

Inclusive Physical Education: Teachers' Attitudes

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Abstract: Physical Education (PE) is seen as a core curriculum component in the inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This study aimed at describing the inclusive attitudes of 53 PE teachers working in public schools in the District of Porto, Portugal. A mixed methodology was applied, using a scale of attitude and a discussion group. Findings revealed positive attitudes, which depended on different factors. The conclusion pointed to the need to invest in specific training for teachers, multidisciplinary support, curriculum differentiation, infrastructure and active participation by the whole school community.

Keywords: Physical Education. Attitudes. School. Inclusion.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the school-for-all paradigm, the way sports are dealt with at regular schools should be contextualized and reinvented in order to ensure equal participation opportunities to all students.

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Sports practice at schools has been considered an important facilitator of inclusive attitudes by promoting contact and social relationships among students (BLOCK; RIZZO, 1995, RODRIGUES, 2008, SOUZA; BOATO, 2010, TRIPP; RIZZO; WEBBERT, 2007). Thus, the PE component in curricula should be recognized as fertile ground for creativity and expressions of supportive values and feelings, helping the fight against prejudice and social exclusion at school spaces (FERNANDES; MÜLLER, 2008). It thus becomes important to encourage teachers for exploring ways to facilitate effective participation by all students (AINSCOW, 1997).

Historically, the concept of inclusive school dates back to at least six decades, to the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Its origin was based on a past highly influenced by power, institutionalization, normalization, punishment and separation between people. Its trajectory has also been marked by exclusionary educational practices and social inequalities within the school population.

The great principles enunciated by the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) propose education of all students at regular schools, which must fight discriminatory attitudes and create open and supportive communities. This concept of Inclusive School came to assume quality education for all, regardless of their specificity, cultural origin or any other aspect that differentiates them (FERNANDES; MÜLLER, 2008).

From 1960 on, new concepts and practices began to be introduced in the context of educational responses to be given to children and youth with disabilities. From the demand for distinct responses to the need to promote success for all students, inclusive school's trajectory has been hard and marked by controversial perspectives and attitudes. In Portugal, important decrees were published by the Ministry of Education in 1973-74, assuming for the first time the inclusion of students with disabilities (SANCHES; TEODORO, 2006). However, most schools still lack commitment

to that population and many initiatives do not have the expected results (PERRENOUD, 2001).

As a source of societal change, inclusive education demands dynamic processes appropriate to each culture and context, promoting the universal right to quality education for all (UNESCO, 1994). Currently, new strategies are used, such as: adjustments in schools' structure and operation, contributions by specialized technical professionals, pedagogical differentiation, individualization of educational pathways appropriate to the needs of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), directed studies, among others. In many countries, SEN curriculum components also began to be integrated into the curriculum of initial teacher and educator training in order to prepare those professionals to teach inclusive classes (RODRIGUES, 2006).

An inclusive culture must prevail in so-called inclusive environments, which demands an attitude change within the educational community. It thus becomes necessary to invest in the human education of teachers and students and in family-school relations, in which cooperation between all those involved should prevail (SANCHES; TEODORO, 2006). Co-operative Education is therefore an essential success factor, not only because teachers need support, but also because they gain skills to be able to cooperate with families and professionals inside and outside the school (SANCHES; TEODORO, 2006, AINSCOW, 1997). Therefore, only cohesion in the school team can encourage positive attitudes in order to develop innovative projects. Such sharing must be understood as culture rather than as a method or technique, and it takes on high importance.

With regard to sports practice in regular schools, inclusion did not bring enough renewal to PE content. This curricular component continues to encompass essentially collective and competitive modes, keeping strong emphasis on performance and excellence. These features tend to reduce participation of students with SEN in equal opportunities with their peers (HAYCOCK; SMITH, 2011a).

If we take into account the European Sport for All Charter, which stipulates that “everyone has the right to sport” (CONSELHO DA EUROPA, 1988, p. 8), it becomes evident that sports should be planned for all, regardless of their individual condition. Although people with disabilities are different and face their limitations, they have their own legislation that protects and assures their right to sports practice in the several social fields as well as in schools.

Inclusive school is based on teachers’ initiative ability and values (RODRIGUES, 2006). However, in the world of sports practice in schools, teachers have failed to develop teaching interconnected with the new heterogeneous social reality (NASCIMENTO et al, 2009). It is therefore indisputable that the area of special or adapted PE lacks better preparation and interest by professionals. Recently, that specific training began to be included in the curricular programs of universities (MORLEY *et al.*, 2005; RODRIGUES, 2006).

Experience and knowledge on SEN are considered of utmost importance for the development of positive attitudes, since teaching in inclusive classes requires more dynamism and creativity on the part of teachers (JEONG; BLOCK, 2011). It is also important to make the connection between the PE content, the students and the teacher, since the sports practice reveals a privileged instrument to work with students with disabilities.

In the sports world, there are several approaches applicable to people with disabilities that promote social integration. It is up to PE teachers to intervene in formation of inclusive values, avoiding bias related to any kind of difference (RODRIGUES; DARIDO, 2011). Therefore, solidarity and cooperation should be fostered among students, eliminating the several forms of exclusion. Ross (2004) also points out that inclusion of students with SEN should be a responsibility of the whole school community, which should feel committed to the full inclusion of those students.

Beyond the concept of difference and inclusive practices, we should recognize teachers’ hard task to teach in heterogeneous

classes, since it is not enough that the school assume the discourse of difference; difference itself must be debated. Several authors recognize that inclusive attitudes by teachers towards educational inclusion are an extremely important condition for this process to take effect with high quality (LAMBE; BONES, 2006, DUNN, 2008, GALVÃO, 2002, JEONG; BLOCK, 2011, JERLINDER, DANERMARK; GILL, 2010, SOUZA; BOATO, 2010).

There is no doubt that teachers play a unique role in schools. They are the liaison between school, society, knowledge and students (DUNN, 2008, GALVÃO, 2002). Their involvement in school inclusion is an extremely important condition to achieve equal opportunities for all students. A qualified and concerned teaching professional can develop well-planned strategies by constantly evaluating and by changing discriminatory attitudes (FREITAS, 2008). Teachers are expected to have a receptive attitude towards diversity and to be available to apply innovative pedagogies in the classroom. Therefore, a critical stance and new programs must be adopted to respond to diversity (DOMÍNGUEZ ALONSO; PINO 2008).

“Resources are secondary. The important point is the attitude of the school and the teacher” (RODRIGUES, 2006, p. 7). According to the author, given the idealism that associates inclusion to human rights and social justice, it is understandable that the core force to promote a particular program lies on teachers’ attitudes, will and ethics. Other studies (JEONG; BLOCK, 2011, QI; HA, 2012) confirm that PE teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEN influence their pedagogy, reinforcing the theory of planned behavior. Effectively, if we prize attitudes, other factors such as resources may be less appreciated (AVRAMIDIS; NORWICH, 2002).

Considering these findings, we arrived at the issues generating the problem under study, which consolidated as the following questions: Which attitudes do PE teachers have about Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs? What are

the factors that most influence their inclusive attitudes? What are the existing barriers to the development of inclusive PE? What are the facilitating factors?

Given those questions, the main goal was to describe the educational community's attitudes towards Inclusive PE. Then, we formulated study hypotheses related to the nature of attitudes, specifically regarding inference of participants' personal and professional characteristics.

2 METHOD

To respond to the problem of study, we started from the deductive method and chose an interpretive study with non-experimental design, conducted through empirical and field research. The research's methodological perspective combined a mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative nature in order to approach the reality studied.

The sample consisted of 53 PE teachers who taught at Elementary schools in the district of Porto in the 2011/2012 school year: 49.1% were male and 50.9% were female; 18.9% were under 30 years of age; 52.8% were 30-40 years old; 17% were 41-50; and 11.3% were over 50.

As for academic degree, 77.4% held teacher undergraduate degrees and 22.6% held master's degrees. Regarding professional experience, teachers had an average of 13.19 ± 9.55 years of teaching, and 64.2% had some experience in inclusive classes.

Regarding school level, 41.5% taught 3rd Cycle (7th-9th year) and Secondary School, 34% taught 1st cycle (1st-4th) and 24.5% taught 2nd cycle of basic education (5th-6th). As for specific training, 73.6% of teachers had had SEN curriculum components in their initial training and 47.2% participated in Training Actions on Inclusive School.

In the second stage of the study, a discussion group was

formed, consisting of nine participants: five PE teachers (three males and two females) with an average age of 39.4; two 39- and 42-year-old female tutors and two students from the 2nd and 3rd cycles of basic education, who had studied in inclusive classes when they were 11- and 14-year-old, respectively.

Since an investigation was carried out in schools, this project was submitted for approval by the Directorate-General for Innovation and Curriculum Development of Portugal's Ministry of Education, fulfilling provisions of Order 15847/2007, published in the Official Gazette 2nd series no. 140, of July 23.

After also obtaining approval of the management of the 17 target-schools, we applied the questionnaire developed to assess Inclusive Global Attitude: "PE and inclusion of students with SEN". The first part of the questionnaire was related to participants' Personal and Professional characteristics. In the second part, teachers indicated their level of agreement with 12 statements about the topic according to a 1-5 Likert scale (Visual Analogue Scales). Then, by priority, they ordered conditions for the success of inclusive PE and pedagogical difficulties in inclusive classes. The scale applied proved to be a reliable and valid measurement tool with good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.71$).

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 19.0 for Windows. We resorted to descriptive and inferential statistics, using the Student's t test, One Way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation, considering the independence of groups.

Group discussion was used after quantitative research in order to integrate different perspectives and better clarify and interpret results. An online group discussion group (*ef-inclusiva*) was organized in which we applied a guiding matrix for data collection seeking a better description of the reality of inclusion in PE and identification of prospects for improvement. Systematic content analysis was conducted on the resulting information.

3 RESULTS

PE teachers' average Inclusive Global Attitude was $M=3.29\pm 0.34$ on a 1-5 scale. The minimum value obtained was $M=2.42$ and the maximum value was $M=4.08$.

The item participants prized the most was importance of specialized training for PE teachers to be able to respond appropriately to all students ($M=4.08\pm 1.11$).

Given the difficulties of this process, teachers seem to agree that their educational effectiveness is reduced in inclusive classes ($M=4.06\pm 1.06$) and that inclusion requires a change in normal school activities ($M=4.06\pm 0.91$).

In the discussion group, teachers explained these difficulties by saying that "each student with SEN requires a curriculum adapted to his or her difficulty" (teacher 3); student 2 argued that "there are students who cannot do all exercises; they also do not have the materials they need"; "the planning requirement derives from the PE professor's professional ethics ... there is always a way to plan an activity for a special student if the teacher knows that student well, and his or her limits and capabilities" (teacher 1). They also revealed that "the curriculum is not very flexible, and a variety of curricula would be necessary for different students with SEN" (teacher 5).

Given the benefits of inclusion, teachers agreed ($M=4.06\pm 0.90$) that the presence of a student with SEN provides new learning situations for all students; that it attenuates differences between that student and his or her peers ($M=3.70\pm 0.93$), not interfering with his or her progress ($M=3.60\pm 1.21$).

On the other hand, some disagreement was found on the facts that the heterogeneity of classes was not a factor for academic failure ($M=2.94\pm 1.42$), that pairs who interact with students with

SEN are less likely to develop ($M=1.6\pm 1.01$), and that inclusion is not beneficial for students with special needs or their peers ($M=2.21\pm 1.26$).

Regarding the consequences of inclusion for the students' peers, tutor 2 said that “children who live in contact with difference become better human beings, are more tolerant and understanding, with higher moral and citizenship awareness. Children with disabilities, in turn, have greater social interaction [...]”.

In view of the most important factors for successful inclusion in PE, teachers prized in the first place specific training in SEN (5.68 ± 1.59) (Table 1) followed by support by experts (5.25 ± 1.85). With very approximate values, they prized infrastructures (3.60 ± 1.75), teaching methodologies (3.64 ± 1.50), and teachers' attitudes (3.66 ± 1.90). Attitudes were in second-to-last place (3.32 ± 1.99) and the evaluation process was last (2.94 ± 1.83).

Table 1: Factors Required for Inclusion

	Training	Technical	Material	Methodologies	Teacher	Attitudes	Assessment
Mean	5.68	5.25	3.66	3.64	3.60	3.32	2.94
SD	1.591	1.849	1.901	1.495	1.747	1.988	1.834

Source: Prepared by the author

Regarding collaboration between teachers and experts, the discussion group also noted that “collaboration of special education teachers and psychologists is very important to discuss together the best way to integrate students with special needs” (Tutor 2).

As the main difficulties in the inclusion process, teachers pointed out lack of training (6.67 ± 2.86), expert support (6.89 ± 2.23), and the number of students in classes (6.92 ± 3.20) (Table 2).

Table 2: Difficulties in Inclusion in PE

	Support	Training	Availability	Experience	Methods	Number	Student	Family	Materials	Prejudice
Mean	6.89	6.92	4.28	5.26	5.60	6.77	5.94	5.45	5.57	2.28
SD	2.23	3.198	2.273	2.595	2.323	2.860	2.397	2.325	2.892	2.421

Source: Prepared by the author

The discussion group also highlighted difficulties related to training, support and the number of students in classes: “There is a lack of proper preparation/training” (teacher 3); “Teachers also need support” (student 1), “... lack of technical expertise to monitor students in PE classes” (teacher 5); “... they feel very demanded, because they have no training or they often do not seek it. On the other hand, classes are too large, and differentiation becomes difficult” (tutor 2).

Students’ problems were ranked 4th (5.94 ± 2.40), followed by difficulties resulting from teaching methods to be applied (5.60 ± 2.32), lack of infrastructure and adapted materials (5.57 ± 2.89), and family support (5.45 ± 2.33).

Obstacles related to curriculum differentiation were also pointed out: “The curriculum is very stiff and not flexible. A more varied curriculum, more appropriate to classes with SEN students could put these students on equal conditions with their colleagues” (teacher 4). The idea that “lack of adequate physical conditions at school hinders inclusion” was also m (teacher 3); and that “most schools lack teaching materials adapted” (teacher 5).

The less valued difficulties were work experience (5.26 ± 2.60), availability of teachers (4.28 ± 2.27), and finally prejudice (2.2 ± 2.42).

In the inferential study, the variables of gender and years of teaching did not influence teachers' attitudes ($p < 0.05$). Regarding age, the group under 30 showed less reduction of pedagogical effectiveness in inclusive classrooms ($M = 3.30 \pm 1.25$, $p = 0.031$) and the 30-40 group agreed most with this statement ($M = 4.39 \pm 0.83$).

Furthermore, with regard to academic level, teachers holding master's degrees agreed more ($M = 4.67 \pm 0.49$, $p = 0.041$) that their effectiveness decreases in classes with students with SEN than the group of teachers with undergraduate degrees ($M = 3.85 \pm 1.12$).

Compared to Education Cycle, results indicated that teachers' inclusive attitudes decreased as the cycle advanced (Table 3).

Table 3: Attitude regarding School Cycle

School Cycle	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
1st Cycle	18	3.3750	.36408		
2nd Cycle	13	3.3654	.30908	2.529	.090
3rd Cycle	22	3.1667	.30211		

Source: Prepared by Author

Results pointed to the importance of basic training courses for teachers to act on the issue of inclusion. They also indicated that the untrained group feels more ($p = 0.017$) the need to change normal activities in class ($M = 4.50 \pm 0.65$) than the group that received training ($M = 3.69 \pm 1.15$). The former group training also attributed more importance to specific training in the area of SEN as a necessary condition for the success of inclusion ($M = 5.36 \pm 1.69$) than the trained group ($M = 6.57 \pm 0.76$, $p = 0.013$).

Together, the frequency of specific training actions interfered significantly on attitudes. The group that did not perform actions seemed to perceive more the reduction of their educational effectiveness and to need more training (Table 4).

Table 4: Attitude depending on the frequencies of Specific Training Actions

	Training actions	N	Average	DP	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-t)
Reduction of pedagogical effectiveness	Yes	25	3.68	1,145	2,488	,121	2,563	51	,013
	No	28	4.39	.875			2,524	44,755	,015
Need for training	Yes	25	3.68	1,282	7,767	,007	2,589	51	,013
	No	28	4.43	.790			2,523	39,050	,016

Source: Prepared by the author

The interference of the variable of *experience with inclusion* showed that the inexperienced group requires more specialized training to respond appropriately to students with SEN; the experienced group, in turn, perceived more difficulties as a result of the lack of appropriate infrastructure and materials (Table 5).

Table 5: Attitude as a function of Experience with Inclusion

	Experience	N	M	SD	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-t)
Prize training	Yes	34	3.85	1.234	4.463	0.40	2,015	51	0.49
	No	19	4.47	.697			2,340	50.9	0.23
Difficulties due to lack of materials	Yes	34	6.18	2.790	.255	.616	2.124	51	.039
	No	19	4.47	2.816			2.118	37.08	.041

Source: Prepared by the author

4 DISCUSSION

The results suggested that PE teachers' attitudes were mostly supportive of inclusion of SEN students in their classes. Attitudes seemed to depend on several factors such as age, level of education, specific training in SEN and experience in inclusive classes.

Other authors have also found similar results and concluded that teachers are available for inclusion (HODGE *et al.*, 2004, JERLINDE; DANERMARK; GILL, 2010), although they do not consider themselves properly trained to teach inclusive classes (SOUZA; BOATO, 2010).

As in this study, Hodge *et al.* (2004) pointed out teachers'

lack of preparation and schools' few human and material resources as the greater difficulties. Others like Morley *et al.* (2005) confirm the importance of support by experts to explore opportunities for participation in the PE curriculum component.

Training in SEN and/or adapted physical activities proved to be a key variable for teachers' inclusive attitudes, and the vast majority showed the need for more specific training. Similarly, studies by other authors (BLOCK; RIZZO, 1995, HUTZLER, 2003, KOWALSKI; RIZZO, 1996, MONTEIRO, 2008, RIZZO; VISPOEL, 1991, RIZZO; KIRKENDALL, 1995) found that untrained teachers had negative attitudes. Future teachers must be trained to understand and apply the contents of that curricular component differently (RODRIGUES, 2008, SHARMA; FORLIN; LOREMAN, 2008). Nascimento *et al.* (2009) also concluded that continuous training is more relevant than initial training for the professional's practice in PE classes in the inclusive context. However, Pinto Pires and Condado (2012), analyzing the PE curriculum at Portuguese universities, concluded that there is no background in teachers' training for the concepts of inclusion to materialize. Indeed, inclusive PE training should not be restricted to the basic course. Professionals should improve their curriculum with knowledge and experience throughout their careers (BLOCK; RIZZO, 1995, PARRILLA; MORIÑA, 2006, RIZZO; KIRKENDALL, 1995).

As Hutzler (2003), we found that the experience in inclusive education contributed significantly to favorable attitudes. Rodrigues (2006, p. 307) point out that the process of specific training is linked to professional practice, so that teachers can have a support team.

Consistent with other studies, there was the influence of the gender variable on teachers' inclusive attitudes (KOWALSKI; RIZZO, 1996, MONTEIRO, 2008; RIZZO; DAVIS; TOUSSAINT, 1994, TRIPP; RIZZO; WEBBERT, 2007). However, others showed a more inclusive attitude towards females (FOLSOM-MEEK; *et al.*, 1999, GORGATTI, 2009, HUTZLER, 2003).

Academic degree was also not associated with SEN training and did not influence pedagogical effectiveness. Similarly, other authors (CORTEZ, 2008, HAYCOCK; SMITH, 2011, KOWALSKI; RIZZO, 1996) showed that the degree of perceived competence is the best predictor of favorable attitudes rather than the level of academic training.

PE teachers with lower educational levels showed more positive attitudes. Several authors advocated this view, since inclusion is seen more positively for younger students (DEPAUW; DOLL-TEPPER, 2000, KOWALSKI; RIZZO, 1996, RIZZO; VISPOEL, 1991). In this sense, Domínguez Alonso and Pino (2009) also indicate that measures of attention to diversity depend on the level of education and students' type of educational support needs. Salvia and Munson (1986) make an important contribution by concluding that as those children grow and evolve in the school hierarchy, teachers tend to focus more on the subject conveyed, relegating the class's differences and difficulties to the background.

Authors such as Block and Rizzo (1995); Rizzo and Vispoel (1991) and Rodrigues (2005) confirm this study's view that teachers with inclusive experience overcome prejudice more easily and display more favorable attitudes. In this sense, Haycock and Smith (2011) indicate that education professionals can only perceive inclusion appropriately if they are within that context. Also Ainscow (1997) and Karagiannis, Stainback and Stainback (1999) admit that inclusive school encourages dynamism of its employees, and the environment of inclusion leads schools and their professionals to reflect more in attempting to achieve new forms of working.

Close collaboration between professionals, families and the community is pointed out as a success factor (MANTOAN, 2003, SANCHES, 2006, AINSCOW, 1997, HAYCOCK; SMITH, 2011). Also, the curricular component's curriculum was seen as inflexible, hindering pedagogical differentiation and adoption of methodologies appropriate to all students. Therefore, teachers'

skills for flexible curriculum management, processes of pedagogical differentiation and application of teamwork methodologies are underscored. Thus, some authors (BIEGER, 2012, CHICON, 2008, HOWES; GRIMES; SHOHEL, 2011, KHOCHEN; RADFORD, 2012, SHARMA; FORLIN; LOREMAN, 2008) point to the importance of PE teachers developing critical and flexible pedagogy in their training, working in collaboration with the whole school community. However, that would demand building an inclusive culture within the educational community through mutual dialogue based on the understanding of the several points of view, where each party can make its contribution but always in conjunction and with common goals. Other studies also confirm that the improvement of the inclusive practice involves valuing participation of families in school. Such participation leads to mutual understanding about the education of students and increases trust and cooperation, which brings a very positive impact on the teaching-learning process (DOMÍNGUEZ ALONSO; PIN, 2009, RODRIGUES, 2008). The process of teacher qualification and training, in a joint effort with the school community and students' parents, may effectively be the best way to facilitate inclusion (RODRIGUES, 2008).

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research concluded that the success of education in the future depends on a joint and collaborative work.

Government support is essential when it comes to offering specialized training and improving material resources and technical support at schools. However, change in the education system itself must be based on training of the several educational actors. Therefore, for inclusion to take place in different social contexts, it is necessary to promote inter-sector initiatives for training and reflection among school, health and social service professionals, thus expanding the ties with families and community.

Teachers must be trained to develop a more inclusive pedagogy that includes curricular flexibility and diverse teaching

methodologies. It is also necessary to restructure the PE curricular component's curriculum by adopting a less competitive, more flexible and supportive character. But only close cooperation between all those involved can foster an increasingly inclusive culture at school, allowing full development of all students.

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