Internationally there is increasing attention on the use of schools to deliver physical activity initiatives and sport-focused policies (Mackintosh, 2012) and the last decade was considered to have witnessed a ‘quiet revolution’ in youth sport in England (DfES, 2007), with the development of two major national strategies for Physical Education and School Sport (PESS). The strategies advocated a partnership approach to governance which had become the ‘norm across all sectors of government’ (Roberts, 2009:3) including education. The strategies were accompanied by £2.4bn investment of public funds and the construction of an infrastructure of School Sport Partnerships (SSPs) strategically managed by a Partnership Development Manager (PDM). The SSP was established to accompany the implementation and realization of policy.

Applying Bernstein’s theoretical concept of the pedagogic device our study investigates how the national strategies, created in the recontextualising field moved out and into schools situated in the secondary field. More importantly, the role that staff employed in the SSP played in the processes of selection, transmission and transformation.

Utilising a range of ethnographic methods, this study examined 9 SSPs in a sub-regional area of London and is the first such study undertaken from a position inside the SSP network. Enabling an analysis of how the strategies were transmitted and transformed to encourage schools to support the implementation process. We identify the methods employed within the management of the programme to ensure compliance and the achievement of the overarching performance target set out within the Public Service Agreement.

Our findings identify how the SSP, and ultimately the PDM, is positioned within the pedagogic device. We present an analysis of the complexities of the contractual nature of the PDM post. In particular the requirement of the PDM to operate in both the recontextualising and secondary fields sometimes simultaneously. Furthermore we identify how PDMs were active in the process of positioning themselves and others drawing particularly on their professional background in sport development or education. This study considers the implications for the realization of government strategies in schools. We acknowledge the distinctly different skills, knowledge and language required to communicate and operate with agents and agencies in the recontextualising and secondary fields. Concluding with future considerations for youth sport policy implementation.