

### A Part of and Apart from Sport: Practitioners' Experiences Coaching in Segregated Youth Sport

Spencer-Cavaliere, Nancy; Thai, Jennifer; Kingsley, Bethan

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Spencer-Cavaliere, N., Thai, J., & Kingsley, B. (2017). A Part of and Apart from Sport: Practitioners' Experiences Coaching in Segregated Youth Sport. *Social Inclusion*, 5(2), 120-129. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v5i2.889>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Article

## A Part of and Apart from Sport: Practitioners' Experiences Coaching in Segregated Youth Sport

Nancy Spencer-Cavaliere<sup>\*</sup>, Jennifer Thai and Bethan Kingsley

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, AB T6G 2H9, Edmonton, Canada;  
E-Mails: ncavali@ualberta.ca (N.S.-C.), jen.thai@ualberta.ca (J.T.), bkingsle@ualberta.ca (B.K.)

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author

Submitted: 30 January 2017 | Accepted: 6 April 2017 | Published: 29 June 2017

### Abstract

Sport can present a site of exclusion for many youth who experience disability even when it has a focus on inclusion (Fitzgerald, 2009). While sport practitioners can play a critical role in creating inclusive environments, they frequently struggle to do so. As a consequence, the sport opportunities for young people who experience disability are often inadequate and inequitable. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of youth sport practitioners who teach and coach youth in primarily segregated settings. The overall goal was to gain a better understanding of how sport practitioners think about disability and sport within the context of their practices. Guided by the method of interpretive description, we interviewed 15 sport practitioners. Analysis of the data led to the overarching theme, 'a part of and apart from sport', highlighting the ways in which segregated youth sport was understood to be more or less inclusive/exclusive by sport practitioners. Within this overarching theme, four subthemes were drawn: a) authentic connections, b) diversity and adaptations, c) expectations same...but different, and d) (dis)ability and competitive sport. While highlighting the need for self-reflective and knowledgeable coaches, our findings also bring attention to the concepts of ability and ableism and their impacts on the sport opportunities of youth who experience disability. Our discussion highlights the need to question assumptions underlying segregated sport.

### Keywords

adapted physical activity; coach; disability; exclusion, inclusion; segregation; sport; youth

### Issue

This article is part of the issue "Sport for Social Inclusion: Questioning Policy, Practice and Research", edited by Reinhard Haudenhuyse (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium).

© 2017 by the authors; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

### 1. Introduction

Sport is an integral part of the composition of society, yet for young people who experience disability, it can represent a site of exclusion even when it has a focus on inclusion (Fitzgerald, 2009). Sport can in fact serve to both include and exclude youth who experience disability through a range of structural and socio-cultural factors (Goodwin & Peers, 2012). Inclusion and exclusion are not a binary but rather represent a spectrum of engagement or disengagement in and from sport (Macdonald, Pang, Knez, Nelson, & McCuaig, 2012). For example, exclusion can be a choice, reflecting a form of resistance

or it can be a process of othering when one is being excluded (Macdonald et al., 2012). Inclusion can represent a view of equal opportunity, a focus on social justice, or emphasis an individual's sense of belonging and acceptance (Fitzgerald & Jobling, 2009). In essence, both concepts capture a range of possibilities, which are further complicated when considered within a realm such as youth sport.

Just as inclusion and exclusion can be differently conceptualized, youth sport and the experiences produced therein are also diverse. This can in part be attributed to the goals of youth sport which can range from participatory, recreational, and educative to highly competi-

tive with a focus on elite development (DePauw, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2009). Youth sport is also undergirded by rarely questioned assumptions that it is inherently good and that through participation, youth will gain critical developmental benefits (Coakley, 2011). This logic is apparent when extended to youth who experience disability who are assumed to benefit through sport participation in a myriad of ways (e.g., physically, cognitively and socially) ultimately leading to greater inclusion in society (Smith, 2009). In her book, *Bringing Disability into Youth Sport*, Fitzgerald (2009) queries the goals of youth sport. In particular, she questions whether or not the goals of youth sport can in fact support the achievement of youth who experience disability. Fitzgerald draws attention to what she terms a fundamental contradiction between “understandings of ‘disability’ and ‘sport’ [in that] both emphasize physicality. However, sport is underpinned by precision in movement whereas disability often signifies deficiency” (p. 2). To better comprehend this contradiction, Fitzgerald calls for greater understanding of the experiences of youth who experience disability in sport and of the sport practitioners who teach and coach them.

Youth who experience disability have fewer opportunities to meaningfully take part in sport (Anderson, Wozencroft, & Bedini, 2008; Moran & Block, 2010). Research on the sport and recreation experiences of these youth are often permeated with accounts of feeling excluded due to the negative attitudes of others and lack of knowledge on the part of sport practitioners about disability and how to appropriately facilitate participation (e.g., Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Jones, 2003; Lee, Causgrove Dunn, & Holt, 2014; Tsai & Fung, 2009). Significant responsibility is placed on coaches when it comes to inclusion, yet little is known about their experiences and challenges in doing so (Spaaij, Magee, & Jeanes, 2014). Coaches have a critical influence on how youth who do and do not experience disability accept ability and disability differences, the potential of fighting discrimination based on ability, and promoting equality in sport (Dinold, Diketmüller, Grix, & Phillipots, 2013). Despite acknowledgement of the need for more research on the role of coaches in sport for people who experience disability, substantial attention has not been garnered in the literature (Tawse, Bloom, Sabiston, & Reid, 2012) and this is particularly the case for sport practitioners of youth who experience disability.

Any attempt to understand sport practitioners’ experiences coaching youth who experience disability must be foregrounded by an understanding of the varied contexts within which they coach and teach. Building from the work of Goodwin and Peers (2012), structurally we can consider three broad models or settings for inclusion in sport for youth who experience disability. The first setting is commonly referred to as disability sport, also known as parasport, and reflects sport contexts that are segregated. Segregated settings are typically comprised of only youth who experience disability, with or without similar impairments, and are designed to meet individ-

ual needs based on the presence of impairment. By contrast, mainstream settings tend to be those created for youth who do not experience disability but may include a few youth who do, thus the application of the term integrated when youth who experience disability are present. Integrated settings are not specifically designed to include youth who experience disability and while some may find inclusion within the mainstream, marginalization and exclusion are common. Lastly, alternative settings are described as contexts where innovative approaches are used to facilitate inclusion. An example is reverse integration, where youth who do and do not experience disability participate and compete with and against each other in sports originally designed for people with impairments such as, for example, wheelchair basketball (Goodwin & Peers, 2012).

Although segregated settings can provide opportunities for youth who experience disability to take part in recreational to elite level sport (e.g., Paralympics), to learn new skills, to experience a sense of belonging (Wynnyk & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2013), and to develop peer relationships and an athletic identity (Shapiro & Martin, 2010), there is ongoing criticism that promoting segregated sport is based on a false assumption that it is a “desirable and equitable” context for people who experience disability (Fay & Wolff, 2009). The philosophy of inclusion in which “all people are valued as unique contributing members of society and included” (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p. 139) has been acknowledged in the sport world for some time, however, inclusion in sport appears to be far from the case for youth who experience disability. Despite the different inclusion models described, a limited range of meaningful sport participation contexts exist for these youth (Zwier et al., 2010) and segregated settings remain among the most commonly practiced (Goodwin & Peers, 2012).

## 2. Purpose

Debates and criticisms with regard to the types of sport settings available to youth who experience disability (e.g. segregated, integrated, reverse integrated) continue to permeate the literature on inclusive sport, as well as the everyday sport opportunities of these young people. Given this debate, the influential role of coaches in contributing to inclusive (and exclusive) sport environments, and concerns about the goals of youth sport as incommensurate with disability, in this study we examined sport practitioners’ experiences coaching youth who experience disability in segregated settings. How practitioners understand and experience sport and disability in and through coaching youth is critical to the type of experiences they can offer participants. What is it that sport practitioners who teach and coach in segregated settings think they afford youth and for what purpose? How do these experiences inform their understanding of disability and sport and how can gaining a better understanding of these experiences inform future, more inclusive,

coaching practices? The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the experiences of youth sport practitioners who teach and coach youth in primarily segregated settings.

### 3. Method

In seeking “to discover associations, relationships and patterns within the phenomenon” to achieve a more profound understanding with “the potential to shift the angle of vision with which one customarily considers that phenomenon” (Thorne, 2008, p. 50), we engaged an interpretive description (ID) approach to our study. We used this approach to understand the perspectives of youth sport practitioners (i.e., coaches and instructors) who teach and coach youth who experience disability. ID supported the scaffolding of relevant disciplinary knowledge (that may or may not be theoretically driven) in order to address a critical issue and by way of the subjective human experience, “generate credible and defensible new knowledge in a form that will be meaningful and relevant to the applied practice context” (Thorne, 2008, p. 51). Essentially, ID is a methodology developed to address issues related to practice. In this regard it was a strong fit for our investigation into the coaching experiences of sport practitioners. Epistemologically then, ID studies acknowledge the world of human experience and reality as multiple and socially constructed (Thorne, 2008).

### 4. Participants

The study was approved by a university research ethics board. Fifteen sport practitioners (11 women, 4 men; mean age 31 years) who taught and coached in a variety of sports and programs (e.g., handball, soccer, baseball, sledge hockey,<sup>1</sup> rhythmic gymnastics, martial arts, swimming, and Special Olympics) in primarily segregated settings consented to take part. Several practitioners also had experiences coaching and teaching in integrated settings and the majority had experiences coaching in mainstream sport settings. All participants also indicated that mainstream sport had played a role in their lives growing up. The sport practitioners were purposefully sampled through parasport organizations, convenience sampling (i.e., they were known to the interviewer through sport and coaching circles), and snowballing (i.e., suggested by other participants through coaching connections) (Mayan, 2009). Ultimately, participants were selected on the basis that their coaching experiences were relevant to the research question and the assumption that they would therefore be rich informants on the topic of investigation. Participants were informed about the study by way of a recruitment letter describing the purpose of the study, nature of data collection, and information related to confidentiality. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to ask questions about

the study of both the interviewer and first author prior to consenting. On average, sport practitioners had been involved in coaching and teaching in a segregated setting for approximately 7 years, had acquired various levels of coach, teacher, and/or program-specific certification, and had post-secondary education. For three of the coaches, their experiences coaching segregated sport were tied to their full time employment (e.g., gymnastics coach). For the remainder, coaching was a volunteer position. One practitioner identified as experiencing disability. We have not provided a table cross-referencing pseudonyms and participant descriptions in order to maintain confidentiality, as several participants were known to each other.

### 5. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews, the primary source of data collected, were chosen in order to guide conversation relevant to the topic of interest but also support flexibility in allowing the interviews to unfold (Mayan, 2009). An interview guide was developed drawing on the disciplinary literature (Thorne, 2008) and was refined on the basis of two pilot interviews and through discussion among authors. Examples of interview questions included: “How did you become involved in coaching youth with disabilities?”, “What is your approach/philosophy to coaching in this program?”, “Can you tell me about some positive/negative experiences coaching in the program?”, “What kinds of barriers/facilitators do you experience in coaching this program?”, “What kinds of expectations do you have of the youth in the program?”, and “Can you share your thoughts about integrated versus segregated sport opportunities for youth with disabilities? Are there any particular strengths or drawbacks?” With the exception of one interview, performed by the first author, the interviews were conducted by the second author. Both interviewers had experience coaching youth sport and knowledge of varied sport settings for youth who experience disability. Interviews ranged in length from approximately 23 to 84 minutes and took place in locations selected by the participants (e.g., coffee shops, private office).

Immediately following each interview, the interviewers documented reflective notes. These notes outlined how the interviews progressed, any arising concerns, and initial impressions of the data (Mayan, 2009). The reflective notes also provided an opportunity to return to the interviews in a different way than afforded through transcribed text or audio recording, providing support and challenge to the data interpretation and greater data immersion (Thorne, 2008).

### 6. Analysis

In keeping with Thorne’s (2008) ID approach to establishing familiarity, analysis began with immersion in the

<sup>1</sup> Sledge hockey may be considered a reverse integrated sport. Within this article, it was primarily segregated however, a few examples of reverse integration are described.

data through the interview transcription, which was performed by the second author, and the reading and re-reading of transcripts and reflective notes. Immersion was accompanied by highlighting potentially relevant pieces of data and note taking. This was followed by the discovery of patterns and differences, which were then extended across cases to understand what relationships might exist within the data (Thorne, 2008). Within this process, we attempted to answer the questions of, “What is happening here?” and “What am I learning about this?” (Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997, p. 174). Discussions among authors and retracing analytic thinking (e.g., pieces to patterns to relationships), led to the determination of the study themes. This inductive approach to ‘sense-making’ (Thorne, 2008) also reflected Morse’s (1994) description of the cognitive processes of comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing.

### 7. Credibility

Credibility was sought in multiple ways consistent with ID and the study purpose. In addition to pilot testing interview questions for relevance and clarity, each participant provided feedback on their individual transcript. This led to major revisions of one transcript. These revisions comprised the removal of some information and clarification of other shared information in keeping with our ethical commitment to participant confidentiality. Through meetings and discussions among authors, the study processes were continually revisited and documented. The resulting audit trail afforded defensible retracing of study decisions and epistemological integrity (Mayan, 2009; Thorne, 2008). Finally, the corroboration of data sources (i.e., interviews and reflective notes) and the collaborative analysis and interpretation processes helped to establish an analytic logic and demonstrate an interpretive authority through the relevance of findings to the practice context (Thorne, 2008).

### 8. Findings

The overarching theme of this study was captured in the phrase ‘A part of and apart from sport’. Common across the interviews were descriptions of the ways in which youth who experience disability were included in (i.e., a part of) sport as well as the ways in which they were excluded (i.e., apart) from sport due to the nature of sport, disability, and taking part in a segregated setting. The overarching theme represents the lack of binary between the concepts of inclusion and exclusion. The overarching theme is apparent in the four sub-themes that highlight the ways in which practitioners experienced coaching and instructing youth who experience disability and how they viewed sport and different sport settings to be more or less inclusive and exclusive. The subthemes demonstrate the complex relationship that exists between (dis)ability and youth sport participation in general and in particu-

lar as it occurs within segregated sport. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants’ identities.

### 9. Authentic Connections

The subtheme of Authentic Connections highlights practitioners valuing of segregated settings in affording critical opportunities for youth to develop a sense of community with other youth who also experience disability. At the same time, practitioners questioned the implications of segregated settings for social inclusion beyond the segregated sport context.

In describing the strengths of segregated programs for youth who experience disability, overwhelmingly practitioners articulated the importance of the “social environment to...make some new friends” (Paige), “to counter social isolation” (Jill), and “to come together as a group and feel...a sense of belonging” (Rick). More than just an opportunity to socialize, these settings afforded “opportunities [for youth] to create authentic relationships and friends within their own [disability] community,” said Michelle. Likewise Tanya elaborated, “some of their best friends are their sledge hockey teammates....They have some of the same issues with everyday life and they can relate to each other better than anyone.” As a result of the social component, some practitioners felt that an “inclusive environment still exist[ed]” (Jill) within segregated settings so long as it was “selective segregated programming...[and youth were] not forced to go into a program...because they have a disability” (Rick). Inclusive in this sense referred to the idea that “nobody’s left out” (Kevin).

The importance of finding connection through segregated programs also extended to the families of the youth. “A lot of my families...have become connected and they share resources, they share stories, and they sort of have someone to lean on and who are going through the same thing...” said Jill. Having a “place to come together and see that there are other families out there and just to build like their own social network and support group...” (Tom) was an important benefit for parents. These programs also led to unique experiences within families. As Tanya explained, “the chance for their parents to watch them [youth] at something is a really big motivator....They’re just like looking up in the stands...and so excited that finally there’s something where people can come and support them...that’s a big one that I think they get out of sledge hockey is that feeling of being included and being important.”

Despite the social value of the segregated programs, Jill explained there was still a “stigma of being in a separated class” and Jen wondered how segregated programs would lead to greater inclusion in society. While supportive of segregated programming, Christine explained that these programs did not counter the “archaic views about disability and [mis]understandings of disability that [continue to] exist.” She felt that “in integrated settings, children and youth...make friends...[and other youth] under-

stand that disability isn't as different as you might assume." Similarly, Paige felt that integrated settings could teach "some important" lessons about differences.

## 10. Diversity and Adaptations

The second subtheme, Diversity and Adaptations, speaks to the range of participant needs and abilities within the segregated programs and the central role practitioners played in creating adaptations to facilitate their engagement. Although adaptations were necessary, many practitioners struggled in their efforts to be inclusive. All coaches described working with youth with "a big spectrum" (Tanya) of different impairments because there were not enough programs in the community for youth "to have their own needs met," (Nadia). As Christine shared, "there's such a range in their skills and what they could do....I coach paraswimmers, each one is different." Similarly, Tanya explained, "you're working with some people who know all the skills...and you're working with some people who don't know very much." Within segregated settings, wide diversity was anticipated and accepted. This led to an environment in which "adapting...and having a lot of support," (Jen) was the norm. Paige described "having an individual approach to each person's progress" and Kevin explained how the segregated Tae Kwon Do program had a "more customizable timeline for progression and growth" than the non-segregated program. Specific examples of how practitioners provided adaptations included, "slowing the pace down...concentrating on simpler movements" (Tom), "setting realistic goals for their ability level" (Cora) and having "one-on-one or smaller groups" (Callie).

While all of the practitioners described needing to make adaptations in their programs, it was challenging for many of them. "It's hard to tailor a practice to fit everyone's needs and make sure they're all improving," shared Tanya, and James described how "you definitely challenge yourself to think outside the box." This was complicated by a lack of impairment specific knowledge. As Christine explained, "you don't know enough about that disability, or how to even go about teaching them." Kevin was candid with his response, he said, "I wonder a lot if I'm qualified to do what I'm doing," despite his years of experience, certifications, and positive feedback from families. Having "people who are trained" (Lana) and the support of parents (Jill) were essential resources for the practitioners in individualizing activities. Lastly, Callie shared the importance of consultation in offering adaptations. She said, "they [youth] know what they can and can't do and I think it's very important to ask them and not to make assumptions. To me it's very disrespectful to just assume that they can or can't do certain things."

## 11. Expectations...Same but Different

The subtheme of Expectations...Same but Different, reflects the practitioners deliberate efforts to be inclusive

in such a way that disability was not always at the forefront of the sport coaching and participation experience. In this way, practitioners held fast to the idea that the expectations they had for youth who experienced disability were not different from the expectations they would have of youth in mainstream programs. When describing their approach to coaching and teaching in the segregated programs, practitioners articulated similar philosophies to each other and to how they viewed mainstream youth sport. The most common expectations were for participants "to have fun and just try their best" (Cora). Additional expectations were well summarized by Allison who offered, "it's about growing, it's about honing some skills, physical skills and teamwork skills, sportsmanship skills..." A number of practitioners indicated their coaching and teaching philosophies were the same regardless of whether or not the program was segregated. As Callie explained,

I think the same [philosophy] as I have for any other students that I work with. So it's that you come and you try your hardest. You do everything that you can. You bring a positive attitude, you be respectful of yourself, you be respectful of your instructors, you be respectful of the people around you, and that you challenge yourself.

"I don't think my philosophy or approach changes," shared Tom. "I think what I teach and how I teach changes, but basically I'm still there to make sure the kids are having fun, being challenged, you know, getting...that feeling of accomplishment and community out of the program."

At the same time, some practitioners wondered if, "for some kids, it [segregated programming] doesn't push them hard enough" (Paige) and that "maybe it would not be challenging enough for some athletes" (Cora). When discussing drawbacks of segregated programs, Callie said, "sometimes we don't set our expectations high enough or we over-accommodate." Likewise, Christine found it difficult to know how much to push. She said, "I really struggled when I started coaching....He [the head coach] would tell me...you're not pushing them enough, you need to push them if they're going to develop." Nadia questioned the value of segregated settings given that "a lot of the things we're going to ask our participants in the future are going to have to be integrated.... It's not going to be set up always for them to succeed at their best [in] the real world." Concurrently, several practitioners indicated that taking part in the segregated program "could be used as a stepping stone to slowly branch off to integrated programs" (Jen), and to support "transition into community programs in an inclusive [integrated] setting" (Rick). Finally, Michelle saw value in having a diversity of sport settings. She shared, "if they're [youth] able to function in a regular [integrated] program, keep them there...but don't rule out...other opportunities [segre-

gated sport] because I don't think they're mutually exclusive, I think they can work together and they should work together.

## 12. Competitive Sport and (Dis)ability

The final subtheme draws attention to the nature of competition and the challenges it presented sport practitioners in their attempts to create inclusive sport environments. Importantly, when asked to clarify the competitive nature of their segregated programs, all but five practitioners indicated the focus was non-competitive or "totally non-competitive" (Paige). The focus on participation and development over winning, as highlighted in the following quote, was a critical component of the majority of the segregated programs, including the semi-competitive and competitive ones. "Everyone gets to be on the floor equal amount of time," said Nadia, "it's not about who is playing the best." Allison shared that in mainstream community programs, it "comes down to physical ability" and described how for one of the youth she coached, "being accepted onto the [segregated] team was a huge boost...[because] many of the kids with disabilities can't play in regular league because it's so competitive." This was further reinforced by Michelle who noted, "a lot of our athletes just can't keep up...in the mainstream program and they got to a point where they just couldn't, they got to an age where they couldn't keep up." At times, even when athletes were skilled, they encountered opposition within mainstream sport. Allison explained, "I have some really good athletes that are deaf and trying to get them into a community program is difficult."

Michelle described how Special Olympics offered a range of segregated programs (non-competitive to "very competitive") to meet different participant and parent motivations. Sledge hockey also provided a unique opportunity for youth who experienced disability to excel and compete. "These kids who are wheelchair users or...use crutches....Once they get on a sledge and play hockey, they're the fastest kids out there," said Tanya, "when we have able-bodied players come in and play against us, they just go circles around these able-bodied players and it's so nice for them to finally be excelling at something." At the same time, adaptations and meeting individual needs remained a critical part of the sledge hockey environment. "We worked to his ability level," Tanya said of one athlete who experienced very restricted movement, "we make sure that everyone has a place on the team." Similarly, Allison described how in the semi-competitive handball league, a player "couldn't catch a ball at all, but if it rolled, she was able to pick it up, so we found a defensive position for her and made her abilities work really well." While described as competitive in nature, as illustrated in the last few examples, participation was prioritized over winning within segregated sport settings.

## 13. Discussion

Rearticulating previous work in the field of inclusive sport, our findings emphasize the role of segregated settings in affording social connection, acceptance, and friendship among youth who experience disability and their families (Goodwin, Fitzpatrick, Thurmeier, & Hall, 2006; Shapiro & Martin, 2010; Wynnyk & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2013). Social inclusion in this regard was a particularly strong theme within the findings. Segregated programs were valued for the social inclusion afforded within them and they were also recognized by practitioners as necessary in order to meet the individual needs of youth participants. The significance of segregated settings in this regard is also supported by previous research (Goodwin et al., 2006; Wynnyk & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2013). However, practitioners also questioned and were critical of the potential for segregated settings to lead to broader inclusion in society. Practitioners also indicated a desire to be more knowledgeable about the nature of specific impairments and to better understand how to modify activities to meet the diversity of participant needs. These are not uncommon findings in inclusive sport research for young people who experience disability, as a lack of coaching expertise specific to disability and adaptations has been identified as a barrier (Jones, 2003; Kozub & Porretta, 1998; Tsai & Fung, 2009).

## 14. Considering Ability, (Dis)ability and Ableism in Sport

While several of the findings serve to reinforce what has previously been generated in the literature around inclusion and exclusion in and from sport for youth who experience disability in segregated sport, additional ways of thinking about and questioning sport practices within both mainstream and segregated sport are also afforded through the experiences of the practitioners in this study. One such example is the way in which ability continues to play a defining role for youth who experience disability in segregated sport and how it does so in similar, but perhaps more subtle, ways than in integrated mainstream sport. Ability can be a source of differentiation, separation, and comparison and influence the degree to which inclusion and exclusion in and from sport play out. According to Hay (2012), different conceptualizations of ability are critical to consider in youth sport as they can lead to the privileging and inclusion of some and the marginalization and exclusion of others. Hay offers several interpretations of how the concept of ability can impact the participation of youth in sport, two of which we consider here (see Hay, 2012, for more about the concept of ability). One understanding aligns closely with the ways in which sport is culturally practiced, emphasizing dominance, excellence, and comparison between people (Hay). In this first sense, ability is used to separate people into 'winners' and 'losers' and is in line with what typically occurs in competitive sport. This brings into

play, Fitzgerald's (2009) queries about the commensurability of the goals of youth sport and the achievement of youth who experience disability. Or, stated differently, the (mis)alignment between disability and sport.

Within our findings, the above understanding of ability, as dominance over others, informed practitioners' views that segregated settings were necessary to support the participation of youth with impairments who were unable to 'keep up' in mainstream competitive sport. Not keeping up was primarily attributed to a lack of physical ability, although practitioners also referred to the cognitive and social 'abilities' of youth. This resonates with Jones' (2003) study wherein competition was considered a significant barrier to inclusion in integrated sport for youth who experience disability. When the goals of youth sport are centered around competition (i.e., winning) underscored by a concept of ability that emphasizes dominance and excellence, integrated sport does not appear to work for most youth who experience disability, according to the practitioners in our study. In essence, this appeared to provide a primary justification for the need for segregated sport. However, even within segregated sport competition was eschewed. This was evidenced in practitioners' descriptions of the segregated settings in which they taught and coached as necessarily non-competitive. Practitioners who indicated their segregated programs were semi-competitive or competitive (e.g., sledge hockey) placed greater emphasis on skill development and ensuring all athletes had a valued place on the team. Essentially their goals were participatory. This interpretation offers support for the view that disability and sport, when underscored by a dominant conception of ability, are as Fitzgerald (2009) described, in "fundamental contradiction" (p. 2) with each other.

Another conception of ability offered by Hay (2012) is described "in a normative sense as competence, entailing the display and development of capacities that most people possess and that can support their participation in sport (e.g., the ability to run or walk or throw)" (p. 87). This second interpretation seems to align with the practitioners' coaching philosophies within the segregated sport settings and specifically their approach to providing individualized adaptations through the focus on developing skills. In comparison with the first explanation of ability, this second understanding appears more inclusive of diverse performances. Yet, in actuality, it is reliant on and advances the privileging of "normative abled(ness)" (Campbell, 2009) in sport because 'ability' is measured by the acquisition of capacities that "most people possess" (Hay, 2012, p. 87).

According to Campbell (2001), ableism is "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being" (p. 44). This second articulation of ability both maintains and reinforces ableness. If normativity underlies the conception of ability in youth

sport generally and in segregated sport in particular, not only does it exclude the majority of youth who experience disability, who do not physically perform skills in normative ways (or at all), but it also excludes any youth whose ability is considered less than 'average'. In fact both conceptions of ability are exclusive and when promoted in youth sport lead to the marginalization of those deemed less able. While segregated sport may be positioned as resistant or in response to this type of marginalization, in actuality ableness also plays out in various ways as evidenced in sport practitioners' articulations around adaptations and expectations.

This interpretation was prominent when practitioners described segregated sport as an opportunity for youth who experience disability to develop and as a 'stepping stone' to mainstream sport settings. This potential outcome of segregated sport and other segregated contexts (e.g., segregated education), has long been disputed (Reid, 2003). This also brings into question whether or not segregated sport can be considered an "equitable" context for people who experience disability (Fay & Wolff, 2009) if in fact the goal is achievement in the mainstream or development in order to 'advance' to the mainstream. Previous work has been critical of how the play and leisure of disabled children has been promoted for the primary purposes of development and rehabilitation (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010). This critique is also evident in mainstream youth sport literature, where development of youth through sport for the purpose of producing more productive citizens or better people is also questioned (Coakley, 2011). However, the focus on development for the purpose of achieving ableist norms or stated differently, gaining entry into the more valued mainstream sport setting reflects "a chief feature of an ableist viewpoint...that impairment (irrespective of 'type') is inherently negative which should, if the opportunity presents itself, be ameliorated..." (Campbell, 2008, p. 154). As Campbell suggests, impairment may be understood as a problem to be fixed. In the context of this study, one could argue that segregated sport becomes the mechanism by which some practitioners attempt to 'fix' participants so they might one day be 'able' enough to join the mainstream. Despite claims that disability sport has shifted away from a medical rehabilitative model (McPherson, Wheeler, & Foster, 2003) evidence to the contrary still exists. Furthermore, "the problem of exclusion continues to be located within the child and not the [leisure] environment or its practices" (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 322). Although beyond the scope of our article, Hay's (2012) alternative discussion of a social construction of ability challenges the notion that exclusion is a problem of the individual but is "a complex process dependent upon the interactions of multiple factors" (p. 94).

Jespersen and McNamee (2009) call for a new way of understanding disability in sport, one that is not contingent on "deviation from 'normal' abilities" (p. 6). Diverging from comparative and normative conceptualizations



of ability brings possibility for considering differences in movement performance, not as deviant or less able, but as valued diversity. Within practitioners' descriptions of segregated sport, there is evidence that diversity in movement performance was valued and there was a desire and willingness on the part of practitioners to make sport an inclusive experience for youth who experience disability. At the same time, taken for granted assumptions of ableism continue to permeate and contribute to the justification and need for segregated sport settings due to the absence of other opportunities. In order to shift understandings of ability in youth sport in ways that support meaningful inclusion "more sustained attention to the ontological nature of disability" is required (Campbell, 2001, p. 42). Moreover, an understanding of ability as valued diversity in performance, as exemplified by individuals who use different forms of movement, can contribute to alternative ways of thinking about the purposes and possibilities of sport for all youth.

### 15. Limitations

We acknowledge several limitations to our study. While sport practitioners had experiences coaching and teaching in segregated settings, the nature of these settings and the participants within them were very diverse. On the one hand, this may well represent a particular kind of youth sport context, where different goals and abilities are present. On the other hand, this diversity presents challenges in terms of providing recommendations about how sport practitioners might better facilitate inclusion. Essentially, this study limitation rearticulates one of the ongoing challenges of facilitating inclusion, diversity. Another limitation to this study was the range of experiences practitioners had both within segregated settings and beyond them. While such differences offer richness in experience, it also limits the degree to which the study can speak to specific practices. Lastly, other forms of data, such as talking to youth coached by these practitioners would have added an additional interesting perspective.

### 16. Conclusion

In closing, Campbell (2008, as cited in Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013) "usefully reminds us that segregation should not be confused with separation. Campbell [also] sees separate spaces as providing opportunities for sanctuary—a space away from ableist values and assumptions and a place to recover from internalised oppression" (p. 321). At times, the segregated settings described in this study appeared to reflect opportunities for sanctuary through authentic connection, acceptance, and individualized adaptations. At other times, the settings described by practitioners seemed to reproduce certain ableist values and assumptions. It is critical that such spaces are not rendered compulsory for youth who experience disability due to a lack of other possibilities

(Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). As researchers and practitioners, we must ask ourselves 'what is the purpose of youth sport and of segregated sport in particular?' There is an ongoing need to question and reflect upon the assumption that segregated programs are (still) for the purpose of improving or intervening on young people with impairments so they may be more 'normal' (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). Enhancing the reflexive capacities of coaches (Hay, 2012), questioning ableist assumptions, and examining our contributions to furthering the ways in which disability and sport are constructed as contradictory are required. Further work is needed on how this can actually be accomplished.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the participants of our study for sharing their experiences and perspectives.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### References

- Anderson, D. M., Wozencroft, A., & Bedini, L. A. (2008). Adolescent girls' involvement in disability sport: A comparison of social support mechanisms. *Journal of Leisure Research, 40*, 183–207.
- Campbell, F. A. K. (2001). Inciting legal fictions: 'Disability's' date with ontology and the ableist body of the law. *Griffith Law Review, 10*(1), 42–62.
- Campbell, F. K. (2008). Exploring internalized ableism using critical race theory. *Disability & Society, 23*, 151–162. doi:10.1080/09687590701841190
- Campbell, F. K. (2009). *Contours of ableism: The production of disability and abledness*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230245181
- Coakley, J. (2011). Youth sports: What counts as "positive development?" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 35*(3), 306–324. doi:10.1177/0193723511417311
- DePauw, K. P. (2009). Disability sport: Historical context. In H. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Disability and youth sport* (pp. 24–38). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- DePauw, K. P., & Doll-Tepper, G. (2000). Toward progressive inclusion and acceptance: Myth or reality? The inclusion debate and bandwagon discourse. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 17*, 135–143. doi:10.1123/apaq.17.2.135
- Dinold, M., Diketmüller, R., Grix, J., & Phillpots, L. (2013). Managing diversity and European policy: Towards a typology for sport pedagogy. *European Journal of Sport Science, 23*(6), 689–696. doi:10.1080/17461391.2013.770925
- Fay, T., & Wolff, E. (2009). Disability in sport in the twenty-first century: Creating a new sport opportunity spectrum. *Boston University International Law Journal, 27*, 231–248.

- Fitzgerald, H. (2009). Bringing disability into youth sport. In H. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Disability and youth sport* (pp. 1–8). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Fitzgerald, H., & Jobling, A. (2009). Future directions in disability and youth sport: Development, aspirations and research. In H. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Disability and youth sport* (pp. 160–170). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Goodley, D., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2010). Emancipating play: Dis/abled children, development and deconstruction. *Disability & Society*, 25(4), 499–512. doi:10.1080/09687591003755914
- Goodwin, D. L., Fitzpatrick, D. A., Thurmeier, R., & Hall, C. (2006). The decision to join Special Olympics: Parent's perspectives. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 23, 163–183. doi:10.1123/apaq.23.2.163
- Goodwin, D. L., & Peers, D. (2012). Disability, sport and inclusion. In S. Dagkas & K. Armour (Eds.), *Inclusion and exclusion through youth sport* (pp. 186–202). London, UK: Routledge.
- Hay, P. J. (2012). Ability as an exclusionary concept in youth sport. In S. Dagkas & K. Armour (Eds.), *Inclusion and exclusion through youth sport* (pp. 87–99). London, UK: Routledge.
- Hodge, N., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2013). 'They never pass me the ball': Exposing ableism through the leisure experiences of disabled children, young people and their families. *Children's Geographies*, 11(3), 311–325. doi:10.1080/14733285.2013.812275
- Jespersen, E., & McNamee, M. (2009). Philosophy, adapted physical activity and dis/ability. In E. Jespersen, & M. McNamee (Eds.), *Ethics, dis/ability and sports* (pp. 1–10). Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Jones, D. B. (2003). "Denied from a lot of places": Barriers to participation in community recreation programs encountered by children with disabilities in Maine: Perspectives of parents. *Leisure/Loisir*, 28(1/2), 49–69. doi:10.1080/14927713.2003.9649939
- Kozub, F. M., & Porretta, D. L. (1998). Interscholastic coaches' attitudes toward integration of adolescents with disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 15, 328–344. doi:10.1123/apaq.15.4.328
- Lee, H., Causgrove Dunn, J., & Holt, N. L. (2014). Youth sport experiences of individuals with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 31, 343–361. doi:10.1123/apaq.2014-0142
- MacDonald, D., Pang, B., Knez, K., Nelson, A., & McCuaig, L. (2012). The will for inclusion: Bothering the inclusion/exclusion discourses of sport. In S. Dagkas & K. Armour (Eds.), *Inclusion and exclusion through youth sport* (pp. 9–23). London, UK: Routledge.
- Mayan, M. (2009). *Essentials of qualitative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- McPherson, G., Wheeler, G. D., & Foster, S. (2003). Socio-political influences on adapted physical activity. In R. D. Steadward, G. D. Wheeler, & E. J. Watkinson (Eds.), *Adapted physical activity* (pp. 75–98). Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press.
- Moran, T. E., & Block, M. E. (2010). Barriers to participation of children with disabilities in youth sport. *Teaching Exceptional Children Plus*, 6(3), 1–13.
- Morse, J. M. (1994). "Emerging from the data": The cognitive process of analysis in qualitative inquiry. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 23–43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Reid, G. (2003). Defining adapted physical activity. In R. D. Steadward, E. J. Watkinson, & G. D. Wheeler (Eds.), *Adapted physical activity* (pp. 11–25). Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press.
- Shapiro, D. R., & Martin, J. J. (2010). Athletic identity, affect, and peer relations in youth athletes with physical disabilities. *Disability and Health Journal*, 3, 79–85. doi:10.1016/j.dhjo.2009.08.004
- Smith, A. (2009). Disability and inclusion policy towards physical education and youth sport. In H. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Disability and youth sport* (pp. 24–38). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Spaaij, R. F. J., Magee, J., & Jeanes, R. (2014). *Sport and social exclusion in global society*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Tawse, J., Bloom, G. A., Sabiston, C. M., & Reid, G. (2012). The role of coaches in wheelchair rugby in the development of athletes with spinal cord injury. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 4(2), 206–225. doi:10.1080/2159676X.2012.685104
- Thorne, S. (2008). *Interpretive description*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Thorne, S., Kirkham, S. R., & MacDonald-Emes, J. (1997). Focus on qualitative methods. Interpretive description: A noncategorical qualitative alternative for developing nursing knowledge. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 20, 169–177. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-240X(199704)20:2<169::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-I
- Tsai, E. H., & Fung, L. (2009). Parents' experiences and decisions on inclusive sport participation of their children with intellectual disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 26, 151–171. doi:10.1123/apaq.26.2.151
- Wynnyk, K., & Spencer-Cavaliere, N. (2013). Children's social relationships and motivation in sledge hockey. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 30, 299–316. doi:10.1123/apaq.30.4.299
- Zwier, J. N., Van Schie, P. E., Becher, J. G., Smits, D., Gorter, J. W., & Dalmeijer, A. J. (2010). Physical activity in young children with cerebral palsy. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 32, 1501–1508. doi:10.3109/09638288.2010.49701

### About the Authors



**Nancy Spencer-Cavaliere** (PhD) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. Her primary areas of research and teaching include adapted physical activity and children's physical activity engagement. She is particularly interested in exploring inclusive participation in play, sport, and physical activity for children and youth and in finding creative ways to develop accessible and meaningful opportunities for young people to take part in these contexts.



**Jennifer Thai** (MSc) is a graduate of the kinesiology and occupational therapy programs at the University of Alberta. She currently works as an occupational therapist at the University of Alberta hospital where she supports her patients to participate in and regain independence in self-care and leisure activities. She continues to coach rhythmic gymnastics, working with recreational to national-level competitive gymnasts.



**Bethan Kingsley** (PhD) is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) at the University of Alberta. Bethan completed her PhD in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. Her doctoral dissertation explored marginalizing practices in recreation for young people living with lower incomes.