

## Inclusive physical education - premises for the development

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### Abstract

In last years, one of the major educational interests was to assure conditions for inclusion in normal school for children with special educational needs. This paper is part of a national research project (CNCSIS 931/2007) that finally intends to elaborate „Models of curricular design for adapted and inclusive physical education”. By starting from this project, the present study aims, on the one hand, at identifying the way in which the physical education teachers in mass schools perceive the integration of children with some disabilities into the physical education class, and, on the other hand, at identifying the way in which the teachers working in special schools manage to involve them into the sport activities practiced by normal children, so that one could talk about integrated physical activities, where each pupil, with or without a disability, is equally important. Knowing the way of approaching the activity within the inclusive sport activities can facilitate the disabled children's better involvement into the respective practice and their better social integration. To this purpose, we initiated two parallel studies. They were based on questionnaires and on direct observation, and were conducted on a 4-month period. The integration models through inclusive school determine the specialists to pay more attention to physical for all, where the disabled children are integrated in normal school classes.

**Keywords:** *inclusion, physical education*

### Rezumat

În ultimii ani, unul din interesele educaționale majore este includerea copiilor cu dizabilități în școlile de masă. De aceea toți factorii implicați încearcă să asigure condiții pentru realizarea acestuia. Articolul prezent este realizat în cadrul unui proiect național de cercetare (CNCSIS 931/2007) care și-a propus să elaboreze „Modele de proiectare curriculară pentru educație fizică adaptată și incluzivă”. Pornind de la această proiect, studiul de față are ca scop, pe de-o parte, identificarea modului în care percep profesorii de educație fizică din școlile de masă aspectul de integrare a copiilor cu deficiențe ușoare în lecția de educație fizică, iar pe de altă parte de a identifica modul în care profesorii de la școlile speciale reușesc să atragă în activitățile sportive pe care le desfășoară copii fără deficiențe în așa fel încât să se poată vorbi de activități integrate în care fiecare elev cu sau fără dizabilitate este la fel de important. Cunoașterea modului de abordare a activității în cadrul lecțiilor sportive incluzive poate facilita o mai bună angrenare a copiilor cu dizabilități și integrare în societate. Pentru aceasta am inițiat două studii, care s-au desfășurat în paralel (unul la școlile de masă, iar altul în cadrul școlilor speciale). Ele s-au

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derulate pe baza unor chestionare, precum și a observației directe efectuate pe o perioadă de patru luni. În final, suntem de părere că integrarea copiilor cu dizabilități în lecțiile de educație fizică desfășurate în școlile de masă solicită mai multă atenție din partea cadrelor didactice. Acestea trebuie să adapteze ceea ce au de predat la posibilitățile elevilor cu care lucrează.

**Cuvinte cheie:** educație fizică, incluziune

## Introduction

Since the eighties, the perception about the disabled persons has been changing, as a result of the ONU documents reinforcing the connection between the concept of “special educative needs” and the belief in the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. Thus, in 1989, in the ONU Convention about the Children’s Rights, it is stipulated that all the children have the same rights, with no discrimination, and that education has to provide them a full social integration. Four years later, the ONU Standard Rules about the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) added some mentions related to the integrated education as a means of equalizing the opportunities, by specifying that the disabled children’s education represents an integrant part of the national education system.

According to the international documents about special education, in the latest decades there has been a tendency to allow the disabled children’s access to educational services provided by the mass school. Promoting the inclusion into mass schools, in the case of children whose parents want it and where there is a possibility of giving them a proper support, this still remains an essential point of the Romanian education reform. The term “inclusion” assumes that school should be a place everyone belongs to, where everyone is accepted, where everyone supports and is supported by the others.

In 1994, the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO) asks all the states to adhere to a common action

regarding the inclusive education achievement. Romania also signed this document stipulating that “inclusive school illustrates the idea that all the children must learn together, as long as possible, despite the difficulties or differences among them. Inclusive schools must identify and meet their pupils’ different needs, by adapting the learning styles and by providing the quality of education through corresponding programs, organizational adjustments, instruction strategies, the used resources, partnerships with local communities”.

There are children who, because of their psychomotor particularities that can be or not associated to some disabilities, need a special attention from their educators, attention concretized in the choice of some methods and means corresponding to their potential and able to guarantee the achievement of the adapted physical education objectives. The way of approaching these objectives will be different, depending on the context in which classes take place, namely within the special or the mass education system. This variant should represent the institutional context of the inclusive school education, destined to meet all the children’s educational needs.

In Romania, it has been initiated, since 1990, a national program meant to optimize the disabled children’s access and participation to school education, this process being backed by the civilian society through the non-governmental associations and benefiting from the technical and financial

support of the UNICEF Agency in Romania. Studies emphasized that, up to then, the results had been partial and insignificant, therefore it was concluded that “school didn’t meet yet all the children’s needs, inclusively of those with disabilities”. Traditionally, in Romania it has been promoted a segregated education system, particularly destined to the disabled children’s instruction and education. The model is not unique, because in many countries there are similar forms of education organizing. Armstrong (1998) (quoted by 1) analyzes the special education development on more than 100 years and underlines the modifications it passed through, before the inclusive tendencies manifested nowadays.

Inclusion models have been experimentally put into practice in Romania, too, especially after 1995, when the *Education Law 84/ 1995* and the *Special Education Regulations* were implemented and, at the same time, a series of projects were initiated, their aim being the disabled children’s integration into mass schools, in a number as great as possible. The studies having evaluated the efficiency of such approaches, although they make reference to pupils’ school results, they don’t insist on the study of a methodology oriented towards the adaptation of the teaching contents and methods to these children’s particularities (2).

The inclusion into the school groups of some children presenting different types of disabilities (for instance sensory, locomotor, learning ones) raises important problems related to the possibility of meeting their special needs through the existing physical education programs. The specialists in the field consider that it is not possible to find a unique solution to the previously mentioned issues, because the education process will obviously be strongly influenced by the theoretical conception it

relies on and by the available material resources (1, 3).

**Aim of the paper.** This paper is part of a national research project (CNCSIS 931/ 2007) that finally intends to elaborate „Models of curricular design for adapted and inclusive physical education”. By starting from this project, the present study aims, on the one hand, at identifying the way in which the physical education teachers in mass schools perceive the integration of children with some disabilities into the physical education class, and, on the other hand, at identifying the way in which the teachers working in special schools manage to involve them into the sport activities practiced by normal children, so that one could talk about integrated physical activities, where each pupil, with or without a disability, is equally important.

**Hypothesis of the research.** Knowing the way of approaching the activity within the inclusive sport activities can facilitate the disabled children’s better involvement into the respective practice and their better social integration.

**Research organizing.** To this purpose, we initiated two parallel studies (one in mass schools, the other in special schools). They were based on questionnaires and on direct observation, and were conducted on a 4-month period.

**Results and their interpretation.** In mass schools, the questionnaire, except for the questions that allowed us to know the teachers’ experience in physical education and sports field (30 teachers - years of service, education cycle, didactic degree; see figure 1), also included questions related to their direct activity with the disabled children.

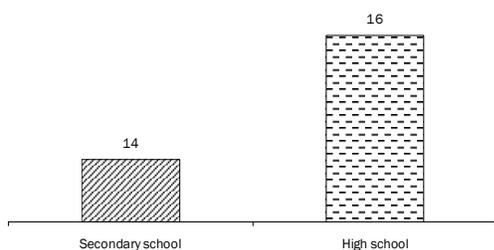


Figure 1. Teaching level

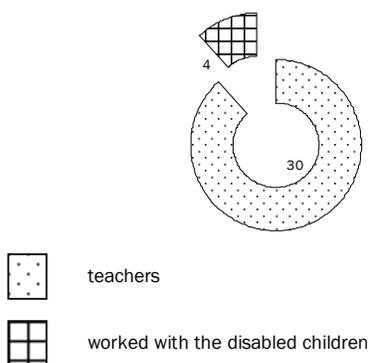


Figure 2. Teachers who worked with inclusive groups

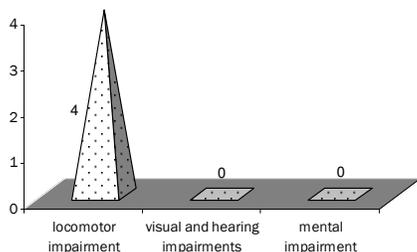


Figure 3. The integrated children's disabilities

Thus, among the teachers who answered the questionnaire, only 4 had worked with the disabled children in their physical education classes, within the mass education (see figure 2). All those children had locomotor disabilities (see figure 3). The other teachers answered that pupils with mental, visual and hearing impairments attend special schools that adapt their way of transmitting information to the child's possibilities.

To the question: "Do you agree with the disabled pupils' integration into the normal physical education classes?", most of the teachers answered in the negative, their arguments being the difficulty of working with this category of children, the content individualization and the lack, in their own professional training, of some information about adapted and inclusive physical education, lack because of which they were not able to adapt their methods and means to the particularities of the children with disabilities (see figure 4).

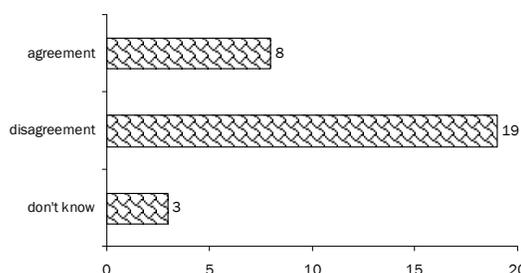


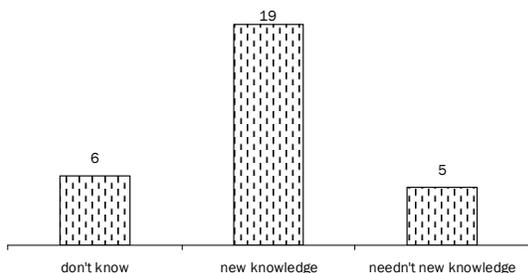
Figure 4. Agreement/disagreement about the disabled pupils' integration into the physical education classes, within the mass schools

As for the knowledge they would like to possess in order to improve their teaching level, most of the teachers proved to be interested in information about the disabled children's growing and development particularities, as well as in the adapted methods and means (see figure 5).

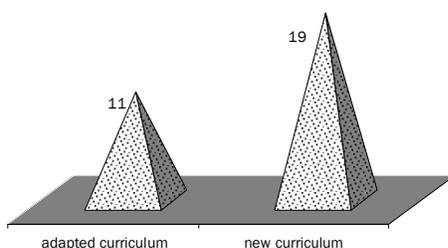
Generally, the mass school teachers avoid integrating pupils with disabilities into the activity, they preferring to "keep them on the bench" instead of working with them. The answers related to the acceptance of the disabled child/children by the other pupils didn't vary.

11 teachers thought that the existing physical education curriculum could be adapted if some children with disabilities participated in the class, while 19 considered that teaching physical education to inclusive groups required new programs, conceived on purpose, so that the

disabled pupil could actively take part in the class, with the respect of his deficiency particularities (see figure 6).



**Figure 5.** The need for new knowledge



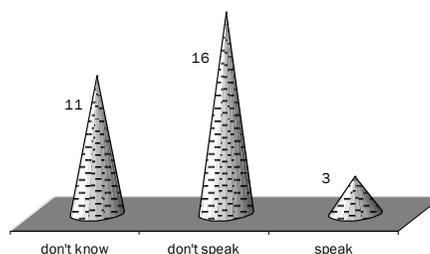
**Figure 6.** Necessity of a new curriculum

Generally, the mass school teachers avoid integrating pupils with disabilities into the activity, they preferring to “keep them on the bench” instead of working with them.

The answers related to the acceptance of the disabled child/children by the other pupils didn't vary. Most of the teachers asserted that there were no discussions about these pupils' integration and only 3 said that such debates took place among the school leaders, teaching staff and pupils (see figure 7).

When referring to the sport discipline that brings a significant contribution to the physical education of pupils with different disabilities, most of the teachers didn't know what to answer, because they

hadn't had any contact with such a category of children.



**Figure 7.** Discussions related to the acceptance of the disabled child/ children by the other pupils

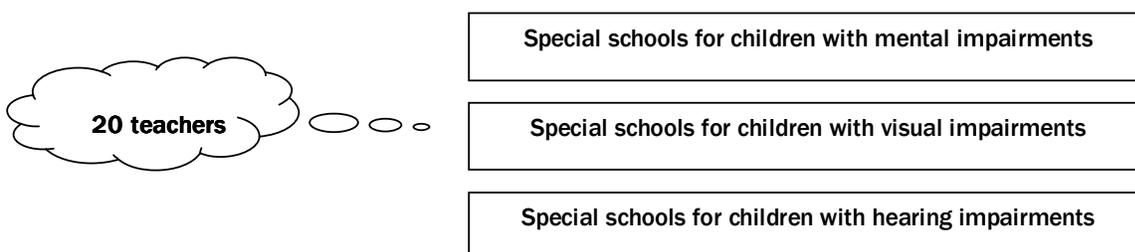
Finally, all the teachers agreed they had the task of integrating the disabled children, within the physical education classes, into the sport activity.

As for the study conducted in special schools, it consisted in a questionnaire also related to the integration problem, but this time the point was the way in which normal pupils treated the disabled ones and participated together with them in competitions.

This study was made in cooperation with 20 teachers from 10 special schools in Bucharest, schools that include children with mental, visual and hearing impairments (see figure 8). Unfortunately, these results are not favorable enough to support the idea of inclusive physical education. Thus, we found out that the disabled persons' exclusion from the activities which could be practiced in common negatively influenced the others' perception upon them.

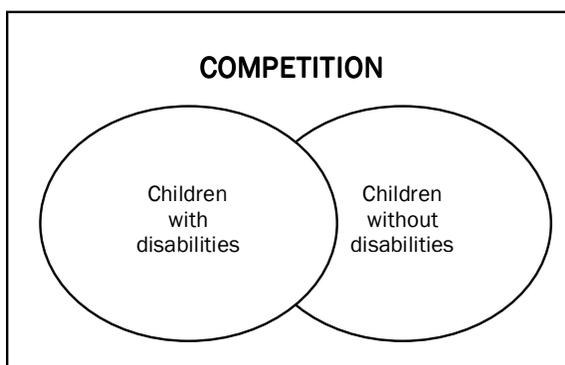
A negative value judgment, associated to the disability, will tend to shadow other aspects with which it has no connection at all.

For instance, a person in the wheelchair tends to be judged as having a mental disability, too; some interlocutors speak louder to a person having a visual impairment; a mentally disabled person is thought to be more intellectually affected than he is in reality etc.



**Figure 8.** Schools with special education teachers

In the same context, we noticed that only the pupils learning in special schools for the mentally disabled had the opportunity of participating, together with normal children, in inclusive sports activities. We refer here to the unified sport competitions, organized under the care of Special Olympics Foundation, that promotes the mentally disabled children’s involvement into sport activities, along with pupils without disabilities (see fig. 9), in order to prove that in sports there are no barriers.



**Figure 9.** Inclusion in the unified sport competition

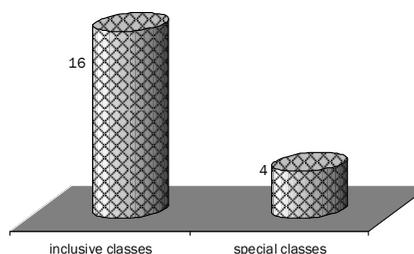
In these contests, children compete in the same events and fight for the success of their team.

Among the advantages emphasized by the teachers working in special schools, after the disabled pupils’ participation in sport activities, we mention:

- they learn new motor skills specific to the practiced sport;
- they have the possibility of making part, together with other athletes, with or without disabilities, of

the same team, where each person has his place and role;

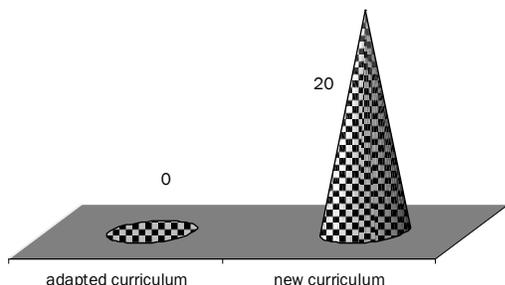
- the children in mass schools can be taught about the disabled persons and the way of treating them, and about the fact they can be useful to society;
- they have the opportunity of making new friends.



**Figure 10.** Teachers working in special schools - inclusive groups

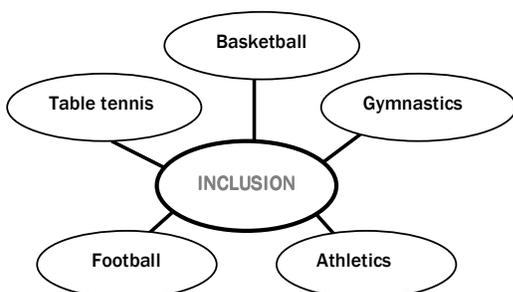
Related to the applied questionnaire, 80% out of the teachers agreed that pupils with mild disabilities could be matriculated in the inclusive groups within the mass schools (see figure 10), because, in this way, they are given the chance of cooperating with other children, of easily integrating into society and of being useful to it, according to their possibilities.

All the teachers in special schools agreed that it was necessary to conceive a new curriculum including aspects related to inclusive physical education and to the possibilities of the disabled children, who must be placed in the situation of cooperating, of being in a direct contact with their fellows (see figure 11).



**Figure 11.** Necessity of a new curriculum

As for the sport discipline that brings a significant contribution to the disabled children's physical education, most of the teachers agreed to the idea that all the disciplines in the existing curriculum and which are practiced in their schools (taking into account the material facilities in the respective school) contribute to the inclusion achieving, because the means specific to them also suppose the collaboration among partners (see figure 12).



**Figure 12.** Sport disciplines in the existing curriculum, allowing the inclusion

All these studies led us to the following **conclusions**:

- Presently, the school doesn't meet all the pupils' needs, including those with disabilities.
- For most of the pupils and teachers, the disabled persons are permanently suffering. Many people don't understand their way of life, of adaptation to different social requirements that is why they have a compassionate attitude towards them; but these persons need more from the part of the society.
- Certain difficulties in the disabled persons' inclusive approach are the consequence of the fact

that they have been systematically separated from the society, as for the educational activities, but also the social and economic ones;

- The instruction strategies (objectives, methods, means) and the teaching styles must be adapted, so that all the children may benefit from a modern education process.
- An inclusive curriculum must rely on an optimum ratio between the physical education program content and its adjustment, so that the sport discipline practiced within the physical education classes be assigned to all the pupils (equality); at the same time, it must provide objectives and contents proper to most of the pupils and alternatives for the disabled children.
- It is impossible to guarantee a total equality if physical education is practiced within groups including a relatively great number of pupils.
- The obese children or those with a reduced motor experience have also "special needs" when practicing physical exercises, because, at the motricity level, they are placed in a lower position, as compared to their colleagues of the same age. We can assert that physical education teachers are constantly confronted with the need of taking into account the individual particularities. Therefore, we may consider that, nowadays, the inclusive orientation has already become permanence at the theoretical and practical levels, this being reflected by the differentiated treatment promoting. But this differentiation used to be made according to the criterion of pupils' bio-motor level. To become more "inclusive", the differentiation in physical education must also use other criteria, such as: the locomotor capacity, the capacity of receiving and processing sensorial information, the motor learning capacity. Criteria will act depending on the type of disability the children are confronted with.

▪ Presently, in Romania, the models of integration through the “inclusive school” compel the specialists in the field to carefully approach the problems of physical education within the mass schools where there are children with disabilities. Although in the specialty literature there are information about the adapted physical education, the inclusive education problem has been insufficiently researched. Inclusive physical education represents a new field to which theory and didactics may bring important contributions, in order to establish a unitary instruction methodology, beneficial to the disabled children’s development.

At the same time, this new development direction of our field requires an important effort from all the specialists, theorists and practitioners, whose training must be permanently refreshed with knowledge and competences allowing them to get involved into a modern and equitable instruction process.

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## Teenage use of public sport space in post-communist society

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the use of public sport space by teenagers as a function of social class in a post-communist society. Through an analysis of data collected through a questionnaire given to wrestlers and skateboarders in the city of Timișoara, Romania, we examine the significance of using public, covered gymnasiums for wrestling and public, uncovered skate parks for skateboarders. If the communist sport system was organized to promote performance in the classic and organized sports, the post-communist system permits the development of street sports and ideals of non-conformism. This comparative analysis between wrestlers and skaters reveals significant links between the social origin of the young sportsmen and their sports as an organized or no organized form. Our findings indicate that many wrestlers originate from a lower social class and use the sport as a way of winning respect in their peer group, while skaters are mainly from the middle class – an emerging social class in Romania – and skate as a way to express their non-conformism.

**Keywords:** social class, wrestling, skateboarding

### Rezumat

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