



Ambivalent implicit attitudes towards inclusion in preservice PE teachers: The need for assessing both implicit and explicit attitudes towards inclusion

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Implicit attitudes towards inclusion are ambivalent in preservice PE teachers.
- Implicit and explicit attitudes towards inclusion are negatively correlated.
- Reported readiness to teach inclusively did not correlate with implicit attitudes.
- Cognitive dissonance might result from implicit-explicit discrepancy.
- Teacher education should address cognitive dissonance between both attitudes.

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ABSTRACT

Explicit attitudes towards inclusion are increasingly investigated in (preservice) teachers. However, few studies examine implicit attitudes towards inclusion, despite the advantage of being less sensitive to social desirability. Since inclusion is a sensitive topic, we aimed to investigate implicit and explicit attitudes towards inclusion as well as interactions between these attitudes. Using the Single-Target Implicit Association Test, early semester preservice teachers exhibited ambivalent implicit attitudes and positive explicit attitudes. Implicit attitudes were negatively correlated with explicit attitudes. Methodological and contentual explanations for these findings are discussed and theory-based implications for university education are suggested.

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1. Introduction

The issue of inclusive education has become increasingly relevant for teachers and preservice teacher education. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2008) has stated that inclusive education “is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all, while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities” (p. 18). In the teaching area of physical education (PE), the role of (preservice)

teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education has been gaining interest (Tant & Watelain, 2016). That is, in PE, students learn holistically, combining cognitive, affective, motoric, and social learning (Sherrill, 2004). A better understanding of experienced teachers' as well as preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education is relevant due to the impacts of attitude on teacher behavior and, more precisely, on method of teaching (e.g., Yeo, Chong, Neihart, & Huan, 2014).

Previous research has almost exclusively focused on assessing explicit attitudes towards inclusion (i.e., deliberate, self-reported evaluations; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). The sensitivity of inclusion as a topic (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) renders the predominant focus on explicit measures problematic, as individuals are directly asked to reflect on their beliefs and to self-report them in questionnaires. Recent empirical evidence has highlighted the

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potential weakness of this approach and pointed to the vulnerability of employing explicit attitude measures towards inclusion for social desirable responding (Lüke & Grosche, 2017a, 2017b). In detail, Lüke and Grosche (2017b) used an experimental approach to underscore the problem of social desirable responding when examining inclusion. They manipulated information on the organization conducting an online survey on inclusive education by using different organizational logos and names, implying different standpoints on inclusion (e.g., “No Experiments with Our children” or “Our School for All”). Results show that reported attitudes towards inclusion highly depended on the perceived attitude towards inclusion of the fake organization. To overcome this methodological weakness, implicit assessment of attitudes (i.e., measuring automatic and often unconscious evaluations with reaction-time based measures) has gained attention in many domains. Latest results encourage the application of implicit measures to inclusion (Kessels, Erbring, & Heiermann, 2014), and the study of the relation between implicit and explicit attitudes towards inclusion (Markova, Pit-Ten Cate, Krolak-Schwerdt, & Glock, 2016; Lüke & Grosche, 2017a). Therefore, the main aim is to investigate implicit attitudes and explore the relation between implicit and explicit attitudes towards inclusion in first- and third-semester preservice PE teachers.

1.1. The associative-propositional evaluation model

Theoretical underpinnings for implicit and explicit attitudes is provided by the associative-propositional evaluation (APE) model of Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2006). The APE model holds that human behavior is the result of two qualitatively distinct but interacting processes. Associative processes lead to immediate affective reactions to a given stimulus. A spontaneous unpleasant ‘gut feeling’ (i.e., implicit attitude) might thus be the consequence of being confronted with children with special needs at school. The propositional process is based on the (internally logical) validation of information. Reflecting on individuals with special needs might, for example, lead to the explicit evaluation that children with special needs could profit from inclusive teaching (i.e., explicit attitude). Associative and propositional processes operate in a default interventionist manner, which means that a spontaneously evoked affective reaction “will be regarded as valid unless it is inconsistent with other information” (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, p. 66). This underscores the importance of investigating implicit attitudes, which constitute the default mode of peoples’ decision-making or behavior. In the case of consistency between implicit and explicit attitudes, a positive correlation between implicit and explicit attitude towards a stimulus can be found. In the case of inconsistency between the two, cognitive dissonance emerges (Festinger, 1957), which needs to be resolved (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Empirically, negative as well as positive correlations between implicit and explicit attitudes have been found (Franco & Maass, 1999; Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwendner, Le, & Schmitt, 2005). These correlations depend, for example, on evaluative beliefs about discriminatory behavior (i.e., “I do not care about disadvantaged groups.” vs. “Negative evaluations of disadvantaged groups are wrong.”) and perceived discrimination (i.e., “Students with special needs represent a disadvantaged group.” vs. “Students with special needs do not represent a disadvantaged group.”).

In detail, when applying the APE model to (preservice) teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, the following simplified scenarios are plausible. A congruent feeling emerges when a (preservice) teacher implicitly as well as explicitly evaluates inclusive settings as positive or negative. In the case of inconsistency: A teacher implicitly has a negative attitude towards inclusion but knows that inclusive

education is required from the state and the school boards and has been perceived as morally implacable (Antonak & Livneh, 2000); thus the teacher’s answers on an explicit level might be rather positive. Dambrun and Guimond (2004) consider this an over-compensation strategy where explicit answers are strongly inhibited and thus, adapted to socially desirable standards.

1.2. Explicit attitudes towards inclusion and related impacts on teaching in physical education

There is ample evidence for the impact of explicit attitudes towards inclusion on teacher behavior. Recently, based on several qualitative and quantitative studies, reviews have summarized and stressed the importance of (preservice) teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion due to the impact of attitude on successful inclusive teaching in PE (Reuker et al., 2016). In a qualitative study, teachers were clustered in positive and negative attitude groups based on their results in an attitude towards inclusion questionnaire (Combs, Elliott, & Whipple, 2010). The subsequent interviews revealed that teachers in the positive attitude group included numerous teaching styles in PE (i.e., multiple focus on self-esteem, movement ability, and motor skill performance), which are more beneficial for inclusive processes. Comparable results were found in further interview-based studies with PE teachers (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Grenier, 2006). These studies show that the use of different teaching concepts and more adapted teaching styles are associated with teachers’ positive attitude toward inclusion. Quantitative studies show the same patterns of results. For example, Elliott (2008) observed that teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion allow their students significantly more practice attempts during PE than teachers with negative attitudes, which is arguably an indicator for effective teaching. In a larger sample of 142 randomly selected PE teachers (Beamer & Yun, 2014), attitudes towards inclusion have also been found to be positively related to the intention to teach inclusively. Focusing on preservice teachers, attitudes towards inclusion predicted 20% of the variance of self-reported intention to carry out the behavior in 230 preservice teachers (Martin & Kudláček, 2010). Overall, empirical evidence shows that explicit attitudes towards inclusion impact teacher behavior and teaching style in PE. However, in addition to limitations of assessing attitudes explicitly (e.g., social desirability), implicit attitudes have also been found to explain unique variance of behavior (Perugini, Richetin, & Zogmaister, 2010). Therefore, assessing implicit attitudes towards inclusion is necessary, as well.

1.3. Implicit attitudes towards stigmatized groups

Areas of research that apply implicit attitudes are diverse and focus on a variety of stigmatized groups (e.g., Wilson & Scior, 2014), such as the obese (e.g., O’Brien, Hunter, & Banks, 2007; Fontana, Furtado, Marston, Mazzardo, & Gallagher, 2013), ethnic minorities (e.g., Van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010), and students with special educational needs (Hornstra, Denessen, Bakker, van den Bergh, & Voeten, 2010).

In recent years, implicit measures have increasingly been used to investigate implicit biases in teachers or preservice teachers (e.g., Van den Bergh et al., 2010; Glock, Kneer, & Kovacs, 2013). Van den Bergh et al. (2010) found negative implicit attitudes towards ethnic minority students in elementary school teachers. More interestingly, while these biased implicit attitudes explained ethnic achievement gaps in school, explicit attitudes did not. Confirming this pattern, Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, and Sibley (2016) demonstrated that students’ mathematical achievement is higher when their teachers’ implicit attitude favors the students’ ethnic group, whereas teachers’ explicit attitudes are largely unrelated to

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