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What is This?
High School Physical Educators’ Beliefs About Teaching Differently Abled Students in an Urban Public School District

Bethany L. Hersman¹ and Samuel R. Hodge²

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine general physical education (GPE) teachers' beliefs about teaching differently abled students in inclusive classes. The participants were 5 GPE teachers from a large urban school district. The research method was explanatory multiple-case study situated in planned behavior theory. Data were gathered using a demographic questionnaire, attitude survey, and interviews. Survey data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and revealed that the teachers' judgments vary on inclusion and their level of acceptance in teaching differently abled students. The teachers agreed that more professional training was a need. Interview data were analyzed with constant comparative method. The emergent themes were: (a) teachers’ pedagogies troubled, (b) dependent self-efficacy, (c) paradoxes, (d) motives, and (e) concerns. Findings thus implied that urban school districts should regularly engage teachers in professional development focused on teaching differently abled students.

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Today, inclusion is a common educational practice in the United States of America and elsewhere (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000). In an inclusive setting, the emphasis is on placing a differently abled student into the least restrictive environment (LRE) where she or he can be the most successful. This is required under Public Law 108-446, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). IDEIA also requires physical education for differently abled. In that context, scholars have examined how general physical education (GPE) teachers view, construct, and respond to inclusive programming (Grenier, 2006). For example, Ammah and Hodge (2005) examined the beliefs and practices of GPE teachers on inclusion and teaching students with severe disabilities in suburban schools. They uncovered three recurring themes, which were (a) wavering beliefs, (b) complexities of inclusion, and (c) troubled confidence. First, the teachers expressed both favorable and unfavorable or wavering beliefs about inclusion. Second, the teachers spoke of complexities to class organization and management, especially in teaching students with severe disabilities. Third, the teachers voiced concerns about inadequate professional preparation, which troubled their confidence in teaching students with severe disabilities.

Consistently, research has shown GPE teachers’ beliefs about teaching differently abled students are influenced (both favorably and unfavorably) by multiple variables such as professional preparation and development, experience, availability and use of supports, resources, time demands, class sizes, and student disability type and severity (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, LaMaster, & O’Sullivan, 2004; LaMaster, Gall, Kinchin, & Siedentop, 1998; Lieberman, Houston-Wilson, & Kozub, 2002; Lienert, Sherrill, & Myers, 2001). To extend our knowledge base, more research is needed to better understand the complex social-educational phenomenon of inclusive practices in GPE across various school contexts (e.g., urban schools) with a diversity of teachers and students (Hodge, Kozub, Robinson, & Hersman, 2007).

For this research, multiple-case studies were conducted with GPE teachers from Columbus Public Schools District (CPS), a large urban school district in Ohio. CPS is typified with issues common to most urban school districts nationwide (Ward & O’Sullivan, 2006). Nationally, and in CPS, there exist
budgetary constraints, social and disciplinary problems, large overcrowded classes, high percentage of poor students and students of color, low test scores compared to student test scores at schools in neighboring suburban districts, high dropout rates, limited parental involvement in school matters, and a deteriorating education infrastructure (Ward & O’Sullivan, 2006). Of note, following an ascending trend, the graduation rate of students in CPS was 67.7% in 2004 to 2005 (CPS District, 2006). Ward and O’Sullivan provided an excellent discussion on the educational contexts of urban schools, contextual particularities of CPS, and the context of physical education in this district.

For CPS, the population of the student body was not proportional to the population of the city of Columbus. In the schools, the largest population was African American, as opposed to the city where the largest population was White, non-Hispanic. The city’s estimated population was 711,470 residents, which makes it the largest city in the state. Of the residents, most (68%) were non-Hispanic Whites; another 2% identified themselves as biracial (i.e., White and another race or Other races). In other words, about 70% of the residents of the city were White or White plus Other races. The next largest group of residents was African American, comprising nearly 26% of the population, either as one race or in combination. Asians and Pacific Americans (as one race or in combination) made up for nearly 4%, followed by Hispanic residents who made up 2.5% of the population (City of Columbus, 2006). Hispanics may be of any race but with their own ethnospecific values, attitudes, and behaviors (Marín & Marín, 1991). Scholars have called for more research in physical education on the beliefs and experiences of such culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse groups (Hodge et al., 2007).

Predictably, with continuing advocacy for inclusion, there will be increased opportunities for teachers to teach differently abled students. Furthermore, with an increasingly larger and more diverse population of differently abled students receiving their education in general education settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), determining, analyzing, and theorizing on the beliefs of GPE teachers is critical to the preparation of future teachers and the professional development of current teachers. Given this rationale, the purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs of GPE teachers on teaching differently abled students in inclusive GPE classes. Research reported in this article is part of a larger study designed to examine the beliefs of physical education teachers on teaching differently abled students in inclusive classes. The central research question was, “How has teaching differently abled students
influenced the beliefs of GPE teachers on inclusion and teaching differently abled students at urban schools?”

**Theoretical Framework**

Theory of planned behavior (TPB) was judged an appropriate theoretical framework for interpreting the beliefs of GPE teachers on teaching differently abled students. TPB posits that attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are the underlying aggregates of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1985, 1991).

TPB posits three conceptually independent determinants of intention: (a) attitude toward the behavior, which denotes the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question; (b) subjective norm, which denotes the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior; and (c) perceived behavioral control, which denotes to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. These determinants of intention are posited to be a product of three accessible belief systems: (a) **behavioral beliefs** that represent the influence attitudes toward the behavior, (b) **normative beliefs** that denote the underlying determinants of subjective norms, and (c) control beliefs that provide the basis for perceptions of behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

From these accessible belief systems, behavioral intention is the immediate antecedent of a particular behavior. Given adequate control over the behavior, individuals are likely to carry out their intentions if afforded opportunities to do so (e.g., teacher modifies game play to include a student with a disability). Thus, it is posited that intentions “capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). This intent to perform a particular behavior assumes that the behavior in question is under volitional control (e.g., teacher has the wherewithal to adapt instruction to effectively include differently abled students in class activities). Hence, perceived behavioral control refers to a person’s **perception** of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior of interest, which is partially dependent on resources and opportunities available to the person to carry out the act (Ajzen, 1991).

For the current study, TPB was used in interpreting and making analytic generalizations of the findings. We defined **beliefs** as accessible beliefs (Ajzen, 1991) expressed by teachers on teaching differently abled students and on the basis of their knowledge and experiences doing so.
Method

Research Method

The research method was explanatory multiple-case study (Yin, 2003). Case study method was used to better understand the complex phenomenon of teaching differently abled students in inclusive GPE classes at high schools within CPS, a large urban school district in Ohio. Explanatory (Yin, 2003) or interpretative (Merriam, 1998) case studies are “used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to data gathering” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). Yin asserted that case study method can support both quantitative and qualitative strategies. He explained that researchers “can use multiple strategies in any given study (e.g., a survey within a case study or case study within a survey)” (Yin, 2003, p. 9). In the current study, data were collected with a teacher’s demographic questionnaire, attitude survey, and face-to-face (conversational) focused interviews.

Teachers, Students, and School Contexts

Five GPE teachers (3 women, 2 men; mean age = 40), Diane, Tyrese, Matt, Denise, and Shanika (pseudonyms), at three high schools in CPS participated in this study. In accord with Yin’s (2003) guidelines, the selection of these teachers involved contacting the district’s school principals and physical education coordinator for nominations of teachers matching the selection protocol criteria. The teachers (a) represented diversity of personal interests, backgrounds, and work environments (Lienert et al., 2001), (b) had received training in physical education teacher education (PETE) programs, (c) held physical education teaching certification, (d) taught differently abled students at high school level, and (e) were judged as effective teachers (Hodge et al., 2004; LaMaster et al., 1998). The teachers had between 6 and 17 years of experience teaching GPE and 2 to 19 years experience teaching differently abled students (Table 1). They all had a bachelor’s degree and teaching certification in GPE. In addition, Diane had earned a doctorate degree, and Tyrese and Matt had obtained master’s degrees. Shanika had taught adapted physical education (APE) in CPS for 3 years previous to her current GPE position. No teacher aides or APE specialists were available to support the teachers’ GPE classes.

The teachers described teaching students with various disabilities (Table 2). For example, Shanika said, “We have different levels of students with disabilities, we have hearing impaired, low incidence, high incidence. . .” (Shanika, interview). On average, the teachers had taught for 12.6 years in GPE contexts and across cases they averaged 10.8 (range: 2-19) years
experience teaching differently abled students (Table 1). The diversity of experiences teaching differently abled students is captured in Shanika’s comments: “I taught K-12, I don’t know what the current terminology is, but then, it was SBH kids, multi-handicapped, . . . I’ve had Deaf kids, blind kids, physically handicapped kids, I’ve had a combination of everything. . . .” Shanika, who once held an APE position in the school district, had the most
experience teaching students with severe disabilities. In all other cases, the teachers had somewhat limited experience teaching students with severe disabilities (e.g., severe behavioral disorders). They did, however, have an assortment of experiences with varying disability types as reflected in Denise’s remarks.

What we have here is mostly behavioral disorders. The classes are packed with those [students with behavioral disorders]. Um, many of them are labeled, many of them not. Um, I’ve had hearing impaired students, learning disabled students, but, very few with physical disabilities or visual impairments. (Denise, interview)

Matt also spoke of varied experiences. “I’ve dealt with a lot of hearing impaired kids. . . . Now we do have some with behavioral disorders, you know, hyperactivity, things like that. Other than that, I’m sure we’ve had learning disabilities.” Likewise Diane asserted:

I have had a lot of people with disabilities . . . a lot. . . . Um, they’ve never said what the initials stand for so I know I’ve got ED, MD, and S-something, so I don’t know what their disabilities are. Um, basically, most of the disabilities I’ve had are more learning disabilities and physical. (Diane, interview)

In all, these teachers had taught students with various disabilities. But in most cases, they had limited experience teaching students with severe disabilities.

Diane, a White woman, taught in a high school of 758 students. Most students were African American (82%), 16% were White, and 1% were Hispanic, Asian Pacific American, indigenous Native American, or multiracial. She had taken an APE course at the undergraduate level. However, Diane had not engaged in any professional development training focused on teaching differently abled students. The average class size she taught was 24 students, with a range of 8 to 15 students, including those with disabilities.

Tyrese, an African American man, taught in the same high school as Diane. He had taught differently abled students for 14 years and had taken 6 APE courses at the undergraduate level, as well as attended various workshops, conferences, and seminars to further his training to work with differently abled students.

Matt, a White American man, taught in a school with 1,266 students. The student populations were African American (73%), White (20%), Hispanic
(5%), Asian Pacific American (2%), and less than 1% multi-racial. He had taught differently abled students at times for the past 15 years of his teaching career. Matt had taken one APE course but had not received any further training to work with differently abled students.

Denise, a White American woman, taught in a school where 77% of the 1,144 students were African American, 17% were White, 4% were Hispanic, 1% were Asian Pacific American, and less than 1% was multiracial. Denise had been teaching differently abled students for 19 years although she had only taught physical education for 17 years. She had taken an undergraduate APE course and had attended a couple of workshops and seminars to further her training.

Shanika, an African American woman, taught in the same high school as Matt. She taught GPE classes daily and had taught differently abled students for the past 4 years. During her PETE training, she had taken two APE courses, and in the past 2 years, she had engaged in workshops geared toward teaching differently abled students. In addition, prior to her current faculty position, she held an APE teaching position in this school district for 3 years.

Instrumentation

Data were collected at each teacher’s school with a demographic questionnaire (LaMaster et al., 1998), the Physical Educators’ Judgments About Inclusion (PEJI) survey (Hodge, Murata, & Kozub, 2002), and an open-ended (conversational-style), focused interviews (Yin, 2003).

**Demographic questionnaire.** To collect demographic data from the teachers, a questionnaire developed by LaMaster et al. (1998) was used. Data secured included information about the makeup of the teachers’ classes (e.g., class size, disability types), gender, age, educational history, working conditions, teaching experience, access to services and supports, and teacher responsibilities in working with students who had disabilities (attending IEP meetings).

**PEJI survey.** The PEJI survey was used to gather data on the teachers’ judgments pertaining to the inclusion of differently abled students in physical education classes (Hodge et al., 2002). Conceptually, judgments represent the cognitive expressions of attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). The PEJI survey was judged valid and reliable in measuring PEJI after strict psychometric analyses (Hodge et al., 2002). PEJI is comprised of three subscales: (a) judgments about inclusion versus exclusion, (b) judgments about acceptance of students with disabilities, and (c) judgments about perceived training needs for measuring judgments (Hodge et al., 2002).
The survey was administered with an attached cover sheet that provided the teachers with a set of general directions and a definition of inclusion. A disability-specific definition page also accompanied PEJI. Protocol was adhered to as scores on PEJI were averaged, and the scale used for interpreting means was 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Scoring on negatively phrased items was reversed, and individual subscale scores were reported instead of a total PEJI score as recommended by Hodge et al. (2002).

Focused interviews. The interviewing protocol was a two-phase, open-ended (conversational style), focused approach (Yin, 2003). Recent studies have used a similar approach (Goodwin, Fitzpatrick, Thurmeier, & Hall, 2006). Open-ended questions were used to facilitate a two-phase (i.e., reflecting and responding) interviewing process. In the reflection phase, 12 interview questions were given to the teachers several days before the interview to allow them time to reflect on their experiences and beliefs associated with teaching differently abled students. The questions were developed in accord with TPB. In the responding phase, each teacher responded to questions asked in a conversational style. Although the open-ended questionnaire ensured consistency of questions reflected on before the interview (reflection phase) and later asked during the interviews (responding phase), the data collector was encouraged to probe beyond the preestablished questions to get at the individual teachers’ contextual realities. The teachers were interviewed, uninterrupted, at their respective schools.

Typically, the focused interview sessions lasted 60 minutes (Yin, 2003). This is consistent with previous studies in our field (Goodwin et al., 2006). The teachers had work-related time constraints that the researchers were mindful and respectful of in conducting the interviews. All interviews were audio-taped with the teachers’ permission, transcribed verbatim, and later, for confirmation of interpretations, the teachers were contacted through telephone or electronic mail. They all agreed with the accuracy of transcribed content from the respective interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Use of multiple-case study method was an economically feasible and time-effective means of simultaneously gathering data from a diversity of GPE teachers across CPS, an extremely large urban school district. The data collector was a White, non-Hispanic woman. At the time, she was an APE doctoral student at a nearby Carnegie Research I university. Demographic and survey data were summarized with descriptive statistics (Thomas & Nelson, 2001),
Descriptive statistics were used for analyzing demographic and PEJI data. Due to research design limitations (i.e., use of nonrandomized groupings, small sample), assumptions underlying use of inferential statistics could not be satisfied. Thus, the researchers decided to not use inferential tests but rather to report descriptive statistics (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). MINITAB Statistical Software (2000) was used for all quantitative data analyses.

Teachers’ interview data were analyzed inductively by preparing the data (transcribing and translating as warranted), reducing the data (reading, bracketing, gleaning, and winnowing text), categorizing (using constant comparative procedures), and thematizing the data, and by theorizing (Merriam, 1998). First, the interview data were prepared for analysis by transcribing the audio-taped interviews. Second, the lead author independently listened to the audio-taped interviews while reading along with the written transcription to check for accuracy and to make minor corrections as needed. Third, the transcriptions were independently examined by the researchers as they engaged in a process of reducing, categorizing, thematizing, and theorizing the data. In reducing the text, the researchers read and marked with brackets passages they judged as of interest and importance. This process of gleaning text led to categorizing (category construction) and thematizing the data by connecting threads and patterns within categories and between categories resulting in the emergence of recurring themes (Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness and Transferability

To reduce subjective bias and ensure trustworthiness, the researchers (a) collaborated in designing the cases, (b) worked independently at first and later converged in analyzing and interpreting different pieces of data (i.e., triangulation of the data and investigator triangulation in searching for agreement and consistency of evidence from different data sources) to ensure dependability of the findings, and (c) used member checking to ensure credibility and conformability (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

A diverse team of researchers worked in collaboration in designing and conducting this study and as analysts in interpreting the different pieces of data within and across cases. In all cases, the on-site data collector conducted member checks. This researcher returned the interview transcripts to the respective teachers for their review to ensure correctness of content, and they were encouraged to comment, clarify, elaborate, or suggest changes that would accurately represent their beliefs and experiences (Brantlinger et al., 2005).
A few minor edits were made. All five teachers agreed with the accuracy of the data specific to his or her particular context, experiences, and beliefs.

Transferability denotes whether distinct findings from an inquiry can be transferred to other similar contexts or circumstances while sustaining “the particularized meanings, interpretations, and inferences from the completed study” (Leininger, 1994, p. 106). The degree of transferability or fittingness of the findings beyond this current study to other contexts, situations, or cultures rests with identifiable congruence of other classes, teachers, and students (Leininger, 1994).

**Findings**

The findings are divided into two sections. First, PEJI data for these cases are reported using descriptive statistics (Table 3). Second, thematic findings that emerged from within-case and cross-case analyses are presented. Extracted themes are supported with quotes from the teachers.

**Quantitative Results: Judgments About Inclusion**

For PEJI Subscale 1, judgments about inclusion versus exclusion, descriptive data (i.e., means and standard deviations) gives you an idea about the teachers’ level of disagreement (Diane, Tyrese, and Denise) or uncertainty (Matt) to agreement (Shanika) with the position that differently abled students should be included in GPE classes (Table 3).

On PEJI Subscale 2, judgments about acceptance of students with disabilities, descriptive data on these teachers’ responses indicate that their judgments

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**Table 3. PEJI Subscales Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Subscale&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Subscale&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Subscale&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Total Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrese</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanika</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scoring scale: *Strongly disagree* = 1; *disagree* = 2; *undecided* = 3; *agree* = 4; *strongly agree* = 5; PEJI = Physical Educators’ Judgments about Inclusion; Subscale<sup>a</sup> = PEJI subscale—Judgments on Inclusion versus Exclusion Settings; Subscale<sup>b</sup> = PEJI subscale—Judgments on Acceptance of Students with Disabilities; Subscale<sup>c</sup> = PEJI subscale—Judgments on Perceived Training Needs; Total Scale = Total PEJI scale data.
varied on their level of acceptance in teaching differently abled students (Table 3). Most important, they expressed accepting beliefs (i.e., mean scores of 3.5 to 5.0) toward teaching students who had any one of the following impairments: hard of hearing, visual impairment, learning disability, and physical disability.

For PEJI Subscale 3, judgments about perceived training needs, descriptive data (means from 3.2 to 4.2) suggest that these teachers believed they needed additional professional training, knowledge, exposure, and assistance from others (e.g., APE specialists, peer tutors) to more effectively teach students with mild-to-severe disabilities (Table 3).

**Teachers’ Beliefs: Recurring Themes**

Emerging themes revealed that inclusive programming in GPE influences teachers’ beliefs about teaching differently abled students in physical education at urban high schools. The teachers’ beliefs about teaching differently abled students were captured in the following themes: (a) teachers’ pedagogies troubled, (b) dependent self-efficacy, (c) paradoxes, (d) motives, and (e) concerns. The themes are described in narrative with quotes from the teachers.

**Teachers’ Pedagogies Troubled**

The teachers’ pedagogies were troubled with difficulties and complexes beyond those of a typical noninclusive GPE program. The essence of this theme was the belief that the more severe the student’s disability, and/or more inattentive, hyperactive, or behaviorally distributive the student, the more time is necessary to prepare, and the more difficult it is to plan, prepare, and organize classes. Troubled, the teachers (with only a few exceptions) said that inclusive practice is simply more difficult. Mostly, the teachers voiced difficulties in teaching students with attention deficit disorders, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders, learning disabilities, and various severe disabilities, including severe emotional-behavioral disorders. For example, speaking on this, Diane said, “The mild is okay, the severe is difficult, you know, if they’re not understanding or don’t know, you know just don’t know what to do.”

Replicated across cases, the teachers voiced difficulties as to (a) more time demanding planning lessons and knowing what to do to include differently abled students in class activities; (b) more difficult managing time and attention necessarily given to differently abled students and individualizing instruction, which potentially took time and attention away from students...
without disabilities; and (c) more difficult adapting activities and modifying lessons to fit the needs of differently abled students. For example, Tyrese stated “I think . . . depending on what activity we’re doing you might have to break everything down into baby steps.” Related to this, Shanika said it was difficult at times incorporating a student’s individualized educational program (IEP) goals into class lesson objectives. She explained as follows:

Um, probably if there was a difficult issue knowing what’s in the IEP and being able to incorporate what’s in the student’s IEP into your regular class. And it’s more difficult because we don’t deal with it on a regular basis, and a lot of the things in the IEP may not even be appropriate for our class so trying to figure out what a kid can and cannot do and what they are willing to attempt. (Shanika, interview)

In relation to some teachers’ beliefs that inclusive programming made delivering instruction more difficult (e.g., repetition in giving instructions over and over again to some students), a couple of teachers believed it had an adverse consequence for students without disabilities. For example, Diane spoke of how inclusion was difficult for students without disabilities.

Well, it makes it difficult for the able-bodied students because they don’t always have the patience, and things you have to go over and over again with the LD kids, the able-bodied kids have already picked it up, so they get frustrated. And . . . , it makes it hard to play team sports if they can’t follow the rules correctly. (Diane, interview)

The teachers also spoke of a need for more patience required in teaching differently abled students. Tyrese emphasized this point as follows:

Well, you have to have a lot of patience. . . . Like I said, with the special needs kids, when they do something, it’s huge to them, and it may not be as huge to a regular education student. But once they see that, it’s just, you know, try to remind them, “Hey you did that yesterday” a lot of encouraging and patience. . . . (Tyrese, interview)

Lastly, these teachers believed that it was more difficult managing student behaviors and motivating differently abled students. For instance, Diane articulated that she does not know how best to manage the behaviors of students with severe disabilities and that she lacks training to do so, leaving her to wonder what to do in certain cases:
Well, the mild students, you know, blend in, or you give them special instructions. Today when I was explaining badminton serving, I made sure that this boy [student with severe disabilities] stood by a boy that was nonspecial ed when I was explaining serving so he would understand how you rotate back and forth. . . I try, but like I’ve said, I’ve had no formal training to learn to work with these kids. . . all they want to do is hit the volleyball as hard as they can, they don’t care about it going back and forth, I don’t know what you can do. (Diane, interview)

For Diane and Matt, who had limited experience and/or minimal training at teaching students with severe disabilities, they were not in full support of inclusive programming. Two veteran teachers, Tyrese and Denise, were also not in full support of inclusion; nonetheless, they expressed strong positive beliefs at accepting those differently abled students who were included in their classes. Shanika was the most experienced teacher at teaching students with severe disabilities and was in agreement with inclusive programming. Three of these experienced teachers, Tyrese, Denise, and Shanika, believed that teaching students with severe disabilities had become easier for them over the years. They also understood how novice GPE teachers would have difficulties in inclusive settings. For example, Denise explained as follows: “Um, at this point in my career because I’ve had many years of experience, it’s easier teaching students with disabilities. But I can see a younger teacher having difficulty.”

**Dependent Self-Efficacy**

In this urban school district, these GPE teachers’ self-efficacy in teaching differently abled students was contingent largely on their experiences, knowledge, formal training, student disability type and severity, and availability or lack of resources and supports (e.g., APE specialist, teacher aides). For these teachers, as they gained experience teaching differently abled students, their perceived effectiveness increased. In addition, those teachers with more training (formal and informal) and support, mentoring, and encouragement from others such as special education specialists and occupational and physical therapists voiced a higher, albeit modest, level of confidence than did teachers with little training or support. For example, Shanika asserted that experience played a large part in her confidence teaching differently abled students.

I’m confident. I don’t want to say super confident, but I am familiar, I’ve done it before, so being able to adapt the lesson or change a lesson to help fit someone else, I think I’m pretty confident. (Shanika, interview)
Tyrese indicated a need to develop positive relationships with students to get to know what they like and dislike, which in turn would help him become even more confident in teaching them. He explained as follows: “Um, I think I’m pretty confident and effective. Basically like I said, I just try to get to know something about them. Um, try to get a personal relationship thing going.”

Case after case, the teachers felt more confident and effective teaching students with mild disabilities compared to teaching students with various severe disabilities including severe emotional-behavioral disorders, or students who exhibited attention deficits and hyperactivity. The teachers’ self-efficacy was largely contingent on professional preparedness, type of experiences, and contextual variables. Denise commented, “Mild to moderate, I’m fine. With severe disabilities, I could teach as well, although I feel that there would need to be an assistant in the classroom.” Less confident, Matt stated that he would not want to teach students with severe disabilities because he was not confident in his abilities to do so. He said, “Severe? Uh, that one I probably would not be very confident if they were that severe. I wouldn’t want to teach them without being confident, because that will show. Wouldn’t be good for them, wouldn’t be good for me. It’s like me teaching science or something.”

Across cases, the teachers voiced a need for more and better professional preparation (e.g., more courses on inclusive pedagogy and hands-on experiences teaching students with mild to severe disabilities) at the preservice level. They also desired more and better professional development opportunities in their current school districts geared toward teaching differently abled students in physical education settings. In general, they voiced a need to learn more inclusive pedagogy strategies and activities. For example, Denise suggested a need existed to incorporate workshops into in-service training to keep the teachers current in how best to teach differently abled students. She said, “No, truly, I mean workshops would always be good; there are always new ideas that come out. So probably just uh, having more workshops would help.” On preparedness, Matt said he took only one APE course during his PETE preparation and that he desired more and better training to prepare him to teach differently abled students effectively. Matt explained as follows:

Well, probably I don’t know enough about them. Like I said, I’ve only had one adaptive PE class. I don’t think our background is very suited for dealing with a lot of these kids. They kind of just throw them in here without us having in-service training, we could be better prepared, let’s say. (Matt, interview)
Diane also desired more training to better serve differently abled students. She said, “Well, I would like more training, I would like some training.” Diane believed she needed to know more on how best to include differently abled students into her classes. “I need to know what you do when their behavior is out of control and techniques you [need to] know if they have a certain learning style.”

Several teachers discussed the influence of others in helping them become more effective teachers of differently abled students. For Denise, professional colleagues were helpful in that regard. She explained as follows:

I would have to say there was a physical therapist and occupational therapist in Cincinnati when I worked there. They influenced me. Just in their abilities to work with people with disabilities, uh their patience, their communication skills with their clients as well as with the adults around them. I think with their influence of showing a lot of patience and that, uh, depending on the disability sometimes you would have to accept the smaller things as progress rather than trying to achieve that final goal quickly. (Denise, interview)

Shanika’s confidence and perceived effectiveness was enhanced by encouragement from the district’s director of special education during her years employed as an APE teacher.

I would probably have to say . . . the special education director for [the county]. When she hired me for that APE position, I had no experience, had no idea what I was getting myself into, I really was just looking for a teaching job and that was the first one I was able to get. But she really helped me perform my job to a level where they were at least satisfied; she encouraged me to learn more about kids with disabilities, etc. So, leaving that environment after three years and coming back to regular physical education, I think has made me a better teacher. (Shanika, interview)

Likewise, Tyrese was mostly influenced by a mentor.

Hmm . . . there have been a few people who have influenced me; the first is probably Brad [pseudonym], and he’s one of the coordinators now. . . for the special needs department. When I first started teaching . . . he was my mentor at the time, and I learned a lot from him as far as building
good relationships with students. It makes my job a lot easier, you know even outside my classroom, if I’m in the halls and something is maybe happening, I can maybe go up and deescalate the problem. (Tyrese, interview)

In addition to positive role models, encouragement, and support from others who helped these GPE teachers learn to more effectively teach differently abled students, they asserted that the types of experiences they had was a major factor in their self-efficacy. In most cases, again, the teachers had more experiences and greater confidence teaching students with mild disabilities compared to teaching students with severe disabilities or students who were inattentive, hyperactive, learning disabled, or exhibited emotional-behavioral difficulties.

Paradoxes

This theme captures the paradoxical nature of inclusive environments. These classes were typified as environments that were meaningful (accepting of diversity, encouraging, rewarding) for teachers and students and socially dynamic with a heightened willingness to support peers (e.g., peer tutoring) and teacher’s creativity in individualizing instruction. Paradoxically, some teachers held uneven expectations of students with and without disabilities, at times teachers separated differently abled students from their classmates without disabilities, and some teachers felt that the inclusion of differently abled students negatively affected the learning experience of students without disabilities. The teachers varied in their views on whether or not inclusive programming had changed their teaching behaviors (e.g., modifying class activities) or class dynamics. In general, these teachers believed that inclusive programming brings both negative and positive aspects to the culture of teaching and learning for teachers and their students with and without disabilities. For example, the paradox of inclusive settings was captured in Diane’s comments: “I mean it was just, every day was different, it was very challenging, but at the same time it was really rewarding” (Diane, interview).

This paradox was also evident as Matt talked about changing aspects of how things are done in his classes but, at the same time, claims not to change the environment. Matt claimed, “Honestly, it hasn’t changed the environment. But, immediately he explained, “. . . now we talk about maybe changing some things, the way we give tests, you know, orally or you know, different ways to do it. But as far as the overall class and activities, I haven’t changed them” (Matt, interview). Similar to this, test modifications were evident in
Tyrese’s statement: “I know for our classes we take, we have uh, exams every once in a while, so we had to have different versions, like a modified version, uh, for the special needs population.” In Diane’s cases, she attempts to adapt lessons and provide extra instruction and encouragement for her differently abled students. Her goal was to put students into situations where they could be successful. But, despite her efforts students did not always want to participate. She explained as follows:

Well, yeah, I try to adapt. I try to give them extra pointers, try to pull them aside to give them extra help to make sure they understand. But a lot of times they don’t want to participate because they don’t think they can do it, so I give them extra encouragement. (Diane, interview)

Denise asserted, “Actually, I really wouldn’t say that it’s changed the learning environment. I do what I’m going to do, what I have planned, and it’s more of an individualized change for the student.”

For these teachers, the inclusion of differently abled students both hinders and benefits the learning experience of their students without disabilities. Tyrese explained this paradox:

Again, it kind of slows you down a little; it takes you off task just a little bit, and it takes you away from the rest of the population, but the good thing about that then is that if you have a class that are pretty much independent learners, you have that time to pull those kids aside and give them help for a couple of minutes. (Tyrese, interview)

In contrast, a couple of teachers believed that if a student with disability could not “fit in” the GPE class, that student should not be included in GPE. That is, a some teachers believed that it was not their teaching behaviors or the environment that needed change but rather a need for the differently abled students to adjust and function within the class context. If the student with a disability didn’t “fit in” that student should be placed elsewhere (e.g., self-contained APE classes). On this issue, Shanika stated, “If they’re not able to do a lot of the expectations on their own, then they need to take them out of the environment.” Furthermore, she explained as follows:

They have the same expectations, they follow the same rules, and we let their parents know that if they are going to be put in this environment these are the things they are going to have to follow in order to be here. If they can’t meet those expectations, we just tell them that we
think the APE environment would be better for them in order to be successful. (Shanika, interview)

**Motives**

For these teachers, motives to comply with inclusive programming and to teach differently abled students were derived from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The teachers varied in the degree to which they were motivated to comply with how others (e.g., parents, colleagues, school administrators) felt about them teaching differently abled students. Most teachers were intrinsically motivated to teach differently abled students. This was very evident in what many of them emphasized in their interviews. However, extrinsic factors such as educational policies did motivate some teachers to work with differently abled students in their classes as well.

Typifying these teachers’ predominant motives, Shanika, Matt, Tyrese, and Denise emphasized student success. Quotes from their interviews captures this gratifying motive:

I like to see the expressions on their face and feelings of success they get out of learning something new. That is the most rewarding thing for me... when they finally get it, they get it, and they keep it and can take that skill into other environments, that’s huge. (Shanika, interview)

For Matt, “Seeing them succeed, [sic] make it. Hopefully give them a good experience.” He continued, “Our goal here is to help them understand exercise in their life is important, to be healthy, they will be better at whatever they do. To appreciate exercise is going to be better for them socially, physically, all those” (Matt, Interview). Likewise, Tyrese articulated:

Just when I see progress in special needs kids, I mean I want them to succeed and be able to do things, but for special needs kids, there are so many of them that have made a 360-degree turnaround from the beginning to the end of the year; it’s just great to see that. (Tyrese, interview)

Denise was moved by student success and stated, “Most meaningful motivation would be when a student performs a skill they think they couldn’t do due to their disability.”

In some cases, parents and administrators provided the teacher with much motivation in teaching differently abled students, but for some teachers they
receive little or no motivation to comply with inclusive programming from colleagues, parents, or administrators; in the case of Tyrese, teachers rarely visit his GPE classes, but he makes a point to invite them to build a bridge between physical education and the classroom. He discussed this:

Some of their teachers come down and are like, “Aww, they’re doing a push-up?” They’re just amazed, so I kind of [sic] encourage the regular classroom teachers who have some of these students to sneak in and just sit back and observe them a little bit. That also helps them in their own classroom because they’ll bring up something like, “Oh, I saw you in phys ed. the other day hitting the volleyball.” So again, it’s that relationship that we talked about that makes it pretty nice. (Tyrese, interview)

Concerns

These GPE teachers voiced concerns on teaching differently abled students. Most cases, they were concerned about students fitting in with peers, experiencing success, and making measurable progress. In addition, the teachers were concerned with a lack of administrative support, inadequate training, and various environmental situations. Several teachers indicated that the administration failed to inform them on when they would be teaching differently abled students in their classes. Denise’s comments capture this concern:

Um, I think probably my biggest concern is that they are not identified at the beginning of school. The students with disabilities I’ll have to figure it out for myself.

Interviewer: So they don’t tell you, that’s what you are saying, right? Right. About halfway through the first quarter you get a list of the students with learning disabilities. Um, the students with behavioral disorders, that’s real quick to pick up on.

Interviewer: How does this impact your teaching effectiveness? Well, obviously, if I had a background on the students, I could possibly address the issues earlier. (Denise, interview)

Denise was also concerned on how best to work with students to help them stay motivated and on task: “Well, due to the fact that most of these kids are behavioral [i.e., emotional-behavioral disorders] is probably most challenging in getting them focused on the task and keeping them directed to the appropriate task.” On this concern, Shanika felt a need for students to have requisite social skills to be successful.
My biggest concern would be the social, and we require kids to dress so they have to come and change their clothes. So the responsibility of changing their clothes and then the social of how they are going to interact with the other kids in this environment because we have two classes going on in here, so there’s quite a bit of things they are going to have to do in order to be on task and follow the class expectations. (Shanika, interview)

Shanika admitted that she was not current on legislative policies and procedures but believed that she should be included in the IEP meetings for her differently abled students to keep up to date on the students’ goals and objectives and progress.

There are some teachers who give us copies of the IEP, but not all of them, if they are going to be integrated into the regular PE environment with support, that teacher should give us a copy of the IEP, and we should be invited to IEP meetings, whether they can attend or not, at least get an invitation, but we are supposed to be included for that kid. And we don’t get invitations. (Shanika, interview)

Diane was concerned that her perceived lack of adequate professional preparation played a large part in the concerns she had in teaching differently abled students: “It is most challenging when they don’t behave,” she said, “when they just run around and won’t settle down.” She was unsure about what to do, “You know when they just won’t do what the rest of the class is doing.”

Discussion

According to TpB, behavioral intentions are influenced by the motivations of an individual, the willingness of the individual to attempt to perform the behavior, and the amount of effort the individual is willing to exert to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2002). In this study, TPB was used to better understand how inclusive programming in physical education had influenced the beliefs of GPE teachers on teaching differently abled students in urban high schools. These GPE teachers varied from disagreement or doubt to agreement in their positions on inclusive programming. These teachers’ pedagogies were troubled because it was more difficult and complicated teaching students with severe disabilities and students who were inattentive, hyperactive, or exhibited emotional-behavioral or learning difficulties, compared to
teaching students with mild disabilities (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hodge et al., 2004; LaMaster et al., 1998; Lienert et al., 2001; Sato, Hodge, Murata, & Maeda, 2007).

Overall, the teachers’ beliefs varied as to the easiness or difficulty of teaching differently abled students. In some cases, the teachers had gained confidence in their teaching effectiveness from the influence of others coupled with professional development training and experiences they had gained throughout their teaching careers. The more confidence the teachers had in their efficacy to teach differently abled students, the more the teachers perceived they did so well. The teachers were mostly accepting of differently abled students. It was also evident that several teachers were not in full support of inclusion. These teachers believed that whereas it was more difficult teaching differently abled students due to contextual variables (e.g., space, equipment, facilities), these problems were further compounded by inadequate (pre-service) professional preparation and (in-service) development opportunities and limited experience these teachers have in teaching students with severe disabilities, including problems faced while delivering instruction to and managing the behaviors of students who often were inattentive, hyperactive, or exhibited emotional-behavioral or learning difficulties. This adversely affected their self-confidence and perceived behavioral control to be effective while teaching students who had severe disabilities or exhibited inattentiveness, hyperactivity, or had emotional-behavior or learning disorders. The teachers realized these difficulties and suggested that patience was a virtue in teaching differently abled students and that more and better training (Lieberman et al., 2002) and experience would make them better and more prepared teachers.

In all cases, inclusion for these teachers created a paradox between positive and negative aspects of the teaching-learning context. The teachers had experienced meaningful moments teaching differently abled students, especially when students were successful performing various tasks and even more so as students with and without disabilities interacted in positive ways (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Grenier, 2006; Hodge et al., 2004; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Van den Auweele, 2002; Obrusníková, Válková, & Block, 2003; Place & Hodge, 2001). This gave the teachers a sense of accomplishment that motivated them to try even harder at accommodating the needs of differently abled students. The teachers talked about how they gave extra time and energy, modified testing, adapted activities, and gave more encouragement, attention, and instruction to differently abled students (Hodge et al., 2004; Grenier, 2006).

On the other hand, these teachers also felt that by doing the aforementioned things, the pace of their lessons slowed, students were not always motivated to participate, and students with and without disabilities did not always interact
in supportive or positive ways (Suomi, Collier, & Brown, 2003), which was a concern and challenge. For some teachers, if a student with disabilities could not “fit in,” whether socially or behaviorally, then that student should be removed from GPE and placed in APE classes (Hodge et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, mostly the teachers did their best at including differently abled students in class activities and were encouraged when these students succeeded (Grenier, 2006). This served as an intrinsically motivating factor to try even harder in their planning and adapting lessons and modifying activities to help differently abled students become successful more often, plausibly strengthening the teachers’ resolve or intentions toward inclusive programming. Despite this, several teachers voiced concerns about inadequate professional preparation and development initiatives geared toward teaching differently abled students (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hodge et al., 2004; LaMaster et al., 1998; Lieberman et al., 2002). In such cases, the teachers did not know how to work best with students with various disabilities (especially those with severe disabilities) to help these students become successful in their classes. Furthermore, it was a concern of these GPE teachers that they were simply not included in IEP meetings and that they were not updated on new laws and pertinent information that would help them to comply with students’ IEP goals and objectives. Lastly, some teachers were not made aware (e.g., at the start of the school year) of various differently abled students who were included in their classes, and this concerned them (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hodge et al., 2004). In this instance, it is the responsibility of both school administrators and teachers to communicate regularly with one another about the inclusion of differently abled students in physical education. This will go a long way toward ensuring that teachers are prepared, at all times during the school year, to readily accept differently abled students into their classes. In the event, a teacher is not made aware of the inclusion of a student with disabilities into GPE, the teacher should initiate contact with the appropriate school administrator and special education teacher for information about the student with disabilities.

Typically, most PETE programs require only one APE course toward physical education teacher certification (Hodge & Jansma, 1999; Hodge, Tannehill, & Kluge, 2003). Rizzo and Kirkendall (1995) reasoned that exposure to one such course does not provide the knowledge, experience, or competence teacher candidates must have to become effective teachers of differently abled students in physical education. Lieberman et al. asserted that many differently abled students are not receiving appropriate physical education. This is mostly because “GPE teachers with very little or no previous training are being asked more and more to provide direct service to students with
“disabilities” (Lieberman et al., 2002, p. 365). Furthermore, they asserted, “These teachers may either be prepared inadequately or uninterested in teaching students with disabilities” (p. 365). The teachers we studied voiced concerns regarding inadequacies in their professional preparation and development as critical limitations to their effectiveness in teaching differently abled students (Hodge et al., 2004; LaMaster et al., 1998; Lieberman et al., 2002).

School districts should engage practicing GPE teachers in effective professional development initiatives that will “help them shift their thinking and their practice to ensure better-quality physical education teaching and programming for the children and youth they serve” (Bechtel & O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 378). Effective professional development is no less important for teaching differently abled students in physical education (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008; Hodge & Akuffo, 2007).

Study Limitations

Several cautions must be made when interpreting the results from this study. The participants were a small sample of physical education teachers within an urban school district in Ohio. This is typical of qualitative studies that focus “in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). This was the case with the current study of five teachers. Nonetheless, the sample may not be representative of GPE teachers elsewhere with varying levels and types of experiences teaching differently abled students. Moreover, the teachers did not team teach with fellow teachers, but rather they were the sole teacher for the classes they taught. Therefore, they cannot be considered representative of teachers who practice a team teaching approach or those GPE teachers who have an APE teacher present or available for consultation on teaching differently abled students.

Conclusion

Related to their circumstances (e.g., class sizes, resources, and facilities), adequacy of professional preparation and development, and years and types of experiences teaching students various disability types and severity levels, GPE teachers tend to have unfavorable or ambivalent to favorable beliefs about inclusive programming (Hodge et al., 2004). Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs associated with perceived behavioral control vary in relation to their situations, professional preparation and development, and experiences. Ultimately, teachers’ sense of social justice and role identities motivate them to teach all students included in their classes whether or not
they are in full support of inclusive classes (Grenier, 2006; Theodorakis, Bagiatis, & Goudas, 1995).

It is reasonable to suggest that GPE teachers’ self-efficacy in teaching students with mild-to-severe disabilities will be improved with effective professional preparation and development (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008; Hodge & Akuffo, 2007; Hodge, Davis, Woodard, & Sherrill, 2002; Hodge, Tannehill et al, 2003; Lieberman et al., 2002; O’Sullivan & Deglau, 2006). PETE programs should consider this in making curricular decisions for teacher candidates (Kowalski, 1995). Likewise, school districts should engage GPE teachers in effective and relevant professional development focused on inclusive practices in physical education (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008; Hodge & Akuffo, 2007; Lieberman et al., 2002).

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