

## **1.5 PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS AND PORTRAYALS OF DISABILITY**

Despite the increasing numbers of students with disabilities attending inclusive schools, many physical education teacher education programs still perpetuate a separate system in education by training adapted physical educators to focus on students with disabilities, while neglecting to train general physical educators to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

Textbooks are a staple in most college teacher education programs and often reflect the dominant and subversive messages of the current educational culture, including messages about inclusion and disability (Besser et al., 1999; Starck & Wyffels, 1990). The average student will have read between 25,000 and 30,000 textbook pages by graduation, and college students consider textbooks an integral part of their courses and learning (Besser, Stone, & Nan, 1999; Kern-Foxworth, 1990). Textbooks are a powerful part of the learning process; they help instructors design their courses, provide uniform content, and provide the basis for class discussion (Besser et al., 1999; Starck & Wyffels, 1990).

Despite the prevalence of textbooks in the college classroom, relatively little critical attention has been paid to the power of texts (Apple, 1986). Certain groups of textbooks, but not those used in general and adapted physical education, have been analyzed over the years for their gender or racial bias or inclusion of racial minorities. However, the examination of textbooks for messages about disability is virtually nonexistent (Hogben & Waterman, 1997; Sleeter & Grant, 1991).

### ***Methodology***

The purpose of this study was to examine the photographic images of disability in general physical education textbooks. Specifically, this study examines if general physical education textbooks reinforce or reject stereotypical notions about physical activity and disability. Photographs were chosen for study because of their power to convey meaning, particularly in sport and general physical education publications. Since there were so few photographs of persons with disabilities, the text and content surrounding photographs were also examined to supplement the photographic findings and provide richer and more descriptive data.

### ***Textbook Selection***

Photographs in 59 physical education methods textbooks in print in 2001 were examined via content analysis (Entman, 1993). For the sake of clarity, the researchers defined physical education textbooks as textbooks focusing on teaching methods that are written primarily for use in training pre-service physical education teachers to teach general physical education at the elementary, middle, or secondary levels. Textbooks that focused primarily on adapted physical education or on specific content such as fitness, or a primary sport skill such as volleyball, were not included in this study.

### ***Data Collection***

A recording instrument was developed by the researchers to code 2,455 photographic images. The instrument used categories from the work of Cuneen

and Sidwell (1998) and Duncan and Sayaovong (1990) and adapted for use with images of disability, was generated to analyze the textbook photographs. For obvious reasons, only discernible disabilities could be coded. Unless a disability such as visual or hearing impairment was pointed out in the photo or caption, researchers could not discern the disability.

After the photographs were coded, the researchers examined the textual information that surrounded the photographs of persons with disabilities. The researchers noted the particular chapters in which photographs of persons with disabilities were located and read the entire chapters, as well as the descriptive cut lines for each photograph (Entman, 1993; Hardin & Preston, 2001). The researchers used this additional descriptive information to supplement the photographic findings and provide richer and more descriptive data.

### ***Results***

Textbooks examined in this study overwhelmingly reinforced the hegemonic notion that sport is a realm for the non-disabled. In the selected 59 textbooks, a total of 2,455 photographic images were coded. Only 14 photographic images were coded as a person with a disability. While some publishers printed more photographs of persons with disabilities in their textbooks than others, none published more than 1.5% of their total photographic images with persons with disabilities. Three of the six publishers included no photos of persons with disabilities in their textbooks.

The stereotypical notion that non-disabled persons are well-suited for physical activity, while persons with disabilities have no potential for such activity in an integrated environment was perpetuated by the textbooks examined in this study. Most of the coded photographs depicted persons with disabilities as receiving assistance from authority figures or peers. Of the 14 photographic images of persons with disabilities, 10 (71%) pictured the person with a disability receiving help from a teacher, coach, or peer. In contrast, of the 2441 photos of persons without a clear physical disability, only 19 (.008%) were pictured as receiving assistance from authority figures or peers. Seven photographic images were of students in wheelchairs playing with a parachute while receiving physical help from adults. Two of the photographs were of children playing baseball, but in both cases they were receiving physical assistance from a coach or peer. One of the photographs was of a male participating in football, but again the student was receiving physical help from a peer. Only 1 photographic image out of the 14 in the textbooks was of a person with a disability participating in an integrated activity without physical assistance from a teacher, coach, or peer. This lone image was of a little girl who appears to have Down syndrome participating in a generic movement activity with peers without disabilities.

### ***Practical Applications***

The representation of persons with disabilities in the selected physical education textbooks contrasts the way non-disabled persons in these textbooks are portrayed. For example, non-disabled persons were pictured participating in all types of activities, including high risk and strength sports. Persons without any visible disability were also pictured participating free of any physical help from others and were often pictured participating with their peers. This representation implies that persons with disabilities are more different than similar to their non-disabled counterparts, and if they participate with their non-disabled peers they will need physical assistance. This stereotypical view is contradictory to the experience of many persons with disabilities; participation in sport "demonstrates that individuals with disabilities are more able and similar to their non-disabled peers" (Taub, Blinde, & Greer, 1999, p. 1469).

These overall findings are devastating for efforts to promote inclusion in U.S. physical education on two fronts:

The absence of children with disabilities in physical education textbooks dismisses inclusion and tacitly implies that it is not a reality in public education;

The sparse images that do exist reinforce the idea that children with disabilities are a burden for teachers or classmates because almost every image depicts the persons with disabilities receiving assistance from a non-disabled person;

- Measuring by the photos, segregated and exclusionary environments might be construed as preferred; they are depicted as the only spaces where children with disabilities do not seem to need assistance;
- Changes for general physical education texts and teacher education classrooms will not happen without concerted and conscious effort--adapted physical education teachers are encouraged to look closely at the textbooks and other visual and print media general physical education teachers are using in their curriculum, becoming involved in the selection process for textbooks and other curriculum media.
- General physical education teacher educators are encouraged to infuse knowledge about disability throughout the general physical education curriculum, examining textbooks being used, as the texts may present highly negative visual messages about inclusion in general physical education environments;
- Both adapted and general physical education teacher educators need to consciously integrate ways to value and support inclusion in their curriculums by using supplemental material and perhaps

even discussing the deficiencies of their textbooks with students and colleagues when opportunities arise. This would encourage pre-service teachers to become more sensitized to resisting the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities in the sport and general physical education environments.

It should be noted that all of the publishers of the general physical education texts examined in this study publish adapted physical education textbooks and or ancillary materials. It could be argued a reason why few pictures of persons with disabilities appear in general physical education textbooks is due to the fact that these topics are covered in other specialized adapted publications:

- Textbook publishers deserve credit for producing multiple adapted publications;
- Should not be excused from including persons with disabilities in their general physical education texts;
- Lack of positive photographs of persons with disabilities in these textbooks does little to encourage inclusion.

### ***Summary***

As an academic community, adapted physical education teachers and general physical education teacher educators need to demand that authors and publishers provide significantly more positive images of children with disabilities in integrated settings in all of their textbooks. Adapted physical education teachers and teacher educators should feel responsible for helping the textbook industry do a better job of providing a more equitable, less oppressive space for all learners. Textbook reviewers should take note of the types of photo representations proposed for texts. Finally, and perhaps most important, textbook authors and publishers must develop a social conscience that embraces, rather than tacitly rejects, inclusion.