

## Promoting Adolescent Physical Activity

**Interviewer:** Sam Walter (Interviewer, Ideas Lab)

**Guest:** Professor Joan Duda

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**Intro VO :** Welcome to the Ideas Lab Predictor Podcast from the University of Birmingham. In each edition we hear from an expert in a different field, who gives us insider information on key trends, upcoming events, and what they think the near future holds.

**Sam:** So we're here today with Professor Joan Duda who's a Professor of Sport and Exercise Psychology in the School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Birmingham. Hello Joan.

Joan: Hello, good afternoon.

**Sam:** So can you tell us a bit about what you do here at the university?

Joan: Yes. Well as you said I'm a Professor of Sport and Exercise Psychology and I lead quite a large group of fellow colleagues, research fellows, post-grad students, in terms of research in this area and I think we're one of the leading programmes, not just in the UK but internationally, but also a lot of our work is taking the research we do that draws from theories and taking it out to the real world and trying to make a difference.

**Sam:** So it's real hands on stuff.

Joan: Yes, yes. I mean so we work with very different audiences, everything from children in schools and physical education settings, to talented international level athletes, to your average person that we're just trying to promote a little bit more physical activity and an active lifestyle. So it's quite a diverse range of folks from less able to more talented, from children all the way through the lifespan.

**Sam:** So you've had a project called PAPA (<http://www.projectpapa.org/>), which is 'Promoting Adolescent Physical Activity', which involves nearly 10,000 children from across Europe. Can you tell us exactly what this epic project involved?

Joan: Yes, so the PAPA project, a nice little acronym there, it has been a European based project, it's just winding down this September, it's been going for over four years now but the whole backdrop to the project is to look at the youth sport setting and to maximise it in terms of its implications for public health. I mean it is a setting where the potential's fantastic, amazing for children to be active, to learn about physical activity, to feel better about their meteoric abilities, to develop physical skills and to have psychological benefits too, enhancing their self-esteem and sense of self and how to work with each other. So great promise but it's not always the case that that setting is optimised. So the backdrop to the PAPA project was basically to go in there with a theory, and evidence based programme, to work with the coaches themselves to create an environment that is what we call 'more empowering'. This is a programme that we've developed over the last twenty or so years and it's evolved over time. That tries to give them the tools about how to, you know, have children feel well about themselves and feel connected and feel a sense of choice and really maximising their engagement in that setting.

**Sam:** Why are coaches so important in this process?

Joan: Well I mean certainly there's lots of difference significant others. The parents that are on the side of the pitch and drive the kids to and from training and matches are very important as well, but in this setting we do know that coaches matter. Their behaviours and interactions with the children are a key component of their motivational climate that surrounds young people and for this project then, the idea was to try to go in there and work primarily with them to at least start the building blocks to creating a better weather system for youth sport.

**Sam:** And how is this different from what the coaches were doing before? What was their change of approach after doing the programme?

Joan: I mean I think we at least have come quite some way in terms of having coaches do some type of training. It's not always the case that coaches have had courses or what have you but it's getting better. But if you look at most of the coach education out there it primarily focuses on the xs and os. How do you teach children strategy and technique and how can you organise drills and things like that? And even when these courses referred to kids and working with children, it's quite superficial, it's like 'OK, remember they're children and you want to have children feel well and you want to have sport be fun'. Well, we can go a lot deeper than that. We've done work with parents. They're a key component of contributing to their children's motivation. We know they love their kids and they care and they want their kids to do well but how they can give these motivational messages in a more adaptive way. So yeah, it's like chipping at the base of the mountain. There's many different aspects that come to play when you talk about children's sense of self and their sense of physicality and likelihood of adopting an active lifestyle but youth sport and the environment that coaches curate are one important piece.

**Sam:** So the PAPA project is a truly global project really isn't it? It's not just in the UK. How does it differ around the world with these different projects?

Joan: Yeah, well it was funded by the European Commission so it was primarily European based at its heart. So besides England, the PAPA project involved colleagues in Spain, in France, in Greece and in Norway. These all were very interesting countries to centre on. I mean first of all they represent different parts of Europe but also there's differences in participation patterns of children, there's differences in the way youth sport is organised and within the PAPA project, I mean the empowering coaching programme is applicable to all kids, all sport activities or physical education, those types of things. We're doing work in dance and so on but within the PAPA project we centred on grass roots football, just because of the sheer numbers of children that do participate in football, you know, in Europe and of course around the world. I think they estimated something like over 40,000 teams of children in the ages that we targeted in the PAPA project which was between 10 and 14 years of age.

**Sam:** We're really on the crest of the wave following the 2012 Olympic legacy aren't we at the moment? What's on the horizon for sports motivation, for sports involvement, following that?

Joan: Well yeah, I mean the London 2012 extravaganza was fantastic, even ending with Andy Murray winning the US Open, his first major. I mean rightly so, I think the Government has taken a step back and has put more money into sport programmes within schools. I think there's something like £150m coming into schools to create these programmes for kids. You need to have programmes, you need to have facilities, that's all great but pitches and coaches and programmes and access are not enough. They're a step in the right direction but they're not enough. What you need too is to make sure that the environment they create is adaptive, is empowering, because at the end of the day that's what sustains engagement for kids.

**Sam:** Professor Joan Duda, Thank you very much.

**Outro VO :** This podcast and others in the series are available on the Ideas Lab website: [www.ideaslabuk.com](http://www.ideaslabuk.com) (<http://www.ideaslabuk.com>). There's also information on the free support Ideas Lab has to offer to TV and radio producers, new media producers and journalists. The interviewer and producer for the Ideas Lab Predictor Podcast was Sam Walter.

