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## FORMING TEACHERS' POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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The current article reflects some results of research that come up with several essential contributions to the implementation of effective integration process within the Physical Education framework, by focusing on the root of altering behaviour – by examining and daring to alter stigmatic attitudes which demand taking responsibility on one's own role as a living model for leading change and eventually, being prepared to restructure the school culture. Based on a special training programme, Physical Education teachers were exposed to and became familiar with the multi-diversity attitude changing model and we could see that they actually became able to reconsider and change their attitudes towards the students, providing live leadership models for their "regular" pupils to keep making change happen.

**Keywords:** *disability, positive attitude, inclusiveness, adaptation, physical education.*

### FORMAREA ATITUDINILOR POZITIVE ALE PROFESORILOR FAȚĂ DE STUDENȚII CU HANDICAP

În prezentul articol sunt reflectate câteva rezultate ale cercetărilor care vin cu mai multe contribuții esențiale la implementarea unui proces de integrare eficient în cadrul educației fizice, concentrându-se pe rădăcina modificării comportamentului, examinând și îndrăznind să modifice atitudinile stigmatice pe care le cer, asumându-și responsabilitatea pe propriul rol de model viu pentru conducerea schimbării și, în cele din urmă, pregătit pentru restructurarea culturii școlare. Pe baza unui program special de formare, profesorii de educație fizică au fost expuși și s-au familiarizat cu modelul de schimbare a atitudinii multiversității. Astfel, constatăm că aceștia au devenit, de fapt, capabili să-și reconsidere și să-și schimbe atitudinea față de studenți, oferind modele de conducere live pentru elevii lor „obișnuiți” să continue să facă schimbarea.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *dizabilitate, atitudine pozitivă, inclusivitate, adaptare, educație fizică.*

Over the years, disability policy has developed from elementary care in institutions to education for children with disabilities and rehabilitation for persons who became disabled during adult life. After the Second World War, the concepts of integration and normalisation were introduced, which reflected a growing awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities.

Towards the end of the 1960s, organisations of persons with disabilities in some countries started to formulate a new concept of disability. That new concept indicated the close connection between the limitation experienced by individuals with disabilities, the design and structure of their environments and the attitude of the general population [1]. At the same time, the problems of disability in developing countries were more and more highlighted. In some of those countries, the percentage of the population with disabilities was estimated to be very high and, for the most part, persons with disabilities were extremely poor.

The problems of the persons with disabilities, especially the rights of persons with disabilities, have been the subject of much attention in the United Nations and other international organisations over a long period of time.

The International Bill of Human Rights, comprising the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and other documents, constitute the political instruments, but also moral foundation for the future national policies in the field.

One of the most important documents was the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly by its resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982, that emphasized the right of persons with disabilities to the same opportunities as other citizens and to an equal share in the improvements in living conditions resulting from economic and social development. There also, for the first time, handicap was defined as a function of the relationship between persons with disabilities and their environment. The document offered the definition of equalisation of opportunities.

United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, A/RES/48/96, United Nations Resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its 48<sup>th</sup> session on 20 December 1993 highlighted that through education and rehabilitation, persons with disabilities became more active and a driving force in the further development of disability policy [2]. We would like to mention that the document has valuable contribution to understand the use of the two terms "disability" and "handicap", that should be seen in the light of modern disability history. The Standard Rules explained the three pillars as prevention, rehabilitation and equalisation of opportunities of persons with disabilities. Recalling the role of education, in situations where the general school system does not yet adequately meet the needs of all persons with disabilities, special education may be considered. It should be aimed at preparing students for education in the general school system.

Thus, the general strategy from special education to inclusion of student in the general school system was highlighted. Despite the fact that "inclusive education" is not used, all proposed terms as "to accommodate educational provisions for persons with disabilities in the mainstream", "gradual integration of special education services into mainstream education" reflect the inclusion idea.

According to Salamanca Statement Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), every person with a disability has a right to express their wishes with regard to their education, as far as this can be ascertained [3].

We noted that the phrase "Society for all", which makes the transition from integration to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, was first defined in the Madrid Declaration adopted by the European Congress of People with Disabilities in 2002.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) recognises that disability is an evolving concept and it results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, a that children with disabilities should have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children [4].

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and requires special measures to ensure the rights of children with disabilities. We would like to recall the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), which provides for some protective measures against disability as well as the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to ensure the rights of girls and women with disabilities.

Also, we consider that the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care and other relevant instruments adopted by the General Assembly should be taken into account.

In the context of involvement of persons with disabilities in the education system, the Dakar Framework for Action Education for All should be mentioned: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" [5]. Thus, the express connection between inclusive education and education for all was mentioned.

Also, the global education agenda (Education 2030), as part of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), should be considered. Persons with disabilities were not included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and consequently, were excluded from many development initiatives and funding streams. In contrast, the 2030 Agenda includes persons with disabilities. Disability is referenced in various parts of the SDGs and specifically, in parts related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the SDGs, for instance: Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. In addition, the proposal calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and also provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

We would like to put emphasis on the following: *more often inclusive education is connected to equitable quality education*, and that implies more sensitive and responsible strategies and actions.

Recognising that the adoption of many international instruments represents important steps in the recognition and institutionalisation of the human rights of disabled persons, its practical and concrete implementation remains the most important challenge.

Different authors and documents proposed different terms/definitions to identify and design the specificity of the phenomenon of education of children and students with disabilities. The most relevant terms used in relation with the phenomenon of disability are the following: inclusion/social inclusion, integration/social integration, special needs, special education, inclusion culture, education for all and others [6].

International human rights agreements, covenants, and legislation, provide definitions of inclusion that focus on equity, access, opportunity and rights. The trend in social policy during the past three decades has been to promote integration and participation and to combat exclusion. Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights [7].

As we mentioned above, "Agenda 2030" reflects the interest of persons with disability. Including persons with disabilities among vulnerable people means that whenever 'vulnerable' is referenced throughout the Agenda (18 times), these provisions directly apply to persons with disabilities. At the same time, the representatives of civil society organisations/disability movement prefer the term "at risk" rather than "vulnerable," but "vulnerable" is more broadly accepted by governments at the UN. Due to the political sensitivity of the Agenda 2030 negotiations, it was not possible to change this term.

Thus, we can mention that the term of social integration is more extended/larger than inclusive education. Inclusion focuses on the need for schools to adapt in order to meet the needs of all children, and not children having to change to meet the requirements of the school. This reform in the school system requires a new and different school culture, a culture whereby teachers have to change their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour towards students with diverse needs [8].

Researchers and psychologists in the area of sport sought psychological theories and approaches to explain the persistence of exercise. They found that there is a connection between the goals, beliefs, predictions and success and participation in physical education.

Inclusion is an important aspect in the education system. It promotes self-determination and participation of individuals with disabilities as any other minority in the community. In addition, while some authors question full inclusion, most would agree that the principle of inclusion and appropriate placement within an inclusion delivery system should be seen as a right of children with disabilities. Several United Nations policies affirm the right of all children, including those with a disability, to be valued equally, treated with respect, provided with equal opportunities within the mainstream system, and experience full and effective participation and inclusion in society.

Physical education classes in school, especially in junior high and high schools, are included in the category of classes that many students seek to avoid participating in. Physical Education is an integral part of the curriculum and education in the school because physical activity is an important factor in child development, not only in physical but also the psychological and social aspects.

From our point of view, from a conceptual perspective, inclusive physical education is based on social, pedagogical and psychological fundamentals. The social fundamentals aim at the dynamic balance between personality and school/society; integration of the individual with disability into education system and then into society (including the legal framework, norms, traditions, community's culture/inclusive culture). The pedagogical fundamentals refer to the theories of education and learning, including specific concepts on inclusive education; general and specific principles of education. The psychological fundamentals relate to theories of personality development; to the theory of early intervention in child development; to the theories of evaluating the psychic structures of personality (self-esteem, survival capacities etc.).

The Salamanca Statement (1994) highlighted the importance to enhancing teacher education as regards provision for special educational needs [9]. Teacher education has a crucial role to play in ensuring that classroom teachers are prepared for the challenges of educating students with disabilities—who, contrary to some misconceptions, can achieve in inclusive classrooms. All teachers should be trained/prepared to act on the belief that all students, including students with disabilities, belong in general education classrooms.

Many different authors and researchers explored the professional and transversal competences of teachers. One of the important components is attitude. During the analysis of specialised literature, we identify different terms of teachers' attitudes in relation with disabilities and PE: positive attitude, negative attitude, inclusive

attitude, reserved attitudes. Thus, positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in PE means acceptance of children with disabilities at physical education lessons. Negative attitude means non-acceptance of children with disabilities at physical education lessons or discriminatory approach/discriminatory attitude. Reserved attitude is sceptical approach, formal acceptance but in reality, a non-supporting attitude. Very often, inclusive attitude is understudied as positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in PE. From our point of view, the positive attitude is larger than inclusive attitude towards the inclusion of children/students with disabilities in PE, including friendly approach and respect, support/encouragement, and empathy, oriented to individual needs and preferences of the disabled students, without any limitations. The positive attitude includes the aspect of promoting and encouraging (active support) of disabled students.

We conclude that inclusive education should be the process of quality education of all children and students, regular and with disabilities, that aims to better explore their potential, and offer opportunities to all for future inclusion and personal and professional development. Inclusive education is a precondition in creating welcoming/"friendly" communities and establishing the inclusive society. At the same time, inclusive education can be a tool to change discriminatory attitudes but also, vice-verso – forming the inclusive attitude is a precondition in establishing the inclusive education/inclusive school.

In the context of our research, we expose the program on Adapted physical education. As a modern field of study within the sport sciences, adapted physical activity (APA) has been defined as "research, theory and practice directed toward persons of all ages under-served by the general sport sciences, disadvantaged in resources, or lacking power to access equal physical activity opportunities rights"[10]. From an educational perspective, this means that students with all types of disabilities and within all types of educational settings should be served in a way that conforms to their human rights, suits their individual functions, and focuses on their educational needs.

The central term used within APA terminology is adaptation, referring to assessing and managing variables (related to the tasks, persons involved, and environment) to meet unique needs and achieve desired outcomes. Adaptation occurs as an interactive and reciprocal process of change between the individual and environmental agents, who by means of their practice may facilitate or hinder this process. The aim of adaptation in APA is to enhance the achievement of physical activity goal of individuals of all ages with movement limitations and/or social restrictions.

Most teachers who participated in the formative programme described feelings of higher self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards the inclusion. The positive results of the research were confirmed by the positive results of PE teacher's adaptive activities with students with different disabilities – pre and post-tests (Table):

Table

Results of PE teacher's adaptive activities – pre- and post-tests

	Pre-curs	Post-curs
PE teachers come to their class with a lot of adjustment to include students with mild retardation	0.5	2.5
PE teachers that use large balls and outstanding for students who have vision problems	1	3
PE teachers that use large balls and outstanding for students who have physical problems	1.5	4.5

During the experiment period we observed that in the schools, when teachers involved in the programme cooperated well with parents and students without disabilities, and specialised services addressed to disabled child/students, students with and without disabilities demonstrated more motivation to play/to study together.

From a psychological perspective, changing stereotypical attitudes and transforming them into concrete actions is a more challenging and time-consuming mission, so it is important to become more aware of the importance of inclusion and its implementation even in the primary stage during PE lessons.

It can be argued that any practical intervention at behaviour level demands a closer cooperation between family, students at risk, psychologists, teachers and community, requiring a complex and prolonged educational process whose successful implementation can be evaluated over time.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we state that the process of forming the PE teachers' positive attitude towards students with disabilities to increase inclusion towards students with disabilities can be effective if focused on: increasing PE teachers' positive attitudes to attract disabled students on equal base with non-disabled students in PE lessons; diminishing the damage to the students with disabilities, emphasizing the undamaged skills of coping; motivating students with disabilities and non-disabled students to participate in PE lessons together; correlation with several factors, principles and forms of education, dropout preventive strategies etc.

At the same time, the process can be efficient, provided that the following conditions are carefully kept: the PE teachers will be ready for their lessons; the PE teachers recognize the factors that determined the participation of students with disabilities; performance indicators of students with disabilities at rejection risk are determined; physical education teachers have to acquire and continually improve specific effective coping strategies in their process of integrating pupils with disabilities.

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