

# “I Just Didn’t Fit:” Lessons From Those ‘Disabled’ by Physical Education.



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# Presentation Outline

- What is disability?
- What do we know about inclusion?
- Methods and Theory
- Claire's story
- What can we learn from Claire?
- Concluding thoughts

# What is a disability?

*Common sense assumptions?*

- **Medical**

Research focuses upon “helping disabled people to cope, or fit in with ‘normal’ life” (Fitzgerald, 2005)



**OR**

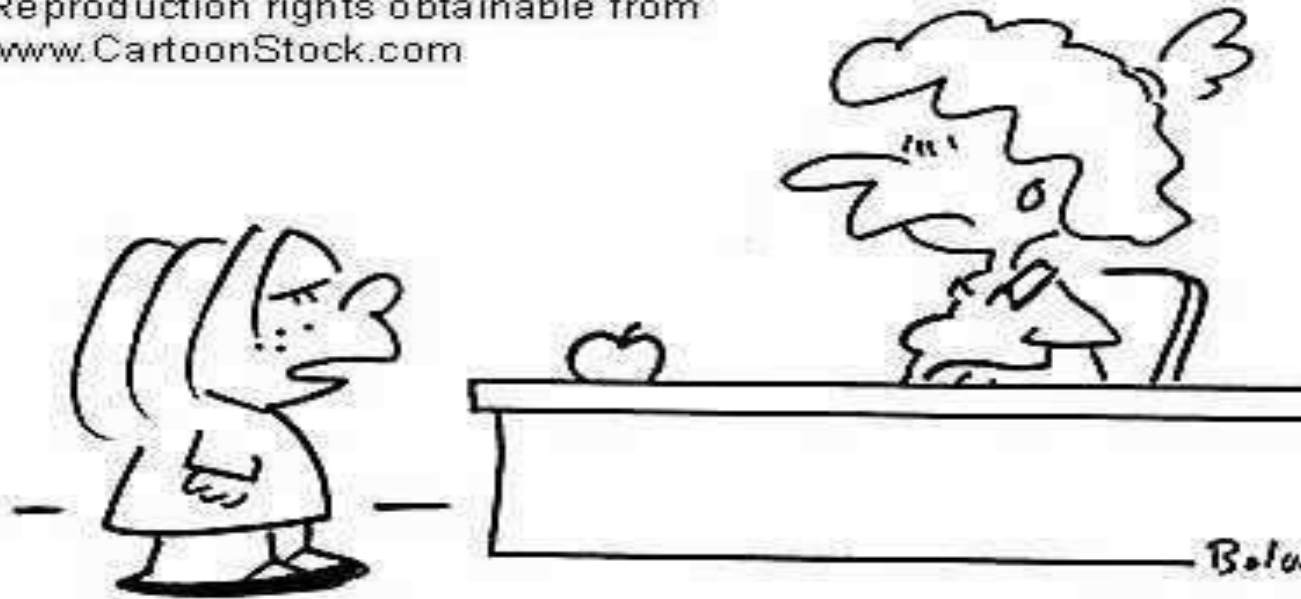
- **Social**

An individual is not ‘disabled’ by their conditions, but by society (Barton, 1993)



# Disability in Education?

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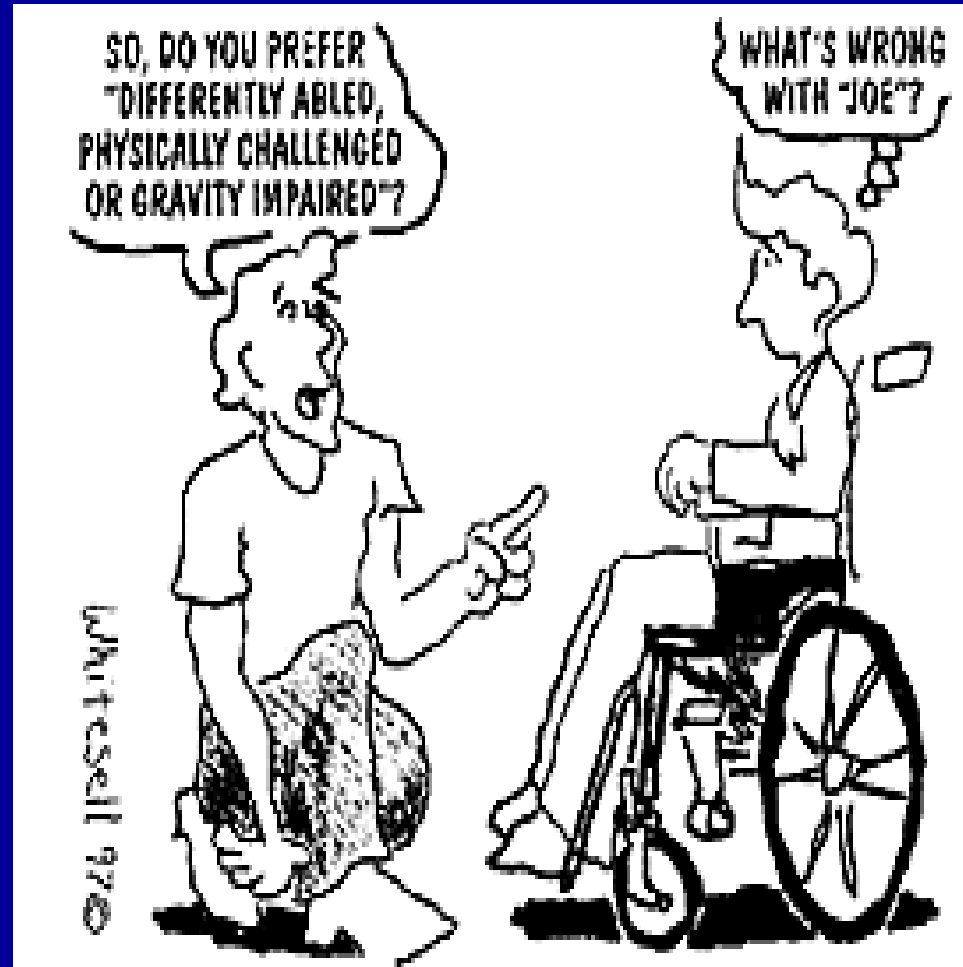
"How do you know I have a learning disability?  
— Maybe you have a *teaching* disability!"

# Why is Inclusion Important?

- Inclusion cannot occur through policy or practices alone (Slee, 1998)
- Inclusive research is riddled with difficulties and issues of power versus knowledge (Shakespeare & Watson, 1998)
- Student orientated research is neglected and the importance is disregarded (Fitzgerald, 2003)
- We need to know what it feels like, not just what it means

# What Do We Know So Far?

- Inclusion is influenced by the teacher. (MacArthur et. al., 2007, p.59)
- Learning happens, but at what cost? (Rutherford, 2009)
- Inclusion is about “sameness” (Connors & Stalkers, 2007)



# Inclusion?

“I know it’s being ‘included’, but you just don’t feel like you are included”

(Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010, p.257)



# Inclusive Physical Education

- Sport is the gatekeeper of society (Hahn, 1984)
- Physical education is an able bodied creation, for the able bodied population (Depauw, 1997)
- Discourses of ability are reproduced rather than challenged (Evans, 2004)
- Children feel limited by the assumptions other people have of their abilities (Goodwin, 2000)

# The Failure of Inclusive Physical Education?

- A failure of educational policy and teacher training?
- OR***
- Is exclusion embedded in the nature of physical education?



# What is CMT?

- A form of Muscular Dystrophy caused by genetic mutation of gene PNP22
- Axonal damage causes muscle wasting of peripheral aspects of the body
- Hereditary, present from birth
- Poor strength, balance, coordination, control, or feeling



# Methodology

- Foucauldian Poststructuralism
- Privileging the knowledge of those whose insights have typically been rejected
- Life History methodology enables us to “encompass the universal within the particular” (Sparks & Templin, 1992, p. 120)
- Discourse analysis involved placing Claire’s story within wider social discourses which shaped her understanding of what is ‘real’

# Claire's story: Before Inclusion

## Separate and Segregated

- Fear of the 'special school'

*"People doubt your intellectual ability because of your physical ability...  
People tie the intellectual and the physical in together"*

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## Separate and Segregated

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- Extra curricular activity and the 'Crippled Children's Society'

*"With a lot of people with a lot of disabilities, so that made you feel quite different as well, which didn't help you feel accepted, or feel normal"*

*"It just made you aware you belonged to an organisation that was for kids who were disabled, and therefore you felt like you were disabled...then you feel like that in all areas"*

# Claire's Story - Exclusion

## When PE doesn't fit

- The disabling structure of Physical Education lesson

*“I never got picked for teams, I would dread athletics and swimming...I just hated sports day, I absolutely loathed sports days. I couldn't do sack races, couldn't walk along a beam”*

# Claire's Story - Exclusion

## When PE doesn't fit

- The disabling structure of Physical Education lesson

*"I never got picked for teams, I would dread athletics and swimming...I just hated sports day, I absolutely loathed sports days. I couldn't do sack races, couldn't walk along a beam"*

- Teacher's responses

*"She just expected you to do it. And you were pretty much ignored because you were no good anyway. They only wanted to know about people who do well"*

# Claire's story – Exclusion

## PE and Society

- The social value of the able body
- Physical Education is a direct reflection of society
  - “physical activity and sport provides... a choice between productive citizenship or anti-social behaviour and ill-health”  
(Wright and O'Flynn, 2007, p.19)

# Claire's Story – Would it be Different Today?

- *“I don't know whether it would be different now or not. Because I think it is all about how you feel about yourself, and I didn't feel good about myself, but I don't know how I could have when my physical appearance seemed to be so obvious and I was treated differently.”*

# What Can We Learn From Claire?

- Physical education reinforces the social value of the body
- Inclusion can only occur once we realise this
- Teachers assumptions shape how students see themselves and others

# Where to From Here?

- Sport might be the gatekeeper, but physical education lets everybody in
- Including isn't inclusion (Graham and Slee, 2008)
- We need to get back to the student, what do they think about all this?

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