“It Didn’t Exactly Make Me Feel Grand”: Students with Physical Disabilities’ Experiences of Secondary School Physical Education

Kate Holland

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ABSTRACT

Physical Education has long been recognised as the domain of the physically ‘able’ (Barton 1993, 2009). As a result, many students with physical disabilities who do not display the socially constructed abilities, movements or body types privileged in Physical Education remain sidelined or absent from the subject (Barton, 1993, 2009; Evans, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005). In this thesis I explore the Physical Education experiences of those perceived as physically ‘disabled’. The display, surveillance and use of one’s body is foregrounded in Physical Education more than in any other school subject (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012), yet the experiences of students with different bodies have rarely been explored.

Drawing on theoretical resources found in the disciplines of Childhood Studies, Disability Studies, the Sociology of the Body, Physical Education and Teaching and Learning, I examine six students with physical disabilities’ experiences of secondary school Physical Education in New Zealand. I examine what kinds of movements, bodies and abilities are privileged in the students’ experiences’ of Physical Education and ask questions about why and how this is the case. Further I investigate what school-based Physical Education does to, and for, young people with physical disabilities, drawing on the young people’s testimonies to understand how the subject and its imperatives shape their subjectivities.

While environmental, social, cultural, pedagogical and political interests clearly constrain the young people’s capacity to engage with Physical Education, their narratives point to the ways young people can, and do, exercise agency, challenge orthodoxies and resist the normative expectations of Physical Education as it is currently configured in some New Zealand schools. The young people in this study
challenge how we come to know disabled, able and normal bodies and raise questions about whose needs, interests and capacities are privileged in Physical Education.
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Most importantly, thank you Shane, Holly, Kelly, Cody, Connor, Angela and your families for your wonderful enthusiasm, interest and participation in this research. I truly hope this thesis does you justice. You are inspirational and powerful young people. I look forward to seeing your big ideas in action and watching you change the world.
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... i

TABLE OF CONTENTS: ............................................................................................... iv

TABLE OF FIGURES: ..................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 1
  Aim and Scope .................................................................................................................. 3
  The Research Context ...................................................................................................... 4
    Locating the Research in Legislation and Policy .......................................................... 5
    New Zealand’s Education Context and Students with Physical Disabilities ............ 10
    New Zealand Curriculum .............................................................................................. 14
    Physical Education in New Zealand Secondary Schools ........................................... 17
    Summary .......................................................................................................................... 20
  A Note on Language ........................................................................................................ 21
  Thesis Structure ............................................................................................................... 22
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................ 26
  Childhood Studies ........................................................................................................... 27
    The Field of Childhood Studies ...................................................................................... 28
    The Social Construction of Childhood .......................................................................... 30
    Children as Social Actors .............................................................................................. 31
    Children’s Voice in Research ......................................................................................... 33
    Childhood Research from New Zealand ......................................................................... 35
    Insights from Childhood Research ................................................................................ 36
    Summary .......................................................................................................................... 38
  Disability Studies ............................................................................................................ 39
    The Field of Disability Studies ....................................................................................... 39
    Deficit/Medical Model of Disability .............................................................................. 41
    Social Model of Disability ............................................................................................. 43
    Social Relational Model of Disability ........................................................................... 45
    Conceptualising Disability in Secondary School Physical Education ......................... 47
    Summary .......................................................................................................................... 48
  Understanding the Body .................................................................................................. 49
    Naturalised Bodies and Scientific Justification .............................................................. 49
    Socially Constructed Bodies ........................................................................................... 51
    Understanding the Bodies of Students with Physical Disabilities ................................ 53
    Summary .......................................................................................................................... 55
  Physical Education ......................................................................................................... 55
    The Development of Physical Education ....................................................................... 56
    The Social Construction of Ability in Physical Education ............................................ 58
    Students with Disabilities’ Experiences and Physical Education ............................... 61
    Constructing Ability Through Adaptation? ................................................................... 62
    Summary .......................................................................................................................... 64
  Teaching and Learning .................................................................................................... 64
    Teaching and Learning Practices and Pedagogies within New Zealand Schools ........ 65
    Teaching, Learning and Curriculum .............................................................................. 66
    Teaching and Learning within Physical Education ....................................................... 69
    Summary .......................................................................................................................... 71
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 71
TABLE OF FIGURES:

Figure 1: Kelly's drawing of emotion ................................................................. 140

Figure 2: Cody’s story of Physical Education .................................................... 178

Figure 3: Kelly's drawing of healthy and un-healthy people ............................. 199

Figure 4: Kelly's drawing of a blind man .......................................................... 208

Figure 5: Kelly's drawing of research production .......................................... 262

Figure 6: Email from Cody's teacher aide ...................................................... 263
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

People don’t see what we have to offer, and what we can do in Physical Education. People need to stop looking at us and being like, oh, you have a walking frame or you have a granny style wheelchair, but look at the person. You never say, I’m never going to talk to you because you’ve got blue eyes, so why do it because you’re sitting down, or because you can’t walk? (Holly, 2013)

Holly’s quote exemplifies the insights that students with physical disabilities have to offer Physical Education research. Despite a growing awareness of the value of engaging with children and young people in the research process (Hill, 2006), those with disabilities are often underappreciated and overlooked (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010; Fitzgerald, Jobling & Kirk, 2003; Kelly, 2005; Priestley, 1999; Stalker & Connors, 2003). Traditionally, the voices of parents, educators and medical professionals have replaced those of children and young people. Even with the recent surge in student-centred research in Physical Education, many texts omit the voice of students with physical disabilities, instead privileging other forms of diversity such as class, ethnicity or gender (Barton, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Suomi, Collier & Brown, 2003). In New Zealand, the Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities have received relatively little attention (Morrison, 2009).

Cognisant of the aforementioned gaps, in this thesis I work alongside six students with physical disabilities (aged 12 to 18) to explore their experiences of Physical Education. In doing so, I share what they feel is important for people to know about Physical Education and the place of students with physical disabilities

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1 For the purpose of this thesis, Physical Education is defined primarily as a school based subject comprising practical and theoretical lessons about the body, movement, health and well-being (Ministry of Education, 2007). Extra-curricular sport and recreation activities are referred to by some students as forming part of their Physical Education experiences.
within Physical Education. Throughout this thesis I privilege the voices of students with physical disabilities, and enlist their guidance to examine the thesis question: What are the secondary school Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities?

I come to this thesis largely through my own experiences growing up able-bodied in a family affected by Muscular Atrophy. Despite enjoying secondary school Physical Education, this was not something shared by other members of my family. As I journeyed through Physical Education, I became more aware that the practices I found rewarding, such as sport days, fitness testing and public team selection, also worked to exclude and disable those closest to me. For other members of my family, Physical Education was experienced with feelings of difference, objectification and sadness. As a result, I bring to this research an acute awareness of the impact Physical Education can have on an individual’s sense of self-worth, ability and understanding of his/her body. While I do not share my family’s experiences, I recognise the value of listening to people with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education. I feel that engaging with the accounts of such students can challenge all educators to better our practices to include all students in school-based Physical Education and beyond.

In this chapter, I contextualise the research, beginning by addressing the aims and scope of this research project. I outline the key questions that drive this study and point to the importance of attending to ‘the body’ within the students’ narratives. The third section of this chapter outlines the context of the study, beginning with an overview of the legislation relevant to the lives of young people with disabilities, followed by a discussion of the New Zealand education context and the Physical Education terrain in particular. Finally, I discuss the language I
chose to use regarding the students involved in this study and outline the thesis chapters.

**Aim and Scope**

The aim of this research is to examine the secondary school Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities. By foregrounding students’ voices I hope to challenge commonly held adult assumptions, practices and structures within education, and demonstrate how these can limit and confine the ways students understand themselves. In doing so, this research highlights the value of student voice and the unique insights students with disabilities have about Physical Education. This research is underpinned by a commitment to making a difference (Hill, 2006). It is premised on the recognition, best explained by Holly, that:

> The PE world needs a whole lot more broadness. It’s not just about physical activity. The next generation of kids with disabilities deserve to do the crazy stuff in PE and be mainstreamed like all the other crazy 12 to 15 year olds.

I hope the students’ voices woven throughout this thesis inspire the readers to reflect on Holly’s statement and consider what this ‘broadness’ might entail.

As I come from the position that students with physical disabilities should be included in research about them (Clavering & McLaughlin, 2010), this thesis is participatory in nature. Participatory research involves working alongside a community of people to formulate knowledge together (Barton, 1997; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010; Hill, 2006). I locate this thesis in the nexus of Disability Studies, Childhood Studies, the Sociology of the Body, Physical Education and Teaching and Learning scholarship and interweave the students’ experiences with literature from these disciplines - particularly that which engages with children and young
people in research production. Drawing on post-structural theoretical resources, I ask questions about the nature of Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools and examine how this can facilitate or constrain the experiences of students with physical disabilities.

Throughout this thesis, particular attention is given to the way students describe, explain, and experience their bodies. I view bodies as the mediums through which we come to know and experience the world and our place within it (McLaren, 2002; Theberge, 1991). I recognise that the body is the central focus of Physical Education as it is the medium through which the socially constructed notion of ability is understood and reproduced (Evans, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Kirk, 2001, Tinning, 2004). In other words, it is through, and with their bodies that the students experience Physical Education.

In this thesis I explore how the movements, bodies and abilities privileged in Physical Education serve the interests of some, while marginalising and excluding others. Furthermore, what are the consequences for students who are marginalised or excluded from Physical Education? I also examine how these experiences impact on the way students view themselves, their bodies and their sense of ability/worth within Physical Education and throughout their lives. These questions inform the central focus of this thesis, which asks: What are the secondary school Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities?

**The Research Context**

Disabled children and young people worldwide have rights to inclusion and equal treatment enshrined in national legislation and international conventions. Yet they often remain left out – from generic children’s research, from policy-making about children’s services and, in their everyday lives, from inclusion in friendship groups and social and sporting activities. (Stalker, 2012, p. 173)
The experiences of Physical Education that the students share in this thesis are inherently tied to the educational and political contexts within which they occur. As Stalker (2012) explains, despite children and young people’s rights being recognised in legislation and policy, these rights are infrequently enacted in reality. Whether or not students’ rights are realised within the context of Physical Education will no doubt impact on the experiences available to them. Therefore, I now move to contextualise the thesis question alongside national and international legislation on the rights of young people with disabilities, the New Zealand education context and, specifically, Physical Education within New Zealand schools. Such contextualisation permits me to read the students’ experiences alongside the rights, expected outcomes and experiences specified in such documents. It is important to note that in this section I am simply describing the way students’ rights, educational contexts, opportunities and outcomes are documented on paper. I do so prior to critiquing the language used in educational policy and other documentation as I examine how students’ rights are enacted (or not) throughout this thesis.

**Locating the Research in Legislation and Policy**

Every child’s right to an education and to be included in decisions which directly affect them is documented in numerous international conventions, national laws and policies (MacArthur, 2013). Here, I briefly note particular articles, provisions and objectives which deal with students’ (particularly students with disabilities) rights to education and to their voices being heard in matters which concern them. By doing so, the importance of participatory research and inquiry into students’ Physical Education experiences is highlighted.
At an international level, the right for all students to access and be included within education has long since been acknowledged. For example, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that every person has the right to education (United Nations, 1948). In later conventions relating specifically to children and to people with disabilities, this right is reinforced. For example, Article 28 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by New Zealand in 1993, stresses that all students, irrespective of ability, are to be supported to achieve to the best of their ability in their education setting (United Nations, 1989).

Of particular relevance to this thesis is Article 12 of the UNCRC, which is about consulting and respecting the views of children and young people. In this article, adults are encouraged to engage children and young people in decision-making, and to listen to their opinions regarding issues that involve them (United Nations, 1989). As mentioned previously, this thesis recognises the right for students with physical disabilities to have their say. Unfortunately, Quennerstedt (2009) argues that many New Zealand schools fail to respect this right. Instead, students are often excluded from decision-making about them. Further, Article 13 of the UNCRC discusses a child’s right to freedom of expression, and to exercise this right in any manner they choose (United Nations, 1989). Therefore, the way students choose to express their views should not be limited to verbal communication.

Returning to the right to education, Article Eight of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) encourages acceptance and respect of people with disabilities within society and education, while Article 24 states that every person has the right to inclusive education, and
should not be removed on the basis of their disability (United Nations, 2007). Of particular relevance to the study of students’ experiences of Physical Education is Article 30 of the UNCRPD. This states that “governments should do everything they can to make sure disabled children can take part in play, leisure and sporting activities, in and out of school, on an equal basis as other children” (Human Rights Commission, 2012, p. 87).

From these international conventions, it is evident that all students have the right to an inclusive Physical Education. Barriers to achieving this goal are to be removed to ensure their rights are realised and enacted. However, despite young people’s rights being addressed on paper, the ongoing monitoring of these conventions reinforce that realising rights is a continuing battle. For example, the most recent annual report of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism of the UNCRPD suggests that, despite positive steps being taken to enact children and people with disabilities’ rights to education, there is still a long way to go (Human Rights Commission, 2012). This report concludes that barriers remain for students to enact their rights, and that there is insufficient attention and action given to this cause.

On a national level, young people’s right to education is also recognised within specific New Zealand legislation. The 1989 Education Act is pivotal to acknowledging the rights of all children to access education. Under this Act, “People who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education in state schools as people who do not” (New Zealand Government, 1989, section 8.1). The right for all children to attend school is reinforced in more recent New Zealand laws and policy documents. For example, Section 57 of the Human Rights Act states that
every child has the right to education, and that it is unlawful to exclude or remove students from their educational context on the basis of disability (Human Rights Commission, 1993). Also, the New Zealand Disability Strategy states that “all children, youth and adult learners will have equal opportunities to learn and develop in their local, regular educational centres” (Objective 3, Ministry of Health, 2001). In other words, every student is to be recognised, accepted and included within education.

Within educational policy documents, the avowed acceptance of all students within education continues. The New Zealand Curriculum states that practices within all New Zealand schools should be “non-sexist, non-racist, and non-discriminatory; it ensures that students’ identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). Students’ right to an inclusive, equal and fair education is extended in the Special Education 2000 policy, which still informs current practice (Ministry of Education, 2014). This policy aims “to achieve a world class inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities of equal quality to all children and school students” (Ministry of Education, 1996). The inclusion of all students is not merely a passing comment in the Curriculum or special education policy, but an ongoing priority for New Zealand education (Ministry of Education, 2014). The most recent Ministry of Education Statement of Intent (2013) gives priority to the education of students with ‘special educational needs’ and reinforces the aim of a fully inclusive education system.

As these conventions, legislation and policies attest, students with physical disabilities are to be valued, respected and included members of education like all students. Yet, the mere presence of such documents suggests that these rights are at
risk. The need to have their rights explicitly stated indicates that these rights are not automatically realised and that barriers exist that prevent young people with disabilities from enacting their rights (MacArthur, 2013). The UNCRPD Independent Monitoring Mechanism supports this claim. This report states:

In New Zealand the legal right to education for disabled students is not established in a way that consistently guarantees disabled students are able to attend their local state school and receive an education aimed at the full realisation of their abilities and talents. (Human Rights Commission, 2012, p. 64)

Instead of realising these rights, often students with disabilities are denied access to education, denied the opportunity to participate alongside their peers and face lowered expected educational outcomes (Human Rights Commission, 2009; IHC, 2014; Quennerstedt, 2009). These injustices are well documented by a number of complaints to the Human Rights Commission, which notes, “education-related complaints from or on behalf of disabled students continue to be amongst the most frequent groups of complaints to the Human Rights Commission” (Human Rights Commission, 2008, Section 2.7.9). In particular, issues of the availability of educational options for students with disabilities, the accessibility of these options, acceptance of students with disabilities within education and the lack of adaptability of education to accommodate students with disabilities create barriers for these students to enact their rights (Human Rights Commission, 2008, 2009). As a result:

Disabled students continue to be seen as ‘other’, and therefore as problematic for the education system, the school and the individual teacher. Disabled students remain the object of policy rather than the subject of their own education. (Human Rights Commission, 2009, p. 17)

Investigating international conventions such as the UNCRC and UNCRPD, legislation and policy documents highlights the relevance of work with
students with physical disabilities in relation to Physical Education. Conventions, legislation and policies provide a means to compare and examine the experiences of students with disabilities, and provide impetus to the statement that it is not acceptable that students with disabilities can have vastly different educational experiences to their able bodied peers (Human Rights Commission, 2012; IHC, 2014). As it is documented that students with disabilities face barriers in accessing education in general, how do students with physical disabilities go about accessing Physical Education? This is a particularly important question as Physical Education has been viewed as an area reserved for a certain type of student (Evans & Davies, 2004).

In the next section I outline how the New Zealand education context has been critiqued in literature regarding the place of students with disabilities. This literature provides the evidence to support claims that rights enshrined in policies are seldom realised by students with physical disabilities in New Zealand secondary schools, and specifically, Physical Education.

**New Zealand’s Education Context and Students with Physical Disabilities**

In New Zealand’s neo-liberal education context, education is increasingly regarded as a commodity (Pope, 2013). Families are encouraged to choose the best ‘product’ for their child, resulting in a highly competitive marketplace driven by education outcomes that focus specifically on numeracy and literacy (Armstrong, 2003; Ballard, 2013; Gordon & Morton, 2008; Higgins, MacArthur & Morton, 2008; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Millar & Morton, 2007; Morton, Higgins, MacArthur & Phillips, 2013; Pope, 2013; Wills, 2006; Wills & McLean, 2008). A specific focus on measurable educational achievement has also been cited as causing value
to be ascribed, not only to particular schools, but also to particular students (Kearney & Kane, 2006). This is largely dependent on what resources are required for them to achieve educational success and how students are sorted and stratified by their perceived educational potential (Willis & McLean, 2008). For example, Higgins et al. (2008) explain New Zealand children and young people are measured in terms of their potential to produce certain educational outcomes and how much time, funding and support is required to assist children and young people to reach these outcomes. This is particularly evident for the students with physical disabilities who are represented in this thesis.

The students involved in this study receive government support to access and achieve in education settings from the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) (Ministry of Education, 2012). This funding is based on an assessment of their perceived need for educational support, with particular emphasis on what students cannot do, rather than what they could achieve (for more detail see Higgins et al., 2008; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2012; Wills & McLean, 2008). The deficit based process required to apply for this funding has been critiqued as a “demarcation exercise, that is, drawing a line in the sand to mark those with very high needs, those with high needs and those without” (Kearney & Kane, 2006, p. 209). This is said to have the potential to foster “significantly lowered expectations” (Macartney, 2009, p. 74) of students with disabilities than those without. The competitive, market based education context and the pervasive assumptions held by educators that students with physical disabilities are educationally less able than their able bodied peers (Kearney & Kane, 2006; Macartney, 2009), greatly conflicts with the tenor of legislation and policy which recognises every child’s right to education without discrimination.
Despite New Zealand education policy pointing towards inclusive education for all students (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2013), there appears to be conflicting and inconsistent government perspectives regarding the place of students with physical disabilities in New Zealand educational institutions (Higgins et al., 2008). As many scholars have suggested, New Zealand education policy struggles to position itself within a particular commitment to inclusive education. The terms ‘inclusive education’ and ‘special education’ are used interchangeably, perhaps signalling a lack of understanding of the underlying beliefs and values for special and inclusive education (Brown, 1997; Higgins et al., 2006; Higgins et al., 2008; Morton et al., 2013).

As Ainscow (2007), Ballard (2004) and Slee (2001a) agree, inclusion is the recognition and valuing of the diversity of all students, and their rights to education. It is about valuing all students’ “presence, participation and achievement” in the mainstream classroom (MacArthur, 2009, p. 14). Inclusion is also a process of examining and removing barriers - rather than viewing students’ “educational failure” the result of “characteristics of individual children” (Ainscow, 2007, p. 3). Barton (1997) clearly summarises the differences between ‘inclusive’ and ‘special’ education. He explains:

Inclusive education is part of a human rights approach to social relations and conditions... It is thus important to be clear in our understanding that inclusive education is not about ‘special’ teachers meeting the needs of ‘special’ children in ordinary schools... It is not about ‘dumping’ pupils into an unchanged system of provision and practice. Rather it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate all pupils (p. 234).

Therefore, the conflation of such terms within New Zealand educational policy is highly problematic.
Discrepancies between ‘inclusive’ and ‘special’ education thinking are evident in the “Success for All: Every School Every Child” initiative aimed to “demonstrate inclusive practice by 2014” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 1). This goal is reinforced in the 2013 Statement of Intent (Ministry of Education, 2013). Yet the processes of achieving this goal are based on providing more funding and support for ‘special’ education (Ministry of Education, 2013). Further, if one was to go by the information provided on the Ministry of Education website, they would be forgiven for questioning what ‘inclusive practice’ means, as the term is only found under the section entitled ‘Special Education’, and students with disabilities are continually referred to as ‘special needs’ (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Like Ballard (2004), who recognises that special and inclusive language is becoming increasingly analogous, Rutherford (2012) argues that New Zealand’s policy has a “flawed alignment of ‘special’ and inclusive education as if they were one and the same” (p. 3). This is a longstanding issue within New Zealand education policy. In Brown’s (1997) examination of ‘Special Education 2000’, which, according to Pope (2013), still provides the foundation for New Zealand’s education system, she describes the use of inclusive language within special education policy as conflicting and confusing. This is something Slee (2008) would view as evidence of discursive tensions “that point to irreconcilable epistemological foundations” (p. 179) of special and inclusive education.

The consequences of a confused and contradictory state of education for students with disabilities are evident in the discrimination the latter may encounter when accessing their local schools (IHC, 2008a, 2008b, 2014). As Higgins et al. (2006) explain, “there does seem to be a way out, or a safety valve for schools” (p. 63), where schools can argue that students with ‘special needs’ (including those
with physical disabilities who receive support under the special education umbrella) would benefit best from separate education, either in special education units, or separate schools.

The nature of such confused policy raises questions about whether students with physical disabilities are viewed by their local schools as “special or included” (Ballard, 2004, p. 351). The notion of students with physical disabilities as in need of ‘special’ education is recognised throughout this thesis. If students with physical disabilities face difficulties in accessing education itself, what are their experiences of accessing Physical Education, something that has long been regarded as an optional extra and unnecessary for students with physical disabilities (Halliday, 1993)? I now move to further contextualise students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education, and what their experiences should entail according to policy rhetoric. I begin with an overview of the New Zealand Curriculum, then move to specifically address the Physical Education context as it exists in New Zealand secondary schools.

**New Zealand Curriculum**

In this section I briefly outline the New Zealand Curriculum to provide some background understanding of the students’ secondary school Physical Education environments. This document is the basis for current educational practices within New Zealand schools. The vision of the current New Zealand Curriculum, which was published in final form in 2007, is to create “confident, connected, actively involved, life-long learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7). The 2007 Curriculum differs significantly from earlier Curriculum documents. One major shift with the 2007 document is a move away from what students learn, to an
emphasis on *how* students learn (Burrows, 2005). It comprises a number of
elements set to guide the teaching and learning of New Zealand students. I now
discuss the Values, Principles and Key Competencies which make up the New
Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

A range of values underpin the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum. While the
specific values prioritised and the way these are implemented are the responsibility
of the school and the community, overall the aim is to foster respect and value for
the students’ selves and for others (Benade, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2007).
Like the Key Competencies soon to be discussed, these are of particular importance
for students with disabilities. The values identified in the New Zealand Curriculum
(particularly diversity, equity, integrity, community participation and respect) have
a particular tie to the notion of inclusion (Higgins et al., 2009; Ministry of
Education, 2007). Therefore, it can be assumed that valuing and respecting all
students extends to students with physical disabilities within Physical Education.
Yet, as Benade (2011) mentions, some values are given higher priority over others.
As the Curriculum works to guide, rather than instruct, teachers are able to choose
which, what and how to communicate Curriculum Values to students (Benade,
2011). Therefore, while in principle all students are valued and respected, this may
not be reflected in reality.

Of particular importance are the Principles which underpin the Curriculum,
decision-making and thus the learning experiences of students with physical
disabilities. There are eight Principles which are expected to drive all educational
practice. These are having high expectations of students and empowering them to
do their best; developing students’ ability to learn; acknowledging the Treaty of
Waitangi; engaging in the community; valuing cultural diversity; providing
coherent and future focused learning; and most relevant for this thesis, inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2007). The Principle of inclusion affirms that all students’ rights to education, individuality and learning needs are to be respected and addressed.

The Curriculum’s ‘Key Competencies’ ensure students develop the ability “‘to do’ rather than ‘to know’” (Wood & Sheenan, 2012, p. 20). The Key Competencies, along with the Values and Principles contribute to the Vision of the Curriculum. The Key Competencies which students are expected to develop throughout education are “thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). They are about providing students with the “capabilities for living and lifelong learning” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). Burrows (2005) believes that Key Competencies marry well with Physical Education in New Zealand schools, contending that, “in some ways the key competencies seem like they were written for Health and Physical Education. Describing the Key Competencies is like describing the kinds of dispositions a HPE Curriculum is designed to procure” (p. 10, italics in original). She argues the intention to guide rather than instruct sits well with the critical thinking encouraged in Physical Education. The Key Competencies that are particularly relevant to the investigation of students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education are “Relating to others, and participating and contributing” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12). However, the ability to relate to a variety of people and to become an active member of the community is hinged on a student’s access and opportunity to do so (MacArthur, 2013). For students with disabilities in particular, these opportunities can be limited (Morton, McMenamin, Moore & Molley, 2013).
Overall, the key thrust of the New Zealand Curriculum is about encouraging learners to develop into well-rounded students ready to enter the world (Benade, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2007). The Values, Principles and Key Competencies are in place to guide students to achieve this aim. Addressing the key points of the New Zealand Curriculum is of particular importance when contextualising this thesis. This guiding document situates students’ experiences and provides insights into how students should, in theory, experience Physical Education. Like the legislation and policies discussed previously, the New Zealand Curriculum provides a measure against which to examine students’ experiences and the impact of these on the way they feel about themselves. In the next section, I specifically address Physical Education as it occurs in the Curriculum and within New Zealand secondary schools to further situate this thesis.

**Physical Education in New Zealand Secondary Schools**

Under the New Zealand Curriculum, Physical Education is incorporated within ‘Health and Physical Education’. Health and Physical Education comprises one of the eight learning areas within the New Zealand Curriculum, and is compulsory until year 11 (Ministry of Education, 2007). The Health and Physical Education learning area (herein referred to as Physical Education) incorporates seven Key Areas of Learning (Ministry of Education, 2007), namely Mental Health, Sexuality Education, Food and Nutrition, Body Care and Physical Safety, Physical Activity, Sport Studies and Outdoor Education. The underlying concepts of these learning areas include Hauora (well-being from a Māori perspective), the Socio-ecological Perspective, Health Promotion, and Attitudes and Values. The Curriculum also expects teachers to engage students critically within the strands of
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Personal Health and Physical Development, Movement Concepts and Motor Skills, Relationships with Other People, and Healthy Communities and Environments (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22). Within these areas, it is expected that the Key Competencies, Values and Principles of the Curriculum are reflected in teaching and learning.

However, Physical Education’s presence in the New Zealand Curriculum is not without critiques. Culpan (2008) argues that labelling Physical Education as a Key Area of Learning results in compartmentalising Physical Education. More specifically, he suggests that Physical Education, in this form, can become a ‘tick box’ exercise, where students ‘do’ rather than ‘learn’ about Physical Education (Culpan, 2008; Culpan & Bruce, 2007). For example, students may be able to ‘do’ the tasks required to achieve in Physical Education, yet may not learn the associated message or meaning behind these. Also, while Health and Physical Education appear as a joint entity in the New Zealand Curriculum, in many classrooms Physical Education remains a distinct and separate aspect of education. As a result, the links between Physical Education, Health Education and the wider Curriculum can be lost (Culpan, 2008).

Furthermore, some have regarded Physical Education in New Zealand as a neo-liberal marketplace, like the wider school system. Pope (2013) and Petrie, Penney and Fellows (2013) argue that this marketplace is filled with competing discourses of what Physical Education is about, who the ‘real’ teachers of Physical Education are, and what type of citizens Physical Education attempts to produce. Petrie et al. (2013) argue that an ‘open marketplace’ has narrowed, rather than expanded the scope of Physical Education. For example, a variety of Physical Education resources and contractors can be bought, or brought into the classroom
(Petrie et al., 2013). This, coupled with the close ties Physical Education retains with other government, health and sporting organisations such as Sport New Zealand, can mean that Physical Education is reduced to developing specialised movement skills and sports participation (Culpan, 2008; Petrie et al., 2013; Pringle & Pringle, 2012). It also means that the ethos of the Curriculum, which is designed to inculcate particular principles, and ways of engaging with knowledge, can be diluted.

Physical Education has also been subject to the whims of governmental influences (Burrows, Petrie & Cosgrove, 2013). Further, Physical Education is said to absorb the brunt of governmental and policy changes (Ovens, 2010). Unlike other subjects, Physical Education is often tasked with the responsibility of maintaining the health and well-being of the wider population (Burrows, 2005; Kirk, 2001). Evidence of such responsibility is reflected in New Zealand Physical Education classrooms. Burrows et al. (2013) argue that Physical Education is subject to a vested interest by government. The subject is often viewed as a means to look after the health and well-being of young people. This responsibility does not sit well with the critical focus of Physical Education, which encourages students to form their own opinions about health and well-being (Burrows, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2007). In particular, government and social concerns about ‘obesity’ prevention can narrow the scope of Physical Education to foster critical thinking about health and physical activity messages (Burrows et al., 2013). Thus, while Curriculum documents suggest a holistic approach to well-being is taught to students (Ministry of Education, 2007), particular aspects can be favoured more than others, due to unprecedented government interest and investment in Physical Education to ‘fix’ health and social issues (Burrows et al., 2013; Pringle & Pringle, 2012).
This reduction of the types of Physical Education raises questions about the consequences for students with physical disabilities. If Physical Education is said to embrace normative movement skills and bodies, what then happens to students whose movements and bodies do not fit with the socially constructed ‘normal body’ (Dowling, 2012, Foucault, 1978; Slee, 2011, Wright, 2004)? As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, regulating and monitoring of bodies within Physical Education risks reinforcing an idealised ‘normal’ body (Wright, 2004). In this thesis, it is assumed that whether or not a students’ size, shape or movement aligns with discourses of ‘normality’ could greatly impact how they understand their selves and their bodies. In other words, the discourses, pedagogies and practices employed within Physical Education will significantly influence how a student experiences it. The presence of a range of competing and confusing intents indicates that the Physical Education contexts that students have access to may be extremely varied.

Summary

I proceed with this thesis from a recognition that the educational climate in which students are located is complex and confused. Despite a variety of provisions protecting the educational rights of students with physical disabilities to learn alongside their peers, it appears some students struggle to enact these rights in the current educational climate (Pope, 2013). As a result, students with physical disabilities are subjected to wider educational discourses of special education or inclusion, depending on the knowledge privileged by their specific contexts and teachers (MacArthur & Kelly, 2004). Within Physical Education in particular, narrow understandings of physically educable bodies may similarly exist. Thus, by outlining the current context of Physical Education and students with physical
disabilities, an image begins to emerge which suggests that students’ experiences of Physical Education warrant attention.

A Note on Language

As Slee (2011) explains, it is important to think about, not with, our words. The language we use to speak can greatly influence the way we take meaning from what is being said. In this section the language used throughout this thesis to describe the students who took part is discussed.

I use the word ‘students’ instead of ‘participants’ to describe the young people who helped formulate the knowledge contained in this thesis. I do so because throughout this research project we all became students, learning from each other and working together to construct the research. I wish to avoid, where possible, the use of ‘participants’ as I feel this refers to the students as being recruited simply for their information, rather than engaging in the ongoing construction and formation of a research project.

It is important to discuss the language relating to disability. As I mention in the following chapter, there are many competing discourses about ‘proper’ disability language. After intense discussions with the students involved in the research, where necessary we decided I would use the term ‘students with physical disabilities’ in this thesis. This is firstly to recognise the students as people, as advocated by New Zealand advocacy organisation People First (People First Inc., 2014). Physical disability does not define who the students are, but instead physical difference is something they may experience or have, like for example, their eye colour or hairstyle.
However, I recognise the complexity involved in language usage. For example, many social model theorists, such as Oliver (2009), could argue that this choice of language runs the risk of viewing students as deficient, or as possessing a disability, rather than representing them as subjects of oppression and discrimination within society. While cognisant of the debates regarding language, I chose to respect and use the language the students in this study prefer.

While ‘students with physical disabilities’ is used when required, I mostly refer to the students as Angela, Connor, Cody, Holly, Kelly and Shane, (pseudonyms selected by them), or simply as ‘students’. This is because the students did not wish to be defined by their bodies. Some also felt that the term impairment was more discriminating than that of ‘disability’, and others felt that saying they had a medical condition would more adequately describe them. As a result, I hope the language I use encourages the reader to agree with Angela, who says, we could “just see them as being normal people”.

**Thesis Structure**

Finally, I outline the thesis structure to give the reader a sense of what is to come.

Chapter Two consists of a review of literature from the academic disciplines which inform this research, namely, Childhood Studies, Disability Studies, the Sociology of the Body, Physical Education and Teaching and Learning. In this chapter, I demonstrate the importance of research with young people, and the need to critically examine students with disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education. I also discuss how overlapping disciplines add depth and insights to this research,
and identify the gaps between and within these disciplines that this thesis attempts
to fill.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodologies and methods employed in the research. In the first section, the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, and the participatory framework (the ‘methodologies’) are discussed. Here, qualitative research, the social constructionist paradigm, as well as my ontological and epistemological groundings are outlined. I then link these to my use of post-structural theoretical resources, and outline the concepts used in the later section of the thesis to analyse the students’ experiences of Physical Education. In the second section, I discuss the methods involved in the research. Here, I outline the project development, ethical considerations, recruitment, participants and research methods. This is followed by a discussion of analysis and dissemination practices.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven constitute the body of the thesis. In these chapters I re-present the students’ stories and examine how their experiences reflect wider educational, social, and political discourses that exist within the Physical Education context in New Zealand secondary schools. I attempt to foreground the students’ voices here, while recognising that weaving their voices into academic writing may detract from the impact their voices can have. Each chapter deals with one of the themes that emerged from the students’ testimonies. Firstly, I discuss the wider educational context of their Physical Education experiences. I then examine the students’ experiences of Physical Education and the barriers students face in accessing and participating in this subject. Thirdly, I examine the students’ discussion of Health. This is something students feel is an important aspect of Physical Education and of the way they view their bodies. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I examine how the students discussed their bodies. This was something the students
frequently chose to talk about. In particular, the way they feel disabled both by their bodies, and by people's assumptions about their bodies and what they can do. Also, the students’ experiences of using their bodies to negotiate their way through Physical Education are foregrounded.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. In this chapter I draw conclusions from this research, and demonstrate how examining students’ experiences can contribute to Physical Education policy and pedagogy. I offer recommendations for teaching and learning practices, and discuss how future research could continue to build on the knowledge produced by this thesis. After personally reflecting on the research, I leave the final word to the students. Engaging in the project, for many of them, was an encouraging experience, one that allowed them to feel in control and like they were making a difference, when traditionally they have been researched ‘about’.

**Conclusion**

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined and located the research project alongside academic calls for student-centred research, and a seemingly confused and contradictory educational policy environment for students with physical disabilities. Both of these discussions inform the following chapters as I investigate how students with physical disabilities experience Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate how young people with disabilities are able to use their position as valued members of a research team to provide alternative ways of viewing and knowing Physical Education. As the reader makes their way through this thesis, I hope that Holly’s introductory statement resonates throughout. Encouraging those on the margins to
not only speak about their Physical Education experiences, but to be heard, affords opportunity for educational improvement for all students.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I outline the areas of Childhood Studies, Disability Studies, the Sociology of the Body, Physical Education and Teaching and Learning that inform the question, what are the Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities in New Zealand secondary schools? I draw on literature from these disciplines to ask questions about the nature of childhood and disability; how we come to know the body as a physical and social entity; and how Physical Education and teaching practices and assumptions work to construct particular types of youthful, able bodies. Furthermore, the literature examined in this section points to the unique and challenging issues that students with physical disabilities face in accessing Physical Education.

In terms of chapter structure, I first outline the academic disciplines from which literature is selected. I then examine key research themes emerging from these schools of thought that pertain to the way students describe their experiences of Physical Education. I begin with an examination of Childhood Studies, and the key conceptualisations of childhood drawn from this discipline, before examining literature about children’s identity and educational experiences. In the second section, I examine the area of Disability Studies and outline the most prominent models of disability, namely the medical model and the social model. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of these models, I draw on literature which informs the social relational model of disability, which is distinct from the social model. In the third section, I address the topic of the body and highlight differing ways the body is represented, particularly in Sociology. I then draw on literature that examines how children with
disabilities discuss their bodies and their sense of self, thus bringing together the threads from the Childhood Studies and Disability Studies sections. In the penultimate section, I examine the area of school-based Physical Education, focusing particularly on the topic of ability and the socially constructed norms of the body which inform the subject. I examine literature that deals specifically with students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education and address the issue of adaptation in relation to discourses of ability and normalised bodies. Finally, I address the topic of Teaching and Learning in New Zealand schools. In this section I examine literature regarding pedagogy and practice in relation to the inclusive, student-centred New Zealand Curriculum. I conclude this chapter by recapping key points from the literature examined in this review.

**Childhood Studies**

Childhood Studies is an encompassing label describing a multidisciplinary research area. It is informed by a range of academic disciplines and paradigms, which study children in the social, political, institutional, and economic contexts in which they live (Corsaro, 1997). In this thesis, I embrace the notion of a socially constructed childhood (and child), which is developed by scholars such as Corsaro (1997), James and Prout (2008) and Smith (2013). Viewing childhood in such a way reflects my epistemological standpoint. I begin by briefly discussing key foundations of the field of Childhood Studies relevant to this work. I then focus on two concepts – the social construction of childhood, and the child as a social actor. Of particular importance are discussions about the ways in which these concepts influence how the research is carried out and therefore, what this research concludes (Bowman & Spencer, 2007). I then examine literature that draws on Childhood Studies concepts to examine the
challenges in disrupting power dynamics between adult and child researchers to highlight the value of insights garnered from research with children. Here, I discuss Childhood Studies from a New Zealand perspective, and examine the insights from Childhood research.

The Field of Childhood Studies

It is widely recognised that the study of children and the socially constructed world of childhood is a unique and valuable area of study (James & Prout, 2008; Smith, 2013). Rather than viewing children as passive, smaller versions of adults, simply occupying a developmental category of ‘childhood’, Childhood Studies adherents regard children as a community of people: interacting and constructing lives within power relations and structures wrought largely by adult-centred conceptualisations of what childhood is or should be (James & James, 2008). Under this rubric, the focus of Childhood Studies is on recognising the experiences and realities of childhood as unique and separate from adults; on permitting participants to express themselves in their own ways, not through the words of adults; and on the importance of allowing children to speak and be heard (Kehily, 2009).

The field of Childhood Studies is vast and informed by a range of epistemological, theoretical and paradigmatic differences. Yet it is united by the attempt to critically examine and challenge traditional notions of children and the view that childhood is a singular, linear process (Kay, Tisday, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009). In doing so, Childhood Studies advocates for the rights and well-being of children (Bowman & Spencer, 2007; Smith, 2013). These sentiments are shared by researchers in spheres such as Feminist Studies and Disability Studies, who similarly advocate for the rights and voices of marginalised groups to be recognised (Davis, 2013). However,
unlike these areas, in the case of Childhood Studies, children themselves are not leading the fight for change. Bowman and Spencer (2007) explain: “Unlike women or African Americans, children are not the scholars creating a new area of scholarship” (p. 9).

Given Childhood Studies is an area of scholarship largely created and controlled by adults, respecting and recognising the role of the child in this area is even more important. Therefore, creating opportunities for children to speak in research is a key facet of Childhood Studies (Alanen, 2011). Permitting the child’s voice to be heard and genuinely seeking to understand the world from their point of view are strategies designed to minimise the possibility that adult, political and moral agendas will take precedence (Smith, 2013). It is research for and with rather than about children that is envisaged from a Childhood Studies perspective and this informs my approach to this research project. Corsaro (1997) sums up the idea of child orientated research with the statement: “Children are the best source of understanding children” (p. 103). Fairly obviously, what this implies is that research about children must also include them.

However, Childhood Studies research does not stop at eliciting children’s stories, experiences and involving them in the research. Childhood researchers also concern themselves with critically examining the discourses that children draw on to construct their experiences and those that work to construct the notion of childhood itself. Alanen (2011) explains that the critical nature of Childhood Studies involves examining the discourses, institutions, physical and structural constraints that children, adults and researchers draw upon in order to construct understandings of childhood. Therefore, developing an understanding of students’ experiences of Physical Education must involve a critical examination of how the categories of childhood, disability and Physical Education are constructed, and how each intersect to enable (or constrain) the ways students express their experiences.
Childhood Studies resources relate closely to those embraced by Disability Studies advocates (Davis, 2013; Davis & Watson, 2001; Kelly, 2005; Tisdall, 2012; Watson, 2012). As Kramer and Hammel (2011) explain, the “understanding of childhood is particularly relevant to children with disabilities” (p. 122), as both childhood and disability are social constructs used to define and justify one’s place in society. While larger discussions of structure/agency and the global/local shaping of childhood are important (Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout, 2008), I focus predominantly on understanding childhood as a social construct and children as social actors who respond to, resist and shape their childhood in their own right herein. These ideas fit within those in Disability Studies and gel with my own philosophical assumptions around the social construction of reality. They are also useful in facilitating a critical examination of the way students with physical disabilities understand their Physical Education experiences in New Zealand secondary schools.

**The Social Construction of Childhood**

The understanding that childhood itself is a social construction has revolutionised and reoriented the way that children and childhood are understood and studied (Scott & Boocock, 2007). James and Prout (2008) explain this notion as follows:

> Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies. (p. 9)

Adhering to this perspective requires a questioning of traditional definitions of what constitutes a ‘child’ and ‘childhood’. As Jenks (2009) suggests, there is no absolute meaning or definition of what a child is or is meant to be. In other words, “there is no
natural or evolutionary child, only the historically produced discourses and power relations that constitute the child as an object and subject of knowledge, practice, and political intervention” (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001, p. 9). This means questioning the power relations and structures that have created ‘childhood’ and ‘the child’. In turn, this yields possibilities for understanding how people in the social group ‘children’ respond to the constraints and freedoms of their socially constructed reality (Morss, 2002; Smith, 2013).

James and James (2008) extend the above argument to explain that not only did the concept of a socially constructed childhood revolutionise the way that childhood was understood, but also had an impact on research application. That is, understanding childhood from a social constructionist perspective yields insights into why and how children’s experiences and expectations vary cross-culturally and globally – a phenomenon little understood via early developmental approaches to childhood. For example, orthodox approaches to studying and conceptualising childhood regard it as a time of biological immaturity. Yet if this is the case, then how is it that children can hold down jobs and support their families without reaching the point of adulthood (Kehily, 2009) as they do in many third world (and indeed first world) countries? In terms of the current project, embracing a social construction of childhood perspective allows me to posit questions about ‘normal’ childhood development (Kay et al., 2009) and how students are able to draw on socially constructed ideas of ‘normal’ childhood, bodies and movements that exist within Physical Education to explain their own bodies.

*Children as Social Actors*

Another key concept of the Childhood Studies which informs this research is the idea that children are more than just pre-adults, and in fact, active members of
society. Understanding children and childhood as social constructions also highlights a child’s humanness, or similarity to adults, in the ways that they respond to, resist and reshape society in their own way (Corsaro, 1997; Davis, 2013; Smith, 2013). Morss (2002) explains that “the proposal to treat children as humans may not be as banal as it may seem” as “children are no different from adults except as the consequence of treatment… children are people who are treated, by themselves and/or by others as “children” (p. 52). Embracing this perspective means regarding children as humans with agency and ability to adapt to different contexts, or, in Mayall’s (1994) terms, as ‘social actors’.

James and James (2008) define the term social actor as “a concept that recognises the active part that children play in everyday social life” (p. 120). For this thesis, such a perspective means viewing the students as able to participate in the traditionally adult centred world of academic research, not only to contribute to knowledge production, but also to resist it. An example of children taking an active role in the resistance of research is found in Gallagher and Gallagher’s (2008) work. This study saw the children involved take over the researcher’s notebook, preventing the researcher from making notes, thus exerting their agency and resistance to the power that the adult researcher inevitably holds.

The extent to which children have agency or the power to change in social contexts is often drawn into question. Mayall (2002) argues that children do have the ability to make changes to social factors or relationships. James and James (2008), however, explain that while children have the ability to be ‘social actors’, they are constrained by what is permitted or expected of them as children and in specific contexts – such as school rules or parents’ expectations, or other discursive constraints. Priestley (1999) and Tisdall (2012) argue that these constraints are particularly evident
for children with disabilities. Therefore, when studying children and embracing the
notion that children are social actors, it is important to enquire critically about the
constraints, or circumstances that influence what the child can and cannot do. Or put
more clearly, it is important to examine “how children are enabled to be social actors”
(James & James, 2008, p. 121, italics in original).

Children’s Voice in Research

Literature that involves student/child participation in the research process is
burgeoning (Curtin & Clarke, 2005). The belief that youth themselves are the experts
regarding their own educational experiences is one I hold firm in this research, and is
underpinned by the ideas canvassed above. In this section, I summarise literature which
raises key points to consider when researching with students with physical disabilities.
Overall, this section demonstrates the value of upholding the standpoint that childhood
is a social construct, and that children can give excellent insights into educational
research, particularly regarding Physical Education (Svendby & Dowling, 2013).

Arguments for the need to hear the voices of students with physical disabilities
are widespread within academic literature about student experience, yet these voices
continue to be overlooked, specifically in Physical Education literature (Davis, 2013;
Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Penney, 2002; Smith, 2013; Svendby & Dowling, 2013).
Leicester & Lovell (1997) feel that this is also the case in education. Without including
children and recognising issues about inclusion and ability, they state “citizens will not
receive a ‘disability aware’ perspective” (p. 112). Also, Prout (2001) describes it as
morally wrong for educational researchers to ignore the accounts of students who are
at the centre of inclusive (or otherwise) education settings. Corbett and Norwich (1999),
Curtin and Clarke (2005) and Lensmire (1998) support this statement. Furthermore,
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ignoring students with physical disabilities does not gel with a fundamental principle of the New Zealand Curriculum: that of student focused, engaging and active learning (Ministry of Education, 2007).

However, it seems that a prevailing assumption that children, particularly those who are seen as ‘disabled’, are “passive and dependent” upon adults (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003, p. 178), inhibits the genuine inclusion of children’s voice. In Connors and Stalker’s (2007) work, which seeks the voices of children and young people with disabilities, one student demonstrates how she feels constrained by adults’ perceptions:

She’s got to understand that she can’t rule my life anymore … I just want to make up my own mind now because she’s always deciding for me, like what’s for best for me and sometimes I get angry. She just doesn’t realise that I’m grown up now but soon I’m going to be 14 and I won’t be a wee girl anymore. (p. 26)

Cook, Swain and French (2001) agree, stating that children are viewed as “‘passive structural determinations’ and not being actively involved in the construction of their own lives” (p. 294). The seminal work of Shakespeare and Watson (1998) highlight critiques to be conscious of when reading literature regarding student voices. These include acknowledging the power relations at play in research and questioning whose voice is privileged, particularly with adults researching children, and non-disabled people researching ‘disabled’ people. Shakespeare and Watson (1998) also highlight the importance of acknowledging the paradigms in which the research is positioned and how this influences the meanings that can be made from the literature.

Writing from the United Kingdom (UK) Physical Education context, Fitzgerald, et al. (2003) acknowledge the above points and conclude that research into children’s experiences is neglected, as the focus is typically upon curriculum and pedagogy (see also DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000; Penney & Evans, 1995). Further, Fitzgerald, et al. (2003) raise issues with teachers, educators, stakeholders and, particularly, researchers
disregarding the value of student experience. They explain, “As a research community we are guilty of ignoring, disregarding and trivialising the voices of young disabled people” (p. 176). Unfortunately this is a recurring theme, also commonplace in New Zealand (Armstrong, 2003; Rutherford, 2009, 2012). These issues support Slee’s (1998) claim that the ‘new’ developments in educational policy are simply a regurgitation of old discourses which separate and ignore those at the centre of the issue (the students) and instead place value on the voice of the expert.

**Childhood Research from New Zealand**

Research specific to New Zealand contexts, which recognises the value of children’s perspectives, is particularly revealing. Rutherford’s (2009) research highlights a range of experiences that students had in mainstream schooling with accompanying teacher aides. While some accounts from Rutherford’s (2009) research were positive – such as Rachel, who felt her teacher aide was “helping me process stuff that I don’t quite understand. It’s like, ‘ahhh, this is what the teacher’s trying to explain to me” (p. 95). For most students though, there was a lot of stigma attached to having a teacher aide and attending special education units in schools. Similar to Rutherford’s (2009) work, Macartney (2008) asks a particular question regarding the role of the ‘expert’ in knowledge about the child: “Are the experts there to create, maintain or fix ‘the problem’?” (p. 44). The issues raised in these studies are important to take forward in research examining students’ experiences of Physical Education.

Despite the myriad of calls to listen to students’ perspectives and recognise the knowledge children bring to the research process, often adult imposed ideals are privileged over those of the children at the centre of the issue (Tisdall, 2012). MacArthur, Sharp, Kelly and Gaffney (2007a) provide a concise account of the effects
that the use of labels and assumptions held by adults, teachers and peers have upon students’ feelings of belonging within the school community. Joanne, a participant in MacArthur et al.’s (2007a) research provides an example of this, stating:

I don’t go to people and go, ‘Hi I am different’. I honestly think that I am equal to everybody else but that you know – oh it is hard to explain – but some people think I am different but I see myself as an equal person to everybody else. (p. 28)

What is startlingly evident in this work, similar to Connors and Stalkers’ (2007) work from the UK, is the concept of sameness. All children, irrespective of disability, talked about a desire to be accepted by their peers, to not be removed from their classes and instead to be allowed to experience education and wider social experiences alongside other children (De Schauwer, Van Hove, Mortier & Loots, 2009).

**Insights from Childhood Research**

The consequences of adult imposed ideals and a lack of consultation of students’ rights are evident in literature that deals directly with students’ participation. Shah (2007) examines the views of disabled students in education. The student voices incorporated in Shah’s (2007) research are particularly powerful and revealing. For example, one student explains that at school she:

Felt as though I was shoved out and not with other people. I was put in a unit that people couldn’t talk you know … and with me being able to talk I was in a room of kids that couldn’t even talk. (Shah, 2007 p. 437)

Children and young people also bring to light issues which can often be overlooked without their consultation (Pitt & Curtain, 2004). For example, Noalga, a fifteen-year-old student states:

At my mainstream school I got picked on a lot because [they thought] I was funny looking ... I didn’t have any friends there... At my old [mainstream] school they [other kids] would not be my partner in sports lessons, they thought I can’t do nothing and left me out. (Shah, 2007, p.
Not only does this research highlight the value and insights of young people in research, but also these are important points to recognise when examining the way students with physical disabilities experience Physical Education, and the impact of these experiences on their subjectivities.

Despite students’ desire for belonging and sameness, literature suggests that, in some cases, adults within institutions such as medical facilities or schools may perceive students with physical disabilities as different from their peers. In doing so, this limits a child’s ability to identify as similar to their peers and feel a sense of belonging within the classroom (Svendby & Dowling, 2013). This statement is supported with evidence from a range of studies that focus on students’ voices. For example, Kelly (2005) explains how adult perceptions of children play a large role in constructing childhood identity. Through engaging with students’ perspectives, she highlights how children are often faced with prejudice and discourses of inadequacy and difference in all aspects of society, which permeate from the voice of parents, medical and educational ‘experts’.

Norwich and Kelly (2004) examine bullying of students with disabilities, and uncover feelings of loneliness in students. For example, one student in their study stated, “I felt quite lonely” (p. 55). Loneliness and difference are themes discussed by many students whose voices are actively portrayed in literature (Svendby & Dowling, 2013). Lovitt, Plavins and Cushing (1999) similarly examine student experiences as a whole and identify common themes of isolation, powerlessness and difference, despite being ‘included’ within education. A participant in their study who was placed in special education without knowing why evocatively reflects this conclusion: “I have an LD (learning disability) but I don’t know why – they haven’t told me” (Lovitt et al., 1999, p. 69).
In this thesis, I seek the students’ perspectives and responses to other people’s perceptions of their bodies, ability and participation within Physical Education. In particular, I ask how do they think their teachers/parents/medical professionals view their bodies/abilities, and how do they respond? I recognise the valuable work that research with parents and teachers has contributed to Disability Studies, and seek to add the third element of students’ perspectives to this research. I agree, “young disabled people’s narratives can bridge the socio-cultural history of PE and disability… avoiding both the pathologising of the disabled body or too much focus on structural issues at the expense of embodied subjects” (Svendby & Dowling, 2013, p. 364).

Summary

In terms of the question, what are students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools? Literature from Childhood Studies demonstrates not only how the students in this study are constrained and constructed by discourses that see them as disabled and on the margins (topics discussed in the following sections) but also by socially engrained and institutionalised discourses about what it means to be a ‘child’. Thus, recognising that the notion of childhood is not ‘natural’ and that children are active members of society, able to participate and contribute to ‘adult’ spheres of research, affords new possibilities for the role students take in the research process and the questions that can be asked of their experiences.
Disability Studies

This section outlines the resources from the field of Disability Studies that I draw on during this research. There are multiple strands of Disability Studies, which could inform this research (Barnes, 2013; Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999; Davis, 2006). However, the models included here have been selected for their explicit usage within literature examining discourses of disability within educational policy and research into students’ experiences of Physical Education (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010). First I outline the field of Disability Studies. I then outline the traditional conceptualisation of disability as a personal, medical problem and explain how this (arguably out-dated) concept will emerge throughout the research. Secondly, I outline the social model of disability and the recent tensions and resistance that have arisen in relation to it. Despite its weaknesses, the social model of disability does afford some conceptual grounding for the current project. However, the resource I will draw primarily from, and will outline in the final section, is the social-relational model of disability.

The Field of Disability Studies

Disability studies challenges … perceptions of normalcy and asserts that difference is evident in ordinary human variation and thus considered to be normal. The discourse of disability studies is one of the politicised social justice, anti-oppression and moral imperative and provides a solid theoretical foundation. (Ashton, 2011, p. 779)

As Ashton (2011) explains, research in the field of Disability Studies provides an alternative way of understanding what disability is and how it is experienced different from that of traditional thinking, in which disability was regarded as a personal problem. As a result, Disability Studies affords conceptualisations which fit well within a critical paradigm and a social constructionist epistemology, and complements the
discussion above regarding Childhood Studies (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Kramer & Hamel, 2011). In a similar vein to post-structuralist thinking, Disability Studies encourages looking beyond the label of disability, to examine the discourses and power relations that have created it, as well as how people experience and negotiate disability (Shakespeare, 2006).

As is the case in Childhood Studies, Disability Studies researchers have challenged traditional assumptions of disability being a definable, biological/physical state (Barnes, 2013) and instead have regarded the term as socially constructed and best understood through individual experiences or personal narratives (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Davis, 2013). In recent times, the value of a shared understanding of Disability Studies and Childhood Studies has been recognised (Connors & Stalkers, 2007; Davis, 2013; Kelly, 2005; Kramer & Hamel, 2011; Watson, 2012). Yet, despite the value of such research, “disabled children are rarely included in research on children and childhood” (Watson, 2012, p. 192). Therefore, as mentioned earlier, I hope this thesis addresses this gap and in doing so demonstrates how collaboration with students with physical disabilities creates “opportunities to explore their [children with disabilities] experiences and interpretations of disability and impairment alongside recognition of their abilities as competent social actors” (Kelly, 2005, p. 262).

As a field, Disability Studies encounters many debates regarding its viability and use (and even existence) as a social theory (Gleeson, 1997; Thomas, 2004). In this thesis, I view Disability Studies as a field of research offering conceptualisations of disability which fit well within post-structural thinking, rather than offering a theoretical lens itself. Therefore, it is important to note the arguments surrounding Disability Studies use as a theoretical perspective. On one hand, some argue that it is a “theoretical expression of the disability movement” (Hughes, 2001, p. 24) which
“formalises the problematisation of simple binaries and challenges what we come to know as ‘normal’” (Ashton, 2001, p. 779). On the other hand, Disability Studies is regarded by some as an area that is yet to be developed into a sound social theory (Thomas, 2004). The latter perspective is supported by those who suggest that Disability Studies ran away with development (Gleeson, 1997), before establishing a solid theoretical foundation to premise its understandings on. However, recent work indicates that theoretical groundings are catching up with the popularity of Disability Studies (Oliver, 2009).

Despite what some refer to as a lack of early theoretical grounding, Disability Studies does offer invaluable concepts that inform this thesis. As Barnatt and Altman (2001) explain: “the most basic building blocks of theories are concepts. Concepts provide the definition upon which theory is based” (p. 3, italics in original). Oliver (1996) agrees. Both authors insist that the ways of seeing disability developed by disability scholars and practitioners were not, in themselves, social theory. As Barnes and Mercer (2004) explain, “the importance of the social model was primarily as a ‘heuristic device’ or an aid to understanding” (p. 3). Thus, it is my opinion that helpful resources can be drawn from Disability Studies when coupled with post-structural theory. These can aid in-depth inquiry into the construction and experience of disability and the way students with such label respond to discourses associated with disability within their Physical Education contexts (Barnes & Mercer, 2004; Kelly, 2005; Watson, 2012).

Deficit/Medical Model of Disability

Traditional disability research has tended to embrace medical or deficit understandings of disability (Barnes & Mercer, 2001). This way of seeing disability is
orientated to the extreme end of objectivist research, and has been critiqued and resisted for promoting objectification, exclusion and barriers to being, based on assumptions about inherent difference (Hunt, 1998). Otherwise known as the “personal tragedy theory” (Oliver, 1996, p. 31), the thinking behind this way of viewing disability is that people have a disability, rather than are disabled (Oliver, 2009). This simple concept implies that a person is inherently deficient (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001) with an impairment that prevents them from participating in many aspects of society – including mainstream education. As leading disability activist Crow (1996) explains, it is only once this impairment or disability has been removed or overcome that a person can regain status as a ‘normal’ member of society. This conceptualisation of disability has been adopted by the majority of medical professionals (Linton, 2006; Verbrugge & Jette, 1994) and unfortunately also by many education professionals and policymakers, both nationally and internationally (Macartney, 2009; Slee, 2011).

While I personally reject this way of thinking about disability, the fact that it is still lurking amongst educational policy and practice (Macartney, 2009) provokes me to consider how this understanding of disability influences my research. For example, the way that the students come to know their bodies may be influenced by the way that they have experienced and understand disability. There is little doubt that the students involved in this research have been exposed to the ‘special needs’ understandings of disability throughout their education (Kearney & Kane, 2006). This thinking has permeated educational policy thinking and has particularly infused decisions around the education of students with disabilities (Macartney, 2009).

While I have come to understand disability as a social creation based on understandings of normality (an idea which will be examined later), it is important to also appreciate and understand how the students who participate in this study may
understand disability as having “flawed bodies, incapable of adequate social participation” (Hughes, 2001, p. 25). Education (Physical Education in particular) is openly acknowledged as a creation by, and for, the ‘normal’ population (Barton, 1993; DePauw, 1997). Therefore, no matter how strongly I disagree with the nature of disability being ascribed as inherent to the individual, I cannot disregard the relationships and discourses that students will encounter within this ablest context of Physical Education and how these will shape the students’ conceptualisations of disability and their bodies.

**Social Model of Disability**

In contrast to medical/deficit thinking about disability, a social model of disability ascribes to the view that disablement is a result of social processes and relationships that exclude certain people (Crow, 1996; Oliver, 2009; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Like Hunt’s (1998) statement above, Brisenden (1998) highlights the difference between medical and social ways of thinking. As she suggests, “We are not ‘the disabled’; we are the ‘disabled people’” (p. 21).

The value and potential impact of the social model is, however, contested. For example, Oliver (1992) in his influential work explains that it is the structure of society itself which disables individuals rather than impairments or personal limitations. He suggests that challenging the social politics and barriers that cause disability, both at a macro and micro level, will simply end disablement. Yet, while in theory this may seem a viable means to ‘end disablement’, it is also recognised that the social model is limited due to its simplicity and ignorance of the personal struggles of disabled people (Crow, 1996; Shakespeare & Watson, 1998, 2001). Thus, despite being a valuable tool for challenging oppression, as Shakespeare and Watson (2001) imply, the social model is
limited as a resource for explaining how disability is understood, rather than why this occurs.

In order to delve deeper into understanding disability and its embodied nature, both Shakespeare and Watson (2001) and Thomas (2002) agree that one must reject the clear cut nature of disability models and couple these frameworks with other theoretical resources, such as post-structural theory. Thomas (2002) explains:

Emphasis is placed on the need to transcend the dualistic thinking attributed to modernism, wherein the body is separated from the mind, the biological from the social, and the cultural from the economic. Rather, all social phenomena, including disability and impairment, should be understood to be woven through, and out of, cultural ideas and discursive practice: there is no ‘reality’ independent of ideas concerning it. (p. 49)

The social model of disability has been strongly critiqued for ignoring the role of impairment and individual stories of disablement (Thomas, 2004, 2013). Personally, I am uncomfortable about the lack of acknowledgement of individual experiences of disability within this framework (Connors & Stalker, 2007). I also reject the idea that removing structural barriers to participation will automatically lead to an ‘able’ life (Shakespeare & Watson, 1998). As Finklestein (2001) explains, “the model (aeroplane) will not explain how an aeroplane flies. The social model does not explain what disability is. For an explanation, we would need a social theory of disability” (p. 11).

Despite these criticisms, the social model still remains a valuable resource for identifying the ways in which students are disabled in the New Zealand education context and specifically Physical Education. Indeed, including all students in education is often defined as the process of removing barriers to participation (Ainscow, 2003; Allan, 1999), which links strongly to the concepts of the social model of disability. It is also important, however, not to disregard or overlook people’s personal struggles and impairments (Thomas, 2013). The lived reality of disability for students who are
ascribed the label will no doubt impact their understandings of themselves, their bodies and their place within Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools.

**Social Relational Model of Disability**

Using only the social model of disability as a resource does not inform or guide us towards one of the key aspects of this study: the subjective nature of students’ experiences. As Thomas (2004) explains, the social model “has only ever presented a simplified version of social relational thinking” (p. 579), meaning that there is more to disability than meets the eye. Shakespeare and Watson (2001) develop this further:

People are disabled both by social barriers and by their bodies. This is straightforward and uncontroversial. The British social model approach, because it ‘over-eggs the pudding’ risks discrediting the entire dish. (p. 17)

In Shakespeare and Watson’s (2001) terms, the social model overemphasises the role that physical barriers play in disabling people, while disregarding the role that the body plays in feelings of disablement and limiting physical ability. This is something the social relational model endeavours to address, by explicitly foregrounding both disability and impairment (Thomas, 1999). Connors and Stalker (2007) define the role impairment plays in constructing feelings of disablement as “restrictions of activity which result from living with impairment, as opposed to restrictions caused by social or material barriers” (p. 25). It is important, however to acknowledge the tricky balance between recognising the role of the medical condition that shapes people’s experiences of disability, and reverting to traditional medical understandings. This point is clarified by Thomas (2004):

Impairment does not cause disability, certainly not, but it is the raw material upon which disability works. It is the embodied socio-
biological substance – socially marked as unacceptable bodily deviation – that mediates the social relationships in question. (p. 41)

Disability is not limited to social oppression, nor is it solely a result of impairment. As Thomas (2013) explains, “not all restrictions could be explained by the presence of social barriers, and some restrictions would remain if all disabling social barriers in society were removed” (p. 13). Thus, disability can be seen as an embodied, subjective experience constructed not only by discourses of normality, ability and difference, but also through and by the physical body (Goodly & Runswick-Cole, 2013). The interactions between the physical body, the environment and social constructs then inform the experience of disability, both personally through impairment effects (Thomas, 2007), and publicly, particularly in areas where a discourse of normality is reinforced, such as Physical Education (DePauw, 1997; Evans & Davis, 2004).

Impairment effects arguably enhance and differentiate the social relational model from the social model by recognising the effects that impairment can have on a person, without disregarding the belief that disability is a social process (Thomas, 2007; 2013). Impairment effects have been described as restriction of activity directly due to impairments which differ from the concept of disability/diabilism (Connors & Stalker, 2007). Impairment includes things such as “tiring easily, being in pain, having difficulty completing school work” (Connors & Stalker’s 2007, p. 25). More specifically, the effects of impairments are “direct and unavoidable impacts that impairments have on individuals’ embodied functioning in the social world” (Thomas, 2012, p. 211). Thomas (1999) explains, “Impairment effects may become the medium for disability in particular social relational contexts” (p. 43). Therefore, in contrast to the medical model, disability is not caused by the individual’s impairment. Instead, the social relational
model implies that judgements, assumptions and barriers that are based on impairment effects are what comprise disabilism (Thomas, 2007, 2012, 2013).

Nonetheless, while disability is separate to impairment, this is not to say that disability does not also restrict activity. Thomas (1999) explains that ‘barriers to doing’ and ‘barriers to being’ highlight the personal struggles of disability, something that is often overlooked in other ways of seeing (Crow, 1996). Barriers to doing refer to structural creations that stop individuals with impairments from accessing or participating. Factors like inaccessible transport and discriminatory policies and practices (Connors & Stalker, 2007) are examples. Barriers to being refer to social interactions which affect one’s feeling of self-worth, such as discriminating language or negative attitudes that impact on an individual’s sense of self-worth (Thomas, 1999).

**Conceptualising Disability in Secondary School Physical Education**

While medical understandings of disability may reflect the basis of special education paradigms and the social model may reflect the general inclusive education standpoint of New Zealand educational policy (Macartney, 2009), I feel that neither is sufficient in providing a theoretical framework to examine how students understand their bodies within their Physical Education environments. The social relational model however, allows for more questions to be asked. For example, if inclusion within a Physical Education practical session is simply about removing barriers, why is it that students often do not feel included (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010)? And if disability is similarly fixed by ending oppression, how are feelings of exhaustion or pain that still exist once barriers are removed (Connors & Stalker, 2007) explained?

Furthermore, Thomas (2004) argues that the social relational model allows the experience of disability to be not only explained, but understood. She suggests it is the
ontological difference between the social relational model and the medical and social models. Unlike the social model, which seems to embrace a realist ontology – assuming everyone is similarly disabled by the same barriers and will thus have the same experiences – the social relational model not only acknowledges the socially constructed nature of disability, but also speaks to the embodied, subjective, unique and relative experiences of people who face both social and physical barriers.

**Summary**

Adopting the social relational model framework encourages particular attention to be paid to the *individual* nature of students’ Physical Education experiences. We can see disability not only as oppression and barriers, but as comprising the impact of these barriers, as well as the effect of impairments on the lives of those labelled disabled (Thomas, 2002). In other words, “impairment effects and disabilism are thoroughly intermeshed within the social conditions which bring them both into meaning” (Thomas, 2013, p. 14). In so saying, clear cut social and medical frameworks of disability are regularly drawn on in both the policy and practice of special and inclusive education (Reindal, 2008). The way that schools, teachers and parents understand disability and the place of students with physical disabilities will undoubtedly shape the experiences and understandings of the students participating in this research.

It is important to remember that this project focuses on students’ perspectives, experiences and understandings, rather than my own, adult imposed ideals. Therefore, it is important to understand and respect the way that the students know disability and recognise that these may differ from interpretations I may hold. Simply approaching the project with an understanding of disability as oppression or as a condition is not helpful when orientating the research towards students’ perspectives. While the social
relational model of disability may inform the analysis of this work, when working with the students it is imperative to endeavour to understand and research their reality alongside the realities I have gleaned from the literature discussed above. This is especially the case, as I aim to work with rather than about students with physical disabilities to better understand their perspectives.

**Understanding the Body**

Understanding how the body is understood is central to asking questions of students with physical disabilities experiences of Physical Education – as body is largely the focus of teaching and learning in this subject. In this section, I outline literature from the Sociology of the Body which view the body as either a natural phenomenon, or a social construct. Drawing on the work of Shilling (2004, 2012) and aligning the argument with the social relational model of disability above (Thomas, 1999, 2004, 2007), I argue that the body cannot be reduced to either a biological or social entity. Whilst I argue that the body itself is socially constructed, I am cautious of overlooking the physical presence of disability or impairment which could inform students’ Physical Education experiences (Hughes, 2013).

**Naturalised Bodies and Scientific Justification**

Shilling (2012) and Turner (2008) explain that, from a naturalistic point of view an individual’s role in society is defined by biology. This is an argument which became (and arguably still is) entrenched in the way individuals are classified, segregated and defined by their bodies. The notion of the “pre-social body” (Shilling, 2012, p. 45) means that it is the body itself which defines individual and social identity. Viewing the body in this way defines a person’s place in society in relation to the physical
characteristics s/he possesses. While both Shilling (2012) and Turner (2008) would agree that before the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, identity was not overtly defined by biology, the period of enlightenment drew on science to ‘prove’ innate physical differences were the basis of social positioning. At this time, “the body was viewed as the very \textit{basis} for human identity and social divisions” (Shilling, 2012, p. 47). For example, slavery and other ethnic injustices were premised on ‘racial classification’, which rendered particular groups as inferior to others (Kliwer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2006). This idea has been enduring throughout history and justifies some social practices today (Shilling, 2012).

Drawing on the work of Gallagher and Laqueur (1987), Shilling (2012) explains gendered relations were “a naturalistic reinterpretation of women’s bodies [that] solved the ideological problems involved in justifying unequal 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century gender relations” (p. 47). Women were deemed inferior to males, subject to the fragility and dangers of their bodies. Yet, while gender and racial definitions provide excellent examples of the naturalised bodily identity, disability is another example of how one’s body is defined by physical attributes, historically justified and proved inept by ‘science’ (Gleeson, 1997). Hughes (2013) explains that people with disabilities were (and still remain) excluded from many aspects of society, including the workforce, due to “normalising proclivities” which assume disabled bodies as “invalidated” (p. 56) and naturally different.

As discussed above, the medical/deficit model of disability explains how naturalised views of the body can be accepted and built on. Paterson and Hughes (1999, as cited in Fitzgerald, 2005) explain, “the term body tends to be used without much sense of bodiliness as if the body were little more than flesh and bones” (p. 60). Viewing the body in such a way reduces the perception of the disabled body to a
physical/biological issue, which can be proved and diagnosed (Macartney, 2009). Thus, providing the justification for individuals’ differential treatment and segregated positioning in society and education (Kitchen, 1998). Due to the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, I do not adhere to a naturalised conceptualisation of the body, yet discussing its origins and uses is important given its on-going presence in disability discourse and some Physical Education practices (Evans, 2004; Shilling, 2012).

Socially Constructed Bodies

In complete contrast to the notion of ‘naturalised’ bodies is the idea that bodies are social constructs, produced by discourse. In this way, the body is viewed as a “receptor, rather than a generator, of social forces and cultural meanings” (Shilling, 2012, p. 74). Many theorists take different approaches to explaining socially constructed bodies. In this thesis, I align myself with a post-structural view of the body. Foucault (1974) argues that the body is a social construct and a product of discourse and power. This idea provides insights into how particular knowledge is popularised, idealised and begins to be seen as truth within society, and could be taken up by students and reflected in the way they describe their selves and their bodies in relation to Physical Education (Hughes, 2013). Shakespeare (1994) provides an excellent example of the social construction of a disabled body. Drawing on a range of examples, he explains how cultural representations of disabled individuals reinforce discourses of difference, fear and objectification of people with disabilities. Barnes (1992, as cited in Shakespeare 1994), argues this cause further, stating:

Disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television, and in the press. They form the bedrock on which the attitudes towards,
assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily, and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion for mainstream community life. (p. 39)

Despite viewing the body as socially constructed, which provides insight into how bodies are differentiated, disabled and remain as such, it is important to acknowledge criticisms which counter that the body ‘disappears’ from Foucauldian social constructionist thinking (Hughes, 2013).

A concern with the mind/body relationship sees a social constructionist place extensive emphasis on the ‘mind,’ to the extent that the physical body, and experiences of this, are absent in literature. To combat this, Shilling (2012) argues “if we accept that knowledge is grounded in and shaped by the body, rather than separate from it, then this objection is misplaced” (p. 85). Through this perspective, the way students understand and experience their own bodies in Physical Education can be thoroughly examined and questioned.

Furthermore, viewing the body as a “multidimensional medium for the constitution of society… allows us to recognise the creation, sustenance and degeneration of social relationships as an inescapably corporeal process, and to highlight the significance of the embodiment of education” (Shilling, 2012, p. xvii, italics in original). In other words, the body is a location for, a source of, and a means for society to exist (Durkheim, 1995; Shilling, 2004). Thus, it is on, and through, the physical body that discourses and knowledge are produced and maintained. How the body ‘fits’ these discourses, or resists these, furthermore demonstrates how the ‘corporeal process’ is not a result of linear power relations, but rather a circulatory, multidimensional construct (Shilling, 2012).

Viewing the body in the aforementioned way, points to a particular way of thinking about the importance of students’ bodies in their Physical Education
experiences. As aforementioned, post-structural thinking conceives that bodies are given meaning by society, and give meaning to society, thus making them a central aspect in the way students with physical disabilities understand and construct their selves/identity (Evans & Davies, 2011; Wright, 2006). As van Amsterdam, Knoppers and Jongmans (2012) explain, questions such as “how disabled students… construct and position themselves in relating to dominant discourses which mark their bodies as abnormal or deviant?” (p. 3) are important to ask when examining students’ Physical Education experiences. This links to a social relational thinking of disability, where although disability is a social construct, the role impairments play in shaping disability, and also how people position themselves in relation to disability is very much an embodied experience (Fitzgerald, 2005).

**Understanding the Bodies of Students with Physical Disabilities**

Priestley (1999) argues that the way young people understand their bodies is largely influenced by the resources they have available, their experiences, and the contexts in which they exist. In this thesis, I examine the resources available to students with physical disabilities in Physical Education. As the social model and the social construction of the body have been critiqued for forgetting about the body, Priestley (1999) argues that children’s insights offer a refreshing reminder that one cannot disregard the role of the physical body in shaping subjectivities.

A similar reminder is given by Watson (2002), who highlights the dangers in assuming a shared, unified identity for people with disabilities, that is:

Applying a category as a foundation or as fundamental to political claims can only result in political closure. Identity is constructed in relations of discourse and power. Fixed identities of disabled people are enforced through regulatory regimes. (p. 510)
The danger in studying the ‘socially constructed self’ lies in assuming that a disabled identity is imposed on individuals and that individuals accept this imposition. Watson (2002) explains this when describing a research participant, stating:

His is not a docile body, he does not meekly adopt a passive and prescribed notion of self identity, and he is not trying to distance himself from his impairment or the value systems that are attached to have such an impairment. (p. 520)

In other words, while individuals may be socially constructed as ‘disabled’, they are also able to construct their own subjectivities in relation to other discourses or positions within society.

Flintoff et al. (2008) share a similar argument to Watson (2002) and encourage reflexivity and recognition of intersectionality on the part of the researcher when working with categories of bodily difference. They share concern with a “single issue focus” (Flintoff et al., 2008, p. 77), and caution about the risk of essentialising particular identities, such as that of the “homogenous ‘disabled child’” (Curtin & Clarke, 2005, p. 198). Furthermore, Flintoff et al. (2008) share a similar argument with Priestley (1999), explaining how the bodily appearance, be it skin colour, musculature, and/or impairment are central to how young people understand themselves and their identities. In other words, while the body can be viewed as socially constructed, the physical characteristics of the body itself can also contour the way students view, understand and experience their selves and their bodies within Physical Education.

Other literature reinforces the theme that disability is only one aspect of a student’s identity. For example, De Schauwer et al. (2009) conclude:

Disabled children are just regular persons…Ordinary things determine their lives, not just the difficulties or disabilities…The children themselves recognise that they are different but, as they make it clear this difference only becomes relevant at certain times and in particular contexts. (p. 104-105)
Kramer and Hammel (2011) similarly recognise that despite limitations, children with disabilities are competent and active members of society, like their able bodied peers. However, this view is often overridden by discourses which regard them as passive and dependant on others, thus making “it difficult for society to envision them as active agents” (Kramer & Hamel, 2011, p. 133). Taking a flexible approach to understanding students’ bodies is therefore paramount to this research. The way they understand their bodies is undoubtedly informed by the discourses they engage with and the way they negotiate these (Priestley, 1999).

**Summary**

In this section, I have outlined differing perspectives regarding the body, and how these may be relevant to an analysis of students’ experiences of Physical Education – a subject to which the body, movement and ability are central (Evans & Davis, 2004). However, literature that supports the notion that the body, like childhood and disability, is socially constructed is also quick to caution oversubscribing to this view. For example, the notion of intersectionality is hugely important for this thesis (Flintoff et al., 2008). Recognising the participants are able, active young people also involves a recognition that they are not only subject to discourses of ability and normality, but also gender, race, class and a myriad of other social constructs which identify and classify their bodies (Flintoff et al., 2008; Priestly, 1999).

**Physical Education**

In this section, I briefly trace the western world’s development of Physical Education and the underpinning discourses which inform it. The argument that ability is a social construct is also discussed in this section. Here, literature that demonstrates
how normalised understandings of ability are reinforced by discourses and practices that exist within Physical Education is reviewed. Following this, I discuss Physical Education literature which takes a student-centred approach and examines the impact Physical Education has on a student’s sense of identity and understanding of themselves. Finally, the debate regarding adaptation of bodies to ‘fit’ within Physical Education is analysed. Here, I state my position on the adaptive Physical Education and encourage caution when approaching inclusion from an adaptive perspective.

The Development of Physical Education

While queries as to Physical Education’s legitimacy within the education system have existed since its inception in the early 1900’s as a school subject (Kirk, 2001), Physical Education was constructed to help mould the bodies of students to fit within the social expectations and discourses around bodies at the time (Evans & Davies, 2004; Kirk, 1992; Shilling, 2012). Physical Education was a subject where the bodies, rather than the minds, were “schooled”. In other words, Physical Education involved “the social regulation and normalisation of bodies through educational practices such as learning physical skills and other practices specific to the school as an institution” (Kirk, 2001, p. 477).

Physical Education, and particularly the gymnastics and military drills which largely comprised the early New Zealand Curriculum (Culpan, 2005), was similar to that in the UK and Australia. These aspects developed Physical Education as a means of “schooling the docile body… (creating) compliant and healthy citizens” (Kirk, 2004, p. 55). The process of becoming a worthwhile citizen was reinforced through surveillance techniques such as assessment, praise or punishment. These reinforced that normality and regularity of appearance and movements was associated with value and
worthy bodies (Foucault, 1977). As Kirk, (2004) explains, self-worth was largely associated with a sound physical body and physical appearance. Thus, by engaging in what Foucault (1977) would call, ‘disciplinary practices’, such as the regimented Physical Education lessons which involved group drills, competitions and very public assessments of ability, the physically educated students’ bodies became “normalised and regulated to suit particular social class, economic and cultural purposes” (Kirk, 2004, p. 55). This concern with moulding the body reflected wider social concerns about corporeal power and responsibility for the body (Kirk, 2004), which arguably is still present today. DePauw (1997) argues that Physical Education scholarship tells us the body remains something to be ‘worked on’. Those who conform to, or maintain normalised, regulated bodies, such as Physical Education teachers, still remain in the position to pass judgement over those who do not ‘fit’ this mould.

Over time, the disciplined schooling of the body evolved. No longer did regulated exercise routines imposed on the students’ bodies dominate within Physical Education (Kirk, 2001). Instead schooling of bodies in Physical Education shifted to liberating the body, encouraging play and exploration of the body. Yet, this liberation was constrained by particular power structures which ensured the body was schooled and regulated in particular ways (Kirk, 2001). Power shifts in Physical Education can be traced from schools imposing particular types of movements on students, to internalised monitoring, or the exercise of bio-power, where students regulate and take concern for their own movements and actions (Kirk, 1998, 2004).

The personal responsibility for one’s own body reveals how surveillance of the physically educated self has moved from external sources to within the students (Kirk, 2004). This is reflected in Curriculum documents about Physical Education where “students develop the knowledge, understandings, skills, and attitudes that they need in
order to maintain and enhance their personal well-being and physical development” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22). This policy statement can be explained using Foucault’s (1997) concept of governmentality (as discussed in Chapter Two). This government rationality which contours individuals’ actions and practices (Simons & Masschelein, 2005), encourages students to ‘work on’ themselves, and to take control of their bodies. Yet while students are encouraged to take charge of their bodies, this policy is also encouraging them to do so in ‘acceptable’ ways. This reinforces the discourse that the ‘good citizen’ is one who (under the guise of freedom) maintains themselves in set ways (Macdonald, Wright & Abbott, 2010). For example, as the New Zealand Curriculum states, students develop “understandings about movement, and positive attitudes towards physical activity” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22). These understandings are inevitably contoured by the information they have access to, and knowledge of what movements and attitudes are deemed acceptable. Thus, Physical Education itself is shaped by ideas about bodies, normality, and responsibility (Evans, 2004). Despite shifting from a state of linear power relations, where discipline was handed to and demanded of students by educators, to discipline being expected of (and by) the students themselves, the central focus remains on the body and adherence to social norms (Fitzgerald, 2005; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Kirk, 2001; Tinning, 2004).

**The Social Construction of Ability in Physical Education**

Sports and Physical Education are practices which are socially constructed within the culture in which they exist and any adequate account of them must be grounded in an understanding of power, privilege and dominance in society. (Sage, 1993, p. 153)

Sage (1993) and many others (such as Barton, 2009; DePauw, 1997; Evans, 2004; Hay & Macdonald, 2010) encourage a questioning of the discourses which
inform Physical Education Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, and whose interests they serve. As mentioned above, regulating bodies to conform to corporeal norms of movements, actions and behaviours was historically Physical Education’s role. Moreover, Physical Education practices encouraged the notion that bodies were things to be worked on and to be maintained (Kirk, 2004). As a result, students were (and still are) expected to conform to the norms of bodies, to develop and shape their bodies to fit within accepted ideals. Should students not achieve what was expected of them, or differ from these norms, lack of ability was the prescribed reason, rather than questioning the structures of schooling, which caused such a chasm between the ‘ability’ of students (DePauw, 1997; Evans, 2004; Evans & Davies, 2004).

Many authors have pointed to the idea that ability itself is a social construct, contingent on social discourses and entwined within ideals of normalised bodies (Evans, 2004; Evans & Davies, 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Wright & Burrows, 2004). For example, Evans (2004) argues that Physical Education has become “strangely disembodied” (p. 96). Instead of developing students’ physical bodies, Evans (2004) argues Physical Education is used as a means to ‘fix’ social issues of poverty and obesity, which may impact the students’ bodies and their abilities. The consequence of this, according to Hay and Macdonald (2010), is that “ability is understood to represent potential for achievement that is fulfilled to a lesser or greater degree depending on the opportunities for expression of ability” (p. 2). Within Physical Education literature, it is cited that certain discourses and knowledge about ability are privileged over others, students’ ability to ‘fit’ these are contingent on the contexts available to demonstrate ability, and adhere to bodily norms (Evans, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005; Hay & MacDonald, 2010). Conceiving ability as a relation of power and knowledge demonstrates that “processes of schooling have been, and continue to
be, implicated discursively and pedagogically in the social construction and control of the body” (Tinning, 2004, p. 218).

What then, does this mean for students who do not fit the socially constructed ideal of the normal, able body? While claims that both able and disabled individuals partaking in Physical Education together will enhance understanding and awareness of differing bodies and abilities (Barton, 1993; Halliday, 1993), as Barton (1993) claims:

Physical education is the creation of and for able-bodied people… it gives priority to certain types of human movement…individual success is viewed as a means of personal status and financial well-being. It is depicted as the way to the ‘good life’. (p. 49)

Thus, from the outset, students with differences outside the physical norm face barriers to participation and success in Physical Education. Joint participation is by no means conducted on a level playing field, but is merely a result of the able bodied sphere being opened to accommodate for others (DePauw, 1997). Arguably this in itself is a result of a move towards inclusive education practices – causing students with physical disabilities to negotiate their way through discourses of ability and normality which, as discussed above, work to exclude and segregate bodies of difference (Barton, 1993; Brittan 2004).

Literature reflects this claim, suggesting that the place of students with physical disabilities in Physical Education is, at best, marginal, and at worst, non-existent. Fitzgerald and Stride (2012) argue, “Physical Education was conceived of and continues to be practiced in a normative way” (p. 283), ultimately excluding and marginalising students who do not fit the perceived norm of a workable, malleable body. Haycock and Smith (2011) and Penney (2002) reiterate this statement, and argue that there is an unequal playing field, and unequal participation rates, for students with physical disabilities who partake in ‘mainstream’ Physical Education. DePauw (1997), Evans (2004), Fitzgerald et al. (2003) and Slee (2011) agree that students with
disabilities of any kind, who are ostensibly accepted in Physical Education, in reality, struggle for acceptance. Drawing on key researchers such as DePauw (1997) and Evans (2004), Fitzgerald (2005) concludes that researching students with disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education provides a means of questioning the socially constructed nature of Physical Education itself, and how this works to enable and disable particular students. I now move to examine how students with physical disabilities understand themselves in relation to the normalised discourses of the body and ability introduced here.

**Students with Disabilities’ Experiences and Physical Education**

Students with disabilities’ experiences of feeling included and valued within Physical Education are rarely reported in literature (Fitzgerald, 2005). However, assuming inclusion is the feeling of being accepted and valued by one’s peers, both Fitzgerald (2005) and Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010) discovered that students who have previously been disabled in practical Physical Education classes wanted to feel like legitimate members of the classroom, on an equal footing with their peers. It was also noted that being a legitimate member of the classroom comes about by allowing students with physical disabilities the opportunity to both challenge themselves (Fitzgerald et al., 2003) and prove their ability to others (Goodwin, 2009).

However, this is often not the case. Instead of feeling included and like a legitimate member of the classroom, student-centred research highlights feelings of discrimination, bullying and low self-esteem within the Physical Education setting (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Connors & Stalker, 2007; Goodwin & Watson, 2000). Particularly relevant is Coates and Vickerman’s (2010) study on student experiences in Physical Education. While students noted some positive experiences of Physical
Education, the responses of others to their presence in the class and judgements about their ability appeared to create many negative experiences. One child in their study said:

> It [the other children] makes me feel different, like I don’t want to do any PE anymore when they’re gonna act like this… I used to love PE, now I’m getting on the other side of PE because people are picking on me, saying that “you can’t run” and sometimes in PE they are talking behind my back. (Coates & Vickerman, 2010, p. 1523)

The nature of Physical Education as an able bodied creation is illustrated by causing disabled people to become invisible and provoking negative experiences (DePauw, 1997). While this may be the case, I feel that listening to the students, and understanding what causes negative feelings can provide the tools to understand and counter ‘bad days’ in Physical Education (Goodwin & Watson, 2000). After all, as Coates and Vickerman (2010) conclude, “who knows the child’s needs better than the child itself?” (p. 1524).

**Constructing Ability Through Adaptation?**

It is important to acknowledge a developing area of research within practical based Physical Education – the development of assistive technologies in order to allow students to participate in mainstream lessons (Winnick, 2011). While technological advances and innovative ideas about how to adapt the lesson (or the students’ bodies) to suit the setting may seem positive, I agree with Fitzgerald (2005) who argues that these ‘advances’ can merely reinforce discourses of difference and the need for help that is seen in the medical model of disability. As a result, without rigorous critical enquiry about students’ experiences of the devices or adaptations provided to them, students will remain disabled by the barriers imposed by the discourse of Physical
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education. It will continue to be an able bodied creation, for the able bodied population (Barton, 1993, 2009; DePauw, 1997).

Modifying tasks or activities to suit the needs of all students is a growing area of discussion in Physical Education scholarship. While some research identifies this as a positive way to remove disabling barriers to Physical Education (see Goodwin (2009), in my opinion, critical questions can be asked about the foundations of adaptive judgements. Instead of a default move to assistive technologies, teaching others to respect and value the different ways people move throughout life is something that may be more productive within Physical Education. I feel that the return to ‘fitting’ the student to ‘normal’ standards is a risk for adaptive Physical Education and also challenges the intent of an inclusive, student centred Physical Education, as purported in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). For example, if adaptations are based on perceived judgements of ability, and are based on measuring students’ ability to ‘fit’ (Gordon, 2011), critical questions need to be asked about assumptions of disability, values of the body, appearance, normality, and inclusion held by those involved in practical Physical Education lessons. This is not to say that adaptation made in a way that is respectful to the student, which nurtures positive experiences and assists with full participation, is not valuable (Goodwin & Watson, 2000). But first a consideration of the students’ preferences, environment, rules, assessments and the ways these confine how students can move and achieve is required.

This sentiment is reflected in the New Zealand Curriculum, which is designed to be student centred, inclusive and flexible to ‘fit’ all students, rather than expecting students to ‘fit’ the curriculum. In other words, the Values, Principles, Key Competencies and Learning Areas (as discussed in Chapter One) demonstrate the
capacity of New Zealand secondary school Physical Education to include all students, rather than requiring ‘adaptation’ of students to fit within the curriculum parameters.

**Summary**

The Physical Education literature reviewed here illustrates the overwhelming focus on ability and ‘normalcy’ that disables and excludes students with physical disabilities (Barton, 1993, 2009). Despite the Physical Education Curriculum aiming to achieve feelings of self-worth, critical thinking about bodies and an enjoyment of engaging in movement with peers (New Zealand Curriculum, 2007), it seems that in international literature at least, these aims are seldom realised for students with physical disabilities. Instead, the pervasiveness of discourses of ability and normalised bodies appear to reinforce students with physical disabilities’ differences from the ‘norm’. Furthermore, students with physical disabilities have strong opinions about how these ideas can be challenged to construct more inclusive environments (Coates & Vickerman, 2008).

**Teaching and Learning**

While this thesis explores students’ perspectives and experiences of Physical Education, it is important to briefly explore how teachers work within the curriculum area of Health and Physical Education in New Zealand schools. More specifically, it is crucial to understand how teacher pedagogies and orientations towards the curriculum area may shape students’ experiences. As Alton-Lee (2003) suggests, as facilitators of learning, teachers have considerable power to advance or restrain student experiences and opportunities. I begin this section by outlining what the teaching and learning process is purported to look like and how inclusive pedagogies are represented in the
New Zealand Curriculum. I then draw on scholarly critiques of the teaching and learning context, before narrowing the focus to teaching and learning within Physical Education.

**Teaching and Learning Practices and Pedagogies within New Zealand Schools**

Quality teaching is widely linked to higher levels of student achievement within education (Alton-Lee, 2003). However, what ‘good’ teaching pedagogies and practices looks like is a major discussion point. As the students demonstrate in this research, what ‘works’ for one student may not work for another. To provide context to this project, in this section I discuss literature that examines what ‘good’ teaching practices should look like, and how these can facilitate the success and enjoyment of diverse young people within New Zealand education.

Within New Zealand, as it the case elsewhere, schools and classrooms comprise students form diverse backgrounds with diverse dispositions and orientations towards learning (Berryman, Woller & McDonald, 2009; Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003). The varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of New Zealand learners requires teaching and learning practices which work for all, not just some students (Alton-Lee, 2003, 2010). Furthermore, when students’ achievement levels are examined across ethnicity and socio-economic contexts, significantly lower results are evident for Maori and Pacific Island students and those from low decile rated schools (Bishop, 2011). The discrepancies between student achievement levels and modes of engagement amongst New Zealand students have long been a concern for New Zealand educators, the public and government (Durie, 2001; Kane, Maw Chamwayange, 2006; Sleeter & Owuor, 2011).
In order to facilitate teaching practices that work across the range of students, political, pedagogical and curricula changes have been made to help teachers encourage and support the learning of all students. Bough (2008) argues that in order to include all students and to recognise the diversity of learners, traditional teaching pedagogies will not suffice. Rather than adopting a teacher-led, content-based curriculum of the past, a need for more collaborative practices and pedagogies is required to address the number of students who “‘fall through the cracks’... and do not receive the kind of schooling they need or deserve” (Dowden 2008, p. 7). Alton-Lee (2003) argues that collaborative practices must be accompanied with high expectations of students. From her perspective, quality teaching involves a focus on achievement and outcomes in teaching and learning. Engaging with learners, and challenging the mentality where expectations are lowered for particular groups (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009) is important in developing quality teaching practise. Therefore, recognition of the role that teaching pedagogies can play to redress these disparities and a belief in the capacity of all to achieve positive educational outcomes is pivotal to good practice (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bough, 2008).

**Teaching, Learning and Curriculum**

Inclusive teaching practices are expected to be thoroughly embedded in New Zealand secondary education (Alton-Lee, 2003; Dowden, 2008; Hattie, 2002; Kane, et al, 2006). The need for inclusive teaching strategies, which engage students in the learning process and foster positive identities and relationships, has been especially recognised and foregrounded in the 2007 Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). Dowden (2008) explains that this document sees a shift from ‘subject-centred’ to ‘student-centred’ learning. The language used throughout the Curriculum, particularly
in the Learning Areas, Key Competencies, Values and Principles (discussed in Chapter One of this thesis) indicates a shift away from ‘teaching’ content-knowledge towards ‘fostering’ holistic learning and development (Kane et al, 2006). Major (2012) explains that this change reflects a paradigmatic shift in the way that knowledge is understood in the twenty first century:

These shifts and changes reflect theoretical arguments grounded in postmodernity, constructivism and notions of twenty-first century thinking that ‘emphasises the need for a reconceptualisation of knowledge and learning in educational policies and practices (Andreotti, 2010, p. 1). The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC), then, marks a move towards a potentially different kind of education (Major, 2012, p. 2)

Rather than assuming that knowledge can be transmitted by teachers to students, the holistic approach to learning found in the 2007 Curriculum sees learning as a discovery process, contingent on appreciating the student as individuals (Major, 2012). This is evident in guiding questions such as:

What is important (and therefore worth spending time on), given where my students are at? What strategies (evidence-based) are most likely to help my students learn this? What happened as a result of the teaching, and what are the implications for future teaching? (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35)

Overall, as Bough (2008) explains, the 2007 Curriculum differs greatly from previous editions. The focus has shifted to student-centred learning, where the curriculum works for the students and actively engages them in knowledge production and the pedagogical process (Kane, et al., 2006; Petire, Burrows, Cosgriff, Keon, Naera, Duggan & Devcich, 2013).

Brodhagen (2007) and Beane (2005) agree that student-centred learning is about placing the students at the heart of learning and teaching to their needs. In this sense, having knowledge of the topic is not enough to provide adequate teaching and learning (Alton-Lee, 2012). Instead, she argues, “purpose must guide methodology” (p.5). Alton-Lee, (2012) reiterates Major’s (2012) statement, acknowledging that student
interests and needs must guide teaching practice and content, rather than traditional content/topic based teaching paradigms (Bough, 2008).

The shift from directive teaching to more inclusive pedagogies is also said to encourage more democratic classroom practices (Ministry of Education, 2007). In particular, working within the curriculum guidelines to include all students reinforces the recognition of student-voice (United Nations, 1989) and collaborative pedagogical practices (Bough, 2008). Hattie (2002) explains that the most important factors that impact young peoples’ experiences of education is the relationship between students and teachers. A teacher’s ability to be flexible with learning practices, and his/her recognition of the values their teaching reflects, is an important factor in facilitating positive learning environments and ultimately educational success (Alton-Lee, 2003; Kane, et al, 2006).

In relation to this research, student-centred learning indicates a sense of positivity in the educational experiences of students. Teaching in such a way implies that inclusive content and practices are relevant to the production of knowledge and to fulfil the learning needs of students. Yet, such curriculum imperatives do not mean that all practices of teaching and learning are positive, engaging and fulfilling for students. In particular, criticisms about the amount of flexibility and lack of direction in the curriculum have been noted. Some commentators believe that excessive freedom creates gaps for both students and teachers to fall through (Dowden, 2008).

Firstly, the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum sees a stark and sudden change to traditional teaching practice and thinking which have existed in the profession for years. Such a change not only impacts pre-service teachers, but yields challenges for experienced teachers that have worked under more subject centred approaches (Bough, 2008). Teaching and Learning post 2007 means that teachers need to have a broad,
flexible knowledge of pedagogy and content to fit the needs of the learners, which can be a challenge for many teachers. Furthermore, working across Learning Areas sees a breakdown in barriers between subjects. While this is positive, it can also blur the lines between topics, creating confusion for teachers (Bough, 2008). Combined with the lack of professional development and teacher education can result in less than sufficient student-centred learning occurring (Bishop et al, 2009).

Finally, despite policy rhetoric encouraging communication between teachers and students, literature suggests this dialogue is often missing (Brown, 2002). As Kane et al (2006) explain, “teachers need to understand the ways their pedagogical practice are likely to affect the way children learn” (p.1). Having a belief in the learning ability of the student, and recognising the impact of teachers’ perceptions of students largely shapes learning experiences (Brown, 2002). Yet teachers and students continue to bypass each other in discussions about quality teaching and learning (Brown, 2002), meaning that opportunities are lost to understand and address the impact of teaching and learning approaches on student experiences.

**Teaching and Learning within Physical Education**

The direction of teaching and learning practices towards more inclusive, student-centred approaches is recognised as extremely positive for Physical Education (Burrows, 2005). As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, the Key Competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum sit well with Physical Education, and invite new and exciting practices to implement learning in Physical Education (Burrows, 2005). However, it is important to remember Ballard’s (2004) cautionary note that attention must be paid to “how a child may experience teaching, which may differ from teacher intentions” (p. 10). Petrie, Jones and McKim (2007) address Ballard’s (2004) in their examination of
teaching and learning in Physical Education. Recognising that the lack of teachers’ professional development in the area of Physical Education is of concern (Petrie, et al., 2007; Petrie, 2008), and that “many teachers feel ill-equipped and reluctant to teach HPE” (Petrie, et al. 2007 p. 3); the “Everybody Counts?” project sought to examine how Physical Education teaching and learning practices can work for all students (Kane et al, 2006).

Similar to other research, Everybody Counts (EBC) recognises the importance of getting to know students in the class, developing relationships, including and working alongside students to foster learning opportunities (Kane, et al., 2006). While such an approach to teaching is beneficial to all areas of New Zealand education (Ministry of Education, 2007), this approach to teaching and learning is particularly relevant to fostering positive experiences in Physical Education. As Evans and Davis (2004) as well as Leahy (2009) agree, this is because dis-engagement in Physical Education can greatly impact a students’ sense of self and willingness to participate in learning opportunities. As discussed earlier, the body is on show in Physical Education unlike any other subject. Confident teachers who develop relationships, encourage and foster self-worth within the Physical Education context are therefore important to students’ holistic learning experiences.

Despite changes to the way that teaching and learning occurs in curriculum documents, some scholars have critiqued the ability of teachers to turn policy into practice and include all students within Physical Education. Evans and Davis (2004) argue that,

in contrast with meeting the diverse needs of all learners, research suggests that those with the “right” image, body type and disposition to eat and exercise well often receive “more time, space, opportunity, attention and reward, both emotional and material” in schools than those who have different bodies and embrace different health practice (cited in Petire et al., 2013, p. 3).
In other words, the extent to which healthist discourses have pervaded the learning area of Physical Education can dilute the messages of well-being and the inclusive, accepting practices expected in Physical Education.

**Summary**

In summary, the New Zealand Curriculum supports an inclusive and engaging learning context for all students (Ministry of Education, 2007). Students are, in theory, no longer required to ‘fit’ education. Instead, the pedagogies and practices enshrined in the New Zealand Curriculum conceptualises all students as active, included and engaged learners. Within the Health and Physical Education learning area, pedagogies are similarly inclusive. The extent to which students’ experiences of Physical Education mirror this inclusive policy intent will be explored in the latter chapters of this thesis.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have drawn on literature from a variety of disciplines which inform the research question: What are students with physical disabilities experiences of Physical Education? Literature selected from Childhood Studies, Disability Studies, the Sociology of the Body, Physical Education and Teaching and Learning share the common view of a socially constructed reality. Viewing bodies, abilities, childhood and Physical Education as social constructs allows for a questioning of discourses and relations of power, which would not be possible should an alternative approach be taken. For example, should childhood or disability be viewed as stable categories, one would not be able to interrogate discourses constructing them as such, nor offer students the chance to challenge these discourses by engaging with the research process.
I feel this literature review reinforces the importance of including students in the research process, and their ability to contribute knowledge to elicit educational and social change regarding disability (Kelly, 2005; Watson, 2012). This literature review highlights key post-structural questions which orientate this research: whose voice is listened to, what discourses are privileged within the context of Physical Education, how are some individuals, such as teachers, policy makers and teacher aides positioned as ‘experts’ of experience, and what are the consequences for students with physical disabilities? The importance of asking these questions is demonstrated by a range of scholars who similarly posit such questions in their research, particularly in regard to topics of ability and inclusion (Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Evans, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Goodwin, 2009; MacArthur, 2007a, 2007b; Rutherford, 2009).

Finally, it can be concluded that understanding students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools is an important and valuable undertaking. Claims to support this statement are made by Barton (1993), DePauw (1997) and Fitzgerald, (2005) who explain that the role of Disability Studies within Physical Education is to both challenge and critically analyse the nature of Physical Education and the impact it may have on young people’s understandings of themselves and their bodies. Thus, I end this chapter with Barton’s (1993) concluding argument: “The voice of disabled people needs to be heard and seriously examined. This is absolutely essential in the teaching of Physical Education” (p. 52).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Everyone shares their ideas differently, and has different ways of expressing ideas; you just have to find the right ways of getting them to communicate. (Connor, 2013)

In this chapter, I deal with the methodology and methods of the research. After revisiting the aims of the research discussed in Chapter One, I discuss how the philosophical, theoretical and participatory research frameworks work to support and develop these aims. This is followed by a discussion of the research project, beginning with the development of the research topic. In this section, I discuss the ethical considerations and recruitment processes used in the project. The students themselves are then introduced, along with the particular methods of ‘data’ collection. Following this, the ways that the students’ testimonies were analysed and the role that they played in this analysis is discussed. Finally, the way that the research will be disseminated is outlined, including the role that the students have in sharing their insights with those they feel need to listen.

Research Aims

Students’ perspectives about their experiences are relevant to the wider study of inclusion because it is only through trying to understand their own views of their experiences that schools can effect change by restructuring their cultures, policies and practices. (Carroll-Lind & Rees, 2009, p. 2)

In this section I revisit the aim of this research project, which is to examine the secondary school Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities. Simply put, this thesis asks, in what ways do students with physical disabilities experience Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools? Furthermore, I question how the movements, bodies and abilities privileged within Physical Education
serve the interests of some, while marginalising and excluding others; and how students’ experiences of Physical Education contour their perceptions of their selves and bodies.

This project is driven by an awareness of the value of understanding students’ experiences as a precursor to facilitating educational change (Carroll-Lind & Rees, 2009; Coates & Vickerman, 2008; Davis & Watson, 2001; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010). New Zealand literature in particular highlights the inconsistency in positive student experiences of education, and points towards the need to reject ‘one-size fits all’ approaches (MacArthur et al, 2007a, 2007b). Instead, scholars encourage people to listen and respond to each child’s views and experiences of education, to create an environment that works for all students (Carroll-Lind & Rees, 2009; MacArthur, 2013; Morton et al., 2012; Rutherford, 2012).

Locating the research in Physical Education allows for specific interest to be paid to discourses of ability (Evans, 2004), the body (Shilling, 2004; Tinning, 2009; Tinning & Glasby, 2002) and how we come to know (and measure) normality (Barton, 2009; Foucault, 1977). As already discussed, literature which examines Physical Education describes the place of students with physical disabilities as largely on the margins. Not only are many of these students on the margins of (or absent from) the Physical Education environment; but this also appears to be the case in academic research, where students with physical disabilities are often missing, even in discussions of diversity, oppression or inclusion (Goodley, & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Svendby & Dowling, 2013). My own frustration with disability being “sidelined as an etc issue” (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 4), alongside topics of race, class and gender in undergraduate Physical Education courses (and the accompanying academic literature) made me question not only where the voices of people with disabilities were, but also why no one noticed they were missing.
Fitzgerald’s (2009) claim that “these omissions … illustrate how scholars continue to be complicit in marginalising young disabled people’s needs and interests in youth sport” (p. 4). This statement and similar recognitions by other scholars (Barton, 1993; Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Coates & Vickerman, 2008, 2010; DePauw, 1997; Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Goodwin, 2009) have informed my thinking about the injustice of ignorance regarding the representation of students with physical disabilities. It has also encouraged me to question how diversity/inclusive research in Physical Education is able to make a difference, when those at the heart of the issue are excluded (Fitzgerald, 2009). The aforementioned points drove me to undertake a research project centred on the voices of students with physical disabilities within the Physical Education setting. In order to do so; this thesis adopts particular philosophical and theoretical orientations.

Overall, this research not only aims to uncover the politics of Physical Education and the place of students with physical disabilities within the New Zealand secondary education system, but also aims to assist the students in making sense of these experiences and encourage them to take action. In the next section, I discuss the philosophical and theoretical foundations that underpin these research aims.

**Philosophical Foundations**

The aims of the research project discussed above align with a particular set of philosophical foundations. In order assist students to make sense of their experiences, it must be assumed that ‘experience’ is something fluid, changing and able to be interpreted in a myriad of ways. Furthermore, recognising that each student’s understandings of Physical Education will be different, indicates a great deal of subjectivity and flexibility. In this section, I examine qualitative research, the socially
critical paradigm, social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology. These philosophical views inform how it is that the research aims are developed, how ‘reality’ is understood and how the insights students’ provide are interpreted. Finally in this section, I demonstrate how assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality inform the research methodologies adopted for this research.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative researchers need to be storytellers. That, rather than any disdain for number crunching, ought to be one of their distinguishing attributes. To be able to tell (which in academia essentially means to be able to write) a story well is crucial to the enterprise. (Wolcott, 1994, p. 17)

In this section, I trace the development of qualitative research as it applies to this thesis. Drawing particularly on qualitative research about people with disabilities, I discuss qualitative research’s desire for socially just, meaningful research and how the fluid nature of such research informs the way I examine the students’ discussions of Physical Education.

**Development of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research, particularly in colonial times, evolved out of a desire to study and understand “the other” and their social differences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 1). Researchers drew upon their own direct experiences of a given research population which, at times, resulted in the reproduction of stereotypes and preconceived ideas. Thus repressing the ‘researched’ population and reinforcing their difference from the ‘norm’ (Nairn, 2005). Early qualitative researchers in the disability sphere in particular, have been charged with contributing to the imposition of hegemonic values and ideals upon
those who they viewed as different or inferior (Barnes, 2003; Mercer, 2002; Stone & Priestley, 1996). For example, Hunt (1989) coined the term ‘parasite researcher’ following an arguably derogatory account of disabled people’s living conditions during the 1960s. In this study, researchers were invited into the residential care home, Le Court Cheshire Home, by residents to assist in their struggle for basic human rights. Instead, residents felt alienated, betrayed and exploited by the researchers who adhered to their own so-called scientific principles in an attempt to produce unbiased research by researching on rather than with the residents (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999; Mercer, 2002; Stone & Priestley, 1996).

Accounts such as these prompted great disdain and resistance to able bodied qualitative researcher in Disability Studies (Stone & Priestley, 1996). As is the case in other areas, such as Indigenous Studies, some qualitative research turned from creating objective outsider accounts, to being re-configured as a tool for social change and equality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Stone and Priestley (1996) draw on the early work of Touraine (1981) to explain the role of the qualitative researcher as one of being both ‘agitator’ and ‘secretary’: stirring those who are marginalised to speak, recording and representing what they have to say. This is in contrast to earlier research, such as the Le Court Cheshire Home inquiry, where researchers spoke for those being studied.

**The Role of the Qualitative Researcher**

Disability Studies researchers, like many others which use qualitative methodologies, desire to conduct socially just, decolonised and often emancipatory forms of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mercer, 2002). This commitment to morality and social justice for participants, in both their lives and with respect to research
protocols, is currently a principle, which unifies most kinds of qualitative research. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry project, but it is also a moral, allegorical and therapeutic project. Ethnography is more than human experience. The ethnographer writes tiny moral tales, tales that do more than celebrate cultural difference or bring another culture alive. (p. xvi)

Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) perspective suggest that as qualitative researchers, we must concern ourselves with the meanings and representation created from and within qualitative research practices. Also, it is suggested that qualitative researchers must approach subjects of enquiry with a strong moral compass and a desire to understand (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) build on this statement in their outline of qualitative research characteristics. They explain that qualitative researchers must examine the process of constructing meaning in a descriptive, inductive manner. Therefore, qualitative research draws on a variety of theoretical and methodological resources to explain what is known (Taylor & Bodgan, 1998).

**Types of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research comes in many forms, depending on the epistemological, theoretical and historical influences that shape any particular instance of it (Hastie & Hay, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlight the difficulties with finding commonalities (other than the social commitment to morality and social justice) within the broad scope of qualitative research, explaining that qualitative research is rife with “contestation, contradiction and philosophical tension” (p. xv) causing unity within the field to be a near impossible feat. For example, Marxist, feminist, or critical race theorists all bring different theoretical assumptions to the research project and often critique each other’s understandings of social relations. Similarly, the fundamental difference between
structural and post-structural researchers appears to render them opposites, yet arguably the two theoretical orientations are united by the aims of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Building on the exceptionally broad nature of qualitative research, research in this field is not as limited by methods or epistemologies in the same way as quantitative research is (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Instead, qualitative research can be viewed as a fluid research umbrella, under which researchers are guided by the variety of methods, theories and epistemologies appropriate to the project in order to facilitate rich understandings of participants’ lives (Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

The Socially Critical Paradigm

Paradigms are best described as basic belief systems which inform one’s way of viewing the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes, 1992). While there are a range of paradigms underpinning disability research (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; MacDonald, Kirk, Metzler, Higles, Schempp & Wright 2002; Mercer, 2002), I have chosen to locate this research in what can be broadly labelled the socially critical paradigm, which fits within my post-structural theoretical orientation discussed later in this chapter (Tinning & Fitzpatrick, 2012).

In this thesis I argue that students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education are dependent on the wider educational contexts and perceptions of ability/disability embedded in these. Therefore, the paradigm that focuses primarily on recognising limiting structures of power and creating social change (Sparkes, 1992;

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2 Structuralism assumes that individuals are influenced and constrained by social structures, and that all elements of society and culture can be understood in relation to wider social structure (Oliver, 2010). Broadly speaking, post-structuralism rejects the overarching notion of structure and control and instead assumes that multiple meanings and interpretations of reality exist (Wright, 2006).
Tinning & Fitzpatrick, 2012) seems most fitting for this research. As MacDonald et al. (2002) explain, socially critical research recognises the imbalance of power within society and the need to challenge this at both individual and social levels. According to Macdonald et al. (2002), “the assumptions and purposes that underpin and guide a socially critical perspective have included a commitment to social justice, equity, inclusivity, and social change” (p. 140). The latter features render this paradigm a sound match for a project focused on exploring the experiences of students with physical disabilities within Physical Education. As several critical scholars attest, education is an area rife with dynamics of power, which serve the interests of some while excluding and disabling others (Armstrong, 2003; Barton, 2000; Slee & Allan, 2001).

Foundations of the Socially Critical Paradigm

Socially critical research is founded on the recognition that some people are rendered powerless alongside groups with vested interests in retaining power (MacDonald et al., 2002). Those who embrace a socially critical paradigm tend to believe that change is wrought by initially changing the thinking/consciousness of individuals about their situation (Sparkes, 1992). Within education as a whole, disabled students often remain (and feel) powerless or like ‘extras’ in a system that is not created to serve children equally (Armstrong, 2003; Slee, 2001a; Slee & Allan, 2001; Tomlinson, 1982). Assisting disabled students to understand the wider political factors that contribute to disablement within education and affording them the tools to challenge this is therefore imperative. Change on a personal level, however, is not necessarily sufficient for contributing to wider educational knowledge and development. Rather, in order to contribute knowledge which could encourage a rethinking of Physical Education practices within New Zealand secondary schools, inequalities must be addressed, on
both a personal and political level (Rutherford, 2009; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010).

The socially critical paradigm yields potential to address inequalities at both personal and political levels. Unlike the paradigm of interpretive research, which Sparkes (1992) explains tends to generate research in a vacuum of ‘splendid isolation’, often ignorant of social, economic, political and cultural influences, the critical paradigm assumes the social constructions of knowledge, power relationships and oppressive structures play a large role in how people shape their lives (and subjectivities) and those of others (MacDonald et al., 2002; Mercer, 2002). For example, traditional Childhood Studies research was orientated to the interpretive paradigm, with a focus on simply contributing to adults’ understandings and knowledge of childhood (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2008). However, a recent move towards socially critical research has resulted in a fundamental shift towards a concern with emancipation and empowerment of the researched individual. Gallagher and Gallagher (2008) explain: “It is not sufficient to carry out research on or about childhood; childhood researchers must research for and with children” (p. 500).

*The Aim of Socially Critical Research*

Socially critical research does not stop at describing the world. Rather, the aim is to change it (Sparkes, 1992). Whilst the goal of changing the world is unrealistic for this thesis, proceeding with the view to ‘make a difference’ is fundamental. These sentiments are increasingly being expressed by others within the Disability Studies community, where scholars argue that research must firstly be concerned with respecting and empowering those involved in the research project (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001), rather than merely using those involved to generate understanding. Fitzgerald (2009)
provides examples of socially critical research into students’ experiences of Physical Education, where research is conducted by students themselves. She concludes with a key point of socially critical, qualitative research: “Indeed, it is not sufficient to merely listen to young people but rather we should seek to support an environment in which their voices are heard and celebrated” (p. 156).

However, operating in a socially critical paradigm is by no means value free. If research is seen to be a political act, it is important to recognise that the researcher is in no way separate to the research (Sparkes, 1992). My own values, assumptions and personal experiences will inevitably shape the construction of this research and the meanings derived from it. In other words, the researcher is “built into the research process” (Hastie & Hay, 2012, p. 82). Therefore, while critical researchers have been critiqued as “occupants of the moral high ground” (MacDonald et al., 2002, p. 141), continued practices of reflexivity, reciprocity and awareness of the interrelatedness of the researcher to the outcomes and construction of knowledge is vital to sound, critical research (Devis-Devis, 2006).

**Social Constructionist Epistemology**

Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as the philosophical term for deciding where and what knowledge is possible. While keeping in mind that a range of research disciplines which yield multiple understandings of childhood, disability, the body and Physical Education will be drawn upon, it is important to remember that epistemological stances “are not to be seen as watertight compartments” (Crotty, 1998 p. 9).

**Justifying Social Constructionist Epistemology**
While I assume a predominantly social constructionist epistemology – meaning that knowledge or meaning is constructed rather than discovered (Crotty, 1998) – at times subjectivist and even objectivist epistemologies will also be drawn upon to make sense of the nature of Physical Education, wider education and disability, through the eyes of the students (Sparkes, 1992). An objectivist epistemology would assume that it is possible to measure or observe the way students experience Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools (Light, 2008). A subjectivist epistemology, on the other hand, would assume that meanings made from Physical Education are unique to the individual, even if he/she shares identical contexts to others (Sparkes, 1992). While I do agree that this thesis is a meaning-making activity undertaken by myself and the students (post-structural orientations would also veer me in this epistemological direction) I feel it important not to disregard the social, physical and political factors which shape the process of meaning-making in the Physical Education context, particularly in relation to ability and disability (Thomas, 2004). Therefore, I adhere to the view that the knowledge students feel they gained from Physical Education about themselves is constructed out of interactions with the environments, discourses and relationships with others that exist within it (MacDonald et al., 2002).

**Social Constructionist Epistemology and Education**

Dyson (1999) explains that students are not passive learners who construct knowledge in similar ways. Social constructionist approaches assume that students not only construct knowledge through their interactions, but also draw on their prior knowledge and subjective experiences to construct their perspectives in unique ways. Therefore, while all students may experience similar interactions, their previous
experiences, the ways they engage with the world, what discourses they chose or are prompted to take notice of, as well as their familial, class or gender contexts (Flintoff, Fitzgerald & Scraton, 2008) will cause them to construct or produce their knowledge and understandings in a unique way unlike their peers.

This approach is particularly helpful when discussing how students with physical disabilities experience Physical Education and how these experiences impact on the way they view themselves, their bodies and their sense of ability/worth. Students across a range of educational contexts, for example, high decile, low decile, single sex and co-educational schools will all have unique understandings and experiences. Therefore adhering to a social constructionist epistemology allows me to recognise the embodied, subjective nature of the students’ knowledge and experiences. It also allows me to examine the similar discourses within these contexts that students draw on in their discussions of Physical Education.

Building on the statement that students are not passive learners, a social constructionist epistemology also does not assume knowledge is only created out of interactions and experiences. As Devis-Devis (2006) explains, the construction of knowledge is immensely political. It is created to serve the interests of some, while often disempowering others. The recognition of the political nature of knowledge production means that a social constructionist epistemology links particularly well to literature discussing the creation of education and Physical Education (DePauw, 1997; Hahn, 1984; Tomlinson, 1982).

**Relativist Ontology**

Moving on from the way knowledge is produced or constructed, ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Devis-Devis, 2006; Sparkes, 1992). Ontology is
described by some scholars as comprising a continuum between the ‘realist-relativist’ nature of reality (Devis-Devis, 2006; Sparkes, 1992). Crotty (1998) suggests that ontology and epistemology are implicitly linked, thus ontology can be implied from one’s epistemology. However should one examine “what it means to know” how students with physical disabilities experience Physical Education, then it is imperative to also question “what it means to be” a student with a disability/constructed as disabled within this education context (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

Devis-Devis (2006) explains that ontology not only questions the nature of reality, it also questions the nature of the research topic. In relation to this topic, ontology raises the question; are the ways that students with physical disabilities understand and discuss their experiences of Physical Education true, provable and comparable? Or is this research topic relative, subjective and impossible to prove or define as reality shifts from person to person? A relativist ontological perspective would assume the latter.

**Ontology and Education**

In contrast to national policy which (on paper) appears to assume that the presence and experiences of students with physical disabilities in Physical Education should be no different to those of their able bodied peers (Ministry of Education, 2007), I am assuming that the nature of reality for students with physical disabilities (like all students) is relativist and immensely subjective. This means assuming that the way that students exist within and react to the socially constructed nature of Physical Education will differ from person to person. For example, what it means to be able or disabled; the knowledge reproduced by teachers, peers or media (Coates & Vickerman, 2008); the social value attached to the able body in this subject area (DePauw, 1997); the reality of
being included/excluded from Physical Education; and how these experiences inform understandings of disability/ability, will mean differing things to each student.

There is presumably a wide range of individual experiences that are discernable using a relativist ontology, which makes drawing generalisable conclusions between individuals difficult, if not impossible (Devis-Devis, 2006). As a result, relativist ontology could be critiqued as productive of research specific only to particular individuals’ lives. However, MacDonald et al. (2002) and Sparkes (1992) argue that a relativist ontology is central to understanding the way that power relations and discourses of ability, disability, gender and appearance contour the ways knowledge is produced within the secondary school Physical Education context, and how this knowledge is understood and taken up by students with physical disabilities. While assuming that knowledge is something that is socially constructed, the individualist/relativist ways that the students understand the knowledge within Physical Education will most likely influence the way they articulate their experiences and understand their bodies. Therefore, understanding how students experience Physical Education is not necessarily about finding out the ‘reality’ of these experiences, but rather a matter of looking at the factors that shape this reality for the individual students. In other words, “Educational research doesn’t so much prove anything or establish ultimate truth as much as it reduces our uncertainty and hopefully helps us to better understand our world so that we can strive to improve it” (Giangreco and Taylor, 2003, p. 134).

Summary

In this thesis, I adopt qualitative methodologies because they provide flexibility and fluidity in research, which I believe embraces the value of students’ voices and
contributes to understanding how students with physical disabilities experience Physical Education. These philosophical perspectives also prompt me to recognise it is not possible to prove that what any given student says is ‘true’, and I share the belief that:

A methodological discourse that requires research to be systematic and grounded within parameters that demonstrate, amongst other things, reliability and validity… is disablist and fails to recognise the circumstances of researching issues relating to disability. (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 156)

Further, I assume that the way that students with physical disabilities position themselves in relation to discourses of education and ability – which exist within the Physical Education context – is immensely subjective. Should a student be exposed to the knowledge that mainstream Physical Education was not created for everyone (Tomlinson, 1982), or experience a neo-liberal, results driven education system where social and education value is ascribed to those able to achieve (Ballard, 1997; Barton, 2000; Macartney, 2009), their educational experiences and understanding of their place in the Physical Education setting would undoubtedly differ from those who experienced an equitable, inclusive educational setting.

With these philosophical foundations, I conclude the nature of Physical Education is something that is socially constructed and thus contested. It is about the knowledge created as a result of discourses, power relations and previous experiences that the students in the study have had and have been exposed to. I also view the reality of students with physical disabilities’ experiences in Physical Education through relativist ontology. Aligning with post-structural thinking which is discussed in the next section, actually proving a reality or ‘truth’ of what the students’ testimonies contain cannot be achieved (Wright, 2006). Nonetheless, identifying the discourses and relations of power and knowledge within social, political, economic and historical contexts, which ultimately construct these experiences, is possible.
I now move to discuss the particular theoretical tenets that inform this research. The issue of perspectives will guide this discussion. More specifically, how disability and education can be understood from researchers’ and students’/participants’ perspectives, and how theoretical resources can involve, rather than exclude students/participants. In other words, I am interested in addressing questions about how to use post-structural theoretical resources in a way that “makes a difference” (MacDonald et al., 2002, p. 144) to both the project and the participants.

**Theoretical Foundations: Foucauldian Post-structuralism**

From the outset, it is important to note that this thesis is not purely post-structural in nature (Wright, 2004). However, I draw on many post-structural theoretical resources that inform the research aims and questions asked in this study. As I now discuss, engaging with these questions requires a particular use of post-structural concepts that complement the philosophical understandings discussed above.

Post-structural theory has informed questions about how students with physical disabilities might come to know or understand their own bodies in relation to their Physical Education and wider educational experiences (Allan, 1999; Allan & Riddle, 1998; Slee, 2011). More specifically, what discourses do students draw upon to make sense of these experiences? Unlike other social theoretical resources (for example, structuralism or Marxism), post-structural thinking allows me to look beyond the political and social constructions of categories such as Physical Education, disability, the body and childhood – which I discuss in the following chapter. It allows me to view engaging in Physical Education as a relative experience, one which will mean different things to different students within different contexts (Davis, 2013; Jones, 1993).
In this section, I firstly outline some tenets of post-structural theory (specifically those informed by Foucault) and their relevance to research with students with physical disabilities in Physical Education. I then discuss the post-structural resources that I will draw upon to inform this research that are frequently used in the study of disability (Hughes, 2013; Shakespeare & Watson, 1998), childhood (Ashton, 2011; Laws & Davies, 2000) and education (Slee, 2011). These are the concepts of discourse, subjectivity, knowledge and power. Under the section ‘knowledge and power’ I further examine notions of surveillance, governmentality, discipline and the production of docile bodies, and explain my interpretation of the term ‘bio-power’. I also mention other post-structural terms I draw on throughout the discussion chapters, all of which are recapped before their use in their respective chapters.

**Post-structuralism in Education**

Allan (2008) believes that the theoretical tools provided by Foucault can assist in challenging and altering thinking about the place of students with physical disabilities in education. Post-structuralism can also provide some valuable theoretical tools that help to uncover different ways of interpreting how student experience their respective Physical Education contexts. As Jones (1993) explains, “post-structuralism provides a conceptual language which transcends agency/structure dualism” (p. 157). In contrast to traditional research regarding education and the place of students with disabilities – which views inclusion as a structural issue, examining the physical and social barriers to participation and how these can be removed or changed to integrate the students (Morley, 2005) – post-structuralism potentially encourages different ways of thinking. For example, it encourages us to understand that the way students describe Physical Education is not only the result of experiences or discourses imposed on students, but
these experiences are also shaped by students. In other words, it allows us to view students’ experiences of Physical Education as a political, social and personal construct (Davis, 2013; Slee, 2011).

However, using post-structural concepts to understand the experiences of young people in Physical Education is not without its critics. As Allan (1999) explains, Foucault never specifically researched education, and post-structuralism is often viewed as an overly individualistic form of social theory, failing to acknowledge any points of unity between individuals’ experiences (MacDonald et al., 2002). In response to these claims, post-structural thinkers agree that there are points of similarity between individuals, due to the fundamental way that discourses operate (Law & Davis, 2000). Also, using post-structuralist theoretical resources adds another layer of thinking to my enquiry about the nature of Physical Education, the ‘disabled’ body and the way students draw on these to describe their own bodies. In particular, post-structuralism permits an understanding of how Physical Education, disability, the body and childhood are socially constructed. It allows questioning of why this might be the case, whose interests such constructions serve and the potential effects on how one lives their life, and understands themselves (Slee, 2011).

Within Physical Education literature, Wright (2006) explains that post-structural resources are used for “an emancipatory purpose; that is, to make visible the ways in which power and knowledge operate to privilege certain practice and forms of subjectivity and to examine their effect on the lives of individuals and groups” (p. 60). Post-structural resources therefore provide valuable tools to call into question what and how the students come to know what is ‘normal’ within the context of Physical Education.
Constructions of ‘normal’ development, gender, ability and appearance within Physical Education are frequently examined under a post-structural lens (Gore, 1995; Morrison, 2009; Wright, 2004). I too use this lens to question the construction of discourses of achievement, appearance, development, ability and disability, and how these shape students’ participation in and experiences of Physical Education. Furthermore, post-structuralism aids an understanding of how students respond to, challenge or reproduce discourses of ability and normality (among others) within Physical Education, and how they draw on these to describe their embodied experiences.

**Post-structural Concepts**

This section outlines the particular aspects of post-structural theory I use throughout this thesis. I begin by discussing the concept of discourse, before moving to discuss subjectivity – an integral concept for this thesis. I then move to discuss the relationship between power and knowledge. Following this, I outline the differing operations of power discussed in this thesis. In particular, I examine concepts of surveillance, discipline and the way this produces the docile body, governmentality and bio-power.

**Discourse**

For Foucault, discourse was something more than a matter of linguistics and dissecting textual data (McHoul & Grace, 1998; Oliver, 2010). Rather, the term is deeply entrenched in the dynamics of knowledge and power, and how we come to know what is real (McHoul & Grace, 1998; Wright, 2006). As Wright (2006) states, discourse “captures the relationship between meaning and power; it is used to refer to a system of beliefs and values which produce particular social practices and social relations” (p. 61).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The creation and production of discourse is very much tied up with the legitimation of certain forms of knowledge, which Oliver (2010) suggests is clearly evident within educational institutions.

Discourses themselves are not always explicitly drawn upon or seen within the ‘data’ of research projects such as this one. However, Wright (2006) explains that language choices made in conversations point to the use of particular discourses. In this project, the language chosen by the students allows me to identify the discourses that they negotiate within their Physical Education contexts. I pay particular interest to how the students draw on and respond to discourses of ability/disability, appearance, healthy bodies and normality that are supported within the Physical Education environment. Do the students accept or reject them? Or do they negotiate or overlook these discourses to ‘fit’ their own reality? These questions will provide insights into how and what shapes students’ experiences of Physical Education.

Subjectivity

A central concept of this thesis is the notion of subjectivity. Subjectivity is “the ways in which a person gives meaning to themselves, others and the world” (Davis & Banks, 1992, p. 2). This meaning is constructed through discourse and the way that people take up, resist and respond to the ‘regimes of power’ which contain them (Allan, 1999; Gore, 1995). In other words, subjectivities are not passively created through discourse, nor remain the same in differing contexts. People are both subject to, and the subject of social practice, discourses and power relations within the settings they exist (Jones, 1993). They are controlled and influenced by discourses imposed upon them by others with legitimated knowledge, and also by their own knowledge, and relations of discourses to their self (Allan, 1999). Yet, people are not always constrained by these
discourses. Rather they have opportunities to take up, resist or transgress them. For example in Jones's (1993) study of gender, she explains that girls are not simply socialised into gender roles, but are supplied with discourses of femininity which afford them subject positions which they may take up or resist.

Returning to the context of this thesis, I agree with Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010) in their statement that educational experiences are immensely subjective. While the discourses of ability, as well as the structures of power that individuals are exposed to within the education may be similar, the way that students take up and respond to these in order to construct their subjectivities will likely differ between students and contexts. As a result, rather than seeking similar realities between students, I am searching for similar and different discourses within Physical Education that students draw on to shape their subjectivities. As well as this, I am searching for those that are missing, rejected, or reshaped by and between the students to construct their own, unique sense of themselves and their bodies.

**Power and Knowledge**

Of particular focus in this thesis is the operation and legitimation of certain forms of knowledge as power (Gore, 1995). This conceptual notion provides the bases for discourse to be regarded as ‘truth’ (Wright, 2006), and a mode of understanding how subjectivities are formed (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Foucault (1977) was particularly interested in operations of power within institutions (such as schools) that worked to control individuals through means of surveillance and governmentality.

Despite Foucault not delving into topics of disability and education in depth, thinking around institutions and the operations of power at work within them can be regarded as useful for investigations about education (Allan, 1999). Slee (2011) provides
a fine example of the operations of knowledge and power within education. He explains that teachers have only limited understanding of disability, often from medical professionals, which imply that the student is deficient and in need of help. Reinforcing this particular medical discourse not only limits the ‘inclusive’ experiences of students with physical disabilities, but retains the medical and educational experts’ place of power (Allan, 2008). The same could be said about childhood. Certain knowledge of child development as linear, progressive and measurable is reinforced within education, particularly within Physical Education (Burrows, 2000). By examining where this knowledge comes from, I not only question how this knowledge came to be legitimised in educational realms, but also whose interests this serves (Slee, 2011). Allan (2008) suggests that in order to ask these kinds of questions, tools are needed to be able to see the operation of power. One tool she draws on is “the rather shameful art of surveillance” (Foucault, 1977, p. 173), which I now discuss.

**Surveillance**

In very general terms, surveillance is the ‘disciplinary gaze’ enacted through discreet observation, normalising judgements, and processes of examination (Allan, 2008) in an effort to control the individual (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Within education, each student experiences the operation of power in unique fashions, as: “Curriculum is not benign. It is experienced differentially by different groups of students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular will experience the negative force of the ‘exercise of institutional power’” (Slee, 2011, p. 146). Gore (1995) explains that surveillance is inherent to education and allows comparisons to be made, knowledge to be reinforced and actions to be monitored. These surveillance practices also work to identify difference and can subject students (particularly those with physical disabilities)
to often discriminatory actions (Macartney, 2009) and “much greater scrutiny and surveillance than their non-disabled peers” (Macartney, 2008, p. 36). These practices link with Foucault’s (1977) statement, that surveillance “…is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency” (p. 176).

**Discipline and the Production of Docile Bodies**

For Foucault, discipline was not only linked to punishment, but also to positive and productive actions that empower and regulate individuals (Foucault, 1977). Examples of discipline and docile bodies pepper education and other such institutions. For example, the nature of schooling permits regulation of students and their bodies by providing structures that confine the way they can act (Evans & Davies, 2004). More specifically, the way individuals internalise discipline (often referred to as engaging with technologies of the self [Foucault, 1977; Wright, 2006]) to produce docile bodies is evident within Physical Education. For example, a typical lesson involving supervision from the teacher, held within a gymnasium with particular images of ‘healthy’ bodies displayed, and often in the presence of mirrors on the walls for students to ‘monitor’ their actions, is permeated with messages about the ‘normal’ body. From a Foucauldian perspective, this setting encourages students to “…monitor themselves, to develop a disciplinary gaze that they direct upon themselves in order to gain a sense of self-empowerment” (Danaher, Schrito & Webb, 2000, p. 57). As Kirk (2004) mentions, discourses of self-responsibility and well-being are also present within some countries’ National Curriculum, including New Zealand’s (Ministry of Education, 2007). This now brings me to the discussion of governmentality, which deals with the way we understand
how our bodies and the bodies of others should be, and how these are continually reinforced (Leahy & Harrison, 2004).

**Governmentality**

Of particular importance in this thesis is a questioning of the place of students with physical disabilities within education, specifically Physical Education. The process of governmentality – where “citizens are both ‘regulated’ by the state and its institutions and discourses, and educated to monitor and regulate their own behaviour” (Danaher et al., 2000, p. xii) in response to state imposed concerns – provides an understanding as to how it is that pervasive, medical knowledge of disabilities has taken an authoritative place in the educating of disabled students (Slee, 2011). Thinking back to the creation of special education as serving the interests of the majority (Ballard, 2004; Higgins et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 1982) it is possible to uncover the justification/rationale for drawing on ‘deficit discourses’ in order to both manage/govern students who do not ‘fit’ the system (Ballard, 1997). These practices continue to permeate today (Macartney, 2009). Disabled students are subject to a range of state level surveillance strategies (governmentalities) before even entering the classroom. For example, the ORS funding process (Ministry of Education, 2012) constructs students with disabilities as deficient, in need of support, or in special need (Macartney, 2009; Slee, 2011), demonstrating the regulation of students to ‘fit’ within education structures. Also, students with disabilities are further subjected to governmentality once within the Physical Education classroom, where particular knowledge about ability, health and appearance is invoked. This is largely due to Curriculum and government initiatives (e.g. the “Push Play Campaign”\(^3\))

\(^3\) The “Push Play Campaign” is a government initiative introduced in New Zealand to increase physical activity levels nation-wide (Bauman, McLean, Hurdle, Walker, Boyd, van Aalst & Carr, 2003). The
of health and well-being (Wright, 2004). Such initiatives reflect and demonstrate how state and social concerns that are enacted in Physical Education to regulate the “health” of New Zealand’s young people.

**Bio-power and the Normalised Body**

Bio-power (otherwise referred to as Bio-politics) can be defined as the regulation, measurement and categorisation of bodies to fit within particular ideals and needs of society (Dowling, 2012; Foucault, 1978; Slee, 2011). This results in reinforcement of ideas of normalisation, thus differentiating bodies that are different or do not ‘pass’ the normalising judgements (Gore, 1995; Tremain, 2005). The concept of normality, and of a normalised body, is both central to, and a result of bio-power.

Drawing on the concept of bio-power in this thesis allows for questioning of the embodied experiences of students with physical disabilities within Physical Education. The processes of measurement, and normalising judgements students face, not only to gain access to education, but also within the specific context of Physical Education, reflects ideas of regulating and monitoring bodies, particularly those who are different to the norm. As Wright (2004) asserts, practices of assessment and measurement within Physical Education in particular reinforce notions of the ‘normal’ body.

This thesis is enhanced by recognition of bio-power and the construct of ‘normal’ bodies. In particular, Foucault’s work allows a questioning of the practices students with physical disabilities are subjected to within Physical Education and wider education, the way students respond to these experiences, and draw on notions of ‘normal’ bodies to campaign encouraged individuals to exercise for at least thirty minutes a day, and was particularly targeted at youth to encourage enjoyment of, and life-long participation in, physical activity (Schofield, 2003).
discuss their own bodies and explain their experiences within the Physical Education context.

**Summary**

In this section I have outlined how post-structuralism informs the construction of the research question and briefly described the language and concepts that will be drawn on in this thesis. Foucault deals specifically with the construction and maintenance of power within institutions. Thus, his work prompts me to look not only at what informs individual experiences, but where these ideas come from, and whose interests they serve. In other words, post-structuralism allows me to ask particular questions about students’ experiences. Wright’s (2004) post-structurally orientated questions, for example, guide my investigation of these issues. She questions:

How are bodies inscribed with meaning? What part does schooling and Physical Education play in this process and with what effects? What institutional and cultural discourses are brought into play to construct particular identities and social practices associated with health, sport, physical activity in the context of schools? What kinds of selves/bodies are regarded as normal and what not? What has the power to determine this and on what authority (discursive or structural) do they draw? (p. 23)

Finally, post-structuralism allows for questioning of both what is said by the students, and also what is not said. It does not stop at simple textual analysis, but looks beyond the texts, and recognises the “value of hesitations and closer interrogation of utterances of conventional wisdom” (Slee, 2011, p. 13). The value of post-structuralism lies in its’ capacity to provide alternative ways of seeing. As MacDonald et al. (2002) explain: “Post-structural research makes visible what has been invisible; it provides new ways of seeing, and therefore acting, and thereby makes a difference” (p. 144). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, making a difference is a key aim of this research.
**Participatory Research Framework**

As the philosophical and theoretical discussions attest, the research aims and questions assume that the reality of Physical Education experiences cannot be ‘proved’ and that there is no concrete ‘truth’ about what contributes to these experiences. Instead, this research focuses on student’s interpretations of their experiences, recognising that change and awareness on a personal level is first required for political change. In other words:

The insights of students can help break down assumptions, values and meanings that block progress to achieving more inclusive, socially just schools. (Carrington, Allan & Osmolowski, 2007, p. 8)

In order to gather these insights in an inclusive manner, I work within a framework that is participatory in nature. The methods I adopt focus on foregrounding students’ perspectives and encouraging them to speak in a way that allows them to contribute to the research with their own understandings of Physical Education. In this section, I review the notion of participatory research and student voice. I do so to provide background to the differing research methods I discuss later in the chapter.

**Explaining Participatory Research**

This thesis is underpinned by a commitment to include students’ voices and engage students in the research process. To do so, this research is located in the participatory research framework. As Clavering and McLaughlin (2010) explain, a commitment to including students in such research requires a shift in research production from ‘on’ or ‘with’ participants, to research ‘by’ participants. In this thesis I have developed research ‘by’ participants by encouraging the students themselves to decide
what is important to know about Physical Education in New Zealand secondary schools, and how they wish to share this information.

While on the surface, engaging students in the research process may seem like a project adhering to the tenets of emancipatory research (see Barnes, 2002, 2013; Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Oliver, 1992), I remain uneasy with this claim, and prefer to locate this as ‘participatory’ in nature. This is because emancipatory research is concerned with challenging social oppression and, as such, is regarded by some as a political act, or as an attempt to re-create and challenge how research about disability is produced (Barnes, 2013; Barnes & Mercer, 1997). While in principle, I feel these are important actions, in this thesis I do not claim to have transformed how research is produced. Rather, I feel that despite my best attempts, complex and ingrained power dynamics of research still render myself as ultimately in control of the project. While I still believe this work to be research by students, for students, I cannot disregard the fact that this is also research initiated by myself as a researcher, with the goal of furthering my own knowledge and qualifications. Thus, I choose to view my role in this project as one in which I “might participate with others in the community as contributors of community knowledge” (Barton, 1997, p. 251). In other words, while privileging students’ voices drives this thesis, it is a participatory project, where together, the students and I construct knowledge and produce research about their experiences of Physical Education within New Zealand secondary schools.

**Participatory Research Methods**

Proceeding from this assumption, the participatory research framework selected for this thesis is intended to “enable young people with disabilities to become actively included within the research process” (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012, p. 286). Thus,
researchers with a social justice focus, who recognise the importance of alternative methods of communication and research production (such as Connors & Stalkers, 2003; Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Stalkers & Connors, 2003), have informed the variety of research methods employed throughout this research. The importance of participatory research lies in the ability to explore alternative methods that respect and authentically represent students’ views.

Using a participatory framework acknowledges the need for fluidity and flexibility in research methods (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Hill, 2006). For this research, no prescribed methods were employed. Instead, students were invited to use whatever methods they preferred. Hill (2006) justifies this invitation, stating: “many young people recognize that different methods suit different people and purposes, so that ideally they should be offered a choice and range of methods” (p.76). As a result, some students selected structured research methods, such as interviews and drawings to communicate, while others chose to communicate their insights using story-telling and tours of their schools. The specific participatory research methods employed for this research are described later in the chapter, in the section ‘Participants and Methods’. The methods are discussed alongside each student because each research method is specific to them and they were adapted to work in a way that suits them.

**Participatory Research Cautions**

Empirical participatory research with children and young people with disabilities is a burgeoning area. However, Stalker (2012) explains that the lack of theoretical grounding, as well as overly-narrow topics of research, has prevented research with young people who have disabilities from being recognised as truly valuable. Also,
Tisdall (2012) argues that even participatory research privileging the ‘student voice’ is still a process of adult-led interpretations about which voice is listened to and how it is re-presented. In this thesis I respond to these limitations and ground the research across disciplines and within post-structural theory. From a post-structural perspective I recognise that the ‘student voice’ I share is not value free or ‘authentic’ (Tisdall, 2012). Furthermore, as the previous section’s discussion attests, nothing is real, truthful or without multiple meaning (Wright, 2006). Therefore my own choices as an adult and a researcher without doubt shapes and mediates how the student voices are represented.

Working with student voice in a participatory manner involves “listening to and valuing the views that students express regarding their learning experiences … thus empowering them to take a more active role in shaping or changing their education” (Seale, 2010, p. 995). Student voice research encourages researchers to move away from assumptions about what students think and instead embrace their knowledge and wisdom (Campbell, 2007; King & Evans, 2007). O’Neill and Wyness (2005) argue that research focusing on ‘voice’ allows individuals who have previously been silenced/overlooked to be listened to and empowered.

While the concept of student voice encourages empowerment and inclusion of marginalised groups, critiques have been raised as to the extent of the transformative effect of student voice and whether student voice is simply heard or actively listened to (Porter, 2008; Seale, 2010). As Seale (2010) explains, “giving what children say ‘due weight’ involves listening rather than hearing. This conceptualising of student voice is not reflected, however, across the whole of student voice activity” (p. 998). Further, Robinson and Taylor (2012) argue that *which* student voices are heard or listened to are conditioned by many adult imposed decisions. For example, the particular children or young people selected to take part in research is often a result of an adult decision about
who would best suit the particular project. Cook-Sather (2006) agrees. Drawing on Fielding (2004) she states that despite researchers’ best efforts, there remains a great power imbalance between children and adults, and students and teachers, even when engaging in student voice research.

These cautions are of particular importance to this research. It is important to recognise that the students invited to take part in this research ‘fit’ within my decision to solely research with young people with physical disabilities at a secondary school level. This decision excludes a number of other children and young people. Further, the student voice presented in this thesis is my re-presentation of what the students wished to say. However, post-structural thinking implies that it is impossible to generate the views of ‘all’ students. Even the largest of studies cannot draw generalised conclusions (Wright, 2006) as each student experiences reality in a unique fashion. Therefore, even though these students’ voices are tainted by adult imposed ideals and power relations, this does not cast them as invaluable or less worthy of study. The students’ voices still can provide valuable and important insights which are paramount to consider.

**Summary**

The benefits and cautions raised in this section are important to consider as I now move to discuss the research methods employed in this project. In the following section, I discus the research project and the methods employed. Whilst a variety of methods were used to garner insights into Physical Education, each fits the tenets of participatory research and allows for students’ voices to be heard. The reasoning behind such a variety of methods being used becomes clear in relation to the individuals involved in the research.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Research Methods

In this section I discuss the research methods in chronological order. I begin with addressing the change in the research aims and methodologies from the initial research proposal. I then provide a discussion of the ethical consideration when working with children and young people, and outline the process of gaining ethical approval. Then, I discuss the research recruitment. Following this, I introduce the participants and discuss the differing participatory research methods selected by each student. Finally, I demonstrate the process of analysis of the students’ voices and discuss how each student was included in this aspect of the research project.

Project Development

This research project commenced in early 2011. Initially, I proposed to observe and interview students and teachers within Physical Education to uncover what ‘inclusion’ looks like. This initial projected was informed by my interest in inclusion and my limited previous experience using observational research tools. However, after meeting with interested students and teachers, engaging in reading around the notion of participatory research, and developing an interest in student voice, the focus of the research shifted to examining the ways that students experience Physical Education.

Engaging in critical thinking about my own philosophical groundings further raised questions as to the ability to ‘prove’ what inclusion means. Determining what an inclusive classroom looks like contradicts the fact that reality is fluid and contingent. It seemed that defining inclusion, when working across a range of contexts with a variety of individuals, would limit the ability of students to share their own opinions and
recognise the diversity of their experiences. While there would no doubt be similarities across the students’ experiences, no two students’ experiences or insights would be the same. Therefore, it was decided to adjust the research aims and methodologies to work with and celebrate the knowledge of students, rather than set out to ‘uncover’ inclusion.

**Ethical Considerations**

Adopting a participatory research framework resulted in the employment of differing research methods depending on the participants’ input. Premised on the work of Stalker and Connors (2007), Gallagher and Gallagher (2008), Gillies and Robinson (2012) and Fitzgerald (2011), who demonstrate that all children, irrespective of age or communication strategies can participate in research processes, I proceeded from the assumption that each student may wish to communicate in differently. However, the flexibility in the communication methods employed by each also involved paying acute attention to “ethical issues such as confidentiality, dealing with sensitive issues and responding to information about potential harm and risk” (Stalker & Connors, 2003, p. 33).

Ethical discussions regarding research with children are understandably geared towards preventing poor conduct, rather than constructing a positive research experience for the child (Flewitt, 2005), yet both aspects are important to consider. There are a number of ethical considerations crucial to this research, in particular regarding anonymity, confidentiality and participatory research practices.

Guaranteeing the anonymity of research participants/students is a near impossible task (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008) and is often referred to as a myth (Malone, 2003). This is particularly evident here given the relatively small proportion of young people with physical impairments within the research area, the detailed nature of
their testimonies and their enthusiasm to take part in research dissemination. Thus, finding a boundary between ensuring anonymity, yet not disregarding their wishes to have their stories heard by others is a difficult balance. To combat this issue, I have attempted to maintain as much anonymity as possible throughout this thesis, by providing sparse personal information to the reader, using pseudonyms and generalising the educational contexts within which they experienced Physical Education. I continue to re-visit these issues as we work together to decide on appropriate dissemination methods beyond this thesis.

As Malone (2003) explains, informed consent prior to the commencement of the research is not sufficient to ensure the comfort of the students throughout the process. She explains that interviews are often the site where otherwise unknown information is revealed by the student and that students have an ongoing sense of worry about what will be done with the information and how it will be presented. To attend to these concerns, prior to the study beginning, a meeting was held with each student and their family to outline what the study entailed. I also attempted to develop a relationship where students felt in control of their own testimonies, by reminding them of their place as the research ‘expert’ and encouraging them to act as owners of their voice, controlling what they discussed and determining what aspects of these discussions were recorded and used in the thesis. These practices were on-going, and while I believe it ‘impossible’ to completely breakdown the power dynamics of the research relationship, I hope that these practices made some difference to ensuring that students were comfortable with the project.

Furthermore, children, young people and the ‘disabled’ community share similar research experiences (Connors & Stalker, 2007). These groups historically find themselves the subjects of research, rather than students within the process (Barnes,
2013; Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Fitzgerald, 2009; Flewitt, 2005; Matthews, 1998; Stone & Priestley, 1996). In order to research inclusively (Fitzgerald, 2009), I recognised and positioned the students as “expert knowers” (Barnes & Mercer, 1997, p. 7), and attempted to see the project through their eyes (Matthews, 1998). This included discussing what the students felt was relevant, not what I as a researcher thought was relevant. This also involved remembering that this research is primarily for the students. Therefore it was important to keep the students’ wishes (rather than their teachers or parents) at the forefront of the project and to provide them with a platform to be listened to about what works for them and what does not (Fitzgerald, 2009; Matthews, 1998). However, as the students were mostly classed as minors (under the age of 16 years old) I could not ignore their parents’ wishes.

A detailed discussion of harm and risk was also carried out in the ethical approval process, which was granted on the 11th of November 2011. This initial ethical approval included discussions about research in schools, and observing/interviewing their peers and teachers. Due to the sensitive nature of information students could provide, as well as the potential for emotional distress when discussing past events, addressing these issues with the students and their families prior to commencing research was pivotal. While it is the students’ voices that are at the forefront of the project, parental consultation and consent throughout the project was crucial from an ethical standpoint. As discussed in the later section regarding ‘participants’, these relationships were of prime importance in developing and maintaining a research environment centred on the students themselves and where they felt safe, respected and in control of their research participation.

As the focus of the research altered, additional consultation with the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee occurred. The revised participatory project, with a
focus on student voice, no longer involved work within schools. Thus, the Human Ethics Committee believed this decreased ethical concerns and the revised project was accepted under the initial proposal, without the need to resubmit for ethical approval. As a result, the revised project was carried out under the reference number 11/241. Information sheets and consent forms were altered to align with the revised direction. These are included within the appendices of this thesis.

**Recruitment**

Following ethical approval, I sought assistance in recruiting students through a community organisation that facilitated opportunities for students with physical disabilities to participate in sports. Having previously volunteered with this organisation, I had a good relationship with the head of the organisation, Barbara who volunteered to contact the students on my behalf.

As mentioned above, it was hard to find students with physical disabilities who actually took part in secondary school Physical Education lessons. Physical Education is only compulsory for students who are in years nine and ten at secondary school, and many students who expressed interest in this study were in Year 11 or above and had elected not to take the subject. Students who were in years nine or ten were predominantly engaged in physiotherapy or using the practical time as a study period, rather than participating in Physical Education alongside their peers. The lack of students able to participate, and the resistance to be ‘studied’ in the form of observations

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4 Barbara was head of a local community organisation that facilitated opportunities for students with physical disabilities to participate in sports and physical activity. She acted as a link between the students, assisting with recruitment, invitations to participate and organising meetings between students, their families and myself.
expressed by one potential participant prompted a rethink of the ways students were recruited.

Thus, instead of seeking students who were participating in Physical Education, I invited students who felt they had things that they would like to say about Physical Education to meet and discuss their views on how this research project could develop. Initially Barbara contacted potential students by phone to gauge their interest. If they were keen to take part, I then posted information sheets to them and their families. Some of these students were individuals I knew through community involvement, who had already expressed interest in the project, yet who had been excluded as they did not fit within the initial criteria of currently participating in Physical Education. Others were invited by Barbara who felt that their experiences and interest in advocacy and disability rights would extend to participation in this project.

Six students from the local district were invited to meet to discuss the research. One student declined to take part due to time commitments. I met with the other students (Kelly, Connor, Cody, Shane and Angela) and their families between November 2012 and January 2013 to gauge their interest in taking part in the project and to discuss their thoughts. During these meetings, we discussed ethical issues mentioned in the information and consent forms (see Appendix A, B, C and D) and other questions they had. In particular, I drew attention to the fact that the students’ opinions would be privileged for this research. This meant that should the students wish, we would meet without their parents being present, but, due to ethical issues of research with minors, this would only occur with the parents’ consent and support.

I also ensured the students and their parents recognised they were able to opt out of any meetings and the project at anytime, that they were able to contact me with any concerns both during and after the project and encouraged the families to discuss the
research among themselves. The students were reminded of their rights as research participants at each subsequent meeting and I also checked in with the students at each meeting to ensure their parents remained supportive of their engagement in the project.

After our initial meetings (in which consent forms were signed by students and parents), all students and their families were enthused by the project, and displayed pleasure at someone wanting to listen to them regarding Physical Education. The sixth student, Holly, was invited to take part in this study after a chance meeting at a New Zealand university. She too agreed to participate and saw this project as an opportunity to begin advocacy work for students with physical disabilities who wanted to participate in Physical Education and sport.

Participants and Research Methods

Here I briefly introduce each of the students involved in the study and the methods used to gather their stories. At this stage I provide only small amounts of information about the students, not only for confidentiality reasons, but because I feel that ‘getting to know’ the students is best done by the readers as they engage with their stories in the following chapters. I also feel it imperative to avoid defining students by their impairments, or to have this become the focus of the study. While students were identified and recruited for this study based on fitting the category of ‘physically disabled’, to this day, I do not know the impairments some students have, as it was not a topic ever brought up by them. As one student, Shane, explains, “everyone has a disability”, and the importance placed on the disability is immensely personal and subjective. This was a belief that guided me through this project and interactions with students. It was not their ‘disability’ that I was interested in, but their willingness to take part and share their knowledge about Physical Education.
Introducing Kelly

I was introduced to fourteen-year-old Kelly and her mother at a meeting with Barbara at the community trust’s office after school. This was at a time when I was beginning to rethink the research project. Kelly attended a large, urban, low decile girls’ secondary school and had a love for all things sporting. While Kelly’s mother was enthusiastic about the study, Kelly remained quiet throughout our meeting, and did not participate in much of the conversation. In hindsight, this was due to the speed of the conversation, which would have rendered it difficult for Kelly to follow, due to her hearing impairment.

A few months later, Kelly’s mother dropped her off at my university office. After an initial discussion with her mother before she left, to ensure both she and Kelly were still comfortable with taking part, we discussed what Kelly thought about the project and how she felt we could formulate her ‘story’. Kelly was excited about taking part in the project and particularly enjoyed our meetings, which she decided the research methods would involve drawing pictures and dog walking. Kelly liked to talk about her school and home life, and was never short of conversation. I allowed Kelly to direct the flow of the conversation, however at times did encourage her to expand on what she discussed by asking questions such as “how did that make you feel”, “what did you think of…” and “what do you mean by…”.

Although I brought a voice recorder to each of our five meetings (which lasted one to two hours and occurred at fortnightly intervals between November 2012 and February 2013), Kelly was charged with the responsibility of deciding when and when not to use it. At the first meeting, Kelly did not turn the recorder on, and at other times
turned it off mid-way through our conversations while she drew pictures to further explain what she was discussing verbally. Often, she then chose not to turn it back on.

From the perspective of a researcher attempting to elicit data, the conversations had while the recorder was off could be seen as missing out on rich, valuable information that would have been insightful for the study. However, as I proceeded from a belief that I was privileged to have the opportunity to hear Kelly’s stories, I feel our conversations that remain un-recorded were just as valuable as those that were. This is because Kelly was not only able to control what was used for the research, but was able to use our meetings to talk about topics she wanted to resolve, but did not want to share with others. She reflected on this during our last meeting stating: “I believe a few of my problems are solved”.

*Introducing Connor*

When Connor and I first met, he was fifteen years old and attended a large semi-rural secondary school. He felt his school was extremely sport-focused, which he described as ironic due to their lack of success in sports. He was frustrated with the lack of interest in arts and drama at his school, as these were areas in which he thrived and excelled. He believed research into Physical Education was extremely important as he felt he faced many injustices in this subject at school, many he assumed due to his teachers’ perceptions of his ability, based on his medical condition that restricted his growth. He was excited to share not only his experiences, but also his insights into what could be done better to construct a more inclusive environment.

Connor decided it would be easiest if we met at his house on three occasions during the summer holidays (December 2012 to February 2013) and that he would prefer if I supplied him with questions prior to our meetings (which were voice recorded) to
prompt his thinking about Physical Education. The questions provided to Connor can be viewed in Appendix E. As well as Physical Education discussions, which centred around the questions supplied, a large portion of our meetings was spent discussing other topics, such as music, drama and future career aspirations.

Like Kelly, Connor’s mother was present at the start of our initial meeting where we again discussed the project, as well as her and Connor’s rights. Connor’s mother stayed within earshot of our initial meeting (which took place at the dining table) and occasionally contributed to the conversation, seemingly enthused by the project. At our subsequent two meetings, Connor decided to talk away from his family and after initial family greetings, we moved outside and worked on the veranda, where we expanded on the previous meetings and the topics set out in Appendix E.

After our first meeting, Connor decided he would like to try his hand at playwriting, choosing a topic about “people being different, you could have popular and non-popular people, people good at sport and not good at sport, and you could start off with them hating each other and then they would realise they are just like each other”. Connor thought about acting out his play as a way of disseminating the research to teachers and students, and decided to also submit it for a school competition. However, despite months spent working on the play, Connor felt it was not up to a “professional standard” that he would be comfortable with sharing to a large audience, and so it has been omitted from this thesis.

**Introducing Cody**

Cody was a vibrant twelve-year-old who I met for a game of ‘Wii’ in June 2011. His parents (both determined for their son to receive education alongside their able-bodied peers) were enthusiastic about the research and were keen for me to attend
Cody’s secondary school Physical Education lessons to help facilitate inclusion. His Physical Education teacher and his teacher aide (Liz) were also enthusiastic about my presence in the classroom. However, at this early stage, I had yet to figure out a means of communicating with Cody on his own (as he is profoundly deaf and has difficulty signing due to Cerebral Palsy, I was reliant on his parents or teacher aide to act as interpreters for our conversations). In hindsight, I question whether Cody was as enthusiastic about taking part in the research as his family and teachers were.

After a change in the research focus, and numerous informal meetings with Cody and his family throughout 2011 and 2012, I met with Cody and his teacher aide (Liz) during his study periods in November 2012 to collaborate on the project. While his parents and teacher aide had given their consent for Cody to take part (Cody had returned their signed consent on their behalf), I was concerned about whether Cody felt similarly enthused. In order to gain his consent, I asked his teacher aide to communicate the key aspects of the research project and consent forms (Appendix C and D) to Cody. Via sign language developed by Cody and his family, I asked Cody whether he understood and he signed ‘yes’ and reached for his “signature stamp” to sign his consent to take part.

Our initial meeting turned into an interview with Cody’s teacher aide, with very little input from him. After recognising Cody’s boredom (and exclusion from the conversation), I worked with his teacher aide to develop a means of communicating with Cody on my own. I checked with Cody to see if he was still willing to participate, and he said ‘yes’. Our following two meetings (which took place in term one of 2013) involved Cody choosing to show me around his school pointing out places he liked and disliked, showing me photographs of activities he participated in and using his ‘communication book’ to communicate how he felt about the different activities. Cody’s teacher aide also took photographs of a Physical Education lesson (as directed by Cody)
and Cody wrote a story to accompany the pictures (see Figure 2). Unfortunately, I recorded our meetings verbally, rather than visually, thus in the following discussion chapters, his voice is not present verbatim.

**Introducing Shane**

Shane was a welcome contributor to this project and another force that led to the change in topic. Having seen seventeen-year-old Shane speak at public events about advocacy and the rights of people with disabilities, and participate at national level sporting events for athletes with disabilities, I was excited about the possibility of him taking part in the research. Shane and his mother were similarly enthusiastic. Despite excelling academically at secondary school (he attended an urban, all boys secondary school which he selected due to the support available for students with Cerebral Palsy that was not present at his local school), Shane did not participate in Physical Education. Instead he was required to spend this time receiving ‘support’ such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy in the special needs unit. Despite the lack of experience in Physical Education, Shane had excellent insights into the nature of education and was able to articulate the barriers he and other students with physical disabilities at his school faced in enacting this basic human right.

Shane chose to be interviewed three times for the research. These interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and took place at his home during December 2012 to February 2013. Like Connor, he asked to be supplied with topics we could discuss (see Appendix E). Our first interview also included his mother, who shared the experiences of fighting for Shane’s right to attend mainstream education, and the barriers that they faced as a family in doing so. At the beginning of each interview Shane and I discussed his participation in the project and ensured his family supported his
participation. At each meeting Shane and his family remained enthusiastic and willing to continue. Our subsequent two interviews involved Shane discussing his own opinions and experiences of education, and evolved into discussions of what he would do if he was prime-minister and was able to change education to work for all students.

*Introducing Angela*

Fifteen-year-old Angela was the catalyst for the current research project. At the time of our initial meeting, she had just changed from her local, rural secondary school to a small urban secondary school due to bullying, which she believed to be based on having a mild form of Cerebral Palsy and other (unknown) medical conditions. Angela felt that she had a hard enough time attempting to fit in to Physical Education, and having me present in her classroom could undo her hard work to pass as just another student. As with Cody, Angela’s Physical Education teacher, and the school board were happy for me to carry out research in their school. Yet it was Angela’s opinion that I found most compelling and important to listen to. After discussing the re-worked project with her and her mother, Angela was keen to participate. We met three times on Friday afternoons at her home during term one of 2013, where she would reflect on her week and offer insightful comments about her experiences of Physical Education.

As Angela had a very difficult time at her previous secondary school it was of great importance for me to address issues of emotional distress with her and her mother. We met as a group to sign consent forms prior to our meetings taking place and discuss any issues that may arise. As Angela was to be in control of what she discussed (and her mother was to be home, but in a different room), Angela and her mother were comfortable with her participation and aware of their right to withdraw from the meetings or entire study.
Unlike Shane and Connor who wanted to be ‘interviewed’, I encouraged Angela to guide our discussions, recognising that a number of topics, particularly her Physical Education experiences at her previous school, may be off-limits and too painful for her to discuss. Angela occasionally commented that she would like to move onto a different topic, when she found the experiences she reflected on during our discussion upsetting. In these moments, I asked if she would like to stop the meeting, however each time she wished to carry on. Like Kelly, Angela was encouraged to control the voice recorder, however, Angela was not concerned with its presence and it remained running throughout our discussions.

**Introducing Holly**

The final student in this study was seventeen-year-old Holly. We met at a university event where we discussed the research project. As a university Physical Education student, with a keen interest in advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities, Holly was excited to take part. Despite having Cerebral Palsy and not participating in secondary school Physical Education, Holly was a keen outdoor adventurer and had a go-get-it attitude to her current Physical Education activities. Holly wanted to ensure that the voices of students with physical disabilities were listened to in Physical Education research, and offered her ‘untouched’ words to be included at the conclusion of this study (see Chapter Nine: Conclusion). This encouraged me to afford this opportunity to the other students in the study, all who viewed this as chance to put their own stamp on the research production.

Holly and I met twice to formulate her story (however we did meet prior to discuss the study and sign the associated information and consent forms). Our meetings were held in a study room at a local university, and were voice recorded. During these
meetings I was very much aware of my position as learner and Holly’s as the teacher. She spent numerous hours recounting her experiences of education, her desires for the future of Physical Education, and the role she hopes to play in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.

**Analysis of Students’ Testimonies**

The success of any qualitative research project depends on the researcher’s ability to gain a clear understanding of the knowledge that individuals use to make sense of their world. This is particularly true when investigating the world of children. (Suomi et al., 2003, p. 189)

I transcribed all spoken data that the students wished to be used from our meetings and placed this alongside the drawings and photographs created by Kelly and Cody. The students were then supplied with the data and asked to review, amend, remove or add any information they wished, prior to beginning the analysis. After the students gave consent to begin the analysis of their data, I used discourse analytic strategies, largely informed by post-structural theory to construct a textual representation of each student’s experiences of Physical Education (Atkinson, 1991). Students were encouraged to participate in the analysis of their testimonies, and as the following section attests, did so to varying degrees.

**Students’ Roles in Analysis**

Once the students felt they had said all they had to say we decided to ‘end’ the data collection stage and move to the analysis. This occurred at different times for each student. Then, each student engaged in a differing level of analysis post data collection.
I met with each student during the analysis to talk about the re-presentation of his or her voices. Shane, Kelly and Holly were particularly interested in the aspect of the research. While Angela, Connor and Cody found themselves too busy with their own work and were not overly interested in my analysis of their voices.

Initially each student and I met to review their transcripts to encourage them to make changes they wished. Following this, I met frequently with the Shane, Kelly and Holly to discuss how their voices were to be interpreted. This occurred at the beginning and end of any major writing period, or when I had questions about the meanings of their testimonies.

During these meetings, we discussed how their stories linked to wider educational issues. This involved simplifying academic language in a way that was understandable and clear for the students. I asked questions of the students, such as ‘what does your experience tell you about …’ or “how could we interpret the way that you experienced…” in order to gain insight into their thoughts on education. Certain themes came out of these discussions that I used to formulate analysis from. For example, viewing the body as a burden, believing themselves to be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of Physical Education and interpreting other people’s perceptions of their bodies were insightful topics of analysis Holly, Shane and Kelly in particular discussed.

Following these meetings, I wrote up an analysis and then returned to each student to discuss. I also encouraged students to discuss the analysis of the data with their parents, and again asked for suggestions for change. Their guidance throughout this time was invaluable and also doubled as a way of reinforcing their place as valued members of our research partnership. Shane, for example, critiqued the number of academic resources drawn on throughout the analysis process and questioned the presentation of some chapters. I then reworked these to his expectations. This clearly
created feelings of a team research environment. Kelly particularly enjoyed meeting to discuss what she felt to be a “story, except not an action” that I was writing about her experiences of Physical Education. She provided further insight into how people perceived her body which I wrote into the analysis as per her wishes.

I feel that gathering guidance from the students as part of the analysis (while perhaps not as interesting for some students as others) spoke to the premise of this thesis: to privilege the students’ voices and the value they bring to the research. In the next section, I discuss in academic language the process of discourse analysis and how this was applied to the students’ testimonies.

**Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

In the analysis of the data, I adopted Graham’s (2005) approach in which she explains, when engaging Foucauldian discourse analysis there is “not a set of rules to follow, but a journey and conversation” (p. 2) to embark on. Instead of following prescribed ways of doing (as some forms of discourse analysis imply), in this thesis, I recognise the post-structural belief that “the process of analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint” (Wetherall, 2001, p. 384). Thus, the way the students’ stories are analysed is not in anyway factual, or truthful (Trifonas, 2000). The meanings the reader takes from the analysis are contingent on their own subjective positions, as this analysis is contingent upon my own interpretations of the students’ voices. As Ainsworth and Hardy (2004) explain:

The social constructionist assumptions that underpin discourse analysis do not reject the material existence of reality independent of human consciousness, but assert that reality is only knowable through social processes of meaning making. (p. 237)
Therefore, the belief that there are multiple meanings of texts available, causes the following discussion chapters to form an “interpretive art” (Edwards & Nicoll, 2001, p. 106), which myself and the students engaged in as the storytellers, and the reader as the interpreter.

In engaging with the art of post-structural discourse analysis, I attempted not only to tell the stories of the students’ experiences, but other stories contained in their testimonies. This involved an attempt to “think and see otherwise, to be able to imagine things being other than what they are, and to understand the abstract and concrete links that make them so” (Graham, 2011, p. 666). In doing so, I asked questions of the students’ testimonies and looked for the gaps and contradictions both in and between the students’ testimonies. By reading between, across and behind what the students said/drew/wrote clearer pictures began to emerge that told other stories about Physical Education. By doing so, with the assistance and insight of some students, discourses of Physical Education, health and ‘normal’ bodies, special education and disability stood out as informing the way students understand their selves and their experiences in Physical Education.

As mentioned above, re-presenting students’ discussions as chapters of this thesis, is an act of story telling. This provides the reader with a platform to interpret the students’ stories in their own ways (Graham, 2011; Scheurich, 1995; Whetherall, 2001). I have consciously attempted to place the students’ voices at the forefront of the thesis. To do so, I drew on extended quotes by the students and positioned their drawings in ways to demonstrate how they also tell another story. Alongside the voices of the students, I drew on educational policy and literature which make these interpretations possible and highlight discourses and power relations at play in these stories.
During the analysis, I was not only concerned with what the students said, but how they said it. Drawing on Foucault (1972), I made the language chosen by the students problematic to question how it functioned to create meaning, and reflect discourses or power. To do so, I attempt to:

… describe statements, to describe the enunciative function of which they are the bearers, to analyse the conditions in which this function operates, to cover the different domains that this function presupposes and the way in which those domains are articulated. (Foucault, 1972, p. 86-87)

For example, while a universal thread throughout the testimonies was the notion of disability, the particular language each student chose pointed to differing discursive constructions of the meaning of disability, and what it means to them. Further, problematising the language affords an insight into how particular bodies are represented as normalised and others as not (Graham & Slee, 2008). Thus, looking at what stories students’ testimonies told, and how these are told, sheds light on alternative ways of seeing (Potter & Wetherall, 1994).

The analysis of the way the students experienced Physical Education resulted in four discussion chapters. In the following chapter (Chapter Four, Educational Contexts of Students’ Experiences), I analyse the wider educational contexts of the students’ experiences, which they referred to throughout our meetings. In this analysis, I draw on the dominant ways of thinking about education for students with physical disabilities that permeated the students’ testimonies and shaped their Physical Educational experiences and their understanding of their selves within the education context. In the second discussion chapter (Chapter Five: Physical Education), I examine the practical Physical Education contexts and how the students’ stories of inclusion/exclusion demonstrated different ways of thinking about Physical Education and the impact of these experiences on how students feel about their selves. This is followed by a similar
analysis of ‘health’ in Chapter Six: Health, as this was something many students felt important to discuss in relation to their Physical Education experiences. Finally, considerable time is devoted to discussions of the body, disability, and the way their bodies played a role in the negotiation of Physical Education in Chapter Seven: Perceptions of the Body. Here, I specifically focus on the multiple ways students described their bodies, demonstrating alternative ways of seeing and understanding disability and young people.

**Positioning Myself in Research**

Being an ‘able bodied’ individual researching disability would raise concerns in the views of ‘disabled’ activists such as Oliver (1992). After all, what do I, and other able bodied researchers alike, know about the experience of being ‘disabled’? I do agree with Oliver (1992), in the sense that there is no way that I can share my own experiences of impairment or disablement due to physical, social or political barriers based on assumptions of ability (Thomas, 1999).

However, this project is not investigating disablement or exclusion, nor is it a project that researches ‘on’ disabled students (Barnes & Mercer, 1997). While able bodied researchers like myself cannot be activists from the inside (Fitzgerald, 2009), it is possible to provide a platform for the students to share their knowledge and experiences about Physical Education, wider education and disability. Instead of discovering truth, my role is to highlight the value of listening to students and valuing the knowledge that they can provide for those, such as teachers, practitioners and policy makers (Carpenter & McConkey, 2012; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012) who aim to create an inclusive Physical Education experience.
From a Disability Studies viewpoint I am researching from the outside, and therefore it is important not to become a ‘parasite researcher’ (Fitzgerald, 2009; Stone & Priestley, 1996). As my aim is to foreground the voices of students and create opportunities for them to speak as experts, there is no objectivity in this process. Whilst I am not ‘one’ of the disabled community, or one of the ‘teenager’ community, I cannot retain a purely ‘outsider’ status in this research. The voices I choose to listen to, how this is done, and the way I interpret and present the voices in this thesis cannot be pursued objectively.

**Research Dissemination**

Having the students themselves disseminate their knowledge ensures that they are “empowered to take a more active role in shaping or changing their education” (Seale, 2010, p.995). Also, the students sharing their knowledge directly ensures that their voices are heard in an untainted manner and allows them to engage directly with those they feel need to hear their voices, which is a key principle of student voice research (Porter, 2008). Carpenter and McConkey (2012) argue that young people with disabilities are the most affected by policy, yet their voices are rarely considered or acted upon. They explain, “simply revealing marginalised voices does not necessarily bring about change in policy and practice” (Carpenter & McConkey, 2012, p; 257). Cook et al. (2001) share this belief, arguing that children and young people often do not have the chance to have their voices heard, particularly regarding their education. Also, Higgins et al. (2009) conclude, “disablist adult assumptions … can interfere with disabled
children’s rights … to be consulted and involved in decisions that affect their lives” (p. 478). Therefore, by offering students the chance to facilitate change, to recognise their rights and be involved in consultation is paramount to this research.

Students were encouraged throughout the research to consider how they would like to disseminate their voices to people. For every student this was very important. Teachers and other educational professionals were viewed as the most important people to hear their voices. After concluding the research process, Shane and Holly gained further momentum in their desire to advocate for disability rights. Our ongoing contact and shared enthusiasm for this cause has resulted in them giving guest lectures at a New Zealand university for undergraduate Physical Education students regarding inclusion for students with physical disabilities. Shane and Holly recognised that engaging in public dissemination in such ways would remove their anonymity as research participants, yet were comfortable with doing so. Shane and Holly have also acted as advisors for international conference presentations, offering advice on important topics and ways they feel would best communicate issues of students with physical disabilities. Angela, Cody, Connor, Kelly and I remain in contact and frequently meet at sporting events and community functions. I feel that this contact demonstrates the success of our research relationships as joint researchers.

As the younger four students develop, their interest in advocacy work and having their voices heard increases. It is hoped that together each student can share their stories and make a difference to the educational experiences of students with disabilities. The power of one individual to make change is an idea keenly felt by all students.
Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodologies and methods used in the research process. The philosophical, theoretical and methodical framework adopted for this project contributes to the research question: What are students with physical disabilities experiences of secondary school Physical Education? Furthermore, the commitment to sharing students’ voices is supported by a belief that creating awareness on an individual level works as a facilitator for wider social change. This is particularly evident through the research methods and dissemination, which uncovers evocative and powerful insights into Physical Education experiences of young people with physical disabilities.
CHAPTER FOUR: EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS OF STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES

I didn’t really know that I was disabled up until about secondary school, and then, with all these weirdos, like, there was something about me. Like people in wheelchairs that couldn’t speak, couldn’t eat, couldn’t walk, and I thought, oh I guess I am one of them now. And you know, sort of seeing everyone around me and I thought oh, well if I am here, I must be like them. (Holly, 2013)

In an education system focused on neo-liberal outcomes such as New Zealand’s (Armstrong, 2003; Wills & McLean, 2008), the place of students with physical disabilities within mainstream classrooms is often under threat (Higgins et al., 2008). Education for students with physical disabilities ultimately seems to be a battle rather than a right, which can greatly impinge on how students experience Physical Education alongside their peers. In this chapter I examine the wider educational experiences of students with physical disabilities. I position this chapter at the forefront of the discussion in order to provide context for the students’ Physical Education experiences I discuss in the following chapters.

I align this chapter with Kearney and Kane’s (2006) discussion on ‘normalness’ and educational value, in which they state:

If a student is different or not normal, they are not as valuable as a student who is not different or falls within the socially defined boundaries of normalness. Of course, with value comes rights, the more value, the more rights. (Kearney & Kane, 2006, p. 206)

Also informing this chapter is MacArthur et al.’s (2007b) discussion that “cultural and structural aspects of the school setting” (p. 105) impact on students’ feelings of difference within education. In other words, the perceptions of others regarding a student’s ‘normalness’ could greatly impact the way students understand
they themselves, their bodies and their place within Physical Education. In this chapter I
draw largely on the Foucauldian concepts of surveillance and bio-power to examine
how educational decisions, which often serve the majority, are justified and maintained,
despite educational and social policy which states otherwise.

This chapter is divided into two major sections that address the “cultural and
structural aspects” of students’ wider educational experiences (MacArthur et al, 2007b,
p. 105). In the first section, I ask the question: how do others’ assumptions about the
students’ abilities limit or enhance their educational experiences and views of
themselves? In particular, I examine the role that teachers and other educators within
the wider school context play in the students’ perceptions of themselves. I also question
how friendships or lack thereof, can impact on the students’ views of themselves as
similar or different to their peers. Finally, I contrast the different experiences of those
in ‘the unit’ (separate, special education classrooms within the school) with those who
experience a largely mainstreamed (alongside their able bodies peers) education. As the
following chapter attests, the way teachers and peers perceive students’ educative,
social and physical ability impacts on whether or not they are allowed to access Physical
Education.

In the second section the role school structures and supports play in enhancing
or constraining the students’ educational experiences is examined. This is done from
the perspective that the current state of education for students with physical disabilities
is underpinned by an ideology that views students with physical disabilities as
inherently different, and having different needs to students in the ‘mainstream’ (O’Neill,
Bourke & Kearney, 2009). In this second section, I ask how discourses associated with
being in a special needs unit can be both a barrier and an enabler to students’ learning
and views of themselves. Then, the role that teacher aides play in the way students
understand themselves is examined. This involves questioning the actions and assumptions that the aides and the teachers (discussed in the students’ testimonies) have about the students’ abilities. Finally, I examine the issue of funding. This was something a number of students were acutely aware of, and drew on to explain their difference/similarity to a ‘normal’ student. In particular, I foreground and interrogate the students’ experiences of funding applications for support to assist them at school, the issues faced in accessing this funding, and how these experiences were drawn on throughout their discussion of schooling in general.

Perceptions of Others

Perceptions passed onto children by parents and other key figures in children’s lives affect the ways in which those children perceive and interact with other groups within society. Children spend a very large proportion of their lives up to the age of 16 in schools being exposed to a huge variety of images and assumptions, many of which they may continue to carry with them throughout their adult lives. (Britten, 2004, p. 75)

Britten’s (2004) statement rings true in terms of the stories of the students involved in this study. In this section, I examine the role that other individuals within education played in constructing students as disabled, impaired or different. Doing so in a wider education context explains how these are then perceived, and often amplified within Physical Education, as discussed in the following chapter. This section begins with the experiences of Kelly, a young, vibrant student with a love of physical activity, and her view of teachers’ perceptions of her abilities.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Ability/Disability

Kelly recounts both positive and negative experiences of teachers, giving rise to a range of feelings about herself and her academic ability. For example, her arts
teacher “would draw pictures of what he meant, and he would do it in steps… He is very good at making everybody understand and um, he talks loud and clearly”. As she cannot hear as well as other students in the class, talking “loud and clearly” is something Kelly finds helps her fit in with her peers. This is a common desire for students with impairments who wish to emphasise their similarity, rather than difference to others (Macarthur et al., 2007a). In contrast, Kelly describes how other school staff sometimes cause her to feel different from her peers. For example, despite having a keen interest in Social Studies, she finds it “frustrating because the teacher doesn’t… doesn’t teach me, and I don’t really understand what she is saying and I find it hard because I don’t understand what she is saying. So I don’t really understand”. Furthermore, in other classes, Kelly explains that teachers supply her with “different work from the other kids because I haven’t quite caught up yet” causing her to feel frustrated as she is aware of how easy it would be for teachers to help her to catch up:

I prefer, well, she doesn’t talk very clearly. Well, she does talk loud but she doesn’t talk clearly so I don’t understand her words. Yeah. I would make sure she talks clearly and mainly writes down something, she goes too fast instead.

While many students feel ignored or objectified in Physical Education because their difference to the perceived physical norm is on display (an issue I discuss in the following chapter), Kelly’s ‘difference’ is also evident within the classroom where the ability to hear is privileged. Her experiences point to questions about the assumptions teachers make regarding how students learn – particularly as Deaf and hearing impaired children face a number of issues regarding expectations and assumptions that differ between the child and the teacher (Davis, Watson, Corker & Shakespeare, 2003; McArthur et al., 2007b). Kelly’s experiences in particular point to such issues and raise questions such as, why are particular ways of learning privileged over others? Why is Kelly viewed as academically behind due to the teacher’s inability to speak clearly?
And who is viewed ‘at fault’ when students are unable to learn (or move) in the same way as the majority of the class (Kearney & Kane, 2006; Rutherford, 2009)? From a Foucauldian perspective, these questions point to how ‘normalised’ ways of being and achieving in education are maintained. As Gore (1995) explains, “Indeed, exclusion, as the flip-side of normalisation, is properly seen as integral to pedagogy” (p. 174). Thus, despite no fault of her own, Kelly is viewed as ‘behind’ due to being excluded from ‘normal’ ways of learning.

Holly had some teachers who helped her to feel like just another student. She explains, “I was fully mainstreamed at primary and intermediate school so I did PE there and the teachers were really keen and were like, ok come on do this. The teachers made me do everything, which is what I like to do”. These early experiences of being treated like any other child seem to play a role in shaping her attitude about herself and her ability to do things like other people. As Biklen (2000) explains, when teachers are seen to be “the coach rather than the judge” (p. 345) perceptions of students (and students’ perceptions of themselves) move from a view of incompetence, to one of competence, as evident in Holly’s case.

Holly, now a university student, discusses how her swimming teacher made her push herself to be the best she can be, and inspired her to take part in sports: “My teacher, he was really good. He like pushed me and he was like, no whinging! He didn’t treat you any different for being disabled, he expected you to pull your finger out and actually swim!” Having competence reinforced by her swimming teacher gave her the confidence and motivation to be the best that she could be in this setting. However, these attitudes did not extend to her secondary education. Holly’s perceptions of herself as an able, active teenager changed dramatically when she shifted schools: “I didn’t really know that I was disabled up until secondary school”. At secondary school, her
school placement in ‘the unit’ was due to her perceived needs based on her impairment, at the expense of her social and personal views of herself – a sacrifice often experienced for students who may need extra support to ‘fit’ into the school environment (Mortier, Dsimpel, De Schauwer & Van Hove, 2011).

Meeting these perceived needs often results in more disabling attitudes and barriers being created. For example, Shane, now at university, reflected on his experiences of dealing with others’ perceptions of his ‘needs’. He recounts being given a teacher to provide support for him on the first day of secondary school. Yet he found that:

He wasn’t that approachable, he was quiet intimidating. I was a 12-year-old boy and I was scared of him. He still actually scares me now! Not scared, but intimidating. And that was the major barrier I guess. I don’t like to admit this, but I cried almost everyday when I came home. I was so scared and that.

He provides an explanation as to why he faced such disabling attitudes from the teacher who was expected to help him adjust to school life: “He was just that type of person, and I was probably the first disabled person out there that was academically able”. These experiences encourage a questioning of how pervasive discourses which assume one is both physically and intellectually impaired (Davis & Watson, 2001) inform his teacher’s attitude. Shane’s experiences demonstrate traditional relations of power within the education setting for students with physical disabilities and also destabilises these relations. By recognising he is both disabled and able Shane challenges the dominant perception of disability held by his teacher, something his teacher obviously found unsettling.

Drawing on Foucault (1977), Slee and Allan (2001) argue that “In forming its’ own knowledge, and thereby its power base, special education has constructed particular ways of knowing the disabled person” (p. 180). As Shane’s perspective of
events with his teacher aide demonstrates, students with physical disabilities can feel rendered ‘less than’ other students by their teachers (Graham & Macartney, 2012; Slee & Allan, 2001). Shane assumed his teacher perceived him unable to be educated in normalised fashions like their able bodied peers. However, as Shane explains, his presence in the education context challenged the discourse of students with physical disabilities as ‘less than’ others. Being both academically able, and willing to voice his frustrations with inferior treatment (which he did later in his high school years), perhaps contributed to the unjust attitudes of his teacher, as he disrupted and challenged what the teacher knew as ‘normal’ for students with physical disabilities.

Shane also describes the other school staff as attempting to separate students with disabilities from other students, which he feels could explain the issues he faced in attempting to be mainstreamed. He explains that for students who were placed in ‘the unit’, time outside of ‘the unit’ was only spent when “the teacher aides would take them out for a walk, but again they were really isolated from the rest of the school”. Furthermore, Shane talks of being removed from ‘mainstream’ activities by those who ran ‘the unit’, because of his perceived difference and needs. This was particularly evident in his experiences of Physical Education discussed later. The need to separate and remove those perceived to be different is a frequent theme in the students’ testimonies, and in literature. Davis and Watson (2001) suggest “everyday individual and cultural practices of adults and children” (p. 672) and the “structural forces that impinge on schools and teachers” (p. 672) reinforce discourses of separatism and differentiation between ‘able’ and ‘disabled’ students within schools.

Angela feels that teachers, especially relievers, are unsure how to deal with her presence in the classroom, and focus on her impairment rather than her academic ability.
She thinks that some teachers get a shock at her presence in the classroom and are limited by their assumptions. She recounts one particular moment:

I would say they did get a shock but they were trying to hide it, because they didn’t want me to feel uncomfortable I suppose… People assume that because you’re different you do things differently. They didn’t see me as being smart enough to be in the top class, which is ridiculous because now I am in the top class of the top classes! I felt like I wasn’t going anywhere with my education because stuff was just so easy it was like, ok, now can I have some REAL work?

The need to prove competence to others to satisfy or challenge their assumptions (Biklen, 2000) is a common issue for students such as Angela. She discusses feeling disheartened and frustrated as the potential she knew she had was unrecognised because of others’ assumptions of her (in)ability: “they never actually gave me the opportunity to do better either, like they put you there, but they never actually give you the opportunity to step yourself up! Like, what’s the point?” Angela’s experiences raise questions, not only about why such assumptions persist in an educational setting, but also about the consequences of these assumptions on how students understand themselves and their abilities. Despite knowing that she was limited by the assumptions of others, she rarely chose to challenge these. Perhaps, as Foucault (1977) would argue, this is due to the power differentials between teacher and student, and the way that limited thinking about what students with physical disabilities can achieve is legitimised in educational discourse under the guise of doing the ‘best’ for all students. As Purdue (2006) points out, despite New Zealand being ‘committed’ to the education of all children, it appears that this ‘commitment’ is informed by the belief that students with physical disabilities are “‘special’, different and therefore require different treatment” (p. 12).

Overall, the students discuss feeling overlooked and under appreciated by their teachers within the mainstream secondary education setting. As mentioned in earlier
chapters, educational outcomes and a narrow view of what constitutes student achievement appear privileged in the mainstream setting in New Zealand (Gordon & Morton, 2008; Graham & Macartney, 2012; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Pope, 2013; Willis & McLean, 2008). Despite being academically able, perceptions of the students as ‘different’ or ‘having something wrong with them’ appear to persist. Perhaps this is because special needs units remain viable places to educate students with disabilities (who do not fit the mould of the average child) in neo-liberal, competitive markets (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Higgins et al., 2008). Furthermore, it appears some teachers (many of whom enter the profession as white, middle class and able-bodied) draw on medicalised thinking of disability. In this sense, it is assumed the issue lies within the child, rather than in their own teaching practices or structures of the school (Graham & Macartney, 2012).

Yet there are moments of hope that come through in the students’ testimonies of teachers who empowered the students. Kelly’s art teacher and Holly’s primary school teacher provide good examples of how simply treating them the same as others made a huge difference to their experiences. These teachers challenge perceptions of students as disabled, and view them as worthy and important members of the classroom (as expected in the New Zealand Curriculum). While it is widely cited how teachers can be limited in their thinking and actions by the discourses outlined above, these teachers act as a reminder that it is the little things which often make a large difference to students’ experiences.

As discussed in the next chapter, the perceptions of ability and assumptions about what students can and cannot do are often amplified in Physical Education. In this subject, the body is on display and assumptions of normality are reinforced through the content and assessments with the subject, therefore the experiences that students
have in wider education are important to note as they remind us of the broader educational contexts and discourses informing Physical Education. I now move to question the perceptions of the students’ peers, and how these contributed to students’ perceptions of themselves as able, worthy young people.

Peers’ Perceptions of Disability

Social interactions are said to be of key importance for the education of the ‘whole’ child within New Zealand education (Ministry of Education, 2007). Also, to feel safe and belonging within the school environment is an educational right for all students (MacArthur, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2007). Yet, often students with physical disabilities struggle to make and maintain friendships within the school setting, and share stories which counter the policy rhetoric of ‘good’ education (Davis & Watson, 2001; MacArthur, 2013; MacArthur et al., 2007b).

A common theme in educational research about children with disabilities is the issue of bullying based on physical difference (Connor & Stalker, 2007; MacArthur, 2013; MacArthur et al., 2007a; Mortier et al., 2011). This issue also emerges in the students’ testimonies, where they describe being bullied or ignored by others, based on their perceived difference to their able bodied peers. While many students discuss having friends who stuck up for them and overlooked their difference, some faced discrimination or ‘barriers to being’ (Thomas, 1999; 2004).

Experiences of Students in ‘The Unit’

For the students associated with ‘special needs’ units at their school, making friends outside of these places is/was difficult. Shane and Holly share stories of feeling
alone, and struggling socially because of the ‘special needs’ label they are given. Furthermore, being associated with the ‘special needs’ units at their respective schools meant that their presence in Physical Education was lessened. Instead of attending Physical Education with their mainstream peers, Shane and Holly were assumed as being in need of a different therapy, rather than Physical Education. While many of these experiences will be discussed in the next section about institutional practices that contour the students’ subjectivities, here I briefly mention some social interactions that appeared to inform students’ perceptions of themselves.

Holly felt like a “retard” at school and had few friends. She discovered that moving towns since leaving school however, gave her a fresh start and a new peer group of friends: “they have been great and they have been so nice to me, and the disability kind of dropped from the centre and people just accept you, it’s pretty cool!” In contrast, when reflecting on secondary school, she explains, “I didn’t really have any really, super close friends. That I could talk about anything to. And I didn’t have any friends full stop! It was such a sad life, because I was just on my own.” Her acquaintances, who were also in ‘the unit’ at her school doubted her ability to move towns once she finished secondary school. Holly explained:

I had a big argument with them. They were kind of jealous I decided to make the move, and yeah, they are a bit more disabled than I am. They get almost jealous if they can’t pull off what others do.

Positioning herself as ‘more able’ than other students with physical disabilities (as she felt other students in ‘the unit’ would not be able to manage moving towns as she did) may allow Holly to construct a positive identity of herself as ‘better off’ than others. Constructing a ‘hierarchy of difference’ (MacArthur et al., 2007a) is a common theme from research with students with disabilities (Davis & Watson, 2001; MacArthur et al., 2007a, 2007b). The way Holly draws on differences within her friendship group,
however, challenges dominant discourses of people with disabilities as similar to one another, based on their difference to the ‘norm’.

Shane also had few friends at school because of his association with the unit. However, his best friend from school often stands up for him when people approached him because of his difference. For example, when receiving ‘sympathy’ from a woman about his impairment, his friend questioned the woman, saying “why, because he is the most intelligent person in this café?” The social support appears to reinforce Shane’s positive attitude about himself, and helps him to ignore, or overcome the disabling attitudes that he faces. However, for some students, not having social support from peers appeared to negatively impact on how they felt about themselves, particularly for students who face bullying rather than support from their peers, as I now move to discuss.

**Experiences in the ‘Mainstream’**

Angela had a difficult time at her first secondary school. Being the only girl who used a wheelchair who attended mainstream classes (the other students in wheelchairs “didn’t really venture out of the special needs unit”), she was constantly bullied. She explains some of her experiences were still too painful to talk about, but recounts people shouting “I know you can walk!” on a daily basis as she crossed the school grounds. She goes on to explain:

> It’s not like it was the people in my year saying it because they know. They know that even though I am in a wheelchair I can walk and stuff. They know, but it is those people that don’t know! It’s like, I shouldn’t have to explain my life to you!

As Kearney and Kane (2006) argue, “a student who uses a wheelchair for mobility may not have a special need if the environment was set up so as to not
disadvantage that person” (p. 208). Yet, as Angela explains, being ‘disabled’ would not necessarily have been alleviated if the school environment had accommodated wheelchair users. The disablement she experienced extended to the social objectification by peers/barriers to being (Thomas, 1999). The name-calling and bullying Angela faced demonstrates the challenges students with physical disabilities have to maintain positive feelings about themselves and their ability (Goodwin & Watson, 2000). Angela felt isolated from her peers, and even those who she considered friends she approached with caution, afraid of ridicule from them also. As a result of this bullying, Angela decided to change schools to pursue an education that was focused on her ability rather than her impairment.

Perhaps in response to what Foucault (1977) calls the ‘disciplinary gaze’, which acts as a form of surveillance and self-regulation to adhere to discourses of the normalised body, Angela stopped using her wheelchair when she moved schools. She explains this “is amazing, because it changes the way people look at you. Because they don’t know you for being in a wheelchair”. Furthermore, since changing schools she has not told her peers about her impairment, stating that at her old school “they would treat you differently by, like, sort of being extra careful by what they said, and they try not to offend you and stuff. And I would rather they didn’t know and didn’t care”. Connors and Stalkers (2007) also discuss students being recognised by the presence of a wheelchair. Like Angela, students in their study explain they felt frustrated by being labelled and constrained, not only physically, but socially as people quickly formed perceptions of them as unable to walk or move ‘normally’.

Kelly also faces bullying and like Angela, does not feel she should have to explain her difference to her bullies. She struggled initially to make friends at secondary school, explaining: “last year I hardly had any friends… I used to go to the
learning support where all the people with disabilities go. That was very quiet… they didn’t talk much”. This made her feel “a bit lonely really” and in order to make friends, she:

Found a girl that is a nice girl that I like, so um, I followed her and I met some of her friends. And I started hanging around each day, just having lunch with them and I began to make friends.

Despite being happy to now have friends, Kelly misses out on a lot of the conversation, explaining, “really, I don’t understand much. They talk quite quickly”.

It was in Kelly’s first year at secondary school, when she did not have many friends that she faced the most bullying:

Well when I was in year nine it was a pretty bad year because I didn’t have any friends, so I felt quite lonely, and most of the girls in my class were mean so it was a pretty bad year. While I was in PE, one of the girls stole my phone… I don’t know why they are horrible to me. I don’t know why.

These experiences cause her to feel “really scared” of attending school. She demonstrates this both visually and verbally:

![Figure 1: Kelly's drawing of emotion](image)

To explain this drawing, Kelly says:
Most of the time I cried, and I said to Mum I don’t want to go to this school anymore, so mum didn’t like me being bullied so much like that. So she was thinking of changing schools but then my parents said no, I don’t think so, this is a good school for you and you should stay there and I just had to put up with that. And so the teacher said next year they would put me in with the nicer girls, so I had no bullies in my class. And I kind of cheered up at that.

Despite initially stating that she did not know why she was bullied, Kelly believes this is because she has a disability: “Why are they doing this to me? I have a disability, but I am not going to explain that to them!” She goes on to explain that her friend, who also has a disability, is also the target of bullying: “even my friend Sarah, she has a disability, the one that thinks very slowly and that kind of problem, she is always, always, always crying and I have to comfort her. She doesn’t understand either”.

While it is difficult to know what Kelly’s parents mean by her school being “a good school” for her, this statement does prompt questions about what counts as a good school. As Slee and Weiner (2003) suggest, effective schooling, or what Kelly’s parents view as a “good school” is often understood from very functionalist views. Strong achievement records, ‘good’ teachers and opportunities for all round success, in neo-liberal times in particular, often cover up or override other issues (such as Kelly’s) in the pursuit of the ‘best’ education (Barton, 2004; Slee, 2006).

Peers and teachers can either encourage or inhibit students with physical disabilities sense of belonging and worthiness to learn alongside their peers (Allan, 1999; Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Davis & Watson, 2001; De Schauwer et al., 2009; Fitzgerald, 2005; Lightfoot, Wright & Sloper, 1999; Lovitt et al., 1999; MacArthur et al., 2007a; MacArthur & Kelly, 2004). For Kelly, having a teacher who was willing to put a stop to bullying causes her to feel safer among her peers. This brief mention from Kelly about her teacher’s actions demonstrated that small actions and statements by
teachers have a major impact on the students’ experiences. For Kelly, her teacher’s willingness to stop bullying was a ray of hope for her as she struggled through school. On the other hand, Angela felt that the teacher’s ignorance and unwillingness to address the bullying she faced compounded her situation and resulted in her changing schools. The contrast between the two girls’ experiences is a good reminder for teachers and educators about the power they have to make a change to a student’s situation for either better or worse.

Being the target of bullying based on difference is reported to be a common issue for students with physical disabilities (Bourke & Burgman, 2010; Carter & Spencer, 2006). The consequences of such “discriminatory social processes that shape children’s identities through a rejection of the different body” (MacArthur et al., 2007b, p. 29) lie in how the students draw on these experiences to understand themselves as valuable, deserving individuals (Connors & Stalkers, 2007). Furthermore, events such as bullying highlight students with physical disabilities’ difference to their peers (MacArthur et al., 2007a). Often students wish to simply fit in, and be seen for their similarities, rather than have their differences objectified in cruel acts of surveillance (Peachter, 2013). While the other students in the study do not discuss being bullied based on their difference, many mentioned times when they faced being outcast, or alone because of their peers’ perceptions of them. The differences between Angela and Kelly’s experiences link back to MacArthur et al.’s (2007b) and Kearney and Kane’s (2006) statements discussed earlier. Feeling like they belonged and were similar to their peers was greatly impacted by the perceptions of others and opportunities they had to realise their similarities.
CHAPTER FOUR: EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

School Structures and Supports

In this section I examine how barriers to doing (Thomas, 1999) impact on the way students perceive themselves as able/disabled individuals. In particular I examine the students’ experiences with special needs units and notions of separatism and disablism associated with these (Slee & Allan, 2001). I also examine issues of funding; paying particular attention to the way students are required to prove the ‘severity’ of their disability in order to receive funding to attend school like everyone else. Also, the role these ‘supports’ play in students’ understanding/experiences of disability is examined. In particular I ask whether supports are in place because of the perceived severity of impairment, rather than assisting with the “mismatch of competency and demands with the environment” (Mortier et al., 2011, p. 217). The students’ stories also demonstrate how “once a child is considered to have a physical or sensory impairment, other diagnoses of academic, cultural and social deficits are but a short step away” (Davis & Watson, 2001, p. 684). Again, while not specific to Physical Education, these experiences were discussed in depth by the students and therefore important to include in this thesis. Such discussions are also important to examining and contextualising the students’ Physical Education experiences, as the wider educational barriers will no doubt impact at the level of Physical Education. In particular, issues of access, and perception of ability within Physical Education are contoured by these wider education experiences.

Research specific to a New Zealand context points to a special education ideology that has long informed the education of students with disabilities (Brown, 1997; Kearney & Kane, 2006; O’Neill et al., 2009; Rutherford, 2009). In special education thinking, which is largely informed by deficit based, medical model definitions of disability, it is assumed and accepted that “only expert teachers can know
about, and meet the needs of students who are disabled” (O’Neill et al., 2009, p. 589). Arguably, what maintains the special education ideology is not only firmly entrenched assumptions about normality and difference (Slee, 2011), but the neo-liberal marketplace in which education in New Zealand is currently situated (Armstrong, 2003; Morton et al., 2013; Nairn & Higgins, 2007, Wills & McLean, 2008).

Viewing education as a prized commodity, measured by quality of results and calibre of students, justifies segregations and separation of students with disabilities, and greatly limits their opportunities for education support and success within New Zealand schools (Gordon & Morton, 2008; Higgins et al., 2006; Higgins et al., 2008; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Millar & Morton, 2007; Morton et al., 2013; Wills, 2006; Wills & McLean, 2008). As Wills and McLean (2008) claim, the processes of ‘drafting and selecting’ students like sheep, have resulted from neo-liberal thinking, where children are rarely viewed for the social value and diversity but instead for the funding and academic ability in the competitive market place that they may, or may not attract. The economic benefits/lack thereof, and concerns about ‘risk’ to a school’s reputation, could yield views that the presence of students who are perceived as in need of ‘special’ educational resources may detract from the overall value of the school. Thus, resulting in assumptions that special needs equates to less or un-educable students (Kearney & Kane, 2006).

**The Role of ‘The Unit’**

Shane, Holly, Kelly and Cody describe varying associations with the special needs units at their schools. Holly and Shane attended ‘the unit’ to receive physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy, which frequently replaced their Physical Education lesson. Kelly attends her school’s unit to assist with her
learning, while Cody attends his school’s unit for the 15 hours that he is not funded for a teacher aide. While each student had/have varying reasons for attending these places, all mention the social barriers they faced as a student labelled as having ‘special needs’. In this section, I use the students’ discussions of ‘the unit’ to question how these experiences impact their views and understandings of themselves as able and worthy individuals. I draw on literature which reflects their stories, to highlight the complex issues of balancing academic, physical and social needs; and to demonstrate how students with physical disabilities are subject to educational structures and policies, which are “instruments of power/knowledge relations through which the identities and experiences of children with special educational needs are constructed” (Allan & Riddle, 1998, p. 30).

As mentioned above, Shane and Holly were associated with their schools’ special needs units due to the physiotherapy and occupational therapy support available. Not only did this placement limit their participation in Physical Education, but they also felt socially outcast and excluded because of their peers’ perceptions of the unit. Holly explains, “I found it really hard to make friends outside of ‘the unit’ because they were all like what a retard” She calls ‘the unit’:

A jail inside a school… you are kind of confined, and you have a big label, like a big label hanging off you. But I got through it and got what I needed… If I went to my local school I don’t think I would have got UE. I don’t think I would have got NCEA level 1, 2 and 3. Um, because I wouldn’t have the support, so academically I am really pleased I went to that school; it’s just that socially, I didn’t really have a good time.

Holly’s statement raises questions about the knowledge that is valued within her educational context. Despite Curriculum imperatives which claim a holistic, well-rounded education for all (Ministry of Education, 2007), it seems that her education, and her choice of school, were centred around knowledge which privileged results-
based education in which academic success overrides the emotional and social well-being of students with disabilities (Kearney & Kane, 2006). These experiences could be justified as a result of neo-liberal thinking where, should the student “try hard enough” (Nairn & Higgins, 2007, p. 263) educational achievement is possible. However, in Holly’s case, this success came at a cost – a common issue facing students identified as in ‘special need’ (Slee, 2013).

Despite achieving academically, Holly explains that she was labelled and identified as different by her mainstream peers: “I was in ‘the unit’, and everyone saw you and was like oh, you are from the centre!” She also found that being associated with ‘the unit’ subjected her to a particular disciplinary gaze, imposing an identity which she had not considered previously. This is demonstrated in the opening quote of the chapter where Holly states, “I didn’t really know that I was disabled up until about secondary school”. Interestingly, Holly did not view herself as inherently different from her peers. Instead, she recognised her similarities to her peers (being academically able and interested in sport), but found these were overridden by others’ perceptions of her as ‘in need’.

Instead of feeling recognised for her abilities and similarities to her peers, Holly was differentiated, labelled and separated based on what Graham and Slee (2008) describe as a “disturbingly pervasive” (p. 281) construction of ‘normal’. This construction perpetuates education and ensures students with disabilities are dissociated from the ‘mainstream’ and subjects such as Physical Education which are seen as being reserved for the ‘able bodied’ (Evans, 2004). Instead, these students are required to primarily associate with other students with ‘special needs’ (Kearney & Kane, 2006, MacArthur, 2013). Drawing on Foucault (1977), Holly appears subjected to socially constructed, yet naturalised discourses of what it means to be normal.
Through ingrained educational practices and beliefs she is classified and subjected to “the assignment to each individual his ‘true’ name, his ‘true’ place, his ‘true’ body, his ‘true’ disease” (Foucault, 1977, p. 198; as cited in Graham and Slee, 2008, p. 285).

In other words, educational practices, even those concerned with ‘inclusion’, are based on the notion that there are “others” to be included (Graham & Slee, 2008). These “others” such as Holly, who are classified based on “characteristics held by dominant groups” (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 286), reinforce socially constructed difference. This difference is maintained and legitimised as knowledge and serves to reinforce education as a means of ‘sorting’ students, in terms of physical appearance, ability and geographical location within the school (Ballard, 2004; Slee, 2001a). This is particularly evident in Holly’s discussion, where peers who fit the ‘norm’ identify her as a student with a disability from ‘the unit’. Perhaps as a result of this, she resigns herself to being different and associates herself with the “other”.

Holly’s feelings of disablement were reinforced when her teacher pointed out her difference with regard to norms of speech and movement. Again, it appears she is given her ‘true’ label (Foucault, 1977; Graham & Slee, 2008), and assigned individual responsibility to ‘fix’ her problems:

That was the other thing! Up until like sixth form, I didn’t realise that I spoke, like my speech was all weird and people couldn’t understand me and then I was like, oh really! Now I am really munted! So I had speech therapy as well, because my teacher suggested I have speech therapy. So some periods I would go and do speech therapy, and I didn’t really like it so I kind of didn’t try, because I knew I have been speaking like this for 17 years, how is a miraculous 50 minute period going to change it?

Despite Holly’s resistance to being ‘othered’, she found the structure of her school caused her to constantly feel inherently different and in need of therapy. This is a key issue for students in New Zealand whose place in education is often defined by
the amount, and cost of support or extra provisions required (Wills & McLean, 2008).

Holly explains the consequences of this:

I could have made an effort to socialise more, but it was like, kind of hard when you have to go back to physio and OT and speech therapy. It was just annoying how I went to school, but it was therapy’s role, and it was like school is to make you less disabled.

Holly’s feelings reflect Graham and Slee’s (2008) statement that “the subsequent validation/invalidation of different ways of being normalises and naturalises schooling performances that are in accordance with accepted social norms, whilst particularising, objectifying and compartmentalising those which are not” (p. 289). In other words, Holly’s ‘difference’ was objectified due to the naturalised understanding of the ‘normal’ student privileged at her school. This largely medicalised thinking about difference and disability places the onus on students like Holly to ‘fix’ themselves by attending numerous therapy sessions away from the other students (Ballard, 2004).

Shane had similar experiences of being defined by physical difference. Also, the other boys in his school’s ‘unit’ were reinforced as different through the cruel acts of bullying that Shane feels could have been prevented:

It was right across from the sixth form common room, so the sixth formers would give them a bit of a hard time, but that could have been prevented easily if they were involved in mainstream… because then the sixth formers would have got to know them and know that they were decent boys.

Shane felt compelled to stand up for the boys in ‘the unit’ who faced discrimination not only from the other students, but also by the staff. He describes examples of unjust treatment from the teacher such as ‘the unit’ boys being “put in isolation for days at a time, they would speak to them horrible, like not swearing but pretty harsh words”. Shane chose to resist this, and stand up for the boys. His mother explains: “He developed quite a rapport with the boys in ‘the unit’ and they all kind of
looked up to him because he was their advocate”. Yet, despite his best attempts, his voice was often disregarded: “I wasn’t getting listened to, and if I didn’t keep quiet I could have lost support and I couldn’t afford that really”. His mother felt that the staff in ‘the unit’ felt threatened by Shane, perhaps because: “they never had a boy like him in ‘the unit’ and they were used to dealing with young boys with intellectual problems”.

Shane not only challenged the practices and knowledge which justified these exclusionary practices, but the role and foundation of ‘the unit’ itself. As Slee (2001a) argues, questions about whose interests are served, and how ‘professional opinions’ separate and maintain distinctions between students under the “guise of social justice must be asked, to decipher whether units are in the best interests of the child, or due to them being “bureaucratically convenient”’ (p. 378).

Despite these experiences, Shane and his family believe that the ‘unit’ was a “safe haven”. This is a theme reflected by Kelly, who feels she can go to her learning support unit at lunchtime for safety. Yet, if the above events occurred in Shane’s place of safety, what does this say about the rest of the school? These examples highlight that while special units are present under the guise of what is ‘best’ for the students (MacArthur et al., 2007a; Slee, 2001a), they can reinforce and encourage the separation of students who do not ‘fit’ within education. In doing so, this highlights a student’s difference to the norm and the need for them to be ‘worked on’ away from the mainstream (Slee, 2001a).

Cody attends ‘the unit’ at his school to cover the 15 hours not funded by a teacher aide. His parents wanted him to be as mainstreamed as possible. However, Cody still experiences othering, because of his association with ‘the unit’, and because he does not have a “not a huge amount of interaction” with his peers. His friends Bert, Tommy and John are all educated solely in ‘the unit’ at his school, and when Cody
attends mainstream classes he sits with his teacher aide, separate from his able bodied peers. As a result, Cody’s social interaction is limited. However, it appears that his teacher aide and some teachers have encouraged students to communicate with Cody at lunchtimes and between classes. His teacher aide explains that this is mostly with the students with whom Cody went to intermediate school, therefore they know and accept Cody, more so than students who may have had little contact with students with physical disabilities. While Cody seems happy with his schooling set up, it seems his ‘inclusion’ in the mainstream is something which still relies on the presence of ‘the unit’. For those times he is not funded, Cody must attend ‘the unit’, thus demonstrating the overlapping of ‘special needs’ discourses into a theoretically inclusive environment (as claimed by the school).

As the students’ testimonies attest, school units serve not just as barriers to doing (such as taking part alongside peers), but they also construct a major barrier to being (Thomas, 1999), as they cast students with disabilities as different to the rest and in need of help. As demonstrated by the students’ experiences, this separation reinforces special education knowledge which, as Slee (2005) argues, is incredibly dangerous due to the “potential [it yields] for teachers to feel more confident that their hunches that some kids don’t belong in our schools” (p. 149).

**The Role of Teacher Aides**

Most students within this study are ‘academically able’ and (with the exception of Kelly and Cody) face few learning difficulties as a result of their impairment. However, all of the students discuss the constant need to prove their ability academically, as this is often doubted. Further, many discuss how their teachers perceive teacher aides as a replacement teacher or supervisor, resulting in a physical
separation of the student both geographically and literally from the rest of the class (Ballard, 2004; Rutherford, 2009; Slee, 2001a). In this section, I discuss the roles that teacher aides and other academic supports play in how students perceive themselves as able young people. In particular, I examine how and when student voice is listened to or ignored in discussions about ‘help’ in the school context.

Kelly is separated from her peers in many of her classes. She feels that this is because of her own issues with keeping up with the work. For example, in some classes she explains she must do:

- different work from the other kids because I haven’t quite caught up yet.
- I sit at the back because the things the teacher puts on the board I don’t do. Cos I do different stuff from the whole class so I am not quite caught up yet. It’s so frustrating… Frustrating!!

Her teacher aide, Suzy, “always” sits beside her during lessons. Suzy is present to assist Kelly’s learning: “She would help me with what I need a lot of help with, I pretty much get a lot of help.” However, on the days that Suzy is not present (she only comes on Tuesdays and Thursdays), Kelly must sit beside the other students with disabilities, away from her friends and work independently. This separation raises questions about how the structures impact on her learning. For a student who needs “a lot of help”, how is removing her from her peers, and only having support two days a week enhancing her learning? It seems Kelly’s experiences are a form of “educational disablement” (Slee, 2001b, p. 167), in which the structure and nature of schooling works to exclude and disable Kelly.

Questioning the structure of the support she receives allows an alternative view of Kelly's learning impairment. This results in discussions that go deeper than a perceived inability to learn, as reflected in questions asked by many in teacher aide literature (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Elderman, Luiselli & MacFarland, 1997; Howard & Ford, 2007; Rutherford, 2009,
2012). For example, is Kelly, like many students in similar situations, inherently unable to do the work her peers do, or are the structures and assumptions imposed on her and her abilities limiting the ways she can learn? Furthermore, is her frustration primarily with her own ‘learning impairment’, or with her way of learning not being catered for? These questions highlight the fundamental injustice of the role of teacher aides (Rutherford, 2009), where the least trained educators are required to ‘care for’ students who may have complex learning characteristics. While the teacher aides are undoubtedly doing their best, Kelly’s learning opportunities could be limited as, unlike her ‘able’ peers, she is ‘taught’ by less (or un) qualified teachers. Again, this indicates how students with disabilities are often constructed as receiving a ‘lesser’ education due to their ‘higher’ needs (Kearney & Kane, 2006; Slee, 2011).

Kelly’s experiences resonate with those of other students, especially Cody. Liz (Cody’s teacher aide) is often left to teach Cody what she feels is fit for his learning. Cody does not attend all of his classes. According to Liz, science “is just not safe, and maths is just too difficult for him”. Furthermore, the class sizes at his school means that sometimes Cody does not have desk space. Liz explains, “Well in some classes there is just no room, because there is up to 21 kids in the class. And that has an impact”. When he is ‘unable’ to attend classes, he works with his teacher aide in a separate room. In these sessions, Liz does learning activities with him and tries to balance his learning with enjoyment by watching videos and playing games. Whilst Liz is doing her very best for Cody, his lack of participation in “mainstream” classes (despite his parents wishes) raises a number of questions. Firstly, why is Cody’s learning sacrificed due to lack of space? Also, it seems Liz is not only assisting Cody’s learning, but is also responsible for the content and structure of his learning. Teacher aides being required to take on the primary responsibility for students’ learning is something Giangreco et
al. (1997) call “inappropriate and inadvisable” (p. 15) yet, as in Cody and Liz’s case, remains common practice (Giangreco, 2013; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Slee, 2007). Rutherford (2012) also mentions that there is little consensus and definition of the actual role of teacher aides, in particular, where being an ‘aide’ ends and teaching begins. Yet their presence in the classroom is often viewed as the solution to inclusion and used as an attempt to ‘fix’ issues with inclusion. Giangreco (2013) explains this further:

Too often teacher assistants are not used wisely in inclusive classrooms, but rather metaphorically as a bandaid for an injury that at the least requires stiches and possibly major surgery; no bandaid, regardless of size or type, will meet the need. (p. 2)

In this sense, as reflected in Cody and Liz’s situation, the realities of teacher aide work greatly differs from their rhetorical position. Rather than “working under the direction of the classroom teacher” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1), Liz appears to have to become Cody’s classroom teacher, responsible for his learning in place of his teachers – something she is not employed or trained to do.

Cody’s experiences also raise questions about who counts within education. It seems that despite his parents wish to challenge the usual practices of Cody’s school, which would place him in ‘the unit’ with other ‘different’ students, Cody is subjected to discourses which privilege the learning of those who ‘fit’ the mould of a ‘normal’ student. It seems Cody has conditional acceptance into the ‘mainstream’ (Rutherford, 2012). He is only allowed in when space and lesson structures permit the presence of a student who may not be “safe” to have in the classroom. What is particularly alarming is how these experiences do not gel with legislation and policy set out to protect children, as discussed in Chapter One. For example, Article 28 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) states, “Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable”. Furthermore, the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) is said to be
“non-sexist, non-racist, and non-discriminatory; it ensures that students’ identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed” (p. 9). Yet it is greatly questionable whether Cody’s (and others’) experiences of education reflect these statements (Clarke & MacArthur, 2008; IHC, 2014; MacArthur, 2013; Rutherford, 2012). Cody’s experiences raise questions as to whether these experiences would be acceptable for the majority of students, or whether his exclusion is justifiable based on metaphorically sacrificing Cody’s education for the sake of the majority (Slee, 2001a).

These inconsistencies between policy and practice point to the need for further interrogation. Why is Cody viewed as ‘unsafe’ or ‘unable’ to be catered for in some classes when he has constant supervision? Would a ‘normal’ student be excluded from classes because of space constraints? What discourses of surplus population (Ballard, 2004) persist in Cody’s experiences? How are Cody’s rights to an equal and fair education recognised by separating and removing him from particular lessons? This final question is one pivotal to many students with physical disabilities within New Zealand. Despite many policies proclaiming students’ rights to education, these rights are not always recognised (Clarke & MacArthur, 2008; IHC, 2008, 2014; Rietveld, 2005; Rutherford, 2009, 2012). Instead, as Giangreco (2013) explains, teacher aides appear to be used as a ‘bandaid’, or the easy way to ‘do’ inclusion, attempting to cover up deeper epistemological flaws in the education system (Slee, 2013).

In response to these questions, it seems that Cody’s experiences reflect wider practices within mainstream education. These practices show that “disabled students either find themselves excluded or co-opted into shallow exercises of assimilation” (Slee, 2001a, p. 389). However, Slee (2001a) would argue that ‘blame’ cannot be laid on particular people or structures which exclude and prevent Cody from learning.
alongside his peers. Lack of clarity about the role of teacher aides within schools, changeable and unclear expectations about the type and level of educational assistance and funding limitations have all been acknowledged as affecting students’ learning when supported by teacher aides (Giangreco, 2013; Giangreco & Broer, 2003.) As a result, the gap between what is a sufficient education for a ‘normal’ child and a child with a disability may be exceptionally wide and seemingly unjust. Yet, this gap is legitimised by a belief that ‘special’ educators know best for students (Higgins et al., 2006; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Rutherford, 2012). Thus, teachers may assume that Cody’s presence in the classroom is inclusion enough, based on their understandings of the ‘needs’ of a disabled child and what constitutes ‘inclusion’ under the guise of special education thinking (Davis & Watson, 2001; Slee, 2007, 2008).

*Experiences of Funding*

Schools play a large role in the way students view themselves, their impairments and ultimately understand disability (MacArthur et al., 2007a, 2007b). The need to prove the severity of their impairments to ensure adequate funding to attend school is something students draw on to explain how they understand themselves as able/disabled young people.

In New Zealand, funding for students with physical disabilities is available through the Ministry of Education. Each school receives a ‘Special Education Grant’ to provide resources, training or other supports such as teacher aides (Ministry of Education, 2014). However, some schools “struggle to teach disabled children in the face of insufficient and inflexible resources” (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 63). Students may also receive additional funding through a variety of schemes. The particular scheme students in this study drew funding from the Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS), which
“provides support for additional teachers, teachers’ aides, specialists and items a child might need in the classroom” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2). While this application is said to be a joint process between the Ministry, educators, professionals and families, many parents feel they receive little support or guidance during the application process (Higgins, et al., 2008). While limited access to resources is one issue (there is only a fixed amount of funding available, therefore some students miss out regardless of circumstances) the attitudes of educators, the negative way in which students are portrayed, and the inflexibility of school structures to accommodate students with physical disabilities are all examples of barriers that are difficult to overcome (Higgins et al., 2008). Drawing on one example of an ORS funding application, Higgins et al. (2008) explain:

> The social child with rights who is part of the group of all children at school is de-emphasised… in favour of an emphasis on the surveillance of the individual… The portrayal selectively defines Jenny by her impairment and her bodily functions, which are intimately described, rather than reflecting respect for, or valuing Jenny as a child at school. (p. 149)

Thus, application for funding to enable students with physical disabilities to receive education alongside their peers is a task fraught with difficulties and inequalities. The need to construct children as deficits, and portray them in perhaps their worst light, no doubt impacts on the students themselves and their families (Higgins et al., 2008).

Several students in this study are acutely aware of the funding that they received to help them attend school. As Rutherford (2012) explains, the process of gaining funding to access educational supports involves a “deficit-based application process that requires parents and teachers to highlight students’ lack of competence, the extent to which they are ‘below’ or ‘behind’ the educational achievement of their same aged peers” (p. 3). From the outset, it is obvious that engaging in such processes may affect how education staff perceive particular students and how students’ perceive themselves.
Furthermore, the disciplinary mechanisms employed to retain funding, such as surveillance (Higgins et al., 2008) may well reinforce a student’s difference from their peers (Foucault, 1977; McCartney, 2008).

As discussed previously, Cody is only allocated 21 hours of funded time per week, which goes to support his teacher aide. Cody’s lack of full ‘cover’ meant that he was not able to participate in some classes, as mentioned in the previous section. This is a common theme in educational research, where teachers and schools may feel ill equipped to ‘include’ students with physical disabilities without the support of teacher aides, who, as in Cody’s situation, are only present when funding permits (Higgins et al., 2008). As a result, students remain separated and segregated both geographically and socially from other students (Ballard, 2004; Curtain & Clarke, 2005). Thus, despite human rights and social justice ideologies, which push for equal and equitable education (Curtain & Clarke, 2005), discourses of students with physical disabilities as in need of ‘help’ above and beyond what the teacher can provide continue to cast them as inherently ‘different’ from their peers.

Processes of biopower evident in funding applications further reinforce this categorisation. From a biopower perspective, the students are measured and classified based on their difference to bodily ‘norms’ (Higgins et al., 2008; Macartney, 2008). The need to be proven incapable could not only impact on the students’ education, but also on the way they view themselves as worthy of education. In attempting to gain funding, disciplinary practices, which typically involve adhering to the social norms, are reversed. Despite the wish to be seen as similar to their peers, students, and their families are required to demonstrate and maintain difference, in order to receive education they are entitled to (Rutherford, 2009).
Cody’s predicament is similar for other students. For example, Shane and his mother describe getting funding as a “battle”. At one stage during Shane’s time at secondary school, Shane’s mother “ended up paying the teacher aides for a while”. What is evident from Shane’s experiences is the lack of responsibility from the school regarding Shane’s education. This is something Macartney (2009) argues is pertinent for the inclusion of all students. For example, Shane’s mother explains:

> With the last year being his transitional year to university, I had spoken to them at the Ministry. We had sufficient cover to cover him at school and that was fine. And then the first two weeks he didn’t have sufficient cover. So anyway, I kind of asked them what happened, and they said oh no, he’s only got such and such hours, and I thought that’s a bit strange, as I was told he had full cover, so then I got back to the Ministry of Education, and he did have full cover!

Unfortunately, these experiences are not limited to Shane. As Carroll-Lind and Rees (2009) explain, in the New Zealand context, often the “needs of a system” (p. 3) are put before those of the students. In other words, the convenience of the education system is privileged over the education of students with physical disabilities. As a result, students are left without the means to receive education, meaning they continue to be segregated. They remain cast as different based on their extra needs to ‘fit’ within the system (Macartney, 2009), and are arguably constructed as less important or less worthy than those who automatically ‘fit’ within the education system (Kearney & Kane, 2006).

Shane does not feel that it was acceptable that he was expected to learn without someone who could write for him in class. His attempt to confront the school was met with the response: “‘You can’t always get what you want’, and they told him he was selfish!!!” Yet, how can a young person be ‘selfish’ for wanting what he is entitled to? As McDonnell (2003, as cited in Ballard, 2004) explains, discourses of “power, control, dominance and subordination” (p. 318) are perpetuated within ‘special’ education
thinking. Furthermore, “for children without disability, the resources of the state school system are there as of right. For children categorised as ‘special’, their access to resources is not assured until they prove themselves sufficiently different to qualify” (Ballard, 2004, p. 320). Therefore, constructing students as different (which is reinforced under funding regimes) rotates the discourse that funding is provided to ensure all students are entitled to equal education (Ministry of Education, 2012), to that of students with physical disabilities as beneficiaries of financial good-will from education providers.

Many families of students with physical disabilities that Shane knew did not receive enough funding for the support they required. Yet, Shane’s mother explains that many of these families were afraid of “rocking the boat”, and did not wish to challenge the power dynamics which appeared to position them as ‘lucky’ to receive the amount of support they did. She explains:

Halfway through sixth form the physio and OT were let go because there was no money, so I mean, that bothered me big time, but I thought we are just about done… but it was pretty hard for the other kids who needed it… It’s really hard to get other parents in on it too, because a lot of them are frightened to rock the boat.

Shane goes on to explain that “me and Mum wrote heaps of letters to the Ministry, but we had no support from the management at the special need unit, and no support from them”. Thus, it seems many families at Shane’s schools were resigned to accept the less than adequate supports provided for their children. Clarke and McArthur (2008) reflect this, explaining that, despite the existence of provisions regarding students’ rights to funding and the supports necessary for their education (such as the conventions, policies and legislations discussed in Chapter One) these are often not recognised within the school setting. As a result, many students go without, often due to the attitudes of those in a position to enact these rights (Carroll-Lind & Rees, 2009).
However, Rutherford (2009) raises an important point that is reflected in Shane’s experiences: Would it be acceptable that families of “the majority of students for whom school structures and practices are more accommodating” (p. 92) to “battle” in such ways as Shane’s family did for their child’s right to the education they are legally entitled to? Therefore, why is this acceptable for students with physical disabilities?

Furthermore, how does this “battle” for funding impact on the way students view themselves? Angela’s discussions provide insights into this. She explains that when she had a period of time with no funding for a teacher aide she was disadvantaged in her learning:

I didn’t have any funding, but that’s the government’s fault not the school’s fault, and then when it came to it after six weeks, my teacher got my friend’s book, who takes really good notes. They were just like, glue it in. And I was like, no I learn best by writing everything out in full, so I wrote everything out in full.

It is not only her education that appeared to be impacted by funding issues. She explains, “I got funding for when I got surgery, until I am normal and things again”. Arguably the use of the term ‘normal’ reflects Foucault’s (1977) notions of bio-power. Angela is subject to “governmental practices into which the subject is inducted and divided from others to produce the illusion that they have a prediscursive, or natural, antecedent (impairment)” (Tremain, 2005, p. 11, italics in original). These ‘governmental practices’ are demonstrated by funding regimes, in which she was constructed as in ‘in need’ and thus, naturally different from others. For example, Angela asked her mother to explain her funding, which reflects how she is constructed as different and in need:

When you started primary school, you had ORRS funding [an earlier version of the current funding model], then you went from that to high needs for two years, then they dropped that, and you were on moderate needs, then they dropped that. Then you had an operation and they put you on high needs for a short period, and then they dropped that. Then
you had nothing and you went to high school and had nothing, and then high needs again, and then you had nothing!

Drawing on her mother’s explanation, it is evident that being ‘normal’ is something important and achievable for Angela, reflecting Waldschmidt’s (2005) statement that “the notion of normality now meets the authentic needs and wishes of those people who are on the fringe of society … it is formed and shaped by the acting subjects themselves” (p. 191-192). In other words, Angela’s own perception of normality is fluid and changing. There is no fixed notion of ‘normal’ for her. Instead, her own perceptions of normality, are associated with the absence of the label “high needs”. The consequences of labelling students as different in order to receive educational funding to learn with their peers are a key issue. While Angela may be able to ‘lose’ the label, and view herself as ‘normal’ when she does not need funding, how do other students negotiate the ‘label’? And how do they negotiate their educational experiences when constantly being cast as ‘in need’, having to prove their difference in order to receive and education similar to their peers who are automatically entitled?

In this section I have examined how structures within education can either confine or empower students’ educational experiences and perceptions of themselves. I feel it is critical to examine and question these structures, to gain a deeper insight into students’ experiences of Physical Education within their respective schools. What is overwhelmingly clear from the students was the difficulty in challenging power/knowledge relationships and structures that cast them as different from their peers. Despite their best attempts to be viewed as similar to their ‘able bodied’ peers, students often found themselves excluded based on institutionalised discourses ingrained in the practices of their schools.


Conclusion

This chapter has examined the broader educational context in which students’ Physical Education experiences are located. In doing so, I have explored the role that wider institutional dynamics play in the construction of students as ‘disabled’. In particular, I examined how people’s perceptions within the school setting challenge students’ perceptions of themselves as able and achieving young students, and how institutional barriers to doing (Thomas, 1999) further shape students’ understandings of themselves and their experiences of disability. As the students discussed, many of their experiences of disability within the school could have been avoided if structures, policies, language and attitudes of those in positions of power were altered. Special needs discourses, which construct students with physical disabilities as inherently different and deficit, appear to permeate the students’ testimonies.

However, the prevalence of deficit based, special needs thinking, which in some way is part of the foundation of neo-liberal education itself (Higgins et al., 2008), has become entwined with attempts to construct inclusive educational policies (Ministry of Education, 2012). No doubt, due to New Zealand’s confused position on the place of students’ with disabilities – exemplified in the ‘Special Education Guidelines’ (Higgins et al., 2006; Ministry of Education, 2014) – special education discourses offer themselves as the most logical, and simplest way to educate students with disabilities. What the students’ experiences show us is the importance of recognising the plurality of student experiences and opinions, even in a time of confusion, uncertainty and competitive educational markets (Higgins et al., 2008). Whilst on one hand, the educational supports required by students with physical disabilities may identify them as different, like any other student they have a right to access to the best education possible.
As the next chapter attests, Physical Education is an area where these experiences are amplified. It is not surprising then, given the barriers students faced to receive basic support to help them read or write, that support in Physical Education is non-existent for many of these students. The assumptions and perceptions that the students’ face in wider education evidently limit their opportunities to access Physical Education, a subject which Barton (1993) argues is often not viewed as integral to the education of students with disabilities.

Overall, the importance of reflecting on current educational practices is a key message in the student’s testimonies. As the students explain, the way that people and institutions can impose a disabled identity on them, often jars with the way they view themselves (MacArthur, et al., 2007a). Further, the students encourage us to question why it is we perceive certain educational practices as ‘best’ for students with physical disabilities. For example, would practices of proving inability and difference, separation and denial of education be acceptable for the majority of ‘mainstream’ students (Rutherford, 2012)? Therefore leading us to question, why, and for whose benefit, are students with physical disabilities treated in these ways? Without questioning these discourses, such practices continue as acceptable practice. As evident from the students’ testimonies, these practices can greatly inhibit their educational experiences and opportunities, as well as negatively influence the way they understand themselves in education.
“Who’s In? Who’s Out? How Come?” are questions asked by Slee (2011, p. 152) regarding where students sit within the context of education. Slee (2011) argues that when minority students (such as those with disabilities; other ethnicities or those from low socio-economic circumstances) do not achieve required levels of educational success, rarely is this failure viewed as the fault of education to recognise and accommodate these differences. Instead, “we confer titles of defectiveness on these children” (Slee, 2011, p. 151). In this chapter, I narrow the focus of these questions to Physical Education. By foregrounding the voices of Angela, Connor, Cody, Kelly, Holly and Shane, I examine how the marginalisation and exclusion of students with physical disabilities is justified in Physical Education, and ask which bodies, movements and physical skills are privileged in Physical Education?

To do so, I draw on Barton’s (1993) claim that despite what is proclaimed in policy documents, Physical Education has, is and will always be reserved for certain ‘types’ of bodies. This assertion has been continually revisited in literature, indicating little has changed in the past two decades (Barton, 2009). Arguably, this claim has a legacy from 19th and 20th century Physical Education practice where the subject existed for a set reason: to physically educate and mould the ‘docile bodies’ of future citizens (Foucault; 1977; Kirk, 2004; Turner, 2008).

This chapter is divided into two sections. First I deal with the question, ‘Who’s In and Who’s Out?’ Two sub-sections comprise this discussion. The first discusses the stories of students who did not receive a conventional Physical Education, while the
second airs the views of those who did attend their ‘mainstream’ Physical Education classrooms. In the second section I ask “How Come?” I examine the contexts within which the students’ experiences occurred (such as gymnastics, swimming, changing rooms and outdoor education), and question what role these play in governing who can and who cannot access or achieve a ‘physically educable’ body.

**Who’s In and Who’s Out?**

Barton (1993) states that traditionally, Physical Education “is not a curriculum which will easily accommodate physically disabled students” (p. 49). Despite the New Zealand Curriculum’s intent to be inclusive (Petrie, et al, 2014) discourses of normalised ability and movements that are engrained within Physical Education can inhibit teachers’ capacity to work with the curriculum to include all students (Burrows et a., 2013; Evan & Davies, 2011; Kirk, 2004; Pringle & Pringle, 2012; Tinning, 2004). As discussed in Chapter Two, Physical Education was intended for particular types of bodies to be moulded to suit social needs and norms (Kirk, 2004). Specifically within a New Zealand context, Physical Education is seen to bear the brunt of governmental and policy changes related to the health and well-being of the wider population (Burrows, 2005; Culpan, 2008; Kirk, 2001; Ovens, 2010). Notwithstanding attempts to realign Physical Education within the broader curriculum, the very premise of Physical Education - to educate ‘the body’ to be healthy and a contributor rather than a strain on wider society - remains (Burrows et al., 2013; Evans, 2004; Evans & Davies, 2004; Hay & MacDonald, 2010; Tinning, 2004). Furthermore, Culpan (2008) and Culpan and Bruce (2007) argue that the Curriculum itself could limit the experiences of students within Physical Education. In particular, placing Physical Education as a Key Area of Learning, risks compartmentalising Physical Education, assessing students’ ability to
do rather than to critically comprehend Physical Education practices (Pringle & Pringle, 2012).

Therefore, it was expected that the students in this study may experience discrimination or exclusion from certain areas of the Physical Education Curriculum. In this section I draw on the students’ stories to examine what Physical Education means for those who fall outside what is perceived as a ‘physically educable’ student (Barton, 1993). Firstly, I foreground the stories of Shane and Holly, who were required to attended physical therapy rather than Physical Education. I question how this can be when Physical Education is said to be compulsory for all students (Ministry of Education, 2007). Secondly, I examine the experiences of Kelly, Angela, Connor and Cody who were allowed to participate in Physical Education, in order to further question why some and not others are given access to a Physical Education.

Experiences of Students Who are ‘Out’

There was no place in the Physical Education classroom for Shane and Holly. Unlike the other students in the study, Shane and Holly were located in the special education unit at their respective schools. This was in order to receive funding and services that they would not have access to if they were placed in the ‘mainstream’. Shane’s mother explains that the reason they chose his particular school was based on the services offered to students with physical disabilities despite the social consequences:

It had a special unit which had a physio and an OT, and that’s what we needed, but in hindsight, he (Shane) was in mainstream classes, but he was associated with ‘the unit’, and it impaired his social development.
The need to be labelled as ‘special needs’ in order to receive funding raises a number of larger, complex questions about education practices and policies (see Slee, 2011), as well as the social and psychological effects they yield for the students. However, the focus here is on how the ‘special needs’ label influences students’ experiences of Physical Education (or lack thereof).

Despite Physical Education being a compulsory part of the New Zealand Curriculum, physical therapy was regarded as more important than a Physical Education for Holly and Shane. The way that Holly and Shane justify this exclusion is particularly revealing. Holly explains, “I did everything in the mainstream, but obviously physio instead of PE. Looking back I was kind of like, well now I am part of the centre, I may as well be disabled now”. Shane’s explanation of why he was excluded points to how particular bodies are selected for Physical Education: “People think I wobble a bit and might fall over, but I never do! That’s what probably stopped me from doing PE”. Shane’s statement reflects what Foucault (1977) describes as the production and maintenance of power, where others’ assumptions of what students can or cannot do take precedence over their own perceptions of ability. These assumptions (of teachers or therapists) are largely based on knowledge about which bodies are physically educable – able to participate and achieve in a regimented, competitive Curriculum – and thus ‘fit’ the Physical Education context. Furthermore, it demonstrates how barriers to doing and being (Thomas, 1999) which deny Holly and Shane access to Physical Education, impact on the way individuals come to understand themselves as able/disabled (Connors & Stalkers, 2007; Thomas, 1999). In particular, Holly found an identity imposed on her, resigning her to the fact her body and thus, herself, must be different.
Questioning why denial of access occurred for Shane and Holly returns us to the question of who Physical Education is for, or, “Who’s In”? Not only has the nature of Physical Education and understandings of ability changed little over the last century (Evans, 2004; Kirk, 1998) but the place of students with the label of ‘special needs’ such as Shane and Holly in Physical Education has also remained largely unchanged (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012). Halliday (1993) explains that historically, students with physical disabilities were placed into ‘special’ schools or institutions. In this scenario Physical Education was viewed as “surplus to requirements because the students already had access to regular physiotherapy” (p. 206). Although times have changed, this discourse remains, and appears to be drawn on by Shane and Holly to justify their exclusion from Physical Education. This was mentioned by Holly in the previous paragraph, and by Shane who recounts his experiences of being ‘removed’ from the mainstream Physical Education class to attend physio in ‘the unit’. As cited in the opening quote of this chapter, Shane explains, despite Physical Education being compulsory, he was not able to take part. His exclusion included being physically removed from Physical Education when he defied instructions and went to the lessons with his peers. He recognises that his exclusion from Physical Education was a result of his perceived ‘special needs’: “I should have just been mainstreamed, but the physio was there [in the special needs unit]”. These experiences reinforce the notion that Physical Education, which encourages the understanding and appreciation of bodies (Ministry of Education, 2007), is not a place for those with ‘special needs’ that could be ‘fixed’ by therapy in other areas of the school.

Despite being ‘removed’ from Physical Education, Shane recognises he is ‘lucky’ to receive a mostly mainstreamed education:

Imagine if I was in a special school what a waste it would be. Some of them [students at special needs schools] have a lot of sporting
abilities too and all that’s wasted, because not many of us get the chance, and not many have good families like I do.

Yet Shane is also acutely aware that barriers still exist and there is a long road to travel to achieve educational equality – especially in Physical Education. Shane and his mother link these barriers to the label he held for being located in ‘the unit’, and longstanding discourses about the value of therapy over education (Halliday, 1993; Smith & Thomas, 2006). For example, Shane explains that the Head of Department justified his exclusion from Physical Education based on a lack of funding for teacher aide time – a rationale which has been drawn on to justify exclusion for nearly 30 years (Barton, 1993; Burrows, 1994; Halliday 1993). However, Shane had different ideas:

Because PE was the only class I missed out on my friends said why aren’t you doing it? And I said because he won’t let me, there is not enough teacher aide time. But you can fight to get more funding surely you can?

Despite “just wanting an opportunity to try it out” Shane believes ‘doing things by the book’ in terms of funding (which ironically contradicted educational policy to accept and include all students) was a guise for a lack of knowledge or understanding about students with physical disabilities: “they didn’t think I could keep up with it anyway, I know I am limited in what I can do, but I think I could have done a third form PE class easy”. This explanation of exclusion harks back to the question orientating this chapter: What bodies, abilities and movements are privileged in Physical Education? Shane’s experiences explain that the answer to the question often lies with those (such as teachers) who are in positions of power to justify decisions as to who can and cannot receive Physical Education.

Shane’s experiences speak to the roles teachers play in shaping the experiences and opportunities students have in education. As Flintoff and Scraton (2001) make clear, teachers have a powerful role in shaping student experiences and opportunities in
Physical Education. In Shane’s case, the Head of Department’s attitude to Shane participating in Physical Education severely limited his opportunities to engage in physical activity alongside his peers. From a post-structural perspective, Shane’s testimony raises more questions than answers. For example, if he was allowed to participate in Physical Education, how would his perception of himself, his ability and his place in education alter?

While Shane feels it was an injustice that he was not allowed to participate in Physical Education, in Holly’s case, it seemed more practical for her not to take part in Physical Education:

I did physio because we were part of the centre. You didn’t really do PE, they would automatically go ok, you do physio … but the intellectually impaired, they could do PE, I guess because they could still run and stuff. I guess now it bugs me, but back then I didn’t know any different.

The way Holly describes being part of ‘the centre’ and not taking Physical Education draws attention to the way she constructs herself as ‘disabled’. As mentioned earlier, it would appear Holly felt resigned to being disabled based on her association with the centre, and as a result, felt that it was acceptable for her not to attend Physical Education classes. However, this counteracts educational (and wider social) policies that state all students have the right to all areas of education (Human Rights Commission, 1993; Ministry of Education, 2007; New Zealand Government, 1989; United Nations, 1989, 2007). Further, despite educational policy legally requiring all students to attend Physical Education, the discursive construction of “all” students has its limits. It seems in Shane and Holly’s experiences, “all” students refer to only those without a ‘special needs’ label.
Experiences of Students Who are Allowed ‘In’

The void between policy and practice not only applies to discussions of entitlement and the label of ‘special needs’. For students who are allowed to participate in Physical Education, it would seem that fostering positive physical experiences for them is far from reality. Returning to Barton’s (1993) statement that Physical Education is designed for a certain type of body, I now move to discuss the experiences of those students who receive some form of Physical Education.

As discussed earlier in the Literature Review, it has been argued that Physical Education was constructed by the able bodied population to serve the needs of the able bodied population (Barton, 1993, 2009; DePauw, 1997). Therefore, as people are not created equally, Physical Education ultimately highlights physical differences. This is not only through structural barriers that exclude certain bodies, but also through the production of levels/labels, such as New Zealand’s education assessment measures. These include National Standards and National Certificate in Education Achievement (NCEA) which stratify student achievement (e.g. from “Excellent to “Not Achieved”). Connor explains that these labels are the more “PC” words used to differentiate between success and failure. Labelling of ability is an enduring aspect of Physical Education. Historically, for those who did not succeed in this area of social training (Kirk, 2001), labels such as ‘abnormal’ or ‘deviant’ were given to students for not achieving the requirements of the subject. While the present labels are not as explicit, Connor believes that “Not Achieved” still implies that “you are a failure”. Unfortunately, labelling of students occurred (and still occurs) rather than questioning the structures of the education such as assessment, Curriculum or educational policies that could prevent some students from achieving (Evans & Davis, 2004; Slee, 2011).
The notion that being physically educable is dependent on one’s ‘ability’ still pervades Physical Education today (Croston, 2013; Evans, 2004; Wright & Burrows, 2004), to the extent where the concept of ability has become “akin to a ‘physical intelligence’: a kind of God-given, homogeneous immutable entity” (Evans, 2004, p. 99). The assumption that students either have it, or they do not, causes students to question themselves, and their place within Physical Education. This is something articulated by Evans and Davies (2004) as they state: “for a great many young people… the content and conventional organisation of education and PEH [Physical Education and Health] and sport may increasingly be neither worthwhile nor empowering” (p. 7). While we have moved away from explicit, crude labelling of students who do not have the ‘ability’ to be physically educated (in other words who do not succeed in ‘fitting’ the assessment) the students in this study indicate that these assumptions still exist. For example, in Angela’s class, she thinks that, unlike in other subjects, teachers and peers are able to see how well she achieves, as assessments are public. She explains:

In other subjects, you are given back your paper with your mark and you don’t have to tell anyone, but in PE, say you are doing the beep test, and you pull out everyone knows you pulled out because they saw you and your mark and you pulled out at that point.

Connor also draws on the notion of being on show to explain how he felt when ‘not achieving’ in Physical Education: “It didn’t exactly make me feel grand. I haven’t achieved anything, and to not be able to do it, and just have the teacher completely reject you and not even help you, it’s not the greatest feeling in the world”. Thus, not ‘having’ the ability to achieve in Physical Education appears to be something perceived as fixed and unchanging (Evans, 2004), yet still required to be assessed publically through tasks and activities. For Connor especially, rather than addressing the issues and assumptions about the bodies, movements and physical skills required to achieve in certain ways, it
seems accepted that Connor will not be able to achieve. Therefore, the teacher’s attention is directed elsewhere.

Connor explains there is a distinct three-way split in ability within his Physical Education class: “there is the super athletics people and they just get excellence in everything, and then there is the not so super athletic people, so they are average, and then there are the failures”. This statement encourages an examination of the purpose and outcomes of Physical Education. As Wright and Burrows (2004) also mention, the “sorting and streaming” (p. 277) of students based on ability – as evident in Connor’s experience – goes against the ‘goal’ of constructing Physical Education which “…contributes to people’s pleasure and enhances their lives” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23). Evans and Davies (1993) reflect Connor’s statement, recognising that students’ experiences contribute to their understandings of their selves as either ‘excellent’ or as failures. As they suggest, Physical Education has “the capacity to empower, instil confidence, cooperation, sensitivity, dignity and pride in oneself and others… [it] can [also] alienate, promote insensitivity, exaggerate difference, foster selfish individualism, separate and divide” (Evans & Davis, 1994, p. 3). Connor’s experience indicates answers to questions about the values of Physical Education, and the difference between policy and practice for students who are often overlooked (or simply not counted) within Physical Education. In particular, he points to the way assumptions of ability define achievement opportunities and privilege certain forms of movements. Supporting Connor’s views, Barton (1993) explains: “If we begin to make a distinction between the formal rhetoric and actual practice of school, a quite different picture begins to emerge” (p. 49).

However, experiences of Physical Education are not solely reflective of ability or disability. As Flintoff et al. (2008) explain, for students with disabilities, impairment
is not the only factor (or necessarily the major factor) they choose to draw on to construct their identity. This notion of inter-sectionality is especially reflected in the stories of Cody, Connor and Shane. As young men who recognise their difference to the norm in terms of movement, speech and appearance, they also talk of the way particular discourses of masculinity are privileged in Physical Education, and discuss how this constrains their access to, or experiences of Physical Education. Shane is acutely aware of the enduring association between aggressiveness and masculinity (Kirk & Tinning, 1990, cited in Barton, 1993). He explains his exclusion from the classroom: “They thought it would be too rough for me being in an all-boys school, but I did PE at intermediate and I just wanted to be with the other boys!” Despite his ability and desire to take part alongside his peers, teachers assumed this would be too much for Shane in the secondary school setting. As Fitzgerald (2009) suggests, this is a common justification for young disabled students who sit out of particular physical activities. As a result of this justification, the difference between Shane’s own perceived capability and the perceptions of those with the ability to decide on his education clash. Dominant discourses of strong and physically dominant masculinities (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; O’Flynn & Lee, 2010) remain privileged, justifying Physical Education as “too rough” for Shane.

Cody faces similar assumptions about Physical Education being “too rough” for him. Despite his family’s wishes for Cody to be included in Physical Education, and Liz’s (Cody’s teacher aide) belief that Cody does enjoy participating with his peers, his teacher believes it to be a “bit of a shame” the adaptive Physical Education class was not on offer for his first year at secondary school. This would see him engaging in a therapy-based session with other students with ‘special needs’. His Physical Education teacher also invested in a bicycle for Cody, in the hope that he would “work out” during
Physical Education. However, Cody rarely uses this and instead likes to participate in team games – as he wished to demonstrate by his story of Physical Education:

**MY STORY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

I do P.E. in my walking frame.
I walk fast when it is time to head back to my wheelchair.

This term we have been learning Catching and Throwing.
Our teacher is showing us how to play the new game. We practise first.

We line up to be put in teams.
Today I am in the blue team.

I walk fast when it is time to head back to my wheelchair.

Figure 2: Cody’s story of Physical Education
While Cody liked to return to his wheelchair, this does not mean that he did not enjoy participating in team sports, even if the teacher assumes they may be “too rough” for him.

For Connor, the importance placed on physicality and masculinity in school Physical Education saw him measuring himself and his perceived worth against other students (Fitzgerald, 2009). He explains that most “not sporty” people at his school do not want to take Physical Education because it is “really, really physical, even if you take one of the lower PE classes it’s still really physical and you have to do this and this to pass, and if you don’t you fail”. Yet he explains that those students who succeed in Physical Education have a greater chance of becoming prefects or head boy due to their physical attributes and skill: “all the Head Boys have to be good at everything, and sports, well I just can’t do it... I know who is going to get it though, he’s really smart, can sing really well, AND he is good at basketball”. Again, the notion of ability being fixed and Physical Education being something that Connor “can’t do” causes him to feel limited in his options as a male role model for his school. Those who are physically talented, according to Connor, hold more chance of representing the school as their Head Boy – the masculine figure for students to aspire to – than someone who does not take part in sports or Physical Education.

**How Come? An Examination of Contexts**

While it is important to examine the role that students’ bodies, and perceptions of these, play in their experiences of becoming physically educated, it is also important to examine the contexts in which their experiences occur. I now move to examine the unique location of these Physical Education experiences. In particular, I examine how the students describe where their lessons take place, and how they feel constrained or
empowered by the settings. First, however, I raise the point that experiences and context are intertwined, and often it is difficult to see the wood for the trees. In other words, it is challenging to tell whether the ‘issues’ students with physical disabilities face are as a result of their bodies, or rather of the context/assessments/environments within which they are required to move.

Barton (1993) and Fitzgerald (2005) argue that inherent assumptions about ability and movement within Physical Education cause students who cannot conform to these prescribed norms to be viewed as having ‘problems’, rather than prompting a questioning of the context itself. The students involved in this study reiterat-ed this idea, highlighting how deep-seated assumptions about being physically ‘educable’ permeate school Physical Education contexts today. Furthermore, Evans and Davies (1993) raise the issue that “unadapted, unhelpful and unfriendly environments” (p. 3) do little to suggest that Physical Education is for all students. In this section, I examine specific Physical Education contexts within the schools that some students chose to discuss, namely, gymnastics, swimming and changing rooms. I raise issues with the assumptions (or ignorance) students believe others have of their ability to ‘fit’ the environment, and in turn to access Physical Education. I also address the challenges students face when Physical Education is taken into the outdoors, and how perceptions of their bodies influence their Physical Education experiences in these settings.

Gymnastics

It has been noted that Physical Education practices exclude students with physical disabilities based on their inability to ‘fit in’ with traditional gym based contexts (Coates & Vickerman, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2009). Traditionally gymnastics was undertaken in order to encourage strength and agility (Kirk, 1992) and this rationale
remains entrenched in Physical Education practice. It requires apparatus and equipment that Connor feels is not always safe, and in his mind the whole point of gymnastics has been lost: “What’s the point? Like oh there’s a fence, I’m going to backflip that!” For students with physical disabilities, the gymnastics context was not one in which they could easily participate in. Angela explains: “I didn’t do PE for the six weeks … I just sat in class and they were like take notes”. Alternatively, students received assistance from their peers to keep them safe as Connor did: “I just got my friends to lift me off, and my friends were always there, just holding my arms, in case I fell when I was doing it”. Angela’s and Connor’s statements add depth to the questions orientating this chapter: Which bodies, movements and abilities ‘fit’ Physical Education (and the gymnastics environment) and therefore are physically educable? It seems in the gymnastics context, their bodies did not ‘fit’ the gymnastics context.

Furthermore, being asked to sit out of the activity, or needing help to be kept safe – perhaps also a larger issue for all students – raises questions about how these experiences influence the students’ construction of themselves and their place within Physical Education. What messages about their bodies and their place in Physical Education are they receiving, when their experiences imply gymnastics is not a subject in which they can participate? As Connor explains later, experiences such as these “didn’t exactly make you feel grand”. It seems the Angela and Connor encountered clear messages about the particular bodies expected to participate in Physical Education. Their exclusion from activities causes them to assume that their bodies are not welcome, thus impacting on how they feel about themselves.

**Swimming**

Gymnastics was not the only context that caused students to feel they did not belong in Physical Education. Despite the large focus on learning to swim and drowning
prevention within New Zealand (Moran, 2009; Moran & Wilcox, 2013), both Angela and Connor describe feelings of not belonging in the aquatic environment. Connor was able to participate in swimming lessons at school, yet describes feeling as though he did not measure up:

You were told to swim like this, and if you don’t, well you’re just not doing well sort of thing. You had to jump in the pool, go swish, swish, swish to the other end… yeah… which… there were three of us which were way behind, and surprisingly, it was me and my two friends!

Not only does Connor draw on the notion that Physical Education is for the ‘able bodied’ who can swim, but he also raises questions about who is taught to swim and how this plays out in wider Physical Education: “well they teach you how to swim in year nine and ten PE. Well, if the teacher is any good they theoretically should teach you how to swim…they throw you in and flounder round and start swimming”. Yet despite this ‘lesson’ in how to swim, he explains that very few people choose to take part in swimming sports, as it is not an activity in which many students feel competent. Connor’s statement reflects Naera’s (2013) claim that events such as swimming can marginalise many students, not just those with disabilities, as these events “put students’ abilities on public display as their peers, family and community can literally see who’s good and who’s not” (p. 17).

Despite swimming at national events in the past and being a prime competitor for school events, Angela explains she was not allowed to take part in her school swimming sports because:

It was seen as unsafe for me, I would need a teacher aide in the pool!! They know I can swim and stuff, but it would violate their health and safety protocol. Like I’m going to fall over in the pool and slip over and drown or something? And I’m like what’s the big deal I can swim! I’m safer than someone who can’t swim and is made to swim, but it’s like… yeah… I dunno… you just sort of have to go with it because there isn’t much you can do. Cos then Mum kind of went along with what they were saying, and I was like, do I not get a say in this? Cos I actually can swim!
CHAPTER FIVE: PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Not only does Angela raise questions about why a competent swimmer like herself was denied access to swimming sports, but she demonstrates whose voice counts in this decision. Perhaps due to her need to use a wheelchair, ‘they’ (whoever ‘they’ may be) made assumptions about Angela’s ability to swim, which caused frustration and resentment. However, what is also interesting is the way she describes ‘health and safety protocol’ as being a justification for her exclusion, and a legitimate excuse with which her mother agreed, despite knowing her daughter’s swimming ability. This raises questions regarding the guise of ‘health and safety’ and whether this is used to justify decisions about who can and who cannot participate in swimming sports. How does this ‘health and safety’ knowledge pervade understandings and hold such power that Angela’s mother feels it is a legitimate ground to deny Angela’s participation? Whose interests are best served or protected by these protocols that view Angela’s body as ‘unsafe’? And perhaps most importantly, as Angela herself mentions, why is she viewed as a greater ‘risk’ than other students who cannot swim? As mentioned earlier, assumptions about which bodies can participate remain accepted and unquestioned within some education contexts, such as Physical Education (Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012). This greatly limits the opportunities for students such as Angela to prove their ability and recognise her right to participate alongside her peers (Slee, 2011). Thus, practices such as swimming arguably reinforce the statement that Physical Education was, and is not for “all” students, but rather only for the majority who move and swim in ‘normal’ ways (Barton, 1993, 2009).
CHAPTER FIVE: PHYSICAL EDUCATION

**Changing Rooms**

How students understand their bodies as physically educable and their position within Physical Education appeared to be greatly informed by their experiences within changing rooms, a site where their bodies are on show and their impairments (for some) are more obvious. It was also a site with little or no supervision from the teacher, something Kelly feels is a cause for bullying. She explains: “I used to keep my phone in my pocket, and hang my clothes. While I was in PE one of the girls stole my phone...” This, and many other experiences of bullying that Kelly has faced, cause her to feel scared to attend Physical Education and left her questioning why she was the target: “Why are they doing this to me you know, I have a disability but I am not going to explain that to them!”

Connor, Shane and Angela believe that access to changing rooms and the time allowed to get changed would be a barrier for other students with impairments. In a sense, those who were physically educable were ‘sifted’ before reaching the gym setting. For, example Connor believes “it would be a pain in the arse to get a wheelchair into the changing room” and Shane explains:

I take longer to change and get in and out of gear, but I would just go there a bit earlier it would only take me five minutes longer, and you can get in and out so the layout is quiet compact so that wasn’t the issue, it was people’s perceptions.

Accessing the changing room was an issue for Angela because “there would be two or three classes on at the same time, and I wouldn’t actually get to sit down to get changed so I would have to stand up and then I would fall over and everything.” However, she feels the most challenging aspect of accessing the changing rooms was teachers’ perceptions. Teachers appeared to think that if she was not going to the changing room with the other students (instead she changed in the gym office), and was therefore not following ‘normal’ routines, she was unable to do Physical Education:
When we had relievers they thought I couldn’t do PE, I would turn up at PE and wait outside the changing rooms and I would be there in the wheelchair, and they would automatically assume I wasn’t doing PE, it was like well, if I wasn’t going to do PE why would I be in the class in the first place?

The changing rooms appear to be a site that sifts out students perceived to be ‘un-able’ to take part in Physical Education, either through targeted bullying, access issues, or perceptions of what ‘normal’ routines entail. These experiences point to the importance of interrogating the discourses associated with Physical Education practice and routine. The importance of changing into a Physical Education outfit, a process that regulates and surveils bodies (Kirk, 1998) harks back to early constructions of uniformity in Physical Education (Kirk, 1992). However, wearing (and changing into) a uniform highlights the difference of students with physical disabilities. As the students explain, the consequence of this objectified difference greatly impacts their opportunities to participate within Physical Education.

Outdoor Education

A number of students appeared to reinforce the notion that the outdoor education aspect of Physical Education was again reserved for those who move in a particular way. While Cody and Kelly attended school camps with no resistance from the schools and had very enjoyable times, Connor and Shane faced considerable barriers to their participation. Connor attended his camp with his peers; however he found it too physical for him to keep up with the others. On occasions he had to return to site, or get a ride with staff: “I couldn’t do one of the walks, it was just physically impossible for me”. This caused him to feel frustrated with his inability to do the tasks: “It was kind of depressing, everyone else just takes off and they are able to do it, but you are like aww!!” Again, he appears to believe it is his responsibility to ‘fit’, rather than the
teachers to alter the challenge to enable all students to participate. Cody had a similar experience of returning to camp while the class continued on, yet in his case, this as okay due to other activities they could do at base camp: “We did everything except for the walk, we started it but the track was quite steep, so we turned around and went back and had a wee swim in the creek”. This, I feel highlights an important point. That is, what one student may describe as a negative experience is not necessarily interpreted negatively by another student, as students are multiply positioned in relation to any given set of events.

In contrast to Connor and Cody, Shane faced several barriers to attending school camp:

They said I shouldn’t go on camp because of my CP, and Mum said, well other parents are going, so why can’t his dad go with him? And they said well they probably have enough parents, and it is probably too dangerous for him. But I went anyway with my Dad.

Assumptions of who can attend school camps (rarely mentioned aloud and instead justified by a range of excuses that Shane expressed) limited Shane’s participation in a key area of Physical Education (Ministry of Education, 2007). Barriers were required to be challenged by his family, who were not afraid of fighting for his inclusion. Yet, Shane is not the only child who faced opposition to attending camps within the New Zealand Education system. Many of whom do not have the same success in challenging barriers as Shane does. For example, the IHC’s current complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal refers to students’ discrimination within education. In particular, the submission refers to how students with disabilities are denied their right to attend school camps and other outings with their peers (IHC, 2014).

Shane acknowledges how lucky he is to have parents who fought for his right to attend camp, but he also concedes how difficult it is to challenge those who are responsible for such decision-making. He recognises that some teachers do not
necessarily make the ‘right’ decisions, or honour students’ educational rights to a Physical Education and outdoor experiences. One such teacher was his Head of Department. Shane explains that: “he shouldn’t have really stopped me from doing PE but oh well...” Again, we are left questioning why such excuses are created to prevent students such as Shane from attending school camps, and drawn on by those who are expected to remove barriers to participation.

Summary

In this section, I have attempted to address Slee’s (2011) questions “Who’s In? Who’s Out? How Come?” (p. 152) by exploring the specific contexts/sites of the students’ experiences. While it is crucial to note that these experiences were not universal for all students (in fact, Kelly felt Physical Education was the subject she best belonged in), for the students who did not move in normalised ways, feelings of not ‘fitting’ within Physical Education not only emerge as a result of people’s perceptions, but from the contexts and the environments within which they occurred. The students raise problems with ‘traditional’ aspects of Physical Education that have been referenced for many years (Barton, 1993; DePauw, 1997). Practices such as inaccessible camps, sifting of students’ bodies within changing rooms, and the inflexible nature of gymnastics and swimming continue to reinforce and exclude students’ whose bodies may not ‘fit’ the environment. The students’ testimonies encourage critical questioning of Physical Education. Not only of the practices and beliefs about who Physical Education is for, but of how the environments may shape the way students feel about themselves and their bodies.
**Conclusion**

This chapter brings to the fore how particular bodies, movements and physical skills are privileged in Physical Education, and how these contour the experiences of students with physical disabilities. Despite educational and social policy stating all students should have access to a Physical Education, for some, it seems that access is fraught with barriers and challenges. Their experiences point to exclusion which appears discursively acceptable within Physical Education, suggesting that perhaps Physical Education remains, in essence, not for everyone (Barton, 1993). As their stories demonstrate, this exclusion is reinforced by individuals and structures that constrain their ability to achieve in Physical Education. For Shane, Holly and Angela, gaining access to the classroom was a challenge in itself, as others’ assumptions of what they can and cannot do – or need – override their desires (and educational entitlement) to Physical Education. For those who gain access to Physical Education, other barriers exist. However, what all students suggest is that their experiences could be different if attitudes, assumptions and practices were challenged and altered.

In 1994, Burrows stated, “Physical Education for children with physical disabilities is frequently viewed as an optional “extra”, rather than an integral part of their total education” (p. 2). From interrogating the students’ stories, we are left questioning not only what has changed, but also why has it changed so slowly? And perhaps most importantly, what effects does this slow change have on students with physical disabilities who are trying to access the Physical Education they are entitled to?
CHAPTER SIX: HEALTH

There were two components to PE, like PE and Health... but I wasn’t allowed to do the fun stuff like play games with the boys. So I had to name all the parts of the body. (Shane, 2013)

As mentioned in Chapter One, Physical Education is combined with Health Education in the New Zealand Curriculum. Within this joint area of learning the New Zealand Curriculum states that:

Students learn that well-being is a combination of the physical, mental and emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of people’s lives. They learn to think critically and make meaning of the world around them by exploring health-related and movement contexts, they learn how to bring about sustainable health enhancing change for individuals, communities and society. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22)

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, despite Health and Physical Education seemingly being annexed to one another, not all students have equal access to the ‘movement contexts’ of Physical Education. This can cause students to question their physical educability, self-worth and value. In this chapter, I question how students’ experiences within the health-related context of Physical Education and wider society may also inform the ways they view their bodies. In particular, I examine how discourses about health and well-being gleaned from health-related education practices incorporated in Physical Education can give rise to very narrow understandings of what it means to be a healthy, ‘able’ bodied individual (Webb, Quennerstedt & Ohman, 2008).

Students’ discussions of what it means to be healthy and the discourses they take up regarding their own health, rehearse those signalled in discussions of many socially critical scholars. These scholars argue that a particular form of ‘health’ is
privileged in educational and social settings such as Physical Education (Burrows & Wright, 2007; Evans & Davis, 2004; Gard & Wright, 2001; Fitzpatrick, 2014; Fitzpatrick & Tinning, 2014; Tinning, 2009; Tinning & Glasby, 2002; Wright & Burrows, 2004). I begin by examining these scholarly critiques and read these alongside the current New Zealand Curriculum. I then examine the students’ discussions of health within their Physical Education contexts, and how these support Tinning’s (2009) view that a narrow knowledge of health is privileged in the New Zealand Physical Education setting. In the third section, I discuss what the students felt they learnt about health from wider society, and how these discourses align with those privileges in the Physical Education setting. Finally, I examine how students take up or resist dominant health discourses to discuss their own bodies.

This chapter’s focus on health is not only due to its relationship with Physical Education, but also because this was a topic that students were keen to discuss. Students’ understandings of health appeared to greatly inform the way they understood and constructed their bodies. Throughout this chapter, Foucauldian concepts are drawn on to understand how it is that certain discourses of health are privileged over others. In particular, I concern myself with how the dominance of certain health discourses (such as obesity prevention, ‘good’ food choices and mental health) act to constrain and construct what the students say. In saying so, I recognise that there is no singular discourse which students adhere to or draw on in the same way (Foucault, 1977). Foucault’s (1977) conceptualisations of techniques of power and knowledge are especially relevant to this discussion. In particular, I examine how health knowledge is normalised and presented as a set of choices individuals should make to regulate and surveil their own bodies and the bodies of others (Webb et al., 2008). I also examine how the knowledge students possess about health allows them to classify and objectify
individuals whose bodies do not reflect ‘good’ health. I question how students in this study ascribe certain value to particular body types, allowing them to pass judgements on other bodies, and draw on these to describe their own bodies (van Amsterdam et al., 2012).

‘Health’ Education in New Zealand Secondary Schools

Despite a Curriculum which has rhetorically moved away from instructing teachers how to create the docile, healthy student, to one which encourages critical thinking about what it means to be healthy (Tasker, 2006), I argue these changes can be difficult to observe in practice. In this section, I examine how the most recent New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) deals with the topics of health and well-being in relation to Physical Education, while also examining the academic critiques of what currently counts as ‘health’ within Physical Education teaching and practice (Evans & Davis, 2004; Fitzpatrick & Tinning, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2007). This section reflects Fitzpatrick’s (2014) and Tinning’s (2009) argument that that despite the best policy intentions, a narrow knowledge of health persists and influences what is taught to students within New Zealand secondary school Physical Education.

New Zealand’s Physical Education Curriculum has been critiqued for missing critical opportunities to clarify and refine what health and well-being means, and how it is taught (Culpan, 2008). According to some, the Curriculum leaves a large amount of room for interpretation that is expected to be filled with critical teaching about health and well-being (Burrows & McCormack, 2012). Yet, more often than not, this space is filled with popularised teaching of health as a form of obesity prevention and ‘right’ decision-making (Tinning, 2009). This teaching reproduces particular understandings
of healthy bodies (Tinning & Glasby, 2002; Webb et al., 2008; Webb & Quennersedt, 2010), rather than challenging students to think critically about what constitutes ‘good’ health, as the openness of the Curriculum affords and expects (Tinning, 2009). The gaps in educational policy and practice, and what fills these gaps, is discussed throughout the chapter. The students demonstrate disparities between what they should be learning about health in Physical Education (according the New Zealand Curriculum) and what in fact, they choose to learn.

In keeping with the New Zealand context, Burrows and Wright (2007) examine the health resources available to students in Physical Education. They conclude that there appears to be a clear distinction between healthy and un-healthy ways of ‘being’ reinforced in health resources. Furthermore, Pringle and Pringle (2012) explain that New Zealand Health/Physical Education teachers themselves have to reconcile tensions between “problems of the health of individuals and, more grandly, society” (p. 144), then communicate these to students. As a result, while we are encouraging students to make their own decisions about health and well-being, it appears that we are only affording them particular choices as to what these decisions are (Burrows & Wright, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 2014).

The limited choices given to the students can be viewed as a consequence of the responsibility placed on Physical Education in New Zealand for maintaining wider social and community health and well-being (Tinning & Glasby, 2002). Whilst the Curriculum imperatives encourage students to critically engage with wider social discourses about health, at the same time teachers are expected to encourage students to take responsibility for their own health for the benefit of wider society. Benefits, Gard (2004) argues, are rarely, if ever seen. Perhaps as a consequence of these competing priorities, health has become something of a “static or universal concept”
Health is something that students learn must be rigorously followed to avoid the ‘risk’ of becoming un-healthy – risks which are legitimised by the prevalence of ‘expert’ knowledge perpetuated both in Physical Education contexts and wider New Zealand society (Burrows & Sinkinson, 2014; Tinning & Glasby, 2002).

**What Students Feel they are Taught About Health**

What the students involved in this study feel they learn/learned about health within Physical Education reflects the academic critiques mentioned above. In this section, I interrogate their discussions of health and argue that a particularly narrow view of health and well-being appears to be privileged in their classrooms. I also suggest that, despite a Curriculum that wishes to avoid instructing students about good health (Tasker, 2006), ‘lessons’ about what health is and how to be healthy still prevail in the students’ discussions (Wright & Burrows, 2004).

All students mentioned that they had some form of health education at secondary school. Even Shane and Holly – who were denied access to Physical Education – were able to attend Health Education classes. They explain that these classes were taught by the Physical Education teacher and were linked back to the activities their peers were doing in Physical Education. From Shane’s quote at the opening of this chapter it seems his Health Education lessons involved learning facts about the body, rather than engaging in enjoyable physical movement. Furthermore, when I asked Shane if he felt that Health and Physical Education linked together and whether he felt he was missing out, he explains, “kind of, but the practical sessions I think were just running around really, but they had to do a lot of fitness stuff.” It seems that this “fitness stuff” is equated to healthy activities. This points to the discourse that
a ‘fit’ body is also healthy body (Webb, et al., 2008). Shane’s experiences could also reflect the teaching of health in New Zealand schools. Burrows and Sinkinson (2014) explain that within New Zealand, Physical Education teachers are also charged with the responsibility of administering Health Education. However, these teachers may not be the best placed to teach the subject. Burrows and Sinkinson (2014) also describe how the goals of some Physical Education teachers to foster fit, active students may narrow the scope of the type of health messages they choose to teach.

Holly’s experiences of health were quite different to Shanes. She explains: “I did Health in year 10, but that was when everyone was really immature and we were just laughing at the sex education and things, but we did learn health and stuff”. In Holly’s mind, Health is a less important subject. She believes Health Education is about receiving ‘facts’ about health: “don’t drink and don’t get fat”, rather than being provided with opportunities to learn and engage in meaningful critical analysis of health messages (Tasker, 2006). It appears that these ‘facts’ may have a large bearing on her understandings of bodies and what healthy bodies look like. She describes becoming fat as something caused by poor health and lack of exercise. Fat, to Holly is repulsive and something to be feared: “like a few of my friends are really big cos they can’t exercise as much, and I find that really sad cos they have all those big chicken wings and it’s gross! It freaks me out! I don’t know why!” Burrows and Wright (2007) would argue that Holly’s fear of fat is no surprise in a health “context where the abhorrence of ‘fat’ has become the norm” (p. 89). They argue students are educated about the need to be in ‘good’ health, while at the same time being saturated with images about the dangers and disgust of the ‘fat’ body. Therefore, while it seems that Holly disregards the relevance of her Health Education, she appears drawn to discourses of fat as something scary, which she is afraid of. As a result, she monitors her own health to
avoid the ‘risk’ of becoming fat and un-healthy (Leahy & Harris, 2004; van Amsterdam et al., 2012).

Cody, on the other hand is not able to take part in the health aspect of Physical Education, due to a lack of teacher aide time. Liz explains: “If we could do it we would do it, but we are just constrained by the teacher aide stuff”. Liz thinks it is important for Cody to receive information about puberty. However, it appears that Physical Education ‘lessons’ about health (a place where he would receive that information) are not seen as important compared to other subjects. Cody’s minimal Health Education has so far covered ‘conventional’ topics of what Liz calls “puberty and things at intermediate” which have historically formed the basis of Health Education (Sinkinson & Hughes, 2008). Cody’s limited experiences of Health Education are not surprising considering “Health Education continues to have a low status in some schools” (Sinkinson & Hughes, 2008, p. 1079) and often is delivered as a part of wider Physical Education, as in Cody’s case. As a result, the ability of Physical Education/Health teachers to encourage critical thinking about health discourses and to engage students in discussions about the many dimensions of health (Ministry of Education, 2007) is seemingly diminished, particularly if the student is not attending the class.

The understanding that Health Education is about puberty and what to put in your body (Sinkinson & Hughes, 2008) is reflected in the comments of other students. Kelly, who has very clear ideas about what it means to be healthy, feels that in Physical Education she learns “what happens to girls, all the you know, stuff... and we learnt that eating vegies is the healthiest when it comes to meat and sugars and to exercise heaps and you get in excellent shape”. Similarly, Angela describes learning particular messages about the ‘right’ forms of health: “you get educated in drugs and alcohol and mental health”. She explains that despite being told everyone is different, she thinks
Physical Education’s overall goal is to educate you in what not to be: “They go on like if you’re obese, you’re not ok, and if you’re anorexic, you’re not ok. You have to be in the middle!”

From a post-structural perspective, Physical Education appears as a site to encourage surveillance and docility (Foucault, 1977), where students learn to monitor inputs and outputs in the name of ‘good’ health (Gard & Wright, 2001). These lessons appear to leave students with narrowed understandings of health, such as “not to do drugs or smoke” (Connor) and “just don’t drink, and don’t get fat!” (Holly), instead of providing students with the tools to think critically about wider health messages (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

These normalising ideas of the healthy are said to be pervasive in Physical Education, as it is a site where “bodies are not only moved but made” (Webb et al., 2008, p. 353). From the students’ testimonies, it would seem that a certain type of ‘body’ is made in these classes. As Physical Education is moulding productive future citizens (Kirk, 1998), the health aspect appears to be ensuring a certain type of citizen is produced. Tinning (2004) explains: “Healthy citizens are good human capital” (p.16). Furthermore, while the New Zealand Curriculum states students “develop resilience and a sense of personal and social responsibility, they are increasingly able to take responsibility for themselves” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22), it would seem that this ‘responsibility’ involves regulating and working on the body to conform to the discursive norm of what a healthy body should be (Leahy & Harrison, 2004). For example, Connor felt Physical Education “tells you how you should be, about body image and stuff”. He goes on to explain the room where his Physical Education lessons took place “has lots of pictures in the walls of people exercising and that, and I guess like it implies you have to be fit, like twig thin”. Thus, it seems within Physical
Education, particular discourses are privileged with a normalised idea of what it means to have a healthy body and to reinforce how to maintain it through surveillance practices (Tinning, 2004).

Webb et al. (2008) explain that, “the institutionalised discourses, the framework of meaning, are something one must relate to by orientating oneself to – to follow, resist, stand up against or ignore” (p. 255). Therefore, while discourses of a particular form of health which can be read from the body’s appearance are prevalent within the students’ explanations (Burrows & Sinkinson, 2014), this is not to say they unquestionably accept these as ‘normal’. In the next section, I move to examining how students orientate themselves to normalised perceptions of health, not only within the classroom, but within their wider social spheres.

Students’ Explanations of Health

In the above section, I examined how students’ explanations reflect enduring ideas of health as lessons in “do’s” and “don’ts” delivered in Physical Education (Evans, 2004; Sinkinson & Hughes, 2008). I now move from examining what students feel they have learnt, to what students understand about healthy bodies, and from where they gather these understandings. Questions are asked how much influence Physical Education lessons about health have on the ways students view their bodies. I also discuss how the students reconcile and accommodate competing discourses of obesity and fat as equating to poor health, while at the same time engaging in critical thinking about the obesity myth (Pringle & Pringle, 2012). I begin by examining Kelly’s apparent acceptance of the obesity discourse. I then discuss the remaining students’ attempts to reject the hegemonic image of healthy bodies and their attempts to individualise what health means to them.
Perhaps the most definitive understanding of health is given by Kelly in her drawings (Figures Two and Three) and discussions of what it means to be healthy. Whilst she learns a lot about health through her education, and from family engagement in physical activity, she appears to also draw on media representations of ‘fatness’ as bad and health being the individual’s responsibility. For example, Kelly describes a “show I saw a couple of weeks ago, it’s called Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead … there is this man who is really fat and he has had enough so he has decided to do something about it”. It seems Kelly is interpreting this man’s situation as something that is negative, and must be changed, rather than critically thinking about health (as is expected she would learn in education). Such critical thinking would involve recognising that this man is not necessarily ‘bad’, but constructed as so by dominant discourses, which equate health to thinness. Furthermore it seems other aspects of health such as social and emotional well-being do not rate a mention when Kelly discusses what it means to be healthy. She admires the rate of weight loss of the “man who is really fat” and how positive this is: “He has found a way to get into excellent shape … and after 60 days, wow! He is thin!” Whilst Kelly’s comments are not a fixed representation of her understanding of health, it appears she draws largely on discourses of a skinny body being a healthy body (Webb et al., 2008) and media representations of quick fix weight loss as an acceptable way to achieve good health.

Kelly’s unquestioning acceptance of an extreme weight loss program raises questions about the “factors that influence healthy lifestyles” (New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, p. 25) she would have been taught about in education settings, and how she has chosen to take these up. While it is important to note that this snippet of discussion does not explicitly link to what she learnt in Physical Education (as other institutional discourses – such as popular culture – may have a greater prevalence in her
understanding), one would assume that formal education would play a role in her conceptualisation of health. Kelly’s discussions highlight critiques and consequences of the space left for interpretation in the New Zealand Curriculum (Tinning & Glasby, 2002). As mentioned earlier, without a universal understanding of how healthy bodies should be defined and communicated to students within education contexts, the way bodies are understood as healthy, or not, is often filled by discourses of health and appearance referenced in the media (Penny & Harris, 2004; Webb & Quennerstedt, 2010). This is apparent in Kelly’s discussion of a “fat, sick and nearly dead” man.

Kelly’s visual depictions of health and unhealthy individuals also support this claim:

![Figure 3: Kelly's drawing of healthy and un-healthy people](image)

As apparent in her drawing of a healthy person, she appears to have a fixed understanding of health as a particular state of being, constructed by personal discipline,
and surveillance of intake and output of energy: ‘eating the right foods such as vegies and fruits and nuts, and drinking plenty of water plus excising’

The explanation of “energy in/energy out” often fills the gaps in health practices within New Zealand secondary schools (Quennersedt, Burrows & Maivorsdotter, 2010). Thus, while students are encouraged to form their own understandings of health and well-being, dominant discourses of personal responsibility, self-regulation and surveillance often prevail (Wright, 2004).

The way that Kelly assesses whether or not people are healthy is not only based on skinny-ness, but on the presence of pink cheeks, an idea which she appears muddled with: “Some time ago my parents told me that when you see somebody that looks sick, you often see pink cheeks, which means you are well. But I don’t know if that is true!”

It is when she compares this image to her depiction of an un-healthy individual (Figure Two) that the discourses she draws on about health become clear: “sometimes they [un-healthy people] are shorter … they are bigger, you know, round … overweight”. She also explains an un-healthy person “does not eat the right foods, like junk food, not eating enough vegies and fruit plus not excising”. Her list of un-healthy activities coupled with images of a short, round individual (Figure Two) draw attention to the danger of health and obesity ‘claims’ (Pringle & Pringle, 2012). Kelly’s grasp of what it means to be healthy – which appears greatly influenced by her exposure to images about the obesity ‘epidemic’ – has given her the tools to evaluate people’s health based on appearance, and what she feels are good, healthy practices (Gard & Wright, 2005). This statement will be further examined in the following section, where Kelly’s description of “bad fat people” is examined.

Kelly is not the only student whose discussions pointed towards prominent discourses of health equating to body image. While Shane is aware of media
representations of ‘ideal’ images which encourage self-surveillance and regulation of the body’s weight and shape (Wright, 2004), he appears not to apply this to himself: “I don’t pay attention to what they say, like I eat quite healthy, but I eat whatever I like, I don’t really believe in that”. However, while he attempts to distance himself from these discourses, he draws on them to describe someone who is healthy:

Oh it’s hard to say, if you see a person overweight, I guess that wouldn’t be healthy, but it’s hard because that depends on your height and metabolism, and you don’t have to be muscular really. Cos there are different types of health, like you could be healthy but not be very fit.

Shane begins his description of a healthy person by identifying an “un-healthy” person as being overweight. It seems that Shane has a stronger understanding of what an un-healthy person would look like, more so than he does of what ‘good’ health comprises. This is perhaps due to the legitimisation of what it means to be un-healthy, which has been ‘proven’ by health experts and taught within many Physical Education classes (Leahy & Harrison, 2004). Furthermore, Shane gives a single definition of poor health, yet grapples with many ideas about good health. It appears that he is aware that good health is made up of multiple facets and draws on his own health based learning (and knowledge gathered during sports participation) as he identifies a range of common assumptions shared by others. However, he still appears confused as to how these factors interplay, especially when it appears that ill health is something very clear cut and common sense.

Connor also recognised how the discourses in Physical Education can be contradicted by those represented in the media, an issue raised by Gard (2004). Connor explains that at school he learnt: “how to be healthy, like eating right, and exercising properly, not eating junk all the time, and not eating a leaf a day”. Yet despite seemingly
accepting these practices as ‘ok’ Connor feels that learning this way reinforces a particular image:

I think their intentions are to educate people about being healthy and being yourself ... but it doesn’t really tell you how to be an individual, they show you this is body image and what it is all about... But then they see people in the system [referring to social acceptance of ideal body image], I mean the way people around the world see body image ... and then they don’t know how to change and not be in the system.

He goes on to explain the consequences of aligning these Physical Education lessons to popular media:

Because if you look on covers of popular magazines like I dunno, gossipy magazines they are always talking about body image ... then people see those pictures and think, I want to be like that and then you get sick ... In PE they don’t tell you why you should be an individual and why you shouldn’t follow the way everyone else is going.

Thus, while Connor feels that Physical Education teachers are attempting to highlight dangers in ascribing to media images of health and well-being, he feels that the power of the media to convince young people of the ‘right’ way to look has more influence than what they learn in school. Therefore, while teachers may be attempting to demonstrate the dangers of these ideas, some students may feel this reinforces the media representations of health. After all, with regard to the ‘gaps’ in the Curriculum addressed earlier, “nothing is guaranteed in terms of the understandings, interests and values that will be expressed in practice” in the Physical Education setting (Penney & Harris, 2004, p. 104).

Angela has a similar perspective on the role Physical Education plays in informing her understandings of healthy bodies. She exclaims: “there was no point in doing PE! Like don’t become a fat slob”. When asked if she was taught that being a “fat slob” was equated with ill health she explains “no, because society teaches you that being fat is unhealthy, and being anorexic is unhealthy. So it’s society, not PE that
teaches you that [but] I think it is trying to make it seem ok”. It would seem that Angela’s explanations of how health is promoted within Physical Education points towards a very narrow view of health equating to slimness and weight (Webb et al., 2008). This reinforces rather than challenges social discourses about health and weight, expected to occur within the critical nature of Physical Education (Tinning, 2009). Furthermore, Angela’s discussion raises questions about the effects of these discourses on students who may be cast as “not ok”. What are the consequences for students who are not in “that middle”? And how do they foster positive feeling about themselves while negotiating the negative consequences associated with being overweight, such as expectations to take responsibility for their health – not only for their own benefit, but also for wider society (Pringle & Pringle, 2012; Wright & Burrows, 2007)? It seems that wider social discourses about health perpetuated in the media and amongst the students’ peers are particularly relevant in the students’ understanding of health. Physical Education’s attempts to challenges these and to offer alternative ways of viewing health are challenged by the more powerful, clear cut messages circulating in wider society.

In this section a number of questions have been raised about the role of Physical Education in constructing students’ understanding of what healthy bodies are and look like. The way wider social discourses can often contradict, override or confuse Curriculum objectives have also been identified. For students attempting to resist media representations and pave their own way to good health, they still appear influenced by the notion of health as a substitute for ideal weight. As Webb et al. (2008) explain, it is difficult to challenge these understandings and to draw on other discourses, particularly when knowledge is so entrenched and acts to identify difference by distributing certain values to bodies that conform, while excluding those who do not.
In terms of teaching in Physical Education and Health the students’ stories enclosed in this section demonstrate the difficulty for teachers to mediate between the media and the classroom. This is an issue recognised in literature regarding teaching practices in Physical Education and Health (Burrows & Sinkinson, 2014). The way that Physical Education and Health are subject to the whims of governmental change (Fitzpatrick, 2014) in some ways leaves it up to the teachers to consider whether or not they reinforce or challenge discourses of health. While some (such as Connor’s teacher) attempted to get students to think critically about what it means to be healthy the pervasive nature of obesity discourses in particular (Gard & Wright, 2001) can challenge the success of such an aim. Furthermore, the students varied perceptions of what it means to be healthy indicate that teachers need to recognise that each student will interpret assumptions differently. For example, while teachers may choose to challenge discourses which reinforce slimness as a measure of health, it is important to recognise that for some students this is an empowering concept around which the construct their identity as a ‘normal’, healthy young person.

**Students’ Bodies and Health**

In this section I examine how students describe their bodies in relation to their understandings of health and well-being gleaned from both education and popular culture. I ask particular questions of their experiences of Physical Education experiences, how they position their bodies alongside discourses of health, and how they draw on their understandings to label and describe others. In particular, the students highlight that despite acknowledging their own physical difference and the social stigma associated with this, these differences often pale in comparison when discussing issues of weight, fitness and ultimately health.
Social concerns about obesity, health and appearance appear to play a role in how young people feel about their bodies (Wright & Burrows, 2004). For example, Garrett (2004) states “deep-rooted ideas about what is desirable in terms of feminine beauty create powerful normalising processes that impact continuously on the way young women see themselves as well as judge those around them” (p. 140). This ‘normalising’ process’, which constructs slim, toned bodies as holding more worth than other kinds of bodies (Evans, Rich, Davies & Allwood, 2008), makes it difficult for students to feel satisfied with their own bodies, should they not conform to the idealised (and often unrealistic) body image. For example, while Angela is concerned about the way people perceive her disability, when asked if she is happy with herself, her response is “no, because I’m fat!” It appears the emotive value of the slim, healthy body almost consumes the way Angela comes to know her body in the health context. This is perhaps because there are other discourses that are more readily available for her to draw on (and be drawn into) than those of disability (Webb et al., 2008).

On one hand, Angela attempts to be critical of discourses which equate thinness to femininity, happiness and health. This is reflected in her statement, “I’m writing an essay about how pop music has something, about, um, advocating anorexia. I can’t remember the exact wording but I’m like well, yeah, it’s true!” On the other hand, it appears that having a “normal sized” body is something she views as desirable, even though she does not feel she possesses it. Her knowledge of being “fat” seems informed by how she measures up against her friends, media images and Physical Education lessons about health. She explains that particular knowledge about appearance and weight dominates Physical Education, where “you get taught that if you are overweight, you are unhealthy”, rather than lessons about how to be happy with yourself and body. When asked how students who are overweight deal with these lessons, she positions
herself as one of them: “I don’t know you sort of just ignore it because you know it’s coming so you sit there and don’t bother listening”. Thus, it seems that the normalising processes (Garrett, 2004), and the discourses she draws on such as maintaining a slim body, play a large role in how Angela perceives herself and her happiness.

While Angela feels she is on the receiving end of prescriptive messages about health and weight, Holly appears extremely concerned about her health and weight. She discusses the need to engage in practices which reflect self-surveillance, based on a comment her father made when she was younger:

Dad said, when I was 10 or 11, he said, you need to make sure, because you’re not physically active like most people that you don’t put on too much weight and become a blubber, and I was like, oh yeah. And I have been so conscious that this will make me fat!

Holly’s father echoes van Amersterdam et al.’s (2012) belief that “new public health discourses” (p.10) see the body as “a project that students can and should work on” (p.11). Wright and Burrows (2004) further this, stating that engaging in physical activity in order to maintain a particular body image is associated with what it means to be healthy. Van Amsterdam et al. (2012) argue that ensuring students are aware of, and engage in, the process of becoming healthy, is a result of the ‘capillary’ actions of power. This works as parents and teachers monitor students, students monitor each other, and most importantly, students monitor themselves. In Holly’s case, her limitations to engaging in the practice of ‘regular’ physical activity “like most people” cause her to look for other measures to maintain a healthy weight. For example, she ensures she eats “lots of salads and stuff” and avoids “bad foods” such as chocolate: “I do, but in moderation, but I’m always like, uhoh I shouldn’t have all this shit!” These practices of self-surveillance, and recognition of the increased ‘risk’ of becoming fat due to her movement constraints, are reflected in her surveillance of other friends with Cerebral Palsy:
All my friends in wheelchairs are big!!! And I really don’t want to look like them! And they have all got the big arms and it just really freaks me out, you know when you get big arms and they wobble … up home I say, hey mum, do my arms wiggle when I wave?

These comments highlight the way particular ‘truths’ regarding weight and appearance dominate our understandings of health and inform our ability to make judgements about others. For example, both Gard and Wright (2005) and van Amsterdam et al. (2012) argue that obesity discourses can legitimise judgements of others’ bodies and cause anxiety about one’s own body becoming fat and thus unhealthy – as Holly’s and her father’s comments demonstrate. Pringle and Pringle (2012) develop this further, stating that the culture of fear regarding obesity (perpetuated in public health discourses and demonstrated by Holly’s fear of wobbly arms) causes increased self-control and regulation, as people attempt to adhere to normalised constructions of health and appearance in children and young adults.

Unlike Holly, who feels that having Cerebral Palsy may be a barrier to maintaining healthy weight, Kelly feels that, “anyone can be healthy”. For her, having an impairment/disability is not a factor in how she views her body, or the bodies of others. She demonstrates this through drawing a man who is blind (Figure Three) and states that he is healthy “if he is eating the right foods and things, even if he is blind! It probably doesn’t matter to him being healthy”.

\[\text{Blind man/woman}\]
Figure 4: Kelly's drawing of a blind man

The notion of personal responsibility for one’s health is apparent throughout Kelly’s testimony. She believes someone is only seen to be following healthy practices if they are “eating the right foods” and if they appear to be slim. For those who do not appear in this way, Kelly passes judgements about their lack of care for themselves due to their apparent unwillingness to engage in transformative practices to alter their bodies (van Amsterdam et al., 2012).

For example, Kelly sees fat as being associated with being a ‘bad’ person. This is evident throughout her discussions of being bullied at school, and is a similar finding to that of Gard and Wright (2005). While Kelly hints that the bullying she received may be due to her disability, her mother offers her an alternative reason:

Mum thinks that those, um can I say they are quite big? Um, I’ll say the word. Fat girls. Big, and fat. Mum thinks that just because I am small and thin they are jealous. I’m not sure if that’s what they are thinking, but I just don’t know why they do it!

By suggesting to Kelly that her bullies envy her ideal body, Kelly’s mum reflects ideas legitimised by the obesity ‘epidemic’ and public health discourses. This includes the idea that those who are overweight lack particular morals and values associated with good health (Gard & Wright, 2005; Pringle & Pringle, 2012; van Amsterdam et al., 2012). The inability or unwillingness of Kelly’s bullies to engage in transformative and regulative processes to alter their bodies (van Amsterdam et al., 2012) leaves them open for judgements about their other attributes. This leads to comments implying they are “lazy and morally wanting” (Gard & Wright, 2005, p. 182).
Kelly finds it easy to understand her mother’s explanation stating, “Yeah, if they want to be thin why don’t they just go out and do exercise? Because they eat junk food every day!” Her comment reinforces how pervasive knowledge about health and morality has become under the guise of the obesity epidemic (Pringle & Pringle, 2012).

Furthermore, when asked if Kelly thought that eating junk food means that her bullies are unhealthy, she replies:

I can tell they are that big and fat! And you see them eating junk food, I don’t think they are that healthy. Like their parents aren’t feeding them right. I feel sorry for them, but they are horrible to me.

This comment demonstrates her understandings of “the body as an open, dynamic and malleable entity that can and should be changed and moulded to fit normative standards of a ‘good’ body” (van Amsterdam et al., 2012, p. 10). While Kelly is able to identify the healthy practices taught in schools such as eating the ‘right’ foods, it seems for her and Holly, the family is also a site where these discourses are reinforced. However, this investigation also raises more questions for which further interrogation is needed. For example, how do students who come from backgrounds that do not place importance on eating the ‘right’ food comprehend the health messages they are exposed to in Physical Education? And furthermore, what are the consequences for students whose families cannot afford (for financial, cultural or religious reasons) to adhere to the ‘healthy’ eating practices, privileged in educational and media concepts of health?

From Angela, Holly and Kelly’s embodiment of healthy discourses, it seems Garrett’s (2004) conclusion holds true: the ‘normal’ appearance for young people appears to be one of skinny, thin bodies that need to be monitored and worked on constantly. While at face value, these do not seem dangerous ideas, when the preoccupation with this way of thinking does not result in the desired outcome, issues can arise. Angela is aware of these, and appears resigned to not achieving the ‘ideal’
body. However, for Holly and Kelly, every day involves practices of bodily maintenance, monitoring what goes in to the body, and how much energy is exerted in order to remain the possessors of ‘healthy’ bodies. As Evans and Davies (2004) would argue, while we could view this as Kelly and Holly taking individual and social responsibility for good health, one should question how this effects the way they appreciate their bodies. How can one be satisfied and take pleasure from the body, when constant monitoring occurs?

**Conclusion**

While educational policy encourages students to critically engage with a variety of health discourses displayed in both popular culture and public health, it seems that these students’ testimonies still reflect the conclusions drawn a decade ago. That is, despite policy rhetoric encouraging critical inquiry about health, the

Current health-imperatives leave little room for engagement with health knowledge. Rather so called “critical enquiry” becomes a matter of selecting the “right” response or behaviour from a limited range of possibilities … It serves the purpose of governmentality rather than a socially informed understanding about the constructedness of health knowledge. (Wright & Burrows, 2004, p. 228)

The consequences of health being portrayed in this way can be seen in the students’ discussion of themselves and their bodies. In this chapter I have critically examined what having a healthy body means for the students; how they understand their own bodies in relation to knowledge about health; and how these understandings are informed by their Physical Education experiences. Despite policy attempting to show otherwise, it appears that the dominant way students view achieving good health involves following the ‘prescription’ of good diet and exercise (Wright & Burrows, 2004). The belief that these practices will result in ‘good’ health is something
unquestioned by a number of students. Whilst some, such as Connor, Shane and Angela recognise that these actions do not always result in the desired, healthy appearance; it still seems that those whose bodies fit within the healthy body image are able to cast judgement on those whose bodies do not, and base these judgements on a lack of personal responsibility. These judgments enforce the idea that “the body remains a key site for ‘reading’ the health of a person” (Burrows & Wright, 2004, p. 193).
In doing so, I recognise that “disabled children are not a homogenous group and neither are they a cohesive collective with a common identity and interests” (Watson, 2012, p. 195). As their stories show, each student interprets and regards their bodies in differing ways. While there are some similarities in the language they choose to use and the feelings they share, each is dependent upon context and character. In other words, the way students negotiate the differing contexts of their experiences and use these to explain themselves and their bodies is dependent on the discourses and knowledge they have access to and draw on (Oliver, 2010). As Foucault (1974) explains, the construction of subjectivities is not a linear process: subjectivities are constantly fluid, changing and contingent on individual interpretations of discourses and power.

While I am interested in how the students’ Physical Education experiences contoured their understandings of their bodies, as it transpired, the students tended to discuss events outside of Physical Education as having a greater role in the shaping of
their identities. In order to recognise this, and to share what the students wished to talk about, I expand the focus of this chapter beyond the scope of Physical Education.

I begin this chapter by examining how other people’s perceptions of students’ abilities shape how they view themselves and their bodies as able or disabled. In the second section, I draw largely on Thomas’ (1999) discussions of barriers to doing, being, and impairment effects. I also use Watson’s (2002) discussions of identity and disability to examine how students construct their understandings of ‘physical disabilities’ and how they negotiate and resist ‘appropriate’ disability language. In the third section, I discuss the way students experience their own bodies, particularly in relation to Physical Education and the wider educational context. Fourthly, I explore those moments when students felt empowered by their bodies and able to challenge and resist prominent discourses of disability and childhood. Finally, I examine moments when the students felt their body was a burden on themselves or others, and how they negotiated these situations.

**Public Perceptions of Disability**

Not only did the students face largely irrational assumptions about their perceived difference in Physical Education, the students also described times that the general public felt it acceptable to pass judgements on their appearance. Shakespeare (1994) explains this is a common occurrence, stating that people with disabilities face “comments and unwanted attention [that] are seen as legitimate tactics in respect to disabled people, in a way which would be wholly inappropriate for any other group except women, and perhaps black people in certain communities” (p. 288). The students discuss facing public assaults on their identities that were understood as cruel and offensive and challenged how they construct their subjectivities. I now discuss
Connor, Shane and Holly’s experiences that have challenged how they view themselves. I also interrogate how they have maintained a positive attitude about themselves and their bodies.

Shane discusses a number of events where people have perceived him as ‘unfortunate’ because of his impairment, for example:

I was in a café with my friend having a milkshake and that and this lady stared at me for like a minute and then she came over and said hello very slowly and then she said to my friend, “I feel very sorry for him with his disability”, and my mate said “why, because he is the most intelligent person in this café, is that why?” I don’t mind when people do a double take but when people stare at you for more than five seconds, or like a minute like this lady, it’s frustrating.

Despite encountering many offensive remarks in his time, Shane is able to justify these encounters based on people’s lack of encounters with people with disabilities. He also employs strategies to counter this: “I just stare back and give them a smile, because most of the time it is little kids, which I can understand because obviously they have no idea really, I can handle that.” As well as Shane’s belief that people behave in such ways due to lack of contact with people with disabilities, it seems some individuals he encounters draw on a medicalised discourses of disability. Brittain (2004) suggests that the medical model of disability continues to be privileged in education and society, therefore it is what people, such as those Shane encounters, have the easiest access to. Shane’s experiences can also be understood with the help of Thomas (2004), who argues that thinking “disability is caused by illness and impairment and entails suffering and some social disadvantage” (p. 570) leads to a justification of people’s sympathetic attitudes towards individuals with disabilities.

Despite Shane’s attempts to challenge people who stare at him, he is frustrated with people’s face value perceptions of what he can and cannot do. While he appears
to be consistently positive about his intellectual ability, he recognises that this is not what people see:

I get stared at because I walk a bit different, or people see my disability and come up and shout at me or speak really slowly because they think I am impaired, or they feel sorry for me because of my disability. Yeah that’s a few, it’s just how the public perceive the disability really. People’s perceptions don’t worry me though. They can think what they like really, I have achieved well so far and people don’t know that so they will just make a judgement on my walking but I couldn’t care less about that!

He feels his ability to remain positive despite these public assaults on his identity is reinforced by his parents: “my Mum and Dad are quite down to earth and it doesn’t matter what people think, I have got all my achievements so far, so people can just look at them!” Shane’s testimony highlights the importance of including youth voice in research about disability. His ability to remain positive, despite the public ridicule he has experienced, demonstrates his ability to look elsewhere to remain positive about himself. As Watson (2012) and Connors and Stalker (2007) explain, barriers to being such as disabling attitudes, can have a significant effect on a child’s subjectivity. However, the ability of students to challenge these barriers and to build alternative subjectivities (as Shane does) is just as important.

Connor appears to have similar issues with people who stare and cause him to feel objectified in public: “People stare… mainly little kids which is why I hate them so much… I ignore them! But sometimes, if I am in a really bad mood, I will stare them down”. However, while Shane is able to justify why people stare, and is able to foreground his academic achievements to combat these attitudes, for Connor, getting stared at in public appears to be a large barrier to being (Thomas, 1999). Connor is aware that his medical condition makes him stand out. This causes him to be conscious of his body and aware of the curiosity of people who do not know him – a common theme in research with children with disabilities (Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Connors
& Stalker, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2005). As is reinforced by Connors and Stalker (2003), reactions of others, no matter how seemingly irrelevant, can impact on a child or young person’s (such as Connor’s) self-worth and self-belief.

Holly explains the impact that attitudes of others can have on an individual’s subjectivity. While, like Connor, she feels angry at how people treat her, she believes it is not worth getting worked up over. She explains:

There is going to be people with disabilities curled up crying in their rooms being like, why me, poor me, but I’m like, life’s too short! Yeah, I get there are bitches in society, like the really cool people and that happens. But if you are brought up in a posh house and private school where everyone is normal and excellent at what they do, and are like pink Barbie dolls from a box, all perfect and stuff, people don’t see the slightly weird people in society like me!

Shane, Holly and Connor all demonstrate that they are not passive receivers of people’s perceptions. While attitudes and beliefs that others hold about their appearance and ability may cause frustration, and occasionally cause them to re-examine their selves, they are generally able to negotiate and challenge adult’s (and other children’s) views. As Connors and Stalker (2007) emphasise, children and young people with disabilities are active agents of change. By discussing disabling attitudes and events with Shane and Holly, we see that they are able to challenge discourses that view them as ‘disabled’ children/young people. They explain that while these events occur, it is often a result of narrow mindedness or lack of understanding by the public about what disability is. Furthermore, they highlight that while it is assumed these events will negatively impact on how they understand themselves, they provide us with an alternative viewpoint, and make us question who the disadvantaged person in their encounters is.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Four, students who gained access to Physical Education felt that their body was a marker from which people assumed their ability.
What can be taken from this section is the impact that assumptions about what students can or cannot do have on the possibilities and experiences of young disabled people (Connors & Stalker, 2007). To construct positive Physical Experiences, the students indicate that people must view them from a position of competence and ability (Fitzgerald, 2005).

**Students’ Understanding of Disability Language**

In this section, I question how students take up or resist notions of disability implied by others. I look at the particular language they choose to describe their bodies and the alternative language they offer to replace disability and the negative connotations they feel are associated with the word. In particular I examine how students choose to describe themselves, recognising that disability is a small, sometimes non-existent aspect that informs how they see themselves (Flintoff et al., 2008). Instead, students appear more concerned with the notion of sameness: being similar to their peers and identifying similar features, rather than describing factors such as their impairment which cause them to feel different (Kearney & Kane, 2006; MacArthur & Kelly, 2004; van Amsterdam et al., 2012; Watson, 2002). Despite discussing how students understand and explain their bodies, this is by no means a fixed or final discussion. The way the students understand their bodies is hinged on the contexts, experiences and particular knowledge available within these contexts. The students’ perceptions are continually changing. Therefore, the focus here is on drawing conclusions about the way students construct their identity, identifying similarities in the language the students use, and discourses embedded in this language. These conclusions offer insights into how language used by teachers can shape whether students feel able or disabled within Physical Education and other aspects of their lives.
As Barnes (1999) explains, disability language “is about far more than simply ‘political correctness’ it’s about the crucial issue of causality … its normalising tendencies and the politicisation of the process of definition” (p. 578). In other words, the language used to describe disability is laden with discourse. It can both reinforce or challenge taken for granted assumptions, and can contribute to, or work against, the disabling barriers for people with impairments (Thomas, 1999). Each student in the study describes disability in a different way, reinforcing the importance of recognising individual perceptions and understandings of disability and the fluidity of the self (Watson, 2002).

The students regularly discuss the notion of normality, yet this is discussed in a range of ways. For example Angela explains, “you could just see them as being normal people; you should just evaporate that word from the whole society. That word should not even exist!” Unlike Angela, who appears to be distancing herself from the word disabled, by stating “you could just see them”, Shane draws on himself and his own identity to discuss the notions of disability and normality. He explains that realising he was disabled happened “kind of gradually like, I didn’t really notice, like yeah, I just see it is as normal, whatever normal is. I have lived like this almost 18 years so it is normal to me”. For Shane, his body, and his way of being, is ‘normal’ for him. Finally, in contrast to both Angela and Shane, Kelly’s use of the word normal is used to describe her difference to her peers. She mentions, “In the other class the girls were all normal compared to me”.

From a post-structural perspective, each student demonstrates what Foucault (1977) would call processes of normalisation to construct and understand their bodies. As Gore (1995) explains, comparisons to, and by, others highlight the difference between what is normal, and what is not. These perceptions are reinforced through the
“capillary style [of power], seeping its way into everyday practices”, that each student is the subject of, and subjects him or herself to (Gore, 1995, p. 172). For example, Kelly describes herself as different to what is normal within her class. On the other hand, Angela and Shane appear to represent themselves as normal, albeit in differing ways. Angela is challenging what it means to be normal. She states that those who are perceived as not normal (and thus disabled) should be viewed as normal also. In doing so she juxtaposes herself as different to people with disabilities and implies she views herself as “normal”. In contrast, Shane’s statement could be interpreted as normality belonging to the individual person. He recognises that for him, his body is normal, yet as he got older, he ‘gradually’ came to see himself as disabled based on his difference to others in wider society.

What can be drawn from this interrogation of language is that despite the students using similar descriptors to explain themselves and their bodies, they do so in very different ways. Despite all being familiar with the idea of normal, and using it as something to ‘measure’ themselves against – something particularly evident in relation to Physical Education experiences (as discussed in Chapter Four) - Shane and Angela challenge taken for granted assumptions, while Kelly draws on normalness to justify why she is viewed as different to her peers. Particular attention and interrogation of language therefore points to small, but important differences in the way students understand the same topic. As the students’ discussions illustrate, there are multiple ways one can construct and explain their bodies.

Like the use of the word normal, many students focus on ability when discussing what disability means. For example, Angela explains, “Why should it be called disability? Why can’t it be called ability, like everyone has the ability to do something, it’s like you’re diss-ing someone!” The binary between ‘disabled’ and ‘able’ is
something many students have issue with. They feel it implies people with disabilities are lacking something that those who are ‘able’ are not. Shane explains:

The word disability kind of means to me like you are not as able as a non-disabled person. But to me, I don’t really like the word, because everyone has different abilities and not everyone can do everything, so to some extent everyone has a disability.

Similarly, Connor thinks, “it implies that people are less inclined than other people. It discriminates. It is a discriminating word”. Here, students challenge assumptions of disability and ‘appropriate’ language. Many use the language of sameness and similarity, implying they wish to be appreciated for what they can do, rather than what they cannot. This is a theme widely reflected in literature (MacArthur et al, 2007a; van Amsterdam et al., 2012; Watson, 2012). The students also recognise that assumptions about ‘ability’ and disability are the major barriers to their participation in activities such as Physical Education. By altering these assumptions, and looking at people’s ability, the students feel that more opportunities would be available for them.

Many students recognise some negative meanings associated with the word ‘disability’, and offered alternative language. While some of these alternatives go against the grain of the social and social-relational models of disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Thomas, 2004), they are helpful for the students to negotiate disability language and how it applies to them. For example, Connor suggests that “no body is disabled or impaired; they have a medical condition which effects them”. Despite the social model’s attempt to move away from viewing people as solely having something “which effects them” or a deficit (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001), Connor’s views challenge what we have come to know as acceptable language and perceptions. He does not discuss the disabling barriers which are socially or environmentally imposed (Thomas, 2004). Instead, he discusses how people with “medical conditions” like
himself are not able to participate because of their bodies – as evident in his earlier discussions of gymnastics and Physical Education. However, while this challenges social model thinking, which implies that people are disabled by societal barriers, it is not to say Connor is ‘wrong’ in his thinking.

Connor’s language sits well with social relational thinking (Thomas, 2004). His choice of language highlights the importance and reality of ‘impairment effects’ for people with disabilities. In this sense, the embodied, physical aspects of impairment, such as tiredness, and the risk of breaking bones has more significance and importance to him than the socially constructed barriers and attitudes he experiences. Through another perspective, Connor’s language reflects how disability is played out in popular culture to represent a ‘less than’ able person. For Connor (perhaps because of his social experiences, or lack of exposure to other ways of thinking), the discourse of being ‘less able’ entwined with the word disability appears more real to him than academic and political discussions which use ‘disability’ to explain social exclusion (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001).

Connor is also aware of how ‘disability’ can be used to justify and legitimise educational and social exclusion (Slee, 2001a, 2005, 2011). He explains, “everyone who is different are put into baskets, like those are the ones who are disabled in there, the people who are different. But everyone is different, you can’t group people!” For Connor, viewing people with disabilities as merely having a medical condition, which could affect any person at any time, removes the stigma of the ‘disabled’ word. Rather than risk being put into a “basket” himself, a matter of fact approach allows Connor to see ‘disability’ as a mere fact of life.

Holly explains that she also does not like to use the word ‘disabled’. She explains, “I don’t really like the term disabled. Because it makes you sound like you
are not able to do stuff.” Like Connor, she finds that the word ‘disabled’ casts doubt over abilities. Holly explains:

I thought about making up some words like adapting, and all those words just sound so PC, so dad was like, you’re just munted and I was like yeah! I just like the word, although many people are like, what did you say? I just hope other people with a disability can see that and not be offended. And in certain situations I wouldn’t say it, although I wanted to say it, I would be like, ok, I am disabled.

Being able to use different language to describe her body and the bodies of others allows Holly to experience “the happy side of being disabled”. She feels that challenging what it means to be disabled affords her more power to speak about discrimination and injustice in relation to people with disabilities, particularly within the Physical Education and sports contexts. Creating her own language also helps Holly feel comfortable discussing the topic, especially at public functions where she has been a guest speaker. She feels using the word “munted” removes the automatic assumptions that disabled people are unable to do certain things. Instead, she feels it provides an even playing field to tell people “we should be treated like this”, not because of disability or difference, but because of people’s shared human experiences, and right to be treated equally (Rutherford, 2012).

Unlike Connor and Holly, Shane does not have alternative language to describe his ‘disability’ (Connors & Stalker, 2007). When offered the word impairment, he explains:

The word impairment, probably means the same thing really, well impairment is basically affected negatively, so what it means, um… That’s tough, because it’s kind of the same but disability and impairment kind of go together really, and then there is handicap too, and all that stuff.

Shane also challenges academic discussions of language and disability. While academia has offered new ways of explaining and representing what it means to be disabled (Barnes & Mercer, 1997), discourses of negativity and having less ability still
perpetuate Shane’s understanding of disability. Thus, Shane raises the important issue that what is viewed as the ‘best’ or most ‘politically correct’ language regarding disability may hold differing meanings for individuals. Shane also highlights the importance of clarifying individuals’ views and taking the time to hear and understand their perceptions, rather than generating assumptions based on preconceived ideas (Watson, 2002). This is particularly relevant for Physical Education practices. Taking time to accept and appreciate students as individuals can remove the stigma and misunderstanding of inability and difference that justify and reinforce segregation and exclusion (Slee, 2011).

The language of ‘impairment effects’ is perhaps not as helpful for Shane as it could be for Holly or Connor. Their language use seems more aligned with Thomas’s (1999) social relational model. In contrast, Shane is concerned with the barriers to being and doing (Thomas, 1999), such as the attitudes and assumptions that are associated with his ‘physical disability’. The variety in language used by the students highlights that while there may be fundamental distinctions between social and social relational thinking, there are also unifying similarities. As Holly mentions, disability is not a case of “if I struggle you struggle because we have the same disability”. The experiences and language chosen by the students highlight that ‘disability’ is ingrained with discourses that can be taken up or rejected in a range of ways (Watson, 2002).

For those working with young people, particularly within Physical Education, a careful consideration of the language used is important. As the students explain in this section, whether or not people describe them as ‘disabled’ ‘impaired’ or even ‘munted’ alters the opportunities and experiences open to them. Therefore, as both the students and the New Zealand Curriculum encourage, getting to know the individual and
recognising their perceptions of their selves is a fundamental starting point for constructing positive Physical Education experiences.

**Students’ Perceptions of Disability**

In this section, I draw on post-structural thinking about subjectivity, and acknowledge the role discourses play in how one comes to know oneself and one’s bodies (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Watson, 2002). I examine how discourses construct some people as more ‘different’ than others. Therefore, from a philosophical point of view, it is not the students’ bodies which are ‘different’ or disabled, but the ways particular knowledge about bodies is deployed, that construct them as such (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). However, it is important to recognise that the students’ subjectivities are not only social constructs, but also that the “body actively participates in the construction of the self” (Garrett, 2004, p. 142).

As mentioned above, Holly sometimes chooses to view herself as “munted”, as she does not like the word disabled. She explains, “it just describes me you know, like yeah I am basically normal but I’ve got a few issues. My body is a bit different”. However, despite her keenness to challenge assumptions, she explains this does not come easily:

I like how I mock my disability, it take guts to be able to do it, and sometimes you need to use the F word, and be like I'm F’d, I’m not disabled, I’m F’d!!! But you have got to pick your times when you do say it, like with mates and stuff.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, Holly explains disability was something that she only came to realise applied to her when she was separated and identified as different at secondary school. This reflects Shakespeare & Watson’s (2001) post-structural argument that bodies are inscribed with meaning and given meaning in
differing contexts. While her body was not an issue at primary school, the categorising nature of secondary school, which disciplines and controls students’ bodies (Brittan, 2004; Slee, 2001b), caused Holly to question who she was and how she was perceived. Holly explains, “I didn’t really know I was disabled up until secondary school, and then with all these weirdos, like, there was something about me… and I thought, oh I guess I am one of them now”. She mentions this realisation a number of times, explaining:

I said to you last time that I didn’t really know I was disabled until I went to high school, which is really weird you know. I mean, you would think I would have some kind of idea, but I really didn’t have any, not even when I got to intermediate I thought I was normal, like I knew I needed a teacher aide for writing and stuff, but I thought everyone had trouble like writing, and everyone fell over every ten seconds, and then it just came to me when I started high school, and I was like, I guess I’m disabled, bugger.

Having an identity imposed on Holly was not easy: “because you are not very happy because you are starting puberty and stuff and you are like wham!!! Gidday disability, how are ya?” This is a sentiment shared by many students with physical disabilities, particularly in secondary education (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Brittan, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005). Arguably, this imposition of identity had something to do with the nature of secondary education which, as mentioned in previous chapters, was not designed to accommodate students who differ from the majority (Ballard, 2004).

To return to discussions of education for a moment, and recap on previous chapters, Brittan (2004) explains that Physical Education (and education more generally) is greatly influenced by the medical model of disability which allows for “control and discipline” (p. 76) of students and their bodies. This way of thinking, which contains discourses of inability, deficit and difference, is reflected in the practices which take place in schools (Slee, 2001b). Practices such as separating students into ‘units’, the presence of a teacher aide when outside of ‘the unit’ and exclusion from Physical Education justified by the need to fix, rather than enjoy the
body. These practices normalise discourses of difference between students, and legitimise the very actions that maintain it (Wright, 2006). Thus, it is no surprise that Holly feels she was classified and labelled as having a disability.

Like Holly, Angela believes disability was an identity imposed on her through the policies and practices of her first secondary school:

I was the only person who, um, because I was mainstreamed and stuff, so I was normal, so to speak, (but) if I was going from one side of the school to the other, I had to use my wheelchair, which really sucked.

Angela feels that she was able to become ‘normal’ by engaging in practices that would help her to move “normally again”. She draws on her physical body to position herself against the notion of normality. She explains the concept of ‘normal’ is something she does not ‘fit’ when required to use a wheelchair (Britten, 2004). For Angela, her wheelchair acts as a signifier of difference (Brittan, 2004). It acts to reinforce her difference from others and implies she needs to be ‘fixed’ (Hughes, 2001). Doing her exercises and rehabilitation allows her to ‘fix’ her body and lose the wheelchair. As a result, Angela believes the stigma associated with having a different body is removed.

As post-structural thinking implies, Angela’s identity is not fixed in stone. While at times she describes herself as normal, or wishing to be normal, at times she also identifies herself as having a disability. Despite being unhappy with the word ‘disabled’, Angela uses it to explain how people are categorised for her sports tournaments, in which she positions herself as having a physical disability. In this context, Angela explains, people are defined by impairment. Her sport involves grouping “physical and intellectuals together, based on your medical condition and how it affects you and stuff, and they have able bodies, and intellectually disabled and like blind and deaf people and everything”. Angela’s discussion highlights how it is difficult
to separate language such as ‘medical conditions’ or ‘impairments’ from ‘disability’. These terms have long been used interchangeably to categorise and define people, particularly within education (Slee, 2008). Thus, Angela’s use of the term ‘disability’ to label and identify people based on their impairment, despite her dislike of this word, is not surprising.

As Priestley (1999) explains, disability is often used as an “administrative category” (p. 94), which separates and defines people. Furthermore, by categorising people based on their ‘disability’, differing attitudes arise towards different ‘groups’ (Priestley, 1999). Angela is acutely aware of this. While she uses the word “disabled” flippantly in the sporting context to differentiate between differing ‘disabilities’, she is aware that discriminating perceptions and attitudes occur when people know about ‘difference’ in wider social contexts. For example, she chose not to tell people at her new school that she has Cerebral Palsy because “they would treat you differently, by like sort of being extra careful about what they say, and they try not to offend you and I would rather that they didn’t know and didn’t care”. Thus, Angela highlights how subjectivities can change over time, are dependent on the particular context, and that it is possible for people to have multiple subjectivities (Wright, 2006). In the adaptive sport context, where everyone is viewed as having a ‘disability’, Angela is comfortable identifying as having a disability and being defined by her body; while in her school and home contexts, she chooses not to draw on her body to explain her identity and instead identifies as being similar to others as she constructs herself as ‘normal’.

Cody does not discuss disability at all, however, it is mentioned frequently by his teacher aide, often to explain why he cannot take part in some school activities. Instead, Cody chooses to talk about things he likes and he is good at, such as swimming, playing Wii, and spending time with his family. Many of Cody’s educational
experiences were justified on the basis of his perceived needs, or lack of ability to fit within the mainstream classes. Yet, while he may not excel at maths or science, he enjoys and is talented at other educational areas such as photography and dance, which could be embraced to enhance his educational experiences and the way he views himself. While his teacher aide recognises this, she explains she is confined by the structure of the schools, which encourage the moulding of a particular type of student (Kirk, 2001). Not only does this limit Cody’s educational experience, one must question the consequences of such rigid structures and practices which inform the nature of schooling. How is Cody to construct a positive identity in an environment where his abilities and enjoyment are viewed as irrelevant to his educational capacity?

Like Cody, Connor does not draw on the term disability to explain how he views himself and his body. He explains, “no, it’s just a condition. Well, technically it is a disability, but I don’t see it as a disability”. However, like Angela, he appears to feel measured against an imaginary norm, which casts him as different (Britten, 2004). He believes that students his age are encouraged to fit within a particular body image, reinforced by schooling, Physical Education and the media. However, he explains: “I don’t give a stuff about the stereotype, I have to be different”. Yet, despite stating that he is happy with being viewed as different to the socially constructed norm, at times he mentions feeling frustrated by this. For example, in Physical Education sometimes he feels “disappointed. In my own ability, well, inability to do the task. Even though it was stupid, I still wanted to do it like other people.” Thus, while Connor is able to recognise the socially constructed nature of ability, his disappointment with his body reflects the public nature of Physical Education. As Fitzgerald and Stride (2012) recognise, the body is on display and particular abilities are overtly rewarded in Physical Education. Not only does this reinforce the socially constructed ‘norm’, it also highlights the
difference of those who do not ‘fit’. As Connor demonstrates, the nature of these experiences impacts on the way he feels about himself.

Connor’s discussion of being different, yet wanting to be similar to his peers reflects Evans and Davies’s (2004) discussion of the “hierarchies of the body” (p. 8). In this sense, bodies are inscribed with different meaning and value based on their similarity to the socially constructed norm. This norm is reinforced by practices within a range of institutions (Wright, 2006), such as Physical Education where the idealised image/ability is often privileged (Evans, 2004). Through these institutions, the concept of normality is maintained and reinforced, causing students to measure themselves against ‘normality’ and employ disciplinary practices such as surveillance of the body (Foucault, 1977). Yet, while engaging in disciplinary practices may be an option for some (such as Angela who feels that doing exercises post-surgery will help her to become “normal again”), for Connor, no amount of disciplinary practices or self-monitoring will alter his body. While he is able to disregard the discourses in popular magazines as unrealistic and the physical activities in Physical Education as irrelevant, he does, at times appear disappointed in the embodied limitations imposed by his condition. From a social model perspective, these limitations are not any fault of his. Instead this is a consequence of the way that society has constructed what it means to possess or maintain a ‘normal’ body and how this is reinforced in Physical Education (Kirk, 2001). Yet, Connor takes on board these limitations as an issue with his own body. His doing so highlights how pervasive medical model discourses of normality and difference can be, and how marginalised discourses which question or challenge these can become.

From a teaching and learning perspective, Connor’s experiences demonstrate the need for his teachers to be aware of how he feels about his body and how the
Physical Education practices reinforce his difference from his peers. The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) provides the perfect opportunity for this to occur. If teachers worked from a student-centred approach advocated for in the curriculum (Bishop et al, 2009), and engaged in reflexive practices regarding how their pedagogies and practices influence students (Bough, 2008; Petrie et al, 2013), Connor’s experiences of Physical Education and how he feels about his self may have been altered.

Shane draws on his strengths and abilities to counter discussions of disability and how he identifies himself with the term. While he mentions he has a physical disability, he does so in a matter of fact way, before moving on to discuss what he is good at. For example, he says “I have a physical disability, so obviously my sporting ability is affected, but my academic ability is good”. However, like Holly, Shane discussed disability as something he only came to know as he got older:

When I was a wee fella I didn’t see myself as having a disability which can be good and bad, but I kind of ignored other disabled people because of that. But I have grown up now, I do have a disability, I acknowledge that, but I don’t let it get in my way. I don’t let anything get in my way.

However, unlike Holly, who embraces her body and her difference, Shane chooses to focus on what he is exceptionally talented at. Shane and Holly provide excellent examples of how discourses of normality can be resisted or remoulded to construct positive views of the self. One must then question, what are the consequences for students who do not have such positive attitudes towards themselves and their bodies? And furthermore, how can Physical Education teaching and practices work to foster positive attitudes? By examining the curriculum, teaching and learning literature regarding Physical Education (and wider education in New Zealand), it is suggested that student-centred learning should be the focus of practice and pedagogies (Alton-
Lee, 2011). Inclusive teaching, which accommodates all students, not just those who ‘fit’ the discourse of healthy/able should occur (Hay & MacDonald, 2004; Petrie et al, 2013). Yet the fact that students continue to feel different demonstrates the chasm between intent and practice. While the *intent* to include all children may (or may not) be present in teaching practices, the diversity among students, their bodies, backgrounds and beliefs makes it difficult to ensure equitable learning occurs (Bishop et al, 2009). This is not necessarily a negative critique of the state of Physical Education, but a reminder that continued reflection and adaptation of teaching practices must occur to ensure the Key Competencies are achieved by each and every student. In particular, understanding and building relationships with all students, critically examining the thinking and actions which occur in the classroom, recognising diversity are establishing open communication with students are some inclusive pedagogies that could both support learning and shape positive subjectivities for students.

Kelly is one such student who appears to struggle with the notion of disability. While she is proud of her achievements in the adaptive sport field, she appears confused as to what disability means, and why she is singled out at school because of this. As mentioned earlier, Kelly is the “athlete with disabilities champion of the whole New Zealand!” an achievement of which she is “so proud, I was crying, I couldn’t believe it. It’s the first time I have done something really good! And with all the medals!” Despite her achievements, Kelly mentions she gets bullied because of her disability in Physical Education, which makes her feel sad and scared. She also is embarrassed about her body in some Physical Education contexts. For example, she is in a lower level swimming group that her friends as a result of not being able to hear her teacher, thus not learning as fast. She explains that: “I am kind of embarrassed, such a tall girl, swimming with the little kids”. Her mixed emotions and experiences of disability
perhaps contribute to her confusion regarding the term. She explains that a disability “means a person’s body part that doesn’t work properly, like ears don’t work properly and that makes him deaf. Or they can’t see because the eyes don’t work, and like legs and arms and things”. Yet, when asked if she would call herself disabled, she is “not sure, I don’t even know what disabled means”. Thus, like the other students, Kelly demonstrates the fluid and fluctuating nature of subjectivities. Kelly does not view herself as disabled in all contexts, and when she does, this is not in an inherently negative way.

Kelly, like all the students in the study, highlights the dangers of labelling and categorising people based on their impairments. Not all students are the same, nor do they have the same disability. Yet, it appears socially acceptable in education, sport and wider society to group them together and assume a common bond (Curtain & Clarke, 2005; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Watson, 2012). Instead, each student demonstrates a range of responses to the discourses which construct and constrain them as disabled. Some resist and challenge this label, while others resign themselves to this identity and embrace it to challenge the negative discourses associated with the word. However, what all students demonstrate is that “the words we use and the discourses we deploy to represent impairment are socially and culturally determined” (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001, p. 18). The differing contexts students exist within determine differing responses to their perceptions of their bodies. As a result, they highlight the dangers of assuming people have fixed identities and shared perceptions of their bodies. This is an important caution for all teachers working with young people with disabilities, particularly within Physical Education. As Connor explains, “everyone is different, you can’t group people”. Yet, this grouping continues to be
justified and accepted throughout the structural and cultural contexts of education (Slee, 2001b).

**Empowered Embodiment**

I now move to examine moments when students have felt empowered by their bodies in a Physical Education context. Despite pervasive medicalised discourses which portray people with disabilities as ‘suffering’ from a bodily ailment (Linton, 2006), the students all shared stories of times when they have challenged this thinking within Physical Education or sporting contexts, and when they feel their differences have been celebrated or accepted. These are particularly important stories to be shared with teachers or those who work with young disabled people. This section draws on the work of Allan (1999), who explains how students often engage post-structural processes of transgression. The process of transgressions is demonstrated by the way the students are capable of “blurring boundaries that are set for them … without destroying the bridge” (De Schauwer et al., 2009, p. 109). In other words, the students recognised the way that they have been constrained by the disability label, but use this constraint (and their bodies) to negotiate other options. They do this not only to prove their ability and challenge perceptions that limit their Physical Education opportunities but also to empower themselves and give rise to alternative ways of thinking about their bodies.

Connor was able to use his condition to his advantage to get an exemption from Physical Education. He explains, “I wrote a letter to the principal asking if I could pursue a more academic subject instead because I feel that PE is not going to do anything for me”. The principal’s response was: “sure, I don’t really care if you do PE or not!” For Connor, this was a positive result. As discussed in the previous chapter,
Connor feels that Physical Education is only targeted at students with bodies that conform to hegemonic norms. As a result, he was able to trade in a subject he felt was worthless to him, to further his academic development. While this event demonstrates the unstable and challengeable nature of power relations (Gore, 1995), it also raises questions about the nature of compulsory Physical Education in relation to other ‘academic’ subjects. For example, would it be acceptable for a student to ask for an exemption from English or Maths if it was “not going to do anything” for a student with a learning difficulty? Further, what is implied regarding what bodies are fit for Physical Education? From this experience, we can see how students are able to negotiate and challenge power relations by using their difference and demonstrating agency in positive ways. Yet does Connor’s experience reflect an equal and fair education system if students are able to get exemptions from compulsory subjects, based on their difference to the social constructed ‘normal’ student? Furthermore, Connor’s experiences reinforce the longstanding discourse that certain bodies are deemed more suitable than others to Physical Education (Barton, 1993). Despite teachers being expected to include all students, and recognise the rights of students to be present, participate and achieve (MacArthur, 2009) it seemed the discourses that have long informed Physical Education (Evans, 2004) guide some teacher practices and decisions more so than recent inclusive curriculum developments (Culpan, 2008; Culpan & Bruce, 2007). While Connor’s experiences here indicate that he is able to use his body to get what he wanted in education, it could also provide the opportunity for his principal, Physical Education teachers and others involved to question why he felt that he was not suited for Physical Education, and act on these issues to construct more flexible and inclusive Physical Education contexts which would no doubt benefit all students (Fitzgerald, 2005).
Holly also describes being empowered by her body. She was chosen to attend a special camp for students with physical disabilities, which spurred her to take an activist role in disability rights. These experiences demonstrated how she engaged in the process of transgression (Allan, 1999; Foucault, 1977). She had the opportunity to attend camp based on her association with the disability label, yet at the same time, used this to challenge the very structures which confine her identity to this label. She does so by speaking at a number of functions about the treatment of people with disabilities. These opportunities enable her to share the “happy side of being disabled”, such as the opportunities to attend camps and to make a difference to other people’s lives through advocacy work. As Coates and Vickerman (2010) explain, student voices are often disregarded in discussions of disability. Yet, when the opportunity arises to give students the chance to speak and to challenge dominant discourses of what it means to be disabled, this can be immensely empowering. This was reflected in Holly’s experiences. She describes the experience to stand up and speak as “quite fun, I quite enjoyed it. I just went up there and said I do this, and this, and I am munted!”

One event that both Shane and Holly describe as an empowering experience was running the school cross-country, despite not being allowed to partake in Physical Education. While Shane faced disabling attitudes of people who tried to stop him, he resisted these to finish the cross-country. Shane’s mother explains, “he did finish in the second year… he just ignored him [the Physical Education teacher] when he told him to stop, he just carried on!” Shane elaborates on why he chose to do this, explaining, “I have always been doubted and yeah, it doesn’t work well with me… It wasn’t far to go, a couple of hundred meters.” This was a similar experience to Holly. She explains:

We had a short one and a long one, and you could go on the short one, then you could cross the road and go to the long one. And the teacher was at the crossing moving back like come on, go through,
straight ahead, and blocking the road so I couldn’t cross and stuff, and I was like no, let me through!

It seems Holly felt a sense of achievement in completing the cross country, and also enjoyed challenging the Physical Education teacher’s perceptions, stating “That was quite cool, and he said it made his day! And I came back with plasters everywhere because I fell over every five seconds, so it was pretty cool!!”

As Fitzgerald and Kirk (2009) argue, students’ strong embodied identities afford them the confidence to challenge taken for granted assumptions about ability. While the Physical Education teachers who attempted to prevent Holly and Shane finishing the cross-country may have done so due to their discursively informed perceptions of what students can and cannot do, Holly and Shane believed that they had the right and the ability to challenge these perceptions. As a result they appeared empowered by their success, not only in challenging people’s assumptions, but also in their own ability and identity as capable students.

Finally, Kelly discusses particular moments that caused her to feel empowered. As mentioned in the previous section, she explains that becoming national champion made her feel “so proud” of herself, and that this was the “first time I have done something really good”. This event highlights how students perceived as disabled within certain settings can not only challenge perceptions of disability, but also find ways to embrace their bodies and feel proud (De Schauwer et al., 2009). Kelly highlights that, while it is easy to focus on times she is disabled by attitudes or structures, it is just as important to examine what empowers her, and what makes her feel good about herself and her body. These moments are often overlooked in research about, rather than with students with physical disabilities (De Schauwer et al., 2009).
Finally, I examine moments when students feel their body is a burden. These include moments when their bodies cannot do the task at hand, or when they feel the need to prove their ability in order to gain access to something they are legally entitled to, such as Physical Education. I draw largely on the work of Biklen (2000) and Biklen and Burke (2006) and the notion of competence. In particular I examine when students feel the need to prove or justify their ability to others in order to gain the access they are entitled to.

Shane describes times when he felt his competence was questioned due to perceptions which linked physical impairment to intellectual ability. He explains that he was removed from Physical Education classes based on perceptions of ability. He also describes his experiences in wider education, where he felt that teachers in positions of power thought he was unable to achieve the marks he did. He explains, “He didn’t even think, because I got merit in level one, which is ok, but he didn’t think I could get excellence because the exams were too demanding or something! But I got the excellence in level two!” His ability was questioned early on at secondary school, as he explains:

I think that they thought because I have a teacher aide to write with me in class, they thought the teacher aide was doing my work for me, so it took a while to get established. Uni won’t be that difficult, because I have proven myself to everybody.

The pessimism of people in positions of power regarding Shane’s ability is a theme also discussed by Biklen (2000), who explains that the dominant way of viewing disability confines and limits people’s abilities within education. Biklen (2000), along with Shakespeare and Watson (2001) argue that cultural representations of people with disabilities contribute to the discourse of an “unchangeable, static, disabled person” (Biklen, 2000, p. 339). This representation often perceives people with disabilities as
unable to learn, or to learn like the ‘normal’ population (Biklen, 2000; Biklen & Burke, 2006). Thus, Shane’s need to prove his ability, to overcome barriers to being and doing (Thomas, 1999), is a burden of having a body that differs from the majority (Biklen & Burke, 2006). His experiences highlight how presumptions of inability remain justifiable for students with physical disabilities. Yet no doubt, these same presumptions would be viewed as discriminatory if applied to students who appeared ‘normal’.

Angela faced similar pessimistic attitudes. As mentioned earlier, she was held back academically due to her first schools assumption of her ability, which she feels was based on the presence of her impairment. Angela also discusses needing to prove she was able to take part in Physical Education, as it was assumed she would not participate when arriving at class in her wheelchair. Angela and Shane demonstrate that disability is often used as a signifier of in-competence by the able population (Hughes, 2001). As Biklen and Burke (2006) argue, people with disabilities must go through the process of proving competence, while those with able bodies begin from a position of assumed competence. This was evident in Shane needing to prove his academic worth, and Angela her ability to participate in Physical Education. These experiences clash with educational and human rights policy such as the Human Rights Act (Human Rights Commission, 1993), New Zealand Disability Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2001), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (United Nations, 1948), UNCRC, (United Nations, 1989) and UNCRPD (United Nations, 2007) that state access and participation are basic educational and human rights.

The students’ experiences of their bodies as a burden were not limited to the need to prove ability to others. Many students share stories of feeling frustrated with their bodies, seemingly viewing them as an appendage or a thing that holds them back.
For example, Shane explains that “sometimes I get frustrated with having it, but I have never thought why have I got it? You just have to get on with it”. Holly shares similar stories of frustration, particularly about her need to have a carer come in and help her, as she is “too spastic. It’s kind of a bit awkward having to say to people, just a moment my carer is coming”. Connor also explains times when he feels frustrated that his body does not fit with the Physical Education environment. For example, on one school camp he found it “kind of depressing… everyone else just takes off and they are able to do it but you are like aww!”

For Physical Education teaching, these experiences indicate how individual assumptions and values brought into the classroom can limit and constrain some students. Rather than recognising that every child has an ability to participate and achieve (as expected by policy and rights documents), static concepts of ability remain. For Physical Education in particular, the students’ stories of their body as a burden demonstrate the consequences of particular teaching and learning practices and indicate a critical need for careful examination of practices and pedagogies. Further, only by taking the time to work with the student, to hear these experiences, can the need for change be recognised and enacted upon.

From a Disability Studies perspective, these stories indicate that the role of the body cannot be disregarded (Thomas, 1999; Watson, 2002). While the social model may be an excellent political and social tool, it is impossible to deny that the moments where students feel frustrated at their bodies, or embarrassed by their personal needs, play a role in how they view themselves. As the students’ testimonies demonstrate, caution must be taken in assuming disability holds a singular universal meaning, or in reducing disability to a socially constructed phenomenon. Finally, Watson (2002) argues, to view disability in such a way is to “undermine any concept of identity or self”
(p. 510), which is so paramount to progressive disability research (Barnes, 2013; Thomas, 2013).

**Conclusion**

Shakespeare and Watson (2001) argue that dominant ideas of disability rest on the distinction between disabled/non-disabled, and the social, economic, and structural consequences of this distinction. Yet, while this thinking may have made inroads into equality and justice politically; viewing disability solely as a binary term does not do justice to understanding the personal nature of the body, nor the collective identity and struggles of those whom identify as disabled or having an impairment. As the students have demonstrated, there is no universal understanding of what it means to be disabled, nor should it be assumed that there is. However, it appears wider social discourses still assume disability is a fixed category (Biklen, 2000). If one is to ‘fit’ in that category (or “basket” as Connor chooses to call it), uncalled for sympathy, separation, and objectification is espoused frequently by the able bodied population (Shakespeare, 1994).

In this chapter, I have discussed how students are viewed by others, and view themselves. Each student has shared stories of pride in their ability, as well as disdain at their bodies, or treatment they receive based on others’ perceptions of difference within both Physical Education and wider contexts. While from an academic standpoint, some of their explanations of disability may not align with social model/social relational model thinking and language use (largely as they do not have access to this language and are instead utilising terms that are familiar to them in the context of their own lives) I believe their words are helpful to the study of disability. The students challenge taken for granted language around disability and demonstrate that what is
viewed as appropriate for one person, may be extremely offensive for another (French & Swain, 2013). Furthermore, such attitudes severely limit the opportunities available to enjoy their bodies, especially within Physical Education where presumptions of ability pervade thinking and practice (Evans, 2004). Thus, whilst a collective disability identity may have been necessary for social, cultural, and political change in the past (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001), there is real danger in continuing to view disability solely as a social construction – without also examining the embodied, personal views of the topic, people’s experiences of impairment (Thomas, 2004), or the intersectional nature of identity (Flintoff et al., 2008).

Finally, I hope this chapter has demonstrated the fluid and changing nature of subjectivities and students feelings about their bodies. At the conclusion of this thesis, it remains impossible to label or firmly conclude how it is students perceive themselves. While disability may be what brought the students together in this research, it by no means embodies the same thing for each student. Even within the Physical Education context, where the body is centre stage, students respond differently to discourses about the body. Also, the students resist, take up, or transgress from particular discourses or structures of power that confine their identities, in order to shape new, changing subjectivities. Thus I conclude that the word disability is just as dangerous as it is helpful, a position Foucault (1994) would agree is paramount to any activist or social justice standpoint. Approaching the disability topic and working with people identified by this label involves questioning taken for granted knowledge, and instead privileging the knowledge and wisdom of those at the centre of the debate.
In this final chapter, I ask “what can disabled children teach the wider research, service and policy communities” about Physical Education policy and practice (Carpenter & McConkey, 2012, p. 251). I begin by reiterating the epistemological commitments and assumptions that underpinned this research and demonstrate how the theoretical, philosophical and methodological frameworks were woven together to achieve the aims of this thesis.

In the second section, I bring together the threads of the research to summarise the contribution it makes to Physical Education research, policy and practice. I examine what the students’ experiences say about Physical Education, in particular the competing discourses and values that shape students experiences. I then look at what students’ experiences mean for Physical Education, paying particular attention to the students’ insights as to how teaching pedagogies can contribute to positive, inclusive Physical Education. Finally in this section, I outline some recommendations that could see the students’ insights put into practice.

Thirdly, I reflect on the research methodology and the opportunities that participatory research affords for students to actively participate in research that challenges adult-centric assumptions within education (Carrington et al., 2007). I then discuss what I see as the limitations of this research project, before asking “Where to From Here?” In this section I discuss the process of research dissemination and offer possibilities of future research.

Finally, I hand over to the students. As discussed in Chapter Four, Holly offered a piece of writing to be included at the conclusion of the study. I extended the
opportunity to put a final ‘stamp’ on the research to all of the students. The students conclude this thesis by summarising the research project in their own words, and explaining what they feel they gathered from the research experience.

**Revisiting the Thesis Aims, Philosophy, Theory and Methodology**

The aim of this research was to examine the secondary school Physical Education experiences of students with disabilities. The investigation was driven by a number of questions about Physical Education. In particular, I questioned how the nature of Physical Education can facilitate or constrain students’ experiences. Furthermore, I examined how commonly held assumptions, practices and structures that inform Physical Education contour the way students’ perceive themselves and their bodies within the Physical Education and wider social context they exist in.

I recognised that the body remains the medium through which socially construction notions of ability are understood and reproduced in Physical Education (Evans, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005; Hay & McDonald, 2010; Kirk, 2001; Tinning, 2004). Therefore, I asked questions about which particular bodies, movements and abilities are privileged in Physical Education and with what effect for the students in this study. To do so, required a broader look at the state of education in Chapter Four. Here the students’ identified how their bodies worked as markers for educators and peers to base assumptions of their educational, social and physical ability. How students were perceived within wider education ultimately shaped whether or not they were allowed to participate in Physical Education and to what extent.

To examine how students with physical disabilities experience secondary school Physical Education, the research blended together particular theoretical, philosophical and methodological assumptions. A conscious effort was made to merge
Disability Studies, Childhood Studies, and Sociology of the Body theorising with scholarship in Physical Education, teaching and learning spheres to inspire different ways of thinking about students’ experiences.

To understand students’ experiences, I assumed that the meanings students made were social constructs, hinged on social interactions, discourses and relationships (MacDonald et al, 2002; Shilling, 2012). This also meant viewing ‘disabled’ bodies as social constructs that provided a foundation for the students’ experiences of Physical Education. While I acknowledged the material nature of the body, and the importance of this for some students, through a post-structural lens and social constructionist epistemology, I viewed the body primarily as a site where discourses are inscribed, challenged and embodied (Oliver, 2010). Doing so afforded questioning into how students’ experiences were contoured by their teachers and peers perceptions of what they could or could not do, and how those perceptions contrasted with the assumptions and values espoused in curriculum and policy documents.

The research was conducted in the socially critical paradigm with the intent of making a difference (Hill, 2006; MacDonald et al., 2002). I hoped to do so at both a personal and political level by demonstrating what students with physical disabilities can teach “wider research service and policy communities” (Carpenter & McConkey, 2012, p. 251) about their experiences of Physical Education. Those who have worked within the socially critical paradigm and across the disciplines of Childhood and Disability Studies agree that foregrounding what can be learnt from young disabled people is important to challenge and critique traditional assumptions which shape young peoples’ experiences (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2008; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Kelly, 2005; MacArthur et al, 2007a, 2007b; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). In this research, I committed to listening to students voices in order to challenge and critique
the nature and practices of Physical Education. I believe that without this commitment, a very different picture would have been painted of the experiences of Physical Education for students with physical disabilities. The students’ discussions of exclusion, disablement and bullying, as well as celebration, empowerment and success within Physical Education shed light on different ways of knowing, experiencing and thinking about Physical Education.

Working in a multidisciplinary manner (Kelly, 2005), also speaks to Barton’s (1993) (and more recently, Barton, 2009; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012) call to include young disabled people in Physical Education research. It enabled this research to make a difference to the way students with physical disabilities’ experiences of Physical Education are understood. At a political level, students’ experiences challenge the discourses and values that inform Physical Education practices and pedagogies. They destabilise the taken for granted, and inspire new possibilities and directions for teaching practices. On a personal level, this research has encouraged students to take an active role in advocacy. They became aware of the factors shaping their experiences and many committed to making a difference to future students’ Physical Education stories.

**Drawing Conclusions**

This research identifies a number of issues within education and specifically Physical Education, which continue to constrain the experiences of students with physical disabilities. In this section, I summarise how the students’ experiences highlight the real consequences of competing discourses and values shaping the nature of Physical Education as I ask: who is Physical Education for? Secondly, I look at what the students’ experiences can tell us about Physical Education, and how they believe
their experiences could be improved or altered. Finally, I offer recommendations to Physical Education policy and practice based on the findings in this thesis.

Who is Physical Education For?

The nature of Physical Education has long been critiqued as unaccommodating for students with physical disabilities (Barton, 1993). This research shed light on why this is, and why, despite this recognition, the subject area remains this way. The way that students talked about their Physical Education experiences highlighted competing discourses and values that operated within their Physical Education (and wider education) contexts, which ultimately contours what experiences were available to them.

Firstly, the students’ testimonies demonstrated how neo-liberal values constrained the opportunities available to them in both in Physical Education and wider education. As outlined in Chapter One, education is increasingly being regarding as a commodity (Pope, 2013). An outcome based focus appears to be permeating New Zealand schools, where achievement is measured and recorded, resulting in particular values being ascribed to New Zealand schools and students (Armstrong, 2013; Ballard, 2013; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Willis & McLean, 2008).

For many students in this research, access and inclusion within Physical Education (and other learning areas) was dependent on the perceived investment required to achieve the desired outcomes of the school. Angela, Cody, Holly and Shane’s families fought significant battles to receive the educational support required for them to participate in classes alongside their peers. They faced a large amount of time spent without support or resources, and they felt that the financial investment was
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

deemed too steep and better spent elsewhere. For example, Holly, Shane and Cody’s access to Physical Education was sacrificed due to a perceived lack of resources to support their participation. As Holly eloquently explained, it seemed that her inclusion was denied for the sake of her able bodied peers. She felt as though the time and effort that would be required to include her was perceived to be better spent serving the majority of the students within the Physical Education setting. Within wider education, experiences similar to those shared in this thesis exist (Caroll-Lind & Rees, 2009; Clarke & McArthur, 2008; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Macartney, 2009). The prolific reports of students being denied their rights to access and participate (IHC, 2008a, 2008b, 2014) identifies a serious issue regarding the neo-liberal values ascribed to students within secondary Physical Education.

The presence of Special Education language and thinking in policy documents (Ministry of Education, 2014) was also evident in the students’ testimonies. This further highlights the competitive, market-based economy, where resources and investment are measured against the educational returns of the students (Macartney, 2009). Discourses of ‘different’ students needing ‘different’ education appears to remain a logical explanation when teachers and schools are pressured to record high levels of achievement amongst a large, diverse class (Graham & Slee, 2008). For Shane and Holly, where success in standardised Physical Education assessment practices was impossible, they felt that simply being absent from the class was the ‘easy out’ for teachers, and was justified as being in the best interest of the students.

As post-structural thinking suggests, bodies are the makers by which students experience Physical Education and their experiences are shaped (Evans & Davis, 2004; Garrett, 2004; Shilling, 2012). In other words, meanings inscribed in, or on, their bodies influenced how students were perceived by teachers, teacher aides and Heads of
Departments, who worked as gatekeepers to the students’ Physical Education experiences. It was particularly evident throughout this thesis that within Physical Education, value was ascribed to students that fitted the mould of “the docile body… the compliant and healthy citizen” (Kirk, 2004, p.55). Assessment practices and activities worked to monitor, mould and reward ‘normal’ students, while reinforcing the difference of others. For Connor, Shane, Holly and Angela in particular, their bodies worked as signifiers of ‘incompetence’ (Biklen, 2000) within Physical Education and the wider education setting. Perceptions of what they could and could not do were read off their bodies, and they believed this greatly limited the opportunities offered to them in Physical Education. Angela in particular had to challenge her teacher’s belief that she could not do Physical Education because she was in a wheelchair, and felt as though she had to fight for her right to participate with her peers. In many ways, the students were required to prove their ability to access Physical Education, while their peers began from a position of assumed competence (Biklen & Burke, 2006).

Furthermore, the structures of Physical Education reinforced to the students that particular bodies were more suited than others. Inaccessible environments such as changing rooms, gymnastics equipment, and Outdoor Education locations prompted feelings of shame and embarrassment. For example, Connor eloquently explained how the beep test caused him to feel ashamed and “disappointed... in my own ability, well inability” to achieve the ‘normal’ standard. The unwillingness of his teacher to adapt the assessment to fit him (rather than expecting him to fit the assessment), highlighted how Physical Education can still act to regulate and normalise bodies (DePauw 1997; Kirk, 2001), despite the large paradigmatic shift which now expects Physical Education to foster “positive attitudes towards physical activity” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22).
Students also discussed how some people and structures denied them the right to participate in aspects of Physical Education. Shane and Holly in particular, recognised that they had a right to be in Physical Education classes with their peers, that was being explicitly denied by the very teachers responsible for enacting students’ rights (Ministry of Education, 1993). Angela also believed it to be unjust that she was not allowed to participate in swimming sports, based on a justification that she was greater risk than others. While it remains “bureaucratically convenient” (Slee, 2001a, p. 392) to separate students with physical disabilities from their ‘able’ peers under the guise of ‘special’ education and risk; students also felt some teachers legitimately believed they were doing the right thing, due to their limited knowledge and experience with students with disabilities.

From a contrasting perspective, the New Zealand Curriculum identifies very different values and practices that should exist within Physical Education. Teaching practices guided by this document are expected to be inclusive, reach the needs of all students, respect and appreciated diversity in all forms and instil feelings of self-worth in the students (Ministry of Education, 2007). For Physical Education in particular, the curriculum moves away from schooling the body, to fostering enjoyment and participation. The curriculum also takes a rights based focus, reinforcing that every child has a right to access, be included and accepted within all areas of education (Human Rights Commission, 1993, 2008, 2012; New Zealand Government, 1989; United Nations, 1989, 2007). Physical Education teachers are therefore expected to employ flexible pedagogies to recognise and celebrate the differing abilities of all students (Ministry of Education, 2007; Petrie et al, 2013).

It is clearly apparent that the neo-liberal, competitive values and practices which retain Physical Education for students with ‘normal’ bodies, do not gel with those
envisaged by a curriculum founded on principles of rights, inclusion, diversity and support of all learners (Ministry of Education, 2007). As referred to throughout this thesis, the rights of young people are clearly defined and well documented in policy, yet not always placed at the fore of teaching practices (Slee, 2013). At times in this research project, it seemed that the pressure to demonstrate accountability and achievement saw the imperatives of the New Zealand Curriculum forgotten.

The discrepancy between policy rhetoric and the reality evident in this research project is a frequently noted issue in New Zealand Education (Culpan, 2008; Petrie, et al 2013; Pringle & Pringle, 2013). Despite an awareness of the need to challenge competitive, ablest discourses underpinning Physical Education, the engrained and embedded nature of these remain prevalent in some classrooms. As the next section attests, by including students in discussions about Physical Education the consequences of this tension are evident. Not only do students’ voices shed light on the current state of Physical Education, they also offer ways to reconcile these tensions, to improve the experiences of all students.

What do Students’ Experience Mean for Physical Education at Secondary School?

As Fitzgerald (2005) states, understanding the experiences of students with disabilities within Physical Education is beneficial for all students within the classroom. The students involved in this thesis contributed experiences and knowledge that can both challenge and inform the teaching and learning practices within Physical Education. In this section, I highlight what the students’ experiences mean for Physical Education teachers, before aligning these to wider educational policy and practice.

The students’ experiences challenge the way that Physical Education teachers perceived the abilities of young people with disabilities. While many of their teachers
believed them to be limited by their movements (perhaps due to static understandings about disability), the students offered up other views, and showed how they could be empowered by their bodies. Kelly and Holly in particular felt that they were in possession of a ‘normal’ body when drawing on discourses of health they encountered in Physical Education, such as slimness and ‘good’ eating practices. Their perception of having a ‘healthy body’ appeared to lessen the relevance that ‘disability’ had on the way they understood their bodies and experienced Physical Education. This highlights the need for secondary school Physical Education teachers to recognise the diversity among students. Blanket approaches to the education of students with disabilities – perhaps informed by the homogenising of special education thinking and practice (Slee, 2011) – do not speak to the individual nature of experience, nor recognise the students’ own perceptions of themselves and their bodies.

Secondly, the students’ voices also help to question what counts as Physical Education. While school based Physical Education largely shaped their discussions, many reflected on their experiences outside of the classroom as positive Physical Education experiences. For example, Angela, Cody and Shane felt that participating in their chosen sports was a form of physical activity which allowed them to present as able, active young people. While they could not achieve traditional forms of assessment in Physical Education, they identified other ways in which they could be seems as active participants and contribute to their peers’ critical understanding of ability and movement (Ministry of Education, 2007). In other words, the students’ experiences can work to encourage teachers to look outside of the box when considering learning opportunities and assessment practices.

Building on this point, sharing students’ voices also highlight a need for Physical Education teachers and educators to listen and engage with the students to
target their needs and interests. While other New Zealand scholars similarly advocate for this to occur (Alton-Lee, 2011; Bishop et al, 2009), the students’ experiences in this research give further impetus to this need and highlight how this could occur. In many cases, simple changes would have facilitated improved Physical Education experiences. Shane identified how having more time to get changed would allow him to start on an equal footing with his peers. Cody and Connor also felt that their ability could be recognised in different ways if their teachers were to reconsider how the practices and pedagogies employed cast them as different. Kelly and Holly both had teachers who did engage with them and altered their practices to suit their needs. The influence that these teachers had on students’ perceptions of their abilities was particularly evident. All students agreed that achieving in Physical Education and feeling good about themselves was much easier to do so when someone believed in them and worked with them to achieve success. Rather than applying a ‘one size fits all approach’, recognising the needs of individual students is an important point stressed by the students in this research.

Overall, students can contribute extensive knowledge and insights into the effect of teaching practices and educational policies. Allowing students the opportunity to share their experiences and insights allows educators to question and critique their own practice to suit the needs of their learners. In the next section, I offer recommendations for how these insights could be enacted in educational policy and practice.

**Recommendations for Physical Education Policy and Practice**

From this research, a number of recommendations can be made as to how these students’ insights can be enacted in policy and practice. What the students’ voices tell
us largely reflects what in theory *should* already occur in secondary school Physical Education, yet progress is impeded by competing discourses impinging on the Physical Education classroom. Here I link the above points raised by students to the curriculum expectations and suggest ways that these expectations could be recognised more frequently within future students’ experiences.

As the students in this study explained, many of their teachers were simply doing what they believed to be right, based on their own assumptions about disability. Therefore, teachers need to engage in a critical examination of personal and political values operating in Physical Education and New Zealand secondary education. To achieve this, a critical examination of values, assumptions and beliefs informing educational policy should be at the forefront of teacher education (Alton-Lee, 2003). Ensuring that pre-service teachers consider the different ways of understanding disability, and recognising how this informs special education in New Zealand schools (Slee, 2013), would begin to challenge the taken for granted practices and assumptions the students in this research experienced, and would positively impact those of future students (Alton-Lee, 2003; MacArthur, 2012).

Similarly, assisting pre-service teachers to recognise their responsibility to enact the rights of all young people in education is an important step towards constructing a Physical Education environment that works for all students. As Barton (1993) states, Physical Education “is not a curriculum which will easily accommodate physically disabled students” (p. 49). Therefore, ensuring teachers are adequately trained and supported to enact students’ rights in this area is particularly important (Kearney & Kane, 2006). As the students in this research demonstrated, many teachers were unaware or overlooked the curriculum requirement, and students’ rights, to participate in Physical Education (Ministry of Education, 2007). If teacher education
began from a position that the presence and participation of all students is important in Physical Education (Ministry of Education, 2007), and developed teachers’ abilities to enact this, students’ experiences would be greatly improved. To achieve this, the rights enacted in international and national policy and legislation should provide the foundation for teacher education (Major, 2012; MacArthur, 2013). Currently, the teacher education setting is described as managerial, strategic and skill based to help teachers ‘survive’ in the competitive education economy (Apple, 2007; Codd, 2005). Replacing this with a student-centre, rights based approach to teacher education would allow teachers to learn how they can foster and develop the potential of all students within Physical Education (Brodhagan, 2007; Bean, 2005). Doing so would also speak to the students’ belief that teachers need to recognise how their practices can impact the experiences available to young people with disabilities.

As the curriculum directs, teaching should start by considering the needs of all learners (Ministry of Education, 2007). The students in this research agree that time needs to be taken to get to know the students, to understand their strengths and interest, and work to foster these within Physical Education (Dowden, 2008; Hattie, 2002; Kane et al, 2006). Despite what the neo-liberal thinking implies, not all students learn in the same way (Nairn, 2005). The curriculum provides the perfect vehicle to challenge thinking about how and what students learn, by working from a position that centres on the interests of students and respects every child’s right to be present and participate in Physical Education (Ministry of Education, 2007; Petire, et al, 2013). Teachers need to critically examine and question their practices and pedagogies, and the questions guiding the curriculum would assist this. These questions include:

What is important (and therefore worth spending time on), given where my students are at? What strategies (evidence-based) are most likely to help my students learn this? What happened as a result of the teaching,
and what are the implications for future teaching? (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35)

Furthermore, this research shows that teachers need more professional development and support to be able to enact the curriculum in their teaching practices. The 2007 curriculum saw a major paradigmatic shift in the way teaching and learning was understood (Major, 2012). Despite significant time since its’ inception, it could remain challenging for teachers who worked within the subject-centred, teacher led curriculums of the past, to adapt to the student-centred, flexible approach (Downden, 2008). For some teachers discussed in this research, their structured traditional lessons perhaps indicated a need for assistance in developing the more inclusive, flexible practices expected by the curriculum. Ensuring all teachers are supported and aware of ways to promote student-centred learning and recognise the diversity of their learners would again go a long way to improving the educational experiences of all students (Alton-Lee, 2011; Bishop et al, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2005).

While these recommendations are simple to make, it is important to recognise that any progress in critically examining the nature of Physical Education, or the place of students with disabilities within Physical Education has been slow (Evans, 2004; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Kirk, 1998). The entrenched assumptions about ability and the nature of Physical Education continue to permeate teachers’ pedagogy and practice, thus limits students’ experiences (Smith & Thomas, 2006).

Further, while it is simple to recommend teachers spend more time getting to know their students and have increase amounts of professional development, the neo-liberal, market based pressures sees teachers already pressed for time. In a period when the mounting pressures and demands on teachers are becoming a real concern (Vickers, 2014), asking teachers to find more time, and to individualise their practices seems a large expectation. Yet, as this research demonstrates, there are some teachers who still
manage to do these things with great success. These teachers are the rays of hope for Physical Education. Their practices and pedagogies demonstrate that the little things that happen on the margins can open massive opportunities for young people with disabilities to succeed in education.

Perhaps then, while grand changes to pedagogy and practice may be unrealistic, it is hoped that this thesis will still inspire change on an individual level. Even one teacher considering the perspectives of their students could make a great difference to the way future students with physical disabilities experience secondary school Physical Education.

Reflecting on Participatory Research with Students

In this thesis I have critically examined and challenged commonly held assumptions about young people with disabilities and their experiences of Physical Education. The students’ discussions of exclusion, disablement and bullying, as well as celebration, empowerment and success within Physical Education shed light on different ways of knowing, experiencing and thinking about Physical Education. My own assumptions and practices of Physical Education have been challenged by the students as they have brought to the fore the importance of recognising the subjective, individual nature of their experiences. Working alongside students during this study not only offered insights into their Physical Education experiences, it also permitted students to be active members of the research project. It also allowed for the socially critical goal of making a difference on a personal level to be realised (Hill, 2006; MacDonald et al., 2002).

Participatory research endeavours to realise the rights of all students to be heard, irrespective of their desired communication methods, as stated in the UNCRC (United
Nations, 1989). Yet, as mentioned throughout this thesis, these rights are seldom enacted. While often being the focus of research, students in this study (as with most students) had rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to engage in research themselves. This was particular evident with Cody, who had often been the topic of research, but who had never felt included. Finding a means by which Cody and I could communicate together was not easy. I risked researching about Cody by initially planning to observe his Physical Education lessons and moved by default to conversations with Liz, his teacher aide. Once we established a ‘language’ in which we could communicate, Cody truly embraced sharing his own voice directly. In particular, he demonstrated that, despite what those who know him best may think is working in his Physical Education classes, he sometimes disagrees. Finding a means for Cody to communicate his experiences brought to the fore issues that he had with Physical Education and gave him the confidence to speak up about his choices in Physical Education.

As mentioned, several students felt overlooked in decision-making about their own lives. Yet, they recognised the knowledge they could bring to Physical Education, as well as wider society. For example, Angela and Shane were able to quite simply identify ways to overcome barriers to participating in practical Physical Education, which were presented by educators in their schools. Not only does this research garner insights into ways educational practices could be altered to improve the experiences of students with disabilities, but their insights are applicable for all students who may face similar issues (van Amsterdam et al., 2012).

**Limitations of the Research**

As a researcher concerned with equity in research production, I remain uneasy with the final product. Despite philosophical and theoretical groundings encouraging
the view that there is no ‘right’ way of re-presenting and re-producing the students’
testimonies, I question the possible consequences and power relationships that exist.
For example, while the students played a large role in the collection and analysis of the
research, the presentation of their voices was largely influenced by academic formatting
and traditional research structures.

This thesis is also limited by the size of the study, as it only shares the experiences
of a small group of white, middle class, young people. While my ontological and post-
structural persuasions recognise that these experiences cannot be assumed as universal
for all students, I feel further attention should be paid to issues which affect a broad,
cross section of students with disabilities. Specifically, how do experiences differ
geographically and culturally between students with physical disabilities? These are
questions which have not been addressed in this thesis.

One major limitation of the research remains the inaccessibility of language for
the participants and other young people who may be interested in this thesis.
Communicating aspects of the research and in particular reviewing the ‘final product’
with the students was immensely difficult. The need to explain simply a large number
of terms and, in some cases translate these into sign language, demonstrated the
inaccessibility of academic language to those to whom it is most important. Even Shane,
who is well versed in academic language, felt the use of “academic stuff” such as
literature and theory often got in the way of the messages we attempted to portray.

Where to From Here?

Research Dissemination

The value in this research project lies in disseminating the students’ experiences
to those who they feel need to know about them. As mentioned in Chapter Three,
students have already embraced the idea of sharing their knowledge. While this thesis and any resulting academic publications may reach a particular set of educators and researchers, the students felt teachers and trainee teachers would benefit the most from hearing their experiences. This is a belief shared by Fitzgerald and Stride (2012). They agree, “It is important that these suppressed voices are heard by undergraduate students and practitioners who often perpetuate sporting discourses associated with ableism and hegemonic masculinity” (p. 286). The messages students in this research would like to share with these people include the importance of listening to students with physical disabilities. Also, the importance of looking beyond their bodies’ perceived abilities and differences and recognising the value that students with physical disabilities can bring to the classroom is an important message the students wished to share.

Each student had different ideas about how they would like their stories to be shared with those who matter to them. Holly and Shane wish to engage in public speaking and advocacy work around their university – something they have done thus far with great enthusiasm. Connor feels acting would be a good medium to communicate the importance of including students with physical disabilities. Kelly and Cody think drawings and photographs would be a powerful way to share the message that students with physical disabilities are just like every other student.

The value and quality of the research dissemination hinges on the relationships I have developed with the students throughout the project. In order to encourage students to actively engage in this dissemination, research relationships must extend beyond ‘data’ gathering. However, balancing such relationships are difficult. Despite research dissemination being of great importance for me, for the students it is another commitment on top of their everyday lives. Therefore, organising meetings and planning for how we disseminate this research to their ‘target’ audiences must also be
viewed through the students’ perspectives. For Connor in particular, despite enthusiasm for the project, school, work and cultural commitments left little time for him to refine the play he wrote for this thesis to a standard he felt was acceptable.

**Future Research**

This research has also identified further avenues to be explored regarding the educational experiences of students with physical disabilities. While I focused on Physical Education, it seemed other educational experiences played a larger role in shaping these experiences. In particular, I believe a deeper examination of special education and associated experiences would shed light on other ways of knowing how students with physical disabilities experience, and are impacted by, education more broadly. Such an examination may also have implications for more clear-cut, definitive policy – particularly as the consequences of the confused nature of New Zealand educational policy for students with physical disabilities, was evident in this thesis.

This research has focused solely on students with physical disabilities. While this was related to my interest in the body, movement and the physical nature of Physical Education, I feel other students would have similarly insightful knowledge about education that they may wish to share with researchers and educators. As Shane pointed out, students with intellectual disabilities at his school were treated like second class citizens: isolated, separated and often insulted by those entrusted to teach them. These experiences largely fly under the radar in education, yet, as Shane pointed out, frequently occur.
As Holly’s quote at the beginning of this thesis demonstrates, the students hoped this research would demonstrate the value in seeking students with physical disabilities’ opinions about Physical Education. In doing so, they hoped to improve the future Physical Education experiences of students with physical disabilities. To conclude this thesis, I hand over to the students. As Holly suggested, having the ‘last word’ is a way of recognising their contribution and respecting them as researchers. Unfortunately, at the point of submission for this thesis, Cody is overseas and thus unable to send his ‘last words’. Instead, I have inserted an email from Liz about the choices Cody started to make within Physical Education following our meetings. Also, Angela is busy with internal assessments as she aims to get top of her year group, and Connor, while keen to engage in research dissemination, is currently “snowed under” with school work as he aims to become the 2014 Dux of his school.

**Holly’s Last Words**

Disability and sport... It can be a topic with many different views to appreciate. As a person with a physical impairment studying PE, I had had some weird looks believe me. It’s been a bumpy road. I will love and hate disability till the day it ends, in the meantime let’s start to try to accept it!!! Studies like these help improve it, but WE have to help change it. WE abled and disabled need to work together!

**Kelly’s Last Words**

I feel more confident and responsible. I like someone like Kate who understands the way I feel. I really enjoy the interviewing since that helps and things come to my mind, like great ideas for drawing. It helps to understand. Thank you, I just want to be the way I am, I don’t care what people say or change me I always be myself. I am happy in my school and I believe a few of my problems are solved I am happy with my family and my goal levels are building up slowly. I am happy with the good thinking of hiding my real name you are really detailed using your big words it’s almost a story. Except not an action right?
Figure 5: Kelly's drawing of research production

Kelly’s drawing reads:

Kate: So Kelly, How did you feel about school and disabled?

Kelly: I feel confused at school learning lots making friends, every each year in my 4 years of high school so far has got better and improving myself slowly. I believe disabled can do anything I believe.

Shane’s Last Words

I think it’s important to know about people’s lives and how people are treated. People don’t realise that we weren’t involved in PE! Well I wasn’t and people didn’t realise that. And it might have had social implications. You know, you’re not with your peers and you don’t gain the respect. It’s good to get peoples perspectives of PE, like not just one but heaps of different perspectives and it give you more to write about! It’s a hard area to research, because there’s not lots of experts on PE and people with disabilities. But in this thesis there are quite a lot of things from academics, which is good.

If I was doing it again, I would have interviewed all the different types of people, but I probably wouldn't have done so much of the academic stuff, because they haven’t walked in our shoes. It doesn't matter how much research they do, they haven’t experienced it. So I still would have put some academic stuff in, but more people with disabilities, but it’s hard.

It’s important to share this research with people, especially teachers. Maybe we could send it around different schools, because that's where the problem is, it’s with the schools. But it’s hard to say whether teachers would take it in or not. I don't really like teachers tho, so I am biased!
Cody’s Last Words

Hi Kate
Just a wee update. Tried to e-mail this info at the time but our system was down. Here it is now.

On 5th March, for the very first time, he signed he wanted to do badminton at PE. We were in the gym and he signed badminton, pointed to the basketball hoop and the back wall. It was very clear he was making a choice about what he wanted to do that session.

So I hung the shuttlecock off the basketball hoop, as we did last year, and he hit it with the racket. Then we went and hit them off the back wall, again as we did last year. We haven’t done badminton this year so it was good to see him choosing something he wanted to do.

This is the first time he has said he wanted to do a sporting activity. Lets hope this occurs more often.

Bye

Figure 6: Email from Cody's teacher aide
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My name is Kate Holland and I am a PhD student at the University of Otago. I am researching students with physical impairments’ experiences of physical education, sport and physical activity. Thank you for showing interest in this study.

Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not you wish your child to participate. If you decide to allow your child to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you or your child and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is being undertaken by Kate Holland as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago. As you may be aware, not too many researchers listen to students’ stories of their participation in physical education, sport or other forms of physical activity they may be required to partake in throughout their time at school or engage in by choice. I would like to give your child the opportunity to discuss their experiences of these topics, in particular what they have enjoyed and what they have not. The overall aim of this project is to understand how students with physical impairments experience and negotiate their way through physical activities, in relation to ideas of the body, health and ‘disability’.

To do so, I would like to talk with your child a number of times to discuss the experiences of physical education, sport, physical activity that have been important for them, and how these made them feel.

What participants are being sought?

The participants being sought are high school students, who have some form of physical impairment. Your child’s identity and information will remain anonymous to everyone. The only people who will have access to the information you or your child provides is myself, and my supervisors, Associate Professor Lisette Burrows and Dr. Gill
Rutherford. At any time during this study your child is invited to access the information which has been provided by them.

What will participants be asked to do?

Should you give consent for your child to take part in this project; your child will be asked to participate in about three discussions of about 30 – 60 minutes duration. These will occur about two weeks apart and will run over a period of about six weeks.

The initial interview will be orientated towards getting to know each other and discussing your child’s thoughts on school, physical education, sport and other forms of physical activity. The following two discussions will hone in on more specific topics, which will depend on what your child feels is important to discuss. Your child will be given a sheet of topics which might help them in the discussion of particular experiences or memories of physical education, sport and physical activities.

It is not foreseen that students will experiences any discomfort or risk associated with participating in this research, however, should your child feel uncomfortable at any stage, they will be reminded of their right to withdraw entirely from the research, or to decline answering questions or participating in the research, at no disadvantage to them. Should any issues be raised by the student which results in emotional distress or that I feel is a cause for concern, the student will be supported and encouraged to approach school or family support networks and I will ensure that appropriate action will be taken to resolve any issues.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

Personal details, in the form of age, type of school, and impairment will be gathered from your child. However, your child’s name and school will not be identifiable in any data. Instead they and every other identifiable name will be allocated a pseudonym. Every effort will be made to maintain your child’s anonymity throughout the study.

With your child’s permission, these interviews will be tape recorded, and the recording will be destroyed after each interview has been transcribed and all identifying features removed.

Your child will then be given a copy of the transcript to read over, and will be given the opportunity to correct or withdraw any information that they have provided. Consultation will also occur with your child at this stage as to the way they wish the information to be communicated to other students, parents or educational professionals who they feel their stories should reach. This research will be also presented in academic publications and resultant conference presentations, only with consent from your child to do so.

Transcripts will be securely stored in such a way that only those directly involved in the research (myself, Kate Holland, and my supervisors Associate Professor Lisette Burrows and Dr. Gill Rutherford) will have access to it. Data obtained as a result of the research will be retained for at least 5 years in secure storage. Any personal information held on the participants (such as contact details and audio tapes, after they have been transcribed) will be destroyed at the completion of the research project even though the data derived from the research will, in most cases, be kept for much longer or possibly indefinitely.
Any of the information gathered may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand). However, every attempt will be made to preserve your child’s anonymity.

This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes:

A) Your child’s experiences of physical education and wider physical activity, including what they enjoy, dislike or wish to change;

B) Your child’s sense of belonging within physical education, sport or recreation settings, including what makes/made them like or dislike physical education, what makes/made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the class; and

C) Your child’s thoughts on how and why your child would change physical education, sport and recreation to be more inclusive for future students, and what they think people should know about, or do to, include students with physical disabilities in physical education and sport.

The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interviews develop and on information gathered from observations. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that your child feels hesitant or uncomfortable they will be reminded of their right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that they may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to themselves of any kind.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You or your child may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to your child of any kind.

What if participants have any questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Kate Holland and/or Associate Professor Lisette Burrows
Department of Physical Education
University of Otago
Email: kate.holland@otago.ac.nz
Phone: 479 5281 / 027 371 8483
Email: lisette.burrows@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256) and quote the reference code: 11/241. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
My name is Kate Holland and I am a PhD student at the University of Otago. I am interested in finding out about your experiences of physical education, sport and physical activity. I would like to invite you to take part in this study.

Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not you wish to participate. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and I thank you for considering my request.

**What is the aim of the project?**

The aim of the project is to learn about how students with physical disabilities experience physical education, sport and physical activities throughout their lifetime. I am interested in hearing your opinions and experience of physical education, sport and other activities, including what you like, what you don’t like and what you would change about the things that you have been involved in. I am doing this project as part of my study for a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago.

**Who is taking part in this study?**

Participants in this study are high school students between years 9-13 who have a physical impairment. You have been identified by the H* Trust as fitting these criteria. If you would like to take part, you will be one of several participants who will take part in this study. You will be able to look at all the information you provide to me during the study.

**What will participants be asked to do?**

If you agree to take part in this study, I ask you and your parents/guardians to sign the consent forms that are attached to these sheets. These forms say you understand what the study is about and you would like to take part in it.

This study involves three discussion sessions, where we talk about your opinions and experiences of physical education, sport and other activities. Rather than me asking you a lot of questions about what I want to know, I would like to hear what you think is important, and to talk about whatever experiences, memories or thoughts about these topics that you would like to share. To help with this, I will give you a sheet with a few ideas of things we could talk about and a few questions that might help you think about what you would like to say.
How will information be collected and used?

The information that I collect from these discussion sessions will be tape recorded so I can remember what is said. If there are some things that you don't want tape recorded, we will turn the tape off. After each interview I will write out what was said using code names so you can't be identified, and then I will delete the tape. I will give you a copy of each interview to read and see if you want to change anything you said. My copies of the interview will be kept in a locked cabinet at the university, or on my computer in a password protected folder. The only other people who will see the information collected are my supervisors, Lisette Burrows and Gill Rutherford.

The information that is collected will be used in writing my thesis and may be used in academic publications or at conferences. I would also like to share the information in ways that people, such as other students or parents can read and understand what the research is about. You will be consulted about the best way to do this, and all your ideas and inputs will be taken into account and most appreciated. However, your name, your school or anyone else's name that we talk about will not be used in any writing to ensure you maintain your privacy.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You can change your mind and withdraw from any, or all parts of the project at any stage with no disadvantage to yourself.

What if participants have any questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Kate Holland and/or Associate Professor Lisette Burrows
Department of Physical Education Department of Physical Education
University of Otago University of Otago
Email: kate.holland@otago.ac.nz Email: lisette.burrows@otago.ac.nz
Phone: 479 5281 Phone: 027 371 8483

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256) and quote the reference code: 11/241. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

I have been told about this study and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered in a way that I understand.

I know that:

1. Participation in this study is voluntary, which means that I do not have to take part if I don’t want to and nothing will happen to me. I can also stop taking part at any time and don’t have to give a reason.

2. Anytime I want to stop, that’s okay.

3. Kate will audiotape me during any interviews so that she can remember what I say, but the recording will be erased after the study has ended.

4. If I don’t want to answer some of the questions, that’s fine.

5. If I have any worries or if I have any other questions, then I can talk about these with Kate.

6. The paper and computer file with my words will only be seen by Kate and the people she is working with. They will keep whatever I say private.

7. I will receive a small gift as thanks from Kate for helping with this study.

8. Kate will write up the results from this study for her University work. The results may also be written up in journals and talked about at conferences. My name will not be on anything Kate writes up about this study.

I agree to take part in the study.

……………………………  ………………………………  …………………
Signed               Name         Date

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256) and quote the reference code: 11/241. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage. I know that:

1. My child’s participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. I am free to withdraw my child from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

3. Personal identifying information such as audio tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project, but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;

4. This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes your child’s experiences of physical education. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that my child feels hesitant or uncomfortable he/she may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

5. Your child will be asked about their experiences and feelings about physical education and their school experiences. Should any emotional distress or discomfort occur during this time, the researcher will do her best to resolve any issue and provide adequate support where she sees fit.

6. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my child’s anonymity.
I agree for my child to take part in this project.

...............................................................
(Signature of parent/guardian) .......................................
............................................................................
(Name of child)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256) and quote the reference code 11/241. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
THINGS WE COULD TALK ABOUT

This project is about your opinions and experiences of physical education, sport and activities. But it might not be something you have thought about before now. And sometimes it is hard to know where to start, or what to say. This sheet is to help you think about what you could talk about. But remember we don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want to, it’s up to you! Feel free to add or take out topics, make notes, draw pictures, take photos, or do anything that you think would help explain your experiences and opinions of PE to others.

Some topics that we could talk about:

Activities you might do with your family and friends

Sports you like/don’t like to play and watch and why

How you could describe your school, physical education class, and teachers

Your understanding of the words ‘health’ ‘healthy bodies’

Your experiences in PE classes, camps, sports days etc.

How PE makes you feel about your body

Questions I would love to hear your answers to:

What do you think is really important for people (teachers, parents, peers, teacher aides etc.) to know about students with impairments in PE classes?

What are some experiences that you’ve had that could have been better if people knew that…

Questions that I might ask help you explain your thoughts might sound like:

Describe you best/worst/first memory of … PE/Sport/athletics days/swimming sports/school camps etc

How did this make you feel about … yourself/peers/students/teacher aides?

What is your favourite/least favourite thing about…?

Can you explain how you feel when…?

What influences your feelings about…health/disabilities/bodies