

Inclusive Physical Education: teachers' views of including pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities in Physical Education

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Abstract

This article uses a purposive sample of 43 Secondary school (pupils aged 11–18) teachers to explore perceptions of including children with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities in mainstream secondary Physical Education. Findings suggest that teachers' conceptions of inclusion are based primarily around the level of participation children with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities could achieve and that this could be affected by the activity area, level of support and training opportunities available to them. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research for teachers' professional development and school organization and specific implications for the future practice of PE teachers and Teacher trainers are suggested.

Key-words: Physical Education • Special Educational Needs • disabilities

Introduction

The education of all pupils within a Physical Education (PE) environment presents the teacher with a range of issues beyond the context of a classroom setting, including the physical nature of the activities, the use of specialist areas and equipment, and the dynamics involved in grouping and organizing pupils within physical activities. It has been suggested that such issues are exacerbated by the presence of a range of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Bailey and Robertson, 2000), or those

pupils who have 'a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them' (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001: 6). Although on a more positive note, there is some evidence to suggest that children without special needs can become more aware of the needs of others when they are taught in an inclusive setting (Giangreco et al., 1993), while others have argued that all pupils can gain from the enhanced pedagogic expertise that teachers acquire from delivering an inclusive curriculum (Robertson, 2000).

Earlier conceptions of 'integrated education', whereby children with SEN¹ were merely placed in a mainstream educational environment and expected to adapt to their new surroundings, have been criticized as viewing children with SEN as a problem to be solved (Oliver, 1996). More recent versions of 'inclusive education' place a greater emphasis upon social and environmental features of the schooling of children with SEN. Oliver (1996) presents this as reflecting the move away from 'individual' explanations of SEN which locate the 'problem' within the child, to 'social' understandings, with their stress upon society and its failure to meet the needs of a particular group. In a school context this can be simplified even further by suggesting that whilst previous conceptions of educating children with SEN in a mainstream environment were fundamentally concerned with 'going to school', inclusive education is about 'participating in school' (Miles, 2000: 1). The role of the teacher as a facilitator of inclusion and as a manager of the inclusive educational environment thus becomes vital.

This article sets out to investigate teachers' perceptions of including children with SEN in mainstream curricular PE and attempts to understand the emerging issues within the area.

Background

Policies for inclusion

Various policies for inclusion have been introduced by UK governments over the last 25 years following the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science, 1978), which heralded the call for increased 'mainstreaming', or the integration of children with SEN into the mainstream curriculum environment. A number of recent UK policies on the national curriculum (Department for Education and Employment / Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999), SEN and disabilities (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001), and generic principles of educational practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) have further emphasized the need to include pupils with SEN in the context of a mainstream school environment. The UK government has also made more explicit its commitment to developing an inclusive education system (Department for Education and Employment, 1997), through its adoption of the Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994) which proposes that governments enrol all children in regular schools wherever possible. The exceptions that the UK

government has applied to this statement are documented within the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), which suggests that the child must be educated in a mainstream school unless this is incompatible with '(a) the wishes of his parent, or (b) the provision of efficient education for other children' (Part 1, unpagged).

As a result of the policy-driven shift towards the increased inclusion of pupils with SEN into mainstream schools there is an equally increasing demand on teachers to plan for, teach and assess a wider range of individual needs than previously encountered. Therefore, it is necessary to understand teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of pupils with SEN to understand the potential impact of an increase in children with SEN on teaching and learning for pupils with and without SEN.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

It has been suggested that teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with SEN can have a considerable impact on their educational experiences (Norwich, 1994). General discussions surrounding the influence of teachers' everyday philosophies on teaching (Green, 2002) and the significance of teachers' implicit understandings of the teaching environment which they are in (Sternberg, 1993) reinforce the important role teachers' attitudes play in the successful inclusion of a pupil with SEN.

Research has found that teachers consider pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) to be the most difficult to include across a range of subject areas (Clough and Lindsay, 1991; Walker and Bullis, 1991; Yell, 1995), and research with teachers has suggested that they often believe that full inclusion is most problematic with such pupils (Shanker, 1995). Moreover, there is an expressed concern from teachers that including pupils with EBD will have a detrimental effect on the educational attainment of other pupils with SEN in the class (Diamond, 1994; Heflin and Bullock, 1999).

It has also been proposed that teachers perceive the presence of support staff during the lesson as an integral feature of a successful policy for dealing with children with EBD (Guetzloe, 1994; Shanker, 1995). The results of one survey highlighted teachers' scepticism and mixed opinion about the potential benefits of inclusion and an overwhelming expectation that problems would be inherent in a system which sought to include all pupils in a mainstream school environment (D'Alonzo, Giordano and Van Leeuwen, 1997).

According to some policy makers, 'there are strong educational, as well as social and moral grounds for educating children with SEN, or with disabilities, with their peers' (Department for Education and Employment, 1997: 23). An implication of this claim is that the effective development of such inclusive provision will be for the benefit of all pupils, and not just those with special needs.

Favourable teacher attitudes are critical for the successful inclusion of students with SEN in PE (Jarvis and French, 1990; Rizzo and Vispoel, 1991). Attempts have

been made to quantify PE teachers' attitudes towards teaching children with disabilities (Rizzo, 1984), based on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). These have been developed further to incorporate a wider notion of inclusion and the use of judgements in determining attitudes (Hodge, Murata and Kozub, 2002; Kudlacek et al., 2002). However, qualitative research on teachers' perceptions of teaching pupils with SEN in the context of PE in the UK is limited.

Variables related to teachers' perceptions have been investigated and certain themes are beginning to emerge. For example, some research suggests that the gender of the teacher can play an important part in their attitude towards children with SEN, in that female teachers are more inclined to demonstrate a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with SEN than their male counterparts (Aloia et al., 1980; Kuester, 2000). However, other research has questioned these findings (Rizzo and Wright, 1987), with some studies reporting that gender differences are not apparent when teachers assess such pupils (Duchane and French, 1998). Evidence has also suggested that PE teachers' attitudes toward disability vary according to the condition itself, with physical educators in the US preferring teaching students with learning disabilities over those with physical disabilities (Rizzo and Vispoel, 1991).

Although research on teachers' attitudes in general is plentiful and evidence on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in PE is beginning to grow, there have been calls for further research to explore the quality of training that teachers receive, and other school factors that may influence the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion (such as the use of policies, resources, support and organizational frameworks and school practices) (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Heikanaro-Johansson and Vogler, 1996). Therefore, the authors of the present study made a particular point of addressing these themes within their exploration of teachers' perceptions.

Procedure

This qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of inclusion in PE formed an integral component of a central government-funded project primarily designed to establish an accredited course for a range of professionals seeking to develop their understanding of the issues surrounding including children with SEN in mainstream curricular PE.

All state secondary schools (43) in a large city in the North of England were invited to be involved in the research. A response rate of 100 percent was obtained. This unusually high response rate has resonance with that obtained by Croll and Moses (2003) and may be indicative of a wide-scale perception among teachers that this subject warranted study.

A team of seven researchers met at regular intervals prior to the beginning of the interviewing process to discuss the interview format and clarify any ambiguities with the proposed terminology and interview structure. Pilot interviews were carried out in six schools and modifications to the interview schedule and format were incorporated. These involved changes to the order and wording of questions that enabled a better clarity and flow of questioning to be achieved. Other adjustments were made

in the ways in which the interviewer 'prepared' the participant at the start of interviewing (e.g. making clear that it was not a test of competence, or about their use of terminology). An interim meeting was held at a mid-way point during the course of interviewing to conduct a preliminary analysis of findings in order to probe certain areas in more detail in subsequent interviews. For example, initially the teachers were asked to comment generally on the training they had received and many included reference to Initial Teacher Training (ITT). In order to achieve a consistency of coverage and depth, later interviews probed specifically about the teachers' ITT experiences. All interviews were conducted with the teachers at their respective schools over a three-week period between February and March 2003.

Forty-three teachers, one from each of the secondary school PE departments across the Local Education Authority, were selected using the following criteria:

- PE Subject leader selected in the schools where the highest number of children with statements for SEN were present (6 females, P1–6; 6 males, P7–P12);²
- Least experienced teacher (5 females, P13–P17; 6 males, P18–P23);
- Most experienced male teacher (5 males, P24–P28);
- Most experienced female teacher (5 females, P29–P33);
- Female teacher with three–seven years experience of teaching PE (5 females, P34–P38);
- Male teacher with three–seven years experience of teaching PE (5 males, P39–P43).

The selection of one teacher per school sets some clear limitations on the study's ability to comment in detail about the particular school contexts from which these practitioners were drawn. However, the central objective of the study's sampling strategy was, first, to illicit responses from a range of practitioners that had different levels and types of experience. Second, it was considered important that any sample should, to some degree, be able to ascertain whether any experiences of including pupils with SEN existed across all state secondary schools in the area. Third, the significance of the individual school contexts in any analysis would only be considered at the level of available support and training, rather than representing any collective practitioner perceptions and experiences. It was considered that an individual participant from each school would be able to comment on this availability within their school.

The participation of all schools and individual teachers was voluntary. All participants were made fully aware of the study's focus, the procedures that would be undertaken, the nature of their contribution and the confidentiality of their responses. They were also made aware that they could end the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time and that there would be no implications for their school or themselves if they did so. The access to and sharing of data was confined to the research team and managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998.

Data collection

Data were collected via 43 semi-structured interviews. A draft interview schedule, organised around central themes, was piloted by interviewing six PE teachers from two secondary schools (two Subject Leaders (one male, one female), the least experienced member of each PE department (one male, one female), and the most experienced member of each PE department (one male, one female). Initial themes (teachers' perceptions of: (i) barriers to inclusion; (ii) resource issues; (iii) support mechanisms, and (iv) differences between inclusion within PE and other subject areas) were derived from discussions involving all team members, drawing on a collective expertise in school-centred evaluations, experiences as PE practitioners and from the review of existing research. While these initial themes gave the interviews an organizing focus, the semi-structured format gave sufficient flexibility to allow emerging themes to be explored. Themes that arose from the field during the pilot stage were incorporated into the interview schedule used in the main study. Team reviews during the course of the main data collection period also served to inform the exploration of emerging themes through subsequent interviews.

It was evident at the pilot stage that some teachers were uneasy about the terminology they 'should' be using when expressing their perceptions as they seemed to be searching for socially acceptable answers, which seemed to have an inhibiting effect on the answers given. Therefore, within the re-drafted introductory section of the interview, participants were asked to use terminology with which they felt most comfortable and they were assured this would not be judged negatively. At each stage of this process some questions were removed or re-worded to enhance the appropriateness of the interview.

The final interview schedule comprised four sections. The first, *Inclusive PE, definitions and purpose*, was designed to investigate the participants' understanding of the benefits of PE for all pupils and to ascertain an understanding of the ideologies held by the individual teachers in including all pupils in mainstream PE. The second section, on *Professional development*, sought to explore the training opportunities teachers had for teaching children with SEN and their satisfaction with such training. The third section investigated the *Resourcing and support of children with SEN*, with particular reference to perceived differences between PE and other curriculum subjects, and the use of, and relationships with, support staff. The fourth and final section, on *Contextual elements*, sought to examine teachers' assessments of their own confidence in teaching children with SEN. Furthermore, in presenting them with an unconstrained scenario, teachers were given the opportunity to express their views on how the teaching of children with SEN in PE could be best achieved.

Data analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third party. The authors then listened to each of the interview tapes and scrutinized the transcriptions in order to verify their accuracy. Data management was facilitated using a standard

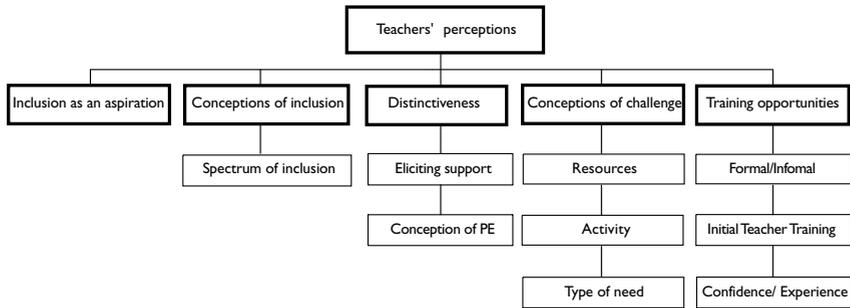


Figure 1 An overview of teachers' perceptions of including all pupils in PE

word-processing package (Microsoft Word) and all transcripts were anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

The interview transcriptions were analysed using a process of selective coding. At the start of this process, instances were identified within the text where respondents had talked about issues pertinent to the project's aims. In accordance with procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), these individual units of meaning were then initially represented by a word and then amplified into a descriptive sentence to allow for further axial coding. The resulting organizational structure (See Figure 1) contained various sub-themes and subsequent 'thematic descriptions' were used to ensure consistent application of findings.

Once themes had been assigned at both the structural and sub-structural level, they were designated as branches within the NVivo software system for qualitative data analysis and a further process of cross-analysis was conducted. A comparison of themes facilitated by NVivo was conducted at both the initial and post-analysis stages allowing units to be merged or split appropriately.

Limitations

This article is intended to provide an overview of the findings from the research and does not attempt to explore correlations between the teachers' experiences or gender and the impact of these on provision for children with SEN (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Rizzo and Wright, 1987). It is also likely that differences in teachers' levels of professional experience could impact upon their responses. However, while our sampling framework makes explicit the selection of participants of differing levels of experience, this criteria was included to ensure that a range of experience was present across the sample. Analytically, much care has been taken in the coding of responses and in their use as examples of general, common themes across this range of experience. The potential for multiple interpretations of SEN by participating teachers is an issue within this study, possibly as a result of the confusion surrounding discussions of inclusion within the PE and wider educational communities (Clough, 1998; Vickerman, 2002).

Discussion

Inclusion as an aspiration

As with PE teachers' other 'everyday philosophies' (Green, 2002), teachers' attitudes towards inclusion can appear highly impressionistic. In this study it seemed as if the teachers viewed inclusion as a 'journey', or a progressive path, towards an ultimate target. To some, there were barriers which needed addressing before inclusion could be achieved at any level, such as the need for extra planning on the part of teachers, themselves: 'it would take a lot more thought and a lot more work, but I can't see any cases where you absolutely could not include a child, it just takes a lot more thought' (P28). But the spirit of inclusion was seen as in the travelling, not the arriving, and, in this sense, inclusion was understood by many of the teachers as a normative concept, to which it would always be possible to make further progress.

Overcoming barriers to achieve inclusion was also apparent from different perspectives, or what Salvia and Munson (1986) refer to as 'teacher-related variables' and 'child-related variables'. In this context, teacher-related variables are reflected by teachers' perceptions of their own inadequacy in providing for children with SEN, as well as the severity of the individual child's need. One teacher expressed apparent frustration at the current situation in their school thus:

You have ideas, you read things, you see things but its sometimes that not knowing, and being, not knowing, uncertainty, not having a definite direction of where to go with them and how to help them sometimes. You want to help them; you want them to do their best, you want to include them but its knowing how to adapt it to suit them (P29).

The implications here may be the need to modify existing school-based plans for curriculum delivery perhaps by changing the chosen activity, adapting the activity or increasing the range of differentiation strategies used within the lesson. Indeed, the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001: 6) recognises that fully including pupils with SEN is a 'challenging objective'. Therefore, if lack of knowledge of how to adapt activities is an issue for teachers it is unsurprising that the greater the degree of adaptation required to include a child in a lesson then the greater the perceived challenge for teaching delivery is likely to be. Moreover, other teachers referred to a more general frustration with varying levels of teacher competence and opinion: 'staff's ability to adapt activities to suit children with disabilities, because you don't always quite know how to adapt things, I can't see it happening all the time because of people's reservations on how to include them' (P8).

It could be suggested that specific and general feelings of 'not knowing' relate to teachers' lack of confidence and knowledge of how to adapt activities. There are clear implications here for initial teacher training and continuing professional development opportunities (see 'Relevance of training opportunities' section later in this paper for further exploration of these implications).

With regard to child-related variables, some teachers discussed the child's level of need as a barrier, 'I think it would depend on the ability or inability of that student as to whether they could be integrated into a certain activity' (P30).

Such levels of 'pragmatic' response have been highlighted by other researchers of professionals' views of inclusion (Croll and Moses, 2000) who found that a strongly avowed commitment to the principles of inclusion is often equally strongly qualified by a sense of limited practicality. In our research these practicalities seem to reflect a number of emerging issues related to other aspects of effective mainstreaming, such as levels of support and perceived confidence with certain types of SEN, which will be highlighted later in this article.

Conceptions of inclusion

General responses relating to concepts of inclusion were varied, ranging from the almost subliminal: 'I tend to think "yes that child is statemented" and not think why, just class it as one thing rather than anything specific' (P28), to the consequences of including children with SEN on other children in a class, 'You want to be giving them a good deal and then I do think about the other members of the group wondering if that person is holding them back' (P39). The perceived detrimental effect on the pupils without SEN becomes more apparent when pupils with diverse ranges of ability are taught within the same group, 'Sometimes in a lesson if you've got a very able and very disabled group, especially here the children get quite frustrated with a child that they can't participate as well as them and it might put them off participating' (P29).

Another teacher hinted at the challenges to inclusive practice from competitive environments: 'You have to be careful you don't negate the point of it for the more able bodied pupils, so that they're bringing the level of their play down to include the others. You can lose spirit. . . young people want to play to the best of their abilities' (P12). These comments seem to reflect a conflict inherent in a subject area that seeks to promote equity and excellence simultaneously, as part of its explicit aims and objectives, as outlined within the national curriculum for PE (DfES/QCA, 1999). Moreover, the comments suggest that the effect on the more able pupils and more specifically the level of ability reached by such pupils is the key factor in the success of the lesson. Where such conflict exists, whereby teachers express concern regarding the potentially detrimental effect the inclusion of pupils with SEN may have on more able pupils within a lesson, it seems the inclusion of pupils with SEN comes at a fairly expensive price.

Spectrum of inclusion

Connected to the teachers' conceptions of inclusion was the frequently mentioned matter of the extent to which a child with SEN could be included within the lesson, for example, 'I am saying they can be included, I am not saying it is always in their

best interests to include all' (P12). Winnick (1987) proposed a spectrum that represents different levels of inclusion possible within an activity setting, ranging from the total inclusion of pupils within mainstream activities in which everyone is included without adapting or modifying the activity, to pupils with SEN participating separately within separate activities. This has been simplified even further as an activity continuum with three levels of activity; discrete adapted activity; parallel activity and inclusive adapted activity (Wright and Sugden, 1999). In the first level, children 'participate individually', in the second they 'play the same game but on their own' and in the third there is 'an opportunity for all children to participate in adapted versions of games and activities' (Black and Haskins, 1996, cited in Wright and Sugden, 1999: 29). These conceptual frameworks can be used to effectively represent teachers' attitudes in this study which suggested that inclusion can occur on a variety of levels dependent on the nature of the planned activity and the desired outcomes.

Teachers mentioned the varying degrees of participation within the context of inclusion in PE from one extreme, 'I think if you have got the resources and you have got the awareness and you know exactly what kind of child you are dealing with, exactly what their needs are, I can't think of an example where you absolutely cannot include every kind of child in one activity' (P28), to the other, 'We do have a separate alternative curriculum in year 10 and 11 which is very similar to basic PE but it is not with the others' (P37). Whilst the rationale for the employment of the separate curriculum is unclear, such responses suggest that some teachers equate the successful inclusion of all children in all PE activities to the availability of suitable resources, and to their awareness and understanding of childrens' differing needs. It follows then that if further inclusion is to be achieved, and teachers' aspirations realised, ongoing support in terms of resourcing and staff development will be crucial.

Distinctiveness

The distinctive nature of PE was the focus of a great number of responses in terms of eliciting support, the nature of the activity and the general conception of PE as an inclusive subject.

Eliciting support

One of the main identified differences between PE and other subject areas was the level of support received from Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). The majority of teachers commented on the lack of support from LSAs thus: 'Assistants, we don't really see that much of in PE which if anything we probably need more so than other subjects' (P28). When referring to children with statements of SEN, one teacher suggested a hierarchy of need by saying: 'These are all pupils who have LSA support in other lessons but we very rarely get support in PE, they are needed in other lessons. In some cases the LSAs can't really do a lot and so they are better off being elsewhere

helping others' (P34). Increasing pressure to provide for children with SEN seems to have raised teachers' awareness of levels of support within PE: 'More and more kids, it used to be just two or three who couldn't manage but now we seem to get more and more. . . We don't get help. Special needs assistants never come to PE' (P37). It would seem, albeit implicitly, from these comments that the level of support from LSAs in PE lessons is not commensurate with the increasing demands of recent policies. One of the reasons for these comments could be the fact that there are more children with statements for SEN placed in secondary schools than there has ever been (DfES, 2003), or perhaps the comments simply reflect recent policy concerns about the availability of specialist expertise and resources to support inclusion in mainstream schools (DfES, 2004). The following teacher typified the majority of responses by suggesting:

They [LSAs] are needed for classroom lessons, they are not needed for PE, that seems to be the attitude. We have asked when we had the cerebral palsy girl going through, their answer was to give us a sixth former to help her on apparatus which we were not happy with. Even now with the two partially sighted pupils going through the feeling is we will manage (P33).

The teachers seemed to be suggesting, therefore, as a result of the distinctive character of the subject, PE is perceived to require additional and different levels of support, but this is support that is rarely evident as the following comments from two teachers indicate:

Statemented pupils are given support in other areas, PE is always the place it is missed out so we do have someone who comes down but we have had to really fight for him and the chances are his contract might come to an end (P31).

In other curriculum areas they get maybe 3 LSAs in a class for their reading and writing skills. If we request them in PE we do get them but it is pretty much that we are not high priority (P24).

The negativity expressed by teachers within the study in relation to the inadequate levels of support raises concern for the potential impact such negative attitudes will have on pupil experiences, particularly when previous research suggests that positive attitudes to inclusion are enhanced if support is provided by the school's special education teachers (Center and Ward, 1987; Clough and Lindsay, 1991; Kauffman, Lloyd and McGee, 1989).

The teachers in this study were critical of the nature and lack of training that LSAs received: 'They've maybe tried it initially but it wasn't beneficial for them and I think they have withdrawn on that front' (P12). 'The main training that they have had is in the classroom rather than a practical or PE base' (P13). 'We have a couple of LSAs that come down and support the children but a lot of those have got no training in the supporting of children within physical activity' (P2). This has been reflected by research suggesting that, in terms of qualifications, professional

development, conditions of employment and career structure, in spite of the considerable demands placed upon them, such staff continue to be inadequately prepared for their role (Moran and Abbot, 2002).

Conceptions of PE

Some teachers relied upon their general experiences of PE in formulating the perception that the subject area was different to other subjects, and this was seen to be a major reason why inclusion in PE is destined to be more difficult than in other subjects. Whilst some writers (e.g., Block and Horton, 1996) suggest that the majority of children with SEN can still be included in PE lessons, it is clear that some teachers in the study recognised that heightened awareness of safety was a significant element of concern: 'It is very different to what we have to teach them in PE to do with the physical side of the needs they perhaps have and we are involving equipment and a lot more safety issues I think which we have to be aware of' (P31) and 'some activities can be potentially dangerous, potentially dangerous to everybody, if the student has a physical disability obviously that could be even more dangerous to them' (P30).

One teacher commented upon the limiting effect that the physical element of the subject could have:

Physical education is about them being aware of their bodies and what they can do with their body and being aware of their health and fitness and if the child is physically disabled a lot of what we do in PE they are going to be unable to do or they are going to have to be taught in a different way. That automatically restricts them rather than the other subjects (P14).

There is a clear indication here that children who have been identified as having SEN often experience very different types and levels of challenge in PE as compared to other subjects. Given the lack of involvement of PE staff with the identification and statementing process (discussed elsewhere in this paper) this is a particularly important issue as the unique demands of the subject area may require a more subject-specific approach to identifying, and providing for, the needs of pupils with SEN than afforded within the existing whole-school framework.

Another teacher refers to the interaction levels within PE being different to other subjects by saying, 'It's a practical hands on subject whereas in a classroom it tends to be a piece of paper, pen, pencil. Interaction with the piece of paper, pen, pencil . . . whereas in PE it's that social interaction, the physical interaction, the relationship interaction' (P22). Whilst another mentioned the teaching environment as being more distinctive in PE than other subjects and used the teaching of examinable classroom-based PE to explain the comments made:

It is not just a case of making sure they can see what is on the board or making sure they can hear what you are saying, it is a lot more difficult. The conditions of the playing area, the equipment that you are using, it is a lot different to

classroom teaching. We do have exam PE so we teach PE in a classroom, but in terms of practical PE it is very different (P2).

The distinctive nature of both the context and content of physical education would seem to have important implications for the planning and provision for pupils with SEN. The acknowledgement of this reflects earlier discussions by theorists and practitioners that question the value of physical educators using a generic descriptor of 'SEN', arguing instead for a more focused and subject-specific distinction between children who have a SEN which is primarily described in terms of their movement skills (such as physical disabilities and motor difficulties) and those who have a SEN in physical education, but which is secondary to other needs (including learning difficulties, sensory impairment and behavioural problems) (Bailey and Robertson, 2000, Sugden and Wright, 1996).

Conceptions of challenge

The teachers involved in the study discussed a range of challenges to inclusion, which influenced their attitudes regarding the extent to which inclusion was, and could be, achieved. Conceptions of challenge included, among other things, the accessibility of physical resources such as facilities and equipment, the type of activity being taught and the specific SEN of the pupils.

Resources

Modifying or planning alternative activities often requires different equipment designed to support learners with special needs. Whilst, in most areas of the curriculum, equipment may be purchased for use across the whole school, in PE the burden tends to fall to one department and this is likely to constrain the development of an inclusive environment. The creative use of equipment to assist in differentiation of lessons was evident in a large number of responses: 'We have got special equipment which is user friendly. Softer balls, easier to handle equipment, smaller or lighter, more colourful, more attractive to them' (P33). Others reflected upon the issue of accessibility within their own school by saying, 'We do have a problem of access, for the lads' sport changing rooms are upstairs and they need to go upstairs to get to PE, so there's a flight of stairs there and there's no ramp or anything to get them anywhere' (P26). These comments substantiate recent policy findings that suggest many staff feel ill equipped to meet the wide range of pupils' needs in today's classrooms as a result of the inadequate amount of resources available for SEN provision (Audit Commission, 2002).

Activity

The picture that emerged with regard to whether activity specific issues affected the inclusion of pupils with SEN in PE is a somewhat hazy one but the debate is generally related to the activity area being taught and the location in which it is delivered.

Activity location

It was generally agreed by most teachers in the sample that it is easier to include pupils with SEN in PE in indoor activities, not least because: 'you have more control of them . . . probably a little bit easier to keep an eye on the group or control the activities differentiated for those children' (P28). Although it was also recognised that access to facilities is a precondition for indoor activities: 'I think the indoors ones as long as there's access for wheelchairs, access through changing rooms. Indoor sports obviously are easier' (P9). Thus, many of the teachers in this sample were aware of the fundamental importance of access to full engagement, rather than mere opportunity to join in, as a necessary condition for inclusion in physical education. This discussion, which is a familiar one in general discussions of inclusion seems to take on a special significance in physical education contexts, where the environment for learning plays such a central role.

Activity area

Certain physical activities will have considerably more 'mainstreaming potential' than others (Meek, 1991: 80), in that they are less exclusive by design and therefore less likely to require substantial modification in order for all pupils to be included. Individual activities were identified as being less likely to present barriers to inclusion:

swimming, gymnastics, dance, outdoor adventures . . . They're the easiest because of the space facility, the temperature, climate (P2).

I think gymnastics is quite a good one because it's all about body management, you can integrate students in there in floor work (P30).

The level of control and individual challenge achievable in gymnastics were reasons for this teacher contradicting the previous response when they suggest,

I don't think gymnastics would be too difficult . . . I think it is a lot easier because it is more of an individual activity you tend to pay attention to the individual rather than, obviously you should do that but an individual activity is easier to keep control and watch individuals as they are performing at their own level (P28).

However, a note of caution was struck some teachers regarding the prerequisite abilities for undertaking certain activity areas, for example: 'If there are some that have physical impediments, then gymnastics is the one that will cause them the most problems' (P34).

Activities that contained an element of teamplay were considered to be more problematic in terms of their potential for including all pupils when compared to individual activities. The rationale for such a claim was proposed in a number of ways, for example,

The team situations, the game situations, okay with the skills that's fine but when they're actually put into a game situation if their level of learning isn't, if

that's the inability they get lost, they get confused, its frustrating for them then because they don't know where they're supposed to be within the spatial awareness of things (P30).

Others spoke of team sports, suggesting that certain disabilities precluded participation of some groups of pupils: there are certain safety considerations particularly with invasion games like basketball etc., 'then we tend to move a small group across to the assembly hall . . . for . . . sort of modified versions of the game' (P12).

One teacher suggested that striking and fielding games provide opportunities to work in a more controlled environment than other games whilst still competing as part of a team: 'Rounders we've found works quite well because you have a static sort of situation where . . . they're playing off a tee and they can get the thrill of going round the pitch while the fielders are trying to get them out . . . that can be managed . . . like a one off situation within a game' (P12).

The teachers in this sample seemed attuned to the 'mainstreaming potential' of certain activities, rather than others (Meek, 1991: 80), and their comments suggest both experience of and reflection on seeking to include pupils with a range of needs in PE lessons. This sensitivity to differential opportunities presented by activity areas should, however, not be taken as advocacy of SEN-friendly or disability-friendly activities, in which certain activities are prioritized (and others marginalized) in a well-meaning response to some generalized notion of SEN. To do so would be to impose upon the language of SEN and disability greater ontological import than it deserves.

Type of need

The majority of teachers in our sample stated that it was more difficult to teach children with behavioural problems in PE than children with any other type of difficulty. The following responses present a representative summary of the views of many teachers:

The biggest problems we have would be behaviour, and their behavioural problems are the biggest thing for me (P28).

When they have behavioural problems, I find that the hardest especially when they are refusing to join in for no particular reason, they just feel that way out (P33).

Behavioural, because they can wreck your whole lesson (P37).

In the light of these concerns, some teachers were apprehensive towards increasing the inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream schools:

The one that troubles me most is the increasing number of kids that have really severe behaviour problems who, when I first started teaching, would not have been in mainstream schooling, they would have been in a special school for

extreme behaviour and it is coping with them and still keeping a lesson moving along and bringing about quality work (P31).

Some teachers seemed content with categorizing those children who present the most difficulties in a PE environment, whilst others went further and proposed reasons for why children with behavioural problems cause most difficulties in a PE environment:

The only way they cause more problems is because of more of the caged animal feeling in a classroom and suddenly they have got a bit more space and so get a bit more excitable and it is getting them pinned down a bit more, that is only within our general discipline problems with them (P34).

The main ones are the ones that have behavioural problems, not ones with physical difficulties . . . PE sometimes has extra problems in that because of the extra bit of freedom to move around, instead of being stuck in a classroom behind a desk where they are a bit more trapped, because they have an open space they can cause extra problems for us with their behaviour than it maybe does in a classroom (P17).

Conversely, some teachers felt confident teaching children with learning disabilities, and to a lesser extent those children with physical disabilities, a view consistent with previous research of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in PE (Rizzo, 1984), 'Any physically disabled pupil or any physical problems would be less of a concern to me, I would find them easier to deal with than anything else' (P14). This reduction in concern of the teacher may be due to the directly observable nature of physical impairments, the amount of resources that are widely available to support children with physical impairments in comparison to other SEN, or perhaps the perceived low level of impact on the learning experiences of others in the group.

Training opportunities

Continuing professional development was seen by some of the teachers as the key factor to increasing opportunities for pupils with SEN, and this reflects earlier research into the development of equitable practices in PE (e.g., Robertson, 2000). Some teachers made it clear that training in SEN for them was limited; for example, one teacher commented: 'None at all, we are not trained' (P31). However, the majority in our sample had experienced some training, whether it was informal or formal.

Formal training opportunities

Definitions of 'formal' and 'informal' training opportunities were not offered to the participant during the interview, thus distinguishing between these concepts was at the discretion of the teacher. The types of formal training opportunities were wide-ranging, with some training being matched to contextual need:

When we had the boy with the weakness down the left hand side we had an hours session with the co-ordinator of special needs at the time, plus the physiotherapist from the unit to give us some advice about how to deal with him (P41).

Other training that was perceived as being valuable was associated with support staff:

I have had no training externally, just what the school does within itself. I think we have a strong special needs department in the school and they have regular meetings to inform you of children and have had regular input and training days to keep us up to date with everything (P39).

Relevance of formal training opportunities to PE

The mention of formal training often contained a disclaimer and this was in the form of the 'irrelevance' of the training to a PE context. The comments of one teacher provide a particularly useful illustration of the perceived inadequacy of school-based training opportunities: 'We do internal school insets. One of them was on inclusion in lessons but it wasn't aimed at PE. It was on general classroom lessons. A lot of it was not relevant to what we do down here because they are not behind a desk with a book in front of them' (P42). The level of relevance was not restricted to whole-school issues however, for it was also evident that some externally delivered courses were viewed as irrelevant as well:

I went on a course about inclusion but I didn't think it was suitable because all they went on about was playing Boccia and that was it. There was nothing on how to adapt lessons to suit all children . . . It was more how to have an able bodied person playing a normally disabled sport not how to have this person with a disability, how can I adapt them and get them involved in an able person's lesson (P29).

Informal training opportunities

Although direct mention of valuable formal training opportunities was limited, there was greater reference to informal training opportunities that was generally conducted at departmental level: 'Within the department we have had informal get togethers and chats and decided what type of special equipment we needed, how to incorporate the special needs children within the subject areas' (P33), or by referring to someone with more experience on an individual level: 'Usually informal chats. If I felt I had a problem with somebody that I knew was very low ability then I would talk to {name of other teacher} and say ask the best way to treat this particular person. Very informal conversation' (P34). The 'informality' of such training, particularly when judged in the light of the dearth of formal training opportunities, raises issues about the effectiveness of teacher preparation for teaching children with SENs. Such instances of imbalance of opportunities could have serious repercussions for the quality of support experienced by children with SEN when training is conducted in such an adhoc manner.

Initial teacher training (ITT) opportunities

Concerns have been raised about the impoverished nature of SEN and inclusive provision generally within ITT (Robertson, 1999; Special Educational Needs Training Consortium, 1996), and this is clearly reflected within the majority of responses from PE teachers. For example, when asked about their experience of SEN training during their teacher training, teachers commented: 'I haven't had any. It wasn't catered for in my teacher training' (P36) and 'I must admit it was very limited' (P1).

Allied to the concept of limited provision during ITT was a recurring theme that such training was based solely on theoretical issues surrounding the teaching of children with SEN:

Training on my PGCE was not practical at all, it was just all theory so although it gave you ideas on how to differentiate I don't think that can prepare you for when you actually come into contact with that kind of child (P28).

When I was at university we had lectures on it, we did not have a great deal of practical work on it, it was mainly the theory side (P43).

This reinforces the doubts raised by Vickerman (2002) regarding the extent to which trainee teachers are adequately equipped with the necessary skills and resources to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. Such findings also raise issues regarding the successful interpretation and implementation of policies such as the Qualifying to Teach standards (Teacher Training Agency, 2002) and the amount of practical and relevant experience trainee teachers actually receive during ITT.

Confidence and experience

Reflecting earlier studies (LeRoy and Simpson, 1996; Rizzo and Vispoel, 1992), many teachers reported that experience played a pivotal role in gaining confidence with working with children with SEN. For example, one teacher commented on the necessity for experience over theoretical acquisition of knowledge:

(I'm) Not particularly confident because I don't have a lot of experience with a range of physical disabilities, I am not confident at all because I haven't had the experience. Even if I was being given the theory on how, I have piles and piles of material on how to deal with a child with this disability in this school, really specific things. It gives us ideas if I ever came across a child with this physical disability then I wouldn't be able to research it and plan my lessons for that child simply because I haven't had the experience of dealing with it (P21).

But caution was also sounded by some about the equation of the cumulative acquisition of experience and the development of confidence. One teacher, relatively early in his career, expressed this view when he wrote:

My opinions on this will probably completely turn around after a few years of teaching and after having dealt with far more disabilities than I have dealt with so far and my answer to that question will be 'no' having dealt with those kind

of child. Because I haven't it is probably easier for me to say they probably can be. That doesn't necessarily mean they can be and it doesn't necessarily mean that all children will get the best they can out of inclusion simply because we can't cater for all needs (P25).

In a similar vein, some teachers equated their lack of confidence with a perception of insufficient levels of support: 'I wouldn't say I'm confident at all, I wouldn't say any of us in the department are confident at all because we haven't had that support to know how to adapt them fully into a lesson' (P29).

So, experience seems to be viewed as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for confident and competent inclusion of pupils with SEN. If, as discussed earlier, teachers enter the profession without specific training in this aspect of their work, and are not offered enough support once they are qualified, it is understandable that exposure to an increasingly wide range of abilities and needs can lead some to feel uncertain and inadequately prepared.

Conclusion

Inclusion seemed to be regarded by many of the PE teachers in this study as a journey, in which inclusion as a principle could be achieved if features of the inclusive process – such as appropriate support, resources and training – were developed more extensively or even completely changed. Conceptions of inclusion were based primarily around the level of participation a child with SEN could achieve and whether this would be detrimental to the rest of the group or indeed beneficial for the child. PE was conceptualized as a subject area that is significantly different to other subject areas, partly because it requires specific patterns of support, but and also because it takes place in distinctive physical environments. It has been suggested that eliciting support from trained support staff was more difficult in the context of PE than in other subject areas and the inherent safety concerns normally associated with PE are exacerbated when including children with SEN in lessons. Moreover, it was suggested that when support was provided, the level of training the support assistants had was generally inadequate.

Swimming, gymnastics and indoor activities in general were perceived to be activities in which it was relatively easy to include pupils with SEN in a mainstream setting. Team situations were viewed as the most difficult areas for inclusion. Children with emotional and behavioural needs were believed to be the most difficult to include, followed by pupils with learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

Experiences of training opportunities were limited in both ITT and continuing professional development within schools. Where training was provided within ITT it was generally viewed as inadequate and of an overly theoretical nature. If training was available in schools as part of an In Service Training (INSET) programme, it was often perceived to be irrelevant to a PE-specific context. This is unfortunate, as inclusion is not simply a concern of individual teachers, but also that of the department as a group. PE-specific INSET can, therefore, offer both more focused advice and a mechanism for staff to discuss shared priorities and concerns.

Implications for future practice

From the findings of this study it is possible to offer the following implications for policymakers and practitioners to address:

- Training opportunities should be made available for support staff to become familiar with inclusive practice in a PE context, and PE teachers need to be aware of the potential for using support staff to enhance learning for pupils with SEN;
- PE teacher training should include practically orientated inclusive education modules that seek to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion, alongside a basis of knowledge, skills and understanding;
- In-service training and continuing professional development opportunities for PE teachers should be subject-specific, department-based, and practically orientated;
- To enhance inclusive opportunities, the quality of individual, self-paced activities need to be developed, and designed to ensure that children with SEN are adequately supported in team-based environments;
- Practically based training opportunities should include strategies for including children with SEN into mainstream curriculum activities and not rely solely on activities designed for children with SEN.

Notes

- 1 SEN has been taken to mean SEN and/or disabilities.
- 2 This coding relates to the interview transcriptions, reported in the findings section of the study.

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Résumé

Education Physique adaptée: les points de vue des enseignants sur les élèves intégrés avec des besoins particuliers et/ou handicapés en Education Physique

Ce texte utilise un échantillon établi à cet effet de 43 enseignants du second degré (élèves âgés de 11 à 18 ans) pour rechercher les perceptions d'élèves intégrés à besoins particuliers et/ou handicapés dans la filière générale du secondaire en Education Physique. Les résultats laissent entendre que les conceptions des enseignants sur l'intégration sont primitivement basées sur le niveau d'activité que les enfants ayant des besoins particuliers et/ou handicapés peuvent réaliser et que cela peut être influencé par le domaine d'activité, le niveau des possibilités d'entraînement et de réalisation possible pour eux. Le texte se conclue par une discussion sur les implications de cette recherche pour la formation professionnelle des enseignants et l'organisation scolaire et des implications particulières pour la formation future des enseignants d'Education Physique et les entraîneurs sont proposées.

Resumen

Puntos de vista de los profesores de Educación Física sobre la integración de alumnos con necesidades educativas especiales o discapacidades en la Educación Física

Este trabajo se refiere la percepción de los profesores de a una muestra de 43 centros de secundaria, con alumnos de entre 11 y 18 años, sobre sus alumnos, incluyendo entre ellos a los con necesidades educativas especiales o discapacidades.

Encontrándose que las primeras concepciones sobre la integración se basaban sobre el

nivel de participación que podrían tener los niños con necesidades educativas especiales o con discapacidades y sobre como estas circunstancias podrían afectar la actividad general; igualmente manifestaban su preocupación sobre el nivel de apoyos y posibilidades de entrenamiento disponibles para ellos. El trabajo concluye con una discusión sobre la implicación de esta investigación para el desarrollo profesional del profesorado y la organización escolar; igualmente, sobre implicaciones específicas en la práctica futura de los profesores de educación física.

Zusammenfassung

Integrativer Sportunterricht: Die Sicht der Lehrer über die Einbeziehung von Schülern mit besonderen pädagogischen Anforderungen und/oder (Körper)behinderungen im Sportunterricht

Dieser Artikel zeigt anhand eines Beispiels von 43 Lehrern einer Oberschule die Erforschung der Wahrnehmung von integrativen Schülern mit besonderen pädagogischem Förderbedarf im allgemeinen Sportunterricht der Oberschule.

Sie zeigt, dass die die Integration betreffenden Ideen, primär auf den Teilnahmemöglichkeiten der Kinder mit besonderen erzieherischen Anforderungen oder Behinderungen basieren. Außerdem ist dies von weiteren Faktoren abhängig, wie der Umgebung, dem Niveau der Förderung und den zur Verfügung stehenden Trainingsmöglichkeiten.

Im Fazit des Studie wird auf besondere Folgen für die zukünftige Praxis der Sportlehrer und Trainer hingewiesen. Sie implizieren nicht nur die Notwendigkeit von professionellen Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten, die praxisorientiert und speziell auf das Individuum ausgerichtet sein sollen.

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