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‘Disabled students and fieldwork: pathways from exclusion to inclusion’

1. Fieldwork as a disabling practice.
2. Student experiences
3. Towards inclusive fieldwork

# Disabled students and fieldwork

- “Institutions should ensure that whenever possible disabled students should have access to ... fieldtrips” (QAA, 2000a, Precept 11)
- “Fieldtrip culture is based on the taken-for-granted notions that everyone is physically able” (Nairn, 1999a: 274)

# Disabled students and fieldwork

- Spend a few minutes brainstorming ways in which fieldwork might be a barrier to learning for disabled students?

# Disabled students and fieldwork

- Exclusion operates on three levels:
  - Practical access and negotiation of physical environments of HEI
  - Teaching, learning and assessment experiences
  - Social experiences

# Disciplines with low participation rates

- Languages\*
- Physical exercise\*
- Arts and crafts
- Medicine
- Geography\*
- Archaeology\*
- Marine science\*
- Health and physical education\*
- Forestry\*
- Agriculture\*
- Social and business administration

- \*Disciplines with fieldwork components

**(Poussu-Olli, 1999: 111-112; Borland and James, 1999: 94-95)**

# Images of fieldwork



# Spaces of fieldwork

- Hegemony of fieldwork model based on introducing students to unfamiliar environments. Suppresses alternative more inclusive models
- “Being able to access the teaching/learning space is certainly a problem for students with disabilities, but this is not just a matter of getting into buildings: teaching and learning space often involves such diverse areas as towns, beaches, farms, forests, archaeological sites, overseas visits and the sea bed, as well as lecture rooms, seminar rooms and laboratories. (Borland & James, 1999, p. 94)

# Practices of fieldwork

- Privileging of the visual sense within fieldwork practices and techniques
- “The privileging of the visual renders other bodily capacities unimportant, and this constitutes a form of disembodiment” (Nairn, 1999a: 279)

# Cultures of fieldwork

- Social practices of eating, drinking, traveling and living as a group (students and staff):
  - Heavy drinking (Rose, 1993)
  - Forming relationships (Nairn, 1999b; Valentive, 1997)
  - Parties (Nairn, 1999b)
  - Joking (Nairn, 1999b)

# Student experiences

- 6 UK Universities in GEES subjects
  - Questionnaire survey
  - 80 returns from 250 questionnaires (32%)
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- (from Hall and Healey, 2005)

Disability category	Number	%
Dyslexia	41	54.6
Unseen disability	14	18.6
Wheelchair user/ mobility difficulty	3	4.0
Mental health difficulty	3	4.0
Deaf/hearing impairment	1	1.3
Blind/partially sighted	1	1.3
Multiple disability	10	13.3
Other disability	2	2.7
* Five respondents did not identify their disability category		

# Findings

1. The extent to which disabled students faced barriers relating to fieldwork
2. The nature of barriers faced by disabled students with regard to fieldwork
3. Independent fieldwork issues

# Barriers faced by disabled students with regard to fieldwork

Response	A concern prior to university	Residential fieldwork	Non-residential fieldwork	Independent fieldwork
Strongly Agree	7 (9.1)	1 (2.0)	3 (4.5)	4 (6.7)
Agree	6 (9.0)	12 (24.5)	12 (18.2)	27 (45.0)
Disagree	30 (44.7)	24 (49.0)	25 (37.9)	18 (30.0)
Strongly Disagree	24 (35.8)	12 (24.5)	26 (39.4)	11 (18.3)

- Can you spend a few minutes brainstorming ways in which the barriers to learning created for disabled students by fieldwork could be overcome.

# Transforming fieldwork

1. No notice taken of the lack of disabled students on fieldwork and in fieldwork-based disciplines.
2. Absence of disabled students noted.
3. Exploring why there is a lack.
4. Analysis of disabled student's experiences on fieldwork and in fieldwork-based disciplines.
5. Challenging the paradigm - changing the curriculum and learning environment in fieldwork-based disciplines.
6. A transformed inclusive system.

# Transforming fieldwork

- “The whole *concept* of fieldwork needs to be redefined in terms of ‘field experience’ in which students with different disabilities are not disabled by asking them to perceive in traditional able-bodied ways, but to evaluate what they can experience within the ‘reality’ of their own transformed environments - i.e. the ones *they* are experiencing, not just conventionally accepted realities defined by ableist teachers and supervisors. By doing this we might actually find out more about places than otherwise” (Gollegde, 2001: personal communication).

# Transforming fieldwork

- “While the mandate to create accessible field exercises may seem like a great burden in order to accommodate a relatively small number of students, we have found that the redesign of the field exercises results in a better learning experience for all students”  
(Cooke *et al*, 1997: 5)

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