

MAINSTREAMING: THE PERPETUAL DILEMMA OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

There has been an apriori assumption by administrators that once a learner with a disability has been mainstreamed, he or she will be able to function effectively in regular class. However, results of this survey showed that teachers in mainstreamed physical education classes still had problems relating to their adequacy of preparation to teach such learners, involvement of support personnel, development of facilities and assessment of the learners needs so that they can fully be mainstreamed.

Key words: *Mainstreaming, Physical Education teacher, teacher preparation.*

INTRODUCTION

The rationale for mainstreaming in physical activity has been based on the assumptions that including learners with disabilities in regular activity programmes would provide them with a wide range of activities, opportunities and experiences than would be available to them in the segregated setting (Titus and Watkinson, 1987). A number of other significant benefits that would accrue from mainstreaming have been cited to include:

- a) increased motor performance (Karper and Martinek, 1985; Rarick and Beuter, 1985; Watkinson and Titus, 1985),
- b) Increased social interactions (Rynders Johnson and Schmidt, 1980; Wasson and Watkinson, 1981),
- c) Improved self-concept (Craft and Hogan, 1985), and
- d) Reduced negative attitudes and impressions held by non-handicapped peers, parents and teachers (Kilburn, 1984; Broadhead, 1985; Karper and Martinek, 1985; Wilcox, Sbardellati and Nevin, 1987).

Based on these studies and others, various countries have implemented programmes for mainstreaming learners who can cope with the demands of regular school. That is, learners with disabilities have been placed in regular classes on a full time basis, part-time basis or in special classes within the regular school depending on their abilities. In Kenya, tremendous efforts have been made in the education of learners with disabilities. The government's commitment

to this course can be noted from the policy papers that have shaped the education of the country. These include the emphasis placed on the area of special education as far back as 1965 (Ominde Commission report) and as recent as 1996 with the establishment of a task force on the status of individuals with disability. There has been a concerted effort to provide education to learners with disabilities through encouragement of direct interactions of such learners with their nonhandicapped peers in natural community settings. This has led to the establishment of many integrated programmes in the country and the establishment of teacher training programmes in the area of special education (i.e. Kenya Institute of Special Education, Kenyatta University and Maseno University College). What has however not been verified is the extent to which those teachers in mainstream schools are able to cope with the demands of a heterogeneous class. In particular the extent to which Physical Education (P.E) teachers in Kenya feel prepared to implement mainstreaming principles needs to be investigated.

This study was designed to gather information the status of mainstreaming in primary school physical education programmes in the country. The information gathered was based on the following factors:

1. The knowledge or professional preparation of physical education teachers.
2. The availability of educational materials suitable for a mainstream class.
3. The availability of knowledgeable consultants.
4. The involvement of parents and volunteers.
5. The availability of suitable facilities.
6. The participation level of learners with disabilities in physical activity.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Subjects were 50 primary school teachers (male n=35; female n=15) currently teaching physical education in mainstreamed classes. The subjects were selected from schools listed by the Ministry of Education as integrated, special class or resource room. The districts selected for the survey were limited depending on where the research assistants lived. Prior to the end of the 1996/97 academic year, second year P.E students at Kenyatta University who had taken a course in Adapted Physical Education volunteered to participate in the study as research assistants. They were required to administer the questionnaire to

Physical Education teachers in their home district schools selected from the list of special schools from the Ministry of Education.

Instrumentation and Procedures

The instrument used in the survey was a modified version of the Cross-Canada Teachers' Questionnaire regarding the integration of physically disabled students into regular school physical education programmes (Watkinson and Bentz, 1986).

The draft questionnaire was pilot-tested on an equivalent sample of primary school teachers in Nakuru town for clarity and structure before the final draft was sent out. Subjects were required to respond to 22 items by circling the appropriate option to every question. The questionnaires were given to P.E. teachers identified by the research assistants to fill. They were collected by the assistants who mailed them back. This ensured that all questionnaires distributed were returned.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Professional preparation of teachers

A key element to successful mainstreaming is the level of teacher preparation to deal with learners of varying abilities in the class. In this survey, it was noted that approximately 86% of the teachers were currently teaching some learners with disabilities in their classes. It was also noted that many of the teachers (86%) felt they were well trained in P.E. to handle learners with disabilities. Another 76% reported that they had undertaken a course, which dealt with learners with disabilities. Sixty (60) percent also reported they had in addition to their training attended workshops which dealt with learners with disabilities. Of these workshops, 60% dealt with teaching P.E to learners with disabilities. Of all the teachers surveyed, 84% had attained a primary or a diploma teachers' certificate (Table 1). In a way, the teachers surveyed reported a high level of preparation and confidence in handling learners with disabilities.

However, as could be noted from subjects' responses on the participation of learners with disabilities in P.E (Table 2), slightly over half (54%) of them reported that learners with disabilities participated in regular P.E. class and did some of the same activities as the other students. Only 13% of them involved their students in regular P.E.

Table 1: Professional preparation of teachers of learning disabled students (n=50).

Item	Frequency	Percentage
1. Currently teaching P.E learners with disability	43	86.0
2. Adequately prepared to teach to learners with disability	43	86.0
3. Undertaken a course in P.E. related to learners with disability	38	76.0
4. Attended a workshop/seminar on learning disability	30	60.0
5. Attained at least primary or diploma teacher certificate	42	84.0

classes fully and allowed them to participate in all the activities taught. Another 10% of the teachers reported that although their students attended regular P.E. classes as they did not participate (Table 2).

In addition when asked to report on whether their students were assessed before entering the P.E. programme, 51% reported positively, while 41% disagreed. In addition 44% reported the assessment given was a medical test while 16% noted that the learners were given a fitness test. Although the survey also showed that all the teachers in one way or another involved their learners in P.E., there was still a mismatch between the teachers' feelings on their preparation and the level of class preparation they made in order to incorporate all learners in the class activities. This may be due to the fact that the teachers rarely assess students to identify their strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of preparing individualised education programmes that would enable all learners to participate in class activities despite their skill levels.

Parental and Consultants' Involvement in Mainstreamed Physical Activity Programmes.

It was noted that very few parents of learners with disabilities are involved in their children's physical activity programmes. That is, they do not seek any information about what type of physical activities their children are involved in or even if it means advising their children to be involved in physical education activities. For those who are involved, they only provide information about their children's disability (34%)(Table 3).

Table 2: Participation of mainstreamed students in P.E. classes as reported by teachers (n=50).

Item	Number	Percentage
1. Participates in regular P.E. and does all activities	7	14.0
2. Participates in regular P.E. and does some activities	27	54.0
3. Participates in special P.E. classes for disabled students	11	22.0
4. Attends regular P.E. classes but does not participate	5	10.0
5. Does not participate in P.E. at all	0	0.0

The survey also showed there were no support personnel (67%) available to help teachers in their classes. Only 12% of the teachers reported that they had paid teacher assistants, while 19% reported that they had the support of volunteers. The availability of consultants in Physical education who could be of help in mainstreaming students with disabilities was also investigated. It was reported by 67% of the teachers that no consultants were available to assist them to provide appropriate programmes for learners with disabilities in mainstream classes.

The lack of involvement by parents, volunteers and consultants to assist P.E. teachers who are involved in mainstreamed P.E. classes shows the magnitude of the task for teachers to effectively manage classes with diverse abilities.

Resource materials

The results of the survey showed that 84% of the teachers had no programme materials, which could help them in developing programmes for students with disabilities in the mainstream class. The lack of relevant resource materials is a barrier to mainstreaming students with disabilities. On the other hand, this may be a pointer to the inadequacy of the teachers to provide or develop teaching materials that are suitable for all learners.

Table 3: Involvement of parents in mainstreamed physical activity programmes (n=50).

Item	Frequency	Percentage
1. Seek information on students' progress in P.E	4	8.0
2. Request exemption for their disabled child from P.E	4	8.0
3. Request that their disabled child participates in P.E.	1	2.0
4. Provide information on activities in which they had previously participated.	5	10.0
5. Provide information on resources available for their child's participation in P.E.	0	0.0
6. Provide information on the student's disability	17	34.0
7. No parental involvement	19	38.0

Classroom preparation and management for the mainstreamed learners with a disability

In order to derive maximum benefits from mainstreaming, the readiness of the learner-disabled child to cope with the demands of regular class has to be considered as well as the readiness of the regular learners. This survey investigated the teachers' methods of preparing their classes for the learners to be mainstreamed as shown in table 4.

It is evident that the emphasis of the teachers in their efforts to prepare their students for the mainstreamed class is in the area of enhancing positive attitudes (40%) and familiarizing regular learners with the conditions and behaviours of learners with disabilities (36%). The other areas of skill development (24%), selecting activities or equipment commensurate with the new learners ability (30%), providing structured extra practice time (14%) or improving titles level of learners with disability (12%) are not seriously considered by the teachers. In all, these aspects, which are important for effective mainstreaming are not adequately addressed by the teachers when planning for integration of new learners.

Table 4: Preparation of students with disabilities before placement in the mainstream class

Item	Frequency	Percentage
1. Selecting activities/equipment in line with what the handicapped learners can perform.	15	30.0
2. Upgrading the motor skill performance of the disabled learners before incorporating him/her in the mainstream class.	12	24.0
3. Providing structured extra practice time for the mainstreamed learners.	7	14.0
4. Improving the fitness level of the handicapped learners as a prerequisite for physical activities.	6	12.0
5. Fostering positive attitudes among the non-handicapped learners towards the new student.	20	40.0
6. Familiarising non-handicapped learners with handicapping conditions and behaviours of learners with disabilities.	18	36.0

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey indicate that mainstreaming in P.E. is implemented in Kenya by teachers who are committed to its success. However, it is evident that there still exist barriers to the successful implementation of the process as noted in this study. There is a need for teacher trainers to provide future P.E. instructors with an in depth knowledge on:

- a) Assessment of learners with disabilities for placement in an integrated class,
- b) Programme planning to cater for a heterogeneous class, and
- c) Involvement of parents, volunteers and consultants in implementing P.E. programmes.

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