

THE STATE OF INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES IN GENERAL PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PRAGUE AND CENTRAL BOHEMIAN REGION

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Inclusion of students with physical disabilities in general schools in the Czech Republic has become widespread educational policy. On the other hand inclusion of these students in general physical education is often overlooked or underestimated. In order to understand this phenomenon in the Czech Republic we must conduct series of survey studies, this being one of them. The purpose of this study was to describe State of Inclusion of Students with Physical Disabilities in General Physical Education in Prague and Central Bohemian region. We used the descriptive study based on survey, which took part in schools with integrated pupils with disability in Prague and also in Central Bohemian region. Participants are teachers of included children. Questions in the survey were focused on experiences of the teachers with inclusive physical education (PE), especially what helps during inclusion and what kind of assistance or advice they would need (education, personal support etc.). Total number of surveys we distributed was 95 and we get 60 of them back. These were used for further processing and the resulting statistics. Total file research respondents were teachers of 29 boys and 31 girls who were in age from 7 – 21 years. All of respondents were teaching in schools in Prague or Central Bohemian Region. The largest percentage of the total number of children participating in PE lessons is pupils with mild physical disabilities (64 %). The most common problems are based on the severity of students' disabilities. Other fundamental problems in inclusion of children to the PE lessons are: (a) the lack of teaching assistants (40 %), (b) special equipment (35 %) and (c) the lack of knowledge (12 %) of teachers in the field of APA.

Keywords: adapted physical activity, adapted physical education, disability, special education

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion of students with physical disabilities has been reported as successful and meaningful option of their education (Block, 2007; Block & Obrušnikova, 2007; Klavina, 2008; Obrušniková, Válková & Block, 2003; Sherrill, 2004). On the other hand there seem to be multiple problems associated with inclusive physical education. Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) and later Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010) also reported mixed positive and negative experiences of students with physical disabilities in Canada. Lienert, Sherrill and Myers (2001) and Morley et al. (2005) reported questioned perceived competence by physical educators and lack of support for inclusive physical education. Rizzo

and Bouffard (2012) presented report of US government from 2010 stating that one of greatest challenges of inclusive physical education is the lack of sufficient academic preparation and experience among general physical educators in teaching students with disabilities, which results in functional exclusion of students with disabilities in physical education. Functional exclusion being defined as the level of non-participation or inadequate participation (e.g. playing cards or chess in PE class while other peers participate in general PE activities).

Grenier (2006) as well as Lytle and Hutchinson (2004) advocate for the need of adapted physical educators as specialized personal support for general physical educators facing challenges of inclusion. Davis et al.

(2007) reported the study of needs of paraeducators to be competent to support general physical educators in inclusive physical education. In Czech Republic Inclusion of students with physical disabilities has been emerging phenomenon since late 1990s (Kudlacek, 1997) with growing attention on studies of inclusive physical education from 2005 (Kudlacek, 2008). Spurná, Rybová and Kudláček (2010) reported similar finding with only 30% of students using wheelchairs being included in physical education. They have also reported perception of physical educators of potential facilitators to inclusion being: (a) lack of financial resources for support and adapted equipment, (b) trained and competent teacher assistants, and (c) appropriate training of physical education teachers. The purpose of this study was to describe State of Inclusion of Students with Physical Disabilities in General Physical Education in Prague and Central Bohemian region.

METHODS

Survey

We used the descriptive study based on survey, which took part in schools with integrated pupils with disability in Prague and also in Central Bohemian region. Structural validity of the survey was done via approval of three experts, university teachers holding Ph.D. or further degree specializing in Adapted Physical Activities. Contacts for schools with included students were received from the staff of special educational centers (SEC). Through those surveys was possible to describe the structure of the goal group – pupils with physical disability, due to their age, sex and type of disability. Questions in the survey were focused on experiences of the teachers with inclusive physical education (PE), especially what helps during inclusion and what kind of assistance or advice they would need (education, personal support etc.). Total number of surveys distributed was 95 with return of 60. These were used for further processing and descriptive statistics. Total file research respondents were teachers of 29 boys and 31 girls who were in age from 7 – 21 years. All of respondents were teaching in schools in Prague or Central Bohemian Region.

Respondents

Research sample was composed of teachers who are teaching in mainstream primary (total of 44) and secondary schools (total of 16). From the total amount of 60 pupils were to the inclusive physical lessons involved just 25 of them. The rest of pupils with physical disabilities were excluded from PE lessons because of the recommendation of the children doctor. Sometimes they even can't imagine that the pupils would attended physical education. Respondents stated the disabilities of their included pupils: 4 pupils with amputee, 1 pupil with spina bifida, 3 pupils with myopathy and the others has e.g. Achondroplasia, corpus callosum, malformations, hydrocephalus, Tourette syndrome and the others. Most significant proportion of pupils had cerebral palsy (14).

RESULTS

Completed surveys offer a representative reflection of the current statement of inclusion. The largest percentage (64 %) of the total number of children participating in PE lessons are pupils with mild physical disabilities (such as pupils with cerebral palsy, upper extremity amputation etc.) who are able of independent locomotion without using any adapted equipment. Those children had least challenges for inclusion in PE lessons, what is obvious not just from practice but also from many of others investigations. Students with more severe disabilities using crutches are included only from 4 % and students using orthopedic wheelchair were included just in 28 %. One of those pupils has got disability of upper and also lower part of body, so he is using electric wheelchair. The rest of pupils were using mechanical wheelchair. When we have a look on a students who are excluded from PE lessons there are 15 % of them able walking, 19 % of them using a crutches and 66 % are using wheelchair (21 mechanical and 7 electric).

From the collected surveys is obvious, that the first stimulus to include pupils with physical disability (in 12 cases) to PE lessons was from the school principals and the teachers of schools. Some schools were against inclusion to PE lessons, but parents of the children with physical disability appealed they

wish to include them. In one case the first stimulus was from the employee of the Special Educational Centre in their region.

Reason to not include students with disabilities in PE lessons was in most cases the same. In 55 % are not interested primarily parents of pupils, in the rest of the cases are not about the meaning of inclusion satisfied teachers and directors of the schools. Nevertheless the results confirm that the inclusion of students with physical disability into the PE is beneficial for both – for students with disability and also for their classmates. Teachers note that students with physical disability are actively involved in most activities, they are motivated to do the best, their ambition and assertiveness increased and they looking forward to be in one class during PE with other classmates.

Teachers of PE reported some specific problems which appears during inclusion of students with physical disabilities to their lessons. The most common problems are based on the severity of students' disabilities. Discoordination or muscle rigidity may negatively affect the teaching process. Other fundamental problems in inclusion of children to the PE lessons are: (a) the lack of teaching assistants (40 %), (b) special equipment (35 %) and (c) the lack of knowledge (12 %) of teachers in the field of APA. The others reported especially incomplete barrier-free environment, worry about the safety of pupils, distance of the gym and other classes, limited options for activities, large size of class, speed and strength of other pupils, great fatigue of students with disability, obesity of the wheelchair users, problem with inclusion into the team sports, competitions and also races. Only 2 teachers mentioned that their students are fully included to PE lessons without any supplementary problems.

Our survey also included questions focused on the preparation and strategy of planning inclusive PE lessons from teachers. Some teachers do not plan for students with physical disability any different activities, they just taking into account their handicap. Some are trying to modified activities for children with disability and looking for a variation of those activities suitable for them. During activities that students with disability cannot do has got a specific helpful role, f. e. referee. Also cooperation with special education workers or physiotherapists was mentioned.

For the purpose of physical education lessons 52 % of students from 25 received the individual education plan (IEP) from. In this context many teachers mentioned, that they would need a help when processing IEP. Planning and implementation physical activities are based on the current state of health, according to the individual options of the students. Some teachers would the most welcome help of the trained assistant.

Through the survey were also collected views which could improve conditions in the school during inclusive PE. Some teachers would the most welcome help of the trained assistant or some professional from the field of adapted physical activities. Teachers of physical education would also need specific advice, ideas and literature about adapted physical education.

DISCUSSION

Number of reported included students using wheelchair was 28 %, which is very similar to finding of Kudláček (2008) and is in agreement with the concept of functional exclusion (Rizzo & Bouffard, 2012). This facts support notion of need for appropriate training for general physical educators (O'Brien, Kudláček, Howe, 2009; Morley et al., 2005), which is also reflected in responses of presented study. Teachers also realize the need to have appropriate support by adapted physical educators and prepared teacher assistants (Davis et al., 2007). Presented study supports our argument about insufficient support for inclusion of students with physical disabilities in general physical education and lack of readiness by teachers and schools in Czech Republic to provide adequate inclusive physical education. In relation to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Kudláček, 2007) we can predict real inclusion as well as functional exclusion from teachers perception of their competency to teach students in inclusive setting, the amount of their control over the outcomes of inclusive PE (e.g. adequate support by APE specialist and teacher assistants) as well as beliefs of significant others related to inclusion in PE. Although we can find some excellent examples of good practice in inclusive physical education from USA and Europe, there is still much to be improved in order to provide appropriate

learning in least restrictive environment to assure real and meaningful inclusion in physical education.

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