



Critical Pedagogies in Sport (CPIS)

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The term critical pedagogy is most associated with the writing of [Paulo Freire](#) who emphasised that education should be a social critique that enables people to identify injustice to strengthen democratic change. Freire was critical of traditional methods of education which he saw as perpetuated existing power relations. He was particularly critical of a banking approach to education whereby teachers transmit knowledge uncritically for students to 'learn' ([Freire, 1972](#)). In this form of education, the curriculum is chosen by educators, and he argues this limits the opportunity to engage people in debate or develop their creative capabilities. Freire (1972) explores how learners should develop a critical consciousness to understand how power manifests in society. Particularly, how that power may limit their own lives, and how to challenge power relations in transformational ways. Education should be based on dialogue and support so students can 'read' the world around them to overcome passivity in the classroom.

Higher Education (HE) and Sport

In the academic year 2020-2021 there were 49,615 sport students studying 'sport' at University in the UK (16,175 female students, 33,440 male students according to [HESA, 2022](#)). 137 universities offer HE Sport courses, ranging from Sport Science to Sport Management. In the UK there is no set curriculum for HE sport courses and while the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#) publish benchmark statements for HE courses at undergraduate level which outline what students could be expected to know at the end of their studies; these are wide ranging. A HE sport course in the UK often map to [Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism benchmarks](#) for validation (QAA, 2019). Due to the diversity of knowledge and content across these areas, these benchmarks cover a range of topics, which vary from knowledge about human responses to sport and exercise; sport performance; health and disease management; and the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural diffusion of sport. Issues of social justice are mentioned in the defining principles but specifics regarding equity and gender, however, are not prominent. Furthermore, some HE degrees may not cover this at all, or if they do, it may be fleeting or optional.

Research in HE sport curriculum has not been extensive, but some literature suggests there is a limited engagement with issues of social justice and equity. For example, [Ličen and Jedlick's \(2022\)](#) analysis of sport management programmes in the US argued that there has been an unwillingness to adapt and respond to areas of social justice that are needed to transform sport more radically in the future. The broader scholarship on subject areas such as sports business is also dominated by certain privileged voices ([Knoppers and McLachlan, 2018](#)) that has an adverse effect on resourcing and supporting teaching and learning. A more critical analysis of what is taught, and how it is taught is needed to transform existing inequalities in sport, within and beyond the classroom.

Why Critical Pedagogy in Sport?

The sport sector arguably remains a conservative space. High profile media cases leading to inquiries about safeguarding, abuse, and harassment in sport have significant repercussions for education providers. HE institutes have a duty of care to ensure students develop practical knowledge and skills, as well as the critical consciousness required to challenge inequalities of power in sport. One of the reasons we formed CPIS is because, as a collective, we are interested in asking questions about *how* and *why* the curriculum within sport-based courses is selected and taught, as well as how students engage in issues of social justice in sport education. We recognise that what is taught reflects what is

considered valuable knowledge about sport. For example, the knowledge that find their way onto the curriculum (and that which remains absent) relate to wider societal issues about *what* and *whose* knowledge is valued in sport.

Understanding this means that we can do something about it and encourage students to be advocates for social change empowering them to dismantle inhibiting structures of privilege.