



## Review

## Forty years later, a systematic literature review on inclusion in physical education (1975–2015): A teacher perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The first objective of this work is to systematically list the international studies about the inclusion of students with disabilities in physical education (PE) from the teachers' perspective. Sixty studies met our selection criteria and are listed. The second objective is to analyse the content of the literature according to the inductive and thematic approach of Thomas and Harden (2008). Our thematic analysis highlights: a) the factors that influence PE teachers' positive or negative attitudes and predispositions towards the inclusion of students with disabilities and b) the factors that can positively influence the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE classes, according to the teachers' representations. Based on these sets of factors, we propose some adapted PE training content for PE teachers. These training content proposals form the basis of research perspectives.

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## 1. Introduction

In numerous countries, educational policies have evolved towards inclusive education and encouraging mainstream schools to include students with disabilities, i.e., allowing those students to truly follow the course of their typically developing classmates.

Indeed, the [UNESCO Salamanca Statement \(1994\)](#) shows that international authorities agree that inclusive education is not simply placing students with disabilities in regular schools; rather, the statement refers to the students' social and active participation in class and to the full development of their potential through access to teaching according to the students' special educational needs (SEN). Therefore, the inclusive education of students with disabilities targets the education of all students in community classes and schools, which are considered the best places for experiencing diversity and learning about one another. Inclusion considers heterogeneity not as a problem but as a chance to transform schools to better respond to their students' diversity ([Booth & Ainscow, 2002](#)). The development of this educational philosophy combined with an increasing amount of inclusive legislation has led to an increase in the number of students with disabilities who participate in traditional learning environments.

Among these traditional classes, physical education (PE) seems to be an interesting context for inclusion. Indeed, PE is often, along with music and art education, one of the first courses to “experiment” with inclusion ([Alquraini & Gut, 2012](#)). Moreover, the participation of students with disabilities in PE activities increases their sense of belonging to a class or a school community, optimizes their physical functioning and motor skill acquisition and enhances their overall well-being ([Murphy & Carbone, 2008](#)). Another advantage is that as a socially structured environment, PE classes provide a unique opportunity for the development of students' social behaviour ([Sherrill, 2004](#)).

These elements contribute to the increasing frequency with which PE teachers are entrusted with the mission to take up the challenge of inclusion. This increased involvement explains why two literature reviews regarding inclusion in PE have already been published in the 2000s. Indeed, [Block and Obrusnikova \(2007\)](#) reviewed studies pertaining to the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE from 1995 to 2005. Thirty-eight studies were retrieved, and after an analysis, six focus areas were selected. One of these areas focused on PE teacher attitudes ( $n = 12$ ); that is, their predispositions and intentions towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in their courses. The authors concluded that a lack of adapted physical education (APE) training and a lack of teaching experience with students with disabilities were two factors that negatively influenced the attitudes of PE teachers. For their part, [O'Brien, Kudláček, and Howe \(2009\)](#) reviewed the literature on the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE over a period of eight years (2000–2008). Twenty-seven studies were selected. Thirteen studies focused on teacher perceptions and suggested that PE teachers believed that inclusion could be achieved if:

- training were more appropriate,
- PE teachers received more assistance from an APE specialist,
- the PE curriculum supported inclusion.

These interesting results highlight two complementary topics regarding inclusion in PE: a) the factors that influence PE teachers' attitudes and predispositions towards the inclusion of students with disabilities and b) the factors that can positively influence the inclusion of students with disabilities, according to teachers' representations.

However, these reviews cover a relatively short period (1995–2008). It would be interesting to review a larger period, especially from 1975 (the date of significant relevant laws: Public Law 94–142: The Education For All Handicapped Children Act in the United States and Law 75–534, June 30, 1975, in favour of the disabled people in France). Moreover, since 2008, other studies on this topic have been published that could enrich a new review of the literature. Finally, these two previous reviews of the literature examined all parameters of inclusion and not specifically the attitudes and representations of PE teachers. However, among the factors that contribute to the success of inclusion (class size and composition, teaching context, etc.), the most influential are undoubtedly the teachers' attitudes and representations of inclusion ([European Agency for](#)

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