Disability, Physical Education and Sport:

Tom talks

Catherine Morrison

Supervisor – Lisette Burrows

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Physical Education

School of Physical Education

University of Otago

2011
Abstract

Normative discourses of disability, gender and human development inevitably contour a young person’s physical education and sport experience. If schooling is to meet the needs and interests of all, then it would seem imperative to understand the experiences of those whose habits, dispositions and physicalities differ from the “norm”. To date, precious little research has foregrounded the experiences and/or voices of young people with disabilities in relation to physical education and sport. Drawing on poststructural theoretical resources – in particular notions of subjectivity, discourse, power and knowledge – this thesis/study investigates how one young man with a dyspraxia label (Tom) negotiates and understands his physicality and sense of “self” in a climate where physical competence and masculinity are inevitably linked. The study explores the discursive context within which Tom resides, asks what discourses he draws on to constitute himself in relation to physical activity and how his engagement in physical education and/or sport affords (or not) opportunities to negotiate him “self” as a viable young man in the current context. A videoed testimony from this young man comprises the main “data” and discourse analytic strategies are deployed to address the research questions. Analysis suggests that discourses of developmentalism, the body, ability and masculinity contour the ways Tom can experience Physical Education and sport. They also pivotally shape the ways Tom is able to regard himself and how he is positioned in physical activity contexts. Tom’s reflexivity, his capacity to identify what and whom makes a difference to his ongoing attempts to engage in physical culture, is highlighted throughout. His testimony affords physical educators salutory reminders that ‘one-size fits all’ curricula and normative notions of what counts as ‘performance’ in physical education and/or sport, do not serve all young people well. Tom’s story simultaneously yields insights about young people’s agency, pointing to the potential and possibility of negotiating and re-working dominant discourses that seemingly over-determine experience and subjectivity in ways that yield opportunities to feel and do ‘the physical’.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, my thanks to Tom who so willingly offered his testimony for this research. The voice he shared is that of someone who has an insight beyond his years into people and life around him.

A special thanks to Stephanie, Tom’s Occupational Therapist, who captured his talk and enabled Tom to have an audience.

A special and heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Associate Professor Lisette Burrows, for engaging in my work with her incredible insight, in-depth knowledge and contagious enthusiasm.

Also many thanks to Hayley Fitzgerald for being an inspiration in terms of the wonderful way she writes and articulates so clearly her research. Along with Lisette she has encouraged me to write with confidence.

I am also grateful to Fiona Stuart whose attention to detail provided support during the last phase of this research.

I also thank and acknowledge the University of Otago College of Education for their support.

Finally to Sam for being you, my wonderful son, in amongst my other fabulous boys Jeffrey, Tim and Dominic.
Material published from this thesis


# Table of Contents

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………………………….ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Material published from this thesis ................................................................................. iv

Chapter 1 ......................................................................................................................... 1

   Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

   Leo. ............................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2 ......................................................................................................................... 8

   Methodology and Method ......................................................................................... 8

   The Research ............................................................................................................. 8

   Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................. 9

   Discourse ................................................................................................................... 11

   Knowledge and power .............................................................................................. 11

   Subjectivity ............................................................................................................... 13

   Discourse Analysis ................................................................................................... 15

Chapter 3 ......................................................................................................................... 20

   Child development..................................................................................................... 20

   Disabilities ................................................................................................................. 22

   Gender Construction................................................................................................ 27
The Photo ........................................................................................................... 60

Faith ..................................................................................................................... 61

Discovery ............................................................................................................ 64

Just as Good ....................................................................................................... 66

Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 67

Leo ...................................................................................................................... 67

Tom Gets it Now ............................................................................................... 69

Bodies .................................................................................................................. 70

People and Spaces ............................................................................................. 71

Enjoyment ............................................................................................................ 73

What is on offer .................................................................................................. 74

The Reflective Educator ..................................................................................... 76

Listening to Tom ............................................................................................... 77

Notes .................................................................................................................... 79

References ......................................................................................................... 80
Chapter 1

Introduction

This research focuses on the experiences of one young man in school physical education and sport. My interpretation of his testimony is filtered through the lenses of mother, athlete, teacher and presently teacher educator, thus in this preliminary chapter, I share some personal reflections on the journey I have made with Leo, my 13 year old son, in the early years of his growing up. My personal experiences as a mother of a child with motor coordination difficulties have informed, if not altered significantly, my understanding of certain practices within the curriculum area of physical education and inevitably shaped my interest in pursuing the proposed research enquiry.

In chapter two I outline the theoretical and methodological resources that inform the shape and substance of the thesis and in chapter three I interrogate some of the developmental, medical and gender discourses that potentially that contour the way children and their capacities are currently conceived. In chapter three, I also attend to some of the key constituents of the sociocultural context within which Tom’s experiences of sport and physical education are located. Chapters four and five are devoted to interrogating Tom’s testimony as a means of further understanding the why and how of his experiences in school-based physical education and sport. My approach to Tom’s narrative involves reading his testimony alongside and against existing literature dealing with young disabled people’s experiences of physical education and/or sport. In the final chapter I tease out the implications of Tom’s story for Physical Education curriculum and pedagogy, foregrounding what physical educators may take from this young man’s narrative of his experience. Let us begin with Leo.

Leo

I had confidently assumed that Leo, my son, would progress in certain ways throughout his schooling. He started school well equipped with knowledge of numbers and the alphabet.
As he was also able to recognise certain essential words, he seemed well prepared for this exciting schooling process. As a teacher, I was confident that his handwriting would progressively develop. Initially, I was aware that some gross motor skills, such as riding a bike and climbing, were more difficult for Leo. I also battled with the fact he was unable to grip a pencil using the traditional tripod grip. I was puzzled by the fact that although he knew what he was trying to say, Leo struggled physically when trying to write it down. To add to the confusion, as Leo continued his junior schooling he proved to be an excellent reader for his age and, of course, armed with running records\(^1\) and with an aged Burt Test (Gilmore, Croft, & Reid, 1981)\(^2\) taken from my years of teaching I could prove this.

Over time, it became increasingly apparent that Leo had continuing difficulty with both fine and gross motor co-ordination skills. I observed his continuing reluctance to ride a tricycle and to catch and throw balls. Year 3 at school turned out to be a year of frustration on both our parts as we struggled with the challenges of homework. Initially involving the formation of letters, Leo’s difficulties with handwriting seemed to be taking a turn for the worse, as story writing required more complex handwriting and planning skills. As a teacher, I had some difficulty reconciling age-related expectations with what I believed Leo should be capable of doing. As the frustration built up he lost the motivation to complete anything much more than a sentence.

We eventually sought further explanation for the confusion of abilities that Leo displayed. He was finally diagnosed as having Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), otherwise known as dyspraxia, by a paediatrician and an occupational therapist. Dyspraxia is a medical label attached to children with motor sequencing and selection difficulty. According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual [4\(^{th}\) edition] of the American Psychiatric Association, children with DCD exhibit poor motor coordination with no evident neuromuscular defects, intellectual disability or autism (Hall, 1988). This diagnosis not only
provided us with an explanation, but at the time, I believed it also gave us understanding and insight into what Leo was experiencing.

In Leo’s Year 5, I saw firsthand the frustration he experienced at school. On one occasion, Leo wished to design a title page of a book. Despite his enthusiasm and wealth of ideas, we both looked in dismay at what he had written. Neither of us could read it. The motor planning skill, which required him to take an idea and then form the letters, was too complex. By this time we were over handwriting. With the support of Leo’s Resource Teacher for Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), we attended an Individual Education Programme (IEP) meeting at the beginning of the year. As an outcome of the meeting, the school applied for an Alpha Smart Notebook computer that Leo could have on his desk. While it was a challenge encouraging the teacher to replace Leo’s books, the introduction of the computer reflected the changing technology and the need to adapt the environment to suit the child. Leo has now moved on to a laptop. This has given him the means to get his ideas down more quickly and has reinforced his skills related to spelling. Although I continued to have some difficulty reconciling age-related expectations with what I believed to be realistic for Leo to be doing at home, over the years I have gained judgement as to what is worthwhile and what is simply too hard.

Leo was a member of not just a school culture but a family culture. He was raised in a physically active and enriching environment. His father’s sporting feats are celebrated in a scrapbook and the cups and medals are now family treasures. As a family, we have had years of involvement in provincial school age athletics, netball and tennis and our achievements are well documented in our oral history. We were confident about the values, lifelong skills and friendships Leo would gain from participation in sport.

However, as his school peers moved out of the sandpit and onto the sports field, I noticed that Leo played predominantly with girls and on the periphery of the playground. With this
shift from the playground to the sports dominated courts and fields, Leo’s difficulties with motor skills became more apparent. What was confusing for us was that Leo persisted in playing weekend rugby even though, at times, the interactions with his team mates were negative. As the competition became more focused on winning the environment began to highlight his co-ordination challenges and he was increasingly placed on the sideline. Eventually, we realised that Leo would always struggle with the team-based sports setting and we encouraged him to participate in other sports. Nevertheless, when visiting friends ask Leo what sports he plays, I observe an uncomfortable shift in his body language as he waits quietly for the list of sports on offer to include taekwondo.

Certain difficulties became more noticeable as Leo grew older, as is often the case in boys with co-ordination difficulties. The Beep Test, for example, has been a twice a yearly regime for Leo since he was 10 years old. The test has students run a series of shuttle runs. As they progressively drop out, they are ranked according to a clearly visual and hierarchical order, which inevitably creates an illusion of an “ideal” level of ability. We can anticipate a number of issues arising from this type of setting, where young people are encouraged to measure their performance in such a visually structured manner.

As they struggle to find their place, children with dyspraxia often encounter bullying and, as a consequence, experience social isolation. Their self-esteem is at risk due to the array of factors that make them noticeably different. Some do have difficulty reading scenarios and knowing what behaviour is appropriate and what is not. They begin to avoid tasks as they recognise the difference between their ability and others. In order to keep them active, sporting activities need to include repetitive skills that are capable of being practised in a non-competitive environment – preferably sports such as swimming or golf, that can lead them to a social setting later in life.
Leo needed to discover something he could excel at. He found other ways to show he was knowledgeable and talented that were not sports orientated. As a result, we now attend the national excavators competition each year. We have ventured into unfamiliar territory. Nonetheless, we have been surprisingly amazed at what excavators are capable of doing. Of course Leo already knew these things. While he was busy queuing to purchase his $2.00 ticket for the digger experience, part of me wished Leo would spend his pocket money on candyfloss like his younger brother. Even though I knew who was getting better value for their money, at times I still struggled to see this. Leo can name any make and model from a distance and he finds building sites and road works exciting places to be. Like other hobbies, his interest brings him to knowledge and understanding and may even provide the basis for a career.

Having interests like this has its downfalls. To encourage his passion, we provided Leo with a reflective vest. He could be seen for miles at the farm and passing cars would often stop if they saw him on the roof of our garage. How proud he was and so devastated when we deterred him from wearing it to school. While it might have been acceptable had it been signed by the All Blacks, we were aware of the hard time he would get from his classmates for parading in the playground without a “Stop Sign”.

Despite the fact the references to Attitudes and Values in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) celebrate diversity and tolerance, my journey with Leo into adolescence and through his transition from primary to secondary school has made me question if he is in fact a recipient of this intended and stated tolerance. While we celebrate Leo’s uniqueness, his love of the farm, animals and machinery, he struggles to show his true ability in the current schooling system. The historically and culturally defined classroom and playground is a challenge for learners like Leo. The ways in which students are required to record information and the manner in which it is delivered by teachers can be incredibly difficult for Leo. This is
where the teacher’s role in nurturing and catering for individuals is paramount, so that those with varied abilities may achieve within an effective learning environment.

Reflecting on my teaching practice over the years, I realise that Leo has forced me to examine the educational framework within which I worked (Morrison, 2008). As a Physical Education teacher, I am now aware that the small group of students on the side lines, (with their never-ending supply of notes from parents excusing them from physical education), knew far more about what was good for them than I did. While they may not have had DCD, for a host of reasons they were vulnerable in this visual landscape. At the time, I would urge them to involve themselves. This desire stemmed from my own culturally constructed physical world where I had had success and experienced a sense of belonging out there playing all manner of sports and games.

Following on from a National Dyspraxia Conference, which I attended with Leo’s RTLB teacher, we reflected on the deficit model of teaching children with learning difficulties. In this case, teachers expected the RTLB to work independently with the child to improve, for example, his handwriting. As a result, the child would be removed from either the classroom or the class activities. In response to subsequent research, educational thinking now favours an inclusive model, where teacher practice, the task and/or the environment are adapted to suit the child.

I also learned about strategies for Leo for later on at secondary school. It was a relief to be able to put shoelace tying on the shelf and I needed to be told that. Although Leo’s springy shoelaces do get their fair share of attention, he can wear slip-ons for the rest of his life - perhaps I will ensure they are not grey ones! When changing for Physical Education he will be required to move fast and doing up and undoing buttons is time consuming, so with my superior sewing skills I “velcroed” his shirt and he is now capable of undressing as fast as any of his peers.
Through writing this narrative, I have learned that I can exercise choices that will support Leo, build his self-esteem, foster resilience and, all the while, celebrate the uniqueness of him as an individual. While he may not have to experience the compulsory cross-country, he will still be able to achieve excellence on that day. In fact, we will have gone to the beach at Moeraki, dug sandcastles, sat on the boulders and looked out to sea while eating our ice creams together.

Another impetus into further study was an 18 year old with dyspraxia I met at the national conference. Tom told of his experiences with dyspraxia, about being male and, in particular, of his experiences of physical education at secondary school. His “testimony” was produced for a purpose other than research and gifted to me to assist in understanding one young man’s reality and his attempts to negotiate discursive conditions that inevitably position young men with disabilities as “abnormal” or “different”, especially in relation to their engagement in sporting and other physical cultures. As I signal in the next chapter, in addition to this young man’s testimony, I have drawn on my own lived observations to yield further empirical insights about being a boy in a context where sporting prowess and physicality’s of particular sorts are excessively valued as indicators of normalised masculinity.

In the following chapter I foreground the theoretical and methodological strategies employed in this investigation.
Chapter 2
Methodology and Method

In this chapter I outline the theoretical resources that inform the shape and substance of the thesis. The project contains several poststructuralist ideas that influence not only the kinds of research questions asked, but also the methodological tools and strategies adopted. I first describe the research undertaken. Following this, I give a general outline of a poststructuralist orientation to research and go on to discuss four Foucauldian concepts that are of particular relevance to this project – discourse, knowledge, power and subjectivity. I also describe the method of discourse analysis that I employed and the central research questions driving the thesis.

The Research

My research draws on a video-taped testimony, recorded for presentation at the National Dyspraxia Conference, of a young man’s experience of dyspraxia. The video was presented at the conference by Tom’s Occupational Therapist, as Tom was unable to attend the conference in person. Tom’s testimony tells of his attempts to negotiate discursive conditions that position young men with disabilities as abnormal or different, especially in relation to sporting and other physical cultures. In the video, Tom reflects on his involvement in sport and physical education throughout his schooling years, including his desire to play competitive basketball in Year 13. He then goes on to describe the process he went through to do this and provides his own observations of why this was important to him. Because of his experiences as a disabled person in sport and physical education, I felt Tom’s voice clearly needed to be heard.

I met with Tom and he offered his testimony to this research study to further enhance understanding of his experience among a broader audience; that of physical educators and scholars in sport sociology. As Cameron (2001) attests “there are some kinds of spoken data which you do not have to record (or ask informants to record) because they already exist and
are in the public domain” (p. 25). As the story told by this young man was produced for purposes other than research and gifted to me to assist with the project, I consider Tom’s testimony to be an example of this kind of data.

This study examined how Tom, replete with a dyspraxia label, negotiated school and the physical cultures therein. I intend to give a sense of the distinct nature of Tom’s experiences in a New Zealand context and physical culture. This study examined Tom’s testimony with the aim of understanding issues regarding the body and masculinity, together with their links to the construction of subjectivity. In New Zealand, sporting prowess and specific physicalities are excessively valued as indicators of “exclusive masculinity” (Wellard, 2006, p. 106) and I intend to analyse contemporary discourses of masculinity, sport and physical activity currently circulating in popular and professional texts. Furthermore, I interrogated discourses of developmentalism that underly both schooling and participation in physical leisure and sporting pursuits (see Chapter 3).

**Theoretical Framework**

Poststructural social theory draws heavily on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault was fundamentally interested in exploring the different ways in which human beings are made into subjects. The scope of his work was large, ranging from archeological investigations of the way discourses work to construct “truths” to genealogical studies of the ways in which particular events and patterns of thought emerge in relation to the exercise of power, through to analyses of how the human subject comes to act on his/herself. There are a number of key tenets underpinning and threading through each of his projects, which require clarification if one is to make sense of his specific arguments.

First, Foucault was critical of metanarratives, or grand and sweeping claims to know the truth about some event or thing. According to Foucault, theories or explanations that purport to explain all there is to know about something or assume it is ever possible to do so (e.g.
Marxism, liberal feminism, structuralism) will always be flawed, because what counts as true knowledge is always partial, relative, implicated in power relations and located in the context within which it was produced. For Foucault, subjugated knowledge, or that which is “not said”, is as important as what does get said in any given situation. Further to this, he asks questions about how it is possible for us to conceive of things in particular ways. For example, rather than assume that normative notions of gender are “givens” or merely unhelpful ideologies that get in the way of men and women being and acting their true selves, Foucault is interested in the conditions that yielded the manufacture of such truths in the first place. The key thing that makes poststructuralist theory different from a structuralist approach is that there is no single, universal truths, no “essential”, “true” “self”; nothing normal or “natural” about the social world.

Informed by such a poststructuralist orientation, this thesis seeks to interrogate the broader discourses that contour Tom’s life. The experiences that Tom expresses have occurred at a particular time and place. How have particular discourses, in and around masculinity, sport, adolescence and disability, shaped Tom’s view of himself and others? I am interested in what discursive resources Tom has available to draw on to make sense of his life and sense of self:

An individual emerges through the process of social interactions, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates. (Davies, 2000 p. 89)

Foucault’s ideas on discourse, knowledge, power and subjectivity will enable me to understand the intersection between institutions and practices linked to disability, sport and masculinity and how these shape how Tom comes to regard himself and his possibilities for re-constructing and/or re-imagining his sense of self. What follows is a brief description of the way I think about each of these concepts and the usefulness of each for the current study.
**Discourse**

A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light . . . this means that, surrounding any one object, event, person etc., there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the subject in question, a different way of representing it to the world.

(Burr, 1995 p.48)

At particular junctures, or moments in time, specific discourses can potentially contour the ways it is possible and/or conceivable to view a particular object, person or phenomena. Discourses are therefore “intimately connected to the way that society is organised and run” (Burr, 1995 p.54). From this poststructuralist viewpoint, my research questions investigate how Tom’s view of his world is located in relation to dominant discourses surrounding masculinity, disability and sport. What discourses does he draw on to make sense of himself, to explain who he is and why he has experienced physical education and sport in schools in the ways he has?

Duncan (2001) refers to Foucault’s concept of discourse as the “cornerstone” to his arguments on power and subjectivity:

He [Foucault] identified discourses as historically specific ways of speaking knowledge and truth, that is, what is possible to speak at any given moment, who can speak and with what authority. Discourses then act as sets of rules and behaviours. (p.104)

**Knowledge and power**

Understanding the relationship between knowledge and power is contingent upon the notion that “truth” is always contextual, construed, and established by communities of individuals.

(Hardin, 2001 p.17)
Knowledge and power have traditionally been viewed as things that people either have or have not. If, however, we understand that people inevitably experience the world (and make meaning from it) in ways circumscribed by the available discourses they have to draw on, then we have an opportunity to interrogate these discourses in order to reveal how they are implicated in the construction of people’s lives and how some have more “power” to infuse their lives than others at different moments in time. Foucault (1977) asks us to view the world differently and challenge taken-for-granted hierarchies of knowledge and power.

Burr (1995) explains that the “power to act in particular ways, to claim resources, to control or be controlled depends on the ‘knowledges’ currently prevailing in a society” (p. 64). Throughout this study, I sought to challenge “taken for granted knowledge” of what is seen, written and spoken, as being the “truth” and, also, the assumption that power is something held or exerted by others. For example, it is interesting to see how the power of the medical discourse works within the educational sector. As funding is closely linked to a diagnosis power is ultimately wielded, not by parents or teachers, but medical experts (see Chapter 3). There are a number of possible issues arising for young people with regard to financial support. If a diagnosis is required then one must fail the medically construed “normal test” in order to receive financial and personnel resources. According to Foucault, this is where we see the link between knowledge and power, as power is not “some form of possession, which some people have and others do not, but [is] an effect of discourse” (Burr, 1995, p. 64). In Tom’s case, for instance, the medical discourses that determine what is regarded as normal also facilitate or prevent his access to resources.

What is thought-provoking is the way power is conceived in poststructuralist thought. If power is understood to be diffused throughout society as a result of the function of discourse, then how have these truths been constructed and, more importantly, for whom and for what purposes? Foucault encourages us to examine the power relations within society, and to ask: who and what is valued? With regard to this research project, I examined techniques of
disciplinary power by exploring how, through subtle practices, schools support those who engage in particular activities (i.e. playing sport, and in some cases particular sports) and reward them for their sporting accomplishments and participation. As a result, we will begin to see how power relations are developed and structured around particular knowledges and that, at any one time, particular “bodies”, intimately bound up with discourses, are valued by a culture. As Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000) explain “Knowledge is something that makes us its subjects, because we make sense of ourselves by referring back to various bodies of knowledge” (p. 50).

For Tom it may understandably have been a challenge to live within gendered discourses that over-prescribe what it means to be masculine and within a culture that places value on practices where the body is the dominant way of knowing. How did Tom therefore view this schooling culture that values participation in this way?

Macdonald et al. (2002) suggests that poststructuralism allows us to “raise questions about how selves are constituted, how power-knowledge relations change across times, places, and in the context of different social, political and cultural contexts” (p. 143). Tom’s testimony and his socio-historical location affords a compelling opportunity to investigate these questions.

Subjectivity

Rather than being fixed or constituted in specific embodied individuals, selves are taken to be constructs. The terms subject and subjectivity(ies) are used to denote the ways in which selves are formed in and through language and other systems of meaning.

(Wright 2004b) suggests that poststructural researchers are interested in the question of how identity and a sense of self are socially constructed and that they achieve this by drawing on a range of theoretical and empirical resources. To further support the use of a post-structuralist perspective, Wright suggests that the theoretical tools researchers employ offer “a
powerful means to make visible the ways individuals construct their sense of self /their identity and the sets of social meaning and values circulating in society” (pp. 29-30).

The celebration of and focus on “sporty type” males within schools, for example, can be problematic for boys with “alternative bodies.” By taking a poststructuralist view, we can also see how the formation of self emerges and is dependent on whether we take up, intentionally or not, the dominant discourses that surround us. It is also apparent that the self is always in flux, that “subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these” (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984, p. 3). With regard to Tom, and his experiences of schooling in particular, it would seem appropriate therefore to ask “how the embodied self is socially constituted in relation to social institutions and discourses associated with health and physical education” (Wright, 2004b, p. 19). As Davies (1994) suggests, “examining any individual’s subjectivity is thus a way of gaining access to the constituted effects of the discursive practices through which we are all constituted as subjects and through which the world we all live in is made real” (p. 3).

Davies (2000) explains that the “positioning” of speakers and hearers is constituted through dialogue. Conversations and interactions are unfolding and ever changing and can be viewed from multiple places, such as speaker and audience. This dynamic evolution is interactive. With positioning, “the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and at the time are resources through which speakers and hearers negotiate new positions” (p. 105). I find this very relevant to my experience with Leo, and how this has impacted on how I take up my role as mother and as an educator, in conversations, and in particular with the analysis of Tom’s testimony. Rather than viewing the self as a fixed identity, a poststructural notion of positioning encourages us to view the world from the “vantage point of that position” (Davies, 2000 p.89). Through this
approach we can view positioning and subject positioning as allowing us to use our lived histories to bring personal understanding to narratives.

**Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis was my chosen methodology. The questions I asked of the text were tightly framed to begin with and the analysis inevitably engaged with broader discourses around sport, masculinity and disabilities and the meaning of physical culture in this young man’s life. As Hardin (2001) writes:

> Analysing individual accounts, from a poststructural methodology, shifts the analytic spotlight away from the individual and toward the processes and practices that produce people in particular ways with particular capacities. (p. 17)

Various authors have attempted to describe this process of discourse analysis (e.g. Burr, 1995; Gore, 1993; Potter and Wetherall, 1987). However, a consensus on the shape and substance of discourse analysis is some way off. Burman and Parker (1993) suggests that it is problematic to speak of one singular approach. However, if a commonality is to be identified, it is that “these approaches are united by a common attention to the significance and structuring effects of language, and are associated with interpretive and reflexive styles of analysis” (p. 3).

The strategy for this data analysis was discourse analysis which, Burman and Parker (1993) proposes, means analysing discourse. So that the process was logical and clear, the analysis needed to be thorough in method and this has certainly been a challenge in my reading of how to *do* discourse analysis. Grace (1998) highlights the importance of refining and developing “systematic procedures for engaging with the narrative material or text” (p. 116) by paying attention to certain kinds of questions. She contends that it is the questions that will indicate the rigour of the process of analysis and that “discourse analysis involves the development of systematic procedures and is not simply a matter of subjectivist
interpretation” (Grace, 1998, p. 117). Grace adds that a “careful and thorough description of one’s method allows others to scrutinize what was done and to debate points of departure or disagreement” (p. 117).

According to Grace (1998), this method of discourse analysis will include detecting “points of crisis” within the transcript in relation to the research questions and “mixes of words with powerful emotional weight, conflicting and contradictory tensions between personal desires and institutionalised actions” (p. 117). She suggests that to “develop a systematic procedure for engaging with the text” means paying attention to certain types of questions:

How do you understand the difference between narrative/story and discourse (i.e. between what the interviewees actually said and specific discourses you might identify)?

What concepts do you wish to employ in order to characterise and analyse your objects of enquiry? How will these concepts help you fulfill the objectives of your research? How will you add attend to the dialectics between what is said and what is unsaid, and between vernacular discourses and mediated discourse? What is the relationship between institutionalised analysis and discourse analysis? (Grace, 1998, p. 117)

These ways of analysing are all relevant. Employing a four step Foucauldian approach to doing discourse analysis, Anderson (2003) suggests asking particular questions of the text which are linked to four analytical strategies (p. 30). These strategies can be summarised as follows:

- Why did this and no other statement occur in this place?
- How are different discursive formations and discursive strategies shaped and transformed?
- How have self-technologies been created and in what way do they prescribe the way an individual can give itself to itself?
How are forms linked together as functional elements in an apparatus? How are discursive or technical elements generalised in a schematic, which creates a strategic logic? (Anderson, 2003, p. 30)

With regard to the final strategy, Anderson (2003) suggests that the concluding chapter in the analysis involves a “dispositive analysis which inquires, as a layer on top of the other analytical strategies, about how discursive and extra-discursive elements are linked together in an apparatus in the bringing about of a particular strategic logic” (p. 30).

In my reading of the data, I was particularly alert to the ways in which Tom operates within and alongside dominant and marginalized discourses. Part of my analytic intent was to unravel the particularities of discourses and how they operate within power relations and work to create specific subject positions. My intention was to investigate the way “participants themselves construct and use categories for various purposes” (Wood & Kroeger, 2000). This involved interrogating the ways in which Tom positions himself and others in terms of being physical, and in relation to his understanding of what it means to be male. As Wood and Kroeger (2000) claim, “the task of discourse analysis is not to apply categories to participant talk but rather to identify the ways in which participants themselves actively construct and employ categories in their talk” (p. 29).

With regard to disabilities, Morton and Mutch (2004) state that “analysis of special education language reveals expert and medical discourse at work in the highly specialised “treatments” and “interventions” developed for students who have particular labels or diagnoses” (p. 15). Tom’s description of himself in relation to the available discourses of disability was a key influence guiding this analysis.

According to Gee (1999), discourses “guide us to ask certain sorts of questions” (p. 87). The questions I used to interrogate the data were focused on the discourses discussed in Chapter 3. This involved explaining how power and knowledge operate within these
discourses. The questions I asked related to the experiences Tom refers to in and around physical education and sport, particularly during his secondary school years. The original proposal identified the possible fields of tension for Tom. By mapping out the key words and phrases within Tom’s testimony that relate to particular discourses, his sense of self and how he sees himself constructed by others, my intention was to highlight the opportunities he saw to engage (or not) in particular contexts and with whom.

The data I interrogated comprises an aural presentation to an audience in the form of a pre-recorded video. The aforementioned concepts ground this research, and I was oriented towards asking the following questions of Tom’s text:

- What discourses (institutional and cultural) have contoured the ways it is possible for Tom to understand himself?
- What discourses does Tom draw on to constitute himself and how does he negotiate the potentially contradictory messages contained therein?
- How does/did Tom’s engagement (or not) in particular physical activities do for Tom? What versions of the self does this engagement offer?

The role of the researcher, therefore, could be seen to offer an interpretation of participants’ words through this particular testimony, in an attempt to answer the research questions. The video recording itself also allowed the discourse analysis to include my readings of Tom’s body language during his narrative, not only of what is said but how it is said, and if perhaps particular words have particular weighting (Nairn, 2008).

Finally, Burman and Parker (1993) eloquently offer a means of justifying the choice of discourse analysis which I consider to be relevant to the issues Tom raises throughout his testimony:
The current popularity of discourse analysis owes much to the ways its analytic tools can be used to inform political practice and struggles. So successful have these interventions been that discourse analysis is currently synonymous with “critical” and in some cases “feminist” research. Discourse analysis is used to comment on social processes which participate in the maintenance of structures of oppression. (Burman & Parker, 1993, p. 9)

As researcher, my interpretation was based on my own lived history and my “reading” of the data. How we position ourselves, or how we are positioned by others, is a result of the interplay of multiple discourses that shape personal identity and frame our understanding of these experiences. In Chapter 1, I introduced this research by including a brief life story of my own, in and around my own personal relationships and lived experiences with my son, which Casey (1993) would suggest, influenced my own modes of research interpretation.

In the following chapter, I point to the dominant discourses circulating at the time Tom offered his story. For Tom, how he takes up (or not) those discourses to make sense of himself, how he is resistant to, and does or does not make sense of his world, is of interest to me as an educator within a learning area that celebrates the body as a measure of identity.
Chapter 3

This chapter interrogates the developmental discourses that contour the way children and their capacities are currently conceived. I am interested in the gendered dimensions of what counts as normal and abnormal child development, particularly in relation to how boys are positioned in these discourses. I then discuss the dominant medical discourses that inform how “disability” and therefore “dyspraxia” are commonly understood, and how evident this is in an educational and parental setting. I will endeavour to provide a working definition of dyspraxia or developmental coordination disorder (DCD). Finally, I examine the broader educational, sociocultural and political context within which this thesis arises. I argue that an intensification of governmental and professional interest in children, young people and their bodies has ramifications for how boys with impairments like DCD live their lives.

Child development

Dominant discourses of child development tend to position children and young people as defective and/or as “not normal” if they experience coordination difficulties. The influence of this notion of linear stages of development is reflected in physical education texts (Gabbard, 1992) where creeping, crawling and walking are signaled as inevitable steps in the passage of childhood. Institutions, in the business of training teachers, reinforce the orthodox developmental story with Piaget’s claims that children should move through a fixed sequences of stages form infancy to adulthood (Morss & Linzey, 1991). Piaget’s influence on this discourse of child development has been immense and as a teacher, I clearly remember learning off the stages of development for examination during my teacher training in the 1970s. Of course, as is the case with any normalised set of expectations about development, there are those that do not fit, those who do not develop in the expected timeframe and fail to meet the expected “milestones” as articulated in these developmental psychological texts and parenting manuals. The very presence of a norm implies that those who fall either side of it
need to be fixed or remediated. When these developmental norms are annexed to medical discourses their allure is hardly surprising.

When we examine the social practices historically surrounding child development discourses, as Foucault (1977; 1994) and others (Walkerdine, 1984; Burman, 1991, 1994; Jenks, 1990; Mayall, 1994; Morss, 1996) would have us do, we gain some insight into how “normal childhood” and thus the norms of child development have been constituted differently at different times and across different cultures. In particular, critical analyses of child development (Morss, 1991, 1996; Vygotsky 1978) show how the very norms we take for granted in relation to childhood are social constructs rather than truths – artifacts made “real” by their coherence with medicalised and scientific knowledge about childhood and supported by professional practices themselves generated from one particularly persuasive branch of scientific enquiry (i.e. developmental psychology).

Commenting on the shift away from Piaget, Morss and Linzey (1991) state that:

The notion of “cognitive development” – growing slowly, and invisibly, much like the child’s bones – seemed to explain less and less as time and research went on. What the child could achieve seemed to depend on the situation, on the nature of the interaction, and on the role of the adult or peer, rather than on some master programme hidden deep in the child’s head. (Morss & Linzey, 1991, p. 26)

Children are not working their way through a fixed sequence of mental states, finally reaching the state which we call adult thinking. This is simply an adult-centred view of childhood. Rather, children are dealing with the world that faces them in the best way they can, employing different strategies for interacting with and understanding the world as seems appropriate. Cognitive development is something adults see, it is not something children experience or which is really there. The stages of cognitive development are in the heads of adults, not in the heads of children. (Morss & Linzey, 1991, p. 20)
We can therefore assume confidently that this shift is quietly permeating our views of, for example, child rearing. However, Burman (1991) points to the numerous ways in which everyday practices highlight and consolidate the “naturalness” of developmental knowledge. It is drawn to our attention in Plunket books where pages are designed for recording the normative weights and heights of babies. Expected milestones (truths) and questions are related to each age group throughout their growing years, reinforcing the notion that medical experts and the developmental scientists know how a child should develop and indeed, are more attuned to what a child may need at various stages of its life than a parent is.

Fox and Prilleltensky (1997) explain that we “all have notions reinforced by the media and by our own hazy memories of childhood of how children are ‘supposed’ to develop.” They go on to explain that there is a “failure to notice that behavior norms are ethnocentric, androcentric, and patriarchal serving the interests of dominant groups” (p. 134). Recent television programmes reinforce the belief that there is a normal way, for example, to raise children, a normal way for them to behave and therefore a normal way in which they should be parented. Programmes such as “Demons to Darlings” and “Supergranny” show families with behavioural challenges that can be “fixed” by experts. They enter the family home and change so called “bad behaviour” to “acceptable behaviour.” The families are selected as suitable for general prime time television viewing and demonstrate signs of remorse and a wish to “be fixed”. Possible issues that may affect some families, such as violence, drug abuse and mental health issues, are conveniently hidden from view. It is a decontextualised account of ideal “development” that is packaged and presented to the public as the norm.

**Disabilities**

Disability is a concept that can be viewed in several ways with contemporary understandings of disability essentially founded on medical or social model perspectives. Disability has historically been defined within a medical discourse as a defect or sickness that must be cured through medical intervention (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Barnes, Mercer, &
Shakespeare, 1999; Oliver, 1996), and despite the best efforts of sociologists and others working in the field of critical disability studies, the medical “view” of disability has dominated. For example in The Ministry of Education Report on Curriculum Policy and Special Education Support (2004), it was suggested that “The most pervasive and influential [discourses] of these is the medical (or expert) discourse of disability, with its professional and clinical focus on the body” (p. 15). However, more recently policies have attempted to move educational practices beyond this medical discourse (Ministry of Education, 2010a).

The themes of the medical discourse are defective and deficit and within this discourse, parents and teachers are positioned as “without” knowledge. Burr (1995) agrees that I, as a teacher educator, am “addressed as non-medic, and positioned with lesser rights to make decisions, make diagnoses and use medical terminology” (p. 143). Within the expert or medical discourse, the needs of children and young people with disabilities are seen as beyond a lay person’s understanding, and the knowledge to improve their skills depends on specialized intervention that is based around a scientific model. This understanding and thinking about disability is supported in a New Zealand context by Kearney and Kane (2006) who suggest that, “One of the most important aspects in the analysis and interpretation of any education system is its knowledge base” (p. 202). Through the perspective of the work of Mercer (1973) and Skrtic (1991) within special education, they state that the:

Knowledge base of special education is one that views disability from the standpoint of individual pathology (that is, an interpretation of a special need or disability as something that residing with a person): the concept of normal and abnormal (there are those students who are normal and those who are abnormal): and deficit theory (something is wrong with the student that needs fixing). (cited in Kearney & Kane, 2006, p. 202)

The social model, on the other hand, positions society itself as the cause of the disablement, through economic, environmental and cultural barriers (Barnes & Mercer, 1997).
We can therefore assume that the “social model rejects the individualistic medical approach to disability that emphasizes personal tragedy, the need to be treated by experts and for disability to be seen as an individual problem” (Fitzgerald & Jobling, p. 75). It is this latter view that informs my research.

It was important to ground this research in an understanding of the term dyspraxia or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). DCD is a medical label attached to a child with a certain impairment that is diagnosed within the medical fraternity. According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual [4th edition] of the American Psychiatric Association, children with developmental coordination disorder indicate poor motor coordination with no evident neurological defects (Hall, 1988).

Kirby (1999) describes this label as follows:

It is an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. It is an immaturity in the way that the brain processes information, which results in messages not being properly or fully transmitted. Dyspraxia affects the planning of what to do and how to do it. It is associated with problems of perception, language and thought. It affects each person in different ways at different ages and stages of development and to different degrees. It is a hidden handicap, as under normal circumstances, children with dyspraxia may appear no different from their peers, until new skills are tried or known ones taken out of context, when difficulties may become apparent. (p. 54)

Throughout Kirby’s definition we can observe the language of disability and the words associated with it, i.e. problems, normal, different, handicap, difficulties and what a disability implies about the individual.

Although there are claims of an increasing recognition of a social model of disability in the New Zealand educational profession (Morton & Mutch, 2004), we still see that funding
support is often linked to a label. This label may acquire more value once again and support
the discourse of special education where human beings “become their label” (Slee, 2000).
Dyslexia is a recent example where a certain label has been recognised. The Ministry of
Education (MOE) does state that, for example, the Ongoing Reviewable Resourcing Scheme
(ORSS) funding is not allocated to a label but based on the level of student need. However, in
2008 on the MOE website stated:

We are now focusing on more explicitly supporting the learning difficulties associated
with dyslexia, based on robust evidence, and are working collaboratively with experts.
Along with researchers and specialists, the Ministry is now moving forward on
understanding how best to act on this knowledge. (Ministry of Education, 2008)

The reference to experts is in accord with what Kearney and Kane (2006) refers to as the
“expert model”, where teachers are seen as only having the experience to deal with students
who exhibit normal behaviour. The MOE also refers to previous or current ways of operating
by teachers in terms of (dis)abilities, signaled by the statement that there is a need to “avoid
pathologising dyslexia or any suggestion that enables teachers to abdicate their responsibility”
(Ministry of Education, 2008).

With Leo, for example, there was an in-depth collation of material and examples of his
inability to match expected milestones e.g. the time taken to write a sentence. Funding is
allocated by severity of need. A diagnosis may be necessary and some must fail the normal
test as having been declared by medical experts. An example of this in 2009 is a personal
experience where Leo, prior to National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)
assessment tasks, was required by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to have an
Occupational Therapist (OT) undertake a comprehensive assessment for a writer. The
teachers’ professional knowledge alone was not sufficient to show this support was needed for
Leo to engage in the required assessments.
Parental knowledge can also be situated in opposition to, for example, intervention by a medical body. Research shows that parents “were more satisfied with the professionals who consulted with their family and recognized holistic needs of children within the family context, rather than a narrow focus on each child’s level of impairment” (Kelly, 2003, p. 51). Leo was involved in an intervention treatment with an OT. Our conversation at times was uneasy as I tried to explain that this deficit model of taking the skill and practicing outside of competing environmental factors had limited success. The OT was obviously uncomfortable with this conversation when she was the one with the professional knowledge and was being challenged by the lay person (non professional). She questioned my desire to improve his skill level, whereas I faced the challenge of ensuring precious time was spent on meeting his social needs and interacting with other children to improve his overall well-being. I was initially positioned as without knowledge. By taking up agency, I resisted and challenged the OT’s position of power within the medical discourse.

Foucault’s notion of agency can be seen here with regard to the subject (Catherine), although constituted by discourse, being capable of critical historical reflection and able to “exercise some choice with respect to the discourse and practices that it takes up for its own use” (Burr, 1995, p. 90). I re-positioned myself as someone with knowledge and resisted the medical discourse by drawing on the discourses available to me as a teacher. Burr (1995) suggests that by using this notion of agency, we can “exercise power by drawing upon discourses which allow our opposing actions to be represented in an acceptable light” (p. 64). This is what I achieved by taking up the teacher discourse. Interestingly, we could question whether I would feel able to do this if I did not have the teacher discourse to draw upon. For Foucault, power and resistance oppose each other (Burr, 1995). The power implicit in one discourse, in this case the medical discourse, is only apparent from the resistance implicit in another, such as the teacher discourse. Foucault states that this is where we see the link with
knowledge and power, as he sees “power not as some form of possession, which some people have and others do not, but as an effect of discourse” (Burr, 1995, p. 64).

The Ministry of Education Report on Curriculum Policy and Special Education Support (2004) states that the “goals of the professional are to fix and cure; the assumption that the goal of the individual is to be fixed” (p. 15). This is interesting to reflect on, as the powerful positioning of medical discourses in our culture, where fixing and curing is what they do, is also assumed to be what we want. Perhaps particular discourses are in fact constructed by society to serve its own purpose which, as Burman (2008) suggests, are linked to limiting financial resources. In 2010 the Ministry of Education announced there would be a review of Special Education services in schools. Whilst couched in a broader discourse of inclusive education, the subsequent policy had an implicit agenda around cost savings (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

**Gender Construction**

Poststructural theorists are particularly interested in how we “do gender” and how discourses govern what can be said and done in relation to this. Foucault argues that there is “no true state of existence, since our understandings of ourselves and our lives are always filtered through the ideas, discourses and institutions that constitute society” (Danaher, et al., 2000, p. 48).

Sporting prowess (knowledge) is valued by many people in New Zealand society, particularly males. An examination of the historical discursive practices that have shaped sporting discourses would reveal that certain males have been excluded and marginalised because they have failed to live up to a normalised notion of what constitutes the kiwi “male.” We can link the ideological underpinnings of what it meant to be “male” in early New Zealand with the association with war, fighting, winning and the place that the male body plays in creating this sense of identity and truth in and around what it means to be male and
“physical” (Connell, 1995). Volkerling (2000) suggests that, historically, we can see that in colonial countries, particularly Australia and New Zealand, sporting values were integral to the practices of elite secondary schools for boys and the cultural power of these discourses of control is seen to be magnified in these two countries in particular. This is still evident, where single-sex boys’ schools continue to dominate traditional sports, and where boys go to certain schools because of the culture and value they place on sport.

Fitzgerald (2005) suggests that “it is a certain kind of physicality that is promoted and practised in physical education” (p. 44). Wellard (2006) supports this by suggesting that:

Although the ability to successfully take part in physical activities is determined by many factors, mostly notable are performance of gender, where traditional, hegemonic masculinity is favoured, and specific skill-based performances are required in various sports. Schools (albeit often unwittingly) discriminate against many young people on the grounds of their bodily performances rather than taking into account the individuals willingness to take part. (p. 117)

The changing fabric of what we see in schools, with a renewed emphasis on physical activity and fitness, again places a focus on the importance of the body and reinforces it as being the leading definer of masculinity (Connell, 1995). The last decade has seen a push toward physical fitness and physical activity in schools as a way to address the avowed obesity epidemic. Initiatives such as Mission On (Clark, 2006) and the Primary Schools Physical Activity Project (SPARC, 2007a) are examples of the pressure schools are under to produce fit, active citizens. The National Education Goals were amended in December 2004 (clause 5) (Ministry of Education, 2011) to include a reference to physical activity and to ensure schools were prioritising time for physical activity.

We can anticipate a number of issues arising for young men with coordination difficulties in such a climate. I described in the narrative how Leo’s interactions in the playground are
predominately with girls and that he often played on the far reaches of the playground. Supporting my observations, Sibley (1997) was able to show that those who are excluded are driven to occupy a “less desirable and often smaller environment on the margin within playground areas” (cited in Clarke, 2004 p. 193).

Clarke (2004) states that “schools and physical education departments are sites of moral and sexual regulation wherein docile and useful bodies are produced and identities constructed, normalised and negotiated on a daily basis” (p. 192). Leo, as a male who has coordination difficulties unlike the majority of males of his age, is positioned as less of a “male” within a gender discourse that specifies particular characteristics as symbolizing masculinity:

Physical education is one distinct site where traditionally there have been and continue to be rigid ways of being physically and emotionally literate, hence for those who fail or who step out of these boundaries homophobic and heterosexist insults abound, albeit not always well documented. (Wood & Kroeger, 2000, p. 194-195).

Foucault (1994) suggests that our sense of who we are is structured around the particular knowledge valued by our culture at anyone time and is intimately bound up with power. It is not surprising then that physical competence in “particular” sports in New Zealand is very important to children and adolescents and is one of the major criteria contributing to children’s social acceptance by their peers (McPherson, Curtis, & Loy, 1989; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). For Tom and Leo this represents a challenge to live their lives in and around the gender discourse of what it means to be male.

**Socio-Cultural Context**

In keeping with a social construction model of disability, the impairment of DCD cannot be considered in a vacuum as a physical ailment similarly affecting all to whom that label is applied. Each of the young boys or men who find themselves labeled DCD are situated within particular familial and cultural contexts, with varying kinds of educational, financial and
therapeutic resources within their grasp. More broadly, boys labeled DCD exist within a wider educational, social and political context – one that is currently replete with admonishments and initiatives pertaining to the body and its performance both within and outside of school contexts.

Within a New Zealand context, Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) presently has over 400 programmes addressing physical activity and nutrition issues, including Mission On (Clark, 2006), The Physical Activity Initiative, Active Families and Active Movement (2007b). These programmes place particular focus on children and young people and have strong footholds in the early childhood sector and primary schools. For example, two current national initiatives, Physical Activity and Food and Nutrition, support teaching practices in schools focusing on the body and how it performs. In 2006, SPARC released a “High Performance Strategy” document which included: “New Zealand athletes winning in events that matter to New Zealand.” This was supported with the statement that “Cricket, netball and rugby would be eligible to receive support because of their importance to New Zealand and their potential to win world titles” (SPARC, 2006).

In our schools, a model of teaching curriculum physical education has emerged that is linked to developing fitter and healthier children. In recent years, policy makers in the United Kingdom have presented physical education and physical activity initiatives as a public health, rather than education, agenda (O'Sullivan, 2006). In particular, Rawlins (2007) suggests that the implicit theme of messages in UK secondary schools is linked to that of being a good citizen. This means making the right choices with regard to lifestyle decisions, such as eating and physical activity practices. Evans and Davies (2004) suggest that these practices, in turn, drive classroom codes and contexts that shape a pedagogical conscience in and around the body that is linked to “performance, perfection and competency” (p. 215). References in the media to an alarming obesity epidemic (Eberhart-Phillips, 2005) support such initiatives.
In a climate where the key word “fitness” is bandied about and physical education teachers and schools are seen as agents for addressing health issues, are we seeing a return to the narrow and prescriptive definitions of fitness that schools once prescribed? Burrows and Gillespie (2006) suggest that the emphasis towards a scientific and prescriptive view of the body may be returning to our schools. As Gard (2005) has pointed out, researchers are increasingly telling children, parents and schools what they must or should do in terms of what goes into their bodies and how they move their bodies. In one initiative, a Ministry of Education Primary Schools Pilot Study, children’s weight was measured alongside their levels of physical activity and their fundamental motor skill achievements (Gillespie & Burrows, 2006). Research is suggesting that new orthodoxies relating to the body, health and self, within health and physical education programmes in schools, is emerging as a result of a move towards making young people fit and thin (Evans & Davies, 2004).

In the Ministry of Education literature of the late 1990s, we see an increasing shift towards perceiving children as individuals, with talk of students meeting their full potential being a dominant theme. Morss (1996) suggests that this rhetoric of the child as an individual exemplifies how educational practices regulate how those children, their parents and their teachers will be treated. Excerpts from the aims and strands of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999) emphasise the self and taking personal responsibility for the health of oneself and that of others, indeed all of society.

“Life long learners” has become a catch phrase that also hints to children continuing their learning into adulthood and becoming community change agents (Burrows & Wright, 2006) through programmes such as those referred to above. A discourse “is often manifest in words…contained, produced and reproduced in organisational and institutional or social practices” (Adams et al., 2000, p. 289). This can be clearly apprehended within health promotion discourses, such as the Ministry of Health and Education funded programme Healthy Eating Healthy Action (HEHA), where children and young people are predominantly
conceived as individuals morally required to take action with regard to their health. However, if individuals fail to reach their expected potential or do not take personal responsibility for their own “health”, does it become the child’s fault? In this respect, the discourse of self-development has the potential to become victim blaming.

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to show that there are several discursive regimes within which Tom’s testimony must be considered. Understanding Tom’s experience and the ways he articulates his engagement with sport and physical education requires an understanding of the broader discourses that contour his capacity to recognize his self. While there are undoubtedly more discourses worthy of attention in this regard, in this chapter I have sought to canvass some of the most pervasive and obvious discourses characterizing the time period and environmental context within which Tom’s narrative is told.

**Conclusion**

Slee (2000) suggests that “for most of us” we come to know disability and know about disability “from a distance and through the powerful professional expert knowledge, practices and discourses of others” (p. 6). Through Tom’s testimony that distance has been lessened. The data I wish to interrogate comprises an aural presentation to an audience in the form of a pre-recorded video. The aforementioned concepts ground this research, and the asking the following questions arose from Tom’s text:

- What discourses (institutional and cultural) have contoured the ways it is possible for Tom to understand himself?
- What discourses does Tom draw on to constitute himself and how does he negotiate the potentially contradictory messages contained therein?
- How does/did Tom’s engagement (or not) in particular physical activities do for Tom? What versions of the self does this engagement offer?
The role of the researcher, therefore, could be seen as offering an interpretation of the participant’s words through this particular testimony, in an attempt to answer the research questions.
Chapter 4

Tom talks: I've got dyspraxia

We must keep the perspective that people are experts on their own lives.

(Delpit, 1995, p. 47)

In this chapter, I interrogate Tom’s testimony as a means of further understanding the why and how of his experiences in school-based physical education and sport. As I read through the transcript, I sought to make meaning by interrogating Tom’s narrative alongside and against existing literature dealing with young disabled people’s experiences of physical education and/or sport. I asked myself what have I read in the literature that resonates with Tom’s experience? What does scholarship about gender, physical education, sport, and that relating to experiences of marginalised groups in schooling suggest about how Tom might come to regard himself and his experience in particular ways?

Given the above outlined intent, I have deliberately structured the chapter content in the following way. First there is a title for each sub-section pointing to the particular aspect of Tom’s discourse that is of interest in that section. This is followed by a quote drawn from the literature that sheds further light on the orientation of each sub section. Following this, I represent Tom’s testimony – his experiences and reflections on physical education and sport. Finally, interrogating scholarship from diverse fields, I examine Tom’s testimony, drawing on the discourse analytic techniques described in chapter two with a view to identifying what and who he draws on to articulate his experience, how broader discourses have contoured his reality and with what effect.

Tom is in Year 13 as he speaks. His testimony is compelling as his insight into his own world and that of those around him. Welcome to Tom’s world as he saw it.

*Hi guys, I’m Tom. I’m seventeen years old, I go to . . . school. Well this is a dyspraxia conference so you’ve probably guessed I’ve got dyspraxia.* (Tom)
Tom assumes that nobody in the audience (which includes medical practitioners, educationalists, researchers, teachers, therapists and parents, and occupational therapists) he is addressing has dyspraxia. Tom also speaks of his dyspraxia, interestingly, as something that he has “got”. We could ask how has Tom come to know about this thing he has got? How has his subjectivity been shaped by his identification as a young man “with” dyspraxia?

Tom suggests that, in some ways he is distinct from other young people. As Davis and Watson (2001) suggest, “processes of labeling and differentiation mark disabled children as different” (p. 673). Tom has understood this, and in fact celebrates the difference by being willing to share with others how life at school is for him. Conner (2008) states that the act of self-defining as a minority group is, in and of itself, an exertion of power. Tom, by defining himself here, is exercising agency and doing so in a way that is somewhat counter-intuitive, given contemporary pressures on young men to cover up any “weaknesses”. Tom goes on further in his speech, to “challenge hegemonic knowledge and understandings, providing epistemological insights unknown to majority groups” (Conner, 2008, p. 459). He is one that operates inside the field of play where the majority rules and physical competence in particular sports is valued and a means of acceptance in adolescence (McPherson, et al., 1989). Tom challenges this majority rule and finds the means to make known to others what being in the “field” is like for him.

Tom takes up a subject position of an agentic person who is speaking with authority and expertise at this conference. He is very aware of his audience and seems to enjoy sharing his story with others. He has clearly made a personal commitment to inform others by representing himself at this conference as a young male with dyspraxia. As we journey through his testimony, it becomes clear that he retains a sense of responsibility for helping others understand how secondary school physical education and sport is for him. Tom’s motivation for this presentation is to make a difference. While much academic and professional discourse
would position young disabled men as relatively disempowered and unlikely to speak, Davies (2000) explains that choices based on rationality can always be superseded by desires. Tom’s desire to share his story as a school-age person with adults from a range of fields highlights for me a depth of maturity in an adolescent who would perhaps ordinarily be expected to prefer fading into the back of the classroom! Tom is passionate and wants to explain to us the experiences he had at school and what these actually felt like.

Subject positions that individuals may take up, are made available through a variety of discourses. One subject position, more often made available to white middle-class males than to others, is of an agentic person who can make choices and act upon them. (Davies, 2000 p. 57)

Tom is accepting of the notion of difference and willing to comply with his label of dyspraxia. He confidently describes this “label” and shares with his audience what this has meant for him in secondary schooling, particularly in and around physical education and sport. MacArthur and Kelly’s (2004) research with a young man of a similar age to Tom, (also in a New Zealand secondary school) pointed to a similar reversal of roles where it was the disabled young male taking responsibility for educating, in this case, the teachers at his school about his needs.

**Normal or Not Normal**

What is important as far as the question of body-image and disabled people is concerned is their powerful personal awareness that they do not, in various ways, match up to the physical ideals able-bodied society sets.

(I had to explain to my two coaches what dyspraxia actually sort of was and this is the basic idea that I gave them. Dyspraxia is – well we’ll call it a “problem” for technical purposes – where it takes me longer to learn certain skills than it would the normal person. For example – and I use this is an example – for example a normal person is...)

(Barton, 1993, p. 47)
brain, skill, do and we’re off, hurrah. A dyspraxic person is brain, skill, skill, skill, skill and then and do. (Tom)

In the aforementioned commentary, Tom describes dyspraxia as a “technical problem” which means that it takes a longer time to acquire skills than a so-called normal person. He suggests that there is a normal way of knowing and doing and reinforces for his audience that he is “other” than normal. Although Tom’s recognition of his own impairment is acknowledged – we can see that his explanation of what this means for him is based on a medical model of disability. Entrenched notions of what comprises skill development, together with the privileged position of medical discourses within western culture, position Tom as not normal because of his co-ordination difficulties. He does not meet the expected milestones that are part of the dominant child development discourses of our time (Burman & Parker, 1993) and therefore casts himself as “abnormal”.

If we examine the social practices historically surrounding the science of child development discourses as Foucault (1977) would have us do, we become aware of how the notion of a normal child has been constructed and the role specific scientific models of child development have had, and continue to have, in our lives from birth. The predominance of a notion of linear sequential stages of development is reflected in physical education texts (Gabbard, 1992) where creeping, crawling and walking are signalled as inevitable steps in the passage of childhood. Of course, as is the case with any normalised set of expectations about development, there are those that do not fit, those who do not develop in the expected ways and those who fail to meet the expected milestones as articulated in these developmental psychological texts. The very presence of a norm implies that those who fall either side of it need fixing or remediating.

The developmentalism referred to above is also evident in motor skill acquisition literature and practices. As Bailey et al. (2009) suggest, historical practices have shaped fundamental ways of being embodied such as walking, running, jumping, climbing and
throwing. Tom’s view of himself is linked to a dominant notion of skill acquisition as primarily being a matter of learning skills in a progression and at a certain pace.

The skills that he judges his “ability” by, will also be valued according to the preferences for physical activity of the particular social groups Tom operates within. As he signals below, these preferences, for boys at least, are predominantly sporting ones.

*Well boys tend to make friends with other boys easier if they play sport. You know the whole grrrr male, competitive, I’ve-got-to-dominate gene. (Tom)*

This perception of his ability – or lack of ability – has been formulated within the social context in which he lives – a context where playing particular sports, being competitive *and* dominating others is part of what it means to be a normal boy.

In fact, only as recently as the 1970s, during discussions on updating The World Health Organization’s (WHO) International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH), the definitions that were advanced for key terms were:

- *impairment* – “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function”;  
- *disability* – “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being”; and  
- *handicap* – “a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting in an impairment or a disability, that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors) for that individual” (cited in Wood, 1980, p. 22-29).

These definitions were and have been strongly opposed by organisations run by disabled people because they are reflective of a medical view that impairment is the determining factor in explaining both “disability” and “handicap” (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Oliver, 1996).
Falling and Failing

Falling is also a metaphor for any calamity that might occur while attempting to play a game. Slipping, tripping, falling from apparatus or while attempting to strike or catch a ball, dropping the ball or failing to direct it to its target, bumping into someone or someone while performing in a game are calamities that occur with regularity for the performer who is physically awkward. Falling is the final insult, a visually powerful statement, punctuating the failed performance. The failing and falling is not only obvious to the faller, but also clearly evident to observers, including peers, teachers, and spectators.

(Fitzpatrick & Watkinson, 2003, p. 286)

I had a really quite a bad time in PE. I was – well I’ll tell you a story. I was running and we were doing hurdles and I was running and I was running and I was going over the hurdles and I slipped and went crack and fell down on one of the hurdles. And my PE teacher decided: that’s a bit weak and unmanly ooh I’ll make an example out of you. So when I was lying on the floor he came over and decided to tense my stomach muscles just to show people how weak I was. So that really didn’t bode very well with me. A very early experience of PE in my life. (Tom)

Physical education is a “place”, unlike any other learning area within the New Zealand Curriculum, where bodies are on display and easily observed by all. There is no hiding behind a desk or book. Tom reveals in his talk about this particular physical education experience, the “crack” of falling on the hurdle and the palpable bodily pain. He clearly remembers the experience and the distress it caused. The intenseness of the falling is more than pain. The teacher’s actions highlight this trauma for Tom and signal, yet again, the failure of his body to perform.

Fitzpatrick and Watkinson (2003) so eloquently describe the impact of the “failing and falling” (p. 286) following their interviews with 18 adults with DCD who reflected on their experiences during physical education classes. When performance and normative notions of ability are prioritised in physical education (Evans, 2004) those who are unable to perform or demonstrate ability in expected ways are inevitably marginalized. As well as Tom being on
visual display to his peers and the embarrassment of the moment, we have the added insult to injury with the teacher poking of Tom’s abs. The fact the physical education teacher feels licensed to touch, to poke and to prod another’s body is totally inconceivable in any other subject area. Tom’s recognition that having failed to leap the hurdle would render him unmanly in the eyes of his teacher is further reinforced by the teacher signaling that Tom has “soft abs”. The teacher’s power over him is displayed in this moment as the teacher stands tall while Tom lies on the ground. All of the class is now aware that weakness is not permissible in a physical education lesson, that Tom was failing to make the manly grade and that this was important to his teacher. Tom recalls this humiliation some years later as an event that he is haunted by. For Tom, it is a critical moment.

Tom feels pain not only emotionally in this encounter but also physically. Gard and Meyenn’s (2000) study found that with regard to physical activity, “actual and potential pain exists as the stated currency which is traded by boys in order to establish acceptable embodied masculine identities in relation to physical activity” (p. 19). Furthermore, Fitz Clarence and Hickey (1998) point out that “one of the techniques used by adults to rationalize physical injury and violence in sport is to claim that it is “natural” for males to engage in these activities and that tolerating pain is an important part of becoming a man” (cited in Gard & Meyenn, 2000, p. 24). Given the currency that “pain” carries, Tom’s falling and the humiliation imposed by the teacher can be conceived as simply part and parcel of “the game”.

**Poisonous Pedagogies**

It is apparent that boys with disabilities are faced with unique conflicts around their masculine identities at school. This is clearly a result of a normative regime of masculinity that affirms and valorizes many of the characteristics that physical disability may take away, including independence, physical strength and (hetero) sexual prowess.

(Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 180)
My PE teacher decided: that’s a bit weak and unmanly ooh I’ll make an example out of you. (Tom)

The moment, previously recalled, where Tom falls in the hurdling and the way his physical education teacher then treats him, speaks to us about broader issues around the conceptual and lived resources that teachers enter the classroom or field with. What gendered understandings do teachers bring with them to class? How are their little (and not so little) actions and words working to reinforce and/or contest dominant understandings of what counts as “boy”? This episode can forever mark how Tom will feel about his body, how it moves (or not) and how it compares to normative standards of performance (Evans & Davies, 2002; Rich, Holroyd, & Evans, 2004).

For Tom, this is just one (albeit indelibly marked) moment amongst others that produced a recognition of himself as a “hurdle-squashing soft-bellied girl!” What impact do moments like these have on one’s sense of self as agentic and physically capable? Tom recognizes that failing to leap the hurdle and the soft abs would now render him unmanly in the eyes of his teacher. Tom now knows (along with his classmates) that weakness is not permissible in a physical education lesson.

Thomson et al. (2002) suggest that “a critical moment provides us with a way of seeing how social and economic environments frame individual narratives and the personal and cultural resources on which young people are able to draw” (p. 351). If this had been the only kind of moment Tom experienced, and if he had not had the support of friends, with patience and empathy who engaged with him and his physicality in different ways, what would be the possibilities for his sense of self? As he recalls below, there are people in his life who afford the potential for different narratives of his physicality to emerge.

I have a friend whose name’s David who does wu shu. Wu shu is a martial art which involves, you know, a lot of kicking, chopping – well I’m not sure about the chopping – but it involves a lot of kicking and jumping and flying everywhere. (Tom)
Evans (2004) argues that in seeking to understand concepts in and around physical education we must seek to understand “what ‘abilities’ are recognised, valued and, nurtured, and accepted, while others are rejected by whom, where and why in schools” (p. 104). Green (2000) found that physical education teachers’ philosophies included an emphasis on sport performance and further suggested that this was “presumably one of the things which discourages some pupils” (p. 200). He further explains that even with emerging ideological shifts in and around physical education in the United Kingdom, “sport, and especially team games, continue to be the most prominent activity area in the vast majority of curricula for boys and girls in secondary schools and lie at the heart of teachers philosophies of PE” (p. 201). In New Zealand, this has also been the case with the dominant discourses in school-based physical education continuing to privilege sport and particular pedagogies which do not serve all well. As Gard (2004) compellingly argues:

Critical physical education scholars have been pointing out for some time that traditional approaches to PE, based around teacher-centred pedagogies on the one hand, and physical fitness and team games on the other, are likely to become less and less relevant to children. And yet the ranks of our physical education teachers remain dominated by sports lovers who are mystified by children’s disinterest in school physical education (Gard 2004, p. 21).

**And all Those Sorts of Sports**

[We need to] question what and whose discourses are privileged in the curriculum of physical education . . . and how and why certain discourses, for example, of health related exercise and games teaching, rather than say, dance and outdoor education, [are] privileged and heard at this juncture in time?

(Evans & Davies, 2002, p. 27)

*I mean I had fun dancing and playing volleyball and doing all those sorts of sports – of course when we played a unisex game of basketball or dodge ball, things like that. (Tom)*
Evans and Davies (2002) suggest that drawing on a Foucauldian perspective prompts us to question the choice of experiences made for young people in physical education. In the above quotation, we see Tom alluding to these less privileged forms of movement – “dancing and playing volleyball” – as “all those sorts of sports”. Not only does Tom have more fun playing “all those sorts of sports”, but he suggests other sports like a “game of basketball or dodge ball, things like that” are also more fun when it is a “unisex game”.

Teachers provide learning opportunities for students. They reflect on what physical activities are providing the context for these opportunities. Teachers are also challenged to provide physical activities that are fun. What learning activities are fun, and for whom are they less or more fun? These are questions that Tom’s testimony evokes.

As Pringle and Markula (2005) attest, societal norms and well established teacher pedagogies shape the curriculum content that is offered, contouring what is regarded as both viable and possible. In chapter three, I alluded to the ways in which physical education is practiced in schools, and the historical discourses shaping curriculum content. If teachers were to reflect critically on what is on offer they would ask themselves questions like, do particular teacher practices dominate and appeal to a particular sub set of boys? Evans and Davies (2002) would suggest they certainly do, and Tom’s testimony would confirm the privileging of particular kinds of Physical Education content in school-based classes.

Tom states, “I had fun dancing”, yet his narrative suggests that dancing is a less available form of movement to him – it is an “other” thing, an “other sort of sport”. Dance, as Bolwell (1998) suggests, is a less common movement context in New Zealand secondary schools. Students like Tom, whose preference is for the kinds of creative movement dance affords, are therefore less likely to enjoy or excel because of this.

In the world of teaching, is it realistic to expect that there is time for critical reflection, and is this common practice in the busy lives of teachers? Petrie (2009) as a fellow teacher
educator, would suggest that from our “ivory tower”, we are removed from the busyness of school life, and therefore critical reflection is challenging to engage in. Teachers, in theory, are certainly encouraged to reflect as is advocated by the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and in teacher in-service professional development. Research to date would suggest that some are capable of and willing to undertake this critically reflective work, while others, for a host of understandable reasons, are not. For example, they may have an investment in one way of doing things; insufficient time to reflect, or the notion of reflection may not match with their personal proclivities (Petrie, 2009).

In New Zealand there are increasing initiatives in and around sport participation from both SPARC and the Ministry of Education where outcomes are measured by the sheer number of participants engaging in sport. Further, as a nation, particular ways of moving are privileged. As stated in the Government funded document High Performance Strategy 2006 – 2012 submitted by SPARC (2006), “Cricket, netball and rugby will be eligible to receive support because of their importance to New Zealand and their potential to win events that matter to New Zealand (Cricket World Cup, Netball World Championships, and Rugby World Cup)” (p. 8). There is little sign of “all those sorts of sports” being included in the future.

Schools are not immune to the effect of political initiatives like those initiated by SPARC. At Kaikorai Valley High School, participation levels are published in the Education Gazette (Erb, 2010) but there is no mention of the quality of engagement by pupils. Unsurprisingly, dance does not feature in the list of sports played.

KiwiSport, a recent SPARC initiative, involves a Regional Partnership Fund of $8.5 million per year (forming part of the total SPARC fund of $20.485 million per year) devoted to grassroots sport. The fund avowedly permits communities, schools, clubs and regional
sports trusts to work together to get children into sport and keep them in sport. SPARC suggests that the initial sports targeted will tend to be:

The traditional team sports that the New Zealand public have a knowledge, understanding, and are generally supportive of. These sports that have been targeted at a national level by SPARC are; rugby, netball, hockey, football (soccer), rugby league, cricket, and gymsports. The latter, gymsports, may be cause for surprise. (Brimble, 2011, p. 2)

Brimble (2011), as the CEO of the local Sports trust, suggests that gymsports may come to the readers as a surprise, yet why does he suggest this? Who does he believe are the readers that will be surprised? Has he already surmised how the readers may react when they read this in their local Otago Sports Trust Activate magazine. Perhaps it is a surprise because as CEO of a Sports Trust (that has a mandate charged with increasing participation in sport and recreation), he did not have Gymsports previously in his sights. Would he have written this sentence “The latter, gymsports, may be cause for surprise” if he was president of the local Gymclub? Perhaps it was a surprise because Gymsports is one of “those sorts of sports”, an “other”, and not a sport ordinarily regarded as popular amongst New Zealanders.

It would seem commonsense to suggest that one route towards increasing the level of engagement in physical education would be enabling schools to offer other ways of moving that encourage all young people to be more active. As Wright (2004a) suggests, the influences of consumerism on leisure have prompted shifts away from team sports to more “individualised recreational activities pursued in many ways” (p. 8). The reiteration of traditional team sports as the raison d’etre of school sports initiatives seems a little out of step with this “fact”. As Brimble (2011) himself acknowledges, research shows a significant grouping of youth still participate in sport but in a less formal and more social way:
The greatest challenge in collecting data on sport is the increasing casualization and the move away from formal organised sport. More and more people of all ages are participating in sporting activities without being formally aligned to a club, registered or being recorded. (Brimble, 2011, p. 2)

Tinning and Fitzclarence (1992), over a decade earlier, warned that if physical education ignores these changes to recreation and sporting pursuits, it will become less and less relevant to children and young people. As Gard (2004) suggests however, there is scant evidence that anything much is changing in contemporary physical education teaching practice. The title to Curtner-Smith’s (1999) paper “The More Things Change the More Things Stay the Same” has been synonymous with the new curriculum delivery initiatives worldwide over the last decade.

**You Can’t Play**

Davis & Watson (2001) suggest that disabled young people “are told that they are different, to naturalise that difference and for that difference to become part of their lifeworld” (p. 673).

*There was a time when people used to say to me: you can’t play sport. And I’d say to them: really? How do you figure? Well you’re slow and no one’s going to want you on their team – and things like that. And so I thought: oh well let’s do this basketball thing, let’s learn the skills of basketball and then we’ll see. (Tom)*

In New Zealand, teenage males who do not play rugby find it difficult to construct a sense of self around the well-worn traits of competitiveness, strength and toughness associated with masculinity (Ferguson, 2004; Messner, 1990; Pringle 2008; Pringle & Markula, 2005; Volkerling, 2000). New Zealand researchers Pringle & Markula (2005) found that young males who deal with the stigma of being labeled disabled are even more disadvantaged and less likely to be invited “to play” than others. Tom recognizes this yet
really wants to do “this basketball thing” despite not having the skills and despite the other kids saying “you’re slow and no one’s going to want you on their team.”

It is understandable that Tom has had little opportunity to develop skills to play. In a review of international literature, Smith (2004) found that an emphasis placed upon sport and team games in class tended to excluded young disabled people. Smith and Thomas (2006) support this further in their study of young people with disabilities in physical education, as when the activities were team games such as rugby and basketball, they were involved to a significantly lesser degree, if not excluded, from the learning.

What then drives Tom to pick up that basketball and get involved in the game once more? Not only does he deal with skills that challenge him, he also has to deal with his peers who challenge his urge to want to play. Why does Tom need to play is a question that intrigues me.

I knew that a lot of people in my school played sport, especially in my year, so therefore I thought that if I played sport that I would have more in common with them.

Well boys tend to make friends with other boys easier if they play sport. You know the whole grrrr male, competitive, I’ve-got-to-dominate gene. (Tom)

As signalled above, Tom understands that sporting prowess is valued by boys and that they in turn make friends with each other because of these interactions. Tom wants to be part of the game.

Given the range of Tom’s life experiences, and in particular his experiences within physical education and sport, he has a clear understanding of what brings males together and of how they form friendships. That is, through sport. When Tom observes his male peers he believes they are all competitive. Whether or not males are all competitive is not the point because this is how Tom sees it.
Competition

Physical education should benefit every pupil in the group regardless of ability and enthusiasm for the subject; therefore an emphasis on sport and with it an emphasis on competition and competitive success…can result in finite resources being used for a few elite performers rather than being available to encourage participation in physical activity for all.

(Capel, 2000, p. 139)

Guys have fun if they’re competing. Unfortunately I wasn’t born with a competitive gene which means I don’t get involved as often as I should. But it seems the more competition the more fun. (Tom)

The question of whether to prioritise competition or cooperation has long been debated in schools. In secondary schools in particular, competition has continued to rule because of the dominance of team games within the curriculum content (Leah & Capel, 2000).

This pressure to compete is understandable given government initiatives worldwide to ensure national teams produce winners rather than losers. Schools are not immune to these wider understandings of what is important when we play. We play to win. Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC), an organisation responsible for delivering sports related benefits to the nation, expressed their mission in the High Performance Strategy 2006-2012 document as one of having “New Zealand athletes and teams winning in events that matter to New Zealand” (p. 3). Further, they state that “by 2012 the system will have contributed to: New Zealand being World Champions in cricket, netball and rugby” (SPARC, 2006, p. 5). It seems not surprising then that physical competence in “particular” sports in New Zealand is so very important to children and adolescents, and is one of the major criteria contributing to children’s social acceptance by their peers. Unfortunately, this perception of competence coupled with normative conceptions of ability linked to athleticism has the tendency to limit some children’s involvement in school based physical education (Fitzgerald, 2005).
The Boys

Peer pressure is arguably more intense for boys, given high expectations that males should be more proficient in sport”

(Fitzpatrick & Watkinson, 2003, p. 294).

And another thing about PE was there were a bunch of guys in my class who, you know, it was like: oh why don’t you do this? And why are you so bad at this? How come you’re not so good at sport? And they’d always take the mickey out of me and tease me about it and it wasn’t very nice. (Tom)

Research and commentary pointing to the dominance of sport and competitive team games in secondary school physical education curricula has, in recent decades, emerged from Australia (Gard & Meyenn, 2000), England (Kirk, 2002) and New Zealand (Burrows & Wright, 2004; Ferguson, 2004; Pringle 2008; Volkerling, 2000). Scholars have argued that the practices of school sport and physical education are closely linked with wider societal beliefs about gender-appropriate behavior. In particular, this body of research illuminates the pivotal role that sporting ability plays in boys’ and young males’ sense of themselves as ‘real men’, and the privileging of competitive sporting traditions that favour males in physical education instruction. Tom’s classmates questioning of why he is so bad “at this” and “not so good at sport” are somewhat unsurprising given the importance attributed to boys’ capacity to ‘play’.

As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) discovered in their work with boys in school, able-bodied boys looked more favourably on those boys with disabilities who did in fact participate in sport and regarded them as more normal than those that did not. As they suggest, “able-bodied boys often appeared to be complicit in the need for boys with disabilities to ‘be normal’, such as participating in sport” (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 165).

Pringle and Markula (2005) were somewhat struck by “how complicit the schools were in the production of normalized masculinities” (p. 481) in their examination of New Zealand men’s experiences in rugby during their teenage years. The positioning of male athletes who
display the same key masculine traits attributes in dance and gymnastics type activities do not gain the same kudos as male athletes playing in the winter football codes who displayed the same skills (Pringle 2008). Similarly, Wellard’s (2006) research, reflecting on gay men’s schooling, suggests that these young males, “found difficulty adapting to school sports…felt unable to perform in the ways expected and developed an understanding of their bodies as weak” (p. 117).

It would appear that marginalized young males’ experiences within physical education are complicated because of attitudes and values linked to the sporting practices that dominate physical education, particularly at secondary schools. The “Toms” are disadvantaged by the kinds of movement practices that are pervasively promoted and practised in physical education. A curriculum dominated by particular versions of competitive sport privileges a particular sub-set of boys’ needs and interests yet serves to highlight, in this case, disabled students’ lack of physicality. In this scenario, disabled boys’ capacity to match up to normative expectations is severely curtailed (Fitzgerald, 2005).

The resources Tom has available to draw on to cultivate a sense of who he is are inevitably shaped by his schooling context. His peers’ responses, his teacher’s pedagogies and a climate where sporting ability is symbolic of “manhood” render it challenging for him to regard himself as anything other than “lacking” – a self-evaluation repeatedly confirmed through the on-going dialogue of his peers and teacher. As signalled above, Tom hears his classmates question why he is “not so good at sport”. Their queries form part of the discursive fabric through which he comes to know and understand himself and his abilities.

Wellard (2006) suggests that listening to adult sporting recollections draws attention to the contrasting experiences of young people. He suggests that those who state that all children benefit from sport “fail to recognize the differing experiences faced by boys and girls in organised sports and school physical education” (Wellard, 2006, p. 117). Tom’s testimony
confirms this, and further points to the particular challenges that boys with disabilities may face when participating in school-based physical education programmes that valorize traditionally conceived masculine traits. As Blinde and McCallister (1998) claim, “the inability or unwillingness by teachers to adapt activities to the needs of the students” coupled with “the behaviour of classmates towards students with disabilities” (p. 67) are additional impediments to the experience of disabled students in mainstream physical education classes.

**The Girls**

Findings indicate that boys in general may initially have more negative attitudes towards peers with disabilities than girls.

(Nabuzoka & Rønning, 1997, p. 111)

*When I first tried to play competitive basketball I found that the other kids in the team mocked me, shunned me and generally made me feel pretty, well, awful. Not the girls mind you, just the guys. Cos the girls are just – because again girls are a lot less competitive and they have fun, they take you under their wing and they say: this is how you do it. Some boys do too but not as often. So yeah those are my experiences in PE. You know the whole competitive gene thing. So that’s the reason I haven’t played competitive basketball for a while. (Tom)*

Because most of the sports and physical education sessions Tom engaged in involved ball skills, Tom’s inability to throw, catch or bounce a ball easily made it difficult to achieve success. Not only that, but because being good with balls is something attached to being a regular “boy”, not being able to play properly meant his sense of himself as a viable young man and his capacity to fit in during secondary schooling was seriously compromised. He knew this, he knew what was expected, but try as he might he was never going to get there. While ball skills dominated, he did not have a chance of feeling or being treated like a real bloke. In this scenario then, Tom is disabled by the curriculum, by the ways discourses of masculinity link to sport, and unfortunately, of course, by his teacher.
Tom spent time with the girls, because “girls are a lot less competitive and they have fun, they take you under their wing and they say: this is how you do it”. They were “nice” to him. Tom’s level of enjoyment increased, which is perfectly understandable as he had more opportunities to play when the game was unisex. The girls were nurturing and showed him how to do things. As Tom suggests, girls say, “this is how you do it”.

You’re Hot

The current ideal male body is lean but highly muscular, characterized by a well-developed chest and arms, with wide shoulders tapering down to a narrow waist.

(Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000, p. 30)

I knew that a lot of people in my school played sport, especially in my year, so therefore I thought that if I played sport that I would have more in common with them. The basic ideal is you’re tall, you’re fit, you’re athletic, people think you’re hot and you like girls looking in your direction. (Tom)

Tom deliberates on the challenges of being and doing male in a place where traditional hegemonic masculinity is favoured. As he attests, sport is a signifier of “hotness” and sexual desirability. Engaging in sport, according to this discourse, will help teenage males appeal to the opposite sex. In schools, as elsewhere, the ideal guy is the buffed up rugby player who captains the First XV. Tom recognises this, and while possibly knowing he will never measure up, still endeavours to try.

As Evans and Davies (2004) suggest, the kind of school-based initiatives and practices we have seen in the past decade work to produce classroom codes and contexts that shape a pedagogical conscience in and around “the body”. According to Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) young disabled males know that “Their bodies’ appearance and movements are major signifiers of their lower positioning within the hierarchy of masculinities” (p. 161).

Schools have traditionally reinforced this understanding of the construction of gender (Kirk, 2002). McConnell and Edwards (2000) describe “typical sporting attributes in New
Zealand [as] often associated by identification with masculine values and characteristics such as toughness, roughness, strength and speed” (pp. 122-123). The Rugby World Cup being held in New Zealand in 2011, for example, has seen a surge of media attention and articles, such as those contained in The Southern Cross Health Magazine, where Tighe writes of celebrating our “iconic” team. He refers to the disappointment experienced by the country when the All Blacks lost the 2007 World Cup. Coach Graeme Henry had at his disposal a “bulked-up, fuel-injected All Blacks waiting to be released on unsuspecting adversaries” (Tighe, 2011, p. 38), yet they lost. Tom is cognisant of this imagery, of what it signals, and how bulked up bodies are regarded, both by those who have them, and those that watch them:

_There was this really sort of big athletic guy once when we were playing a game and he was all like: wow, look at me, look at how cool I can be. (Tom)_

It is no wonder that Tom is aware of what he terms “the basic ideal”. The replay of All Black player Sonny Bill Williams changing his ripped shirt on the field in a Rugby World Cup game on 9th September 2011 here in New Zealand has received 29,450 hits on YouTube one month later! The clip was replayed by all of the major national television networks with slow motion shots highlighting the event, and commentators referring to the excitement of the female audience (interestingly not the male audience). As Tom has surmised, how the body looks matters.

**Popularity and Sport**

Children who are more competent in physical skills tend to be more popular with their peers than children who are not.

(Stroot, 2002, p. 142)

_Why choose sport?  Well the main reason was I have a lot of friends who consider themselves to be quite good at sport and me not being originally a sporty person I decided to prove to them: well I’m just as good as you no matter what you choose to play. (Tom)_
We can anticipate a number of issues arising for young people with coordination difficulties in such a climate where they know that playing sport is integral to achieving a sense of identity and belonging. Tom is in a school and functioning in a setting that encourages and measures performance in all areas of the curriculum. We can see throughout his testimony his recognition that capacity to play is important. We can in fact view this “landscape”, as Clandinin (1998) would suggest, as “narratively constructed: as having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions” (p.3). Tom is part of this intricate and complex landscape and navigating his way, at times, produces a desire to comply.

I wanted to play basketball for fun with my friends because, well, there are a number of reasons. First of all, basketball is a team sport therefore if I was playing with a team I would have lots of opportunities to meet people. (Tom)

Tom has friends. He wants to play basketball with them. He also wants to form new friendships and he has observed that others forge friendships through this play of games and sport together.

I knew that a lot of people in my school played sport, especially in my year, so therefore I thought that if I played sport that I would have more in common with them. (Tom)

Playing sport is a marker of belonging. Despite being limited in his capacity to play, Tom insists, “well I’m just as good as you no matter what you choose to play”. Yes, he may have taken up the dominant discourse, but amongst it all, he retains a sense of himself as okay, skilled or not. The game is on!
Chapter 5

Tom Plays

If we view the world through the eyes of our students and hear the messages embedded in their actions, we will learn things we never knew we did not know.

(Lee, 2009, p. 147)

This chapter aims to inspire both an intellectual and sensory understanding of the complexities of difference in relation to Tom’s understanding of his engagement in physical culture. It is unashamedly an attempt to encourage an appreciation of multiple ways of knowing. The shift in tone and genre evident in this chapter is deliberate. In an effort to render Tom’s testimony more visible and heartfelt, I specifically focus on analysing and understanding Tom’s experience of being coached by a group of peers during school lunchtimes and during the subsequent game time. I am trying to present a nuanced reading of this aspect of Tom’s testimony, where he articulates his celebration of the engagement in the coaching process. I intentionally use a narrative style (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Morrison, 2009; Richard, 2000; Sparkes, 2002; Thomson, et al., 2002), a style that I hope gives the reader a sense of how Tom feels. I deliberately insert myself in this chapter, offering reflective commentary on my own practice as a teacher and teacher educator. Tom’s testimony can of course be read in multiple ways.

Davies (1993), in her research with children’s recorded conversations, attests that tools of poststructuralism permit diverse readings of the multiple moments embedded within any single conversation. Davies suggests that these readings resemble “a kaleidoscope with precious fragments of coloured glass, each one to be treasured, mused over, polished and placed next to other pieces in a pattern” (p. 15). However, as she further explains, viewing narrative through poststructuralist lenses is not a simple matter. These fragments are in fact like shards of pottery and, in a sense, Davies proposes that as the researcher, I am like an archeologist digging away – with my own senses and memories trying to piece together
meaning from a life other than my own. The following quote from Davies (1993) affords a poignant introduction to this chapter:

As the reader you too are the same, imagining life lived for [Tom], not just from the words on these pages, but using your existing ways of knowing, your immersion within, your subjectification through the same discourses out of which [Tom] fashions his life (p. 15).

At First

In identifying critical moments in young people’s narratives we have been able to capture a sense of how they experience the world.

(Thomson, et al., 2002, p. 351)

Now when we organized the first game to play it was sort of well I was thrown into the thick of it and I didn’t really know what to do cos it was my first experience with having a game and all the elements of a game. And so I basically watched everybody else play around me, you know, and occasionally it’d be like – and somebody would pass you the ball and you’d go up the court and like no sooner had you gotten up the court but somebody had taken it from your hands and you’d be (oh really). (Tom)

Tom experiences the fast changing moves on the basketball court. The landscape that Davies (2000) refers to is on the move. The ball changes direction. The ball is snatched. Tom stands back and watches in astonishment – “somebody had taken it from your hands and you’d be (oh really)”. Tom wants to play a part. Not just stand back and observe. It is not the “same”, it is not enough for him, if he cannot play.

Goodwin and Watkinson’s (2000) research with disabled young people in school-based physical education suggested that so-called disabled students were not passed the ball during games. Like Tom, the students in Goodwin and Watkinson’s (2000) study yearned for a sense of belonging but were, at times, simply ignored. Smyth and Anderson’s (2000) work with school-age male football players who had been identified with motor coordination difficulties
yielded similar findings. That is, as these players advanced in age, they were more often than not on the pitch but not really part of the game. This scenario is what French and Wass (1987) refer to as “game related solitary play” (as cited in Smyth & Anderson, 2000, p. 409). As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) found, and as discussed in chapter four, Tom and these “others” know that they are looked on more favourably by able-bodied others if they can play sport. These young people want to belong and know that playing sport with others will in some ways enable them to be more accepted. Tom now knows that he needs to acquire basketball skills as he has to at least get his hands on the ball in a game. Pass the ball to someone. Have someone pass back to him. This, however, is going to take time.

**Time and Patience**

A sense of belonging emerged from supportive interactions with classmates and teachers in the regular physical education program.

(Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000, p. 154)

*The thing that made it easier was that I had the time to develop these skills and my two coaches were totally and utterly patient with me. That was the key of the whole program, patience. You know I didn’t have to rush through any skills or I wasn’t put on the spot at all to do anything. (Tom)*

Tom had time. Time is the important element in this scenario. Tom had time to develop skills that in a structured physical education session he perceived he was unable to acquire. Having the time enabled him to join in the game of basketball. We can question whether, in classes with at least 30 students, it is at all possible to meet every individual’s needs. How can a teacher craft a lesson that caters for the developmental and social needs of all young people in school-based physical education? Rather than incriminate teachers for failing to meet the needs of all students, I suggest that the school environment and the specific institutional practices of physical education sometimes work against achieving progress and achievement for some students.
Fitzpatrick and Watkinson’s (2003) point to the perils of the physical education instructional environment when reporting on their research with young disabled students in Physical Education. As they state, “less than optimal teaching practices were somehow implicated in their [the students] experience of physical awkwardness” (p. 293). The experiences of those students in Fitzpatrick and Watkinson’s (2003) study were similar to those felt by Tom in his hurdling. As recounted in the previous chapter, Tom’s perception was that his teacher’s response to his failure to leap the hurdle rendered him less than able in the eyes of his classmates.

Green’s (2000) research suggests that teachers were primarily focused on students experiencing enjoyment during their physical education classes – a finding that dramatically contrasts with notions that schooling should be predominantly focused on learning. For Tom, learning skills that he perceives are needed to be involved in a game rather than enjoyment per se, seems to be a priority. He has a clear understanding that it is motor skills being transferred into a game situation, in his case at lunchtime with others his age, that will make the difference to his schooling experience. He anticipates he will experience enjoyment through playing in the game of basketball competently. Interestingly, Tom is playing a sport privileging “fundamental motor skills” that within physical education have historically been presented as essential and foundational for future sport and leisure activities for children (Burrows, 2004; Sanders & Kidman, 1998; Wright, 1997).

It is also possible that in contrast to Tom placing the blame at the feet of his physical education teachers for his lack of skill development, that it is in fact Tom who has stepped back from further instruction and assistance during classes. Fitzpatrick and Watkinson’s (2003) research with children with DCD reported that “participants failed more than they succeeded, and when unsuccessful, they did not actively seek instructional assistance. In fact they actively avoided help” (p. 293). Was this what Tom found himself having to do at times to protect his sense of self?
“That was the key of the whole program, patience”. Tom’s coaches were utterly patient with him. They formed relationships. He felt valued and nurtured. Tom then felt able to take risks. Tom did not have to rush. In this “other” environment at lunchtime, Tom is able to learn at his own pace. He feels comfortable.

Tom’s final comment is significant. “I wasn’t put on the spot at all to do anything”. If we look to research in and around the act of physical education we see that school-based physical education is a place where all are on show, or as Tom suggests, “on the spot”! Falling and failing is what Tom fears and this is precisely what Fitzpatrick and Watkinson (2003) refer to when narrating the experiences of those in a similar position to Tom. As one of their participants, Fran, states:

I just didn’t want to have that spotlight on me . . . . I didn’t want to bat . . . . I always got out . . . . I felt the awkwardness came out when . . . people were watching me and that they would think that I was doing it really poorly and in a funny way. (Fitzpatrick & Watkinson, 2003, p. 288)

Here again this reference to being put “on the spot” or, as described above, “that spotlight” is evident. Tom, no doubt drawing on his earlier experiences, feared what would happen if he once again took the risk, performed and failed as he did at the hurdles. This time he is going to be well prepared.

Relationships

Young males find sport an attractive context with which to establish a kind of closeness with others.

(Messner, 1990, p. 431)

I’ve gotten to know the guys that coach me a whole lot better, like Sian. Sian, you know, tells people what the situation is and, you know, makes sure that I keep involved in the game and he passes to me and I’ll pass to him. And he’s always telling people well, you
know, to make sure that I’m there and that I’m involved but he makes it really lighthearted and easy for me. (Tom)

Tom forms close relationships with some of his peers, in particular a student named Sian. This time, engaging in sport does become a catalyst for the forming of friendships rather than a process producing feelings of inadequacy and incapacity. Tom wanted the opportunity to meet other people because he sensed that his peers made friends with those that they played sport with. Certainly it seems to be the case here that friendships developed between Tom and his peers over this time being coached. The distinction here is that Tom was immersed in an environment where he felt valued. He was able to participate with other boys and Sian made sure that he was included rather than excluded. Messner (1990) discusses the phenomenon of boys who need and crave that which is “the most problematic for them: connection and unity with other people” (p. 430). Tom, in a sense, can be regarded as one of these kinds of boys – the kind who recognises that through participation in a particular game, belonging is possible.

As a teacher, I found that I formed close relationships with the students I coached in netball. As Fitzgerald (2005) suggests, many students formulate opinions about their physical education teachers based on their sporting specialisation. As one of her participants put it, “Mr Evans, he’s into football and that’s what he does all the time. He’s in charge of the team, and the coaching and sorting the team out” (p. 315). This was just one of a number of quotes exemplifying what students notice and understand about what their teachers value. My relationships would have been visible and observed by all students at the secondary schools I taught at. I would have been “Mrs Morrison, she’s into netball and that’s what she does all the time”.

**The Photo**

Wright, Macdonald & Wynn (2001-2003) pose the question: “How do young people from different cultural and social locations shape their identities and social relations in the context of the cultural and institutional discourses around physical activity, bodies and health which
currently have prominence in Australia society and in school physical and health education programs?” (cited in Macdonald, et al., 2002, p. 144). This question has relevance when considering Tom’s testimony as evidenced below:

*I have a lot of fun playing basketball. I mean we still do skills but it’s only about twenty minutes and then we have a game and I, you know, I can get shots in and run around and pass the ball to people. There was this really sort of big athletic guy once when we were playing a game and he was all like: Wow look at me, look at how cool I can be. And I was like: Ooooh yeah you’re as big as a hot xxx. And so I guarded him and I was all over him when he got the ball and, you know, tried to take it off him. And I got it off him once and I ran up the court. And, you know, it was just, you know, a whole bunch of people having fun and enjoying a game. I guess I’ve learned to be well a little competitive now but I have fun doing it and I enjoy it. It’s great. (Tom)*

Tom’s Occupational Therapist advertised for volunteers in the school newsletter who were prepared to coach Tom at lunchtime. She did this because Tom had aspirations to play a series of games. When the call went out for volunteers to coach Tom in basketball, a group of Year 13 students put their hand up, and although Tom made no reference to their ethnic backgrounds, the photo of those involved in coaching Tom captured an interesting snap shot of students from specific ethnic backgrounds. Included in the photo were both female and male students, most of whom appear to be of Asian heritage. Had these students also experienced forms of marginalisation? Perhaps not in a sporting sense but within their school/life experience? Is this why they volunteered to support Tom because they understood what it might be like to be “othered”, marginalised, regarded as “less” in a context privileging particular sporting and cultural values?

**Faith**

The organizational patterns of schools and education systems may also have unintended educational consequences.

(Connell, 2008, p. 138)
I don’t complain about life nor feel sorry for myself it’s just that the people who were meant to teach me all those sporty and athletic skills had no faith in me so my faith in myself was rendered useless. (Tom)

Tom believed he was going to be taught sporting and athletic skills in Physical Education yet is this all he thought Physical Education was about? Was it sporting and athletic skills that he needed for his life’s journey? Schools are busy places. There is a lot of movement in schools. The bell rings. One moves. The bell rings. One moves again. The bell rings. Time to get changed for physical education. The teacher yells out to hurry. Boys swing their bags. Change. Rush. Race. Time to perform. Tom then enters the gymnasium

It has long been recognised that readiness for performance in physical education expresses clear messages associated with the powerful regimes of routines and rituals (Foucault 1991; Markula & Pringle 2006) The physical education uniform. The progression of skill building. What is played. What is not. These routines and rituals predominantly require one to conform to particular rules. Some of these rules relate to how one uses and who is entitled to use space in a physical education class.

As Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) suggest, a metaphor for space in the physical education program is the gymnasium. This is the space we lay claim to and regard as our “classroom”. For the participants of Goodwin and Watkinson’s (2000) study, the gymnasium afforded heightened awareness of the students’ bodies:

Due to its stark openness, the gymnasium exposes its inhabitants to the full view of others. For the participants of this study, being observed or ‘stared at’ reminded them that their bodies were different from their own classmates. This reminder contributed to feelings of self-consciousness and transpired into feelings of ambivalence about physical education in some circumstances. (p. 156)
Gore’s (1995) research is instructive in informing our understanding of how social practices, such as those articulated above, work to position those who enter sites such as the gymnasium. Gore describes technologies of power that work to produce “normalizing,” “regulating,” classifying,” and “surveillance” effects (as cited in Macdonald, et al., 2002, p. 144). If we focus on the ways young people are impelled to perform in certain ways, as I have referred to previously in chapter 4, and what particular movements are privileged in physical education we can see that for many of students, the gymnasium, court or field is a place where they and we are on show. As Foucault (1991) would suggest, the body is a disciplined show piece. There is no hiding behind a maths book for Tom.

As I ruminate on my time as a Physical Education secondary school teacher during the 1990s, as Kirk (2002) has documented, sport-based physical education programmes dominated the subject. I valued particular motor skills and the students who were able to highlight their ability to move in those specific ways became part of that value system. The sports I coached and had played when I was younger were traditional good-old-Kiwi sports. Netball. Athletics. Tennis. Interestingly, these were all sports that emphasised ball skills. The ease with which I would positively regard these qualities in the students I taught, on reflection, was grounded in a shared capacity to move in certain ways.

As Curtner-Smith (1999) suggests, most physical education teachers are attracted to the profession because they love sport. Furthermore, if they participated at a high level in a “traditional” type of sports they are more likely to be “extremely conservative in (their) our orientation towards physical education” (p. 87). Consequently we therefore are more likely to see in schools these traditional types of sports and games as opposed to “all those sorts of sports” that Tom referred to earlier in chapter 4, and engaged him in a meaningful way.
The new curriculum has encouraged critical thinking and, in fact, academics have for some time been asking teachers in physical education to critically approach their choice of “what is on offer” for our young people in school based physical education.

Kirk (1997):

…challenges the dominance of team sports sport in physical education and argues for radical changes to ways of thinking about the organisation of physical education, the kinds of physical activities that count and forms of pedagogy employed. He goes onto argue that together with new ways of engaging students in physical activity, physical education should also assist students in becoming critical of the practices associated with popular physical culture. (Kirk 1997 cited in Wright, 2004a, pp. 8-9)

Tom is emotional when he makes the comment that he does not feel sorry for himself and expresses the expectation that he had when he walked through the school gates. What had he expected? Was his primary schooling a different experience than his secondary schooling? Schools have clear expectations which is evident in their school charters and includes their strategic plan, goals and targets for student outcomes. The health and physical education learning area as part of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) has its own expectations for students. What did Tom finally discover and what did he learn that he can transfer to other parts of his life?

Discovery

As they develop resilience and a sense of personal and social responsibility, they are increasingly able to take responsibility for themselves and contribute to the well-being of those around them, of their communities, of their environments (including natural environments), and of the wider society. This learning area makes a significant contribution to the well-being of students beyond the classroom, particularly when it is supported by school policies and procedures and by the actions of all people in the school community. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 70)
The outcome of all this is that I’ve now discovered I can use the approach that we took for me to learn basketball to learn all sorts of skills. I have a friend whose name’s David who does wu shu. Wu shu is a martial art which involves, you know, a lot of kicking, chopping – well I’m sure about the chopping – but it involves a lot of kicking and jumping and flying everywhere. But using the approach that we used for basketball Dave’s going to teach me the basics of wu shu so that we can spar together. (Tom)

What did Tom gain from this experience? He learnt about the transfer of skills. He is going to use this approach that they used for basketball and “Dave’s going to teach me the basics of wu shu so that we can spar together”. Not only did he regard the process for developing his skills as useful for basketball but he saw that he could use these basketball skills in other situations. As is signalled above in the excerpt from the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) as to the justification for studying in the health and physical education learning area, it is avowedly something that can/should be transferred to life outside the classroom, something that can assist in development of a sense of personal well-being and facilitate a sense of belonging and contributing to a community and/or society. In Tom’s narrative, we can glean a sense that he has fostered a resilience and sense of responsibility.

Tom felt his contribution to the game was respected. The game requires a winning team. A team player who can put points on the scoreboard. Tom is thrilled. He gets “so many baskets”. Sian hugs him. “Tom” loved the look on his face”. This is what he treasures. He values the friendships, the opportunity to play and be part of the team. He values that this “moment” has enabled him to see a way forward in a situation he may otherwise have avoided. This is what he has yearned to feel. Tom – just as good as the person beside him on the court.
Just as Good

Although the ability to successfully take part in physical activities is determined by many factors . . . schools (albeit often unwittingly) discriminate against many young people on the grounds of their bodily performances rather than taking into account the individual’s willingness to take part. (Wellard, 2006, p. 117)

I’m now just as good as the next person who can play basketball. This became apparent to me when I got so many baskets in that Sian decided he’d give me a hug, and he did. He was so proud of me. I loved the look on his face. Now I can play basketball just as good as the next person. I’m still a little hesitant but you know I like to get in there and dominate the really showy player who thinks he’s, you know, quite cool and sort of show people that I’m good, look at me, I can do this too, even to the really aggressive players kind of thing. Yeah. (Tom)

Of all Tom’s comments the above one touches me in a particular way. It evokes a sense of how he felt he had failed to measure up previously, of how he regarded himself as a less of a person – as “not good” prior to securing the baskets. As I have endeavoured to describe in prior chapters, Tom struggled with his sense of belonging as a male and not just on the sporting physical education landscape – but also in relation to how he valued himself as a person and measured himself against others. His experience is echoed in the research of Fitzgerald (2005) who found that students often compared themselves with other peers. She draws on the testimony of one of her participants – James – who declares “they don’t pass to me” and “I haven’t got a chance” (p. 50).

Tom, however, has taken a chance and got out there. He has gained confidence – he has faith in “himself”. And he is taking it down the road;

Also I’ve got a friend who lives down the road from me, he’s called Dave, and I can walk down to his house now and say: hey Dave do you want to shoot some hoops? And he says: yeah sure. And you know we play a game and he just has to dumb it down me for me and you know we just have fun. It’s great. (Tom)
Conclusion

In physical education and sport understandings of young people’s disabled experiences have typically been expressed through insights from ‘others’ rather than young people themselves.

(Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 54)

Leo

I began this thesis by explaining how, as a mother, I had observed my son Leo as he grappled with co-ordination difficulties. He was a young boy chomping at the bit to get to secondary school, excited about what he might encounter in physical education. His first day of physical education was a beep test where students run up and down to the sound of a beep … beep; the slowest being eliminated first and the fastest earning “beep test” accolades. Of course, Leo did not do well. His first day of secondary school physical education had privileged a particular notion of ability. It was about how to run fast and long and he had not measured up. My preface pointed to the perils of narrow versions of valued performance in school-based physical education. Leo forced me to re-examine the educational framework I work within. And, Tom has forced me to do so again and again.

As Fitzgerald (2005) suggests above, I myself am positioned as one of the “others” and I am obviously not a young disabled person sharing my particular experiences. Throughout this thesis, it is Tom who has so articulately offered his. In keeping with a poststructuralist framework, Davies (2000) refers to agency as “the discursive constitution of a particular individual as having presence (rather than absence), as having access to a subject position in which they have the right to speak and be heard” (p. 66). Tom takes up this right to be heard.

Tom, in chapter four, reflected on specific experiences at secondary school and pointed to the ways discourses of gender, ability performativity and developmental norms contoured his experiences. Yet, discourse of course was not a concept Tom himself used. Rather, the poststructuralist resources I have drawn on throughout (and explained in the earlier chapters)
have helped/supported me in explaining and interpreting Tom’s experiences. Tom offered insight in and around these discourses and I offered a commentary to read between the multiple lines. In chapter five, Tom’s desire and capacity to play could be conceived of as illustrative of his agency. He recognises he is less ‘able’ than others in sporting pursuits, and that some may not regard him as capable, yet he finds a way to play nevertheless. Tom’s testimony contradicts research that suggests that young disabled people are less likely to be able or willing to challenge normative notions, or negotiate their way in regular schools (Davis & Watson, 2001; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Tom negotiates an acceptable path for himself and cleverly secures a place as part of a team. Tom is astute enough to recognize that playing sport is crucial cultural capital and is able to insert himself into the dominant ways of thinking. His capacity to do this enables Tom to negotiate a way forward for himself. In a sense, here we have Tom “passing” as an able bodied boy (Hillyer, 1993; Stone, 1995). Alternatively, his attempts to play could be read as an unfortunate “trade off” whereby he sacrifices what he “likes” to do to “buy in” to normative notions of a “proper” boy at play. The point here is that Tom’s desire to play can be read in multiple ways.

In the following section I suggest that Tom “gets it now” but in fact such a claim perhaps says more about what I now understand about Tom’s experience than anything else. In what follows, I endeavor to represent what Tom “gets” but, in fact, it is what we can “take out” that is most important.

Van Hove, et al, (2008) suggest that a Foucauldian framework is an excellent mechanism for understanding the way in which a person’s identity is construed. As others have regularly pointed out, how we conceive of ability and what kinds of abilities are foregrounded in sport and physical education make a difference to who is in and who is out (Burrows, 1997; Fitzgerald, 2005; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Kirk, 2002; Macdonald, et al., 2002). Tom wants to be “in” and he has seen basketball as an inroad into “the establishment”.

68
Tom Gets it Now

Van Hove, et al. (2008) suggest that identity is:

…construed in two ways. On the one hand we become known to others through a variety of external disciplines and discourses (many of them institutionally embodied). On the other hand, we make ourselves known through self knowledge and by speaking about ourselves. (p. 134)

Both modes of coming to know oneself are evident in Tom’s testimony below.

All right I get it now, the competitiveness I mean, you see when you play with girls the girls are all passive you know: dribble, dribble, pass, pass, pass here, pass there, you know, we can have a fun and enjoyable game without having to be aggressive. So that’s cool. But with the boys it’s more along the lines of: hey pass to me, oi get that ball or no foul, hey that was my ball, no it wasn’t it was mine, oi no, stop it, tackle, bang oooh crud. You know again the whole big male aggressiveness gene thing. But I get that now, you need that. It’s like acting cos you essentially take on a role, when you play with guys you’re the big male aggressor, which is cool because you switch that on for when you’re playing basketball, which is fine, and then you switch it off again (Tom)

In order to construct a respectful sense of self, Tom in fact presents himself (and others) as an “actor”. Tom is able to present to his audience an understanding of the complex social processes he is engaged in. Through commenting on his own experiences he negotiates a way forward for himself, and in this way resists orthodox discourses of masculinity yet understands their existence and their powerful effects within his culture. Discourses of masculinity are so prevalent that Tom still desires to be part of what it means to be male by playing sport. In so doing, he is also able to stand alongside this hegemonic discursive regime and offer alternatives. He is aware of the performative aspects of gender and signals this in his narrative. It is somewhat unusual for a man so young to be able to challenge and articulate these normative performativities. Perhaps it is Tom’s capacity to express himself and act
discovered in these latter years of schooling) that enables him to envision alternatives and to engage, albeit strategically, with these normative notions of masculinity.

Tom presents an articulate and compelling aural presentation. He states that male aggression is entirely rational – that you “switch that on” and “switch it off again”. He also positions females as being “less competitive” than males. He presents girls as passive in sport, reiterating in his commentary the dominant discourses in and around what it means to “act” like a boy and what it means to act like a girl. He wants to play basketball because he will be seen as “athletic” and therefore “the girls will see me as hot”. In chapter four we read that Tom views himself as “less competitive” and not into the “whole big male aggressiveness gene thing”. In some sense, he could be regarded as different from ‘other’ males. He states that males have a “dominating gene, an aggressive gene”, and they take on a role of being masculine. Tom, however, wants to make friends through sport and to have the opportunity to meet people. Endeavouring to join the masculine sporting fray is one route in for Tom. He celebrates this sense of belonging that research has shown is often absent for those with DCD (Smyth & Anderson, 2000).

**Bodies**

This research is set in a context where increasingly young people and their bodies are constructed in relation to institutional and cultural discourses emphasising bodily perfection (Burrows & Wright, 2004). The raft of government health and physical education initiatives pertaining to the body that I referred to in chapters three and four have been implemented in sites such as schools as a means of monitoring and governing bodies. These initiatives may be reinforcing the idea that young people’s bodies can become markers of achievement and identity in New Zealand culture. Alongside an increasing foci in the media on a so called “obesity epidemic” (Gard & Wright, 2005), we are now presented with new versions of what comprises normal and what does not. Further, the production of health initiatives can work to position some bodies (slim ones) as normal and others as not. Alongside this we have these
normative standards of performance in physical education (Evans & Davies, 2002; Rich, et al., 2004). In light of this, we need to consider how children and young people are positioned within these narrow imperatives, and to what extent performative expectations impact on their opportunities to learn and secure a sense of themselves as “viable” children and young people.

I concur with Kirk (2002) who suggests that we need to “assist young people to deconstruct sometimes harmful cultural myths about body shape, size and competence and to help them better understand their own physical selves” (p. 89). Classroom intervention programs that challenge an adolescence boy’s body image of how the male ideal body is represented are needed. By including programmes with this kind of emphasis, Sparkes (2004) claims we can then encourage young people to question the processes that “lead some narratives within PE to be privileged, foregrounded, and institutionalised (e.g. the myth of the perfect and perfectible, performing, dominating and disciplined body) while others (e.g. the impaired or disabled body) are suppressed, devalued, marginalised, abnormalised, or silenced” (p. 169). In fact it is Tom who is leading the charge here.

**People and Spaces**

As boys with disabilities have illustrated, a school is a potentially disabling site due to its lack of flexibility in accommodating a diverse range of student attributes”

(Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 177)

*it’s just that the people who were meant to teach . . . had no faith in me so my faith in myself was rendered useless (Tom)*

Tom somehow feels that his teachers had no faith in him. A “presumption of competence” dictates that we have a starting belief that all young people are competent but just in differing ways (Biklen & Burke, 2006). We, as teachers, need to provide opportunities for all children and young people to reveal them as being able to learn progress and achieve. Tom suggests we need to have faith.
Rutherford (2011), in her research with teacher aides who worked intensely alongside young disabled students and their teachers (in a New Zealand context), found that relationships were at the centre of developing and enabling disabled young people to have a sense of value. The teacher aides themselves were driven beyond what was expected and attempted to connect their students with their “peers and teachers, to enhance their social and academic presence, participation, and achievement in school life” (p. 113). They were well aware that these meaningful connections were the centre of enabling their students to develop and learn. In such a scenario, the vision for our young people as nurtured through effective teachers, who foster positive relationships within environments that are caring, signalled in our national curriculum documents, is finally realised. These kinds of teachers have a vision for all students to achieve personal excellence regardless of their individual circumstances (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) point out that, in particular, with the teaching of physical education, “A tactful teacher knows when to intervene, when to hold back, when to redirect, and when to use a situation to educate” (p. 155). Tom’s experience with one of his physical education teachers certainly did not reflect this “tact”, yet with his mates on a basketball court, these kinds of teaching attributes were displayed in the behaviour and dispositions of his peers.

As signalled above, relationships are crucial to inclusive learning experiences, yet Tom’s testimony would suggest that relationships alone are not necessarily enough to guarantee an inclusive physical education experience. Physical education classrooms (gymnasiums, fields) are designed to afford teachers a way of controlling and surveilling groups of children in large open spaces. As Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) argue, these are “places that do not afford concealment, but rather exposure” (p. 146). For Tom and others with impairments, the material space of physical education environments often highlights bodies that are unable to perform in expected ways, affording opportunities for everyone to view one’s failings (as
Tom’s experience with the hurdles exemplifies). In the case of a basketball game with his peers, however, Tom felt the support and encouragement of Sian – something that to some extent countered the fear associated with being on display, with being seen to fail. On the basketball court, where warm and encouraging relationships were fostered he was not “on the spot” with Sian. He did not feel he would fall and fail. Same places, different people, different way of doing.

**Enjoyment**

*I mean I had fun dancing and playing volleyball and doing all those sorts of sports.*

*(Tom)*

Research on young people’s engagement in physical education and sport suggests that enjoyment is a powerful motivation for participation (Green, 2000; Volkerling, 2000). Tom’s story conveys a powerful sense of what it feels like to participate in activities he does not enjoy, raising questions about whose needs/interests/motivations underpin the curriculum in school-based physical education. Cairney et al, (2007) claimed their study to be the first and only to examine factors that mediate the relationship between DCD and a lack of children’s perceived enjoyment of PE classes. Their findings suggest that lack of enjoyment was largely due to children’s poor perceptions of their ability in physical activity. Cairney et al (2007) also suggest that it is not only the early identification of children with DCD which could help teachers in their awareness of the particular needs of children in their classes, but that teaching training and the structure of physical education classes need to “focus on developing an enjoyment of physical activity for all children, including those with DCD” (p. 91) In a further review of literature Villa and Thousand (1996) found that:

Children with special educational needs enjoy PE when fully included; however, participation is restricted by discrimination, limited teacher training and material barriers to inclusion. Consequently, teacher training in special educational needs and the
education of nondisabled children about special educational needs requires extensive consideration. (p. 168)

Tom’s testimony would suggest that physical educators could usefully not only question the nature of physical education practices that are common in our schools, but also focus on understanding and “knowing” their students in ways that go beyond appraising their capacity to perform particular physical activities. As Block (1992) would attest, expanding curriculum offerings and presenting learning opportunities in multiple ways is good practice for all children, not simply those labeled “disabled”. As MacArthur and Kelly (2004) claim:

Within New Zealand, there is a need for further work to ensure that the national curriculum itself is inclusive. However, at individual school levels, low teacher expectations for students with disabilities remains an issue of concern and is highlighted as a major barrier to learning with students with disabilities. (p. 47)

What is on offer

As a Physical Education secondary school teacher during the 1990s, with sport-based and physical education programmes dominating the subject (as I have previously documented in chapter three), I believed that all students would gain from involvement in movement, including sport. My desire for students to be involved in sport, stemmed from my own experiences in a culturally constructed physical world that I believed was rich and rewarding for all. As Green (2000) suggests “The way teachers [think] about PE had been shaped by their past experiences and had been bound up in with the job itself” (p. 203)

Tom’s testimony highlights the negative process of gendering that can occur through the institution of sport. He is positioned and told that he is not “good at sport” and “he can’t play”. This might be his peers speaking out loud but what can we as teachers offer a young man who is positioned in this way? One potential solution is to question the dominance of “fundamental motor skills” in many physical education classes. So-called “fundamental”
motor skills, predominantly linked to competitive sports played with small or large balls, were challenging for Tom with his coordination difficulties. A programme privileging these kinds of activities afforded Tom less opportunities to learn and to develop a sense of himself as a physically capable young man. The question that arises is, what might a school-based physical education program without “balls” look and feel like?

In the world of teaching, where teachers know that varied opportunities offer all students ways of developing physical skills, what ultimately drives what is on offer in school based physical education? With a compulsory school curriculum and limited time for teacher education programmes to focus on the pedagogical issues, even offering a breadth of physical activities such as tai chi, yoga, surfing, kayaking that were offered in the past are now difficult to achieve. Swimming has been highlighted as a context that young disabled people can work in at their own level, affording them opportunities to experience their bodies in different ways (Blinde & McClung, 1997). However, in our teacher education programme here at the University of Otago College of Education, opportunities to train student teachers in how to teach children and young people to swim were cut from the course curriculum from 2009. While on the one hand institutional barriers (e.g. cost-saving; government cuts to education; reduced pre-service time allocations) can understandably constrain curriculum offerings, I would counter that, even in fiscally tight times, there are opportunities to re-think current curricula. The old adage “where there is a will there is a way” has currency here.

Burrows (2004) found that activities, such as “badminton, table tennis, volleyball, martial arts, tai chi and yoga are often marginalized or missing altogether in the subject matter of school-based physical education classes” (p. 109), and yet “all those sorts of sports” perhaps would have engaged Tom in a more meaningful way and allowed him to progress and achieve at his own level. Tom required time and patience. The bell rung and Tom had to move along swiftly, before he had made much progress. It was “skill, skill, skill” and then “he
was off”, but not quite at the same time as the others around him. Bells did not quite work for Tom at school.

National Standards for literacy and numeracy have recently been introduced into New Zealand primary schools by the Ministry of Education. Under this regime, from 2011 all schools are required to report to the Ministry and their community on the progress of their students in reading, writing and mathematics. These “standards”, once again, privilege comparisons with other children and other schools, constructing norms and using language that work to label those who do not measure up as failures. While anecdotally some educators are suggesting such standards may be usefully deployed in physical education contexts as well, given the potentially debilitating effects for students like Tom, it is hoped this idea remains on the shelf.

**The Reflective Educator**

One of the key professional skills that teachers could usefully draw on when teaching students like Tom and Leo is that of being able to identify when and how a particular discourse may be present in their own teaching practices. I have reflected on how I have been positioned by the assortment of discourses that infuse the physical education sporty space. What did I value in terms of movement skills as Mrs Morrison? Certainly now working in a teacher education programme, I challenge my prior assumptions and seek to offer varied ways of teaching physical education that engage our students. I challenge pre-service teachers to look beyond what experiences they have previously had at school and to drop their balls! However, like Tom, – we have limited time.

Time to critically reflect is imperative, yet as signaled in chapter four, the busy lives of teachers inevitably mean that this is compromised (Green, 2000; Petrie, 2009, 2010). If we are to understand and reflect on how we position ourselves, or how we are positioned by others, and that this is a result of the interplay of multiple discourses that shape personal identity and
frame our understanding of experiences past and present, we must reflect. How Tom can come to understand his physicality and sense of self in a culture where physical competence is highly valued is a challenge. Ross’s (2004) reflections on his own children’s experiences in school based physical education illustrate the compelling insights time to reflect can yield:

I am sure if my children had been given the opportunities in school physical education to play creatively, to learn useful stuff about their own movement, to experience and enjoy diverse traditional street games, to help others less physically competent while being assisted and not belittled by the physically competent, and to invent games and dance, they wouldn’t have been bored by twelve minute runs, compulsory participation in running races and endless games of touch or basketball. They may have been able to make sense of press ups, avoided put downs and had fun playing interesting games. (p. 25)

**Listening to Tom**

Jerlinder, Danermark, and Gill (2009) suggest that “When people are marginalized and misrecognised in society, for example through disability, and seek to redress potential societal maltreatment or discrimination they have to decide whether to ignore or emphasize their differences” (p. 331). Tom’s desire to share with others what being a boy with DCD has meant for him reinforces the fact that schooling still produces vastly unequal outcomes for different groups of students. I suggest that the school environment and the specific institutional practices of physical education sometimes work against achieving progress and achievement for all students. However, research does show that improved outcomes for students are associated with teachers thinking differently about the students that they teach (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). As Tom Shakespeare (2011) highlighted in a recent keynote there is a need for disabled people to actively contribute to policy formation. More importantly he stressed the need for disabled role models in the workplace and social life more broadly. Listening to the two “Toms” is part of that process of thinking differently.
I have examined discourses (institutional and cultural) that have contoured the ways in which it is possible for Tom to understand himself. This research has addressed how Tom’s experiences, centred on physical education and sport, have been influenced by pedagogical discourses in and around culture, disabilities, physical education, sport and masculinity. My analysis would suggest that there will be on-going challenges for Tom to engage with (whether or not his impairment is considered) while gendered discourses prescribe a narrow version of masculinity for New Zealand young men. In so saying, Tom’s capacity to negotiate the potentially contradictory messages contained at school is impressive, and, as history shows us, “cultural constructions of masculinity change over time” (Connell, 2008, p. 134). Tom’s vantage point enables us to question and perhaps offer alternative ways of knowing ourselves and others, just as Tom in some ways must do in order to retain a sense of himself as a valued person.

Plummer (1995) suggests that there are several criteria that mark the successful telling of a story. Thomson, et al., (2002) state, “while these criteria include the ability of the individual to imagine and articulate a moment, they also include the presence of an audience prepared to hear what is being told” (p. 339). Importantly, this audience needs to scrutinize every one of their own practices for their intent, their underpinning assumptions and for the potential effects they yield for those to whom the practices are applied.

Tom had an audience.

Catherine
Notes

1 Teachers use running records to get reliable information about their students' reading skills and fluency. A student reads aloud while the teacher records exactly what the student reads or does. After completing the record the teacher scores it. Through observation, scoring, and interpretation, the teacher gains an insight into a student's reading behaviour.

2 This widely used test has been revised and standardised for use in New Zealand. It is an individually administered test, which provides a measure of an aspect of a child's word reading skills, i.e. word recognition. The Test Card consists of 110 words printed in decreasing size of type and graded in approximate order of difficulty. Used in conjunction with other information, the Burt Word Reading Test should allow teachers to form a broad estimate of a child's reading achievement to aid decisions about appropriate teaching and reading materials, instructional groupings, etc. In addition, the Burt Word Reading Test should prove useful as an indicator of possible wider reading problems.

3 This multistage fitness test is a commonly used maximal running aerobic fitness test. It is also known as the 20 meter shuttle run test, beep or bleep test among others. The test involves running continuously between two points that are 20 m apart. These runs are synchronized with a pre-recorded audio tape or CD, which plays beeps at set intervals. As the test proceeds, the interval between each successive beep reduces, forcing the athlete to increase velocity over the course of the test, until it is impossible to keep in sync with the recording. The recording is typically structured into 23 'levels', each of which lasts around 63 seconds (the shortest level is level 1, lasting 59.29 seconds, the longest is level 8, lasting 66 seconds). Usually, the interval of beeps is calculated as requiring a speed at the start of 8.5 km/h, increasing by 0.5 km/h with each level. The progression from one level to the next is signaled by 3 rapid beeps. The highest level attained before failing to keep up is recorded as the score for that test.
References

*Education and society in Aotearoa New Zealand.* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press


benefits claimed for physical education and school sport: An academic review. 

research. In C. Barnes & G. Mercer (Eds.), *Doing disability research.* Leeds: The 
Disability Press.


*Equality, education and physical education* (pp. 43-54). London: Falmer.

39*(2), 166-175. doi: 10.1080/10665680500540376

disabilities: Experiences in the physical education classroom. *Journal of Physical 
Education Recreation and Dance, 69*(6), 64-68.

Blinde, E., & McClung, L. (1997). Enhancing the physical social self through recreational 
activity: Accounts of individuals with physical disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity 

Block, M. (1992). What is appropriate physical education for students with profound 


Rich, E., Holroyd, R., & Evans, J. (2004). 'Hungry to be noticed': Young women, anorexia and schooling. In J. Evans, B. Davies & J. Wright (Eds.), *Body knowledge and*
control: Studies in the sociology of physical education and health (pp. 173-190).

London: Routledge.


