

**ELEMENTARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION**

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*Laws and legislation have resulted in children with special needs being placed in general physical education (GPE) classes with general physical educators. The purpose of this study was twofold; (a) to identify two practicing teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities and two teachers with negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities using Rizzo's (1993) Physical Education Attitudes Toward Individuals with Disabilities survey (PEATID), and (b) to investigate, through in-depth interviews, how their attitudes were formed and how it affected their teaching. Teachers with positive attitudes; (a) identified multiple focus areas and objectives in their teaching, (b) developed written lesson plans that incorporated several different teaching styles, (c) had received training in modifying and adapting physical education for students with disabilities, and (d) desired their students to be successful in their classes. The findings have implications for the field of physical education teacher education (PETE). PETE programs should develop programs of study that include adapted physical education classes. Additionally pre-service teachers should be taught how to plan, modify, and deliver developmentally appropriate activities for children with and without special needs.*

*Teacher Attitudes Towards Inclusion in Physical Education*

Laws and legislation have resulted in children with special needs being placed in general physical education (GPE) classes (Obrusnikova, 2008). Students who have mild or moderate disabilities such as mild intellectual disability, learning disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disorders are generally placed into GPE classes without an accompanying teacher's aid. The inclusion of students with disabilities into GPE classes has provided a tremendous challenge to physical educators who have planned to meet the physical education needs of children with disabilities without neglecting the physical education needs of the typical children.

Attitude research in education and physical education has grown increasingly popular over the past twenty years (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; Kozub & Lienert, 2003). This trend has been driven by the belief that the attitude of the teacher can have a direct influence on the successful inclusion of children with disabilities (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1992). The majority of studies that have examined the attitudes of physical educators toward inclusion have referred to the Theory of Reasoned Action or the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) According to these theories, a teacher's beliefs or attitudes towards something are expected to provide insight about actual behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The Theory of Planned Behavior measures individuals' intentions to perform a behavior and has been utilized in several studies investigating issues surrounding the inclusion of children with special needs into physical education settings (Conatser, Block, & Gansneder, 2002; Theodorakis, Bagiantis, & Goudas, 1995).

In the educational arena, some researchers have assumed that attitudes and behaviors were closely related and that attitudes could be useful in predicting behavior (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007). This assumption encouraged researchers to investigate the attitudes held by physical education teachers towards inclusion with the underlying belief that the attitude of the GPE teacher was critical to the

success of inclusion (Block & Rizzo, 1995; Elliott, 2008; Obrusnikova, 2008). It has also been reported (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007) that teachers who feel ill prepared for including students with disabilities, lead to feelings of incompetence that in turn leads to negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. While there has been a significant increase in the last ten years studying the attitude of pre-service GPE teachers, it is clear that more research is needed to assess potential attitudes in current, practicing general physical educators.

The purpose of this study was twofold; (a) to identify two practicing teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities and two teachers with negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities using Rizzo's (1993) Physical Education Attitudes Toward Individuals with Disabilities survey (PEATID), and (b) to investigate, through in-depth interviews, how their attitudes were formed and how it affected their teaching.

## Method

### *Instrumentation*

The attitude of physical education teachers toward inclusion in GPE settings has been documented in several studies (e.g. Hodge & Jansma, 2000; Elliott, 2008) in which the *Physical Educators Attitude Toward Teaching Individuals with Disabilities – III (PEATID-III)* was utilized. The PEATID-III questionnaire was originally developed by Rizzo and has been revised twice (Rizzo, 1986; 1993). The PEATID-III consists of a series of statements which requires teachers to express their beliefs about teaching individuals with disabilities in their GPE classes. Evidence of validity and reliability related specifically to the PEATID-III has been reported by Folsom-Meek and Rizzo (2002). Construct validity of the PEATID-III was obtained through principal components analysis. Reliability was estimated through the coefficient alpha and was reported at .88 for the total scale (Cronbach, 1951). Therefore, the PEATID III has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of physical education teachers' attitudes towards teaching individuals with disabilities.

The PEATID-III questionnaire was mailed to the school address of all elementary physical educators in the school districts who had given the investigator permission to conduct research in their schools. The names of the teachers and their school addresses were obtained either directly from a district physical education supervisor or by visiting individual school websites. Enclosed with the questionnaire was a set of instructions and a stamped return-addressed envelope. Added to the first page of the questionnaire were six items that asked the teacher: (a) whether he or she taught 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes; (b) whether a child with mild / moderate mental disabilities was included in one of their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes; (c) whether the included child came to physical education with or without a teacher aid; (d) whether the teacher had between 2-25 years of teaching experience; (e) whether the teacher would participate in a 60-90 minute interview; and (f) whether the teacher had a physical education teacher aid. These six questions were inserted at the start of the PEATID III questionnaire so that respondents did not have to continue with the questionnaire if they answered *no* to any of the aforementioned six questions, therefore making them ineligible for the study. The questionnaire was formatted so that it was organized, easy for the teachers to read and answer, and convenient for the graduate student helper to code and score.

The main portion of the original PEATID-III consisted of 12 statements such as, *Teaching students labeled as mild / moderate mental disabilities in regular physical education classes with nondisabled students will disrupt the harmony of the class*, and *Having to teach students labeled mild / moderate mental disabilities in regular physical education classes with nondisabled students places an unfair burden on teachers*. Under each of the 12 statements a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) was provided for the respondents to answer each question. Individual questions and total questionnaire scores were derived from the items and represented the responder's attitude toward including students with mild / moderate mental disabilities in his or her class. A total questionnaire score was based on the sum of item scores divided by the number of items so that they were interpreted about the original 5-point Likert scale. To derive proper scale mean scores for negatively phrased statements, the scores were reversed (i.e., 5=strongly disagree, 4=disagree, 3=undecided, 2=agree, 1=strongly agree).

### *Participants and Sites*

Four physical education teachers were selected as the participants for this study. They were selected by a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling seeks information rich cases which can be studied in depth (Patton, 1990). Specifically, an extreme-case purposeful-sampling strategy was used to

select the four teachers. One hundred and fifty questionnaires were sent out and twenty six were returned for a response rate of seventeen percent. Using the scores from the PEATID-III questionnaire, the researcher was able to place all the twenty-six teachers who returned a questionnaire along a continuum ranging from the most positive attitudes towards inclusion to the most negative attitude towards inclusion. The participants were selected by identifying two teachers at each end of the continuum.

All four of the teachers interviewed were experienced physical educators and had at least six years teaching (range 6-18 years). The two teachers interviewed that had a positive attitude towards inclusion were Jan (12 years teaching) and Jennifer (16 years teaching). The two teachers interviewed who had a negative attitude toward inclusion were Sean (6 years teaching) and Tammy (18 years teaching). All four of the teachers had a great deal of experience teaching GPE classes that included students with mild and moderate mental disabilities.

#### *Data Collection*

The purpose of the data collection phase was to collect in-depth descriptive information from the four teachers on issues surrounding inclusion. Information was collected through interviewing each teacher separately for 60-90 minutes each. The interview guide approach established by Patton (1990) was used and involved compiling a list of topics or issues to be explored during the interview. This approach used topics to be discussed in the interview but did not specify the exact order in which the questions were asked. This allowed for questions to be added or eliminated as the interview progressed. Certain guidelines were followed when compiling the interview questions. Specifically, the questions were open-ended, non-threatening and followed by probes, not leading, and arranged in a logical order (Patton, 1990).

Following the interview, member checking occurred by asking each teacher to read his or her transcribed interview. Teachers were invited to clarify, elaborate, or suggest changes to their original responses consistent with Lincoln and Guba (1985). A colleague not involved in the present study who was experienced in qualitative research served as a peer debriefer in this study. A debriefing session took place after each interview. Discussions between the researchers and the peer debriefer focused on methodological issues, the analytical process, the nature of the questions asked of the teachers, and the interpretations of the data.

#### *Analysis*

Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to explore participants' views, opinions, and teaching practices regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities into their general classes. The constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was applied to the individual transcripts as a method of coding and categorizing the data and to summarize the findings in meaningful ways. This process involved multiple and careful examinations of the data to identify key linkages, themes, and patterns which were used to analyze and interpret the qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The analysis of the interview data began with an individual case analysis of one of the teachers, followed by a within-group case analysis (Patton, 1990). This involved inducing categories from the answers of one participant and comparing them to the answers from the participant with the same attitude. Themes and patterns drawn from the two individual cases were compared and contrasted for similarities and differences. The synthesis of the within-group cross-case analyses represented a descriptive and interpretive framework of the two physical educators' feelings towards issues surrounding inclusion. This was done for teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion and teachers with negative attitudes toward inclusion. The next step involved comparing the themes and patterns found in the *positive* teachers' answers to those found in the *negative* teachers' answers.

#### *Limitations.*

A limitation of a qualitative study concerns the generalizability of its findings. The following are limitations of the study.

1. Since the study was limited to elementary physical education teachers, it cannot be assumed that the findings apply to secondary physical education teachers.
2. Since the study was limited to elementary physical educators' attitudes towards inclusion, it cannot be assumed that the findings apply to other content areas such as math education or music education.

3. The participants (teachers and students) in this study were volunteers. The results might be biased by this selection factor (consistent with Cook & Campbell, 1979).
4. Other extraneous variables (e.g., amount of physical education equipment, number of minutes of physical education per week) may have affected the results of the study.
5. The attitudinal scores of the teachers in the study provided a limited continuum scale.
6. The small sample size, common with qualitative research designs, does not allow a representative sample for all teachers. This study was intended to represent only those participating in the interviews.

## Results

### *The Teachers' Stories*

*Jan (Positive Attitudinal Group).* Jan had been an elementary physical education teacher for 12 years and taught in a school of 435 students located in the suburbs of a large city. The gymnasium was located at the back of the school and was slightly bigger than a regulation size basketball court. The walls were decorated with physical fitness and motor skill related information along with a class behavioral score sheet.

Jan had a very clear and positive philosophy towards teaching physical education and believed that physical education was the most important subject that students had in school. Jan wanted all of her children to learn movement patterns, motor skills, and fitness concepts while having fun in her classes. Jan's philosophy on teaching children with special needs in her general classes was very similar to her general teaching philosophy. In fact, she did not want to make a distinction saying that:

*My philosophy is the same for all children. Whether a child has special needs makes no difference, I mean I just have to be creative, use my creative abilities and adapt situations for the students that need a bit of extra help...but I still expect all of them to participate fully and to be successful at their own level.*

Jan made a couple of comments that indicated that she really welcomed children with special needs into her class. She was full of praise for how well her *included* students generally behaved and how skillful some of them were. She noted:

*Many of my students that are labeled with special needs are very skillful movers, energetic, and enjoy physical education...a lot of them are the best movers in their classes and that is great, because physical education gives them a chance for them to excel at something, to be the best at something when they might be struggling in other areas.*

Jan expected all of her students to be on-task *most of the time* in her classes. She noted:

*When I look around I expect all of the children to be practicing the skills that we are working on. They all know that if they are not doing this, then they will be reprimanded and may lose points for their class...and it is important to me because I know that they have to try things to learn them.*

Jan had always been in favor of having children with special needs included in physical education classes. In fact she believed that children with special needs should be included in all classes and not just art, music, and physical education. She stated that, *I think it is very detrimental to the learning of special needs children and all children to have them added to only itinerant classes.* She recognized that her philosophy had evolved over time and that a big factor in the development of her current beliefs was her attendance in a physical education graduate program. A couple of the classes that she took in graduate school were adapted physical education classes that taught her the necessary skills to effectively include children with a variety of disabilities into her classes. According to Jan, *I always felt that children with special needs should be in my classes, but after those adapted and special education classes I felt stronger about that because I had seen how it could be done.* Jan attributed a lot of her perceived success at including children with special needs into her class to the education she received in graduate school. When asked to describe what these classes involved, she talked about how they studied specific disabilities and discussed how children with these disabilities could be included into general classes. Jan also talked about how these classes made her realize that students with special needs should be in her classes and that her school may have been illegally excluding children.

Jan indicated that her lesson planning process was the same for all classes irrespective of whether or not they had children with special needs included in them. She used lesson plans that she wrote *years ago* that she updated and added to the day before she taught. When she was planning new units and

lessons, she wrote out full lesson plans that included activities that could be adjusted for all the children in the class. Jan described how she saw children by skill level rather than by the presence or absence of a specific disability, and that she attempted to design activities that could be adjusted for every skill level within the class. She also tried to think through any potential problems that students with special needs might experience in her classes and address them up front in her lesson planning. When asked to provide an example of this, Jan stated:

*I have one boy who is mildly mentally delayed and his attention span is very small so I really try to present directions as quickly and efficiently as possible. Plus, I pair him with other students who I know will understand what we are doing and can help him through it.*

Jan was very clear about her philosophy on the importance of student success in physical education. She was very quick to differentiate between students being successful and students being perfect. She wanted all children to be successful at their own ability levels. On this topic she said, *I expect them to do their best within their abilities, strive to be challenged, and to always feel successful, as well as to enjoy moving.*

Jan said she used many different teaching styles in her teaching and that she liked to teach in a way that *forced the children to think and to solve problems.* She added that she probably used more peer teaching with classes that were inclusive. When asked why she did this, she noted that, *I think that children can sometimes be the best teachers and that having a student without special needs partner up with a student with special needs can be a win-win situation.*

*Jennifer (Positive Attitudinal Group).* Jennifer had been an elementary physical educator for the past 16 years. She was a positive role model for her students as she was a self-proclaimed fitness fanatic. In her spare time she taught spinning and step-aerobics at a local private gym. Jennifer taught physical education because she *loved children and wanted them to share her enjoyment of movement and exercise.*

Jennifer talked in great detail about her teaching philosophy and what she wanted her students to gain from her physical education classes. Her philosophy focused on the teaching of motor skills and helping children improve their fitness levels and self-esteem. Jennifer described some of the children with special needs that she taught in her classes and wanted to make it clear that she felt that they belonged in her class and that she was very effective at including them. She strived to have all of her children actively participating all of the time. Jennifer recognized that it was important for children to be as active as possible throughout her lessons and stated that she had the same expectations in terms of on-task time for all the children in her classes.

Jennifer stated that her favorite class in her college degree program was one that involved each undergraduate student being matched with a child with disabilities for the entire semester. She proceeded to describe this practicum experience:

*My partner was a little boy named Zach. He would arrive every Monday afternoon on the school bus and just be full of energy. Even the more severe kids knew that this was their special day. We would spend two hours with our partner, an hour in the gym and then an hour in the pool. I was really intimidated on the first day when I saw the kids' faces through the school bus window but this nervousness and fear disappeared after a few weeks.*

Jennifer probably had the most in-depth and thorough lesson plans of the four teachers that were interviewed. On her lesson plan template was a space for accommodations for children with disabilities. She listed several modifications for every activity so that children of varying skill levels could be successful.

Jennifer had many thoughts on the practice of inclusion in general. First, she could not believe that many teachers were actively resisting it because it was the law. She proceeded to tell a story of a colleague at another school who bragged how she *didn't let the child with special needs screw up her lessons because she had this child play with toys in the corner of the gym during P.E. time.* This seemed to anger Jennifer, who said that she believed every child had the right to quality physical education. Second, Jennifer believed that it was important to have a plan that everyone was involved in making. She said that she attended Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and talked about how the individual student performed in physical education and what goals she thought were appropriate for that child. Third, Jennifer described cases where she thought inclusion was not appropriate. She felt

that inclusion was not the best option if the child was a physical danger to himself or to the rest of the class, or if the necessary supports were too expensive.

Jennifer believed that physical education teachers should make sure that all students were successful in their classes. She was asked how she did this, she replied:

*It is pretty simple, really. Any activity can be tweaked so that it is appropriate for the child doing it. That can be something as simple as having a child move closer to a target or holding a child's hand as they are walking across a balance beam. Children have to leave the gym feeling good about activity or they won't do it on their own time.*

Jennifer was the most specific of the four teachers in describing the teaching strategies that she used when teaching inclusive classes. Three specific teaching strategies that she believed she used were proximity, individualizing instruction, and the delivery of lots of positive reinforcement. She felt that she probably gave more positive reinforcement to students with special needs, compared to other students, because she really wanted them to enjoy physical education and to make them feel comfortable in her classes. She also believed that the children with special needs stayed on-task better if she was physically near them in the gymnasium, stating that:

*When I ask the class to get into general space I try to make sure that I am very close to children who may have problems paying attention. I especially try to do this with the children who have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) who sometimes need me near them to help them concentrate and stay focused.*

*Sean (Negative Attitudinal Group).* Sean had been teaching physical education for six years and had been in his current school for the past two years. Sean's school was located in a very large school district in the suburbs of a major city. Sean's philosophy on teaching physical education was more related to the teaching of sports skills than the other three teachers. He wanted the children in his classes to learn the basic skills of the major sports that they might play out of school. He pointed out that he taught skills such as basketball dribbling, passing, and shooting. Sean wanted his children to come to physical education dressed appropriately and ready to *work hard*.

Sean resented the fact that dealing with the children with special needs took up so much of his time during class and he felt that this was not fair to the other students in the class. Specifically, he stated:

*I've really tried with a couple of the kids that I get but they just cannot follow directions. They run around when I am talking and do not follow directions. Sometimes they even run out of the gym and I have to stop my lesson to deal with that problem. When the weather is nice I like to teach outside but I cannot take these kids outside because I am scared they will run off.*

Sean approached the principal with these issues when they first arose. Sean asked the principal if an assistant from the special education classroom could accompany a couple of the children with whom he was having problems. The principal did not provide the support Sean was hoping for, and indicated that physical education time was a chance for the special education teacher and her assistants to have their break. Sean added that his philosophy was based on the belief that children with special needs should only come into GPE classes if they had an aid or teaching assistant come with them.

Sean had minimal practical training or experience teaching children with special needs in the college undergraduate courses that he had taken. He had not taken any classes that focused on the education of students with special needs. Sean expressed regret at not completing a class that dealt with inclusion issues and teaching practices and that his student-teaching cooperating instructor did not help him with this challenge.

Sean did not talk for very long about how he planned his lessons. He showed me an index card that he carried while he was teaching that outlined the lesson. When asked the question of how having a child with special needs included into his class affected his lesson planning, Sean responded:

*I think of the particular child and the problems that they have in here and then I try to plan ways that I can deal with these problems such as giving them other things to do or having them work with a partner that I know they work well with.*

Sean had mixed feelings toward the practice of inclusion in general. He stated:

*I can see how it can make a child with disabilities feel better about themselves and feel part of the general class, and I think this is really important, but I'm just not sure if that is more important than the other children getting what they need in my classes. I guess I believe that inclusion looks great on paper but when it means that it disrupts my class then I begin to question the whole practice.*

Sean wanted his students to be successful when performing *sports* skills. He said that seeing them perform the sports skill correctly let him know that he had done a good job modeling and teaching the skill to them. He measured student success by using a checklist of things to look for in each skill. This assessment technique was required by the school district. Sean described what his goals were for the children who were included into the class. He stated:

*Many of them simply cannot understand the parts involved in a lot of skills so they can't do them that well...maybe they are getting some kind of social benefits from being with the other kids...I'm pretty much just happy if they are not misbehaving as actually following directions is a goal for a lot of them. They just can't stay on-task like the other kids.*

*Tammy (Negative Attitudinal Group).* Tammy had been a physical education teacher for over 18 years. About half of those years were spent in a high school setting and the other half in her current elementary school. She was the only teacher that mentioned attending state and regional physical education conventions. She believed that all of the presentations that she attended at these conventions had helped her formulate her teaching philosophy.

Tammy talked in-depth about how her general philosophy centered on helping children become more physically active individuals. She believed that her philosophy was relevant and important when teaching inclusionary classes as all children needed to learn the skills necessary to be active and to lead a healthy lifestyle. She compared the current educational practice of inclusion to that of the exclusionary classes that she taught when she first started teaching. She described that in her first few years of teaching, children from the special education classroom were not included into her general classes, and instead, she would meet with the special education class as a whole once a week. She believed that this practice served all children better and was easier to plan for. She summarized her current philosophy by stating:

*I just do the best I can. I try to make sure that the child with special needs does not disrupt the rest of the class. If I can manage this and keep everybody safe then I think I have done a good job and if the child with special needs learns something too then it is even better. I just think that a lot of the time these children are thrown into our classes without thinking whether or not it is best for that student and all the other students.*

Tammy pointed out that her job had changed a lot over the past 18 years. She reflected on how *back then* teachers were given more freedom to just teach. Today, she said she *spent so much time assessing children and doing paperwork* that she felt her teaching had suffered. Tammy recognized that her attitude or philosophy towards teaching children with special needs had evolved over time. She stated, *I wasn't taught how to teach children with special needs when they are mainstreamed into my general classes...I was taught how to teach small groups of these children at one time...it is a completely different challenge.* Tammy continued by adding:

*I enjoyed teaching these students together because I didn't feel like I was neglecting the 20 – 25 other children in the class...now I think it just places an unfair burden on teachers to expect them to do all this assessment, meet all these state standards and to spend a lot of time with children with disabilities who are thrown into the class without any help being provided.*

Tammy openly admitted that she did not write lesson plans anymore. She provided the school principal with an outline of what she would be teaching for every nine-week period. She said that she had been teaching long enough to know what she was going to teach and that she did not have to write it down. She added that this *would just be more paperwork.* She did not plan any special accommodations for the children with special needs. Tammy explained that the only major difference in preparation for inclusionary classes (versus non-inclusionary classes) was that she was more considerate of safety issues when there was a child with special needs in the class.

Tammy felt that if the students who were included had trouble performing the activities then they probably should not be with her anyway. When asked to talk more about that, she responded:

*I don't feel that I should turn my lesson upside down just for one child. I teach 8-10 classes a day and I just do not have time to change every lesson with equipment and stuff...the activities are designed for children at all skill levels so I expect that they should be able to do okay anyway.*

After clarification that we were talking about mild / moderate mental disabilities, and not more severe mental disabilities or physical disabilities, Tammy stated:

*If the children included are at the same skill level as others in the class, and they can understand directions then I assess them the same way I do everyone else. The problem is though that even children with milder disabilities who come without an assistant cannot understand what they are supposed to be doing.*

Tammy described the case of one of her students, a boy in fifth grade. This boy had been diagnosed as having both an emotional and mental disability and having a history of not cooperating with other students. He attended physical education without a teacher's aid, because the special education teacher felt it would be a good environment for him to work on his cooperation and social skills. Tammy pointed out that this boy had problems working with other children in almost every class. He would not share equipment or keep his hands to himself. The principal recognized Tammy's concerns, but did not add an assistant or pull the child from physical education classes because he (the principal) felt it was important for this child to learn to work with others. Tammy felt that this decision was unfair to her and to the rest of the children in the class.

Tammy recognized her lack of training in dealing with students with special needs and expressed a desire to become better at this part of her job. She had even approached the district physical education supervisor and asked her to organize more in-services that presented specific strategies that would help her and other teachers effectively include children with disabilities. She stated that, *many teachers like myself did not receive formal training and need help catching up with finding out which teaching styles and strategies we can use in our teaching.*

#### *Interpretation of Qualitative Data*

After extensive studying of the four participant's stories, each case was synthesized and inserted into a table format. This preliminary analysis was done so that topics of conversation could be scanned from each person's interviews. Following the preliminary analysis, four assertions were generated after comparing the responses of the two participants with a positive attitude to the responses of the two participants with a less positive / negative attitude.

#### **Assertion 1: Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion had multiple focus areas or objectives.**

The two teachers with a positive attitude toward inclusion discussed multiple focus areas or objectives in respect to what they taught or thought should be the goals of physical education. In contrast, the two teachers with a negative attitude toward inclusion only presented a singular area of focus. Jan, with the positive attitude, wanted her classes to help all children develop in three main areas (self-esteem / self-confidence, movement ability, and motor skill performance). Similarly, Jennifer addressed affective domain issues by stating that she wanted *all children to feel like they belonged* in her class. Jennifer's lessons also focused on the teaching of motor skills and fitness concepts which she believed could be integrated into each lesson.

The two teachers with a negative attitude had a singular focus when discussing their teaching philosophy. Sean wanted his children to learn the skills necessary to be able to participate in sports outside of school settings. It is noteworthy that every example he gave during the interview was a basketball example. The following quote highlights this:

*I spend a lot of time teaching them the fundamental skills of all the major sports that they might want to play outside of school. We do the lay-up, all the types of passes, dribbling, shooting and with the older kids, well some of them anyway, I do coaching stuff like zone or man-to-man and plays.*

Sean's continual reference to teaching basketball and his desire to have his students *work hard* during his lessons were especially interesting considering that he was also a basketball coach at a local high school. During the interview, it seemed quite obvious that Sean's physical education classes were an extension of his basketball practice sessions. One actual observation note was: *Does he teach basketball all the time...is he teaching or coaching in here?* Later on in the interview the coaching situation arose again when he stated that he did not *have enough time to write detailed lesson plans, perform all the necessary assessment, coach his team, and make accommodation for the children with special needs in every class.* This statement leads one to believe that Sean might be prioritizing his basketball team over the education of the students with special needs in his classes.

Tammy, the other teacher interviewed who had a negative attitude toward inclusion, also discussed one major focus area in her teaching. Tammy discussed in great detail how she thought it was her job to

teach children important fitness concepts. She wanted all of her students to learn the skills necessary to lead a physically active lifestyle.

**Assertion 2. Teachers with positive attitudes developed written lesson plans that incorporated many different teaching strategies.**

Both positive attitude teachers had written lesson plans that considered the needs of all the children in the class. Jan and Jennifer described how their lesson plans helped them to individualize instruction and to provide accommodations that they thought the child with special needs might require. Jan and Jennifer used small groups within their classes to help keep students with special needs on-task and to help all children develop cooperation skills. Jan liked to plan lessons that had students working with a partner and believed that this arrangement was beneficial for students with and without special needs. Jennifer also planned lessons that allowed for children to work together and described how she used the reciprocal teaching style to have children teach and assess each other.

Jan and Jennifer put a great emphasis on their lesson planning. According to Jan, *failing to plan is like planning to fail*. Jennifer's lesson plans were very well written and she was very eager to show them. It was clear that Jennifer consistently planned in depth lessons as she described how she liked to integrate subject matter from other subjects into her lesson plans. She then opened up her file cabinet to display hundreds of written lesson plans. She proceeded to pull one out of the section labeled *interdisciplinary lessons* and showed the thoroughness and thought put into every lesson.

In contrast to the positive attitudinal teachers, Sean and Tammy did not write detailed lesson plans. Sean indicated the following as his reason for not writing out full lesson plans:

*Long lesson plans like the ones we did in college are a waste of valuable time. I can get everything I need onto an index card which I can carry around with me as I am teaching; it has the layout of equipment on it, teams, and teaching cues, things like that.*

Similarly, Tammy indicated that she had:

*... been doing this for a long time now and know what I am going to teach without having it written down. The games and stuff are in my head. My principal doesn't want to see long lesson plans anyway, just a nine-week outline.*

Sean did not plan special accommodations for the children with special needs who came to his class without a teacher aid. He believed that if they did not need an aid then they should be able to do what the rest of the other children were doing. Tammy stated that it would be too much work to write special accommodations for every game that they played for every child with special needs.

**Assertion 3. Teachers with positive attitudes had completed coursework and training on teaching students with disabilities**

All four of the participants commented on the quantity and quality of educational training that they had received in their college degree programs. There was a definite contrast in the education that the teachers with different attitudes had received. The two teachers with a positive attitude toward inclusion had taken classes that specifically dealt with how to include children with special needs into their GPE classes. Jan and Jennifer described the impact that these classes had on the formation of their attitude towards inclusion and on their perceived ability to successfully include students with special needs into their classes. Jan stated:

*I was pretty much in favor of inclusion before I returned to graduate school but the classes I took there helped me to learn the ways that I could teach these children. The professor encouraged us to look at what the child with special needs could do and to make them feel a part of the class and to be as demanding of them as the other children.*

On the same topic Jennifer stated:

*The special populations' class that I took at college was the best class I took. It made me realize that I wanted to teach children who had disabilities, we learned so much in there...what the disabilities were and what we could do with these children in our classes...the best bit was working with our term buddy who came to campus for a couple of hours every week. I was intimidated by him at first but the repeated contact*

*helped me to get over that...I think all teachers in college need those kinds of early experiences with children who are disabled.*

The two teachers with a negative attitude toward inclusion had not taken any adapted physical education classes in their college teacher education degree programs. Tammy had previously taught classes that were exclusionary and expressed her preference for that arrangement. Interestingly, both of these teachers (i.e., Sean and Tammy) recognized that they did not feel well prepared to teach children with special needs in their classes. Tammy even pointed out that she had asked the district physical education supervisor if they (i.e., the school district) could present more in-services that dealt with inclusionary issues.

**Assertion 4. All four teachers wanted their children to be successful although there were notable differences in how success was defined.**

There were no differences between the teachers with the differing attitudes in terms of wanting their children to be successful in their classes. However, the two teachers with positive attitudes extended this issue by discussing what success meant to them. Jan and Jennifer, respectively, stated:

*I want the children to be successful at their own skill level...I don't look in a book and see how a skill should be performed and then expect every child to be able to do it exactly that way.....If two children are at the same general skill level then I have similar expectations for both of them...the only time I might not is if a child has problems understanding and following the directions that I give.*

Sean and Tammy (negative attitudes) also believed that it was important that children were successful in their classes. However, whereas Jan and Jennifer constantly referred to how a student's success can build self-esteem and confidence, both Sean and Tammy described student success as being important because it was an indication that the skills had been well taught. The impression was that Jan and Jennifer wanted students to be successful for the students' benefit (i.e., learn skills and improve self-esteem and confidence) in contrast to Sean and Tammy who wanted their students to be successful for their (i.e., Tammy and Sean) benefit as it made them feel like effective teachers.

There was a notable difference between the teachers with differing attitudes regarding their priorities for the children with special needs in their classes. Jan and Jennifer both made comments that suggested that they expected the included child to be on-task during the lesson. Specifically, Jan pointed out:

*The child with special needs is just like any other kid in the class...when I look around I don't think, oh there is Billy and he has a mental dysfunction, I just see another student...I expect all of my children to be on-task all of the time and they know that and want to do that as it wins the whole class points at the end of the lesson...it might take a little bit of prodding but the kids with special needs stay on-task as much as the others, sometimes even more.*

Tammy, a teacher with a negative attitude toward inclusion, provided a different response to the same question. Rather than discussing on-task time, Tammy pointed out that her main priority for the student with special needs was that she or he did not act in a way that would endanger him or herself or the other students in the class. Tammy's actual comment was:

*Most of the time I'm just happy if they come in and don't hurt themselves or the other children in the class. That is my main priority. To keep them safe and to protect the other kids...and also to make sure that they don't leave the gym or spend too long in the bathrooms.*

### **Discussion**

The two teachers with a positive attitude engaged in behaviors that researchers in physical education have associated with increased levels of student learning and effective teaching. For example, the two teachers with the positive attitudes toward inclusion identified multiple focus areas and objectives in their teaching and described how they used a variety of teaching styles in their teaching. The two teachers with a negative attitude seemed to center instructional time in the areas of traditional games and sports skills, content areas often viewed as more difficult to adapt to individual differences.

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the two teachers with the positive attitudes towards inclusion had taken adapted physical education courses in their formal education. The two teachers with the negative attitudes had not taken any adapted physical education or special populations classes. This qualitative finding supports the findings of Tripp and Rizzo (2006) which indicates the presence

of a positive relationship between teacher attitude towards inclusion and the amount of educational preparation. Other researchers have extended this line of research and have demonstrated that adapted physical education courses and teacher in-services improved the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion (Jansma & Schulz, 1984; Patrick, 1987).

The participants in the study defined student success in differing ways. The two teachers with a positive attitude referred to student motor performance when they discussed student success issues. In contrast, the two teachers with a negative attitude toward inclusion appeared to consider the inclusion of the child with special needs a success if the included child was *busy, happy, and good*. This conclusion was similar to the findings of Placek (1983), who found that inexperienced teachers were more concerned with whether students were participating (*busy*), enjoying themselves (*happy*), and doing as the teacher directed (*good*), than whether students were performing skills correctly. Effective teachers in an inclusive environment must be flexible and prepared to individualize instruction. Inclusion means all students belong in the *community* of learners. This *community* should invite all students to participate in meaningful learning that offers opportunities for personal success. An inclusive environment will make certain that both curriculum modifications (what is taught) and instructional modifications (how the material is taught) are planned for.

These findings may have practical implications for administrators involved in hiring physical educators and for college educators in physical education – teacher education (PETE) program areas. Administrators may use these findings to seek out potential physical educators who have a positive attitude towards inclusion. Administrators should be prepared to hire individuals who understand the shifting emphasis away from traditional games and sports skills. In reality, a perspective from the teacher candidate who continues to believe in the traditional curricula may be responsible for resistance to including students with disabilities in their classes. Administrators may also provide more teacher in-services that focus on how to include children with special needs into GPE classes. Teacher in-services have been found to improve participating teacher's attitudes towards inclusion (Jansma & Schulz, 1984; Patrick, 1987). Additionally, the findings of the present study may encourage PETE professionals to incorporate classes that deal with inclusionary issues into pre-service teachers' courses of study and to address individualizing teaching strategies, lesson plan writing, and different teaching styles in all pedagogy courses.

Explicit strategies for improving attitudes toward students with disabilities should increase the probability of successful assimilation of students into regular physical education. Students in physical education preparation should have ample opportunity to practice what they have learned in real life situations. One way to address this need for authentic learning is to assign pre-service teachers to multiple sites during early field experiences. This would allow future educators to interact with diverse groups of students.

The roles and responsibilities of physical education teachers are dramatically changing. All children are guaranteed free and appropriate education, including physical education. Laws continue to emphasize that there must be an increased emphasis on participation of children with special needs in the general curriculum. Inclusion is a complex issue that is interpreted differently by different people. Regardless, children should have an opportunity to engage in meaningful activities in physical education.

The following questions are suggested for the future study on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, their attitude formation, and the impact of their attitudes on their teaching.

1. Does the attitude of the teacher toward inclusion affect the learning and retention of motor skills for children with and without disabilities?
2. Would the attitude of the teacher toward inclusion affect the performance of students with disabilities and without disabilities on specific measurable variables (e.g., fitness tests, cooperation skills, state-wide standardized test scores)?
3. If more interviews were conducted, would the patterns and themes be consistent with those from the present study?
4. Does the attitude of the teacher towards inclusion affect how students within their classes perceive physical education?
5. What would the effect of an in-service that presented teachers with strategies to effectively include students with special needs into their classes be on: (a) the attitude of teachers towards

- inclusion, and (b) the pre- and post-intervention (in-service) practice and success levels of children in their classes?
6. What is the relationship between teacher attitude toward inclusion and the type and amount of feedback given to students with and without disabilities in regular physical education classes?

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