

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES INTO GENERAL PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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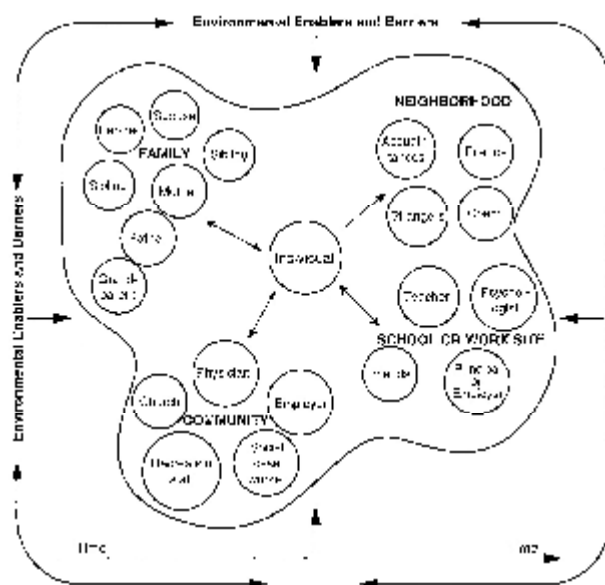
Abstract

The aims of this study were to provide the review of studies focused on Inclusion of children with disabilities into general physical education, to describe the state of knowledge about this phenomenon and to suggest areas for further research. The computed literature search was conducted using words inclusion/ integration and physical education in the database SPORT DISCUSS. For the purpose of this study, only research articles from peer review journals were included. As recently two excellent reviews on attitudes towards teaching children with disabilities (Kozub & Lienert, 2003) and attitude toward the participation (Hutzler, 2003) were published, we have omitted attitudinal studies from further analyses. In order to analyze studies on inclusion the Model of research on inclusion was developed based on the combination of Ecological field theory, PAPTECA model and PE context model. In this model there are three main factors: a) teachers, b) students, and c) teaching process. In the factor related to teachers, we can consider: i) preparation of teachers; ii) teachers with and without experience with inclusion; iii) paraprofessionals; and iv) consultation. In students factor we might study: i) students with disabilities; ii) nondisabled peers; iii) parents; and iv) wider community. In teaching process we might focus on: ii) the impact of inclusion on learning of children; ii) the nature and quality of interaction among children in inclusive PE; iii) the nature and quality of interaction between teacher (paraprofessional) and children in inclusive PE; and iv) the impact of inclusion on attitudes towards persons with disabilities. In this paper we only focus on teachers and students. Majority of studies on inclusion dealt with the attitudes of preservice and in-service teachers toward inclusion. Majority of studies were done in North American educational environment. Recently there has been more focus on teaching process and experiences of teachers as well as students with inclusion using both qualitative and quantitative approach with sound theoretical foundation. However it must be highlighted that the phenomenon of inclusion in PE has not been yet thoroughly studied.

Introduction

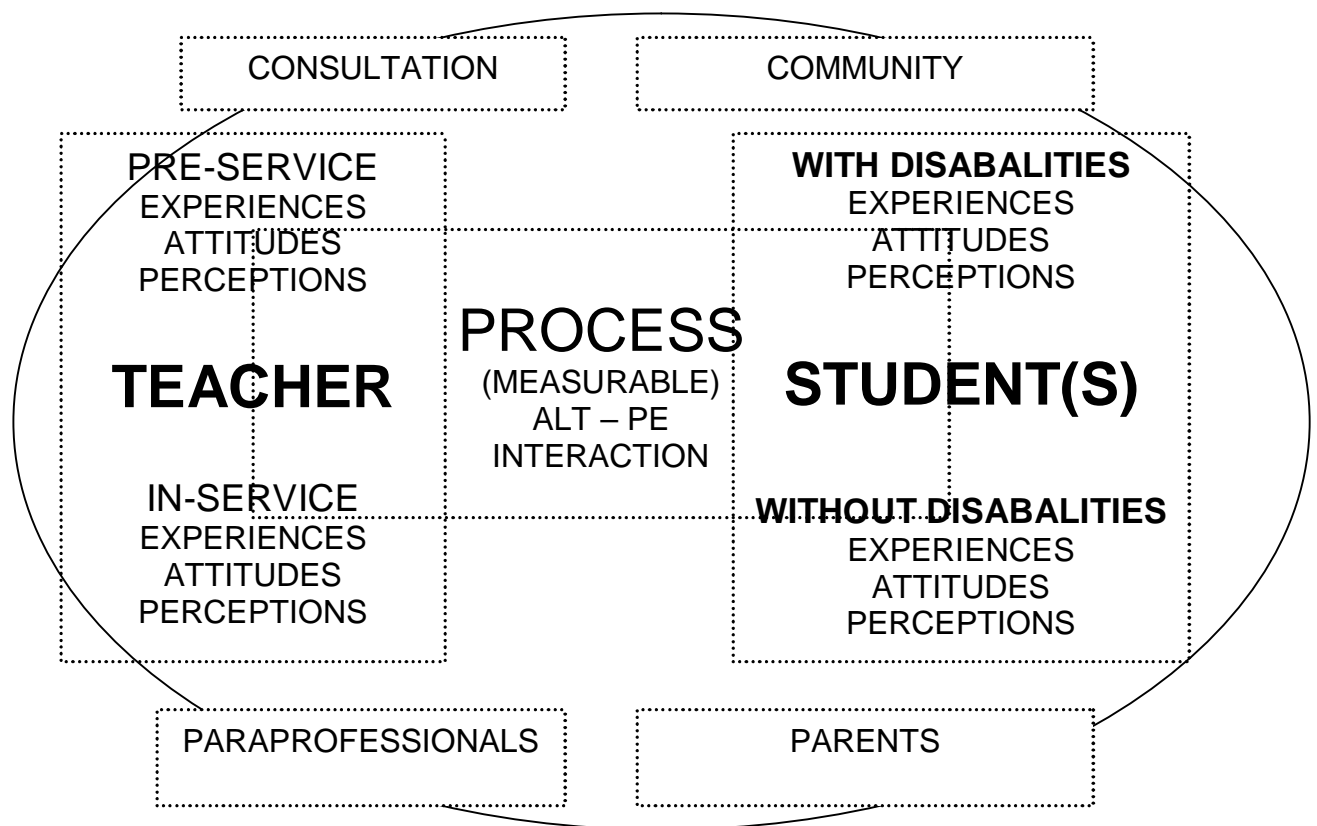
International studies (Kudlacek, Valkova, Sherrill, Myers & French, 2002; Lienert, Sherrill & Myers, 2001; Meegan & MacPhail, 2006) tell us that with a growing number of students with disabilities being included in general education, more and more physical education teachers are faced with the reality of teaching these students together with the rest of the children. In most cases teachers are not permitted to decide if they will have a student with a disability in their class, but they can decide to which extent they will include this student (Lienert et al., 2001). There is a great difference between dumping children with disabilities without proper support into general programs and including them in education with other children (Block, 1994, p. 16; Sherrill, 1998, p. 107). According to Sherrill (1998, p. 107), "The practice of assigning almost everyone to regular physical education and assuming that teachers will take the initiative in adapting instruction is widespread." With a growing number of students with disabilities being included in general education, more and more physical educators will be faced with the reality of teaching these students together with the rest of the children. The process of educating children together has had many titles in past starting with mainstream, changing into integration and finally arriving to current title of *INCLUSION*.

Figure 1. Ecological field theory (Sherrill, 1998)



This name is almost universally accepted in English terminology, but in some countries different terms (e.g. integration) are still used preferably. While inclusion has become widely spread phenomenon (Block, 1994; Sherrill, 1998) studies aiming to help us understand this phenomenon and variables that influence it have been very limited. Therefore the aim of this study is to provide the review of studies focused on Inclusion of children with disabilities into general physical education and to suggest areas for further research. In order to analyze studies on inclusion the Model of research on inclusion was developed based on the combination of Ecological field theory (figure 1.), PAPTECA model and PE context model. In this model (Figure 2.) there are three main factors: a) teachers, b) students, and c) teaching process. In the factor related to teachers, we can consider: i) preparation of teachers; ii) teachers with and without experience with inclusion; iii) paraprofessionals; and iv) consultation.

Figure 2. The model of research on inclusion in physical education



In students factor we might study: i) students with disabilities; ii) nondisabled peers; iii) parents; and iv) wider community. In teaching process we might focus on: i) the impact of inclusion on learning of children; ii) the nature and quality of interaction among children in inclusive PE; iii) the nature and quality of interaction between teacher (paraprofessional) and children in inclusive PE; and iv) the impact of inclusion on attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

Methods

The computed literature search was conducted using words inclusion/ integration and physical education in the database SPORT DISCUSS. For the purpose of this study, only research articles from peer review journals were included. As recently two excellent reviews on attitudes towards teaching children with disabilities (Kozub & Lienert, 2003) and attitude toward the participation (Hutzler, 2003) were published, for the purposes of this presentation we have omitted attitudinal studies from further analyses.

Results

Teachers

LaMaster, Gall, Kinchin, and Siedentop (1998) interviewed 6 elementary school PE specialists, who had students with disabilities in their class. They concluded that teachers were constantly struggling to provide appropriate teaching. The teaching issues were divided into instructional (how to teach particular student, how to adapt activity) and managerial (how to manage students' behavior). Teachers also stated that they felt like they were inadequately prepared to teach effectively in integrated classes. Last issue was little or no support from school in including students with disabilities. Lienert, Sherrill, and Myers (2001) used qualitative research method, specifically individual interviews (approximately 60 min) and observations from school settings, to study concerns of physical educators about inclusion in PE. Participants were from the USA and Germany. Teacher had personal concerns about uncertainty and worry about everyday demands and their competence to meet these demands. In managerial concerns teachers were worried about lack of resources, large class sizes and inadequate facilities. In consequence concerns they worried about kids teasing children with disabilities, or students with disabilities annoying other kids. Teaching was also reported to be much more difficult

in an inclusive setting. Finally teacher held collaboration concerns about support and team teaching with other professionals or support personnel. Learning more about teachers concerns, perspectives and experiences with inclusive physical education can help with policy and decision making related to school rules and curriculum guidelines. Teachers can also feel like their voice is being heard and finally this information can be used for teacher preparation programs.

Lieberman, Houston-Wilson & Kozub (2002) used self made questionnaire to study perceptions of 148 teachers about barriers to inclusion students with visual impairment in general physical education. Professional preparation, equipment, programming, and time were the most common perceived barriers to inclusion. Morley, Bailey, Tan and Cooke (2005) belong to few Europe based studies. They have focused on perceptions (views) of forty three teachers on inclusion and found the main concern to be about the level of participation. Teachers were concerned with the lack of support services and training and also about the accessibility of environment. Feijgin, Talmor and Erlich (2005) studied professional burnout of 363 PE teachers in Israel in relation to inclusive physical education. Although they have found low burnout level among teachers they discovered many barriers to successful inclusion. Among major barriers were: a) suitability of sport facilities, b) difficulties in assessing the students, c) safety, d) adapted teaching methods, e) reports to parents.

Students

In the literature search we have found two main areas of these studies: a) students with disabilities, and b) students without disabilities. Studies on students without disabilities focus mainly on their attitudes towards inclusion and due to limited space we will not discuss this here. Studies focusing on children with disabilities and their experiences (perceptions) with inclusion are only three. First study was published in 2000 by Canadian author Donna Goodwin (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000) with the title "Inclusive physical education from the perspectives of students with physical disabilities." They have used fields notes, drawings and focus group interviews to describe phenomenon of inclusion. In study we can find that students have both good and bad experiences. Good experiences were expressed as: a) sense of belongings, b) skillful participation, and c) PE benefits while bad experiences were: a) isolation, b)

questioned competence, and c) isolation. Goodwin (2001) extended this study when she focused on interaction or rather perception of children with disabilities of interaction with (help of) non-disabled peers. She has examined the meaning of help by non-disabled peers and found out that help (assistance) can be both positive (supportive, empowering) and negative (disempowering). Therefore it is crucial to understand the ways of appropriate reinforcement and to teach it to elementary school children.

Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham and Auweele (2002) focused on perspectives of 10 students with physical disabilities on inclusion and empowerment. They have found five main categories of themes: a) assistive devices which might facilitate inclusion and empower students to participation; b) physical activity in “none inclusive fashion – let them do what they can”; c) peers were either supporting or limiting factor, d) important adults (parent or adults role model) influenced the amount of participation, and e) self-representing the opportunity to experience self using internal type of personal resources.

Discussion

Among teachers findings suggest that there are ongoing barriers which are very similar across different cultures (USA, Germany, and Israel). Therefore it seems as most school authorities fail to provide adequate conditions for inclusive physical education. There is also handful of studies focused on support services and consultation, which are aimed to facilitate inclusion, but there is need to study this area much more. There are very few studies about experiences and perceptions of children with disabilities with inclusion. While described studies can serve as examples of excellent and inspiring research, professional (especially those in Europe) need to accept commitment in establishing research base supporting inclusion by describing the current state of inclusion, describe inclusion as phenomenon, its facilitators and barriers. To describe what is happening can create solid path to the improvement of current situation.

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