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## Negotiating the discursive spaces of inclusive education: narratives of experience from contemporary Physical Education

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Responding to calls about the urgent need to better understand young disabled people's experiences in the subject of Physical Education (PE), this paper adopts a narrative approach to explore how they experience and value teaching and learning in PE; when and how they feel in/excluded; and to ask 'what barriers/facilitators are perceived to be of importance for their sense of in/exclusion?' Narratives structure and illuminate not only young people's own experiences and self-identities, but they also reveal insights about the socio-cultural locations they inhabit. When they are well told they can persuade us to revisit our taken-for-granted realities about disability and inclusive education. Analyses of a case study of stories from the discursive spaces of PE lessons reveal that the deep culture of schooling and the hegemonic 'truths' of PE, not least of performativity, often result in segregated and alienating experiences, in which the disabled student is defined as malfunctioning and lacking 'ability'.

**Keywords:** inclusion; exclusion; narratives; disability; Physical Education; youth

### Introduction

Discourses of disability, education and inclusion create and deny possibilities, both at a societal and individual level (Slee 2004). In this paper we explore the discursive possibilities for young people with a disability in the core subject of Physical Education (PE) in Norway by adopting a narrative approach (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). There have been relatively few European studies of inclusion in PE, and even fewer research projects in Scandinavia (Block and Obrusnikova 2007; Smith 2009), so we aim to make a modest contribution to knowledge about this area of schooling. Barton (2009) recently characterised the need to critically analyse the conditions, relations and practices of the subject as urgent due, in part, to the overall lack of a focus on disability and rather a tokenistic, 'bolt-on' approach when first adopted, but also due to revelations in the existing research which point to large discrepancies between the rhetoric of inclusive practice and what is actually taking place in PE lessons. Given PE's historical legacy of being closely tied up to the practice of sport and performance cultures, and society's increasing focus on the 'cult of slenderness' and the 'ideal' body (Tinning 1997, 2010; Turner 1996), there are concerns that bodies which fall short of the ideal continue to be defined as inferior and are being marginalised despite a curriculum framed by a valorisation of difference (Fitzgerald,

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Jobling, and Kirk 2003; Fitzgerald 2005). There is research that suggests that many PE classes construct learning spaces which normalise a celebration of able-bodied pupils and offer a relatively narrow range of ‘acceptable’ ways to move the body (see e.g. Kirk 1998, 2010; Tinning 2010). In particular we ask, therefore, how young people with a physical disability experience and value teaching and learning in PE; when and how do they feel in/excluded; and what barriers/facilitators do they perceive to be of importance for their sense of in/exclusion? In other words, we are interested in illuminating the lived spaces between policy about inclusion and practices of adapted and in/exclusive PE.

We believe that a narrative approach (Czarniawska 2004; Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff 2012; Gubrium and Holstein 2009; Pheonix 2008; Smith and Sparkes 2008) can be a useful tool for understanding young disabled students’ experience of schooling. Narrative is fundamental to life (Barthes 1977) and narratives provide a structure and a sense of order to “... the multitude of fragmentary experiences which constitute our lives” (Polkinghorne, 1995, 185). The stories young people tell structure and illuminate not only their own experiences and self-identities, but they also reveal insights about the socio-cultural locations they inhabit. Narratives are, in other words, inextricably subjective and relational, and they are imbued with power; no one is simply free to choose a story, and subjective tales from PE lessons are inevitably intertwined with macro societal relations. A narrative approach also recognises the role emotions play in our understanding of social phenomena (Richardson 2000) and when tales are well told, they can persuade us to revisit our taken-for-granted realities about disability and inclusive education (Barone 1995). Narratives conceptualised as social action thus provide us with a means for analysing the ways in which discourses about disability function to include and/or exclude young people within the current discourses of PE and schooling, where ‘inclusion’ is seemingly too often found to be a cliché that has been ‘evacuated of meaning’ (Sikes, Lawson, and Parker 2007).

Of course we are aware of the general challenges facing the realisation of the Salamanca Statement on inclusive education (UNESCO 1994) in Norwegian schooling, and these form a backcloth for our discussion. First of all, there is the tension between education for equality and social justice and the moral panics about lowering standards and the subsequent increased marketization of schooling (Arnesen, Mietola, and Lahelma 2007; Barton 2004; Nes 2004; Slee 1998; Stromstad 2004). Secondly, it seems that inclusion remains a political concept and is rarely an organising principle for daily practice in school settings (Haug 2010). Similar to findings in the United Kingdom (Sikes, Lawson, and Parker 2007), inclusion in Norway is most often defined along the binaries of inclusion/exclusion and of normality/abnormality (Arnesen, Mietola, and Lahelma 2007), or in relation to mainstream/special schools (Haug 2010), and consequently, rests paradoxically upon a discourse of exclusion and the Other (Slee 2011). Thirdly, inclusion is often used as a synonym for special education (Haug 2010), and therefore masks the deeper issues of how best to include *all* students in education as a human rights issue. Fourthly, inclusion and integration are used interchangeably, conflating inclusion with the assimilation of disabled pupils into mainstream schooling rather than changing the fundamental ways we think about education for social transformation and the removal of exclusionary practice (Haug 2010; Slee 1998, 2011). Fifthly, Haug (2010) claims that a special education paradigm and practice seems to be reproduced in ‘inclusive’ schools, since many students with special educational needs are

systematically taught in segregated groups albeit in the same physical building. Sixth, we recognise the persistence of the theoretical tensions between a psycho-medical model and a social model of disability, in which the former tends to construct disability as an individual pathological defect (Slee 2004) and the latter which conceptualises disability as a power-laden, exclusionary, socio-historical construct (Barton 2009; Oliver 1996). In relation to the latter, we are also aware of Grue's (2011) recent observation concerning the false dichotomy between these two models on account of their discourse production occurring in different social fields.

Our own theoretical position is one which is influenced by the social model of disability, but which recognises that physical disability is also an embodied phenomenon, and we are interested in gaining a deeper understanding about how the school subject of PE and its actors, within the current school system and policy framework, include and/or exclude individuals or groups of students. We seek therefore to reveal the power structures within the social construction of PE lessons in Norway: to illuminate the ways in which institutional, ideological, structural and material conditions affect how young people experience teaching and learning in PE (Apple 2006). At the same time, we aim to reveal the ways in which students can exercise agency to create a sense of inclusion. We do not conceptualise a sense of inclusion as a fixed entity but rather something in flux, reflecting the ever-changing local, socially constructed environment. Inclusion is a process involving the establishment of a 'dignified view of difference' (Barton 2009) and involving equitable learning experiences for *all* young people. Our view of inclusive education involves therefore a commitment to transformative change at all levels in the system: with respect to the curriculum, the nature of learning and teaching styles, assessment, practitioners' attitudes and the views of stakeholders. By providing young disabled people with a platform to narrate their unique experiences, we believe that their stories have a potential to enable actors in the education system to painstakingly grasp the other person's viewpoint and "...to overcome that 'certain blindness' of which all human beings are victim" (Plummer 2001, 247). In particular we believe that their narratives can problematise the PE profession's Othering of 'flawed' or 'spoilt' bodies, and may contribute to a re-articulation of notions of 'ability' (Evans 2004), including a shift in thinking about 'appropriate content knowledge'.

### **Young people, disability and PE**

As we stated above, there is a dearth of research in the field of disability and PE in a European context, not least with regard to research which focuses on how young people experience the subject (Fitzgerald, Jobling, and Kirk 2003; Goodwin 2009; Smith 2009). Fitzgerald, Jobling, and Kirk (2003, 178) state that

... often research about young disabled people is embedded in the assumption that these youngsters are passive and dependent ... (and) one can therefore challenge the degree to which we actually understand their PE and sporting experiences and how this influences their needs and wants.

Scholars have been more interested in the functional dimensions of activity, the curriculum or pedagogical issues of inclusion, rather than the 'voices' of young people with disabilities. 'Deficits' have been identified, and adapted and/or compensatory physical educational strategies have been developed in relation to

the 'normal', 'able'-bodied student, rather than seeking to understand the actual insights and embodied experiences of young people with a disability (Barton 2009; Fitzgerald 2005). Young disabled people's narratives can bridge the socio-cultural history of PE and disability with biography, avoiding both the pathologising of the disabled body or too much focus on structural issues at the expense of embodied subjects.

Notwithstanding the epistemological challenges of 'voice' (Richardson 2000), we support therefore those who believe it is important to provide opportunities for these young disabled people's 'voices' to be 'articulated' and 'heard' (Slee 2000), because their experiences are vital for professionals and for understanding the field, and moreover, by engaging them within the research process, we hope that the young people will be able to further explore and critique their experiences (Fitzgerald, Jobling, and Kirk 2003). The first author has long work experience from trying to support young people to receive a worthy, just *physical* education, which is a right according to the Norwegian Education Act (KD 1998), and has been personally troubled (Wright Mills 1959) by many students' stories of exclusion and inequitable practice in PE lessons, as well as in the recently introduced additional school subject of 'physical activity for health' (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2009). Her research project has thus been a process of transforming these personal concerns into public issues (Wright Mills 1959), and systematically investigating the experiences of disabled students. The National Curriculum (nd) states the following about the overall aims of PE in young people's education:

Physical activity is fundamental to all human beings. The physical activity culture, such as play, sports, dance and outdoor life is part of how we create identity in society and what we have in common. Therefore it is important to provide children and young people the ability to improve their skills in sports and other activities, as well as to teach them about outdoor life. Physical activity is important for everyone in their development years as this fosters good health. Physical activity, formerly present as an integral part of daily life, must now be planned and developed in active programmes for general physical activity.

The first author has therefore been interested in asking disabled young people about how they experience the pursuit of these objectives in their compulsory PE lessons; of whether they feel a part of an equitable PE learning culture and/or whether, and when, they feel excluded.

With regard to the insights gleaned from the limited number of international studies which have been carried out on students' teaching and learning experiences in PE, there are findings which can be characterised as both 'positive' and 'negative' experiences, although we believe this binary to be illusionary given that the young people's meanings are in flux and often contradictory (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995). In summarising the young people's 'positive experiences' of curricular PE, it seems that being able to spend time with friends in PE lessons can be important for one's self-identity due to the subject's popularity among peers; it is possible to benefit from the effects of physical training; and young people with disabilities, like their able-bodied peers, report that they feel a sense of mastery when they successfully perform meaningful tasks (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000; Fitzgerald 2005). There appear, however, to be a greater number of 'negative experiences' from PE lessons in the research findings. Firstly, segregated inclusion (i.e. being taught in another locality by other non-PE staff) or limited inclusion (for example, being positioned as an

observer or passive participant such as a referee) are common practices (Blinde and McAllister 1998; Goodwin and Watkinson 2000; Smith 2009). Secondly, and often as the result of the latter, too many young people with disabilities experience being made to feel like 'outsiders' or 'incompetent' by peers, or are teased in PE lessons (Doubt and McCall 2003; Fitzgerald 2005; Hutzler et al. 2002; Smith 2009). Thirdly, PE teachers are also reported to make young disabled students feel marginalised because they appear to lack the knowledge or lack the confidence to adapt teaching and learning tasks in their lessons, and do little to encourage their active participation (Blinde and McAllister 1998; Doubt and McCall 2003; Fitzgerald 2005; Goodwin 2001). Indeed, fourthly, several studies reveal that the range of physical activities offered to the disabled students is limited to individual sports or physical activities, and given that much curriculum time is spent on competitive team games, they are accordingly excluded from participation (Doubt and McCall 2003; Smith 2009; Suomi, Collier, and Brown 2003). On the occasions when PE teachers do offer students adapted physical activities or alternative activities, such as boccia, this lesson content is often frowned upon by able-bodied peers and therefore appears to have little 'exchange value' as physical capital worth accruing (Fitzgerald 2005). This knowledge about the field of PE and disability has consequently also informed the first author's research project; do Norwegian students have similar experiences, and/or in what ways do their experiences differ?

### **Methodology**

Narratives about young disabled people's experiences in PE lessons were generated by the first author via the use of in-depth interviews (Mason 1996; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) with 10 children/young people with a disability between the age of 10 – 19 years old, and with 16 parents/guardians (6 sets of parents and 4 mothers) from a wide range of geographical locations and school districts. The participants in the 'maximum variation sample' (Patton 2002) were selected because they represented a wide range of physical disabilities, attended different types of schools (primary, middle, upper schools) and were from different socio-economic backgrounds. The young people's PE teachers were also invited to be interviewed, but over half of them declined the invitation; 6 PE teachers were interviewed. The design of the project was granted ethical approval by the regional board for medical and health research.

All the young people were interviewed individually. The parents/guardians were interviewed together. Each participant or pair of parents/guardians was interviewed twice (except for one set of parents) to enable trust to be developed, and for emerging analyses to be shared and reflected upon with the research participants. The interviews lasted between 1–2 hours. The first author used an interview guide (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) to activate tales (Gubrium and Holstein 2009) about experiences of in/exclusion in PE lessons, and in schooling more generally. She was acutely aware of the power in interview relations (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) and strove to create a caring, safe interview interaction. She ensured that participants were able to access support from appropriate professionals should the process of participation lead to unanticipated stress or perceived problems, because like Butt et al. (1992), she was aware of the dangers of 'practising therapy without a license'. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and were analysed in relation to the research questions and existing literature both thematically (e.g. what is said, what

themes can be identified?), and by the means of a ‘dialogic/performative analysis’ which involved examining the content of the tales within the contexts in which they have been produced (e.g. whom did the narrator address, when did they act as they did, and for what purposes, and how do contexts beyond the field setting impinge upon the story?) (Riessman 2008).

The first author has analysed all the data generated in the project, but with regard to this paper which is based on one particular case study with Emilie (a pseudonym), a 14-year old, working-class girl who attended a middle school, we have each individually carried out the analyses of interviews with her and her mother Hanne (Emilie’s PE teacher declined to be interviewed), and then shared our emerging understandings both orally and in written form. Following Richardson (2000), we see writing as a method of inquiry: by writing in different ways we have gleaned new insights into the participants’ worlds and these have contributed to our overall analysis. We have also experimented with different ways of writing in order to better ‘capture’ and convey the complex, ambiguous, fluctuating, sometimes contradictory, multiple meanings of being a disabled student in PE. Indeed, by evocatively re-telling Emilie’s experiences we aim to ‘move’ the reader: to invite her/him to re-visit her/his taken-for-granted worlds and to transform unjust practices. As we stated in the introduction, this research project aims to bring marginalised voices to the centre stage. We hope that Emilie’s tales (incorporating her Mother’s stories) have the potential to offer PE teachers and others in the education system a ‘catharsis of comprehension’ (Plummer 2001), or what Bogdan (1974), cited in Plummer 2001) terms as ‘the politics of perspective’. In Slee’s (2011, 170) words, that the narratives will lead to them asking ‘a different set of questions’ with regard to how best to create inclusive learning environments. Of course, our aim has been to avoid the colonisation of the Other (Fine 1994), but it is nevertheless we (white, middle class, able-bodied, women researchers) who ultimately have used the power of our researchers’ pens to convey Emilie’s narratives. We have endeavoured to do this with ethical sensitivity and to remain ‘true’ to her words.

Below we share two of these narrative forms, an ‘ethnographic fiction’ (Clough 2002; Sparkes 2002) and a ‘poetic transcription’ (Richardson 2000; Sparkes et al. 2003). The ‘ethnographic fiction’ is fictional in the sense it is an amalgam of ‘raw data’ from this case study and the 9 other cases, as well as the researchers’ imagination and knowledge about the field: “. . . they are stories which *could* be true, they derive from real events and feelings and conversations, but they *are* ultimately fictions: versions of the truth” (Clough 2002, 9). Wherever possible, however, we have remained ‘true’ to the participants’ syntax and expressions in the interview transcriptions. Indeed, by composing a ‘poetic transcription’ of interview talk we aim to honour the pauses, alliterations, narrative strategies and rhythms of speech common to interviews (Richardson 2000), as well to convey the parts and the ‘whole’ of the narrative from Emilie’s experiences of PE. Both forms of representation aspire not only to represent observations or interview dialogue, but also to provide a dynamic framework in which disconnected data elements are linked together in an *explanatory* way (Polkinghorne 1995). Although we do offer the reader with more explicit theoretical interpretations of the data, we deliberately suspend these with the hope that the evocative narratives can also ‘speak for themselves’, not least emotionally.

Following the tenets of our critical-interpretivist position, we expect our work to be judged according to whether the tales seem authentic in the sense they are ‘true to

life', whether our implicit and explicit theoretical analyses cohere with knowledge in the field but at the same time 'enliven' the research conversation, and whether they can help professionals to develop emphatic understandings of the Other's worlds (Bochner and Ellis 1996; Clough 2002; Eisner 1997; Smith and Deemer 2000). Following Barone (1995), we aim to persuade the reader to revisit her/his taken-for-granted worlds as part of an on-going, critical reflexive practice, and spur her/his imagination to 'anticipate a new social reality' (Freire and Shor 1987, cited in Slee 2000: 889) that acknowledges young disabled people's human rights and supports a view of pride in difference. Like Wolcott (1994), we believe in the potential of the single case for understanding that which is beyond.

### **An ethnographic fiction about in/exclusion in PE**

#### **'I'm an inconvenience'**

The sports hall was alive with pounding feet, taunting cries to the wolf and the carefree laughter of the rabbits who once more had escaped being caught. Emilie thought Marius looked hilarious with the long ribbon cascading from his Bjørn Borg underpants. 'He's got a bit of an image problem today!' she laughingly cried out to Marie. 'You're telling me!' she gasped back, as she skilfully dodged around Marcus, who was stampeding towards them and whose movements could rarely be foreseen. Emilie wiped a pearl of sweat from her pale, white brow as she contemplated her next move. Surprisingly she didn't feel too tired today, even though she'd been forced to retire to her bed in exhaustion the evening before, and accordingly had missed out on Anna's birthday treat at Peppe's Pizza restaurant. Just as she launched herself in the direction of the long dividing wall on the other side of the hall, the piercing blast of Therese's (the PE teacher's) whistle brought the buzz of activity to a sudden halt. Why does that mean old hag always have to spoil our fun, Emilie asked herself? Simultaneously she felt a familiar wave of repulsion ripple through her from top to toe. Please, not yet another humiliating session on that bloody exercise bike, she pleadingly glanced in Therese's direction. As usual, though, Therese didn't offer Emilie a split second of her attention, turning instead to capable Simon and Peter, and asking them to take out the goals for today's game of football, and shouting to Lydia, 'please can you fetch the bag of footballs from the storeroom!'

Soon the sports hall was transformed into a hub of noise and activity, this time with the drone of bouncing balls interspersed with youthful dialogue. Emilie's light-hearted mood ebbed away as she contemplated what Therese all too often termed as her 'choice' of activities. Some choice, she mused. Like last week, and the week before that, again the allure of retreating to the changing room weighed heavily. Why should I mount the tribune steps to sit up there in the rubbish strewn gallery and cycle to hell? Why the hell would I want to watch my mates having a laugh playing footie? She could feel the familiar swell of tears encroaching. Had she feared that anyone had been paying her the slightest bit of attention, she'd have been planning a respectable retreat from this humiliating situation. She was, after all, what you might call an expert at saving face. Yet she knew that even her mates weren't thinking about her, not at this moment. And Therese, a teacher whose entire body language oozed disinterest for Emilie, was probably too busy kicking a ball herself to give a thought to her cumbersome pupil with the rare disability. Lingered on the first step, Emilie pondered for the trillionth time why Therese had never, ever asked her how she felt.

Why couldn't we do more dance? She knows I can do dance. It's not as if I plan to keel over and collapse in her bloody dance lesson! Why all these competitive games, when those who like 'em best can play 'em after school, anyway?

"Are you still here, Emilie?" Therese's roar interrupted her train of thought. "It's not your day to go to the physio, so hurry on up those stairs!" And on that kindly pedagogical note Emilie knew that was the last she'd hear of that silly cow for the remainder of the lesson. On stumbling up the last but one step she felt the trickle of warm, wet rage running down her cheeks. She fought to hold back the reservoir of disappointment, but choked by despair and loneliness, knew in her heart of hearts that it was impossible. She fumbled for her mobile in the half-lit gallery, sliding cautiously onto the cold, plastic seat of the dilapidated exercise bike and rang her Mum. Mum would understand.

### **Battle fatigue – a mother's tale**

For a second, Hanne didn't know where she was, but the persistent sound of her mobile brought her back to her senses. Lifting herself off the sofa, she realised she'd dozed off. Stolen a moment to rest her weary limbs, exhausted as usual, after the early morning cleaning shift at the factory. She rummaged around in the discarded till receipts, lipsticks, hairbrush, bunch of keys, tissue packet and a half-eaten Mars bar at the bottom of her large handbag before successfully locating the 'phone.

'Hello, Emilie! Is that you, darling?' All she could hear was muffled background noise. 'Are you there, Emilie?' she repeated.

'I hate 'er. I hate that cow. And she hates me! I know she does! Leaving me to sit on this bloody bike watching 'em all. I'm going to come home! You'll have to ring 'er! Tell 'er why I can't bear it anymore!'

'Calm down, Emilie. Calm down. Where are you? Have they all run off again outside? Where's Therese?' Hanne's thoughts raced back to the last meeting they'd had at the school. She could happily have slaughtered that aloof, Miss-know-it-all form teacher. Why can't she get it in 'er head that the social side of PE, feelin' a part of the group, is so vital for fitting in? Even I know that, an' I'm a cleaner for God's sake! The kid doesn't want to go for a walk on her own an' I can see why she doesn't want to sit up in that gallery. A teacher's meant to teach, for cryin' out loud! The whimpering at the other end of the line was now being replaced by loud sobs.

'... Oh, I see, they're playing football, are they? Well, then Emilie, you know you can't play football. You don't want to dislocate your shoulder, now, do you? Be a good girl and cycle a bit. Try a little. You know it's good for you to exercise a little...'

Click. Emilie had turned the 'phone off. Hanne was left midsentence to wonder whether she was now on her way home. Would she desert yet another PE lesson? Now she too fought to keep back the tears. Tears of rage mingled with tears of despondency on her heaving chest. How much longer could she keep fighting the system? Did Emilie *really* understand how serious the consequences could be if her main artery were to burst? How could a child cope with information like that? And as for that Head Teacher! Hanne recounted his parting words at the meeting, 'Well, you must understand Ms Smith, the school doesn't have endless resources. We do have 25 pupils to consider, not just your Emilie.' She could hear his intonation, and feel his impatience every time she recollected the utterance. Of course she knew that Emilie could be difficult – she lives with her! But she knew, too, that she has rights, and that the school were not heeding 'em. Hanne pledged there and then to continue

the battle, but as she collapsed once more on the moulded sofa cushion, her aching limbs were symptomatic of battle fatigue, and she wasn't really very sure about how long she'd have the energy to carry on. If only she'd had a partner with whom she could share the burden. . . .

### **A poetic transcription about in/exclusion in PE**

#### **Longing to be me and belonging to them**

To be like  
Them.  
A pointless thought,  
but it hounds  
me.  
Struggling with the  
unbearable weight  
of my school bag.  
Exhausted,  
feeling the mattress support my  
weary limbs  
in a darkened room  
after school.  
A day when I've attended.  
Missing out  
again  
on a party.

But I'm  
Me.  
Proud.  
Wise for my years, or so my Mum says.  
Qualities,  
Others  
envy.  
But who  
dreams of being  
wise?  
Don't want  
to be  
Different,  
Lagging  
behind  
the Others,  
storm past in the gym.

The nice physio,  
says I'm  
alright.  
I feel

alright,  
strong even,  
after doing her exercises.  
Fit and slim,  
within an arm's reach.  
Kind, too,  
that physio.  
Smiles,  
looks at you.  
Let's my friends be there,  
with Me.

Of course, the  
PE teacher  
has 25 Others,  
but just  
once,  
might she cast a  
glance  
my way?  
Make me feel  
I  
belong,  
together with my friends,  
havin' fun.  
Read 'em booklets about  
*my* condition?  
Stop the  
hollow promises  
about an activity plan,  
*just* for me.  
A plan that's  
never  
written.

Fewer  
ball games,  
so she needn't worry  
about Me getting  
injured.  
More time for  
dance,  
aerobics,  
and swimming!  
She knows,  
these activities can  
include  
Me.  
On

good days.  
When I'm not  
tired.  
To be Me  
and  
one of Them.  
And They can  
be like  
Me.

### **Explicit theoretical reflections**

We are acutely aware of the dangers of proffering interpretations of these reconstructed tales from the field because of the way in which our explicit theoretical analyses can seem to provide closure to fragmentary realities (Richardson 2000). On the other hand, we have used the power of our researchers' pens to inscribe glimpses of Emilie's life as it was storied by her and her mother, and therefore believe that we have a moral responsibility to share the ideas which have shaped our researchers' tales, as a result of the dialogical process of researching and understanding disability and inclusive education. We hope, too, that our reflections will stimulate further dialogue about disability and inclusive PE.

A striking feature of the interview talk with Emilie and her mother was the fact that Emilie yearns to be able to actively take part in PE lessons, and yet in spite of her strong desire and motivation, and her mother's proactive support, she all too often experiences being positioned on the margins of the learning arena. She reported that she most often receives segregated teaching, either in the form of being cast as an observer of the rest of the group, albeit with a physical 'learning' task such as cycling on the ergometer, or in the form of physical therapy as provided by a physiotherapist in a different geographical location. When she is 'excluded' from PE lessons in this way, Emilie recounted how she learns that she is not valued, that her physicality is lacking in some way (abnormal), and that she is a nuisance and an inconvenience to the PE teacher. On the other hand, she also made it clear that this sense of being made to feel different or inferior is not fixed, rather it is in flux, and on occasions, like in a warm-up session or when the class are having a dance or swimming lesson, she can feel 'included' in PE, not least because she experiences a sense of competency in these individual activities. Emilie cast the PE teacher as the antagonist in the plot of her local PE learning experiences, as did her mother, although Hanne also pointed to the head teacher's role and acknowledged Emilie's own conduct, but from our researcher perspective the web of structures are far more complex if we are to understand her dominantly negative experiences (Slee 1998, 2004, 2011). This is, of course, not to deny Emilie her sense of disappointment when a promised personalised activity plan never materialises, nor to deny her depth of suffering when she experiences being overlooked in favour of her peers, or indeed by her peers in some settings; as we stated above, we think it is extremely important to listen to Emilie's 'voice' and we have much to learn from her stories. At the same time, as researchers we also see the need to go beyond Emilie's rage directed at the individual educator, and ask how is it possible within the auspices of an inclusive educational system (Utdanningsdirektoratet nd a) for a PE teacher and the school to act in the ways experienced by Emilie? Furthermore, what can we learn with regard to

enhancing learning and creating more inclusive spaces in PE by engaging with her narrative?

In analysing the occasions when Emilie feels more included, than excluded, in PE lessons we discover that similar to international research findings it is when she can perform the same tasks as her peers, together with them in the same geographical space, and when she experiences a sense of mastery. Similarly in relation to international findings, her sense of exclusion is exacerbated by the dominance of competitive games in the content knowledge of PE, the teacher's seeming lack of professionalism with regard to acknowledging and coping with her disability (as evidenced by a lack of an individual activity plan and being segregated from the class either in a nearby vicinity or off-site at the physiotherapist's), and peers' seeming lack of empathy for her special needs. Thus, whilst the teacher certainly has a pivotal role in how Emilie experiences learning in PE and this requires further reflection, we also need to look at the deep culture of the subject of PE and schooling in general. Indeed, with regard to the points we raised in the introduction concerning the challenges facing the realisation of the Salamanca Statement for inclusive education in the Norwegian school system, Emilie's narrative is illustrative for most of them: inclusion appears to remain a political concept rather than an organising principle; the binaries of in/exclusion and ab/normal work to exclude and create the Other; pupils with disabilities are assimilated into mainstream schooling rather than changing how we think about transformative education; and the segregation of pupils with special needs continues, albeit within mainstream schooling. In other words, we need to keep in mind the hegemonic discourses of the socially constructed 'regular' school as well as individual subjects' experiences within it (Slee 2011).

### **A *physical* education – for all young people or just the 'able-bodied'?**

From our analyses of the interview data, we observe that the content of PE lessons has rarely been challenged by Emilie or her mother in meetings with either the head teacher or the PE teacher. Certainly Hanne's working class background makes it unlikely that she has the habitus or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) to enter a dialogue on equal footing with the public school system, and as MacLure (2003) reminds us, there often exists a crude oppositional binary in such school-home consultations ('them'/'us'; lay/professional) which makes it especially difficult to envisage the world from the position of the Other. The asymmetry of parent-teacher interactions is, in general, collaboratively constructed with parents assuming the conventional role as 'client' or 'layperson', or in Tveit's (2009) terms, is one characterised by 'conventions of tact' which can be in conflict with the truthfulness of the discussion. But more importantly in this case, we interpret that the hegemonic *common sense* or dominant truths of the subject (Apple 1996) are so deep-rooted and taken-for-granted that challenging them simply does not occur from the perspective of the teaching profession or students/parents, beyond that of small suggestions for minor adjustments. Even in the face of the evidence that much lesson time is spent on competitive games like football, no one (including the head teacher) points out that on the basis of the learning objectives in the national curriculum, this is undesirable. Beyond Emilie's plight, research has shown that many young women feel alienated by the domination of traditional 'male' activities in PE (Flintoff 2006; Andrews and Johansen 2004), and they on average receive lower assessment grades than young men (Imsen 2000), as well as young men who do not live up to the traditional 'male'

values reporting that they feel marginalised (Dowling Næss 2001). But clearly these do not appear to be concerns of this particular school, and internationally they remain problematic, as do concerns about the consequences of the ways in which the complexities of social class (Evans and Davies 2006) and ethnicity (Harrison 2006) influence young people's learning in PE. As Evans (2004) and Fitzgerald (2005) have pointed out, as long as 'male' sporting performance values like strength, power and aggression (Messner 1992) remain valorised in PE, young people who do not display such 'ability', including those with a disability, almost automatically become labelled as 'lacking ability', as 'physically unintelligent' and as 'deficient'. For Emilie, the intersections of her gender identity, her working class background and her disability make her extra vulnerable (Flintoff, Scraton, and Fitzgerald 2008).

The current strong performance discourse makes other *physical education* practices (for example, yoga or Tai Chi) which are non-competitive and focus upon developing the holistic self, as an existential, embodied subject (Tinning 2010) as simply *unthinkable*, even though the national curriculum does not prohibit them. Attempts to introduce a more learner-centred approach in the school subject of PE have historically had little sustained success, the most notable example being educational gymnastics and dance in the 1960s (Pedersen Gurholt and Jenssen 2007; Kirk 1992, 2010). Indeed, the multi-disciplinary subject relies heavily upon the bio-behavioural sciences and the learner is therefore most often constructed as an object, rather than a subject, and accordingly the body is commonly likened to a machine which needs to be tuned or worked upon (Tinning 2010). The latter has gained more purchase in the light of the new wave of a health and fitness focus in the subject (Dowling 2010), although clearly the skilful, competitive games player also requires 'fine tuning'. The hegemonic truths of PE construct, as a result, the disabled body as deficient, as a malfunctioning machine, and one in need of 'corrective', therapeutic treatment. In the light of this knowledge about the subject culture of PE, the PE teacher's decision to allow Emilie to attend physiotherapy sessions or to offer her 'adapted' training on the ergometer is 'logical', and would not be understood as exclusionary practice. These 'teaching strategies' enable her to pursue a 'normalising quest' where she can 'get on with business as usual' (Slee 1998). PE teacher education programmes tend to have modules, grounded upon a technical-rational approach to teaching and learning, on how to adapt physical activity and these are seen as synonymous with 'inclusive education', 'special education' or 'adapted learning', with less emphasis being placed upon on theoretically problematizing how we understand 'disability'. Furthermore, as a professional group, PE teachers tend to be conservative, White, able-bodied, sporting talents who exhibit little interest in social matters such as equity (Dowling 2011; Flintoff and Fitzgerald 2012), and they often express that their entry into the profession has been partly motivated by a strong desire to recreate the positive PE experiences they had from their own school days (Armour and Jones 1998; Dowling Næss 1998). It is possible to interpret Emilie's PE teacher's refusal to participate in the project as illustrative of the latter, although clearly there can be many other factors which can have influenced her decision.

Our analysis of the interview data also revealed that at no time has it been suggested that Emilie might benefit from an 'Individual Learning Plan', as part of her right to 'special education' (Utdanningsdirektoratet nd b), although the first author's work experience leads her to believe that she would probably be eligible because her current PE seems to fall short of providing "satisfactory benefits" (ibid). Whilst the individual PE teacher may be 'blind' to such a possibility, why is it such

that the head teacher does not suggest this pathway? Here we think that PE's subject status may explain the oversight because it has historically been a marginalised subject (Kirk 1988), and this low status has not improved in the current neo-liberal marketization of schooling in which core subjects like mathematics and Norwegian are prioritised (Slee and Weiner 1998; Stromstad 2004). In England, Smith (2009) documents how pupils with a disability can more easily gain resources in the more so-called 'academic' subjects than in PE, so it is probable that similar conditions can prevail in Norway.

### **Concluding comments**

Our analyses have also led us to dwell upon Emilie's own paradoxical role in upholding the binaries of them/us, ab/normality and right/wrong physical activities in her accounts of PE, but as Sikes, Lawson, and Parker (2007) citing MacLure's (2003) work remind us, these oppositional binary structure of realities are more than likely inevitable given that we can only narrate our worlds and experiences of them using the available 'language games'. Emilie's 'small' stories reflect current 'big' stories (Pheonix 2008) about inclusion, schooling and disability in society at large; they also contain elements which many of the other project participants experienced. In the light of research which illuminates how people with a disability can experience meaningful, existential moments whilst engaging in physical activity (Bredahl 2012), it follows that Emilie searches for what she terms the 'right' activity as a 'solution' to her problems in PE, rather than confronting the deep-held values of performativity which pervade PE's subject culture or the seeming failure of the school system to embrace 'inclusion' in the Salamanca sense, as we describe above. From our researcher perspective, the PE profession and educators in general ought, however, to engage with the latter if PE aims to 'educate' and to 'educate' *all* young people to develop their capacities and desires to partake of physical culture in the broadest sense (Evans 2004) and to meet the aims of the current national curriculum as described in the introductory section. Emilie's narratives beg us to reflect upon our seeming complicity in 'the maintenance of disabling forms of education' (Slee 2000, 884), and to ask what can, and should, be done to enable her, and students like her, to be able to tell more durable stories of inclusion? They lead us to ask how can PE teacher education programmes stimulate pre-service teachers to reflect upon their embodied understandings of dis/ability and to create more inclusive learning environments? We hope that by reading, reflecting upon and sharing (Barone 1995) Emilie's narratives about her experiences in PE new 'truths' about the subject, and 'inclusive' PE for *all* may emerge; in short, they can lead to the emergence of an 'irregular PE' (Slee 2011).

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