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*Title*

‘Disable them all’: SENCO and LSA conceptualisations of inclusion in physical education

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## *Abstract*

There is a propensity for academics and policy makers in Britain to use the terms integration and inclusion synonymously, possibly resulting in diverse interpretations of the inclusion principles laid out in the new National Curriculum. Much of the research available relating to conceptualisations of inclusion in physical education (PE) is from the perspective of teachers. Moreover, PE as a relatively unique learning environment is often neglected in much of the research that does analyse educational inclusion. In this paper, the key theoretical tools of cultural studies, in particular the concept of cultural hegemony, are used to analyse how special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and learning support assistants (LSAs) conceptualise inclusion in mainstream secondary school PE in Britain. Semi-structured, individual interviews explored SENCO (n=12) and LSA (n=12) educational ideologies and experiences of SEN and inclusion in PE. Open, axial and selective coding was undertaken to systematically analyse (textual) data. The research found that most conceptualisations reflected a social ideology because they focused on how educational arrangements can be made to ensure that pupils with SEN have comparable learning experiences to their age peers. Emphasis was placed on the power and influence of PE teachers, and the importance of identifying the specific needs and capabilities of pupils with SEN, as ways of ensuring that an inclusive culture can develop and is maintained in PE. The paper concludes by arguing that PE teachers and LSAs need access to PE-specific and up-to-date guidance and learning targets so that they can use the influence they have over the norms and values of PE to cultivate an inclusive culture in that subject.

## *Key Words*

Cultural studies; inclusive education; learning support assistants; physical education; special educational needs; special educational needs coordinators.

## *Introduction*

Educational 'integration' is said to involve pupils with special educational needs (SEN) acceding to dominant culture by espousing the established arrangements of (physical) education that are planned for those without SEN (Fredrickson and Cline, 2002). However, there is little consensus regarding educational 'inclusion', especially among British policy makers, academics and education professionals. An academic conceptualisation of inclusion

can lie on a spectrum ranging from planning physical education (PE) curriculum that suit the needs and capabilities of all pupils (Oliver and Barnes, 2010), to radically restructuring the culture of schools through policies, learning, teaching and assessment so that pupils with SEN can have enjoyable and meaningful educational experiences (Fitzgerald, 2012). Here, it seems that a pupil's SEN is the consequence of a rigid mainstream school culture; if PE curriculum was developed from the outset to capitalise on pupils' capabilities and cater for individual learning needs then educational provision additional to that offered to the majority of pupils would not be required (Terzi, 2005).

In Britain, the concept of SEN has historic currency and is used widely in academic literature. According to the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfE/DoH, 2015), a child of compulsory school age has a SEN if they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of their age peers, which requires additional education provision to be made to prevent disadvantage. This conceptualisation, however, may be hindered by a tension between attempts to treat all learners the same to avoid being labelled as 'different', and a duty to respond adequately to the needs of individual pupils. This has led some to problematize SEN (see, for example, Terzi 2005) and call for its reconceptualisation through the capabilities approach to overcome the tension at the centre of dilemmas of difference.

The findings of a number of educational studies in Britain suggest that while an inclusive discourse underpins much education policy, in practice, there seems to be a discrepancy between the experiences and opportunities available to pupils with and without SEN in mainstream schools. Some pupils with SEN spend less time doing PE and often participate in a restricted curriculum *vis-à-vis* their age-peers (Fitzgerald, 2005). In endeavouring to explain

these disparate educational experiences, Smith (2004) suggests that the way many teachers conceptualise inclusion, and what they said they did in practice, was actually indicative of educational integration. Here, the onus was often on the pupils with SEN to integrate themselves into lessons that had been planned for the ostensibly more-able pupils. Thus, the case for understanding key stakeholder conceptualisations of inclusion is apparent because of the way in which they can influence attempts to be inclusive.

Vickerman (2002) argues that academics and policy makers in Britain contribute to conceptual ambiguity by using the terms integration and inclusion synonymously. One possible unintended consequence of conceptual ambiguity is that it may result in diverse interpretations of the inclusion principles laid out in the new national curriculum (DfE, 2014). Therefore, all of those involved in shaping the (inclusive) norms and values of PE may need to understand the conceptual differences between inclusion and integration if they are to restrict the unplanned outcomes of the PE curriculum (Haycock and Smith, 2010). An inclusive curriculum should facilitate, rather than hinder, the British Government's inclusion objectives of: (1) setting suitable learning challenges; (2) responding to pupils' needs; (3) overcoming potential barriers (DfE, 2014). While it is challenging to establish consensus among key stakeholders, the interpretation of inclusion may be determined by those involved in shaping inclusive PE curriculum.

Much of the research available in Britain relating to conceptualisations of inclusion in PE is from the perspective of teachers. Moreover, PE as a relatively unique learning environment is often neglected in much of the research that does analyse educational inclusion. Therefore, this article analyses of how education policy, process and practice shape special educational needs

coordinator (SENCO) and learning support assistant (LSA) conceptualisations of inclusion in secondary schools in Britain. It is important to understand SENCO conceptualisations of inclusion because ideologies – that is, established webs of ideas and beliefs (Mannheim, 1936) – often inform action (Elias, 1978) and some hold key decision-making positions within the organisational and operational structure of schools (Maher and Macbeth, 2013) which means that they can influence, to degrees, the extent to which school policy and pedagogical practice is inclusive. In short, SENCOs are able to influence the culture of schools and determine, based on how *they themselves* conceptualise inclusion, whether or not an inclusive culture develops in PE. While LSAs do not hold key decision making positions in schools, they too play a key role in shaping an inclusive culture in secondary education in Britain as key facilitators of inclusion at the level of curriculum delivery (Maher, 2014). The ideologies and actions of these two groups help to shape the culture of PE and, thus, impact on the actions of all those who are involved in the subject. Cultural theory, in particular Gramsci's ideas relating to cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), have been used as a theoretical framework to underpin the research.

### *Cultural hegemony in (inclusive) education*

Cultural hegemony refers to the ways in which those in key decision making positions, such as policy makers and senior management in schools, use the influence they have over the means (educational institutions) and mechanisms (policy and funding streams) of cultural production to shape norms and values (Sissel and Sheard, 2001) relating to conceptualisations of inclusion and inclusive pedagogies. Power and influence is often exercised through the dissemination of established ideologies relating, in this instance, to the ways in which PE can be, should be, or is inclusive. If these hegemonic ideologies are accepted by those involved in shaping the

(inclusive) culture of PE at the level of curriculum delivery, such as LSAs and SENCOs, they can influence the ways in which lessons are planned, delivered and resourced. It is important to note, however, that those who may, at first, seem less powerful, are able to resist to varying degrees the wants and wishes (Hall, 1981) of policy makers and school senior managers. Indeed, educational norms and values are historically-rooted and actively negotiated, over time, by all of those involved in shaping the culture of education. Therefore, whilst LSAs and SENCOs may be involved in reinforcing established educational ideologies relating to conceptualisations of inclusion, they too can play an active role in shaping cultural norms and values relating to inclusive PE because of the influence they have over the educational experiences of their pupils (Maher and Macbeth, 2013). For this paper, culture refers to the ‘way of life’ of LSAs and SENCOs; that is, their established and common-sense ideologies, power relations and rituals. Here, ideologies refer to established webs of educational ideas and values that often influence what LSAs and SENCOs do in practice (Mannheim, 1936); power refers to the ability of LSAs and SENCOs to influence the actions of others (Elias, 1978); and rituals are the socially agreed collective activities of LSAs and SENCOs (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Robert, 2006) While this only goes some way to explaining the complexity of cultural studies in its broadest sense (see, for more, Barker, 2008), it will serve here as an introduction to the conceptual tools underpinning the research.

### *Methodology*

The data was generated via individual interviews with SENCOs (n= 12) and LSAs (n=12) as part of a much broader research project. While Stage One of the research methodology surveyed *all* SENCOs and LSAs working in mainstream secondary schools in North-West England, the individual interviews conducted during Stage Two explored educational

ideologies and experiences in greater depth. A semi-structured format was used because it allowed for the identification and exploration of those serendipitous areas that have not been planned for as they emerged from the dynamic verbal interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Yeo *et al.*, 2013). When discussing SENCO and LSA educational ideologies and experiences it is important to adopt a more flexible approach so that the participants can take the lead and shape their own narrative to minimise bias (Arthur *et al.*, 2013) and allow SENCOs and LSAs to explore issues germane to them. However, to ensure that the interviews had a degree of structure and consistency, and that the discussion was germane to the research focus, the research objectives, findings from Stage One of the research, and the key concepts of cultural hegemony, (educational) ideologies, power (coercive and persuasive) and cultural (educational) rituals structured the interview guide.

### *Participants and interview process*

All of those who agreed, in the web surveys, to participate in Stage Two of the research were contacted, using the details they provided, via email for interview. This form of purposeful sampling (Webster *et al.*, 2013) was strategic rather than pragmatic because it is criterion-based in that people are recruited for interview that share characteristics relevant to the research questions (Mason, 2002). The criteria for recruitment of participants were that the SENCOs and LSAs: (1) had to be currently working in a mainstream school in North-West England; (2) had to have experience supporting pupils with SEN in PE; and (3) had to have completed the web survey. A sample size was not considered at the start of the research; instead, a list of all those who agreed to participate in Stage Two (SENCO n=36; LSA n=54) was collated and, starting at the beginning of the list, SENCOs and LSAs were interviewed until saturation was achieved. There comes a point when additional interviews yield little new knowledge (Webster



*et al.*, 2013) and, thus, become a fruitless endeavour. Saturation for SENCO interviews came during the twelfth interview because no new information of significance to the central themes of the research was gathered, and the decision was made to interview twelve LSAs for consistency despite LSA interview saturation being achieved at the tenth interview. By this time, patterns and relationships across interview data were evident (Bryman, 2012; Saldana, 2009) because a detailed tapestry of SENCO and LSA educational ideologies and experiences had emerged which allowed for an in-depth analysis of SENCO and LSA conceptualisations of inclusion in PE. Interviews were conducted in the schools of SENCOs and LSAs, and each interview lasted between 30 and 120 minutes depending on the time available to participants and the depth and relevance of answers provided by each participant.

### *Interview recording and transcription*

All SENCOs and LSAs agreed verbally for the interviews to be recorded using an audio device. It was explained to each participant that once the audio files were uploaded to a passcode file on a personal computer, they would be deleted from the device to ensure data protection. After each interview the audio recording was transcribed verbatim at the earliest possible opportunity to allow the researcher to immerse themselves in the data and to ensure that any ambiguous terms, phrases or points present in the recordings could be accurately interpreted through recall of the interview situation (Kvale, 2007). Pseudonyms were used to protect identities. Guba and Lincoln (1994) call on researchers to establish ways of assessing the quality of qualitative approaches to research, such as this, that act as alternatives to the traditional quantitative attempts to prove 'validity' and 'reliability'. Endeavouring to establish validity and reliability is based on an assumption that all actors, SENCOs and LSAs in this instance, share a social reality. However, this research aimed to discover SENCO and LSA interpretations, rather than

an absolute account, of social reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Respondent validation (Bryman, 2012), thus, is important because it enables us to ensure that SENCOs and LSAs can reveal their social world as they experience and give meaning to it. Hence, once interviews were transcribed, the text was emailed to the participant to seek corroboration between the textual interpretation of the interview and SENCO and LSA educational ideologies and experiences. None of the SENCOs or LSAs disputed the textual interpretation of their interview.

### *Interview data analysis*

Transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO and read over and over again so that, coupled with the transcription process, data immersion occurred (Bryman, 2012). Initial, open coding was then performed, which involved the systematic analysis of data and the allocation of labels to sections of text that appeared significant to the social realities of SENCOs and LSAs (Saldana, 2009). Next, axial coding was performed to identify relationships between the initial codes so that they could be organised into themes (Bryman, 2012). Through the systematic filtering and ordering of data, NVIVO helped increase the rigour of analysis (Flick, 2009) because analysis occurred across all data, not just those that support the researcher's interpretation (Seale, 2010). The issues relating to conceptualisation of inclusion in PE structure the findings and discussion presented below. SENCO and LSA accounts are separated to reflect their positions within the school hierarchy and, thus, their differing social realities and views of inclusion in PE.

### *Findings and Discussion*

#### *SENCO conceptualisations of inclusion*

In order to understand the ideological basis of attempts to create an inclusive culture in schools generally, and PE in particular, SENCOs and LSAs were asked what they believe inclusion entails. SENCO H (male, aged 38), for example, suggested:

If you were to have a fully inclusive lesson, you would know every single child's needs, every single child's starting point and every single child's learning style. You would basically have an individual lesson plan with each of your children, which would relate to the overall lesson plan.

Most of the answers provided by SENCOs were in keeping with a social ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) of inclusion in education because they focused on how SENCOs, teachers and LSAs can change established educational rituals (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Robert, 2006) to ensure that pupils with SEN have comparable learning experiences as their age peers. Emphasis was often placed at some point during the interviews (SENCOs A, B, D, E, I, J, L) on the importance of identifying the needs and requirements of pupils with SEN. Once learning needs have been identified, teachers and LSAs can use the information as part of their endeavours to cultivate an inclusive PE culture through inclusive pedagogies. Relevant and subject-specific information and learning targets can be used as a cultural mechanism (Hall, 1981) of symbolic exchange to increase teacher and LSA knowledge and understanding of how best to meet pupil needs and capitalise on their capabilities (Maher, 2013).

SENCO G (female, aged 60) mentioned the importance of catering for a diverse range of learning styles: 'Multisensory. Hear, say, see, do. If you can use those four approaches in a lesson, you are going to give the strength of every learner an opportunity to flourish because we all have strengths; we all learn in different ways'. Again, the emphasis is placed here on the agency of PE teachers, who may be considered at first as a subordinate group in the school

power structure because they do not hold a key decision making position (Gramsci, 1971), to ensure that an inclusive PE culture develops. The comments also highlight the interdependent nature of social relations and demonstrate the power – that is, one’s ability to achieve objectives through persuasion or coercion (Elias, 1978) – of the pupils themselves insofar as their learning needs and actions are influencing the actions of others within the school. That is, SENCOs, PE teachers and LSAs, it seems, are purposively responding to, and endeavouring to cultivate an inclusive culture because of, the needs of pupils with SEN. It is the dependency of individuals and groups on the actions of others, together with individual and collective ideologies (Mannheim, 1936) and biographies (Mills, 1959), that can influence their own actions (Elias, 1978). When discussing PE specifically, SENCO A (female, aged 38) suggested that a wide range of physical activities should be provided so that pupils can participate in one or more that are most appropriate for them:

I think that a wholly inclusive PE lesson would be when there are lots of different activities going on... You need to look at the skills that people have got and use them to the best rather than forcing them to do a particular sport.

The logistical challenges of planning and delivering lessons that include different pupils playing different activities aside, it is noteworthy that there was no mention of differentiation or pupil progression in PE. For SENCO A (female, aged 38), it appeared that pupils having ownership over the specific activities they would experience was a panacea to the challenges of inclusion in mainstream PE. SENCO A (female, aged 38) seemed quite critical of teachers using their influence over the culture of PE to coerce pupils to participate in a planned activity, which is perhaps surprising given that it is doubtful that pupils would have the power to ‘opt out’ of doing algebra, or ‘opt in’ to differentiated learning, during mathematics. This point, perhaps, is indicative of the ritualised subordinate status of PE within many schools (Maher, 2014; Maher and Macbeth, 2013). Moreover, if we are to accede that ideological leadership –

persuading people to accept beliefs, ideas and values as a way of gaining their support and influencing their actions – is a more effective means than, say, coercion, for ensuring that aims and objectives are achieved (Althusser, 1971), those in positions of authority such as PE teachers should attempt to persuade pupils of the educational, social and psychological value of the activities delivered as a way of trying to ensure pupil cooperation. Consensus may only come through acceptance of hegemonic ideologies and rituals (Gramsci, 1971).

One potential limitation of teachers having so much influence over the inclusive culture of their subject is that research conducted elsewhere (Smith, 2004) suggests that many PE teachers expect pupils with SEN to assimilate into the structure of the National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) and the common sense established arrangements (Giroux, 1999) of PE lessons that are intended for those pupils without SEN (Fredrickson and Cline, 2002). The continued perpetuation of this educational ritual as a cultural norm has resulted in some pupils with SEN spending less time in PE lessons and often participating in a narrower PE curriculum when compared to their age peers (Fitzgerald, 2005; Smith, 2004). Therefore, given that part of the SENCO role is to advise (PE) teachers on inclusion and SEN (DfES, 2001), the onus is partly on them and partly on teacher education providers such as universities to ensure that teachers understand the conceptual basis of inclusion so that it can inform the ways in which they shape the inclusive norms and values of their subject. This will help to ensure that common sense arrangements (Gramsci, 1971) in PE, which appear to disadvantage some pupils with SEN, can change through contestation by SENCOs and teacher educators. Only then may UNESCO's policy guidelines on inclusion in education (2009) be achieved.

Whilst many SENCOs (B, C, E, G, J, K) at some point during the interviews explicitly promoted ideologies that value inclusive teaching and learning strategies, SENCO J (female, aged 52) highlighted the importance of making changes to the physical learning environment: 'It's about the whole environment such as the accessibility to the classroom and where desks were placed so the students weren't excluded' (SENCO J). Although this specific comment relates to classroom teaching, the principle becomes perhaps even more relevant when applied to an analysis of physical culture and corporeal practices in subjects like PE. For example, Morley *et al.* (2005) suggest that PE teachers in their study found it easier to facilitate inclusion during indoor activities; the natural physical terrain of outdoor activities posed additional challenges such as safety concerns.

SENCO I (female, aged 55) suggested that inclusion simply involves pupils with SEN being educated in the same learning environment as pupils without SEN: 'Pupils are included by the fact that they're in a mainstream class'. SENCO J (female, aged 52) extended this point by suggesting that inclusion is much more than sharing a learning space. They were particularly critical of segregating pupils with SEN from their age peers, even if it occurs within the same learning space:

I'll tell you what it [inclusion] won't include; it would not include a special needs table where all the children sit who've got some sort of 'problem' [emphasis added by SENCO] because that's not inclusion at all (SENCO J).

Again, whilst this educational ideology is geared towards a classroom-based subject – which, perhaps, says something about the extent to which PE forms a part of the SENCO's inclusion objectives – the principle is relevant to PE. Many pupils and PE teachers have argued that the separation and isolation of some pupils with SEN is an established educational tradition in PE,

which can have a detrimental effect on their social interaction with age peers and confidence in PE (Fitzgerald, 2005). Some PE teachers, therefore, appear to be involved in the (re)production of an education culture (Gramsci, 1971) that normalises segregation and, thus, reinforces rather than challenges the subordination of pupils with SEN in PE despite SENCO J (female, aged 52) in particular acknowledging this as poor practice. Ultimately, segregation within a mainstream setting negates many of the perceived benefits of educating pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, which are outlined elsewhere (see, for example, Shah *et al.*, 2004) with one in particular being mentioned by SENCO D (female, aged 53): ‘I know my kids aren’t frightened of people who are different... You know, they’ll talk to anybody and that’s what education is all about. That’s the sort of society we want to live in’. This comment is, of course, based on the proposition that peer acceptance equates to educational and social inclusion.

Whilst many of the SENCOs (B, C, D, E, G, J, K) interviewed acknowledged an ideological commitment to modify learning and teaching practices, SENCO D (female, aged 53) offered what might be considered a more radical approach:

I think it [inclusion] includes every single child in that class. When you go hill-walking you set your pace by the slowest person in that group and that for me is what PE should be about... If you’re doing volleyball then you do it on your bum. If you’re doing football and one is disabled then you should disable them all.

Developing and delivering lessons that cater for the needs of the least able, whether they have SEN or not, would perhaps help to more firmly establish ‘inclusion’ as an educational norm in schools. However, with government increasingly using its influence over school traditions, rituals and experiences, as policy makers and state school funders, to increase the significance of academic attainment as part of its standards agenda (DfE, 2012), it is unlikely that the

educational ideology outlined by SENCO D (female, aged 53) will become a common sense arrangement (Gramsci, 1971) in schools. In fact, according to the SENCO herself, the approach is not even supported by SMT in her own school:

I don't think they [SMT] would actively support it [the teaching approach outlined above]... They actually made it non-negotiable that there should be rapid learning through the lesson. I don't think that you have to go at break-neck pace to have rapid learning but that's what is happened here all the time (SENCO D).

There is an expressed concern amongst PE educationalists that attempts to develop an inclusive culture will have a negative impact of the 'progress' of the more able pupils (Morley *et al.*, 2005). This view is, to some degree, shared by SENCO G (female, aged 60) who suggested that: 'There may be a situation where you have a pupil who does have specific needs, and actually it means that the rest of that learning group never get to do certain things because that pupil can't do them. Is that inclusion?' The prevalence of this educational ideology is important because personal values will inform, to degrees, the extent to which an inclusive culture in PE develops despite the fact that research suggests (Kalambouka *et al.*, 2007) that there is little or no negative impact on the academic achievement of pupils without SEN. Rather, social benefits such as increased tolerance to individual differences and greater awareness and sensitivity to human diversity are mentioned (Kalambouka *et al.*, 2007). There are other SENCOs who are critical of government attempts to devolve power to pupils with SEN and their parents by giving them a legal right to a mainstream education (Stationary Office, 2001). SENCO E (female, aged 47), for example, argued that:

I have so much admiration for the teachers because it's so difficult teaching these groups. I think we have to look at a different school system. Special schools are perhaps a better environment for some of these kids (SENCO E).



SENCO E (female, aged 47) is not the first person, nor probably the last, to question the ideological and practical value of mainstreaming education for those pupils with the most diverse learning needs. Focus has been cast in this direction because SENCO and LSA perceptions of the value of the common sense arrangements of the established education system (Giroux, 1999) will inform, by degrees, the way in which they endeavour to shape the inclusive culture of PE. Regardless of ideological justification, teachers, according to SENCO H (male, aged 38), have a ‘very difficult job’ because learning needs and targets can be complex and extremely diverse. What also seems diverse is SENCOs’ conceptualisations of inclusion generally, and an inclusive culture in PE specifically. So far, a range of perspectives have been discussed but there has been some difficulty identifying a general consensus about what inclusion in PE entails from the perspective of SENCOs. One limitation of this point is that differential conceptualisations of inclusion may lead to differential experiences of PE across schools. The next section will analyse LSA conceptualisations of inclusion to give an insight into the ideological basis of their endeavours to cultivate an inclusive culture in PE.

### *LSA conceptualisations of inclusion*

Many of the LSAs (A, B, C, E, G, L, for example) interviewed suggested that inclusion is achieved when pupils with SEN have a physical and social presence within PE lessons. LSA B (female, aged 30), for instance, argued that inclusion is: ‘Having the pupil involved in the lesson with their peers’. Similarly, LSA G (female, aged 38) suggested that: ‘Inclusion means making sure that every child is included in the lesson so they’re not sitting outside’ (LSA G). Unfortunately, the nature and extent of the physical and social presence was not explored in any great depth. This was only really hinted at later when LSAs discussed pupils with SEN sharing of a learning environment while doing activities separate to their age-peers.

Nonetheless, whilst these comments do point towards an ideological commitment by LSAs to inclusion, affording a pupil access to the same curriculum and learning opportunities as their age peers does not mean that the curriculum will be inclusive. Learning outcomes must also be appropriate for pupils with SEN to ensure that they can achieve success and progress as learners.

LSA H (male, 56) is another who criticised segregation by commenting on the benefits of pupils sharing a learning space: 'I think it's great when the teacher involves the kids with SEN in the whole class and they don't treat them separately. I'm sure the kids must look at me and the child I'm with and say: he's with him and he's different'. Here, the LSA also hints at the potential impact of their presence on the ideologies of pupils without SEN. They openly suggested that the support they give pupils with SEN could contribute to those pupils being labelling as 'different'. Now, it is axiomatic that young people generally, and pupils with SEN more specifically, are not part of a homogenous group because of their increasingly diverse identity, ideologies and experiences (Hall, 1996). The concepts of sameness and difference are influenced by historical, social, economic and political factors (Hall, 1996) such as the established arrangements of the schools in which pupils find themselves. However, to be cast as 'different' by a group whose power may come from them being the majority can result in outsider status (Elias and Scotson, 1994). This point is supported by Beckett (2014) who found that established cultural schemas are often used in schools to maintain the privileged position of pupils without SEN. Despite the implications of being identified as different, LSA H (male, aged 56) continued by suggesting that the identification of difference does not have a negative impact on social interaction: 'They [pupils without SEN] just accept it [difference]. They just accept that that's what happens at school... They don't treat the child I'm with as being any different because they are their mates'. It is, perhaps, exposure to difference that has increased

knowledge and understanding of SEN and, thus, is helping to ameliorate social barriers between pupils with and without SEN.

Unlike LSA H (male, aged 56), LSA F (male, aged 22) is more concerned by the potential impact of their presence. They openly admit to developing a support strategy aimed at ensuring that pupils with SEN are not identified as different:

The main thing is that it's not noticeable who is deemed to have special educational needs. Even if I'm down to help a particular individual, I will never make it noticeable.... I'll aim to help the whole class... (LSA F).

It is perhaps unsurprising to hear that LSA F (male, aged 22) is attempting to limit the impact of their presence given that research suggests that LSA support in PE can have a detrimental impact on the learning and social interaction of pupils with SEN (Fitzgerald 2005) because physicality displayed through corporeal practices is highly valued so additional support can be associated with dependence and weakness. However, it is also noteworthy that, by supporting all of the pupils who require additional assistance, whether they have a SEN or not, the LSA may contribute to shaping an educational culture wherein LSA support is a normative process. This may, to some extent, challenge the propensity to marginalise to those who require LSA support. It may also mean that some pupils without SEN will achieve additional success in lessons – depending, of course, on how ‘success’ is defined and measured – because of the extra support. From the evidence provided it is difficult to determine whether LSA F (male, aged 22) has the power to freely develop and implement this support strategy, or whether it has been initiated by the SENCO and/or teachers. What the comments do illustrate, however, is the way in which the actions of the LSA – who some may, at first, consider to have relatively little influence because they do not hold a key decision making position within the school hierarchy

– shape how inclusive PE lessons are or can be. At the same time, however, the support strategy could mean that those pupils who have a SEN and, arguably, require the most support, may not be getting all of their learning needs met despite LSA F (male, aged 22) suggesting: ‘Obviously, if that individual [with SEN] needs individual attention then I’ll give it to them as and when needed’.

While many of the LSAs were critical of separating pupils with SEN from their age-peers, others suggested that, on occasion, segregation was necessary. LSA E (male, aged 22), for one, suggested that:

‘From the kids I’ve worked with it might be a little too much for them to be included in a mainstream lesson. If they were to be included in a group conversation within a mainstream class, ninety per cent of them would struggle’.

It is worth noting that these comments appear to be underpinned by an individual ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) because emphasis is placed on the problems of pupils when it comes to their assimilation into the established arrangements of the curriculum and learning and teaching strategies that have been planned for the majority of pupils. When the focus shifts to PE specifically, LSA I (male, 30) expressed a view that is also in keeping with an individual ideology:

In some cases... it [inclusion] still can’t work; it doesn’t work. For example, in a mainstream school the pupils should do a six week block of trampolining. Now, if that pupil can’t do trampolining because of his disability they’ll do an alternative activity.

Here, again, the emphasis is – even more explicitly – placed on the pupil not being able to perform an activity because of a perceived individual problem. From the evidence available it

is not clear who has decided to deliver an activity – trampolining – that is inaccessible to some pupils with SEN. Given the increasing flexibility of the NCPE and the upsurge in influence of teachers over its content, it could be inferred that some PE teachers are, whether knowingly or not, excluding some pupils with SEN through their choice of activities. Indeed, one outcome of not being able to assimilate into the established traditions of PE, according to LSA I (male, aged 30), was exclusion: ‘My responsibility was to remove that pupil out of the class, and I would do one-to-one sport with them. They would hardly ever take part in the PE lesson’. Removing pupils with SEN from the same learning environment as their age-peers appears as common PE culture in many schools (Fitzgerald, 2005) and, thus, is not a unique finding. However, what is perhaps of more interest is that it is claimed that attempts have been made to challenge the established traditions (Giroux, 1999) in PE:

I think this school has come a long way in what they’re trying to do [for inclusion]. We’ve managed to secure funding for 12 sports wheelchairs so we now have wheelchair sport as part of the curriculum. It’s not until everyone is on a completely even playing field that everyone is playing the same sport (LSA I).

Whilst earlier comments appeared to be underpinned by an individual ideology, the extract above is more in keeping with a social ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) because it focuses on how teachers and LSAs can plan and deliver lessons that meet the needs and emphasise the capabilities of all pupils. Whilst the physical limitations of the wheelchair user are perhaps at the heart of the decision to invest in sports wheelchairs, wheelchair basketball enables young disabled people to participate with/against young able-bodied people and, especially when Inclusive Zone basketball is delivered (British Wheelchair Basketball, 2014), young people with other impairments. This pedagogical approach is conceptualised as reverse integration by Black and Stevenson (2011) and promoted as one way in which teachers can ensure that inclusive ideologies underpin the nature and purpose of lessons. Many of those traditional

cultural activities that were developed by able-bodied people for able-bodied people such as football and rugby do not allow the same degree of inclusivity unless significant modification occurs (Morley *et al.*, 2005). Whilst the purchase and use of sports wheelchairs may go some way to increasing social interaction between pupils in PE, it should be noted that such specialist equipment is often expensive (Motivation Sports, 2014). Given the increasing financial constraints placed on PE departments in particular, it may not be feasible for other schools to invest in such expensive specialist equipment which cannot be used across the curriculum.

When discussing their conceptualisation of inclusion, LSA D (female, aged 22) mentioned adapting PE activities to ensure that all can participate:

[Inclusion is]... the fact that the pupil with SEN can still do what everyone else is doing. Not like, for example in PE, saying because he can't do that he can be the referee... They [pupil with SEN] should still do the lesson just maybe adapt it a little bit so they feel involved with all the pupils.

It may be inferred that LSA D (female, aged 22) has experienced pupils with SEN being asked to perform refereeing or other duties associated with an activity when they cannot assimilate into what has been planned. If the inference is accurate, this experience would not be unique (Fitzgerald 2005; Smith, 2004). What does not require inference is the explicit belief that adaptation and modification to a learning activity can help to ensure inclusion in PE. The extent to which a PE activity lends itself to modification depends largely on the activity being delivered and how closely the teacher and LSA(s) want to stay to the traditional format; some activities may require significant deviation from its established structure and rules before pupils with some of the most diverse learning needs can participate. Individual activities such as athletics, swimming, tennis, dance and gymnastics have been identified by PE teachers as being

easier to modify in an inclusive way than team games (Morley, *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, at an ideological level, modifying learning activities in PE is more aligned to a social ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) because emphasis is placed on how social arrangements can be made to ensure an inclusive culture develops in PE. The adaptation of learning activities and assessments in order to meet the needs and optimise the capabilities of all learners, not just those with SEN, is a key responsibility of all teachers, not just those who deliver PE. This should be an established and valued cultural norm rather than an exception.

It is interesting to note that LSA I (male, aged 30) viewed adaptation as an identifier of difference and, thus, something that pupils with SEN view negatively:

When you dig a little bit deeper the students [with SEN] actually hate the idea of the lesson being adapted to suit them. They become conscious that the rest of the pupils in the class don't enjoy it because their lesson becomes less fun.

Here, LSA I highlighted a point explored earlier, which relates to the potential impact of an inclusive PE culture on pupils without SEN. What is perhaps unique in this regard is that the LSA is commenting on the topic from the perspective of the pupils themselves, whereas other research has analysed this from the perspective of PE teachers (see Morley, *et al.*, 2005). Unfortunately, it is difficult to say with any degree of confidence whether this LSA's interpretation of the views and experiences of pupils with SEN is accurate. Therefore, future research will be required from the perspective of pupils with SEN. LSA I (male, aged 30) identified the culture of PE as being relatively unique in that conceptualisations of difference become more prominent: 'PE, more than any other subject, makes them [pupils with SEN] more aware of their difficulties; how different... they are to the rest of the pupils'. Difference, as a socially constructed concept, is dependent on established cultural norms and values that

may be unique to PE such as physical prowess and physical literacy as forms of physical capital (Fitzgerald, 2005). Therefore, those who cannot conform to the established ideologies of PE may 'become aware of their limitations [which is]... a constant reminder of how weak they are when compared to their peers' (LSA I).

### *Conclusion*

Most LSA and SENCO conceptualisations of inclusion reflected a social ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) because they focused on how social arrangements can be made during the planning and delivery of lessons to ensure that pupils with SEN have comparable learning experiences to their age peers. Emphasis was often placed on the importance of identifying the specific needs and requirements of pupils with SEN as a way of ensuring that an inclusive culture develops in PE. Therefore, it seems appropriate to recommend that all those involved in shaping the inclusive culture of PE, particularly those involved at the level of curriculum delivery, have access to PE-specific and up-to-date guidance and learning targets provided in the form of Statements of SEN or individual educational plans (IEPs). For this to happen, IEPs have to be constantly reviewed and, if necessary, amended to ensure their currency because SEN is a dynamic concept that changes over time, as does the needs and capabilities of pupils (with SEN) (Maher, 2013).

Both SENCOs and LSAs cast light on the power of teachers because it is their actions that determine, by degrees, learning experiences in PE. Thus, it becomes ever more important that PE teachers understand the conceptual basis of inclusion so that it can inform the ways in which they shape the inclusive norms and values of their subject. However, there may be some



reluctance to initiate significant structural and ideological change given that there is an expressed concern amongst SENCOs and LSAs that attempts to develop an inclusive culture will have a negative impact on the 'progress' of other pupils. This often results in some pupils being expected to perform duties associated with an established learning activity, separate from those performed by the majority of the class, because the pupil could not assimilate into established traditions and practices of PE.

One identified implication of segregation in education is that it can go some way to increasing the marginalisation of some pupils with SEN through being identified as 'different' and assigned outsider status (Elias and Scotson, 1994). It also means that some pupils with SEN are not receiving the same learning experiences as their age peers. For some SENCOs and LSAs there was an insistence that it was not always possible to cultivate a wholly inclusive PE culture. It is duly acknowledged that all those involved in attempts to cultivate an inclusive culture in PE face a difficult task given the diversity and complexity of pupil needs and, perhaps, a lack of knowledge and understanding of their capabilities. That is not to mention the SEN resource restrictions placed on many secondary PE departments (Maher and Macbeth, 2013). One way of addressing this issue may be to 'group' pupils in relation to ability so that they can participate with and against others whose learning needs and capabilities require similar provision. It is important to note that this form of 'setting' would occur within the same learning space so not to isolate the more or less able groups. While this form of 'setting' is prevalent in most, if not all, curriculum subjects, there is an acknowledgement that it may result in hierarchies emerging within and across these social groupings. Therefore, there is a requirement for teachers to develop more bespoke, creative and innovative lessons so that all pupils can have meaningful but challenging PE experiences without established and outsider relations developing (Elias and Scotson, 1994).

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