

Abled bodied experts often discriminate and are wrong about inclusion for people with physical disabilities.

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Abstract

Discrimination against people with physical disabilities in physical education, recreation, and sport exists everywhere. The purpose of this paper is threefold: 1) to discuss how attitudes can lead to discriminatory action towards people with physical disabilities, 2) to give examples through a case study of how inclusion can be a fruitful part of the classroom curriculum for pre-service teachers and 3) to provide results and a discussion of a case study completed in the 2020-2021 academic year in which university pre-service teachers were immersed in an inclusion curriculum. Pre-service teachers can be prepared to teach this population and attitudes can positively shift to include this population. The conclusion focuses on a solution for collegiate instructors to prepare pre-service teachers to include. Individuals with physical disabilities can be successful in the classroom with abled bodied school-aged physical education students and these same individuals can be successful teachers of abled bodied students.

Keywords: inclusion, discrimination, pre-service teacher curriculum, individuals with physical disabilities

2. Introduction

At six months old, this paper's first author was diagnosed with traumatic brain injury after a near fatal car crash (Disclosed Reference). She has lived with traumatic brain injury for thirty years and is considered a person within the population of people with physical disabilities. Thus, when both authors attended a professional physical education conference and heard abled-bodied professional instructors (professionals) give openly discriminating comments about the population, the authors believe the comments warrant a response.

The two most egregious comments were: "I do not have time to include individuals with [physical] disabilities in my classes", (Anonymous, personal communication, 2022a) and "students with [physical] disabilities should not become physical education teachers because abled-bodied students do not respect or relate to them" (Anonymous, personal communication, 2022b). These comments contribute to a cycle of

exclusion which is directly passed from the instructors to their pre-service college students who are the next generation of physical education teachers. In addition, these comments are a statement of worth that the professionals' time is more important than the individuals with physical disabilities. The statement also implies that teaching their own able-bodied students how to include students with physical disabilities in their curriculum is not a worthy endeavor. One must wonder why professionals who are teaching pre-service teachers make such comments. The first and most obvious answer may be: the professionals hold an attitude of discriminatory biases toward people with physical disabilities. Even though these professionals would never admit bias, their explicit discriminatory statements reflect an attitude that argues otherwise. Unfortunately, discrimination exists everywhere, even in a professional meeting of physical educators who are collegiate instructors of pre-service professionals.

Rizzo et al.'s research has clearly stated that a professional's attitude directly leads to discriminatory action against school aged students with physical disabilities (Rizzo T. , 1984; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995). The same is true of instructors who teach pre-service professionals, even though they might not want to admit their own bias. The result is pre-service teachers justifying future exclusion learned from the intuitive bias of their own collegiate instructors. The cycle of exclusion and discrimination continues.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is threefold: 1) to discuss how attitudes can lead to discriminatory comments like the examples above towards people with physical disabilities, 2) to give examples through a case study of how inclusion can be a fruitful part of the classroom curriculum for pre-service teachers and 3) to provide results and a discussion of a case study completed in the 2020-2021 academic year in which university pre-service teachers were immersed in an inclusion curriculum.

We believe pre-service teachers can be prepared to teach this population and attitudes can positively shift to include this population. In our conclusion, we will focus on a solution for collegiate instructors to fully prepare the pre-service teachers to include. That is, we believe that individuals with physical disabilities can be successful in the classroom with abled bodied school-aged physical education students.

2.1 The Psychology of Attitudes

Allport (1979) in his classic, *The Nature of Prejudice*, discusses that, "...an adequate definition of prejudice contains two essential ingredients. There must be an attitude of favor or disfavor; and it must be related to an overgeneralized (and therefore erroneous) belief" (p. 13). Furthermore, Allport states that attitudes and beliefs are intertwined and sometimes the difference between attitude and belief is difficult to see. "Without some generalized beliefs concerning a group as a whole, a hostile attitude could not long be sustained" (p. 13). For example, some believe that students with physical disabilities are incapable of playing robust, high level competitive sports. However, if abled bodied people were exposed to the practice of disability sport, where the participants are actively playing the sport, then the abled body individuals' negative attitude probably would not be sustained.

Allport (1979) also discusses how the brain creates categories for people and groups, which has three purposes. The first purpose is to help the brain adjust to daily activities. Allport uses an example of adjusting when a person, on seeing clouds, reaches for an umbrella. However, the example does not apply in all cases as it is situational to the person's experience and where they live. This is also true when people who are abled bodied interact with a person with a physical disability. Depending on the person's experience with people with physical disabilities the interaction will be different. For example, most people who see a person in a wheelchair may assume the person who is a wheelchair user cannot be actively involved in playing a sport or participating in physical education. Assumptions are common when abled bodied individuals encounter a person with a physical disability for the first time. Wheelchair competitive sport does exist and at a high level of activity, but it did not just happen in a just and accepting world.

The second purpose of the brain categorizing helps the individual understand as much as they can in a couple of minutes. Allport (1979) specifically discusses how we like to solve problems easily. By categorizing a group of people, we can solve the problem quickly because our brain categorizes problems and then generalizes. For example, if an abled bodied person sees a person with a physical disability wearing

a letterman jacket with many awards from different sports an abled bodied person would probably generalize that the jacket does not belong to that person with a physical disability.

The third purpose of categorizing helps identify people of the same group. For example, if we see a person with a physical disability, we may assume the person with a physical disability is incapable of physically participating in physical education, recreation, and sport. This occurs because we have taught abled bodied people that people with physical disabilities are incapable of participating in physical education, recreation, and sport at their perceived level of competition. For example, if an abled bodied person met a person who has a traumatic brain injury, they would be surprised to learn that the person is indeed an athlete. Usually, the abled bodied individual's first thought after seeing a person with a physical disability is not about how capable the individual is in sport. Instead, the first thought is generally a doubt that the individual with the physical disability could be successful. The attitude problem is also compounded by another issue: not all people with physical disabilities have the same disability. Even though many may have the same diagnoses, the disability may manifest itself in a different way with different people. Generalizations should not be formed. With practice and coaching, people with physical disabilities can participate in physical education, recreation, and sport, at a high level.

When we examine the three purposes of our brain categorizing people into groups, we can see the direct affect it has on our attitudes and beliefs. The brain processes are quick and soon we accept what is occurring because it makes understanding our life smoother and speedier. As Allport says, "In fact, ...[categorizations] seem ...to facilitate perception and conduct- in other words, to make adjustment to life speedy, smooth, and consistent" (Allport, 1979, p. 21). Unfortunately, speedy, smooth, and consistent may be wrong practice in relation to people with physical disabilities.

Interestingly, our enlightened society has beliefs and attitudes about people with physical disabilities which have changed little from the beginning of Western civilization. The Greeks and Romans hid those with physical disabilities. The Greeks and Romans perceived the only beautiful bodies to be abled bodied. Any condition other than abled was hidden or banished (Rimmerman, 2013; Spivey, 2004).

Unfortunately, our ideologies and attitudes today still hold true in an ableist society. An ideology is defined as a "...shared interpretive framework that people use to make sense of and evaluate themselves, others, and events in their social worlds" as directed toward another individual, group, or culture (Coakley, 2021, p. 14). An ableist ideology is defined as, "...interrelated ideas and beliefs that are widely used to identify people as physically.... disabled, to justify treating them as inferior, and to organize social worlds and physical spaces without taking them into account" (p. 17). Our enlightened modern society did not include people with physical disabilities until the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990. As a result, many businesses, sidewalks, schools, and transportation were directed by law to give access to people with physical disabilities. Unfortunately, people in positions of power choose to bypass the law so people with physical disabilities are not fully included in physical education, recreation, and sport (Martin, 2018; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference).

2.2. Teacher's Attitudes

If our two examples above of professionals discriminating is common, students with physical disabilities will not be fully included in physical education, recreation, and sport. Research agrees; we do not have full inclusion currently (Martin, 2018; Obrusnikova, 2008; Oliver, 2009; Rizzo T. , 1984; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference). If we had full inclusion, the US would not have three different laws that push for inclusion. Unfortunately, how the laws are interpreted negatively affects inclusion (Disclosed Reference). Research is clear teacher attitudes are exclusionary because of ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes (Allport, 1979; Martin, 2018; Rizzo T. , 1984; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995).

Thankfully though, scholars in the field of disability sport and attitudes are aware of this exclusionary behavior. Martin (2018) in *Handbook of Disability Sport and Exercise Psychology*, discusses why students with physical disability are excluded in physical education, recreation, and sport. Though Martin (2018) mentions different reasons, he agrees that the most important are the attitudes teachers hold toward students with physical disabilities.

Rizzo et al. and others, clearly state that attitudes of teachers teaching students with physical disabilities affect how and when students are included (Martin, 2018; Obrusnikova, 2008; Oliver, 2009; Rizzo T. , 1984; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995). In addition, Rizzo and Vispoel (1991) and others discuss teacher attitudes toward students with physical disabilities versus students with different disabilities. PE teachers prefer students with cognitive disabilities rather than students with physical disabilities in their classes (Martin, 2018; Obrusnikova, 2008; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Tant & Watelain, 2016). Furthermore, Rizzo and Vispoel (1991) also found teachers of younger grade levels have better attitudes than teachers of older students and thus will more often include students with physical disabilities (p.5).

Rizzo and Kirkendall (1995) and others examined teacher preparation programs and found pre-service teachers did not feel educationally prepared to teach students with physical disabilities (Martin, 2018; Tant & Watelain, 2016). In addition, the pre-service teachers were not getting hands on experience teaching students with physical disabilities. Rizzo and Kirkendall (1995) conclude teacher's attitudes towards teaching students with physical disabilities were negative and thus those students were being excluded. However, Rizzo and Kirkendall (1995) and others found attitudes of teachers with more educational preparation and hands on experience were more accepting and prepared (Martin, 2018).

Research is clear: preparation is key, unfortunately most pre-service programs lack the content level or time to accomplish the task. Many teacher education programs have only one class in inclusive physical education and recreation. The pre-service teachers appear to learn about the different types of disabilities and the laws. However, they often do not learn how to fully include the student with a physical disability in the physical education class activity.

2.3. The Case Study

In the Fall of 2020, researcher one taught specific classes to physical education pre-service professionals. This case study examined the effect of an inclusion curriculum intervention on the readiness to include students with physical disabilities in physical education. The researchers studied the effects of the intervention on the pre-service professional's readiness to include if they are exposed to inclusion in multiple classes. Inclusion techniques should be integrated into every class the pre-service professional takes in their program.

2.4. Methods

3. Subjects

The population of this study was: pre-service physical education majors and future teachers both male and female above the age of 18. The participants were selected from a convenience sample of pre-professionals at a liberal arts college and a research university. The participants were a convenience sample because they were enrolled in one of two classes: tests and measurement in physical education or activity and performance. In addition, the two classes were a part of the core curriculum in their program of study. Because the inclusion was imbedded into the curriculum the participants were actively engaged in the curriculum and inclusion¹.

In a tests and measurement course the participants created lesson plans for an activity and then wrote reflective papers about how they would test and measure student progress. Furthermore, the participants reflected on the accommodations made for a student with a physical disability and the specific assessment of progress.

In an activity and performance class, participants wrote a lesson plan, taught a lesson plan to their classmates, and discussed the accommodations created for the hypothetical student with physical disabilities. Afterwards, the participants wrote a full reflective paper about their teaching and about the hypothetical student with a physical disability in the unit they just taught. Finally, another reflective paper was written examining the totality of the class inclusion process.

¹ IRB approval was obtained for this study. University of Idaho IRB, 2019. Case Number 19-173.

3.1. Data Collection

Prior to the data collection, students were made aware of the requirements of the class and the assignments they were to finish for the class. The students volunteered to be a part of the research study by volunteering their reflective papers to be included in the final data set.

3.2. Measurement

The measurement used for this case study was the content of the written words the participants expressed in their reflection papers. Furthermore, the researchers examined the content the participant expressed while including and assessing students with different physical disabilities within the classes.

3.3. Results

The qualitative data was collected through reflective papers the participants wrote. From the reflective papers, themes were gathered. In both classes for their final reflective paper, participants mentioned how they were challenged to meet the needs of the hypothetical students with physical disabilities even though the reflection prompt did not mention this criterion. Participant one mentioned not knowing how hard it was to write a lesson plan to include a student with a physical disability. Participant one changed perspective and wrote how to accommodate and include. Participant two, thanked the instructor for pushing all of them to include students with physical disabilities. Participant two now wants to include the population when becoming both a student teacher and a teacher. In addition, participant two mentioned fear and nervousness on starting the class because of no exposure to including students with physical disabilities. Moreover, participant two discussed learning how to include and by making accommodations for full inclusion, it was very practical. Participant three, from England, had taken the one class of inclusive physical education. Participant three stated how surprised they were in realizing how the United States separates the children with [physical] disabilities and does not include them in the general population. The reflection noted that in the United States we include when it is convenient to us. Furthermore, participant three learned more about how to include because the class was very practical for inclusive teaching.

The overall themes that emerged from both the test and measurement class and the activity and performance class were: 1) imbedding the inclusion in the curriculum was practical for the participants as they gained experience that many do not. 2) preparing for class as a teacher is very different than being a student because one has to actually prepare and create inclusive practices, and 3) after sixteen weeks of writing lesson plans and creating accommodations for the students with physical disabilities, the participants:

- confidence level toward preparing curriculum improved,
- writing accommodations for the population became second nature,
- teaching skills improved across the board, and
- attitudes improved positively towards the students with physical disabilities.

2.5. Discussion

Discrimination starts with beliefs, values, and attitudes. Students who are seeking a degree in physical education usually only receive one class in inclusive physical education (Martin, 2018; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995; Tant & Watelain, 2016). In addition, many researchers have stated that pre-service teachers need more education and experience working with students with physical disabilities in physical education settings (Martin, 2018; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995; Disclosed Reference; Disclosed Reference; Tant & Watelain, 2016). What if we imbedded inclusion into all classes the pre-service students enroll within their program? The findings of the present qualitative case study are powerful for inclusion and have meaning for those pre-service physical educators. In addition, what was found in this case study has implications for physical education programs across the United States.

Implication One: professionals in the field of physical education can become role models to pre-service teachers. Attitudes matter and the attitudes of the professionals' matter when teaching pre-service students about inclusion of students with physical disabilities. The researchers found that when the instructor has a positive inclusive attitude and inclusion is integrated into other classes the students' attitudes improved towards fully including students with physical disabilities.

Implication Two: When implementing an inclusion model as defined in this case study, pre-service physical education teachers can become prepared in teaching and including students with physical disabilities. By integrating inclusion into all classes, pre-service teachers become more prepared to fully include students who have physical disabilities. Usually, professionals build collegiate curriculum for abled bodied students and then make accommodations for students with physical disabilities. Our study argues that pre-service teachers benefit more by building accommodations as the curriculum is built. The act of building both aspects together would influence teachers' attitudes towards this specific population and their preparedness to implement the curriculum and the accommodations.

The third implication of this case study is for the entire field of kinesiology. Inclusion cannot be a separate entity of the curriculum. Inclusion must be integrated, taught, and applied. Professionals in the field of adaptive physical education must teach full inclusion. Furthermore, professionals must advocate for inclusion in all courses that pre-service teachers take in their program of study. The current case study is an example that argues for better preparation and experience for pre-service teachers.

3.4. Limitations of the Study

The largest limitation of the present study is instructor and researcher bias since researcher one was also the instructor of both classes. Another limitation of this qualitative study is that the researchers assigned meaning to the participants' reflective words and created the themes. Moreover, the replicability of the study is a limitation because we do not know if another researcher could obtain the same results as the current study. Thus, future research is needed in this case study design.

2.7. Conclusion

What do we do now? The current case study integrated inclusion into two non-inclusion courses for pre-service teachers. However, the case study will not solve all issues. Discrimination is rooted in our attitudes, beliefs, and values. Attitudes towards students with physical disabilities participating in physical education, recreation, and sport can change. Physical movement can be a positive experience for not just the student with a physical disability but the teacher and other abled-bodied students as well.

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