Taking part in sport within an inclusive education setting

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The gradual change for an inclusive environment in schools is supportive to meeting the Sustainable Development Goal 4. Early exposure to an inclusive environment promotes the need to change perceptions surrounding disability stigma (Vignes, Coley, Grandjean, Godeau, & Arnaud, 2008). Moreover, children with disabilities included inclusive physical activities experience can improve perceptions of health and physical competences to carry out tasks (Alonso et al., 2013; Barg, Armstrong, Hetz, & Latimer, 2010). However, the adoption of inclusive settings can take time to develop. For example, in Finland, there has been an increase from 8% in 2010 to 17% in 2017 of pupils who require intensified or special support in comprehensive schools (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018, January). Many students with intensified support study in the comprehensive classroom, however most students with special support study in either special classrooms or special schools. The same should apply in the physical education class, however some exceptions can be found. For example, if the activity is seen to have high risks of injury then the student may be told not to do the tasks. However, this should not mean that students with disabilities do not take part. The lack of participation is a violation of the rights of persons with disabilities, and can be harmful for the maturing adolescent.

Although there is a fear that such incidents are more harmful than good, there is a lack of evidence that this type of behaviour actually exists. Some researchers have investigated the proportion of students with disabilities who take part in physical activity and sports clubs, but the differences were not are wide as previously thought. Data from over a decade were analysed for the physical activity levels and participation in organised sport activities. There was an increasing trend of participation among children with disabilities in organised sport activities from 38% in 2002 to 47% in 2014 (Ng et al., 2016). Using the same data set based on the 2014 data, children with disabilities were more likely to report medically attended
injuries from either training for sports or at a sports facility, but less likely to report injuries from training for sports at a sports facility than same age peers without disabilities (Ng, Tynjälä, Rintala, Kokko, & Kannas, 2017). This was after controlling for taking part in organised sports, taking part in daily physical activities, perceived competence and family support for sports. As such, there may be an increased risk associated with medically attended injuries among children with disabilities while taking part in organised sports. The current evidence supports the fear of injuries to be a barrier to regular physical activity participation (Jaarsma, Dijkstra, de Blécourt, Alida C. E., Geertzen, & Dekker, 2015). The realm of safety promotion is under resourced, with particular reference to injury prevention. Injuries may lead to absence from school, poor health and greater stress. To create an environment whereby this type of barrier is removed, further work is needed in education, planning and implementation of inclusive physical activity programmes.

References


