

In-Service Teachers and Attention to Students with Physical Disability: Training, Concerns and Needs

Selected Oral Presentation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to delve into the training of an in-service Physical Education Teachers (PET) in schools where students with a physical disability attend, their concerns and needs, as well as the relationship with other professionals. The participants were 57 in-service teachers and 3 physiotherapists (PT). The data were gathered from questionnaires from all the teachers and an interview of 8 PET and 3 PT. The results indicate they need

to improve their training, and, in varying degrees, in such areas as certain sports, learning tasks and curriculum adaptations. The study reveals PT ensure that exercises are conducted which benefit students with disability and not those types which are designed for non-disabled students. Furthermore, teachers' perception of a lack of training results in feeling unable to deal with students with disability, and becoming dependent on the PT.

Key Words: *Students with a physical disability, In-service Physical Education Teachers, Physiotherapists. Concerns and needs.*

INTRODUCTION

The attention given to students with disabilities, in compulsory education at Primary and Secondary schools in Spain, has changed in the last few decades to its present focus of an inclusive orientation incorporated into the curriculum (LOE, 2006). Likewise, it has been established that it is the responsibility of the school administrations to grant these students access to the curriculum. Furthermore, it is the faculty, given the autonomy and flexible constitution in the present curriculum, who establishes these pertinent adaptations.

The conceptual evolution, from the term integration to inclusion and affected at regulation level, entails joint responsibility and commitment of the teaching staff in the design and implementation of the curriculum in its evident degrees of specification. This change encompasses, in reference to the attention to diversity, and as proposed by Arnaiz & Ballester (1999, p. 8) "that the focus of education shift from the contents to the students." This statement could be interpreted to indicate that teachers are to be proficient not only in the content which they are to teach in its broadest sense but the instruction of it as well as the curriculum (Shulman, 1987), which encompass an adequate knowledge of the specific characteristics of the student with regards to his/her disability and environment.

In this sense, the possibility of assisting a student with a disability implies taking into account a great variety of factors. Accordingly, Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkings, Vaughan & Shaw (2000) consider inclusive education to be a distinct process for each school which involves the different agents who participate in it, and, thus, a complex one.

The involvement of the different agents who intervene in the inclusion process requires a conjunction of beliefs, resources, knowledge, which does not always occur (Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster & O'Sullivan, 2004). Consequently, according to Pivik, McComas & Laflamme (2002), physical barriers (e.g. ramps, doors, etc.), attitudes (physical and emotional bullying, isolation ...), lack of awareness and incomprehension by specialists and teachers result in lessons which do not adequately support the student with disability. The outcome has the student with disability acting as an assistant to the teacher or being excluded. Along these lines of study, researchers (e.g. Caus

& Santos, 2011; Díaz del Cueto, 2009; Gita, Bognár, Kalbli & Dorogi, 2008) mention that the principal difficulties experienced by teachers may be found in little specific training in adapted physical activity, the limited information relating to the student's disability, the high student-teacher ratio, little communication among teacher, student and family in addition to limited cooperation with other teachers.

In response to this situation, the purpose of the study was to delve into the training of PET with experience in primary and secondary levels who deal with students with a physical disability, their concerns and needs as well as the relationship with other professionals.

METHOD

Context and Participants: There were 57 (30 male and 25 female) in-service PET in the metropolitan area of Madrid. 39 teachers were from mainstream Primary School (PS) and 18 from mainstream Secondary School (SS). Additionally, there were three PT working in three of the schools.

Data Collection: Data were gathered from a questionnaire comprised of 39 questions and five dimensions of information. We have used the following in this document: (a) professional details; (b) initial and on-going training; and (c) degree of coordination among the varying professionals in the schools.

The questionnaire was designed specifically for this study, after a broad ranging revision of pertinent bibliography, and taking into consideration the focus of the study. It was validated by experts within the department of PE and disability at the university.

A semi-structured interview was conducted (Patton, 2002) of eight PET (four from PS and four from SS) and three PT with the purpose of probing and clarifying the information culled from the questionnaire.

Confidentiality was respected and participants were informed of their right to abandon the study should they desire to do so.

Data Analysis: The statistical analysis centred on the frequency of answers and standard deviation (SPSS 17.0 SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA), no significant differences were found due to gender or

educational stages. The interviews were recorded and transcripts were made. Inductive analysis was employed on the content of each transcript which related to the objective of the study and the dimensions of the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Professional Details: Most of the teachers (79,5% of PS and 82,4% of SS) were permanent members of staff in their schools. The PS teachers had less experience (46,2% had between 5 and 10 years of experience in PE and 46,2% had < 5 years' experience teaching students with disability). Furthermore, 83,3% of the SS teachers had more than 15 years' experience in PE, and 38,9% had more than 15 years' experience teaching students with disability.

Initial and on-going training: 69,2% of the PS teachers and 61,1% of the SS teachers have had instruction in attention to students with disability during their initial professional training. In both groups, attendance to courses, conferences, work groups or congresses, etc. has been limited.

Aspects which teachers identify as being their highest concern are improving their training in disability, specific sport, learning tasks and adaptations to curriculum.

In this sense, Maria (PS teacher) indicates, in the interview, that the lack of training is the source of her anxiety and uncertainty during the course of the lesson:

Very insecure and worried because I want to do things and I am aware that if I had help or if I had a smaller group, I would do so many things.

Coordination among the different professionals: PS teachers (42,2%) as well as SS teachers (44,4%) declare they work together and discuss with fellow faculty members of other departments and PT in order to learn about their specific characteristics. The low rates observed reflect the need for coordination to compensate the need for training, as indicated by Andrés (SS teacher):

Above all, problems arise in coordination. Depending on the tasks which have to be done in class, the students attend a class or they are sent to the physiotherapist.

In both educational levels, the PS teachers (43,6%) and SS teachers (61,1%) state they rarely

meet with the parents of students with disability, which is confirmed by Rosa (a SS teacher) when she says,

Normally the person most parents speak to is Alicia (the physiotherapist).

From this we may deduce that the physiotherapist serves the role of intermediary between the family and the PE teacher.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

It could be said that the PET in this study would seem to be professionally stable given the years of experience in their schools; however PS teachers have less experience teaching both PE and groups which include students with disability. This stability allows them to get to know other faculty and specialists in their school and coordinate with them if so deemed necessary. Despite the training in supporting students with disability undergone, the teachers perceive and state that training needs to improve in areas of content and didactic instruments which provide them with ways to modify the teaching-learning process to accommodate the needs of students with disability (Caus & Santos, 2011; Díaz del Cueto, 2009; Gita et al, 2008). The teachers believe that training which may be enriching could use real and specific cases and experiences within a theoretical-practical format. Furthermore, professional stability not only provides teachers with the opportunity to collaborate with a variety of professionals, but also we believe it is the physiotherapist the person who provides specific information. As a result of feelings insecurity generated by perceived deficiencies in the type of professional training they have received, PET depend on the criteria established by the physiotherapist and other professionals to provide support to the student with disability. This situation could negatively affect participation of students with disability in the inclusive process.

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