

Theme: Talent Development

Talent development – dealing with potentiality

Jesper Stilling Olesen & Jens Christian Nielsen, The Danish School of Education, Aarhus University.

In this paper we will consider talent, as something an athlete does, rather than something an athlete either is or has. Our perspective is informed by new materialism (Fox & Alldred 2017; Mol & Law 2004; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). New materialism supplies concepts that help us focus on the interaction that takes place between an athlete-assemblage and a talent-developer-assemblage, which when they meet creates some agential forces that produce talent. For this paper we study a single athlete whose story challenges our common understanding of what a talent is. We followed the badminton player Jamie over 2 years while attending 8th and 9th grade in a sports class. Based on consecutive interviews with Jamie, his parents, and other key actors in the talent development environment and participant observations (Olesen, Skrubbeltrang & Nielsen 2015), we show that the combined athlete/developer-assemblage is able to maintain talent despite the fact that Jamie is long-term injured and for long periods of time is unable to perform talent on his own. We argue that talent development is a collective handling of potential by two assemblages coming together. In the endeavor to achieve the ultimate goal of excellence the athlete/developer assemblage creates a number of effects: it translates potential into talent; it opens up a possibility eventually to transform talent to expertise; it changes doubts to beliefs and it impedes other ways of life for the selected athlete. The study questions the idea of talent development as a neutral event, which makes itself available for a budding talent. It provides an insight into what might be termed the micro politics of talent development. Talent development proves to be an intervention with far-reaching ontological, pedagogical and ethical implications for the athlete and all the other actors being mobilized by a talent/developer-assemblage.

(295 words)

References:

Deleuze, G. & F. Guattari (1987): *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fox, N. J. & P. Alldred (2016): *Sociology and the New Materialism: Theory, Research, Action*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Mol, A. & J. Law (2004): "Embodied Action, Enacted Bodies: The example of Hypoglycemia". In: *Body & Society*, vol. 10 (2-3), 2004, 43-62.

Olesen, J. S., L. S. Skrubbeltrang & J. C. Nielsen (2015): *Idrætstalenter i den danske folkeskole – forpligtiget på udvikling*. The Danish School of Education, Aarhus University.

Biographies of the presenting authors

Jens Christian Nielsen, Ph.D. and Associate professor in Youth Research at The Danish School of Education at Aarhus University. He has written extensively on youth issues. His work focusses on young people's learning, relationship and well-being, on their transition and becoming and on individualization and standardization. Currently he is working with research on talent development in sport and school.

Jesper Stilling Olesen, Associate Professor, Ph.D., Danish School of Education, Aarhus University.

Research Program: Engage: (Dis)engaging Children and Young People

Resent research projects: Idrætsklasser – plads til idrætstalenter i den danske folkeskole (eng: Sports classes – making room for athletes in the Danish public school), Together with Team Danmark, Undervisningsministeriet, Danmarks Idrætsforbund & Elitekommuner i Danmark.