

The Parents' Optimum Zone: Measuring and optimising parental engagement in youth sport

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ABSTRACT: Both Sport England, through its Long Term Athlete Development programme, and the NSPCC, through its Child Protection in Sport Unit, have a stake in improving parental behaviour in youth sport in order to optimise the safety and performance potential of young athletes. This paper reports on a commissioned review of parenting research literature and programmes by these two agencies in 2005. The outcome is a new model of parenting termed POZ (Parental Optimum Zone) that draws from previous research, in particular that on Activation States (Brackenridge et al., 2005) and Hanin's (1995) notion of the Individual Zone of Optimum Function (or IZOF) for athletes. The model seeks to identify the optimum discourses, knowledge, feelings and behaviours that parents should demonstrate in their engagement in their child's sport. Adopting this framework, and listening to children's views of it, will allow us to describe when parents are 'in the zone' and help them to adopt POZitive voices, knowledge, attitudes and action towards their child's sport. POZ synthesises several previous models and offers both a method of diagnosing and monitoring parent behaviour and a platform for parent education.

The NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) has overseen the development of child protection and welfare systems in English National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs), culminating in the publication of national standards for safeguarding children in sport (CPSU 2003). Sport England has adopted the Long Term Athlete Development model (Balyi 2002; Balyi and Hamilton 2003) as a framework for talent development in sport. Both agencies have an interest in securing optimum benefits from parental engagement in children's and youth sport.

The review on which this paper is based comprised a critical analysis of resources and programmes aimed at parental engagement in sport and of a selection of those aimed at child welfare and protection and talent development in the cognate areas of education and the performing arts. In addition to Internet searches and searches of 'grey' literature, UK and overseas products were scrutinised. A number of key stakeholders from English sport (including national governing bodies, sports development officers and Youth Sport Trust staff) were also invited to offer suggestions for enhancing parental engagement in youth sport. A composite model of parental engagement in sport was devised from previous models and key messages from academic research. This paper summarises the literature on parenting and welfare in sport and outlines a new model that offers a framework for parent education and the enhancement of welfare in youth sport.

Parents in sport

Parents represent a large volunteer workforce for English sport: their in-kind contribution represents a de facto subsidy, without which many children would simply not be able to continue their sports participation. However, parents often get a bad press. The phrase 'pushy parent' is well established in the sporting lexicon yet even a cursory review of children's sport reveals that parents (and carers¹) are engaged in many different ways and many different roles in their children's sport and that this one size

¹ Conventionally, the term 'parent' has been applied to the birth mother or father but it has become socially and politically diversified in recent years. Changes in demographic structures and patterns of family life mean that 'parent' is now applied to a wealth of living arrangements and adult responsibilities vis a vis children. For the purposes of this review 'parent' will be used as a generic term for any adult with de facto responsibility for the ongoing domestic care and welfare of the child but not to those 'in loco parentis' who take only a temporary or intermittent caring role.

stereotype certainly does not fit all. One objective of reviewing the literature on this subject was to tease out the nuances of parental engagement and to build a model of optimum engagement that could then be translated into practice through appropriate training and resources.

As long ago as the early 1970s sport researchers were interested in the role of parents in youth sports, with a literature on 'sport role socialisation' drawing heavily on wider sociological theories of family life and socialisation (see Purdy *et al.* (1982) for a general review and Rowley (1986) for a UK overview). The notion of role has since been discredited in the social sciences as being too restrictive and prescriptive yet the term still persists in the worlds of sport policy and advocacy. Indeed, we use the phrase 'role model' on an almost daily basis.

Since the early studies (mainly from the USA and Canada), various key messages about parenting in sport have been reinforced, many of which are reported in the Canadian publication *Straight Talk* (LeBlanc and Dixon 1997):

1. when problems arise they are usually concerned with excessive involvement and undue expectations by parents of their children (with the proviso that this was found in the North American sport culture which is more intensely competitive than that in the UK);
2. when adults enter and dominate children's sports it is usually because of their need to interact with highly skilled individuals, or to live vicariously through their children, or to gain prestige and reflected glory, or to establish high expectations for their child (or a combination of all of these);
3. even though child anxiety was a recurrent theme in much of this early literature, a study of over 90 elite young female athletes (across 21 different sports) in the UK (Griffiths 1996) found that the girls coped well with parental attention and found it mainly positive. It seems that parent anxiety and emotional control might therefore be more of an issue than children's anxiety about their parents. Research into youth soccer (Brackenridge *et al.* 2004) reinforced the problematic status of parents in that particular sport in England and, as greater political support and funding is invested in English sport, it is logical that parents will also invest more, both financially and emotionally;
4. since the rise of child protection awareness in English sport from the mid 1990s. *lack of involvement by parents* (typically described as using sport like a baby-sitting service) has also been recognised.

In sum then, we have tensions between, on the one hand wanting to bring more and more parents into youth sport in a variety of different roles because of the clear links between family support, safety and positive lifetime commitment to sport and physical activity and, on the other, wanting them to adopt respectful and appropriate behaviours and practices that keep youth sport in a reasonable perspective. There are also some arguments for keeping parents *out* of sport that need to be acknowledged here. For example, some coaches claim that they can work more effectively with young athletes if parents keep well away. Additionally, some young people claim that they want space to be with their mates and to get away from their parents (David, M. *et al.* 1999; Edwards *et al.* 2000). Finding a way of respecting the wishes of all parties is the challenge for the partners in this project.

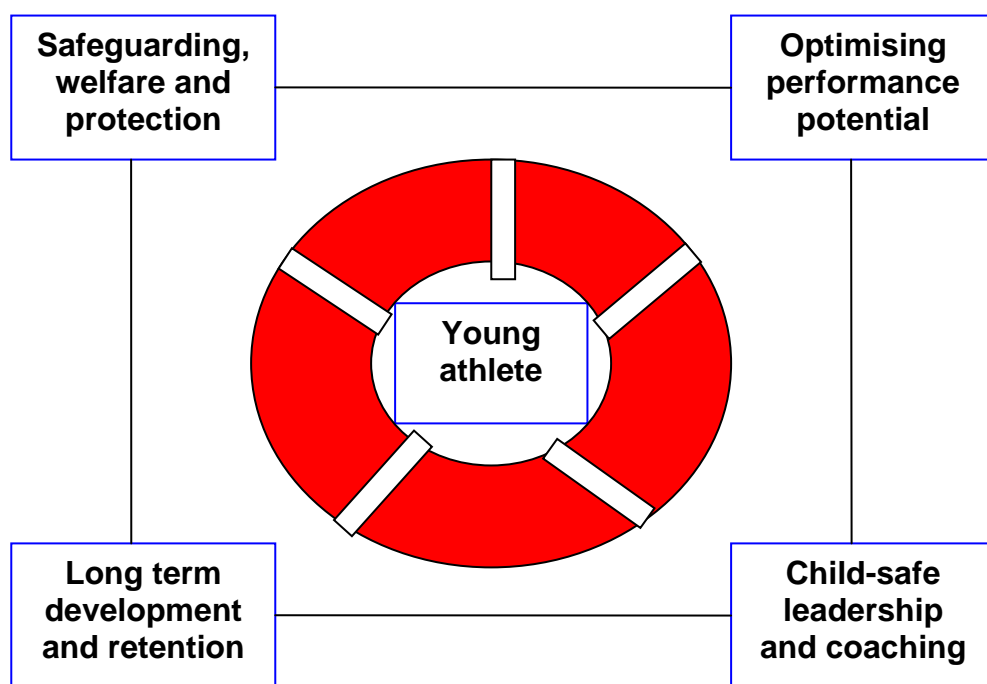
Child protection and welfare in sport

Since its inception (Boocock 2002), England's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), co-funded by Sport England and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has overseen the development of child protection and

welfare systems in National Governing Bodies, culminating in the publication of national standards for safeguarding children in sport (CPSU 2003). At the same time, Sport England has adopted Istvan Balyi's Long Term Athlete Development model (Balyi, 2002) as a framework for talent development in sport. This model now underpins talent identification and development in all of the funded priority NGBs through their One Stop Plans and Whole Sport Plans.

The largest youth sport organisation in England is the Youth Sport Trust (YST), which runs programmes for children from 18 months to 18 years and draws funding from government to the tune of millions of pounds. The work of the YST is focused on youth sport in all its manifestations, from play, to talent development, to leadership, to using sport as a vehicle for wider education and learning. The nurturance of gifted and talented athletes is an important part of the YST's overall mission and is achieved through building on best practice in education and sport both in the UK and overseas. Sports Parent is a YST training programme, for example, that has been rolled out on a limited basis and that has attempted to develop best practice in parent awareness and engagement in their children's sports.

Figure 1 Rationales for parent education in youth sport



Whereas once most sports coaches came from the teaching profession, with years of intensive pedagogic training behind them, now coaches come from all walks of life and all kinds of background experiences. England's main coach education organisation, sportscoach UK (scUK), is currently grappling with the challenge of developing a UK Coaching Certificate as part of the process of professionalising and standardising coach education by 2012 (UK Sport 2001). Child protection and welfare is a crucial component of coach education since child-friendly coaching styles both improve retention, and therefore success, in sport and also enhance the benefits of sport for individuals. scUK has been a major provider of child protection training for sport in recent years and works closely with the CPSU and Sport England to ensure that talent identification and LTAD embed best practice in safeguarding children. Each of these

organisations approaches parenting in sport from a slightly different angle, with four main rationales in evidence (see Fig. 1). Whether the different agendas can actually fit together operationally is a moot point since there are clear tensions between them. For example, in whose interests is talent being developed - the child's, the parent's or the nation's?

Behaviour change and the limits of stage models

In the 1990s most of the available published material on parenting in sport was atheoretical and virtually none of it problematised the relationship between coach, athlete and parent (Brackenridge 1998: p.61). Since then, a reasonable but by no means large literature has emerged on child protection and safety in sport and the founding of the CPSU has institutionalised the issue. Even so, most of the research and practice on safeguarding children draws from theoretical advances *outside* sport science rather than within it. These include, for example, the use of sex offender models such as Finkelhor's 'Four Factor Theory' (1984, 1986), Wolf's 'Cycle of Offending' (1984, in Fisher *et al.* 1994) and, more recently, Hudson and Ward's 'Pathways to Offending' (2000). Using Finkelhor's terminology (1986), for example, parents are 'external inhibitors' who can strengthen the child's resistance to abuse and act as a barrier to potential abusers.

Similarly, literatures outwith sport, on child development and talent development in education, have informed Balyi's LTAD model (2002). Balyi argues that his model is multidisciplinary, progressive, graduated by physiological and maturational factors and not driven simply by chronology. Chronological development, as Balyi and many others have noted, is a very poor indicator of maturation, skill development, academic ability, and personal and social independence. For this reason, decades of physical education teachers and youth coaches have worked to the maxim that the activity should fit the child and not vice versa. Modified activities, mini-games, adapted sports and graduated teaching progressions are therefore core elements of the repertoire of any good teacher or coach. Some parents understand and act on this maxim through personal experience, trial and error or enlightened self interest. Others fail to grasp the knowledge and understanding that their child is not a little adult.

However, the aim of developing the individual athlete could, arguably, be said to be antithetical to the aim of developing sport since there is a practical limit to the number of variants of a sport that can be offered and because, ultimately, the 'adult' version of a sport is the one with which governing bodies, sports councils, governments and Olympic judges most closely identify. In short, it seems that the sport (structure) will always win out over the needs of the individual (development). To this extent, the LTAD model is a means to an end, that end being sport success. Whether coaches and teachers should emphasise the means or the end, the journey or the arrival, is a debate which needs urgent attention in the UK in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

This tension also characterises the motivation of the two lead agencies who commissioned the review that underpins this paper, with Sport England driven by the participation and success imperatives, and the CPSU driven by the child welfare and development imperatives. Finding a way of reconciling these tensions is crucial for the success of both organisations. The simplest way to do this is to persuade all main stakeholders, including parents, that welfare and development *subserve* sport success and do not limit it. An analogy would be Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962) which indicates that the pinnacle of self actualisation can only be achieved if more basic needs (biological, safety and esteem) are met first. In sport, then, we must optimise personal, social and intellectual welfare and development in order to optimise physical/performance success. Keeping a balance between these elements is the main challenge for parents, coaches and teachers.

Given the prominence of stage models in our conventional wisdom about child development (such as Piaget's (1932) and Kohlberg's (1963) models of moral development), it is perhaps important to consider their limitations.

Start – Stay – Succeed: Sport England has chosen this three-stage model of sport development as the framework for its NGB Whole Sport Plans (Sport England 2004). Whilst this is a neat and superficially attractive framework, it masks a number of conceptual and practical difficulties. For example, it implies that:

- one cannot both start and succeed at the same stage
- success is the long term goal
- the stages are sequential and cannot be skipped or reversed ...

... whereas the injured athlete might well have to 're-start'; the adult learner engages in 'late start' and some people are good enough to go straight from 'start' to 'succeed'. Sarah Springman, for example, former European triathlon champion, took up rowing after retiring from triathlon and became an Olympic triallist within months.

Long Term Athlete Development: One of the early models of long term talent development was Bloom's (1985) (see Table 1). This provided a foundation for later work, including Cote's (1999) three-stage model (see Table 2).

Table 1 Summary of Bloom's three-stage model (1985)

(Source: Bloom, B.S. (1985) *Developing Talent in Young People*. NY: Ballentine Books, reproduced in *How to Coach Children* (scUK, 2003/2004))

| | Early years | Middle years | Later years |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Performer | Joyful Playful Excited | Wider perspective Committed Identity linked to sport | Obsessed Responsible Consumed |
| Coach | Kind Cheerful Focussed on talent devt process | Strong leader Knowledgeable Demanding | Successful Respectful/feared Emotionally bonded |
| Parent/carer | Model work ethic Encouraging Supportive Positive | Makes sacrifices Restricts own activities Child-centred | Limited role Provides financial support |

Table 2 Summary of Cote's three stage model (1999)

(Source: Cote, J. (1999) 'The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport', *Sport Psychologist* 13, reproduced in *How to Coach Children* (scUK, 2003/2004))

| Sampling years Age 6-13 | Specialising years Age 13-15 | Investment years Post-15 |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on fun and excitement • Parents/carers are key influence • Need to sample wide range of activities • No sport-specific specialisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on one or two sports • Sport-specific skill development • Practice time important • Lifestyle management (balance of activities) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to achieving elite status in one sport • Massive amount of practice time • Family becomes <i>sporting family</i> (i.e. family activities revolve around young person's sporting timetable) |

Balyi's model is presented as a comprehensive talent identification and tracking structure moving through six key stages (Balyi and Hamilton 2003):

1. FUNdamental
2. Learning to train
3. Training to train
4. Training to compete
5. Training to win
6. Retirement/retention

The LTAD model focusses on *individual* athletic development at various 'training ages' and yet the *context* in which this takes place is also a crucial determinant of success (see Table 3). The very recognition (by Sport England and the CPSU) that parental engagement in children's sport is important reinforces the point that athlete success is rarely achievable without good social support systems. This leads us to an important principle, that is: increasing both the amount and the appropriateness of engagement by parents is not just a matter of changing individual behaviour but also of changing the structures and cultural climates of sport. However, because the majority of sources uncovered during this review focussed on *individual* and *situational* behaviour (of children, parents, coaches and so on) rather than socio-cultural systems (such as reward structures, rules, cultural climates and so on), the main approach here is on parents as individuals (Table 3). Wylleman's (2004) alternative LTAD model addresses 'psychosocial' and 'academic' development as well as 'athletic' and 'individual' development. Because Wylleman's model is focused on athlete transitions rather than performance *per se*, it offers, arguably, a more holistic approach than Balyi's (see Hay 2004, and Lavellee and Wylleman 2000). Sport England has committed its NGBs to working with Balyi's model and it is this framework that has been used to develop their LTAD plans. [See also Issue 25, October 2004 of *Faster, Higher, Stronger* for a set of articles on athlete transitions.]

Table 3 Perspectives on the child athlete

| Sample individual perspectives | Sample situational perspectives | Sample socio-cultural perspectives |
|---|--|--|
| Psychology of individual differences Task v. ego goal orientation Physiological capacity Biological growth and development Maturation and readiness Trainability Sex differences Perfectionism (in gifted athletes) Competitive trait anxiety | Social learning Socialisation Peer, parent and sibling influences Education/academic demands Motivational climate (mastery or performance oriented) Parent-Initiated Motivational Climate Questionnaire (PIMCQ) (see White <i>et al.</i> 1992) Leadership style (see Martin <i>et al.</i> , 1999) Sport Interpersonal Relationship Questionnaire (Wylleman <i>et al.</i> 1995) State anxiety Lifestyle management | Exercise of power History and traditions of sport Social situations Cultural norms 'Idiocultures' (Fine, 1987) Class (socio-economic status/SES), race, gender structures and cultures Social exchange theory Family settings and systems |

Individuals (parents) will only change their actions towards an issue (their child's sport) if they accept that it is important and if they have the confidence to do so. Some parents are opposed to their child's sport, for whatever reason, and others feel they are too ignorant about it to offer constructive help. As parents move from 'not ready' to

'unsure' to 'ready', so they give voice to different anxieties, options and feelings. Measuring the willingness of parents to engage in the change process in respect of their children's sport, in this case to support and become involved in child protection practices and to support LTAD, is an important first step in describing how to avoid resistance at one extreme and interference at the other.

The sources of literature and theories of change include health psychology, management studies, education studies and organisational sociology, among others. Rollnick *et al.* (2000) report that there is an array of possible psychological models and theories that could be adopted in trying to explain individual change. Some of the most prominent that might be applied to parental engagement in children's sport include:

- Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980)
- Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1988)
- Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska and DiClemente 1986)

Each of these is based on tracking individual, personal change and each draws on psychological constructs. Typically, stage models set out a sequential list of phases through which the individual passes on their way to sustainable behaviour change. As with the start-stay-succeed framework described above, however, stage models of change have come in for criticism as being linear, deterministic, artificial, irreversible, psychometrically flawed and atheoretical.

Models of parental engagement in children's sport

There are several extant models of parental engagement in sport that have been used in the past to identify and explain where and why behaviour change is necessary. Several sources simply cite the parent-child-athlete triangle as an important influence on talent development (for example Byrne, in Lee 1993), without going into much detail or without necessarily using empirical research to underpin this. Most commonly cited is Hellestedt's Parental Involvement Continuum (1987, 1990 and 1995), originally developed from family systems theory, which defines parents as underinvolved, involved and over-involved (see Figure 2). Despite being widely quoted in the sports literature, and helpful in applied sports development work, Hellestedt's model has also been criticised for not being derived from research evidence.

Figure 2 The Parental Involvement Continuum
(Source: Hellestedt, 1987)

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Disinterested parent ↑ | Misinformed parent ↑ | The comfort zone | Excitable parent ↑ | Fanatical parent ↑ |
| UNDERINVOLVEMENT | | MODERATE INVOLVEMENT | OVERINVOLVEMENT | |

In their review of parenting literature in sport, Wylleman *et al.* (2000) talk about 'direct' and 'indirect' involvement and list sources showing both positive and negative parental influences on child athletes. Wylleman has also found the child's relationship with their father to be a particular influence on a talented athlete's levels of athletic achievement. This raises interesting questions about the absence of a father figure in a child athlete's home life and the implications this may have for managing relationship boundaries with male coaches (Bringer *et al.*, 2006).

Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) also invoke a continuum to describe the range of parental approaches to children's sport from 'supportive parenting' at the positive end to 'conspicuous parent' at the negative end, where conspicuous parenting plays on the 'use

value' of the child to display the parent as self-sacrificing. This analysis rests on social exchange (social cost/benefit) theory, involving the child in emotional and other 'strings' as part of his/her bargain with parents.

... in the post-modern age children have become to parents covert opportunities to demonstrate prowess, status, symbolic capital, and power.

(Grenfell and Rinehart 2003:90)

It is this kind of *cultural* analysis that raises uncomfortable questions about children's sport for agencies like Sport England and sports coach UK, as set out above, and that is not foregrounded in performance-based models like LTAD. For example, Grenfell and Rinehart echo other authors on children's rights in sport (Seefeldt 1979; Martens 1978; Donnelly 1997; David 2004) when they question whether the young athlete's social, psychological and skill development are necessarily in synch.

The Model - The Parents' Optimum Zone (P.O.Z)

An attempt to capture the many possible types of parental involvement in one model, originally devised inductively using qualitative research data, is the Activation States model (Brackenridge *et al.* 2004, 2005) which depicts the **voices, knowledge, attitudes** and **actions** that are associated with different states of activation towards a subject – in this case children's sport. The addition of discourses to the standard psychological structure (of cognitive/affective/behavioural) was a deliberate attempt to capture some of the local cultural issues that apply to behaviour change, in other words to treat behaviour change as a socially and culturally-located issue. The Activation States, originally described in relation to child protection in youth football, are:

- **Inactive** = no knowledge or commitment
- **Reactive** = reluctant commitment and engagement
- **Active** = satisfactory awareness and involvement
- **Proactive** = full commitment and advocacy
- **Opposed** = either overtly critical of, or covertly against, the CP initiative

In Figure 3a the Activation States model is extended on the basis of the literature review (to include **Hyperactive**) and illustrated using typical parental responses found in youth sport research. Distinguishing between voices, knowledge, attitudes and actions in this way allows us to permutate the many different combinations that exist: for example, one parent may have very poor knowledge about her child's sport but be very enthusiastic about it; another might have excellent knowledge but be disapproving or hostile, and so on. In this way, the model allows for different activation profiles in different situations. It builds on and shares some similarities with Hellestedt's model but offers a more nuanced interpretation of parental engagement.

Below, these two models are combined to depict what will here be called the *Parent's Optimum Zone* – or POZ (Figure 3b). This model (with apologies to Yuri Hanin (2000) and his IZOF model – Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning, 1995) seeks to identify the optimum discourses, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that parents should demonstrate in their engagement in their child's sport. It is important to recognise that one size does not fit all, however, and that, for some children and young people sport, as with schooling (David *et al.* 1999 and Edwards *et al.* 2000), is a private leisure space where they seek autonomy and where parents and carers are not always welcome.

Children from middle class circumstances are more likely to talk about facilitating, or going along with, involvement for parents ... or, when older, to see themselves as responsible for their own education. Those from working class circumstances, and some from minority ethnic groups, sometimes resist parents' involvement because they want a separation between their home and school lives, or because they experience their parents' inability to be involved.

(Edwards *et al.* 2000p.1)

For this reason the model needs to be used flexibly, with children themselves allowed to denote which profile is best suited to them at each stage of their long term athletic development. Adopting the framework of discourses, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and listening to children's views of this will allow us to describe the range of what is acceptable i.e. when parents are 'in the zone' and help them to adopt POZitive voices, knowledge, attitudes and action towards their child's sport.

Conclusions

Parents provide a vast but as-yet uncosted in-kind benefit/de facto subsidy to English sport. Recruitment of more parents into children's and youth sports is an excellent mechanism for realising the government targets for young people's physical activity and participation. Yet some sports suffer from conflicts with parents and struggle to manage parent behaviour causing, at best, negative consequences for children's experiences and, at worst, a haemorrhage of potential talent from sport.

Sport is probably behind education in terms of its provision for child welfare and talent development but appears to be ahead of the performing arts, at least in England. Relatively few NGBs have specific materials for developing parental involvement in sport and there is no coherence in the way these are currently presented. Further, parenting initiatives in sport currently pay too little attention to equity and social inclusion, leaving particular individuals and family types at a serious disadvantage when it comes to supporting children's involvement. Current materials for parent education in sport are not sufficiently differentiated by gender of parent yet research suggests that parenting in sport is significantly gendered.

There are good examples of both child advocacy and parent education/involvement in some sport organisations and agencies in England and overseas but these have not been widely communicated or integrated. Some sport organisations have developed their own parenting initiatives and resources but few of these have been systematically monitored or evaluated.

Academic research into effective parental engagement in sport is relatively sparse, mainly North American, and largely dominated by sports science perspectives (especially sport psychology, exercise physiology and nutrition). Little attention has been paid by researchers to the organisational cultures and structures within which their children play sport. In this literature, parent engagement in youth sport is defined as mainly a matter of personal choice and the cultural climates and social structures of their engagement are largely ignored. There is clear scope for further work on the structural, cultural and relational aspects of parenting in sport as a counterbalance to the apparent dominance of sport science approaches. Whether the competing rationales of child welfare and performance enhancement can ever be reconciled remains an open question.

Note

Thanks to UK Sport and the NSPCC who funded my attendance at CIOSC 2006.

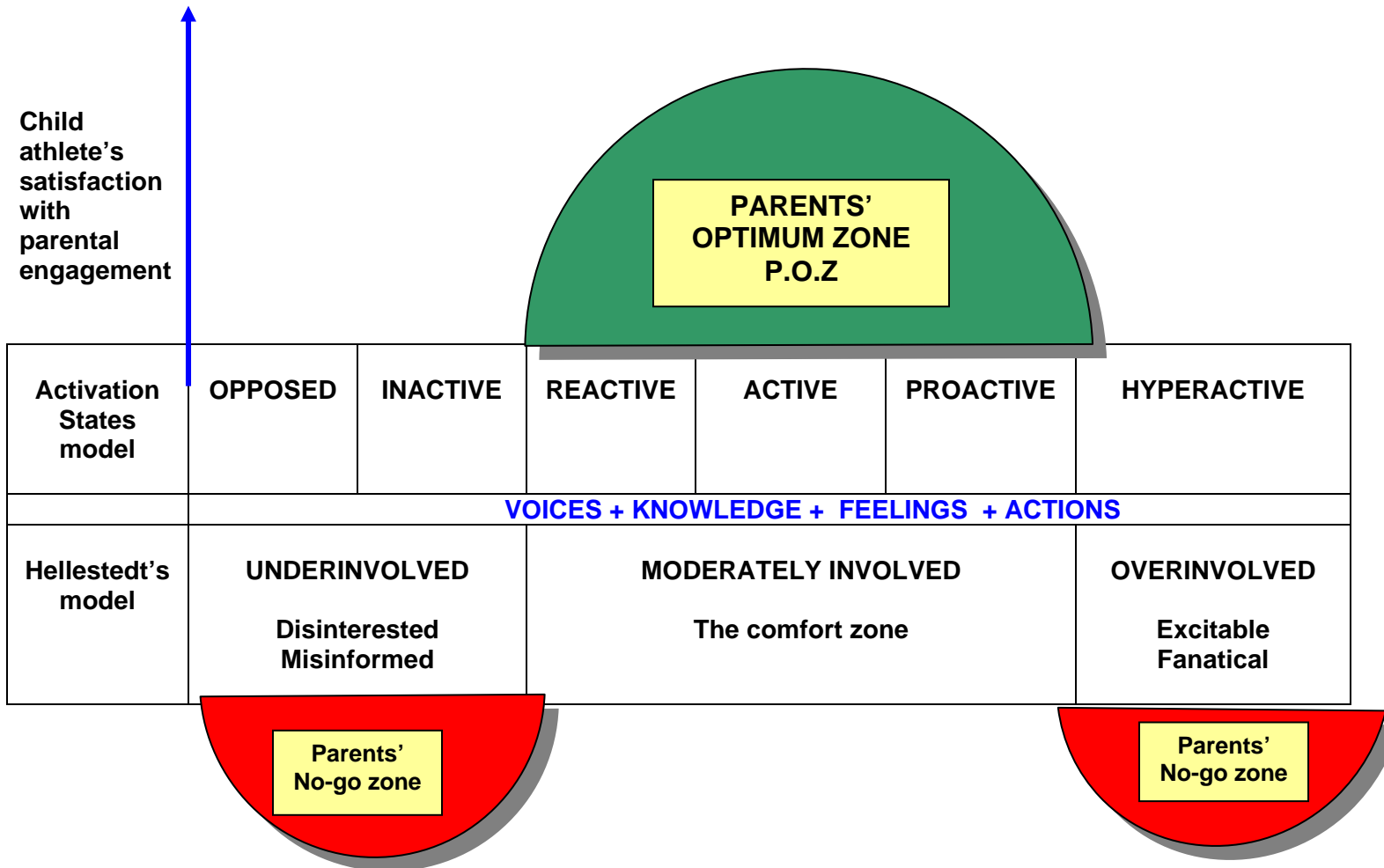
Figure 3a 'Activation states' with regard to parents' engagement in children's sport

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| State -> | OPPOSED | INACTIVE | REACTIVE | ACTIVE | PROACTIVE | HYPERACTIVE |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| Voices/ discourses [What parents say about their child's sport] | This is complete waste of time/ money/ effort. X sport is for idiots, faggots etc. Why don't you play my sport? | It's nothing to do with me. I can't be bothered. It's not my responsibility. Get on with it yourself. | OK, if I have to. I suppose someone has to help. I'm not sure if I know enough. What if I do something wrong? | This is a good thing. We all share this responsibility. My kids deserve my help. You tried your best. | I need to learn more about this. I need to learn from others. S/he will learn from failure as well as success. | What went wrong? Why didn't you win? Why didn't you try harder? You stupid ... After all I've done for you! Wait 'til I get you home! |
| Knowledge & experience [What parents know through experience – awareness, interest or understanding] | Ignorant. Uses myths and prejudices as arguments e.g. sport makes your muscles bulge, is bad for you, will make you butch ... etc. | No knowledge. No awareness. No experience. No interest. No motivation. | Limited knowledge. Limited awareness. Some personal experience. Some interest. | Aware of support roles and responsibilities. Has knowledge appropriate for role. Knows where to find out more. | Knowledge beyond the minimum. Experience of child's sport. Knowledge of LTAD. Know child's wishes about when to attend and when not to. | Obsessive about acquiring training, diet, practice information etc. Privileged access/ knowledge (who, what, how) through own involvement/contacts. Knowledge as a weapon. |
| Feelings [What parents feel – their attitudes and emotions] | Resistant. Hostile. Aggressive. Contemptuous. | Indifferent. Ignorant. Unwilling. | Timid. Nervous. Anxious. Sceptical. Reluctant. | Accepting. Tolerant. Compliant. Accommodating. Willing. | Confident, sure, certain, convinced, committed, positive, relaxed, reflective, evaluative. | Winning is the only thing. Aggressive/pushy. Unforgiving. Exasperated by failure. |
| Action [What parents do /have done – their achievements and behaviour] | Actively opposes child's sport. Readily points out failures, high costs, problems, mistakes etc. Won't give support, funds, permission. Insists on other duties (housework, homework etc.) | Does nothing. Resistant. Bystander behaviour. | Responds only after several 'pushes'. Professes ignorance. Volunteers reluctantly. | Applies knowledge. Happily fulfils responsibilities. Seeks learning and experiences. Attends courses/ workshops. Reads literature. Acts appropriately. Engages actively. Rewards child's effort not ego. | Keeps up to date. Talks with and seeks feedback from child. Adapts and responds. Seeks wider information sources. Participates in or volunteers for support roles. Listens to child and gives him/her autonomy. | Screams and shouts from the sideline/at child/refs/ coaches/other players etc. Breaches codes of conduct. Interferes with coaching sessions. Complains to everyone. Use child for vicarious success. Talks without listening. Bossy and judgemental. |

Figure 3b

Parents' Optimum Zone for POZitive engagement in children's sport



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