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Still feeling like a spare piece of luggage? Embodied experiences of (dis)ability in physical education and school sport

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This paper addresses an increasing concern within physical education and sports research to engage with young people to find out more about their experiences of physical education and school sport. In particular, I centre my concerns on the experiences of five young disabled pupils. I use the conceptual tools offered by Bourdieu to extend understandings of disability beyond those typically associated with medical and social model percepts and in so doing explore the notion of the embodied identities of the disabled pupils in this study. In this paper, I also develop Evans' (2004) recent discussion focusing on 'ability' and particularly his concern for ability to be conceptualised as a sociocultural and dynamic entity. The data generated reveals that a paradigm of normativity prevails in physical education. It would seem the physical education habitus serves to affirm a normative presence in physical education and school sport and is manifest through conceptions of ability that recognise and value a mesomorphic ideal, masculinity and high levels of motoric competence. I conclude by suggesting that articulations of ability need to be recast and understood in ways that extend beyond narrowly defined measures of performance and normative conceptions of what is it to have a sporting body.

Keywords: *Young disabled people; Physical education; Embodiment*

Introduction

Within contemporary society public discourse has much to say about inclusion and equity. Indeed, in recent years physical educators have increasingly been concerned with these issues and as a result of this physical education teachers today can draw on a diverse range of resources to assist them with their practice (for example, adapted equipment, guidelines, syllabuses, CD Roms and CPD opportunities). All

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this, it is anticipated, will provide positive and inclusive experiences for many young people, including those that happen to be disabled. In seeking to explore the nature of young disabled people's physical education and school sport experiences I focus on an important but often overlooked source of information. I centre my concerns on the insights given from young disabled people themselves. As others have argued (Christensen & James, 2000; Christensen & Prout, 2002), I take the position that young people should be listened to and encouraged to participate in research activities. Elsewhere, I have shown how a number of innovative research approaches can effectively be used to engage young disabled people within the research process (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2003a, 2003b). In this paper, I continue to explore the valuable insights that can be gained from these young people. In doing this, I hope to build upon the limited understandings we currently have of young disabled people's experiences of physical education and school sport (Smith, 2004). Indeed, I believe it is only when these views are listened to that we can begin to better understand the actual nature of physical education and school sport experienced in our schools and the consequences this has on young people's sense of self.

This paper attempts to address the recent call by Aitchison (2003) for researchers within leisure (and I believe these comments are also relevant to physical education and sports researchers) to move beyond the discursive boundaries of the field and engage with wider discourses. In particular, Aitchison (2003) points to the utility of engaging with 'disability studies' in order to develop 'inter-subject field discourses' (p. 956) between leisure and disability. In seeking to contribute to the cross-fertilization of this discourse I centre my concerns on the embodied experiences of young disabled people within a physical education and school sport context. By positioning my work in this way I believe it will contribute to understandings within physical education and disability studies relating to two key, but interrelated, areas of thinking. First, I will continue the ongoing and growing dialogue found within disability studies that has extended understandings of social model perspectives by exploring the notion of embodied identities of disabled people. By engaging in this discussion I hope to alert writers within physical education and sport to the contested and evolving terrain of social model perspectives and the merits of understanding disability from an embodied position. Second, I also want to develop Evans' (2004) recent discussion focusing on 'ability' and particularly his concern for ability to be conceptualised as a sociocultural and dynamic entity. In this paper then, I will consider data generated from young disabled people in order to explore the ways in which physical education and school sport impact on how their 'abilities are recognised, valued, nurtured and accepted, while others are rejected' (Evans, 2004, p. 104). Although I centre my concerns on the experiences of young disabled people I believe that the arguments developed carry with them important messages that are relevant to the physical education of many young people.

I first of all briefly consider the nature of research that has been undertaken in relation to young disabled people and experiences of physical education and sport. After this, I highlight the literature informing my thinking in this study. In particular, I draw on understandings of disability found within disability studies, conceptions of

ability evident in physical education discourses and the notion of embodiment found within the writing of Bourdieu. Following this I identify the methods used to generate the research information. I then discuss the findings emerging from the study relating to four key themes: *activity status, embodying difference through the habitus, legitimate participation and attaining capital and the physical education teacher as a nurturer of ability*. Finally, I conclude by reflecting upon the findings in relation to the constitution and practices of physical education in our schools.

Physical education, school sport and experiences of disabled pupils

The familiar hustle and bustle, murmuring and giggling that follow the instruction 'Get into teams' are always accompanied by the predictable 'Aw Sir, do we have to? Or 'No way are we having him'' as the games teachers allocates me to a random team, rather like a spare piece of luggage that no one can be bothered to carry. (Jackson, 2002, p. 129)

This insightful and frank account given by Luke Jackson provides us with a glimpse of the kinds of experiences he encountered during physical education lessons. More importantly though, from this brief recollection we are able to gain a sense of the way in which Luke perceived himself and the way *he believed he was (un)valued by his peers*. This account along with other autobiographies of disabled people (Grey-Thompson, 2001) and research relating to broader life experiences (Swain & Cameron, 1999; Viscardi, 2001; Davis & Watson, 2002; Disability Rights Commission, 2002; Shelley, 2002) provide a range of insights into the way in which physical education and sport can impact on the lives of disabled people. Ironically, as I have pointed out elsewhere, physical education and sports researchers seem disinterested in exploring these kinds of insights (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2003b). Consequently, we currently have to rely on literature from wider sources to extend our understandings in this area. While acknowledging that recent survey work such as that completed by Sport England (2001) is useful, I also recognise this kind of work inevitably falls short of providing in-depth understandings of experiences. The general apathy within physical education and sports research is also coupled with a failure by writers positioning themselves within the sociology of physical education and sport to theorise or sufficiently account for the experiences of disabled people.¹

The need to explore physical education and sport experiences from the perspective of disability was highlighted over ten years ago by Barton who suggested:

Merely adopting a curriculum for able-bodied people without some critical dialogue is unacceptable. The voice of disabled people needs to be heard and seriously examined. This is absolutely essential in the teaching of physical education. (Barton, 1993, p. 52)

Furthermore, in the context of disability and sport the benefits of exploring participation issues centring on these concepts has also been highlighted by DePauw who argued that:

The lens of disability allows us to make problematic the socially constructed nature of sport and once we have done so, opens us to alternative constructions, and solutions. (DePauw, 1997, p. 428)

Since these words were written by Barton and DePauw physical educators have entered into some critical dialogue on issues relating to curriculum and pedagogical

aspects of inclusion (Penney & Evans, 1995; LaMaster *et al.*, 1998; Hodge *et al.*, 2003; Smith, 2004). However, the majority of this work has not yet considered Barton's call to listen to the voices of disabled people. This oversight can only be detrimental to the physical education profession, as we will continue to work in ways that are informed by assumptions rather than actual insights from the young people. I believe the implications of this study are wide ranging and although I focus my concerns on the experiences of young disabled people it is worth remembering, as DePauw so eloquently points out, that the kinds of issues I examine and the critique offered will contribute to broader discussions and in particular the growing body of evidence that supports the view that the constitution and practices of physical education in schools are in need of reform (Kirk, 1998; Gorely *et al.*, 2003) if we are to better serve more young people.

Conceptions of disability, ability and embodied abilities

We all have bodies, but not all bodies are equal, some matter more than others: some are, quite frankly, disposable. (Braidotti, 1996, p. 136, cited in Meekosha, 1999)

Implicit in this statement is the notion that we live in a society that places differing values on bodies. Indeed, within contemporary society youthful, slim, toned and sensual bodies are held with the highest regard (Shilling, 1996; Wright, 2000; Oliver, 2001). Bodies perceived as not achieving this kind of makeup are often seen as undesirable and viewed in negative ways. In this context, non-conforming disabled bodies are frequently perceived as 'spoilt' (Goffman, 1968) and 'flawed' (Hevey, 1992). In order to understand why it is that disabled people are often understood in these terms it is useful to briefly review the concept of disability and ability.

Contemporary understandings of disability are essentially founded on medical or social model perspectives. The medical model of disability centres concerns on the individual with the impairment and focuses on notions of abnormality and deficiency, as defined in medical terms (Oliver, 1996; Barnes *et al.*, 1999). Within this perspective disability is understood as a relatively stable and narrowly defined concept. In contrast, the social model supports the view that disability is socially constructed and that it is society that disables people with impairments (Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1996). The social model has been described as the '... emancipatory force in the lives of disabled people' (Tregaskis, 2002, p. 457). Indeed, it has been argued that **this model '... "speaks" from the standpoint of disabled people and therefore voices an opinion that has, throughout modernity, been silenced by the paternalism of a non-disabled culture' (Patterson & Hughes, 2000, p. 35).**

More recently, a number of commentators have argued that **the social model has excluded 'the body' from the experiences of impairment** (Morris, 1991; Pinder, 1995; Hughes & Paterson, 1997, Hughes, 2000; Patterson & Hughes, 2000). Moreover, it has been suggested that '... Within disability studies the term 'body' tends to be used without much sense of bodiliness as if the body were little more than flesh and bones' (Paterson & Hughes, 1999, p. 600). In this context, Marks (1999, p. 611) believes '... **Individual [medical] and social models of disability represent**

two sides of the same coin'. What Marks is suggesting here is that by pathologising the body (the medical model) and focusing on structural issues (the social model) both models are implicated in failing to consider the individual beyond these restricted understandings. Although commentators are increasingly recognising the limitations of the social model it still remains a central, and persuasive, force for those committed to overcoming the exclusion of disabled people in social life. Importantly though, as we will see later in this paper, the social model is not the only way in which the experiences of disabled people can be articulated and understood.

In many ways, common sense understandings of ability contrast with those frequently associated with dominant discourses of disability—the prefix of 'dis' provides us with a constant reminder of the perceived inferior and negative relationship between disability and ability. According to Gillborn and Youdell (2001), education discourses emphasise ability as something that is fixed, measurable and can lead to broader generalisations about potential. Many of these features of ability are also evident in understandings found within physical education and sport. Indeed, ability is often related to performance and associated with skill and technique (Schmidt, 1991; Xiang *et al.*, 2001). More specifically, it has been argued that physical education and sport supports a normalised understanding of ability that promotes specific bodily ideals. For boys, these ideals are often associated with masculinity and a mesomorphic body type (Tinning, 1990; Light & Kirk, 2000; Tinning & Glasby, 2002). Evans sometime ago warned of the limitations of considering ability through narrowly conceived understandings of performance (Evans, 1990) and recently reaffirmed this view, suggesting that understandings of ability continue to emphasise one-dimensional and static features (Evans, 2004). In representing ability in this narrowly defined manner no account is consequently given of '... the nature of "ability" as a dynamic, sociocultural construct and process' (Evans, 2004, p. 99). In seeking to extend discussions concerning the notion of ability within physical education and sport Evans (2004) points to the utility of using the habitus and other associated conceptual tools offered by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1992).

'The Habitus is located within the body and affects every aspect of human embodiment' (Shilling, 1996, p. 129). It is '... a bridge-building exercise' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 74) that immerses the relations between structure and agency by incorporating society into the body. According to Crossley (2001) the habitus consists of 'dispositions', 'schemes', 'know-how' and 'competency'. For Bourdieu social life can only be understood by considering the embodiment of individuals within particular fields,² such as physical education, through their habitus. According to Bourdieu an individual will be judged on their ability to deploy the relevant habitus within a particular field. Therefore, if an individual's social action is compatible with the style, manner and customs of the field they are likely to be accepted as a member and support the ongoing reproduction of these conditions. Following Bourdieu's thinking, Evans believes that the competencies exhibited as physical education and sports habitus can function as capital and argues that it is these competencies that can and often are considered as abilities.

In effect they may be perceived as ‘abilities’, embodied social constructs, meaningful only in their display and are always and inevitably defined relationally with reference to values, attitudes and mores prevailing within a discursive field. (Evans, 2004, p. 100)

In this paper, I will consider ability as embodied social constructs, and in so doing, attempt to move the thinking offered by Evans forward by exploring how these embodied conceptions of ability are manifest through young disabled people’s experiences of physical education and school sport. Moreover, by centring my concerns through the ‘lens of disability’ (DePauw, 1997) I will also shed new light on questions of ability in the context of disability. As others have illustrated (Edwards & Imrie, 2003) I believe that by using Bourdieu’s notions of the habitus and capital and exploring embodied understandings of disability I will bridge the discursive impasse currently evident between medical and social model understandings of disability. Indeed, in this paper I will move beyond these understandings of disability by using an alternative way of recognising and considering the experiences of young disabled people in physical education and school sport.

Methods

The data reported in this paper were generated as part of a larger project involving disabled pupils drawn from thirty-five schools in the Midlands of England. Over four hundred pupils participated in this research project. These young people experience a range of physical and sensory impairments and learning difficulties. The principal methods of data generation used were the completion, by pupils, of physical education questionnaires and activity diaries. In addition, a series of ‘one off’ focus group discussions were undertaken with pupils from six of the thirty-five participating schools. A further set of three focus group discussions were also conducted at two additional schools. The data generated using these collection strategies reflected an approach to data collection enabling deeper understandings to be gained and explored with each strategy used.

This paper will specifically focus on the data generated from one of the schools where three focus group sessions were conducted with five young disabled people.³ Although it was not my intention to target boys specifically, the five participants were all boys. Essentially, pragmatic reasons relating to timetabling and willingness to participate influenced the selection of participants and the subsequent composition of this focus group.

The paper will draw on data generated in relation to the participants’ experiences and understandings of physical education and school sport. Each of the three focus group discussions were recorded on an audiotape and then transcribed. The transcripts were coded into categories, key themes developed and sorted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Following the constant comparison method of analysing data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I continually reviewed and reworked these categories and themes. Analysis was conducted immediately following each focus group session. In addition to providing an ongoing and evolving insight into the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) this also enabled preliminary results to be considered and discussed.

Embodied experiences of (dis)ability in physical education and school sport

The status and value attributed to different activities

‘It’s [an] easy game ’cause I’m playing.’ (Adam)

It is widely recognised that activities undertaken in physical education and sport carry with them value and status. Indeed, according to Bourdieu (1991) participation contributes to the social positioning of those engaging in such activities. The focus group discussions revealed a general feeling from all the pupils that a number of activities they undertook in physical education and school sport were not perceived in the same or equal manner as activities undertaken by other pupils. The focus group pupils believed this differential status was sometimes evident from teachers’ attitudes towards them. For example, one pupil suggested the physical education teacher lacked any real desire or concern for him to progress in physical education because he did not participate in any ‘high status’ school teams.

Well we’re not the best and we aren’t in the important school teams. If you’re in one then ... You know it’s like Mr Evans does the football team and he spends the lesson with the good players and he’s not bothered about us. (Andy)

The continued concern by many writers about the importance and emphasis placed on competition, team games (Talbot, 1997; Penney & Chandler, 2000; Jones & Cheetam, 2001; Penney, 2002) and elite development goals (Siedentop, 2002) are clearly evident from the comment made by this pupil and are reinforced by similar views expressed by other pupils. Interestingly, the pupil mentioned earlier was in the school boccia team and along with other focus group members placed considerable value on being part of this team.

We had trials. But, and I know there weren’t loads of us trying. But it’s a school team. You have to go and represent the school. You have to go and play in competitions. It is a proper team. Everyone thinks it’s easy to play. (Steve)

Although the pupils had a positive view of boccia they continually referred to their physical education teachers and the belief that these members of staff did not afford high status to this activity. The pupils did not, however, see all their physical education teachers in this way and believed Mr Jones viewed boccia positively.

The boccia club is great. Mr Jones coaches us. He thinks we’re good, he tells us even if we play bad. It’d be good if some of the other teachers could see us playing. If we had a game then we’d show them, they’d be shocked. (Dave)

These pupils also believed that some of their peers perceived their membership of the boccia team as having less status than other teams at the school. For this activity it could be argued that the pupils believed the value of their physical and social capital associated with playing boccia was not as great as that given to those pupils participating in other activities or playing in other school teams. Indeed, on occasions the pupils expressed considerable frustration at the lack of recognition afforded to boccia and the indifferent attitudes of their peers and teachers. It seemed that although the focus group pupils wanted their participation in boccia to have an ‘exchange value’

(Shilling, 1996) this was not the case. Their peers did not recognise boccia as a legitimate activity through which relevant capital could be accumulated or converted.

Throughout the discussions relating to boccia **most of the pupils adopted a social model perspective when discussing this perceived low regard for boccia.** In this respect, they compared boccia to other activities played at school. They did this rather than focusing on the fact that it was the disabled pupils participating in this activity. One pupil suggested boccia had less credibility and seemed not to be accepted by the wider school population because it was a 'new' school activity.

It's new for everyone. We *are* the first [group] to play [boccia]. When we're in year 11 there'll be more playing. Everyone, like more people, will know about boccia then. (James)

There seemed to be a belief that over time this activity would become more widely recognised at school. Indeed, the pupils seemed to think that changes to the composition and nature of capital in this field were possible and that this would enhance the value and convertibility of capital associated with playing boccia. However, for the time being boccia did not have the established popularity and value afforded to other school sports.

You don't see it [boccia] played much. Like not everyone here [at the school] plays and not everyone does it in PE. It's just not around like football or basketball or tennis, you know them popular sports. (Steve)

According to the pupils considerable social capital could be accumulated through involvement in various school activities, including school sports teams. In particular, being 'well known' seemed to be an important quality associated with gaining social capital. In the context of sport James explained how having the role of a team captain could help to make you 'well known'.

Everyone knows who's the football and rugby captain. You get to know . . . But not, most people don't know the boccia captain. (James)

However, as his comment illustrates being the boccia captain does not necessarily afford you this status. Having said this, within the small group of pupils that play boccia there seemed to be some kudos attached to having the role of boccia captain.

[speculating about the boccia captain for the next academic year]

Dave: Next year, I think I'll be the captain.

Steve: No way, it'll be James. He wins us the games. He can play, he's spot on. He'll be the captain.

Andy: Yeah James *is* captain material.

James: Yeah, I'd like that.

This heated discussion illustrates how some social capital then could be attained. This though did not seem to be recognised within the wider field as a legitimate 'prize' for all to compete for.

It is clear from the comments made by the pupils that their teachers and peers influence their impressions of activities undertaken in physical education and school sport. Although we cannot judge Mr Evans and Mr Clarke on the comments made by the pupils alone, they perhaps provide a powerful indication, from the pupils' perspective,

of the influences that these individuals can have on understandings of physical education, the value attributed to activities and an individual's sense of self.

Embodying difference through the habitus

I'm not going to be as good as the rest of them. (Steve)

Another key theme to emerge from the focus group discussions was the notion of 'difference'. Indeed, difference manifests itself in a number of ways including through the activities the pupils undertook, the locations of the activities, the exemptions given to pupils and through the pupils' own sense of physicality. For example, the pupils recognised that they sometimes undertook different activities and in different settings during physical education than other members of their class.

We don't do rugby. We do gym or fitness. The class does rugby, they go on the fields out there. (James)

When James was asked if he would you like to do rugby he suggested:

Yeh, but it's rough and you get hurt, Mr Jones and mum say I don't have to. So I don't. (James)

In this instance the differential experiences are legitimised by James using his teacher's and mum's views and although he suggested he would like to participate in rugby he seemed happy to accept that he did not do this activity. This illustrates, as Davis and Watson (2001) found, that young people happily comply and willingly accept the judgements made by others (in this case Mr Jones and mum) if they feel that they will benefit from the situation in some way. On this occasion, not getting hurt and the roughness of the game were deemed by James and, as he indicated, the adults, as sound reasons for him and his peers not to be involved in this activity. Through the informal discursive practices of this mother and physical education teacher James and the other pupils unquestionably accepted as 'fact' that they could not play rugby. In this case it may be that normative values associated with the rules and structures of rugby were rigidly followed by the physical education teachers. In this respect, the teachers were seeking to 'preserve' and 'protect' (Siedentop, 2002) rugby rather than explore any new possibilities that enabled this activity to be more inclusive.

In accepting that they could not play rugby the pupils identified other associated benefits of not participating in this activity. Indeed, it was clear that all the focus group pupils saw this as positive and they even felt that this gave them an additional degree of social capital over other members of their class:

We all get changed and then go to the gym, gym over there. I know Rob yeh and Simon yeh hate rugby and they've asked to come in but they're not allowed. It's just *us* going up to the gym. (Steve)

Another pupil suggested it was an advantage not to have to undertake physical education outside in cold weather:

We get to stay in when it's cold. We're not out there, the others have to go out, some of them don't like it, like Simon, Simon says it's unfair. (Andy)

In relation to playing rugby it is clear that some of the other pupils recognised the focus group pupils were being treated differently than the rest of the class. Simon

perceived this situation as 'unfair' and ensured that Andy was aware of his feelings. The 'unfairness' for Simon related to the focus group pupils not having to do rugby or go outside during the cold weather. Interestingly, this was one of the only occasions when the focus group pupils recalled their peers questioning in any way the differential practices in physical education. The issue at stake here for Simon was not about Andy's absence from the 'main' physical education lessons but rather the nature of the perceived preferential treatment given to Andy. In this instance it may be that the discursive practices supporting this segregation serve to normalise the absence of the disabled pupils from the main physical education lessons. Quite simply, it could be that the habitus of participants within this field evokes a disposition that positions the disabled pupils as *not* being treated differently, as it is the norm for the disabled pupils not to always be in the main physical education lesson.

Central to the notion of physical education and sport is physicality. Indeed, it is a certain kind of physicality that is promoted and practised in physical education. For boys this is often associated with aggression, prowess, competition and masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hickey & Fitzclarence, 1999; Light & Kirk, 2000). Importantly, the very nature of these embodied competencies contrast with the ways in which dominant notions of disability are recognised and understood. Indeed, DePauw acknowledges the tensions between sport and disability arguing that '... sport, as a place where physicality is admired, has presented a challenge for individuals with disabilities and their active participation in sport appears as somewhat of a contradiction' (DePauw, 1997, p. 423). The tension then arises when 'disabled bodies' are expected to conform to the normalised practices dominating physical education discourse that continue to promote and value a type of physicality that is unobtainable by many disabled people (Barton, 1993). The importance of physicality, and in particular differences in physicality, was also prominent in the focus group discussions. In particular, the pupils often compared themselves with other peers and the consequences this had on their physical education experiences. As James explained:

Most of the boys are bigger than me and I'm not going to get that tall and they're getting bigger and in basketball I haven't got a chance. What it's like, well like I can't get the ball and they don't pass to me and they're bigger and faster and I'll run and try, I'm trying but, that's it, it's hard they're bigger than me. (James)

Here James clearly highlights the ways in which he perceives his physical capital as not matching up to that of his peers. Barton (1993), DePauw (2000) and Davis and Watson (2002) have argued that disabled people are often measured against idealised notions of normality and it was evident from the responses of the focus group pupils that they too were conscious of the ways in which physical education continues to promote and afford credibility and value to those who match up to the normativity practised in physical education. For Steve, it is clear he believes whatever amount of effort he exerts, he is not going to be able to work towards, or achieve, a level of competence recognised as reflecting a 'good' performance.

It doesn't matter how much I try I'm not going to be as good as the rest of them. I get mad and I can't do well. (Steve)

I acknowledge these kinds of understandings are not confined to, or specific to, disabled pupils. Indeed, the recent study by Bramham (2003) illustrates how boys often measure their competencies in physical education against their peers. However, what is important for the pupils in this study is the way normalised values seem to be imposed on all in physical education and the effects that this has on the pupils who fail to match up to these ideas.

Legitimate participation and attaining capital

They don't want you to be there. (Steve)

The focus group pupils were aware that various actions of their peers during physical education lessons influenced the extent to which they were considered as legitimate participants within the field. Some of these actions involved peer-led exclusion from physical education activities and serve to illustrate most vividly an absence of 'cooperative' and 'affiliation' dimensions relating to Siedentop's (2002) educative goal to junior sport. Andy recalls a basketball lesson:

When we were playing basketball last week remember [Andy looks over to James] no one passed us the ball [James acknowledges this with a nod]. What can you do if they won't pass? No one would pass me the ball. (Andy)

In this instance Andy or James did not directly attribute their disability as being a factor contributing to this situation and they both seemed unsure as to why their peers were not cooperating with them.

You can shout and shout for it. Shouting loud, you can shout like loud and you still won't. If I get it I'll pass to Andy and we both get a go then, that's what I do. You know I get fed up of shouting and it's just the same. I don't get what it is. (James)

However, it was clear from a later comment made by Steve that although he perceived this physical capital positively (as he previously had when the discussions focused on bocchia) this value seemed not to be recognised by his peers. Indeed, Steve's comment illustrates a sense that his peers do not seem to even accept him within the physical education class.

I like doing PE but sometimes when we're with the rest [of the group] you can tell some of them, they don't want you to be there. It's not like I'm the worst. They think I am and that's what it's like all the time. (Steve)

According to Bourdieu an individual will be judged on their ability to deploy the relevant habitus within a given field. Therefore, it may be that Steve's habitus places him at the margins within physical education, what DePauw (1997) describes as 'social' marginality. And even though Steve himself uses a normative comparison (being 'good' at physical education or being 'the worst') and measures himself in what could be considered as a positive light, he believed he was still not accepted or recognised in this normative way by his peers. In part, it may be that the physical absence, referred to earlier, from the main physical education class positions Steve, and the other disabled pupils, temporally as 'part timers' within the field. Consequently, their social practice and ability to become 'endowed with the habitus' (Bourdieu, 1993) of the field seems to be adversely affected and is exhibited

through their peers' lack of cooperation and affiliation to the class. **Steve then interprets this lack of acceptance within physical education as relating to his peers' discriminatory attitudes and actions.**

'Cause of me arm and legs I don't fit in. Well, this is what it is, what I mean is they [his peers] don't think that and they go on about it, like it's the biggest thing and its not.' Cause like my arm doesn't make me the worst. (Steve)

In addition to peer-led exclusion the focus group pupils highlighted **name-calling and other put-downs as actions by their peers that influenced their experiences of physical education.** James in particular talked about name-calling:

Some of them call me. Well I know it's because of my frame and my walking. They're immature, that's what I think and I'm not bothered, they wouldn't like it, it's not nice and if they call you it's not nice. (James)

Although James indicated that he was not concerned about this name-calling a later comment was perhaps more telling about the way he felt and his reactions to this:

It doesn't make you feel good about yourself. I get on with things. I ignore them. I sometimes end up shouting and I told Mike his ears stick out [James laughs] and they stick out a lot. Let him see what it feels like to be [name] called. (James)

Here James illustrates how he uses his agency to respond to the comments made by Mike. Echoing the findings of Davis and Watson (2002) and Priestley (1999) James shows that he can mobilise verbal resistance and challenge the name-calling targeted at him. However, Steve was less vocal in his response to name-calling:

Yeh, I get it and ignore it. Let 'em think you can't hear. Let 'em think you're not bothered. (Steve)

The name-calling and deliberate exclusion by peers from physical education activities are experiences that other young people also encounter (Groves & Laws, 2000; Brittain, 2004). However, for Steve, Andy and James **these kinds of experiences may reinforce dominant discourses of disability that emphasise deficiency, lack, inability and 'otherness' (Barnes *et al.*, 1999).** Such actions and reactions by the disabled pupils and their peers perhaps reinforce the centrality of peers in the 'partnership' dimension of Vickerman's (2002) framework for inclusive physical education.

The Physical Education teacher as the nurturer of ability?

He's not just a PE teacher. (Andy)

The perceptions young people have of teachers can influence their attitudes and feelings towards a particular school subject, including physical education (Groves & Laws, 2000; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Brittain, 2004). Indeed, when discussing their physical education teachers it was notable that the **pupils essentially viewed these teachers in terms of their subject specialism.** In this context the pupils often referred to specific activities in relation to their teachers. Andy and Adam made the following comments about their physical education teachers:

Mr Evans, he's into football and that's what he does all the time. He's in charge of the team and the coaching and sorting the team out. (Andy)

Mrs Smith does the netball and hockey with girls. Once we had her for hockey one time. Gemma says she's good at netball. (Adam)

Mr Evans and Mr Clarke teach the rugby. I've not had them but I've been out and seen it. I heard Mr Clarke, Mr Clarke shouts a lot. (Adam)

The pupils also made comments about other related tasks that they saw their physical education teachers doing:

[Mr Evans] You see him a lot over the hall doing the team lists.
(Steve)

Other pupils talked about the teachers' attitudes towards them. For example, Adam believed a teacher's low opinion of him generally in physical education and his participation in boccia related directly to his disability:

I know. I think Mr Clarke doesn't see me.

[after being prompted to expand on what this meant]

Well yeh, yeh and it's like I feel like he's looking down on me and he doesn't care and he sees my chair and all things I can't do.

Some people see my chair and not me and he's [one of the PE teachers] like that. He sees me playing boccia and just thinks it's easy game 'cause I'm playing. (Adam)

In this case, Adam firmly believed this view of him was based on his impairment and essentially founded on a deficit position similar to that evident in the medical model of disability (Barnes *et al.*, 1999).

Another physical education teacher, Mr Jones, was talked about in much broader and positive terms. Mr Jones was acknowledged by all the pupils as being thoughtful and considerate and the pupils reported having a very positive relationship with him. The pupils believed Mr Jones paid much attention to their needs when he planned skills and practices in physical education.

With my [walking] frame it makes PE harder. I don't use it all the time. In one lesson I use it. *Not* in all of, *not* all the time and Mr Jones, he'll give me goes [skills/practices] for my frame. I'm not saying I use it all the time. When I don't [use the frame] then there'll be other gos for me. He doesn't leave me out. (James)

James believed these kinds of actions contributed to positive feelings in physical education.

When I go to PE and see Mr Jones I know I'm okay and have a good time. He makes sure I'm doing something and so I like PE with Mr Jones. (James)

Interestingly, Mr Jones was also the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) and had considerable contact with these pupils beyond his role in physical education. A number of the pupils identified the additional areas of support given by Mr Jones. One pupil suggested:

I know he's my PE teacher. He's *not just* a PE teacher. If you get troubles, troubles that sort of stuff. Last term there's some trouble with a couple of older lads and Mr Jones sorted them out. (Andy)

Another pupil reinforced the positive relationship with this teacher and emphasised the **pastoral role** he adopted:

I get on with him well. Yeh, really well and he makes sure I'm okay and I know he's there if I need to talk to him, like problems and things happening. (James)

Specific characteristics that the pupil identified about Mr Jones were his fairness and willingness to 'have a laugh'.

He's fair with everyone, with me and the others. I think he's a good teacher. I like him a lot. (Adam)

You can have a laugh with him. I mean I know he's a teacher but he's easy going and you know but not joking around all the time just having a bit of a laugh. (Steve)

These comments made by Adam, Steve and the other pupils illustrate how a **strong relationship can be formed with pupils and how this can be nurtured in a way that contributes to a more positive disposition towards participating in physical education.** However, for the other physical education teachers who seem not to have developed such a meaningful relationship it may be that aspects of the subject that exclude pupils are more evident through these teachers' practices. **Even though these teachers may advocate and believe that they are working towards inclusive physical education this does not seem to be evident from the pupils' insights.** For these teachers it could be that wider issues relating to the structure of the secondary school and the normativity of physical education continue to impinge on their efforts to work towards a more inclusive experience.

Conclusion: reconceptualising (dis)ability through the habitus

This paper has focused on five young people's experiences of physical education and school sport. I believe this work builds on other recent work found within disability studies (Davis & Watson, 2001, 2002; Priestley *et al.*, 1999) and extends these understandings by focusing specifically on experiences of physical education and school sport. **Within a physical education and sports context understandings of young disabled people's experiences have typically been expressed through insights from 'others' rather than young people themselves.** In this paper, I attempt to address this current imbalance by placing importance on what young disabled people tell us about their experiences. And although I have centred this paper on a small sample I believe this work illustrates the kinds of in-depth insights that can be gained if young people are given opportunities to express their views within a research context.

The data reported in this paper **illustrates that a paradigm of normativity prevails in physical education.** It would seem the physical education habitus serves to affirm this normative presence and **is manifest through conceptions of ability that recognise and value certain characteristics and competences more than others.** In particular, the focus group pupils seemed to measure themselves, and perceive that they were measured by others, against a mesomorphic ideal. Earlier in the paper we saw how

James was frustrated when playing basketball because his peers were, in his words, 'bigger' and 'faster' than him. In addition, Steve believed he did not 'fit in' because his arms and legs did not work in the same kind of ways as his peers. In both these instances, the pupils were comparing themselves against an ideal that would be impossible for them to attain. However, it is an ideal that contributes significantly to the extent to which their ability is recognised and valued in physical education. Normative conceptions of ability were also manifest through articulations of masculinity that value competitive and aggressive forms of activity. For the focus group pupils not participating in activities that overtly promote these characteristics (such as rugby) and engaging in alternative activities (such as boccia and fitness) did not seem to enable capital to be attained through this conception of ability. **Finally, the pupils in this study illustrate how the physical education habitus supports normative conceptions of ability that are manifest through high levels of motoric competence.** For example, Andy believed that Mr Evans spent much of his time supporting the 'good' footballers, while Steve recognised he was not going to be 'as good as' many of his peers.

It is perhaps not surprising that motoric competences are valued in physical education contexts that are increasingly driven by agendas seeking to identify 'performances' rather than retaining a focus on educational aspirations. Interestingly, the skills required to play boccia seemed to be universally rejected as constituting a high degree of motoric competence. In part though, this may be explained through the absence of any mesomorphic or masculine characteristics associated with this activity. This study found that to deviate from these kinds of articulation of ability was to be seen as different. This expression of difference was essentially seen in negative terms—to undertake different activities, participate in different places, to be physically different.

Although recent developments relating to adapted programmes would seem to provide the much-needed solutions physical education teachers are looking for to enhance their work with disabled pupils, the contributions and inroads these kinds of programmes can make towards rearticulating conceptions of ability seem minimal. Indeed, it would be a mistake to think these arbitrary and essentially superficial remedies mediate in any way to disrupt the deep-seated normalised physical education habitus evident in schools. We should perhaps look beyond strategies of adaptation and instead begin to question dominant conceptions of ability embedded through the physical education habitus. By doing this, articulations of ability need to be recast and understood in ways that extend beyond narrowly defined measures of performance and normative conceptions of what is it to have a sporting body. For example, in this study it is clear that, at times, the focus group pupils have very sophisticated understandings of their peers' and teachers' reactions and views. I would argue, in part, that it is this kind of ability that should be recognised and promoted through physical education. **What I am proposing here then not only requires the reconceptualisation of the qualities valued in physical education but also a radical rethink about the activities and practices that could best support this work.**

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Notes

1. With the notable exceptions of Borrett *et al.* (1995), DePauw (1997, 2000) and Stone (2001).
2. 'A field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)'. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002, p. 97).
3. According to the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) the following descriptions can be given to the participating pupils. Andy has dyspraxia, a 'Specific Learning Difficulty'. James has cerebral palsy, a 'Physical Disability'. Steve has an arm amputated below the elbow and cerebral palsy, a 'Physical Disability'. Dave has a 'Hearing Impairment'. Adam has a spinal cord injury, a 'Physical Disability'.

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