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# Sport coaches as policy actors: an investigation of the interpretation and enactment of disability and inclusion policy in swimming in Victoria Australia

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## ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon education policy sociology, and sport coaching literature, in critically examining sport coaches as policy actors. Stephen Ball and colleagues' conceptualisation of different policy actor positions and roles provided the framework for research that investigated how eight professional swimming coaches in Victoria, Australia, interpreted and enacted disability and inclusion policy. A discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews with the eight coaches reveals the complexities associated with how and why different coaches interpret and enact disability and inclusion policy imperatives in different ways in their specific club contexts. Data are presented that shows coaches adopting multiple and hybrid policy actor positions and roles as disability and inclusion policy was interpreted, translated and ultimately, expressed as pedagogic rules and practices. Our discussion brings to the fore questions about power, agency and control in coaching, while highlighting both limits and possibilities for the enactment of inclusive disability sport policies by swimming coaches working in Victoria, Australia. In conclusion we suggest that this research illustrates that coaches are capable of enacting social change, and have some agency to do so, but at the same time appear constrained by established discourses that shape policy and give important direction to pedagogic practice. We advocate that further in-depth research is required into the coaching policy-practice nexus, particularly as it relates to the advancement of equity and inclusion.

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Disability; Australian swimming; coaching; inclusion; sport pedagogy; Stephen J. Ball

## Introduction

Since the 1990s a number of governments around the world have sought to integrate disability sport and mainstream sport where there is a Paralympic equivalent of an existing 'abled-bodied' sport, with a broader policy intent to increase levels of participation among people with disability (Hammond & Jeanes, 2018; Howe, 2007; Hums, Moorman, & Wolff, 2003; Stewart, Nicholson, Smith, & Westerbeek, 2004). Research also highlights that policy initiatives purportedly directed towards greater inclusion have lacked prescription, and that the adoption of integration and mainstreaming policies by National Sporting Governing Bodies (NGBs) is characteristically diverse (Hums et al., 2003). This paper reflects that amidst the ongoing promotion of integration as an inclusion strategy internationally, it is unclear how (if at all) such policies have influenced coaches' pedagogic practices and

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interactions with people with disabilities. Few scholarly accounts have explicitly explored how coaches respond to external policy imperatives (e.g. Piggott, 2013; Taylor & Garratt, 2010) and very little of this scholarship has directly explored how coaches have explicitly responded to calls for mainstreaming in the disability sport space (Howe, 2007). Additionally, we highlight that while some scholars have explored the translation of disability and inclusion policy at regional (Kitchin & Howe, 2014) and club levels (Kitchin & Crossin, 2018), sport coaching research has provided few insights into the complexity and contested realities associated with coaches seeking to effectively navigate multiple (and not always aligned) policy imperatives associated with disability and inclusion and performance.

This paper, therefore, directs attention to the policy-pedagogy interface of disability and inclusion policies and coaching practices, and the complex relationship between policy and pedagogic rules and practices that, from our perspective, remains relatively unexplored in sport coaching literature (cf. Jeanes, Magee, & O'Connor, 2014; Kerr & Barker-Ruchti, 2015; Piggott, 2013; Taylor & Garratt, 2010).

As we explain further below, the research was conducted in Victoria, Australia and centres on how a small number of swimming coaches translated, interpreted, adjusted and/or essentially dismissed disability and inclusion policies, to suit their coaching agendas. In locating the research project and our analysis of the coaches' responses, it is necessary to explain that in Australia, Section 28 of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act of 1992, means that NGBs such as Australian Swimming are legally obliged to cater for people with disabilities on an equal basis to those without disability. Section 28 pertains to sport and states that it is 'unlawful for a person to discriminate against another person on the ground of the other person's disability' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992, p. 29). However, a caveat to this legislation is that discrimination can be legal:

if the person is not reasonably capable of performing the actions reasonably required in relation to the sporting activity; or [...] if the persons who 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]

[...] 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)

Therefore, while the Disability Discrimination Act is prescriptive about sport and mandates that NGBs (and coaches by extension) be inclusive of people with disabilities, a deeper reading reveals that there is scope for varied interpretations, such that based on their own subjective assumptions of ability, coaches can choose whether or not to discriminate or delineate their programmes for certain athletes.

In addition to the above legal framework, Australian Swimming itself plays a key role in promoting an 'inclusion agenda' for coaches and coaching. Notably, Australian Swimming has established disability coach education and the integration of disability and 'able-bodied' events at sanctioned competition (Phillips, 2008), including the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Moreover, over the last decade, Australian Swimming has developed a number of self-assessment tools and policies to be used by clubs to help self-evaluate their inclusiveness (i.e. identifying barriers and improvements in policies, and procedures to remedy these, Woods, n.d., 2015). Our research reflected an absence of empirical investigation of swimming coaches' responses to sustained policy initiatives associated with disability and inclusion. In parallel, it sought to expand the theoretical perspectives being brought to bear on sport coaching and specifically, the sport coaching – sport policy interface. We drew insight from research in the physical education field (e.g. Evans & Davies, 2015; Penney, 2017; Penney & Evans, 2005) that has illustrated the utility of perspectives advanced by education policy sociology and more specifically, the work of Stephen Ball and colleagues that we discuss further below. Foregrounding a policy enactment perspective (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, with Ball, Maguire, Braun, Hoskins, & Perryman, 2012) enabled us to critically explore the policy positions and roles that coaches choose to adopt, are able to adopt, and ultimately express in their pedagogic practice.

Before expanding upon the theoretical perspectives that informed our research, we review pertinent literature concerned with sport policy implementation, sport coaching and sport policy. In doing so we explain findings and gaps in current research that shaped our inquiry. Throughout the paper

we seek to illustrate that while this research focused specifically on swimming coaches and was conducted in Victoria, Australia, the issues being addressed and concepts being applied are pertinent to sport coaching, sport policy and sport pedagogy internationally.

### **Sport policy implementation and sport coaching**

Policy implementation studies in sport include large-scale evaluations of broad policy initiatives developed by national sporting bodies or government (Fahlén, Eliasson, & Wickman, 2014; Kay, 1996; Wicker & Breuer, 2014); case studies of the development of policies in local sporting clubs at the local level (Skille, 2008, 2011); and; studies that have attempted to look more holistically at policy development and the relationship between governing bodies and coaches or sports volunteers across a number of sites (Jeanes et al., 2018, 2019; Kerr & Barker-Ruchti, 2015; Taylor & Garratt, 2010). Studies that have looked at how clubs develop policies and strategies to respond to external policy problems have mostly used qualitative methods such as document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observation to investigate the implementation of policy (Fahlén et al., 2014; Kay, 1996; O’Gorman, 2011; Wicker & Breuer, 2014). As a consequence, collectively sport policy implementation scholars have forged new insights into how clubs are organised and how they respond to policy at the local level. For example, Poulos and Donaldson’s (2012) research has highlighted that unless extensive efforts are made by sporting organisations to educate and work with coaches to understand and contextualise new policies, external policies are unlikely to have a significant impact on coaching behaviours. Other research emphasises that governing bodies generally have little influence over local level voluntary sporting clubs (Eime, Payne, & Harvey, 2008), even in the cases where financial incentives are provided (Vos et al., 2016).

In one of the few accounts that have examined the enactment of disability and inclusion policies at the grassroots sport club level, Jeanes et al. (2018) highlighted how an accepted ‘logic’ of competition dominates state sporting association policy development in Australia. Many of the club volunteers (who included coaches) in Jeanes et al.’s study conceded that, while competition is important, it also restricts the capacity of clubs ‘to engage a breadth of young people’ (p. 45). Jeanes et al. (2018) echoed others in sport studies (e.g., Green, 2007; Kerr & Barker-Ruchti, 2015; Kitchin & Howe, 2014; Skille, 2011) in questioning whether broader notions of inclusive practices are ‘even feasible within the competitive confines of organised sport’, (Jeanes et al., 2018, p. 49). Furthermore Jeanes et al. (2018) called for key policy actors (Ball et al., 2012) (specifically, state sporting associations and voluntary sporting clubs) to move away from the notion of ‘normalisation’ and instead ‘recognise and support diverse opportunities’ that are not necessarily aligned with competitive pathways (Jeanes et al., 2018, p. 49).

Sport policy implementation literature also speaks to clubs and coaches having agency with regard to how policies are developed and implemented at the local level (Skille, 2011; Skille & Stenling, 2018) and points to an array of external influences shaping implementation in different settings (Eime et al., 2008; Fahlén et al., 2014; Swan, Otago, Finch, & Payne, 2009). However, whilst extending understanding of the enactment of policy at a grassroots level, few studies have explicitly explored disability policy within the context of sports coaching. Scholars primarily interested in disability coaching have overtly examined this within the context of disability policy (cf. Townsend, Cushion, & Smith, 2018; Townsend, Huntley, Cushion, & Fitzgerald, 2018). This literature has illustrated how discourses of ableism and elitism influence coaching practice but has not directed attention to the role of policy within this process. There is, therefore, still a need to bridge the gap between disability policy and sports coaching literature, particularly as governments and sporting governing bodies view the improvement of coaching as being critical to improving inclusion in sport (e.g. Department of Canadian Heritage, 2006; Woods, 2015).

Other Australian research that is also relevant to the current study has highlighted the extent to which discourses of competition and high performance dominate mainstream swimming coaching

cultures (Zehntner, 2016; Zehntner & McMahon, 2013). As Zehntner's (2016) research illustrated, these discourses permeate through coaching and coach development structures, limiting the exploration of alternative pedagogies and reaffirming hierarchical models of professional learning and mentoring. This research, whilst providing valuable socio-cultural critiques of coach education and bodily practices (e.g. McMahon, Penney, & Dinan-Thompson, 2012; Zehntner, 2016) has not specifically explored how coaches work with people with disabilities. This was a distinct gap within the Australian swimming coaching literature that our research sought to address. In the following section, we briefly explain the disability and inclusion policies that swimming clubs and coaches in Victoria, Australia, were encouraged to work with.

### ***Victorian swimming and inclusion policy***

At the time of this study, multiple policies led to conditions whereby coaches were expected to include more athletes with disabilities in their regular training groups. Appendix 1 includes a list of historic and current policies at the time of data collection. The two policies that, from an inclusion perspective, were most relevant for coaches at the time of data collection, emanated from Australian Swimming and involved toolkits and checklists to help clubs become more inclusive of people with disability. These were the GO CLUB inclusion initiative (2009–2015) and the Inclusive Swimming Framework (2016–Present) (e.g. Woods, 2015, n.d.).

The GO CLUB inclusion checklist was designed to enable affiliated clubs to assess how inclusive they, their coaches, staff and facilities were. The checklist addressed four aspects of club infrastructure and operation pertinent to inclusion: premises and facilities; club community; club activities; and communication material (Woods, n.d., p. 17). Only the club community section focused specifically on coaching and evaluated clubs on whether their coaches had completed the Swimmers with Disability extension course (Woods, n.d., p. 13).

The inclusive swimming framework was released in 2016 towards the end of data collection in this study. It expanded the scope of inquiry beyond GO CLUB's disability focus, to include other areas of diversity. It also moved to identify the GO CLUB '7 pillars of inclusion' (Woods, n.d.) as seven areas clubs can focus on to improve their approach to inclusion (Woods, 2015). These areas were: access; attitude, choice, partnerships, communication, policy and opportunities. The Inclusive Swimming Framework document made no explicit reference to coaches' role in enacting practices associated with the 7-pillars if these were adopted by clubs (cf. Woods, 2015).

The focus of this study was to probe how the elements highlighted in the GO CLUB and Inclusive Swimming Framework outlined above were translated and recontextualised by coaches working in Victoria, Australia. In the next section we discuss how we have used perspectives from policy sociology in education and health and physical education to inform this work and to particularly, identify coaches as policy actors who play a key role in giving practical meaning to the policy intent expressed in initiatives such as GO CLUB.

### ***Policy enactment and policy actors***

As indicated above, sport policy and sport coaching literature has acknowledged that coaches have a significant role to play in the realisation of policy intentions, while at the same time being influenced by discourses at play in and across policy contexts and networks that span clubs, NGBs, overarching sport quangos, and extend to other arenas of government (such as disability and social inclusion). From this perspective, coaches are simultaneously policy actors and policy subjects (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011a, 2011b). This research specifically sought to extend understanding of how coaches interpret and respond to policy initiatives addressing disability and inclusion, that were intended to inform and shape coaching practices. Importantly, we were concerned to explore coaches as active participants in policy processes and avoid positioning them as passive recipients of policy, or incidental players in policy. Accordingly, we turned to a theoretical perspective and

an associated language about policy, that would enable us to research and talk about coaches in particular ways.

*Policy enactment* is a perspective advanced by Stephen Ball and colleagues (Ball et al., 2012, 2011a, 2011b) that has helped us re-think policy processes within schools and, prospectively, many other domains in society, including sports coaching. In their book *How Schools Do Policy*, Ball et al. (2012) challenged policy research to explore,

... the ways in which different types of policy become interpreted and translated 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*. (p. 6, our emphasis)

We recognised the processes that Ball et al. (2012) articulate as important for the study of relationships between policy and coaching, and as prospectively providing a means via which we could explore issues of agency and constraint inherent in coaches' responses to disability and inclusion policy.

One of the assumptions of enactment theory is that policies are 'enacted in material conditions, with varying resources' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 21). Following Ball et al. (2012), we propose that policies are put to work by coaches 'against and alongside existing pre-standing commitments, values and forms of experience' (p. 21). For example, coaches working in swimming clubs that emphasise elite performance might be more inclined to include athletes who align with the Paralympic pathways of disability sport as these athletes are more likely to attract sponsors, funding, media attention, etc. Thus, as indicated above, specific coaching and institutional norms and values prospectively have a narrowing effect on policy enactment.

### Policy contexts

As Penney (2013) has described in research focusing on curriculum policy, the process of implementation or enactment is 'complex and contested' and 'plays out differently in different contexts' (p. 190). According to Penney (2013), one of the most pronounced points of difference between an *enactment* perspective and an *implementation* perspective, is the understanding from the former perspective, that policies in the form of textual documents (as produced by organisations such as Australian Swimming) are *inherently unfinished*. To paraphrase Ball (1993) and Penney (2013), policy texts are subjected to (re)interpretation and adjustment as they are re-worked, adjusted (or discarded), and worked into practice by professionals. Hence, a further key aspect emphasised in the enactment perspective is that we need to attend to ways in which 'official texts are read *within and amidst particular professional, institutional, social, cultural, economic and wider policy contexts*' (Penney, 2013, p. 190). In this regard Ball et al.'s (2012) framework directly prompts deep exploration of different aspects of context that are influential in policy enactment. Specifically, Ball et al. (2012) present four dimensions of context (situated contexts, professional cultures, material contexts, and external contexts) to extend understanding of the complexities inherent in policy enactment. Their work highlights that interpretations and practices arising from and amidst policy initiatives will unavoidably reflect the social, political, economic, and historical conditions in which official policy texts are read and acted on. Table 1 illustrates how we have adapted this heuristic for research exploring the sport policy coaching nexus.

**Table 1.** Four contextual dimensions of policy.

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<i>Situated contexts</i> (e.g. locale, club histories and membership base)
<i>Professional cultures</i> (e.g. values, coach commitments and experiences, and 'policy management' in sporting programmes)
<i>Material contexts</i> (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure)
<i>External contexts</i> (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)

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Note: Adapted from *How schools do policy* by Ball et al. (2012, p. 21). Copyright 2012 by Stephen. J. Ball, Megan Maguire and Annette Braun.

Following others who have used Ball's work to understand how contexts mediate the enactment of national policies in schools (Penney, 2013; Penney & Evans, 2005), we have used Ball et al.'s (2012) contextual frames to explore the varied ways in which disability and inclusion policies are enacted at the micro-level by coaches working in specific club contexts.

### **Coaches as policy actors**

Accompanying the insight into policy context, is a 'policy actor' typology (Ball et al., 2011a, 2012). We suggest that the articulation of different types of actors, roles and positions, is helpful in considering the multiple roles and responses that coaches can have in relation to policy. Specifically Ball et al. (2011a) attempted to identify 'different sorts of roles, actions and engagements embedded in the processes of interpretation and translation' (p. 625) and from their findings identified eight types of policy actor positions. Their emphasis was that while in the 'policy interpretation genre' (e.g. Donaldson & Poulos, 2014) 'all actors in the policy process are often considered to be equal' (Ball et al., 2011a, p. 625), from an enactment perspective, actors are 'positioned differently and take up different positions in relation to policy, including positions of indifference or avoidance or irrelevance' (Ball et al., 2011a, p. 625). This conceptualisation of policy actors aligns with sport coaching studies that have pointed to differential positioning and power-relations in coaching, continuing professional development, and coach education (e.g. Chesterfield, Potrac, & Jones, 2010; Zehntner, 2016). In this study, we adapted the original description of roles/positions articulated by Ball et al. (2011a, 2011b, 2012) to reflect a focus on coaching (see Table 2).

In applying this framework, following Penney (2013) we contend that coaches are always, to some degree, consciously or inadvertently 'choosing' to pursue certain sorts of policy work, and that their pedagogical practice represents policy work. In putting Ball et al.'s (2011a, 2011b, 2012) theoretical tools to work, we sought to particularly explore fluidity of the policy positions and roles that coaches may take as they enact various policies as part of their everyday practice. Our anticipation was that coaches' practices would speak to and speak across the actor positions and roles that Ball et al. (2011a, 2011b, 2012) presented. Our interest was in revealing the complexities associated with coaches' enactment of disability and inclusion policy, and extending understanding of both how and why enactment advanced in particular ways in different contexts of swimming coaching.

### **Research design and methods**

In critically examining and theorising the relationship between policy and coaching practice in disability swimming, this paper draws on data from a broader research study that explored disability inclusive policies and coaching practice in a two-phase project (Hammond, 2018). The focus here is on the second phase of the study, where the first Hammond interviewed coaches about their engagement with disability and inclusion policies and their experiences of coaching athletes with a disability. Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method because we elected to gain

**Table 2.** Policy actors and policy work.

Policy actors	Policy work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, (typically associated with head coach or the swimming programme management or swimming club committee)
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity, integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership, and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction, and career
Translators	Production of texts, artefacts, and events
Critics	Monitoring of management, maintenance of counter-discourses
Receivers	Typically associated with junior coaches and swimming teachers involved with club coaching duties: coping, defending and dependency

Notes: Adapted from *Policy actors: Doing policy work in schools* by Ball et al., (2011a, p. 626). Copyright 2011 by Taylor & Francis.

the perspectives of a number of professionals working in different clubs, who all had the common experience of working with athletes with a disability. A phase of documentary research preceded this fieldwork and is reported elsewhere (Hammond, 2019). Documentry research was chosen because very little had been written on the history of disability and inclusive sport policy in Australia at the time of the study (2015–2017). The study was granted ethical approval by the Monash University Human Ethics committee.

Criterion-based sampling (Sparkes & Smith, 2013) was used for selecting coaches. This sampling strategy was most appropriate because our research objective was to recruit coaches within the state of Victoria with the specific experience of including swimmers with disabilities in mainstream club settings. At the time of data collection (late 2015–early 2016) all of the coaches were (a) working in the state of Victoria in Australia; (b) self-reported to have coached an athlete with a disability in the last five years in swimming; and (c) declared if they were being paid for their services at any level of swimming coaching. Swimming Victoria (SV) and the Victorian branch of the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association assisted in recruitment through an advertisement in their bi-weekly newsletters. Participants were selected if they voluntarily responded to the advertisement, that appeared in a total of six newsletters.

Eight (8) coaches (five who identified as female, three who identified as male) were recruited. Gender balance was not a criterion for recruitment. All coaches had been coaching for at least five years and coaching was either their primary or a significant secondary source of income. Table 3 below provides a summary of key demographic information about the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were used to enable key issues to be explored while also affording flexibility to pursue particularities distinct to the individual coaches. The interviewer (at the time of collection) was employed as a swimming coach and had previous experience of coaching athletes with disability in mainstream settings when s/he was an assistant coach at a Melbourne swimming club. S/He had insider knowledge of the Victorian swimming coaching committee and its sub-culture. Interviews were conducted at the lead authors' University campus at a time convenient for the coaches and lasted between 90–120 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews explored participants' education background and 'coaching biography', their experiences of coaching people with a disability, how their educative experiences and life events led to their involvement in coaching, and the challenges and or benefits associated with coaching people with a disability. The interview schedule was drafted by the lead author (a swimming coach with a decade experience of swimming coaching and two bachelor degrees in human movement science) with input from co-author three, who has extensive knowledge of disability and inclusion policies in sport, and coaching pedagogy. The interview schedule was submitted to the

**Table 3.** Participant and description of coaching context.

Pseudonym	Description of coaching context
Carly	Assistant coach integrated one athlete who had a physical impairment and one deaf athlete. Coach at community-based swimming club.
Katie	Head coach who integrated one athlete with intellectual disability into her regular squad. Coach at an elite private girls' school.
Bridget	Special education teacher who coaches approximately 20 swimmers with intellectual disability. Coach employed by government special school running programme in community council owned pools.
Travis	Coach of one Paralympian with less complex physical disability at elite private girls' school.
Louisa	Coach of three athletes with physical disabilities in mainstream community-based swimming club in outer suburbs of Melbourne.
Debbie	Coach of a number of athletes with varying complexities of impairments. She has coaches, some athletes with complex needs, and has a long history of coaching athletes with a disability in both integrated, inclusive and stand-alone settings, depending on the complexity of athlete's disability and the individual. She is also an IPC classifier and coaches at a large community-based swimming club.
Dale	Dale is currently coaching both athletes with intellectual and physical disabilities. He was a coached a specialist disabled program before migrating to Australia. He is a head coach of a community-based swimming club.
Bailey	Bailey is involved with both down syndrome swimming and elite level Paralympic swimming. He has coached world champions in both forms of competition and is a head coach of a swim club in a regional centre.



president of the Victorian branch of the Australian Swimming Teachers and Coaches Association for feedback. Interview questions were also piloted with one swimming coach working as an academic in the sociology of sports coaching at another Australian University. Participants were offered an opportunity to review their transcripts, only two coaches elected to make changes to the transcripts.

A discourse analysis of the eight transcripts following the flexible guidelines set by Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2010) was undertaken. We found these guidelines most appropriate for analysis due to the strong influence of Foucauldian thought in Ball's decades-long work in this area (e.g. Ball, 1993; Ball et al., 2012, 2011a, 2011b), and because they provided us with a flexible yet systematic approach to handle and analyse the data. This allowed identification of the dominant and subjugated discourses of disability and inclusion within the data set. Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2010) concepts of problematisations, technologies, subject positions, and subjectification were used as deductive codes. First, we identified when the coach discussed disability or a person with disability or inclusion (i.e. problematisations) and then examined how those concepts were organised and presented (i.e. by identifying technologies, subject positions, and subjectification). We then connected the corresponding theoretical statements (that aligns with enactment theory, i.e. contexts and actor positions as described above) into themes that linked the individual courses that structure the fields under investigation. Finally, we connected those discourses specific to the field – to the power relations that define the field (i.e. subject positions). The exploration of operations of power from transmissions and transformations of discourse formed the final phase of the analysis (i.e. subjectification).

There are limitations to this study that should be acknowledged in order that we are sincere, credible and ethical in our research dissemination (Smith, Tomasone, Latimer-Cheung, & Martin Ginis, 2015). First, this phase of data collection was confined to interviews with coaches and did not extend to athletes (either able-bodied or athletes with a disability) or co-workers, and did not involve observation. We, therefore, accept that we are only hearing about experiences of coaching from the coaches' perspectives and that we cannot assume depth of awareness of their own practice (Partington & Cushion, 2013). We also stress that the data cannot be generalised to all swimming coaches in Victoria or Australia. The data from this study are in our view, nevertheless, significant in the insights that they have provided into disability policy enactment by coaches and provide a strong foundation for further research.

## Findings and discussion

Consistent with Ball et al.'s (2011a, 2011b, 2012) findings, the nature of actor roles that coaches assumed was dynamic and relational to particular issues. A summary table of the multiple actor positions taken by participants is provided below in Table 4. What follows is further elucidation of how the coaches in this study applied different actor roles to distinct policy issues concerning disability, inclusion and their general practice. The following themes identified from data analysis are discussed: (a) how coaches were 'champions of change' and could be both entrepreneurial and critics in the disability inclusive policy space; (b) how coaches who were predominantly critics of disability

**Table 4.** Coach, role, and various actor positions.

Coach name		Carly	Katie	Bridget	Travis	Louisa	Debbie	Dale	Bailey
Formal coach role		Assistant	Head	Independent	Head	Assistant	Assistant	Head	Head
Types of policy actors	Narrators		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Entrepreneurs			✓					✓
	Outsiders			✓					
	Transactors		✓		✓			✓	
	Enthusiasts			✓			✓		
	Translators			✓			✓		✓
	Critics	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Receivers	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	

Notes: Actor roles cited and adapted from Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011b). See Chapter 4 for elaboration on roles.

inclusive policy used their agency to ignore or resist external imperatives; and; (c) how professionals within swimming, and head coaches particularly, created, crafted, enacted and in doing so, enforced other policies referred to as 'standards' to govern their athletes' lives (both disabled and non-disabled). While this third theme is not disability specific, as standards policy work was not always related to disability and inclusion, it was where head coaches particularly were most entrepreneurial as policy actors, tactical in the positions that they took and actions that they advanced in order to maintain a focus on issues that are important to them; most notably, the production of elite athletes.

### ***Champions of change – critical entrepreneurs?***

Debbie was the most entrepreneurial coach with regards to disability and inclusion policy. In many respects, she was an outlier in that she was extremely passionate about promoting disability sport. This reflected her deep passion and enthusiasm for working with Paralympic athletes. As an assistant coach, Debbie assumed more of policy leadership role in relation to disability and inclusion policy. She spoke of taking an active role in the inclusion policy space:

I have pushed very hard for [my club] to be inclusive ... not just because that was one of the areas I was interested in ... but just because it is in the best interests of the club to cover off all aspects and inclusion ... 7-pillars, [is] now starting to be implemented at [my club] [...] so it is a matter of getting the stakeholders on board and educating them on how it can be done that is not necessarily cost-effective, you know it is not going to affect their bottom line by doing things ... I think [state swimming association name] has been very good in helping us with stuff like that too, concerning working with our swim school manager. Ella at [state swimming association name] has been working consistently with our swim school manager Kate; she was at the pillars as well ... But I think if the administration side of it is not ... massive in terms of setups I think ... people [will] get on board ...

Drawing from Ball et al. (2011a, 2011b, 2012) Debbie is considered to be a policy *enthusiast*. However, her ability to be an enthusiast was constrained by her club (from the perspective of her account) as it advocated for a benign approach to advertising that they were inclusive. As Debbie explained:

The club doesn't openly advertise that we welcome all individuals and that there is a role for them in the sport, it's you know ... [we will] deal with them when they come through the door, it is not proactive, it is all reactive stuff, and that is how coaches of multi class athletes [...] start, we are all reactive, like, 'Oh! We've got an athlete'. 'OK, what do we do now?' ... There is no ... no real desire ... if there is a desire to get people in ... (Debbie)

Contextual factors were thus clearly influencing Debbie's agency and capacity to be proactive about disability and inclusion. Drawing on Ball et al.'s (2012) contextual frames (see above) we highlight that coaches and their clubs enact policies consistent with their histories, biographies, values, yet within the resources and constraints that their contexts provide. In Debbie's case the professional culture at her club (i.e. the benign or indifferent attitude towards inclusion) constrained how inclusive she could be, but also allowed her some freedom to be a champion of change with respect to inclusion.

Bailey also spoke about being a champion of change. He was able to push the State Sporting Association (SSA) to sanction more events and achieve bottom-up change at the institutional level through lobbying the SSA:

we've just been ... because we've got Lilly [who has] Down Syndrome, she wants to prepare for Florence, I have been trying to get her in a lot of competitions to race before she goes away. Very few of those competitions provide for [swimmers with disabilities] so we've been bombarding [the SSA] saying why aren't you running this event/ have disability events? or we can't enter this event because there are qualifying times which exclude Lilly. They might be doing a 200 but the qualifying time is 2:20.00 and she's a 2:40 swimmer. There is no way she's going to be able to qualify but she needs to practice. Now we've had good response [to our lobbying] [the SSA have now] [...] added some disability events [...] [but let me be clear] it wasn't happening because of their initiative, it was happening because of ours (Bailey)

The last comment from Bailey reflects both optimism about change, but also pessimism about the prospects of substantive transformation in the area of disability inclusion. Bailey explained that he and his assistant coach, who also worked at a local disability organisation, recognised ways in

which the SSA could improve what they were doing in the area of disability inclusion, 'and what sort of resourcing they could provide', but also lamented that the SSA remained 'limited by the funding they have got'. In his experience the 'development of a policy doesn't actually result in the implementation' and policies are 'only as good as the paper they are written on unless they are implemented' (Bailey).

Taken together, Bailey and Debbie's experiences show that broader external actors limit club-level changes in the area of disability and inclusion. Arguably, both professionals were to some extent subversive in their policy work as change advocates in the area of disability and inclusion. Furthermore, their agency and actor role illustrated the intersection of professional culture and external context (Ball et al., 2012). Below we show how some coaches used their agency to resist external policy imperatives to be more inclusive of people with disabilities.

### ***Coaches using their agency to resist or ignore inclusion policy***

Ball et al.'s (2011a, 2011b, 2012) enactment theory was designed to foreground the varied and creative ways in which teachers both actively engage with but also 'resist', ignore and re-contextualise policy in novel ways within school settings. Three of the professionals in this study (Debbie, Dale, and Carly) adopted the critic position in relation to the future direction of disability and inclusion policy. The critic position was best characterised by Dale, in his thoughts on growing disability swimming:

- Researcher: Do you think there is scope to grow disability swimming? ...  
 Dale: [long pause] I don't want to be negative about it ... but ... like I say, you just have to provide the opportunities for the kids you know. If the kid is going in that direction, they will go in that direction [...] You have all these multi class events [and] sometimes, nobody has entered. These events are cancelled because there are only two swimmers ... But if you want to increase it, you have to go through the learn to swim area [...] I don't think making more opportunities, and more events is going to help ... (Dale)

Dale's comments revealed much about the problems of disability inclusion policies from a coach's perspective. From his perspective, a lack of supply of swimmers from learn to swim meant he could do nothing to increase his numbers of swimmers with disability.<sup>1</sup>

In our study, we found that Dale and Travis adopted the receiver and the critic position in relation to inclusive disability policies. Dale was a receiver of Australian Swimming policy in this regard and was cautious to comply, suggesting that it was okay to include with a swimmer with a disability, as long as it did not 'disrupt' the other majority abled bodied swimmers:

- Researcher: Are you aware of any of the policies that mandate your club to include a person with a disability?  
 Dale: As a club I make sure that we align well with Australian Swimming policies. We just manage it on an individual basis. [...] you have got to keep in mind from an inclusion perspective that you can't exclude people who haven't got ability or normal ability. You can't just look after the kid who has a disability. You can't put a kid with a disability with 15 other kids, 14 of them are able bodied and then disrupt their training or competition because you now have to include a swimmer with disability you have got to manage that.

Travis echoed Dale's sentiment suggesting that in practice inclusion was 'negotiated'. He explained 'It's great to say that we are inclusive and we can but the reality is [...] that it is not always gonna work'. Travis suggested his coaching of one elite Paralympian with a disability in the mainstream programme illustrated his commitment to inclusion. He also spoke of how he viewed inclusion in the light of constraints arising from his situated and material context (Ball et al., 2012). Specifically, he felt that it was only possible for a small number of people to be included, suggesting that if a coach only had two lanes in a 50 m pool 'it is going to be harder for the athletes to work around each other and actually train in the two lanes when you have varying speeds and abilities'. Similar to Dale, Travis felt the inclusion of people with disability should not disrupt the status quo of their swimming programme. The next sections explain how behaviour and standards central to this 'status quo' contributed to an exclusionary discourse around disability inclusion.

### **The development of policy ('standards') that govern athletes' lives**

Dale, Carly and Bailey all spoke about the importance of 'standards' that served as mechanisms via which to adapt and re-work policies to align with and actively strengthen aspects of their professional standpoints and practice. For example, as head coach and entrepreneur, Dale set the standards of 'inclusion' for his swimming programme:

so we have certain standard most kids would have had to complete a learn to swim programme, they have to have certain ability, age is also important and if they come from other clubs it will also be dependent on if they have state qualifying times national qualifying times etc. [then] we will make a decision (Dale)

Although standards were important as mechanism of control, both Carly and Dale demonstrated flexibility to adjust standards. For instance, Dale suggested that when children had conflicting and multiple academic and sporting demands their volume could be adjusted for 'whatever their goal is', depending on the athlete's ability and what they wanted to do. Dale would advocate for the swimmer to take on a more intensive training volume. From Carly's perspective, broader policies that come from above (i.e. head coaches who are her managers) could be adjusted for individual athletes in some cases have their training plans and standards adjusted (i.e. to accommodate other sporting commitments). She discussed how her athlete Dillon had football training and as a compromise, she suggested that 'he could go to football training once a month' and play games on the weekend. As a receiver of policy (Ball et al., 2012) Carly was expected to implement strict standards with regards to attendance, but was still able to have some agency to negotiate these rules with some athletes in some circumstances.

Overall, however, the control of athletes and strict standards towards ability meant that who could be included in the swimming programmes offered by the coaches was very narrow. Ultimately the coaches bought into and reaffirmed dominant discourses of high-performance sport that have been prominent in other research (Shogan, 1999; Zehntner, 2016), and illuminated broader dominant discourses underpinning the professional cultural context of Australian Swimming coaching that clearly mediated enactment (i.e. high standards, commitment and control would lead to medals). Professionals had strict standards because they wanted to coach elite athletes; thus, head coaches were entrepreneurial (Bailey and Dale) in this area and assistants (Carly) often enacted these standards with little questioning or thought. Coaches in the study were largely unable to deduce or make a link between their strict standards for inclusion in their programming and how this might have been exclusionary towards people with disabilities or other people from marginalised backgrounds. Like Jeanes et al. (2018, 2019), we, therefore, highlight the powerful influence that dominant discourses of elite and performance sport that emphasis competition that find expression in the structures of sport, and how these influence the possibilities for inclusive practice.

### **Putting coaches' policy enactment in context**

The preceding sections have highlighted Ball et al.'s (2012) emphasis that any exploration of coaches as policy actors needs to pursue the complex ways in which dimensions of context frame how coaches interpret and engage with policy. It has also illustrated that how coaches were viewing opportunities for coaching athletes with a disability spoke to the overlying influence of dominant discourses of elite performance. Extending these insights, Bailey specifically suggested that the key to inclusion for people with a disability in swimming was their ability to meet the standards imposed by high-performance disciplinary regimes that characterised his squad. He explained that:

I don't have a disabled group and an abled group ... Libby, who is a Down syndrome girl ... she does exactly the same program as everybody else, [...] she trains with me. She's in the slowest lane and she does not stop for the whole session! [...] Libby has got 10 world records; she has been female swimmer of the meet the last three world championships! ... I think that's because she trains with my able-bodied squad ... Exactly [the] same program, exactly the same expectations in terms of technique. You have lower expectations on the repeat times, but you don't segregate ... (Bailey)

Other extracts from coaches also directed attention to the discourses shaping the professional context where they worked. Carly reaffirmed a view of inclusion that centred on the notion that anyone could join the club provided that they fitted with the prime focus on competing and training to improve at competitions; 'if they don't want to compete then the squad is not right for them' (Carly). Here and elsewhere we saw that the professional contexts of club swimming reflect particular professional values. Travis was open in acknowledging that expanding his professional knowledge in relation to inclusivity was simply 'not high on my priority'; 'Do I have the time to investigate how I can be more inclusive? Unfortunately not' (Travis). In contrast, Louisa explained that some younger swimmers with a disability coming up through the club had led her to specifically pursue professional development to better educate herself about coaching people with a disability. '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' (Louisa). Again, though, it is important to acknowledge that the interest was in supporting swimmers with a disability to advance within the performance-based context that Louisa was working within. Furthermore, the material aspect of context (Ball et al., 2012) was important here. Louisa was fortunate in that she was employed by a club that was in a position to support professional development and pay annually for her to attend a state and national level coaching conference.

Comments from Carly also illustrated the interplay between high-performance discourses and the material dimension of context, particularly in relation to the constraint of pool space. She expressed concern that trying to include a swimmer who, in her terms, had a 'massive disability', would be 'challenging' because they may need additional lane space. She explained that:

You would have trouble with that. Because when we're at [the club] in the afternoon we have got three lanes of a 50 m pool so you have already got say 20–30 people in there and then you're giving up one lane; or reducing the number in that lane then you're really bumping up the other two. (Carly)

Bridget, who ran a disability-only squad, drew attention to another material constraint. She spoke at length about how people with higher needs in her squad required more coaches and explained that her programme was unable to grow because she was unable to raise any more revenue to pay for additional coaches, and unable to hire extra pool space. At his pool Travis highlighted a different limitation to inclusion, commenting that 'With our pool there is no hoist, things like that, so we can't be fully inclusive'.

Thus, throughout this study, we saw the direct and indirect influences of various aspects of context shaping coaches' approaches towards inclusion for people with disability. In closing, we critically explore the implications of our findings for coaching and research.

## **Conclusion: the future direction of disability and inclusion policy**

The findings from this research suggest that an enactment orientation can bring fresh insights to understandings of coaches' work and the roles that they can and do play in advancing and/or inhibiting the realisation of policy hopes. Employing Ball et al.'s (2012) perspective and concepts enabled us to reveal critical differences in the approaches that coaches were taking in relation to disability and inclusion, and identify key aspects of the local and wider context impacting their respective approaches. At a time when governments are increasingly calling upon coaches to promote greater social inclusion and public health governmental agendas (Geidne, Quennerstedt, & Eriksson, 2013; Magee & Jeanes, 2011; Van Hoye, Sarrazin, Heuzé, & Kokko, 2015), our study has demonstrated some of the challenges that coaches encounter when seeking to embrace inclusive practices, even when they are willing to be champions of change. At the same time, it has revealed that other policy imperatives may mean that disability and inclusion initiatives are relegated to the periphery of coaches' policy work, or re-framed to achieve alignment with other more pressing policy agendas. Ball et al.'s (2012) perspective particularly drew our attention to coaches trying to mediate multiple policy agendas, manage policy tensions playing out in club policies – and ultimately

also in coaching practices. Hence, we see important potential for more coaching research that utilises an enactment frame to further examine the complicated terrain that coaches practice within and at the same time, themselves shape. Moreover, we hope that such research can also serve to raise a critical consciousness amongst governments and sporting organisations to be more sensitive to the constraints and pressures faced by coaches and provide greater support for enactment of inclusion initiatives particularly.

As indicated previously, whilst the study provides valuable insights to the complexities of inclusion policy enactment we acknowledge several limitations. We would advocate that future research engages in more in-depth ethnographic work with coaches in context, and seeks to bring disability swimmers' voices to the fore. We would also advocate the use of the policy actor framework to examine coaches working at different levels of coaching in different sports.

In summary, our analysis highlighted how there are many possibilities and limitations to coaches' agency with regard to the enactment of disability and inclusion policies in their local environment. In most instances, however, our data spoke to the preservation of the status quo of swimming that centres on producing athletes in line with the dominant able-bodied elite pathway. Amidst their adoption of varied actor positions and roles, coaches' enactment of inclusion policy was very clearly mediated by the broader policy context and their position within established structural hierarchies of coaching. We conclude by calling for more in-depth research that can extend insights into how coaches working in swimming and in other sports, might productively advance changes in their own practice, in club and coaching cultures that consistently reflect a shared commitment to advance inclusion.

## Notes

1. There is no publicly available data from Australian Swimming or the Australian Sports Commission on how many swimmers are currently classified as having a disability. At the time of writing AusPlay identified disability as a barrier or reason for non-participation but did not report on if participants are involved but also identify as being a person with disability (ORC International & Australian Sports Commission, 2016).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Appendix

Table A1. List of policy documents (historic and current) at the time of data collection (1990–2016) (Hammond, 2018).

Swimming Victoria and VicHealth	
2006	VicHealth PICSAR
2014	VicHealth's State Sporting Association Participation Program.
Australian Swimming Inc. Swimming Australia Ltd.	
1991	Integration Policy (detailed in 90–91 annual report)
2004	Coaching Swimming: An introductory manual
2008	Bronze and Silver coach training program syllabi
2009	Disability Action Plan
2009	GO CLUB PB: Inclusion checklist
2009	Coaching swimmers with a disability training program syllabus
2010	Swimming Against the Current: A Practical Teaching and Coaching Manual for Swimmers with Disabilities
2014	Member Welfare Policy
2014	GO CLUB Inclusive club standard checklist and policies
2014	Swimming Australia Constitution
2016	Inclusive Swimming Framework
Australian Sports Commission	
1993	Coaching Athletes with Disabilities: General principles (Coaching Manual)
2001	Backing Australia's Sporting Ability
2003	Project Connect Disability Action Plan: A standard for sport
2008	Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Directions
2010	Australian Sport: The Pathway to Success
2010	Sports Connect (Review, Recourses)
2012	Australia's Winning Edge 2012–2022
2015	Play.Sport.Australia.
Council of Australian Governments	
2010	National Disability Strategy 2010–2020
2011	National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework
Australian Paralympic Committee	
2001	Announcement of integration policy (APC moving away from service delivery to governance ... see Annual Report)
Australian Confederation of Sports for the Disabled	
1992	Integration Policy: Increasing Sporting Opportunities for the Disabled
Commonwealth of Australia	
1992	Disability Discrimination Act
2009	Shut out (Social Inclusion Board report)