Non-disabled 10-12 year old children’s lived experiences of a wheelchair basketball programme delivered in the East of England.

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Presentation Outline

• Background: Physical education and disability sport

• Study Context: The ‘Wheelchair Sports programme’

• Results and Discussion: Challenging perceptions of wheelchair sport (and disabled bodies?)

• Conclusions: Changing attitudes to (some) disabled bodies
Disability Sport & Physical Education (P.E.) in the UK

‘All pupils should have access to physical education and disability should not be a barrier to inclusion in sport programmes.’

(DCMS, 2000, p.30)

• Focus on ‘inclusion,’ although the meaning of this term remains debated (Barrow, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2012). Not Integration!

• PE rarely offers disability sport to non-disabled children (Brown, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005; Howe, 2009)

• The formal spaces of PE can be a site of control, discipline, gendering and shaping practices that contour and control students’ bodies and normalize ‘ability’ (Kirk 2003): Can exclude disabled children
Studies of disability in PE

‘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.’

(Fitzgerald, 2005, p.53)

- Exclusion takes many forms
  - Medical (disability as illness): Perceptions of disabled bodies/abilities with low physical capital
  - Individualized (disability as tragedy): A habitus of exclusion?
  - Social (stigmatized disability): Marginalisation in the field of PE.
The Programme

• Lincolnshire Sports Partnership (LSP) supplied wheelchairs to schools for a 12 week period

• Their goal:
  – Qualified coaches delivered Wheelchair Basketball sessions during ‘normal’ P.E sessions to ‘raise awareness’ of disability sport among non-disabled pupils aged between 10 and 12 years

• Our role: Independent researchers conducting a case study.
  – Evaluation of the programme across the county
  – Sociological Investigation of children’s embodied experiences in one school
Study Aim

- Bourdieusian Framework used to investigate participants’ embodied experiences and changing perceptions of wheelchair basketball...

- **Perceptions** prior to participation in the programme regarding disabled individuals and disability sport: Embodied Capital in the field of PE.

- Investigate the *physical sensations* and the *embodied experiences* participants encountered during the programme: Hexis & Habitus Clivè?

- Based on participant’s experiences, we investigated participants’ *attitudes* individuals held following the programme regarding disabled individuals and disability sport.
  - Were children reflexive about their assumptions about disabled bodies and Wheelchair Basketball in the field of P.E.?
The Study

Case study participants

100 children
(97 offered consent)

Programme delivery

Participants in the Programme
(48 Children)

‘Comparison’ Group
(49 Children)

Research Methods

24 Interviews
(pre and post programme)

Non-Participant Observations

20 Interviews
(pre and post programme)
Pre-programme Results: Othering the disabled body

- **Limitation of ‘Other’ disabled bodies**
  - Focus upon physical disability as low physical capital
  - Absence of psychological or mental impairments

  ‘My dad says I’m not allowed to watch [the Paralympics] because if I did it would **freak me out** and it wasn’t like the **real Olympics**’
  Simon, male participant

- **Sympathy for ‘medical’ symptoms**
  - Disabled bodies were ‘othered’ by emphasis of the tragedy of disability and of ‘inferior’ abilities: Illness, impairment, limits

  ‘I **feel quite sorry** for them, because it **couldn’t have been their fault**, but someone else could have done it and then they’re **stuck** with it for the **rest of their life**’
  Emma, female participant
Pre-programme Results

• Othering abilities: ‘Easy,’ worthless

Yeah, in like normal basketball they can do slam dunks and stuff, and run around, and do something really interesting, but then [disabled individuals] are just sat down.

Sam, male participant

In, like, wheelchair basketball they’re not using their whole body, just using their arms to power their whole body, but then when I’m playing football, you have to use every bit of your body to move around.

Matthew, male participant
Participant Observation data

• Frustration at complexity and new skills
  “You have to think about so much stuff, how to move to get the ball, how to move when you get it and stuff, it’s really difficult.”
  Beth, female participant

• Physical demands
  “My arms and back are killing. It’s really tiring moving because you have to use both arms all the time [in the wheelchair].”
  Mary, female participant

• Dis-engagement
  – ‘Cheating’ by reverting to established embodied actions (e.g. standing in chairs, trapping the ball with feet)
Post-Intervention Results

• Emphasizing similarities
  ‘No offence, but I used to like look at them and think, they’re not one of us. And now, they are like us, they’re us just [impaired]....’
  Simon, male participant

• From general perceptions to embodied sensations. Expressing Empathy: But still sympathetic?
  ‘I understand more like how they feel and how annoying it is to be in a wheelchair, even though I was only in it for a little bit and I could get out and walk.’
  Maggie, female participant
Post-Intervention Results

• Re-evaluating ‘ability’? Built upon lived experience
  ‘You think oh, its easy, just wheeling chairs about, but when you actually get in the wheelchair it’s really tough…you have to be proper good’
  Anne, female participant

• Unintended consequences:

  Giving disabled children a ‘fair chance’

  Challenging Non-disabled children’s perceptions of disability
Conclusions

• Embodied experiences during the programme were key to affecting reflection:
  – Adapting to a new way of ‘knowing’ the body and it’s capabilities when in a wheelchair

• Experiences challenged internalized perceptions of disability sport
  – Re-evaluating ‘ability’ and physical capital in PE

• Short-term change in values & limited to a specific set of experiences: Only physical impairments in the lower limbs
'Sometimes you think disabled people can’t do this, and can’t do that but actually they can.'

Thank you for your time....

Any questions?
Selected References

