

To include the invisible – a study of a study of what PE practice becomes in classes where pupils (age 10-11) with Neurodevelopmental Disorders are integrated

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Background

In previous research of inclusive physical education (PE) there is often a focus on individual pupils with visible physical disabilities, and how to facilitate and adapt physical education for them to play an active role in the educational situation. Many lessons regarding inclusion have emerged from this important field. Less is however known about more 'invisible' variations. In Sweden for example many pupils who are diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) such as ADHD and Autism are integrated in mainstream classes. These pupils are often more sensitive to demands, stressful situations and they have to struggle to decode social interactions. When it comes to lessons in PE we don't know much about how they perceive the educational situation on group level and what they need for PE to be successful for them.

Theoretical framework

With the purpose to investigate what PE practice becomes in classes where pupils with NDD are integrated we have conducted this study. During a PE-lesson a multitude of events executed by the teacher as well as the pupils can be observed. Events and experience are also two key elements in Dewey's pragmatist philosophy and they have been successfully utilized in previous research in PE. In this study, a transactional perspective is applied and the research question is: What are the inclusion and exclusion processes in classes where pupils with NDD are integrated?

Methods

Data generation consists of nine field observations and 13 individual interviews with pupils (ages 10-11) in three classes, within two different schools in one municipality in west Sweden. The municipality has been granted money from Swedish authorities to work for a more favourable school situation in general for pupils with NDD. No knowledge of which students were diagnosed with NDD were gathered beforehand and for that reason the sample also consists of pupils without diagnosis and one pupil with NDD wasn't sampled. This was a conscious choice based on an ambition to study these pupils on a group level, with peers.

Findings and Conclusion

Findings show that adaptations aimed to support some might exclude others and there are few general adaptations that work for all pupils with NDD. It seems to be more effective if the PE teacher focus on group dynamics than spending hours learning all about the disabilities. Concluding remarks from this study is that inclusive education is complex and demands an experienced and responsive teacher or else it will just end up in simple integration where several of the studied pupils with NDD end up losing the learning opportunities in school PE.

Keywords: Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Physical Education, inclusion processes, exclusion processes, primary school

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