

CHALLENGES OF (INCLUSIVE) PHYSICAL EDUCATION (IPE) IN EUROPE

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Austria**ABSTRACT**

Building on statements and research findings from the last ten years there is little improvement to report in the field of inclusive physical education (IPE). The legislations of the European countries had changed towards inclusive education in the end of the 1990ies but teacher education and practical realization still seem to stay behind the theoretical intentions. Consulting recent international literature reviews (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; O'Brien, Kudlacek & Howe, 2009; Kudlacek, Morgulec-Adamowicz & Verellen, 2010) similar problems are confirmed and only few good quality studies are conducted in Europe.

Recalling the conclusions of my presentation at the FIEP congress in 2007

- Gap between theory and practice
- Stagnation of inclusive developments in PE
- PE teachers don't get sufficient and qualitative education
- PE teachers discover their teaching styles through "learning by doing"

this contribution will ask questions and will try to suggest provisions for the improvement of the problematic areas which are often reported to be the challenges of IPE by teachers and researchers.

The questions are:

- How to deal with the growing complexity and heterogeneity with respect to gender, ability, ethnicity or religion in regular and inclusive PE?
- How to improve the situation of lack of facilities and appropriate equipment?
- How to enhance teachers' competences and their need for personal and financial support?

Keywords: inclusive physical education (IPE), heterogeneity, facilities, teachers' competence

INTRODUCTION

Building on statements and research findings from the last ten years there is little improvement to report in the field of inclusive physical education (IPE). The legislations of the European countries had changed towards inclusive education in the end of the 1990ies but teacher education and practical realization still seem to stay behind the theoretical intentions. Consulting recent international literature reviews (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; O'Brien, Kudlacek & Howe, 2009; Kudlacek, Morgulec-Adamowicz & Verellen, 2010) similar problems are confirmed and only few good quality studies are conducted in Europe. Also, since the Convention of Human Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) is dealing with this issue of respecting the right for education and inclusion in the frame of physical education and school sports it is exigent to have a look if and how these requests are implemented in public in the specific countries.

DEFINITIONS AND FINDINGS

The term "inclusion" is almost universally accepted in English terminology, but in some countries different terms (e.g. integration) are still used preferably. Defining inclusive physical education (IPE) can be challenging. A general explanation given in the frame of lectures for the EIPET project says: "the practice of placing many different kinds of students together in general physical education, and the philosophy that students should be educated together in one classroom instead of separate classrooms designed to meet special needs. Inclusion means the general PE teacher will make the necessary changes in didactics, pedagogy, and curriculum to assure that all students will achieve their PE goals and feel safe, happy, comfortable, and successful in the PE setting." (Kudlacek, EIPET Project)

"An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his/her peers and other numbers of the school community in the course of having his/her educational needs met" (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, in Block, 2007, p. 20).

"Inclusion and participation in physical education require a new approach and concept of shared activities and sports between pupils with different preconditions and skills. Teachers and other experts involved in inclusive physical education therefore have to acknowledge the children's diversity and seize the opportunity of using human variety in planning an arranging inclusive activities" (Schmelzer, 2012).

According Block and Obrusniková (2007) as well as of O'Brien et al. (2009) there is a limited number and quality of published studies. The state of inclusion of students with disabilities in general physical education (GPE) varies across European countries. In many countries inclusive physical education is still a developing practice. The conclusions of the literature review of O'Brien et al. (2009) suggested that inclusion in physical education can effectively work for the child with a disability (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000) and it can work without negatively affecting peers without disabilities (Faison-Hodge & Porretta, 2004; Obrusniková et al., 2003). They confirm that "the success of inclusion is greatly increased when various factors such as support, personnel, training and positive attitudes exist. (...) Europe is in the process of making a positive move towards greater inclusion of students with both mild to severe disabilities" (p. 58).

Recalling the conclusions of my presentation at the FIEP congress in 2007:

- Gap between theory and practice
- Stagnation of inclusive developments in PE
- PE teachers do not get sufficient and qualitative education
- PE teachers discover their teaching styles through "learning by doing"
- Need for improvement of education, teaching quality, system support (see Dinold & Valkova, 2004)

I may emphasize that they had been partly confirmed by quotes of the recent study project of the International Committee of Sport Pedagogy (ICSP) presented at ICSEMIS 2012 and IAPESGW congress 2013. The issues found from the answers of the different countries ("Global Voices ...", 2010-12):

- Policy, curriculum, lack of facilities, lack of financial support
- Marginalization/low reputation of the subject
- Diversity in gender, religion, culture, lack of respect/tolerance
- Human resources, heterogeneity, disability, inclusion
- Physical education teacher education (PETE) and profession

Considering these (so far unpublished) findings this contribution intends to ask questions and will try to suggest provisions for the improvement of the problematic areas which are often reported to be the challenges of IPE.

In order to be able to make such proposals many experts of quality physical education had gathered recently at the UNESCO headquarter in Paris and discussed current weaknesses and how they could be addressed. The following suggestions are inspired by and partly taken as examples from these consultations.

Questions, sub-questions, and proposed answers

How to deal with the growing complexity and heterogeneity with respect to gender, ability, ethnicity or religion in regular and IPE?

It has to be acknowledged that access to physical activity, education and sport are complex and multifaceted, so that it is a predominant aim to raise awareness of 'diversity' by focusing upon the roles of gender, ethnicity, religion, and ability. Examples of how to apply diversity management from commercial practice in sport pedagogy are proposed by Dinold, Diketmüller, Grix & Phillpots (2013). It seems that in direct confrontation with the realistic situation with the specific groups of students it is necessary to identify the barriers for IPE, ask the relevant questions and try to provide specific solutions:

- Is the curriculum gender sensitive?
- Is the curriculum sensitive to cultural identity?
- Is the teaching of physical education inclusive of all children, protective, gender responsive and encouraging of the participation of the learners themselves?
- Does the curriculum allow for variation in working methods to suit the environment within which it is being delivered?
- Do the learning materials cater to the needs of all students with special needs, including those with differing physical abilities, visually impaired and hearing impaired?

Answers

The curricula should be open for adaptation and respect cultural differences in order to allow all children to participate in a secure, protected, and individually promoting way. The development of methods and specific approaches of changing the teachers' attitudes on IPE should be given more priority. The PE programs must be based on collaboration between the parents and on an evaluation of the child. The evaluation of the child must be based on his/her attitudes and his/her impairment, but should not be a reason for excluding the child from PE.

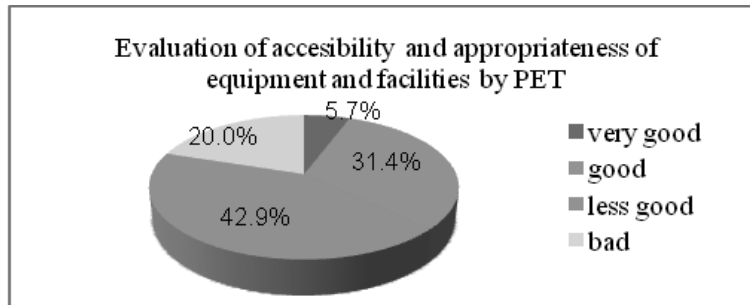
Furthermore it is necessary to improve the understanding of the educational values of physical education by focusing on the attitudes of young people and their communities. The improved communication between parties with vested interests in PE in schools could be motivated by conducting more local research that impacts on immediate issues for practitioners.

Examples from the Global Voices-study:

'Creating intercultural and/or religious awareness programs and community sensitization on the importance of PE', 'We must be creative to reach our goal – education!' Regular involvement of all students in decision making and creating ideas for the educational design is needed.' 'Collaboration between students with and without SEN is the more effective the more often they are asked to do cooperative physical activities and games.'

How to improve the situation of lack of facilities and appropriate equipment?

As an example it can be reported from a recent investigation in Austria that the situation of accessible facilities and appropriate equipment is still problematic in regular schools (Schmelzer, 2012, p. 180).



The sub-questions for this area should be:

- Are the learning environments provided safe and healthy?
- Does the budget provided enable schools to provide appropriate, adequate and accessible equipment and facilities?
- Are schools provided with the resources to maintain existing facilities, equipment and teaching materials?
- Is access to the facilities, equipment and resources required for delivering QPE given to those responsible for delivery as a first priority?
- Do the facilities and equipment used for physical education support access to provision for all students, including young persons with disabilities and girls, and take into account both ability and cultural specificities?

Answers

Aspirations for managing the challenges from the Global Voices-study include the demand to strengthen government commitment to policy and practice in PE, to improve resourcing of PE in schools, and to ask for more acceptance of heterogeneity by the teachers.

Examples of positive strategies

'Improvise PE equipment in schools!' 'Teachers buy equipment from their own money or create some ... They plan around what they have, some use free activities around simple things like balloons, ropes, sticks and balls'.

How to enhance teachers' competences and their need for personal and financial support?

Concerning the education of teachers it is interesting to have a look at the legislation in Italy. In theory all teachers work in inclusive classes and students with disabilities (2.1%) are included in regular schools according the laws. These teachers still complain about their lack of competences for good quality teaching in IPE. But their professional satisfaction is high because they often can rely on a continuously collaborating team across the various school types in order to promote an individual support plan for the child with special educational needs (Pasquariello, 2012).

In order to improve the situation and face the weaknesses of PETE we should ask:

- Are teachers supported to promote and deliver inclusive practice both in PETE and through regular, relevant and appropriate continued professional development and in-service training programs as serving teachers?
- Are there enough specialist teachers deployed at all levels of schooling throughout the country? Are there sufficient training and qualification opportunities offered in line with internationally recognized accreditation?
- Is there an existing 'Framework of Standards' for teachers in place which outlines the key roles and responsibilities of the teacher, along with the professional attributes, knowledge, skills, and understanding required to carry out the job effectively?
- Do indicators for QPETE exist and have they been adopted by the government and by higher education institutions to support regular, effective monitoring and evaluation of provision?
- Do PETE programs address the role of the teacher in facilitating engagement with sport and physical activity beyond the school day?
- Do PETE programs sensitize teachers to the importance of establishment community pathways through local level partnerships?
- Are frameworks established for continued professional development and in-service training program provision which supports teachers to engage with their own professional development throughout their career, in order to ensure their knowledge, skills and understanding are constantly refreshed and up to date according to the situation within which they are working?

Answers

Some proposals from international and regional findings:

Review and improve initial teacher education (ITE) and continued professional development (CPD)! Equip teachers to manage 'inclusion', particularly regarding gender and disability!

Positive evaluation of team teaching (PET + SET)! A continuously collaborating team across the various school types in order to promote an individual support plan for the child with SEN exists in Italy. Austrian teachers emphasize the important value of working in "team-teaching" and in the "equality in team-teaching".

Examples of positive strategies from the Global Voices-study:

'PETE programmes include compulsory courses such as sports for special needs and adapted physical education.' *'Communities of PE teachers are increasing with autonomous associations emerging in many cities.'* *'Social media and web pages for PE teachers have increased and most PE teachers are sharing their experiences and views through these networks.'* *'Increasing knowledge of teachers ... Curriculum development in different grades which includes theoretical as well as practical content.'* *'I am prepared as the professional that I am – I make my PE programme respected, I motivate students and teach them the importance of PA.'*

CONCLUSION

Concluding the proposals it can be summarized that it still depends on individual competences, flexibility, attitudes, and commitment of the teachers if inclusion is successful or not. Anyway, it is a precondition that legal regulations and daily practice in IPE must be aligned! A prerequisite which is crucial for success is in the same time to provide financial, material and infrastructural support, sufficient education, and last but not least – team collaboration.

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