

Title:

“Non-disabled secondary school children’s lived experiences of a wheelchair basketball programme delivered in the East of England.”

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Abstract

Frequently an unquestioned belief is held in UK schools in the value of ‘normalised’ ability in physical education. Consequently inclusion of disabled students can be problematical. Negative perceptions of disability are rarely challenged. This study investigated the embodied experiences of 49 non-disabled secondary school pupils during a programme designed to introduce disability sport to non-disabled school children entitled ‘The Wheelchair Sports Project.’ Funded by a County Sports Partnership, Wheelchair Basketball sessions were delivered by trained coaches during physical education for a 12 week period. 49 pupils aged between 10 and 12 years took part in the study. Non-participant observations were completed during the programme and semi-structured group interviews were completed with 24 participants pre and post project. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework guided data analysis. The impact of the project on pupils’ perceptions of physical disability was investigated. Prior to the project, pupils emphasized the ‘otherness’ of disabled bodies and described disability sport as inferior and not ‘real.’ Observations highlighted how pupils’ experienced physical challenges adapting to wheelchair basketball. Pupils struggled to control wheelchairs and frequently diverged from acceptable behaviour by using their lower limbs to ‘cheat.’ Post-programme group interviews demonstrated that, due to their own embodied experiences, pupils’ began to question their perceptions of the potential ability of participants with physical impairments. Pupils described high physical demands of wheelchair basketball and began to focus upon similarities between themselves and physically disabled individuals. However, participants made no reference to impairments other than physical disability, emphasizing the specificity of the effects of pupils’ embodied experiences on their embodied habitus’ which, although difficult to assess over the long-term, appeared to have an impact on perceptions over the short-term.

Key Words

Disability, physical education, inclusion, Bourdieu, embodied experiences, wheelchair sport, children's perceptions

Background

Issues of inclusion are a central concern in legislation, policy and programming in physical education (PE) (Flintoff, Fitzgerald, & Scraton, 2008; Gabel & Danforth, 2008; Hadley & Wilkinson, 1995; Haycock & Smith, 2010; Lawson, 1998; Peters, 2007; Rueda, Gallego, & Moll, 2000). Disability, in particular, remains an area in which inequality in PE delivery is increasingly relevant given recent discussion about the valorization of disabled athletes following the London 2012 Olympics (Aitchison, 2009; Howe, 2008; Smith & Thomas, 2006). However, concerns remain about the policy, practice and experience of inclusion for disabled students in PE in the United Kingdom. In 2000, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (p.30) claimed that “All pupils should have access to PE and disability should not be a barrier to inclusion in sport programmes.”

Studies have focused upon perceptions of inclusive practice in PE from both student and stakeholder perspectives for disabled pupils (Fitzgerald, 2012). Such studies draw attention to inequity in the PE setting and have outlined how ‘difference’ can be conceptualized through the ‘lens’ of disability (DePauw, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2012). However, debate is ongoing about what, precisely, the nature of this inclusion should be (Barrow, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2012). For example, Ainscow (2002) describes inclusion as a ‘grand’ and ‘elusive’ practice that is often conceived as both a flagship idea to celebrate diversity through the transformation of school cultures and practices, while at the same time remaining vague and intangible (Ainscow, 2002; Armstrong & Barton, 2007). In short, it is unclear exactly what ‘inclusion’ should constitute and how it should be enacted for disabled pupils in PE provision (Fitzgerald, 2012).

Several theoretical models exist in which the challenges of inclusion and overcoming the social inequality experienced by disabled individuals is conceptualized. For example, the medical model of disability emphasizes how impairments can be characterised as biomedical ailments which should be ‘treated’ as if they were curable. Similarly, the individualized model of disability, which emphasizes the personal tragedy of disability (Fitzgerald, 2008). Both models emphasize the ‘otherness’ of the disabled body, and yet are based in questionable socially produced assumptions about the nature of disability. Consequently, the social model of disability emphasizes the socially produced elements of exclusion of disabled pupils from PE (Fitzgerald, 2012; Priestley, 2003). In the social model, disability is viewed as an exclusionary social construction, placing the responsibility for more inclusive PE provision on an education system bolstered by legislation, policy and the willingness of PE professionals to adapt and modify their practice to the needs of all learners. With New Labour’s commitment to inclusive education with the publication of the Green Paper ‘Excellence for all’ (1997), to anti-discrimination legislation including the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Act (2001), the notion that the needs of young disabled pupils should be met within mainstream educational settings has been increasingly propagated (Vickerman 2007 p. 64). In support of these policies, national curriculum inclusion statements have signposted how these requirements can be met, and a range of inclusive strategies have been created through models of delivery such as the ‘inclusion spectrum’ (Stevenson & Fitzgerald, 2009; Vickerman, 2007; Vickerman & Hodkinson, 2009).

However, while the notion of inclusion is explicit within strategic policy, there appears to have been a reluctance from the relatively conservative PE profession to apply such practices (Fitzgerald, 2012). Evans (2004 p. 101) describes how teachers can reproduce dominant discourses rather than challenging and changing them, by enacting only ‘cosmetic adjustments’

to education provision in a context shown to be intolerant of transgressive bodies (Connolly, 2003; Evans, 2004; Slee & Allan, 2001). Furthermore, Fitzgerald (2012) highlights how, for disabled children, inclusion and integration can be incorrectly considered the same thing, citing the example of ‘mainstreaming’ disabled children alongside non-disabled children in classes. In many such cases, few adjustments are made to provision and the school system essentially remains unchanged (Fitzgerald, 2012). Indeed, several researchers suggest that ‘mainstream’ experiences can be isolating and evoke feelings of exclusion (Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald & Kirk, 2009; Goodwin & Fitzgerald, 2009). Consequently, the importance of examining the processual characteristics of inclusion, as well as understanding this process from stakeholder and student perspectives, has been highlighted (Slee, 2010).

Focus on student and stakeholder perspectives has highlighted the impact of teacher attitudes towards inclusion and students with SEN (Hardin, 2005; Morley, Bailey, Tan, & Cooke, 2005; Smith & Green, 2004; Smith, Arthur, McKelvie, & Kodis, 2004), the behavior of disabled and non-disabled students in mainstream PE (Goodwin & Fitzgerald, 2009; Place & Hodge, 2001), levels of support offered and received (Davis, Kotecki, Harvey, & Oliver, 2007; Haegele & Kozub, 2010) and non-disabled peers’ views and perspectives (Sato, Hodge, Murata, & Maeda, 2007; Slininger, Sherrill, & Jankowski, 2000; Verderber, Rizzo, & Sherrill, 2003). Furthermore, recent studies have begun to examine how the opinions of stakeholders, including teachers, parents and policy makers, can influence those of others including children (Fitzgerald, 2012). The views and reflections of disabled students have also been studied (Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2005, 2008, 2012). Such studies use an approach in which disabled people are considered expert ‘knowers’ (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Smith, 2007). Studies of disabled students’ embodied experiences of PE, however, remain scarce (Fitzgerald 2005).

Indeed, among those studies examining the embodied experiences of disabled pupils, the conceptualization of the body has tended to overlook their embodied experiences (Fitzgerald, 2005). However, studies of embodied experience are growing in number in ‘mainstream’ PE (Hunter, 2004). These studies have highlighted how the formal spaces of PE can be a site of control, discipline, gendering and shaping practices that contour and control students’ bodies (Gore, 2001; Hunter, 2004; Kirk, 2003; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Vertinsky, 1992). Likewise, in studies of disability (Scambler and Scambler 2006) and disability in elite sport (Brittain, 2004; Smith & Thomas, 2006; Wheaton, 2004), studies have outlined how different values are placed upon disabled bodies, which can be stigmatized (Howson, 2004). This valuation has a corporeal element, inclusive of physical capabilities and ‘ability’ in physical education (Shilling, 2010). Furthermore, disabled bodies can be viewed as flawed or dangerous because they do not conform to some of the social measures of value (Howson, 2004). Fitzgerald (2005) argues that the PE field is one in which a normalized and gendered understanding of ‘ability’ is valued, but which fails to recognize the sociocultural and ephemeral nature of how ability is conceptualized. Within the PE environment, different activities are imbued with different values – as are pupils’ abilities to complete them. Disability sports, such as Boccia, are afforded lower value than team sports in the PE field (Penney & Chandler, 2000). As a consequence, some disabled children internalize this sense of lower worth placed on their embodied ability (Fitzgerald, 2005). The extent to which this low-worth is produced and reproduced by non-disabled pupils and stakeholders such as teachers remains unclear. Moreover, studies that examine non-disabled students’ perceptions of disability and embodied experiences of participation in disability sport are even less prevalent. Few PE providers presently offer disability sport to non-disabled pupils as part of their PE provision.

As Hunter (2004) argues, a dynamic conceptual framework is required to help understanding of embodied experiences of teaching and learning in PE. One such framework is offered by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. A number of studies of both PE and the embodied experiences of sport and physical activity have utilized the theoretical toolkit of Pierre Bourdieu (Fitzgerald, 2005; Shilling, 1991, 2003, 2007; Thorpe, 2010). It is therefore necessary to highlight the central concepts of this framework in the context of the present study.

Bourdieu's conceptual framework and PE

Bourdieu's conceptual framework attempts to integrate the individual within society (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Swartz, 1998). Bourdieu's concepts of *field* and *habitus*, along with his conceptualization of the forms of *capital*, *practice*, *doxa* and *hexis* are useful tools in understanding embodied experiences of PE, disability and sport within their wider context. Each will be outlined briefly below. For Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p. 17), field refers to a bounded social arena, which encapsulates 'a relational configuration endowed with specific gravity which imposes on all the objects and agents which enter into it.' Fields are therefore containers of cultural norms and expectations (Hunter, 2004). Every object, individual and ideology within a field has a value implicit to that field. Moreover, fields do not exist in isolation but in a multiplicity; each is interrelated. So, for example, the field of PE shares characteristics with those of health, sport, leisure and higher education. Similarly, the way in which disability is conceptualized can be linked to the fields of medicine and care (Scambler, 2009; Scambler & Newton, 2010).

A structured, dynamic system of power relations exists within fields through which various species of capital are distributed, contested and produced through different forms of practice

(Hunter, 2004; Scambler & Newton, 2010). These species of capital include *economic* capital, *cultural* capital, including ‘tastes’ of knowledge and lifestyles, *social* capital, related to the affiliations or obligations of an individual, *symbolic* capital relating to the prestige or honour of an individual, and *physical* capital, which relates to the health, fitness and aesthetics of the culturally produced and corporeal body of actors (Hunter, 2004; Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Shilling, 2003; Thorpe, 2005, 2010). Indeed, Shilling (2003) states that at the very centre of Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction is the body as a bearer of value. The body, for Shilling (2003), is viewed as an unfinished entity that develops in tandem with social forces, and which can be a possessor of value itself. Higher value bodies tend to be healthy, younger, and frequently male (Evans & Sleaf, 2012), while disabled bodies can be assigned lower value due to common representations as tragic, sick or deficient (Fitzgerald, 2005, 2008; Miller, Gillinson, & Parker, 2004; Shilling, 2007).

The forces within a field, including the contestation of capital through repeated social practice, set the parameters of behaviour and social expectation of agents. Practice becomes internalized as the habitus. The habitus is a set of acquired schemes or dispositions, perceptions and appreciations, including tastes, which orient and give meaning to practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Noble & Watkins, 2003). Moreover, as agents engage with repeated practice, habitus becomes embodied through an agents’ deportment, a process conceptualized as *hexis* (Williams, 1995). Hence, those pupils with potential ability develop the appropriate doxic habitus for the PE environment as they hone the skills and capabilities of the body in order to complete the value-laden practice required in PE better than their peers, from which they gain prestige. Thus, the capability to complete these tasks becomes embodied. Furthermore, Bourdieu also refers to ‘doxic experience,’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), where “objective structures and

internal structures are mutually constitutive and complementary, describing the unthinking nature of practice whilst showing how more deliberated and intentional actions will still be located in logic of their social practices and orientated towards the individual's experiences of reality (via doxic habitus)" (Scambler and Newton 2010 p. 87). Individuals both produce and internalize meanings intentionally and unintentionally, and the relationship between agents and structures in a field is dialectical (Hunter, 2004). Hence in PE, the dominant position of those students with high physical 'ability' is accepted, while the practice of pupils and stakeholders in defining which abilities are valued reproduces this hierarchy (Kirk, 2003). Finally, Bourdieu also notes that, as agents negotiate fields, they engage in reflexive practice which is formed in response to the requirements or procedures of the field, but which is only enabled should the requisite resources and conditions to follow decisions through be prevailing (Reay, 1998). The extent to which they invest in these reflexive practices, whether consciously or unconsciously, is termed *illusio* by Bourdieu (Hunter, 2004). Relationships within the field are also maintained or challenged through practices including symbolic violence, in which the practices by which one group dominates another are considered norms of the field even when contrary to the interests of a group (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Hunter, 2004).

This paper presents data from a case study conducted at one UK secondary school during the delivery of the 'wheelchair sports programme.' This programme was designed and delivered by a County Sports Partnership (CSP). The sports partnership designed the programme with no specific pedagogical aim. Instead, inclusive aims focused upon providing both disabled and non-disabled children with the opportunity to participate in, and gain health benefits from, wheelchair basketball. The sports partnership provided schools with wheelchairs and two specialist coaches trained to deliver wheelchair basketball sessions to children with a range of abilities and

impairments. While the programme provided schools with equipment and the services of trained coaches so that wheelchair basketball could be delivered during regular PE classes, it was predominantly non-disabled children that took part in the programme. Indeed, participants in the present study had little experience of participating in any disability sport prior to their participation in the programme.

The principal aim of this study was to investigate the embodied experiences of this wheelchair basketball programme delivered to non-disabled secondary school children aged between 11 and 12 years. The study used Bourdieu's conceptual framework to investigate pupil attitudes towards disability prior to participation in the programme, their embodied experiences of participation, and whether their perceptions altered after the programme ceased. The study also aimed to understand whether the experiences of wheelchair basketball challenged pupils' perceptions of disability sport, and caused them to be reflexive about the inclusion of disability sport within their 'mainstream' PE classes.

Methods

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University ethics committee and the principal researcher obtained a CRB check as part of this approval. Informed consent was obtained from parents and combined with assent from pupils. Both parental consent and pupil assent were required before their data were included in the present study. Data were not collected from non-consenting pupils, but this did not affect their eligibility to participate in the programme. Pupils also had the right to withdraw at any time during the programme, as well as the right to request that their data were excluded from the study for up to 6 months after their participation. Only one pupil did not offer consent in this case. In total, 49 participants took part in the study.

Two measures were utilised in this study; non-participant observations and semi-structured group interviews. . Semi-structured group interviews were selected due to their ease of application to a group of children and because they represent an effective way in which to obtain information from a range of participants whilst offering greater flexibility to investigate shared experiences observed through non-participant observations (Bryman & Teevan, 2004). Non-participant observations were completed throughout the programme to provide insight into children's' behaviours and experiences, and provided the researcher with examples of 'real-time' responses. All 49 consenting children were observed during their participation in the wheelchair basketball sessions over the full twelve-week duration of the programme. Observations were taken from the edge of the playing area by the principal researcher, who adhered to ethnographic principles when conducting observations, including keeping a distance from participants, constant reviewing of field notes by engaging in reflexive practice, and seeking to ground interpretations of observed behaviours with participants' recollections (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Fetterman, 1989). Observations were also integrated into a field diary of the events observed. The intention was to allow the researcher to observe naturalistic behaviour that reflected the everyday social practices of participants (Krane & Baird, 2005). Detailed field notes were maintained throughout the observation period. Data collected included descriptions of participants' behaviours, comments and interactions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Fetterman, 1989; Krane & Baird, 2005; O'Reilly, 2012; Sparkes, 2002). These data were open-coded and matters arising were incorporated for discussion into post-programme interviews (Bryman & Teevan, 2004).

Semi-structured group interviews (Bryman & Teevan, 2004) were completed prior to the implementation of the programme and immediately after the programme completion. Of the 49

pupils participating in the study, twenty-four participants took part in group interviews in same-sex groups consisting of four young people. Our approach assumed that participants were expert ‘knowers’ of the programme due to their experiences (Smith, 2007). Prior to the programme, questions asked focused upon participants’ perceptions of disability, disability sport, and of their experiences of interacting with people with impairments. Following completion of the programme, participants were asked to reflect on their personal and shared experiences of taking part in the programme. Semi-structured group interviews were used to corroborate observation data through discussion of observed behaviours, experiences and social actions from the participants’ perspective (Bryman & Teevan, 2004; Fetterman, 1989; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Participants were also asked about their perceptions of disability, disabled people and disability sport to ascertain if changes to perceptions had occurred post-programme. Group interview data were transcribed verbatim and open-coded. Codes were then grouped into higher-order themes to provide structured outputs and to avoid a plethora of idiosyncratic codes (Bryman & Teevan, 2004). These themes are outlined in depth below. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Results and Discussion:

Pre-Programme perceptions

In this section, findings are outlined that relate to participants’ perceptions of disability prior to the programme. In this context, pupils expressed a lack of understanding of what, precisely, disability sport was in group interviews. Pupils focused upon the Paralympics, and yet were hesitant in their explanations and unsure who exactly who took part in the event. Frequently pupils clarified their explanations by focusing upon the bodies of disabled people from a largely

medicalized perspective, particularly in terms of visible, physical impairments such as lack of limbs or use of wheelchairs. No reference to mental or psychological disability was made. For example, Emma and Tom explained:

Emma: ‘Erm, I’ve seen a bit because...there was this man who didn’t have a leg, but has this....thing (made curved shape)’

Tom: ‘Erm, I know that they have special bikes, but they’re not like, they.... (Mimics arm rotations required for disabled cycling)

Indeed, many participants viewed the physical nature of disability as debilitating to participants, and consequently described disabled bodies as deficient, tragic or incomplete:

Matthew: ‘Like, a chopped off arm or something’

Mike: ‘Like those people, you know those guys with the one half arm’

Matthew: ‘Yeah and them with only the one leg’

Consequently, as in the medical model of disability, pupils’ attention had been drawn to elements of disabled bodies that they equated with illness or impairment (Fitzgerald, 2008). These elements became the focal point for personal analysis of disabled athletes’ physical capabilities (Howe, 2009). These physical capabilities were considered to impact on sports participation in general, not just the Paralympics. For example, throughout the interview process, no reference was made to specific activities, events or achievements of disabled athletes. Instead, focus was consistently made to disabled people’s perceived physical limitations to which pupils ascribed low physical capital (Shilling, 2007). These perceptions corresponded to a general perception among pupils that disabled people would have low sporting ability, and that disabled sport was

therefore relatively worthless (Evans, 2004; Shapiro & Martin, 2010; Verderber et al., 2003). For example, two pupils discussed the perceptually ‘boring’ nature of wheelchair basketball;

Andy: ‘Doesn’t look, very entertaining, because they’re just like sat down.’

Sam: ‘Yeah, in like normal basketball they can do slam dunks and stuff, and run around, and do something really interesting, but then they’re [disabled individuals] just sat down’

Sam’s emphasis on the ability to ‘slam dunk’ and to ‘do something interesting’ reflects traditional conceptualizations of ability in the field of PE, which, for him, compared unfavourably to that of a disabled participant who must be ‘sat down’ and therefore unable to perform such highly valued skills. Sam, and other participants, consequently assigned low physical capital to the achievements of disabled performers because they would be unlikely to perform the skills to which they attributed highest value; that is, the ‘abilities’ promoted in mainstream PE. Indeed, it has been suggested that devaluing disabled individuals’ achievements has led to oppressive behaviour and belief that disabled individuals are inferior (Miller et al., 2004). Similarly, study participants appeared to have normalized the view that disability sport must be fairly simplistic and unchallenging to enable individuals with physical impairments to succeed. Moreover, it has been argued that for society to deal with the ‘problem’ of disability, disabled individuals can be stigmatized in the PE field due to pupil and stakeholder attitudes, including those of parents and teachers, towards their perceived abilities (Fitzgerald, 2005; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Howe, 2009). This is because ability is often defined in terms of the ability to perform skills associated with non-disabled sports. Indeed, the lack of clarity among study participants about the nature and requirements of disability sport suggested a lack of knowledge

about the skills required to compete in disability sports. Consequently, the assumption was made that those skills must be of low value compared to those abilities they knew and accepted (Brown, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2005; Hay & Macdonald, 2010).

Despite describing disability sport skills as being of low value, participants also felt that they must be undemanding physically. For example, participants inferred that because wheelchair basketball players were sitting down, the physical demands of disability sport in general must therefore be lower than non-disabled sport. This was rationalized because most non-disabled sports required the use of the lower limbs and for participants, this would logically mean they would be more challenging. For example, Matthew stated that;

‘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’.

The perceptions outlined above suggest participants viewed the practice of disability sport in a detached, othering way; that is, it was different from ‘our’ (non-disabled) activities. Instead, it represented something for ‘them.’ Participants considered non-disabled skills to be ‘normal’ in the field of their PE sessions, whilst disabled sports skills and performers were viewed as ‘non-normal.’

This detachment appears to be consistent with the production of social values. According to Bourdieu (1984), individuals categorize others into groups based on their possession of capital. In differentiating their own physical ability from that of a disabled person, participants allocated higher physical capital in the sports field to themselves than to perceptually ‘inferior’ disabled athletes. Moreover, pupils also suggested that these opinions were supported by the actions and

opinions of familiar, powerful others, including family and friends. For example, Simon explained how;

‘My dad says I’m not allowed to watch it because if I did it would freak me out and it weren’t like the real Olympics’

Simon’s perception that disabled sport is ‘freaky’ and that it ‘isn’t like the ‘real Olympics’ emphasizes pupils’ distinction between disabled and non-disabled sport. Participants rarely challenged such assertions, and often internalized the opinions of influential individuals as common sense (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These findings are similar to those found by Fitzgerald and Kirk (2009), who noted participants in their study of sports preferences could be influenced to follow their parents’ love for specific sports, often without questioning why. Similarly, parents had an influence in how much value pupils placed upon ‘disability sport,’ particularly given the lack of reference pupils had gained from their own experience. Pupils’ contact with disabled people had been limited in general and was non-existent within the field of sport. Although participants frequently suggested they knew someone who was disabled, they never described that person in a sporting context. Moreover, pupils again focused upon physical limitations, but when asked about disabled people outside the context of PE and sport they also focused upon mental and psychological limitations. For example, Patrick stated that;

‘My cousin [is disabled]. She erm, can’t like speak properly and she can’t like, she needs help walking’

While Mike referred in a general sense to learning difficulties;

‘My friends, little brother erm, has to like, think out loud and stuff, so he thinks out loud and if he thinks, like, that person is an idiot, he’ll shout it loud’

However, when considering disabled people in the context of PE, participants' predominant focus was again on physical impairments, again underlining the high emphasis pupils placed upon physical ability as valuable in the PE context.

A lack of experience of 'being around' disabled individuals also translated into a sense of unease about how they should behave if they interacted with any disabled person. For example, Emma and Simon described how they felt they had to carefully consider how they behaved around disabled people;

Emma: 'I felt silly...erm, and bad because I'm always stood up or like sat down on a proper chair and can move around. I walk and I like run around and things and don't...sit in a wheelchair'

Simon: 'Sometimes it's quite bad for him, and he's got like er, he can't sleep that much and he isn't very good with people so you have to be like really careful when you introduce yourself to him'

Again, the 'otherness' of disabled people was emphasized in such comments. Pupils felt that they should act in a different manner around disabled people, albeit they were unsure what this would entail. Such opinions highlighted the general perception among pupils that relationships with disabled people would be problematic (Fitzgerald, 2005). Here, pupils felt conflicting emotions, including unease, a sense of superiority, but also sympathy. This caused some pupils to reflect on what it must be like to have an impairment. These reflections again emphasized the perceived inferiority of disabled peoples' capabilities, and the view that disability must be something wholly negative – like being sick without hope of a cure. For instance, Liz reflected on how she would feel told if she was disabled.

‘Yeah because if like...someone’s been told that they’re not going to be able to walk again, you’d think, oh no, think of all the things I won’t be able to do’

Moreover, Emma reflected on the long-term nature of impairment;

‘I feel quite sorry for them, because it couldn’t have been, like if someone has a broken leg or something, it couldn’t have been, well it could have been their fault but someone else could have done it and then they’re stuck with it for the rest of their life’

The sympathy described by participants appeared to be founded on a negative perception of disability as some kind of incurable disease. Pupils framed disability in terms of bodies being incomplete or lacking something, sometimes in relation to a perception of illness. Shilling (1996) refers to these perceptions and defined the aesthetics of the ‘diseased body,’ and the prevalence for bodies to be judged in aesthetic terms. Indeed, study participants rarely referred to non-visible impairments, and seemed to reduce their notion of disability to a set of essentially visible, physical criteria relating to limb loss, lack of movement or to use of wheelchairs. These criteria were described in terms that emphasized difference from themselves; as a tragic, visible variation from their own perceptually healthy, ‘normal’ bodies. Such perceptions of physical impairment as tragic are not uncommon (Wilde 2004), but are often considered derogatory and can reinforce the devaluing of disabled bodies, causing an increased sense of inferiority among those with impairments (Henderson & Bryan, 2004; Wilde, 2004).

Sympathy was often expressed alongside feelings of ‘respect,’ but respect that was expressed in a condescending manner in which the ‘bravery’ of disabled children’s participation in sport – often in the face of stigmatization - was emphasized. For instance, Anne explained;

‘I don’t know really, I guess, that they’re really brave, because they don’t care what they look like, they are just going to do what they want to do’

Nonetheless, pupils who expressed this sentiment did so in a hesitant manner. For instance, such pupils failed to identify which ‘disability sport’ deserved respect, nor how it might be challenging or difficult. These opinions were also in the minority. Largely, pupils stigmatized disabled people, particularly in relation to their abilities in ‘mainstream’ PE prior to their experiences of the wheelchair basketball programme. It is their experiences of this programme which are the subject of the following sections of this paper.

Observation Data

During the programme, non-participant observations were completed in which detailed field notes were maintained, from which key themes were identified that described participants’ experiences. The first key theme recognized related to the high physical demands of sessions. It was consistently evident that participants found the physical demands of participation tough, despite pre-programme perceptions that the sport would be easy due to being ‘sat down’. For example, Ruth drew attention to the size and demands of playing a full-court game of wheelchair basketball.

‘It’s way too big to play full court, the baskets are too high’

This led to signs of tiredness, predominantly during the game sections of each session. For instance, field notes indicated how one participant swapped chairs mid-game, stating to the teacher that ‘My arms are hurting Miss, I need a rest.’ Similarly participants following the session stated:

Anne: 'My arms and back are killing. It's really tiring moving because you have to use both arms all the time [in the wheelchair]'

Molly: 'I'm knackered, that was really hard pushing myself up and down the court'

This inability to move around the court resulted in pupils clustering in the centre of the court entangled tightly together, typically around the ball, without the ability to free themselves.

Indeed, so unfamiliar were these skills that some pupils stated how their previous experiences of PE, and the abilities which they had previously placed so much emphasis upon, seemed to be no longer valid. For instance, Guy explained;

'I play basketball all the time and, like, in a normal game, I'd run with the ball and go round someone and stuff but, when you're in a wheelchair, you can't do it that easy.'

Matthew emphasized this point, outlining how;

'When you're playing sports it's different, because when you're playing football you're just kicking a ball but when you're playing wheelchair basketball, it's a bit more complicated, because you've got to turn the wheelchair and you can't just use your body to turn around'

Despite this, most participants showed a willingness to engage with the demands of the activity and chose to use their bodies in a different manner to that expected in 'mainstream' sport and PE, accepting that they were not permitted to use their legs to control the ball and to remain seated. However, for some participants the *illusio* required to engage fully in wheelchair basketball was less evident, and some participants effectively 'cheated' from time to time, using their feet to trap the ball, kick the ball away, or even to stand in their chairs.

It was also clear that the demands of the session were not solely physical. Participants commented on the complexity of moving the wheelchairs at the same time as having to perform game-related tasks, including Beth, who explained;

‘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’

Participants also became increasingly frustrated with the height of the basketball net and the effort of maneuvering around the court. For example Will, after attempting (and failing) to score a basket because his shot lacked power shouted ‘it’s too fucking high’. When the interviewer inquired why Will had shouted this, he admitted his frustrations;

Int: ‘Will, you seemed to find that quite hard?’

Will: ‘I just can’t do it.’

Int: ‘What can’t you do?’

Will: ‘It’s too high. It’s too hard to move and shoot’

Will’s frank exchange related to the physical and cognitive unfamiliarity of wheelchair basketball; pupils emphasized how the game required a new way of moving. Emma described the difficulties of negotiating the games;

‘If you’re like stood up then you know you can like, move away quickly if something’s like going to hit you or something, but if you’re in a wheelchair and you’re not used to it you can’t move quickly.’

The introduction of such new skills as manipulating wheelchairs whilst handling the ball and

shooting without utilizing the lower limbs from a lower position caused the 'normal' social hierarchy in the PE sessions to change. While the field the participants were acting within was the same, wheelchair basketball was a different challenge which required new embodied skills to be developed (Thorpe, 2010). This brought the physical capabilities of pupils' bodies into sharp focus, and caused some to re-evaluate their physical capital in the specific context of wheelchair basketball. Indeed, Shilling, (1993) emphasizes the importance of embodied, corporeal sensations during embodied experiences, and in many cases pupils made reference to the physical demands placed on their bodies. Pupils had to re-evaluate what their bodies were and were not permitted to do. For instance, Simon outlined his difficulties when trying to reach the ball from the wheelchair.

'If the ball is down there and you've got to like try and get it, in football you just normally use your feet but, you've got to like bend over and try and reach it and we had to sit down which was really hard because you normally it's just there' (points at his feet).

This rationalization against other, more familiar sports experiences, suggests pupils reflected on and re-evaluated their attitudes towards wheelchair basketball. As suggested above, participants had perceived disability sport to have low physical demands and to be relatively unchallenging, particularly in relation to 'their' sport, which was somehow more 'real.' However, participants' displays of frustration suggested that the activities they had been asked to complete were more challenging than expected (Clement, 1995; Hay & Hunter, 2006; Hunter, 2004). Even participants previously viewed as 'high achievers' struggled significantly with basic movement and co-ordination when moving the chairs. It is to these changing perceptions after the programme that this discussion now turns.

Post-Programme Group Interviews:

Following the programme, participants' perceptions of the demands of playing wheelchair basketball altered. It became apparent that participants' challenging embodied experiences were often the driving factor behind these changes. For instance, where pupils had previously thought of disabled performers in terms of their 'otherness,' including physical limitation, sympathy and inferiority, participants now noted similarities between disabled sports participants and themselves, and emphasized the difficulty of the skills they had learned. Liz identified how she now considered disabled athletes to be very capable;

'You know what it's like for them and you won't like...like they say, never judge a book by its cover, like you don't know, they might be able to do something, say they only have one arm, they might be able to do something better than us even though they have disabilities'.

Embodied experiences were central to changing perceptions. The high physical demands of wheelchair basketball had encouraged pupils to re-consider their assumptions that wheelchair basketball would be easy because they were seated. Indeed, participants frequently referred to their experiences of the programme and suggested this was the primary cause behind this transformation in their assumptions. However, these opinions did not entirely unsympathetic. For instance, Tom described how he had grown to appreciate the complexity of the sport, but again from a perception of the limitations of the disabled body:

'It made me realize how hard it is for disabled people, to move around and all the things they actually can't do.'

Maggie also reflected on the feelings she had experienced whilst taking part:

‘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, but if you couldn’t get out and stuff, it would be like...just so annoying.’

Apparently, participants had an increased familiarity with the frustrations of having to use a wheelchair, and although had become more empathetic to wheelchair users, still viewed the disabled body as problematic. However, they were no longer expressed in such a dismissive manner as before the programme, and pupils expressed a respect for the physical demands of disability basketball and the skills participants required. For the participants, disability sport had become more ‘real.’ Pre-programme results suggested that the school environment had reproduced negative perceptions of disability among non-disabled pupils. However, at least in this context, the embodied experiences of participants during the programme encouraged a perceptual change. Pupils re-evaluated their perceived capabilities of people with physical impairments. Charlie used his experiences of traditional basketball to explain his reason for change:

‘The fact that you are in a wheelchair and you can’t do those things, like in normal games of basketball, they’ll run with the ball and stuff but when you’re in a wheelchair, say like you have to keep it on your knees and put your chin on it, keep the ball there and then move, it’s so much harder than playing like normal basketball.’

Participants reflected on their embodied experiences of wheelchair basketball during the programme as key to perceptual change, and yet although they still rationalized their experiences in terms of non-disabled sport, the comparison was now more considered. For instance, Anne noted how she now felt better informed to judge the abilities of disabled athletes;

‘Yeah because if you see it on the TV you think oh, it’s wheeling chairs about, passing to each other, good for them...but no, because when you actually get in the wheelchair it’s really tough...you have to be proper [extremely] good’

Anne’s comments demonstrate a shift from a general expression of sympathetic, almost condescending respect, towards reflecting on her embodied experience. The sessions enabled non-disabled individuals to ‘taste’ the demands of wheelchair basketball. This suggests that, pupils had begun to question their core habitual assumptions about the capabilities of physically disabled athletes and children. Also, by being exposed to the embodied practices of wheelchair basketball, they had begun to develop an embodied doxic habitus specific to new skills required to participate in wheelchair basketball. Put simply, participants had to adapt to a new way of ‘knowing’ their bodies. The nature of ‘ability’ altered in this specific context. For instance, they could no longer depend on their lower limbs for movement. Instead they had to learn to maneuver the chairs with their upper limbs, while also having to catch and pass, at the same time as thinking in a new way about their embodied capabilities. They had to learn new skills, to develop a new ‘game sense;’ to experience habitus *clivé*, or a divided habitus; that is, to challenge their internalized perceptions of which skills they valued most and develop skills which suited a new set of embodied rules. Participants had to adapt to enable completion of skills using different elements of their bodies. Hence, at least in the short-term, pupils began to develop a new embodied habitus specific to the new requirements and practices that defined ‘success’ and enabled capital accrual in the field of wheelchair basketball (Bourdieu, 1984).

Summary and conclusions

This study investigated secondary school pupils' embodied experiences of a wheelchair sports programme delivered by a county sports partnership in PE sessions in England among non-disabled children aged 11-12 years. The study highlights how their embodied experiences of wheelchair basketball caused them to re-evaluate their previous value judgments about how easy wheelchair basketball was, and what the physical capabilities of wheelchair basketball players could be. By using Bourdieu's conceptual framework as a guide, it became apparent that during the programme, pupils pre-conceived ideas about 'ability' in sport were challenged. Previously, pupils had equated high ability with non-disabled sport and consequently attributed higher physical capital to themselves than to disabled individuals. The programme challenged these perceptions. In this way, the centrality of embodied experiences was highlighted. The physical, emotional and experiential sensations of taking part in disability sport were key in challenging pupils' preconceptions about disabled individuals' physical capital in wheelchair basketball in particular.

Moreover, for those who showed sufficient *illusio* to engage with the requirements of the sessions – in other words, those who wished to succeed within the rules set and not 'cheat' – the programme appeared to challenge pupils' core notions about what their bodies could and could not do in the context of wheelchair basketball. Certainly, the programme was physically and mentally challenging for participants, and a number expressed their frustrations at coming to terms with new abilities and practices that challenged their pre-existing doxic, embodied habitus formed during participation in non-disabled PE. Moreover, it became clear that even during the short period of the programme, participants began to become familiar with the specific requirements of the sport and began to develop a new 'game sense.' This game-sense became internalized and embodied during the short-term, through hexis, the more participants played and

became familiar with the movements, actions and capabilities of moving wheelchairs. However, the longevity of any such change remains uncertain due to the relatively short-term nature of the wheelchair basketball programme, and further research would be required to assess the maintenance of any changes in participants' habitus. Consequently, pupils reflected upon the requirements of wheelchair basketball compared to those of other sports with which they were familiar. Indeed, they appeared to begin to show signs of habitus *clivé* (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) – that is, to begin to adapt their embodied, doxic habitus to the new practices in the field that they must negotiate in order to be 'successful.'

However, these claims should not be overstated. While many children suggested they now felt familiar with what it meant to be a disabled sports performer in PE and beyond, in reality the embodied experiences described and observed were specific to the context of the programme.

While a number of pupils suggested that they now 'understood' how disabled individuals felt, their experiences were limited to just a few hours over a twelve week period. They also experienced only one disability sport designed for participants with specific impairments.

Participants were not exposed to the many barriers which people with disabilities encounter on a daily basis. Likewise, they only gained experiences of one type of physical impairment limited to the lower limbs and torso, in one type of disability sport. Put simply, participants were exposed for a brief period to an environment from which they could, as Maggie stated, 'just stand up and walk away.' Similarly, the longevity of any changes in pupils' habitus was impossible to examine in the confines of this study.

Participants had experienced, however, for a brief period, the demands of playing wheelchair basketball which led to an appreciation of the potential ability of a disabled person in sport. This has implications for future PE policy and practice. Although the programme in which this study

was situated only implemented one type of disability sport, there is significant scope for further research into other, similar programmes that seek to sensitize non-disabled and disabled children to further physical, mental and emotional requirements of other disability sports. If this can be achieved, perhaps the stigmatization of disabled children, athletes and sports found prior to the present study can be challenged on a wider basis, with the hope that in the future, disabled sport could become considered 'real sport' among children like the participants in this study.

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