, and identified dance and gymnastics as areas for development, some of the SSCos admitted that they would need to get in specialist help to support the development of dance. Terry and Nigel had recently attended an in-service course in dance to improve their skills in this area. Given the gendered nature of the PE profession more generally, this is perhaps not a surprising finding, and one also found in other School Sport Co-ordinator partnerships (Sport England, 2002). It should not be assumed, therefore, that the SSCos work with primary colleagues to raise standards will be straight forward or easy. However, one of the advantages of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme is that it is flexible enough to be *developmental*, and the sharing of good practice between staff with different expertise and age range experience, as well as drawing on that outside the education profession, such as provided by sports development officers (SDOs) or coaches, has been one of the positive outcomes already evident in the programme (Sport England, 2002). Although the SSCos felt that their teaching experience was important to their role, they were also aware that primary development work would be very much about liaison and partnership. As Neil commented in one of the early meetings '*the primary teachers have lots to offer us as well – it's not only one way*'.

*Developing school/club links.*

Building partnerships between schools and wider community sports clubs is another key objective of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme. It is only recently that policy initiatives from one government department have paid more than lip service to those from another. Sue Campbell<sup>8</sup>'s appointment as the non-political adviser to the DfES and the DCMS, and the development of the School Sport Alliance, has clearly been highly influential in attempts to coordinate PE and sport policy. However, the success at national level of 'joined up policy thinking' is not automatically translated unproblematically into action in policy implementation contexts. Robson (2001), for example, has noted that although there are many advantages of different organisations and groups working together, such as a pooling of resources and expertise, differences in organisational cultures and priorities have also to be resolved if the partnerships are to be mutually beneficial.

Terry, the PDM, was already aware of the challenges presented by working across the different partnerships, and viewed the building of partnerships between schools and wider community networks as potentially one of the more difficult aspects of the programme. From early on in the programme, he was working hard on building the relationships with the local SDOs. It is important to note here, again, that there were significant changes to this wider sports context, as the new Active Sports framework was being established within the authority, with its concomitant changes in job descriptions and priorities. Nevertheless, he felt that he was in a strong position to lead, given that the sports college had already done a lot of good work, and because of his long experience in the authority which meant that he knew a lot of people personally – in his own words '*that's the advantage of having an old gimmer as a PDM!*'. He had structured a number of his partnership meetings to include awareness-raising items on wider sports development initiatives; had taken time to meet and explain the School Sport Co-ordinator programme with the local SDO team, and was encouraging his SSCos to begin to make personal contacts with their SDOs. Getting people to work together was a big aspect of his role:

*I think for it to work it is a people thing..they have all got to get on and they have to all push in the same direction. I think that part of the PDM role is to try and draw together all the potentially different factions and different points of view together (Terry, PDM).*

Nevertheless, he also recognised that he may already have '*ruffled some feathers*' of the SDOs as the impact of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme on their roles begins to develop.

This wider strategic perspective was perhaps not currently shared by all of the SSCos, with some admitting that they would need to become more aware of the wider community sports development context. Ossie, for example, described himself as being '*very naïve*' at the moment, and enjoying becoming '*more worldly*' through his training. Neil commented on the same challenge:

*I think if anything it is the use of the outside agencies...like how to get the most of that side of things. Where to be able to go to find outside agencies...A lot of the stuff I have done before has always been ..sort of ..mostly in-house, it has not been ...It is looking at taking a wider perspective. Other than the normal agencies we would use within schooling, your development officers we would have used anyway, but it is when you go outside that sort of area you know... (Neil, SSCo).*

Perceptions of the worth of some partnership building varied between SSCos. Whilst Nigel had got straight into building relationships with his SDOs, Ossie was more reticent, at least initially, and admitted,

*I am doing a lot myself because I feel I am well placed in the sports that I am starting..I am level two coach in football, basketball and cricket... The only SDO that I have contacted so far, is a cricket one but he has tried to help me with a cricket net but he didn't turn up to one of our meetings, and everyone was waiting to hear what he was going to say.....I am a little bit ...what's the word ..skeptical about the SDOs, especially in the leafy lanes. I think that they feel that their main work is in the inner cities and I get that impression, and to be fair, I think that they are more needed there because we can do a lot here ourselves.. (Ossie, SSCo).*

Working on the School Sport Co-ordinator programme entails the Northbridge teachers moving into a different kind of work – strategic development work. This involves not just working with different organisations and agencies but also developing written plans about the strategic direction of that work. Over the last decade or so, PE teachers have been under increasing pressure to be accountable for their work, with some seeing this as simply increasing the amount of paper work involved rather than improving the quality of their work (Evans, et al, 1993b). Certainly, the SSCos considered the writing of their three-year development plan – central to the initial stages of their planning - to be the most challenging and for some, the least interesting. Perhaps this should not be surprising, given the newness of the partnership, and the fact that all but Ossie, were doing the job on a part time basis. Sport England (2002) found that SSCos elsewhere, particularly those operating on a part time basis, had taken more time to adapt to the changing role. The Northbridge teachers admitted to struggling with the development plan process, having had very little previous experience of this kind of work, and were finding this stage very different from their usual role of teaching, mirroring findings in other partnerships (Sport England, 2002; Hendley, 2001). They were keen to finish the development plan and get on with what they saw as the 'real work' of the programme– setting up sporting opportunities for young people. For example, Rosie and Nigel have not necessarily seen the writing of the development plan as either enjoyable or part of the 'real work' of the SSCo role:

*I am finding that ...certainly at the moment, it is more of an admin job than anything else and, to be honest, I am not really enjoying that side of things because that is not really me. That is why I am glad I kept some teaching on actually because, you know, I am not ready to give up teaching (Rosie, SSCo).*

*I am not really sure [what the role is about] because I have not been into the primary schools and actually started the role. At the minute it is going through the motions of going and meeting and doing the audit, getting everything to do it, and the big test will come in January when it is all..er hell let loose (Nigel, SSCo).*

Involvement in the School Sport Co-ordinator programme requires different skills of the teachers involved, and although the programme is supported by a staff development training programme it is clear that this initial training, although perceived as very useful by the Northbridge teachers, has only gone part of the way to helping the development of these new skills. Like other policy initiatives, the development of its staff through ongoing training and development will be central to the long-term success of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme. This will be important to assess as the partnership develops<sup>9</sup>.

#### *Strategic development and the role of PE and sport in whole school development.*

One of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme's outcomes is that it should make a contribution to pupils' overall achievement in school, by improving their motivation and attitude. Recent research by the QCA has demonstrated the important role that PE and sport can play in raising whole school standards and promoting a positive school ethos (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website - [www.qca.org.uk/ca/subjects/pe](http://www.qca.org.uk/ca/subjects/pe)). Others similarly, have argued that investment in school sport can contribute to raising school examination standards (Youth Sport Trust, 2000). How then can the School Sport Co-ordinator programme contribute to improving pupils' attitudes and motivation, not just in PE and sport, but in their schooling more widely?

Whilst it is early days for the Northbridge partnership, the perceptions of the SSCos and the PDM in relation to this aspect of their role were quite vague. Most of them could see that sports activities, particularly if the events were covered in the local media, could be positive for raising the whole school profile. Similarly, they could see how pupils' attitudes to schooling might be improved by their involvement in school sport. Terry, the PDM commented:

*Hopefully,...yeah, I think that if kids get more tuned in on sport and good things are happening, then their overall persona is going to be*



*more positive, and hopefully they may attend school more often ,and hopefully have a knock-on effect on the rest of their school lives...*

However, in terms of contributing significantly to whole school development plans, the Northbridge teachers were quite philosophical about what could be achieved - in this academic year in particular. They were very much aware that their head teachers were focused almost exclusively on accommodating the LEA reorganisational changes. Similarly, they were also aware of the impact of other policy initiatives that meant that, for example, their primary teachers were prioritising the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy, rather than physical skills.

Nevertheless, Terry , the PDM, was very much aware of the importance of them maintaining the wider school focus:

*Hopefully this doesn't sound too cynical but there could well be ..hidden agendas, of why so much money is being pumped into this scheme. So we have to be very aware of, yes, philosophically, as PE teachers that we are improving overall links and overall standards and all the rest of it...I do think we have to be very aware of the picture, not just the PE picture.....*

He reflected on the position and status of PE, and PE teachers too, within the wider school perspective, and was aware that this might not always be straightforward:

*...because the PE department tends to be a bit out on a limb, not only geographically but also philosophically as well, in a school, [it means] that possibly, a few barriers have to be challenged and broken.*

The identification of strategic planning as one of the objectives of the School Sport Programme has helped to ensure that SSCos do address the relationship of their work to whole school developments. Northbridge has included important targets in their development plan around this, such as setting up communication channels with senior management about the successes of the programmes; working to include PE and sport in school development plans, and identifying a school governor to take responsibility for PE and sport. In order to successfully fulfill these, the SSCos are aware that they will have to adopt a wider, advocacy role within their school communities in the future.

Some time ago Penney and Evans (1995) warned about the marginalisation of PE teachers from the mainstream of educational activity in their school if they were to compete successfully in the intra-school market for funds. Their point is equally well made in relation to the broader SSCos' task of raising the profile of PE and sport, and building it into school development plans:

PE teachers who remain detached from the mainstream of educational activity within their schools and the decision making of their senior management, do so at their peril. If they are to stand a chance of securing the resources they need to further positive curriculum development and the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum for all the pupils in their care, they cannot be content to 'leave meetings to others' and decisions about resource allocations to the judgments of senior management or head teachers' (Penney and Evans, 1995, p. 20)

The success of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme in relation to this wider objective of improving children's attitudes and motivation to schooling assumes that the activities, but perhaps more importantly, the ethos underpinning them, will be first and foremost *educational*, and that the opportunities will be accessible and involve all young people. Certainly the official discourse of the programme is firmly about social inclusion and improving the representation of marginalised groups in school sport. The School Sport Co-ordinator Handbook includes three chapters with information and advice on working with identified under-represented groups: girls and young women; ethnic minorities and young people with disabilities. Similarly, the NOF funding provided to support after school hours PE and sport clubs as part of the programme will not be released to individual partnerships without the development plans showing clearly identified target groups and educational outcomes for the planned activities. However, getting involvement from under-represented groups will not be easy. Previous research has shown that it is children from middle class families that have been over-represented in earlier initiatives, such as Champion Coaching, aimed at increasing young people's involvement in sports activities (Collins and Buller, 2000). Young people's sports involvement continues to be heavily differentiated by gender and ethnicity, with girls and children from ethnic minority backgrounds, under-represented (Rowe and Champion, 2000). Whilst it is still early in the life of the Northbridge partnership, observational and interview data suggest that a sporting discourse has been dominant in the work so far. Whether the School Sport Co-ordinator programme can contribute to the social inclusion agenda of the government will depend, to a large extent, upon efforts and philosophies of individual SSCos, working within their school catchment communities but also in partnership with staff inside their own schools. It is hoped that future research will be able to report on this aspect of the Northbridge partnership as it develops.

**Concluding comments:**

SSCos will need to have a good understanding of young people and an appreciation of their different motivations and attitudes towards physical activity and sport involvement if the school sport co-ordinator programme is to be successful in its aims. As MacDonald (2002) notes, young people have multiple identities and learn in and across a number of different contexts and places. For many young people, the school may not be the primary context for meaningful learning, as recent research on young women's active lifestyles illustrates (eg. Flintoff and Scraton, 2001). Part of the SSCos work will be to identify contexts

beyond the school and its immediate setting that can provide positive learning environments for different youngsters. Positively, the reluctance of the teachers in the Northbridge partnership to give up their teaching role completely suggests a close affiliation with the *educational* process as part of their work identities. The School Sport Co-ordinator programme offers the opportunity to develop new learning contexts for young people to be involved in sport, which, whilst they may be located outside the school context, could be underpinned by strong educational (and specifically, inclusion/equity) discourses. For example, Verma and Darby's (1994) research has shown the success of the Youth and Community service in working with minority ethnic youngsters, otherwise very much under-represented in mainstream sport. The key point here is that sport is used as an activity *through which* the wider goals of the service are achieved, rather than as the end in itself. However, as MacDonald (2002) warns, the danger in making alliances with groups outside of schools and the educational environment, is that this educational agenda might be lost – for example, sports coaches might be more interested in boosting recruitment for their clubs and teams rather than providing inclusive educational experiences for all pupils.

It is clear that the scope for 'slippage' or re-interpretation of the policy within a local context, by local 'actors', is large. A key question for the School Sport Co-ordinator programme will be, not just what new opportunities for young people will be opened up, but who will be involved in their delivery, and what philosophies will they bring to this work. In exploring the initial views and positions of the SSCos at Northbridge, this paper has highlighted some of the broader issues for the programme as a whole. The School Sport Co-ordinator programme has the potential to extend and improving the quality of PE and sport opportunities for young people. However, as this paper has highlighted, the nature of these developments will depend heavily on the particular contexts in which the SSCos work, and their individual abilities, skills and positioning to shape the direction of their work. The School Sport Co-ordinator programme is being implemented in a policy space that is already crowded and one in which sport discourse dominates. It remains to be seen whether the implementation of this initiative into such contexts will be in the long-term interests of supporting the development of PE and school sport opportunities that can meet the needs of all youngsters, not just those who have historically been interested and involved.

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The School Sport Co-ordinator programme that is the focus of this paper is an English initiative, although similar schemes exist in other countries –eg. Scotland and Wales (DragonSport) see [www.sportscotland.co.uk](http://www.sportscotland.co.uk) [www.sports-council-wales.co.uk](http://www.sports-council-wales.co.uk) .

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<sup>2</sup> Specialist Sports Colleges were introduced in 1997 by the Labour government, although the broader specialists schools initiative was originated by the previous Conservative government. Specialist Sports Colleges are maintained secondary schools in England that receive additional funding from the DfES to raise standards in PE and sport within its own school, in a local family of schools and in the community. To apply, schools are required to raise £50,000 from private sector sponsorship and submit a four-year development plan.

<sup>3</sup> The first phase of School Sport Coordinator programme development started in September 2000 and there were plans to increase the number of partnerships to 1000 by 2004 (DfES, 2001). A recent announcement in October 2002 has increased this to 3000 by the end of 2005.

<sup>4</sup> SportEngland (the marketing name of the English Sports Council); the Youth Sport Trust (a registered charity concerned with the development of youth sport) and the New Opportunities Fund (a body set up to distribute Lottery funding to health, educational and environment projects are also involved. The professional bodies of the Physical Education Association and the British Association of Advisors and Lecturers in Physical Education are also involved in the in-service training of personnel involved in the programme.

<sup>5</sup> Although this is the preferred model, some partnerships have negotiated for, and are operating on, a different model; in some, there are full time SSCos; in others, several teachers in a department have agreed to share the role, and are released from teaching for several lessons. Northbridge was funded for full-time SSCos and adopted the latter model, with only one SSCo currently doing the role full time.

<sup>6</sup> Active Sports is the name given to one aspect of SportEngland's recent sports strategy to get more people involved in sport. Together with Active Schools and Active Communities (a series of initiatives aimed at developing sport in schools, and sport in the community respectively), Active Sports consists of the development of partnerships working through local centres, coaches and clubs to enable young people to participate in sport more frequently, improve their skills and compete at various levels in initially ten, most popular sports.

<sup>7</sup> With the introduction of the National Curriculum, school years were divided into four Key Stages (KS). Key stage 1 and 2 covers primary education (children aged 5-11 years; Key stage 3 and 4, secondary education (children aged 11-16 years).

<sup>8</sup> Sue Campbell is currently the chief executive of the Youth Sport Trust, and has been central in the Trust's work to improve sporting opportunities for young people. She previously headed up the National Coaching Foundation (now the SportscoachUK), the body responsible for developing sports coaching in the UK.

<sup>9</sup> A project to evaluate SSCos perceptions of their training is currently being set up.