

TOWARDS THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: SPORT EDUCATION AND ETHICS OF CARE

HACIA LA INCLUSIÓN DEL ALUMNADO CON TRASTORNO DEL ESPECTRO AUTISTA: EDUCACIÓN DEPORTIVA Y ÉTICA DEL CUIDADO 

RUMO À INCLUSÃO DE ESTUDANTES COM TRANSTORNO DO ESPECTRO AUTISTA: EDUCAÇÃO ESPORTIVA E ÉTICA DO CUIDADO 

 <https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-8918.144294>

 **Jorge Abellán*** <jorge.abellan@uclm.es>

 **Lucía Reyes*** <lucia.reyes@uclm.es>

 **Irene González-Martí*** <irene.gmarti@uclm.es>

 **Luis Miguel García López*** <luismiguel.garcia@uclm.es>

* Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM). Ciudad Real, Castilla-La Mancha, España.

Abstract: The pursuit of inclusion for students with autism spectrum disorder in Physical Education represents a significant challenge for educators, who must seek pedagogical responses to meet their educational needs. This study aims to explore the perceptions of teachers involved in the implementation of a sport education season in a secondary education group that included two students with autism. Qualitative data were obtained from reflective journals, interviews, focus groups and field notes, which were analysed considering the components of educational inclusion. The results indicate that the essential characteristics of the model have contributed to increasing the students' presence, participation, and progress. Additionally, strategies related to the ethics of care have helped improve the attitudes of teachers and peers. These findings suggest that sport education, together with other specific strategies, can contribute to the pursuit of inclusion.

Keywords: Physical Education. Special educational needs. Critical pedagogy.

Received on: Nov. 29, 2024
Approved on: Jan. 24, 2025
Published in: Sep. 29, 2025



This is an article published in open access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Inclusive education is based on the presence, participation and progress of all students in the education system (Ainscow; Booth; Dyson, 2006). In the present study, and according to Spencer-Cavaliere *et al.* (2017) and Haegele and Maher (2022), it is considered that inclusion should be focused on social justice, equal opportunity and sense of belonging. Teachers in general (Al Jaffal, 2022), and Physical Education (PE) teachers in particular (Nowland; Haegele, 2023), tend to perceive the inclusion in their classes of students with disabilities as a challenge, since they usually declare that they have not received the necessary training to handle it successfully. This is emphasised by the fact that, in PE, students with disabilities are usually integrated in mainstream groups, together with students without disabilities (Haegele, 2019).

The present research focuses on students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), whose needs for educational support are determined by factors related to: a) social interaction and communication, and b) recurring behaviours (First *et al.*, 2022). These students usually require specific and individualised accommodations (Gordon; Pennington, 2022). Research focused on the participation of students with ASD in PE lessons is scarce (Hortal-Quesada; Sanchis-Sanchis, 2022) and it follows different approaches. The most frequent ones are focused on the families' (McMahon *et al.*, 2020) or the teachers' perception (Beamer; Yun, 2014), while the least frequent ones include the students' opinion (Haegele; Maher, 2022).

The present research mainly concentrates on educators' perception about the process of seeking strategies that foster the inclusion of students with ASD in PE. As explained by Tarantino, Makopoulou and Neville (2022), PE teachers feel more competent working with children with less disruptive special educational needs (like physical disabilities), while they find it especially difficult to work with children with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder or ASD in integrated contexts.

In this regard, the need arises to assess the way teachers perceive the process of pursuing the inclusion of students with ASD in PE classes, with the aim of moving towards contexts that promote their presence, participation and educational progress. For example, the study conducted by Maravé-Vivas *et al.* (2021) describes a pilot experience where teachers constantly adjusted their teaching practices in an action-research process with students with ASD where learning environments were used. With the purpose of moving towards interventions that allow for more conclusive results, it seems appropriate to include research on pedagogical models, since this is currently one of the most frequently researched topics in the knowledge field of school PE (Fernández-Río; Iglesias, 2024).

Pedagogical models in PE are a long-term approach which appeared, among other purposes, as a response to the exclusion and little attention to students with disabilities shown by traditional PE (Casey; Kirk, 2020). Nevertheless, in the reviews recently conducted by Block *et al.* (2021) and Fernández-Río and Iglesias (2024), they

revealed that the participation of students with disabilities in the different pedagogical models, such as Sport Education (SE), is still to be explored. The possibility that children with special educational needs (SEN), in this case ASD, can benefit from the application of pedagogical models in PE, together with the previously mentioned research prospects, inspired and justify the completion of this study.

1.2 SPORT EDUCATION FROM AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Given the number of studies conducted and included in the review performed by Fernández-Río and Iglesias (2024), SE can be considered as the most popular pedagogical model in PE. SE has been successfully applied in different education stages and through multiple approaches. One of them is related to the fact that certain types of SE, such as “Sport for Peace” (Ennis, 1999), have been considered critical pedagogies of affect. Critical pedagogy in school PE is understood as “the organization and alignment of curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment in ways that render Physical Education inclusive, fair, and equitable as an embodied experience for young people, in order to empower them” (Kirk, 2020, p. 151).

The implementation of SE with children from socially vulnerable contexts has also taken this into consideration (García López; Kirk, 2022a, 2022b). Among the elements that may contribute to considering SE as critical pedagogy, we can find communication, cooperation and positive social interaction (Kirk, 2020), which are also some of the facilitators of inclusion of students with disabilities in PE classes (Haegele; Maher, 2023).

Some studies have assessed the inclusion of students with disabilities during SE seasons. For example, Menéndez and Fernández-Río (2017) combined a SE season with the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Model and explored the effects on a group of students with physical and intellectual disabilities. The results seem to reveal that the hybridisation of both models can be a powerful tool to include children with disabilities in PE classes, and may help them improve their social relationships out of class as well.

Besides, Abellán and Segovia (2024) conducted a study during a SE season in a Special School, where all students presented disabilities. Two main outcomes were identified. Firstly, it was detected that some of the main features of SE, like the affiliation to small, stable groups, and their signs of identity, encourage the presence, participation and progress of all students. And secondly, in a diversity context, SE must be enriched with other attention to diversity strategies, such as task adaptation and universal design for learning (UDL).

1.3 STRATEGIES THAT ENCOURAGE THE PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Pedagogical models could be considered as a suitable framework to encourage the presence, participation and progress of students with ASD in PE. However, they have not been designed with students with disabilities in mind (Block *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, specific teaching strategies should be added. In this regard, the study

by Sortwell *et al.* (2023) provides practical considerations for teaching PE to young people with ASD, organised into four categories: a) creating a supportive environment, b) communication and instruction, c) visual practices, and d) verbal instruction.

Lastly, UDL could be considered as an educational philosophy that should impregnate the whole teaching and learning process and that is focused on removing barriers. The principles that govern UDL are to provide multiple means of engagement with the way of learning, to provide multiple means of representing what is going to be learned and to provide multiple means of action and expression (Lieberman *et al.*, 2021). Its application to PE has been questioned, so further research is needed regarding its effect on the inclusion of students with disabilities (Haegele *et al.*, 2024). Nonetheless, the recent research conducted by Lieberman, Bean and Grenier (2024) reveals that it can be used to adapt to the different students' characteristics, contributing to positive learning experiences for students with and without disabilities. This latter perspective was applied in the present study.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

Based on the previous theoretical framework, the aim of the present study was to examine teachers' perception of the effect of a SE season enhanced with ethics of care strategies and elements from UDL on the presence, participation and progress of two students with ASD integrated in a year-9 (secondary school) group of students.

2 METHOD

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONTEXT

This paper presents a case study by applying a participatory design from a socially critical perspective (Devís, 2006), with the purpose of promoting a more equitable and inclusive education (Carr; Kemmis, 2003). During the implementation of a PE program, it became necessary to offer educational support to the two students with ASD (Manuel and Jaime) integrated in the group. In particular, the group's teacher expressed her need for support and advice in order to try to increase the participation of these two students. This request is considered to be the beginning of this research study, which was conducted during the implementation, follow-up and assessment of a SE season. Research interest and opportunity led to the development of the intervention with the purpose of offering learning opportunities to these students, in pursuit of quality education for them and their peers, aligning the intervention to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) four (UN, 2015) and target 4.5. Gender disparity and vulnerable groups.

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

Three PE teachers (two women and one man) and a group of 25 year-9 students (13 girls and 12 boys) participated in the present study. Two students presented ASD-associated SEN. Lucía played a teacher-researcher role, while Mireia was the group's

PE teacher and legal representative in the school (participant-observer role) and Jorge played a participant-observer role during the session implementation. Lucía was responsible for teaching the PE sessions contained in the programme that is described below. To ensure anonymity of the people involved, their names have been substituted by pseudonyms.

Jorge's task was to advise Lucía and Mireia in order to maximise the presence and participation opportunities for Manuel and Jaime. It was decided that he would not participate directly to avoid confusion among the students, who already had a teacher-researcher leading the intervention (Lucía) and their reference teacher (Mireia) in class. However, he did work directly with Manuel and Jaime, ensuring they were always present with their group and implementing specific strategies (ethics of care and UDL).

The three PE teachers involved in the study were properly trained and had previous experience. With regard to the experience with the SE model, both Lucía and Jorge had previously conducted other interventions applying SE, from teaching and research perspectives, while Mireia had not worked with this model before. Regarding specific training on educational strategies for students with ASD, Lucía had post-graduate education in inclusion in PE, and Jorge had education and over 15-year experience in teaching students with disabilities. Nevertheless, he did not have specific experience in pursuing the inclusion of students with ASD during an SE season. Lastly, Mireia declared not to have training or previous experience in this field.

The students with ASD (Manuel y Jaime) attended all school subjects together with their reference group, except Mathematics and Language and Literature, for which they combined support in their mainstream classroom (50%) with specific lessons in a special classroom called Open Classroom (50%). Due to their specific need for support, they had been assigned an educational support assistant to move between their classroom and the rest of school facilities, like the sports hall, but this person was not present during the PE lessons. According to the school, both students presented grade-2 ASD and it was their third year at the same school.

Furthermore, several informants and collaborators helped to carry out the research: the group's tutor (Lucio), the Language and Literature teacher (Lourdes), the school principal (Milagros) and the Open Classroom coordinator (Martina). None of these educators had previous experience with SE, and only Martina had received specific training to teach students with ASD.

The educational programme was designed in the context of mainstream school PE classes, in collaboration with the University of Castilla-La Mancha. The study was approved by the ethics committee of this university (CCEIS-689861-G0P7). The sample was accessed through the school management team, who informed the participating students' families. Prior to the beginning of the study, informed consents were collected from the students' families, the educators and the educational authority, as well as the specific consent of all students. With the aim of increasing the information provided to Manuel's and Jaime's families, after providing the documents,

Martina contacted them again directly to thoroughly explain the research that was to be conducted and to solve all their questions about it.

2.3 PROGRAMME

A SE season was designed consisting of 20 PE sessions, 55 minutes each, over a period of three months (second school term). Two sessions were conducted per week, where ringo was played, a net sport with two rubber rings (ringos). One of the major aims for the season was to increase Manuel and Jaime's presence, participation and progress. To do so, apart from SE-specific routines and rituals, specific attention to diversity strategies were added. Table 1 displays a summary of the intervention, with the phases and these specific actions.

Table 1 - Summary of the Sport Education season.

Phase	Sessions	Contents	Strategies to achieve inclusion
Organisation	1-3	Introduction to the season. Team creation and role assignment.	To explain the game rules orally and in writing (UDL).
Pre-season	4-8	Learning ringo technique and tactics. Matches within and between teams.	To accompany students back to their teams when they moved away. To anticipate tasks in the ASD classroom.
Season	9-16	3 vs 3 competition. Round-robin. Competition role implementation.	Video for homework. Material lending.
Final event	17-20	Preparation and celebration.	To anticipate tasks in the ASD classroom.

Source: prepared by the authors.

The students joined one of the four heterogeneous teams composed of 6-7 players each. The following roles were assigned: coach, assistant coach, referee (two per team), scorekeeper, fitness specialist and manager. Some difficulties regarding team operation were identified, so in session eight some teams were reorganised and new roles were assigned, which remained stable until the end of the season. Manuel and Jaime joined their respective teams and played the referee role during the whole season.

With the aim of achieving Manuel and Jaime's maximum presence and participation, ethics of care strategies were added during the season; in particular, actions were performed with the intention to serve as a model and to encourage conversations (Noddings, 1992). Each action was developed as follows:

- a) Serving as a model: during the sessions, Lucía and Jorge ensured that Manuel and Jaime were always with the group. Their behaviour showed their classmates and Mireia that it was important for them to be next to their respective teams. By doing so, it was tried to guarantee their presence, as a key inclusion element. The aim was to show how to take care of these students. Besides, when they were assigned responsibilities within their roles in SE and time to successfully perform them, it was intended to appreciate their abilities instead of focusing on their limitations.

b) Encouraging conversations: dialogue was used to raise awareness of the silenced education reality of these students. The conversation strategy was extended to the interactions with other agents from the educational process, as part of the participatory strategy associated to the research design of this study.

Furthermore, during the whole season, UDL strategies (Lieberman *et al.*, 2021) were applied in order to ensure all students' access to the materials, activities and other elements of the teaching and learning process. In particular, multiple ways of accessing the information were provided, such as easy reading and the use of visual and auditory channels. Several attention to diversity strategies were also added, such as the creation of sheets to support role development, the collaboration with the Open Classroom for students' formative assessment, and family support to conduct supplementary activities out of school hours. Lastly, the considerations for giving PE lessons to children with ASD proposed by Sortwell *et al.* (2023) were taken into account throughout the season. They focused on: creating a supportive environment, fostering communication, using visual support, and preparing in advance the verbal instructions to be used in class.

The recommendations described by Hastie and Casey (2014) were followed in order to ensure the consistency of the SE implementation. Thus, the present study includes: a) a detailed description of the curricular elements, b) a detailed validation of the model implementation [based on the benchmarks proposed by Sinelnikov (2009)], and c) a detailed description of the programme context.

2.4 PROCEDURE AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

The research was divided into three phases: a) diagnosis, b) SE season implementation, and c) assessment. The first one corresponds to the diagnosis of Manuel and Jaime's situation at school, which includes: a) the initial focus groups with the teachers, and b) the individual interviews with Mireia and Martina.

The second phase, the educative intervention implementation, includes: a) the documentation of the SE implementation process by means of Lucía's (teacher-researcher) and Jorge's (participant-observer) journals, and b) the three follow-up focus groups with the teachers. Lastly, the assessment phase contains: a) the final focus group with the educators, and b) the final interviews with Mireia and Martina.

The main instrument used in this study was the reflective journal; Lucía and Jorge filled in one each. In them, they included their perceptions of their interventions, the most relevant aspects of Manuel and Jaime's participation process throughout the season, the influence of context, the development of the focus groups, as well as field notes referring to other aspects related to the study's objectives and the information obtained from informal conversations held during the process.

Moreover, four semi-structured interviews were planned: two with the PE teacher (Mireia) and two with the Open Classroom coordinator (Martina). The first interview was conducted before the intervention (diagnosis phase) and the last one, after finishing it (assessment phase). The aim of all these interviews was to

understand the perception of each interviewee of the SE season implementation and their involvement in Manuel and Jaime's possible inclusion in the tasks performed.

Four focus groups were also organised, with the participation of the tutor, the Language teacher and the school principal. Lucía and Jorge also engaged in the focused groups, acting as moderators. One focus group was conducted before the intervention, two of them were used as follow-ups and the last one was performed at the end as assessment. The aim of the focus groups was to share the research progress, explicitly referring to Manuel and Jaime's presence, participation and progress throughout the season.

Table 2 contains the relationship between the research phases and the different qualitative assessment tools applied.

Table 2 - Relationship between the research phases and the assessment tools.

Phase	Tools
Diagnosis	– Teacher focus group 1 – Interview 1 with Mireia – Interview 1 with Martina
Implementation	– Lucía's journal – Jorge's journal – Teacher focus groups (2, 3 and 4)
Assessment	– Interview 2 with Martina – Interview 2 with Mireia – Teacher focus group 5

Source: prepared by the authors.

2.5 ANALYSIS AND RELIABILITY

All the information collected during the data collection process was transcribed literally and then analysed with the software *Atlas.Ti 9*. Initially, a classical deductive content analysis was performed, considering the critical incidents related to the educational inclusion components: presence, participation and progress (Ainscow; Booth; Dyson, 2006). Thematic analysis was applied to identify, analyse, and report the different themes, with the purpose of understanding educators' perception of the programme's contribution to those components. The recommendations provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed to conduct the analysis, so the process was divided into six independent phases.

The first step was the data familiarisation. Jorge read all the generated material twice, and noted down some initial ideas. In the second step, Jorge read all data again and performed an initial categorisation. After the first codification, the rest of authors discussed and questioned the proposed codes, acting as critical friends (Smith; McGannon, 2018). The main function of critical friends was to provide constructive feedback, trying to ensure rigour during the qualitative analysis process. The third step consisted in grouping the codes into different themes, establishing the first differences in this regard. Based on this decision, a narrative perspective was chosen (Pérez; Fuentes; Devís, 2011), focused on describing the process experienced during the pursuit of Manuel and Jaime's inclusion throughout the SE season. Subsequently, the

complete material was read once more, this time considering the themes identified in the previous step, to verify that they were suitable for the data. In the following steps, the research team critically analysed and discussed the themes, reaching the final agreement presented in the Results section.

Regarding the reliability of the research, according to Devís (2006), first, we appeal to the integrity of the research team itself and its capacity for self-criticism and reflection, which are indispensable in a participatory research process such as the one presented in this work. Secondly, the use of a wide range of information sources has allowed for information triangulation. And lastly, the described research protocol has enabled the research team to analyse, interpret and re-interpret the information obtained, to conduct a robust study.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As part of a broader research project, we interviewed Mireia, the PE teacher of the group that was the subject of the intervention. When asked about her future challenges as a PE teacher, Mireia declared: “what I miss [...] is some training or help [...] to work with students with ASD” (Interview 1 with Mireia). This request for advice is considered to be the origin of this research, whose object was the teachers’ perception during the pursuit of Manuel and Jaime’s inclusion during the SE season.

A summary of the results obtained when analysing Manuel and Jaime’s presence, participation, and progress is presented below. It is important to mention that all results are inter-related so, instead of presenting the events in a chronological order, it was decided to present the critical incidents in relation to each of the realities identified along the process.

Based on the initial analysis, and with the purpose to present the information considering the intervention programme’s contribution to Manuel and Jaime’s presence, participation, and progress, the qualitative data were organised into the following themes: a) discovering Manuel and Jaime’s precarity, b) working on their presence, c) increasing their participation during the SE season, and d) progress will come.

3.1 DISCOVERING MANUEL AND JAIME’S PRECARITY

The aim of Phase 1 was to make an initial diagnosis of Manuel and Jaime’s educational situation, so that the information could be used in the design and adaptation of the subsequent intervention. In line with Sortwell *et al.* (2023), this prior analysis is especially relevant in the case of students with ASD since, given their specific characteristics, educational programmes must be guided by this analysis.

At the beginning, neither Manuel nor Jaime participated regularly in PE lessons. Mireia declared that she had “neither the tools nor the knowledge” (Interview 1 with Mireia) to integrate them in the group. Moreover, she showed a very low self-efficacy perception in this regard, as she expressed in the final interview: “in the end, getting to know them or having the knowledge, that makes you confident to think: ‘I can do

this, say that...’ But at the beginning you have to be extra careful and you think: ‘What if I make a mistake?’” (Interview 2 with Mireia). This perception of little training and low self-efficacy is widespread among PE teachers, regarding the attention to children with disabilities in general (Nowland; Haegele, 2023) and to children with ASD in particular (Ramírez-Forero *et al.*, 2024).

Manuel and Jaime’s prior participation in PE classes had been very scarce, partly because no specific strategies had been implemented to meet their SEN. Mireia explained that “we have tried to do something with them individually [...], like jumping or being with them, but it is complicated” (Interview 1 with Mireia). However, none of these strategies managed to increase their participation and progress in PE. One could say that the intervention had not taken into account the abilities of both students (Sortwell *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, a positive atmosphere was perceived, which could facilitate Manuel and Jaime’s inclusion, as the rest of teachers mentioned (Teacher group 1). They stated that “the children are very welcoming [with Manuel and Jaime]” (Milagros, school principal) and that this behaviour is “a very positive trait of the group” (Lourdes, Language and Literature teacher). The class-group’s attitude has been commonly identified as a facilitator to the inclusion of children with disabilities in PE classes (Shields; Synnot; Barr, 2012). For example, the PE teachers who participated in the study by Haegele *et al.* (2021) identified that having friendly classmates was one of the factors with the largest contribution to the inclusion of students with disabilities. The opinions of the teachers at this school went in the same direction.

Mireia did not seem to know much about the students with ASD, despite being in the second school term, as shown in Jorge’s journal: “I asked Mireia whether Manuel and Jaime can read, and she said she didn’t know” (Jorge’s journal, 08/01/2024). Nonetheless, the following day we confirmed that “Jaime usually reads in Language class” (Teacher group 1), as stated by the Language teacher. Therefore, a lack of collaboration between teachers was detected, which is usually a barrier to inclusion of students with disabilities (Mihajlovic, 2024; Tant; Watelain, 2016). In relation to this, Sortwell *et al.* (2023) suggest that teachers specialised in special education and support must advise PE teachers on the most effective way to explain contents and tasks, which in the present study was not being done appropriately. In this regard, Manuel and Jaime’s educational vulnerability could align with the so-called vulnerability based on the dependency upon one another (Misztal, 2011), since there were situations that were not a direct consequence of their characteristics, but of the particular way schools work.

With the purpose to advise educators about the SEN of Open Classroom students, Martina (Interview 1) stated that “an awareness session” was conducted, where “we explained the characteristics of every student”. For example, “we explained to her [Mireia] how she should work with one [Manuel] and the other [Jaime]”. When delving into the specific aspects included in this teacher awareness session, low educational expectations were detected: “it is true that a student with ASD doesn’t engage in groups” because “Manuel doesn’t like to be touched” (Interview 1 with Martina). This perspective agrees with previous studies stating that autism has

traditionally been positioned within a deficit-based framework, where the uneven development of abilities is perceived as problematic (Dinishak, 2016, Pushkarenko; Dunn; Goodwin, 2021), perpetuating ableism as a social prejudice based on the belief that people without disabilities are superior (Eisenmenger, 2019), which commonly shows up in PE and sport (Block; Fines, 2022).

Over the sessions, constant educational precarity was identified, and this type of situations of educational exclusion appeared throughout the whole study. For example, in a regular phase session of the SE season, the following happened:

We start 20 minutes later because an activity is going on. At the beginning, Manuel and Jaime are not in the sport court. No one thinks of them, they are always the least of our concerns. Mireia tells me they are not coming; they will go home soon and they are not coming down (Jorge's journal, 06/02/2024).

This fact fits into the usual behaviour of the school staff responsible for accompanying Manuel and Jaime to the sports hall and back to the classroom. It also happened during the SE season: "Every Tuesday they leave earlier, since this is the last class" (Jorge's journal, 06/02/2024). Incidents related to Manuel and Jaime's educational precarity occurred until the last day of the season. As part of the final event, an activity was prepared at a close-by park. Manuel and Jaime faced difficulties attending from the start of the planning process. On multiple occasions, both Jorge and Mireia tried to talk to the people responsible for the Open Classroom. For example, one day before the day trip they sustained that "They will get tired, they won't stand it" (Lucía's journal, 18/03/2024). All the explanations were perceived as "excuses", increased by the fact that Martina was on sick leave and, therefore, not present at the school. Finally, they did not attend the day trip, once more proving the difficulties to have their presence in the activities. Certainly, creating a fair, equal, and equitable learning environment is complex, but essential (Gordon; Pennington, 2022) to adopt an inclusive environment (Sansi; Nalbant; Ozer, 2021) where Manuel and Jaime could have the necessary support to participate in all the school activities proposed.

3.2 WORKING ON THEIR PRESENCE

This section includes all outcomes related to the effects of the educative actions on Manuel and Jaime's presence throughout the SE season, and the particular way the model itself and the rest of strategies added have contributed to it.

In the first place, it must be highlighted that, until the beginning of this intervention, the agents involved (school management, Open Classroom management, tutors and families) had not maintained a joint conversation. Therefore, it seems like the research's participatory design, oriented to encourage conversations and give voice to all stakeholders of the teaching and learning process, has managed to break down some structural barriers (Haegele *et al.*, 2021). As an example, it was previously mentioned that Manuel and Jaime used to leave the PE class earlier, especially on Tuesdays, because it was the last class of the day and they went home. Upon asking the person responsible for accompanying them about the reason why this happened,

Jorge wrote down the following regarding the answer: “It’s curious because I asked why they left earlier and there was no specific reason, just to take them to their parents [to the entrance]”. When asked to have them stay until the end of the class, this person accepted without any problems. This type of barriers is usually associated with social context barriers (Wang, 2019), which need longer interventions to be overcome.

Jorge’s main task throughout the season was to ensure Manuel and Jaime’s presence with their teams in the SE-specific dynamics and rituals. He informed Martina about this goal as follows: “In the first step, I want them to feel part of the team, I want the rest to work with them” (Interview 1 with Martina). To achieve it, ethics of care teaching behaviours and activities were applied, especially to serve as a model for the rest of the people involved in the programme. For example, on some occasions, both students performed repetitive motor behaviours through which they got away from their group (jumping and clapping in the sports hall). These recurring behaviours are common in students with ASD (First *et al.*, 2022), and their educational response tends to be related with the creation of a supportive environment (Sortwell *et al.*, 2023). For example, when this happened, Jorge accompanied them back to their teams, trying to guarantee their presence for as long as possible.

Thanks to the fact that Jorge cared about Manuel and Jaime being part of the whole teaching and learning process, Mireia and the rest of the class understood the idea that their presence was important, with Lucía and Jorge’s example serving as a model (Noddings, 1992) for the rest. In this regard, although research on ethics of care in PE is still in its early stages (Li; Li, 2020), there are studies that show how the strategies that involve caring, together with SE, have successfully empowered vulnerable children. For example, García López and Kirk (2022a) described how coaches who showed care contributed to empower a group of young people during a community sport programme.

A few weeks later, the actions oriented to keep Manuel and Jaime with the group, based on the idea of serving as a model, started to have an effect among the students. For example, in session 5, Lucía wrote in her journal: “Jaime participates in all games and, although sometimes he does not follow the dynamics, his mates help him to get back in the game or exercise. During the explanations, they also make sure that he is present and listening” (Lucía’s journal, 16/01/24). It can be stated that Lucía and Jorge’s behaviours towards Manuel and Jaime had started to be transferred to their teammates. Nonetheless, it was proved during the intervention that working on presence is a complex process, since “It’s very hard to make Manuel stay engaged in the task; as soon as the task stops, he leaves it. I have brought him back at least five times, and so have his classmates” (Jorge’s journal, 26/02/24). These findings agree with previous interventions focused on achieving inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream groups in PE, which have revealed that the process is complex and influenced by numerous factors (Haegele *et al.*, 2021).

The task performed by Jorge, focused on presence, was originally planned for the first four weeks. However, it took longer than expected, which affected the rest of the phases and goals: “I’m so focused on ensuring that they are present that I can

hardly spend time on participation and progress without stepping in more. I can't see how I can do it better' (Jorge's journal, 27/02/24). In relation to this, both Jorge and Lucía felt frustrated at times for not making so much progress as they would have wished.

However, the increase in participation has been very positively perceived by the school teachers. When asked to highlight the positive aspects of the SE season implementation, Mireia declared: "Manuel and Jaime have also been more integrated" and "I liked it very much that they were participating" (Interview 2 with Mireia). The different expectations and previous experiences of school teachers and university teacher-researchers may have led to different interpretations of the same facts, revealing two different perspectives regarding educational inclusion (Mihajlovic, 2024).

3.3 INCREASING THEIR PARTICIPATION DURING THE SPORT EDUCATION SEASON

During the SE season implementation, a progressive increase was detected in Manuel and Jaime's participation in PE classes. This level of participation exceeded many of the school teaching team's expectations. At the beginning, Martina shared that Jaime "Is a student with ASD, he doesn't take part in groups, his condition prevents him from establishing social relationships" (Interview 1 with Martina). Nevertheless, SE features, such as the affiliation to teams and their signs of identity, have slowly offered examples of how both students achieved social and motor improvements, which are considered as small wins (Weick, 1984).

The SE season had not been designed with the characteristics of students with disabilities in mind (Block *et al.*, 2021); however, given Manuel and Jaime's social vulnerability and precarity, it turned into a pedagogy of affect (Kirk, 2020). In previous studies conducted by García López and Kirk (2022a, 2022b), it was argued that SE could be considered as a pedagogy of affect that can help overcome precarity, thus expanding the previous proposal made by Kirk (2020), where only some types of SE, like Sport for Peace (Ennis, 1999), could be considered as pedagogies of affect. This is so because for vulnerable individuals who still have to develop autonomy, the routines and procedures that are established through SE roles are a very significant learning (García López; Kirk, 2022b).

The affiliation to small and stable teams has been a facilitator in the vast majority of cases. Kirk (2020) had already suggested that this SE element could contribute to the inclusion of all students. In this experience, it has helped to create a supportive environment for Manuel and Jaime's learning, according to the proposed by Sortwell *et al.* (2023). This was especially noticeable when entering the sports hall since, from session 4, both Manuel and Jaime went straight to their team's training area, as shown by this entry in Lucía's journal: "Today he (Jaime) went to his area as soon as he arrived at the sports hall" (Lucía's journal, 22/01/24). This is in contrast with their behaviour before the programme implementation, when they used to enter the hall and go around the place alone, jumping and clapping. These findings are consistent with a previous study by Mazefsky *et al.* (2013), where it was observed

that defining small working areas in PE increased concentration and reduced stress of students with ASD.

Nonetheless, Jaime's team faced several challenges when trying to offer him an environment that invited him to participate. For example, when Lucía asked the coach to make sure that all team members performed the tasks, this student said that "Jaime is special and if he prefers to be free, we have to leave him" (Lucía's journal, 22/01/24). Strength and conditioning also presented some difficulties, as the student who performed that role (fitness specialist) in Jaime's team expressed and Lucía noted in her journal: "I get frustrated and very nervous because I explain it once, twice... but he doesn't understand it" (22/01/24). In this case, an error is assumed in the pedagogical management of this situation since, from the beginning, it was perceived that, while 'Manuel participates with his team as one more. His team includes him very well and takes care of him', "Jaime's team is not as welcoming" (Lucía's journal, 15/01/24). With the aim of mitigating these difficulties, as well as others related to general team operation, Lucía and Mireia decided to change the teams for the main part of the season, which actually happened in session 9, the first of the regular phase. The group's attitude is essential; in fact, a negative attitude may can make students with ASD experience PE in a context of social exclusion and become a barrier to their participation in class (Haeghele *et al.*, 2021).

Another facilitator were the SE-specific routines, which from the beginning were identified as a tool that would facilitate Manuel and Jaime's participation in class. From the beginning of the season, Martina worked in the Open Classroom on the tasks to be performed in every session, depending on the phase of the season: "We can adapt that and do some anticipation work" (Interview 1 with Martina), and she always showed her commitment to the intervention. This work was based on remembering the signs of identity of Manuel and Jaime's teams, the sport they were practising, the season phase they were in and their respective training areas. Furthermore, during one of her visits to the PE class, "Martina was fascinated by the team work and the dynamics" (Lucía's journal, 15/01/24). For example, one of the routines where Manuel and Jaime's participation was evident was the warm-up led by every team's fitness specialist. These findings are in line with the study conducted by Teh *et al.* (2022), who showed that physical activity interventions with students with ASD could foster their learning in several fields (socio-emotional, physical and cognitive).

3.4 PROGRESS WILL COME

According to Haeghele (2019), inclusion refers to the education philosophy that promotes the learning of all students, regardless of their need for support. Therefore, the incidents related to Jaime and Manuel's progress can be interpreted as proofs of inclusion. However, it is assumed that inclusion refers to an individual experience and cannot be completely controlled by educators (Haeghele, 2019; Haeghele; Maher, 2023).

Regarding their progress throughout the SE season, two main areas can be identified: social and emotional progress and motor progress. The largest evidence of

improvement was found at the social and emotional level. Initially, Martina shared that “Their condition prevents them from establishing social relationships” (Interview 1 with Martina). Nevertheless, we found proofs of social relationships during the season, especially within their teams, which were the result of the development of positive attitudes within the teams in an SE context. For example, during a conversation between Lucía and Jaime’s teammates, the following was heard: “While I was talking to them, Jaime came and kissed César (a student’s pseudonym). Alicia and Sara (two students’ pseudonyms) told me that he hugs them” (Lucía’s journal, 22/01/24). Moreover, an emotional change when entering the sports hall was perceived, particularly in Jaime. This fact appeared multiple times in the different assessment tools, like this entry, for example: “According to his face and attitude, he (Jaime) seemed to be happy” (Lucía, 22/01/24). The day of the season’s final, one of the clearest proofs of social and emotional progress was observed in Jaime’s teammates. The following event was described in Lucía’s journal:

Before the beginning of the match, Jaime was lying at the end of the court and César (student) approached him and said: ‘Come on Jaime, stand up, we have to play the final’, being surprisingly tactful. Both Alicia and Sara looked after him, they gave him encouraging words and helped him position on the court (05/03/24).

Therefore, the development of within-team relationships during the SE season has allowed to overcome, at least occasionally, the barriers encountered in the pursuit of inclusion of children with ASD and caused by their difficulties in establishing social relationships, which render their participation in PE, physical activity and sport a challenge (Lamb; Firbank; Aldous, 2016).

Evidence of motor improvement was observed in both students. Both presented coordination difficulties in the ringo game, especially in the catch. They showed progress in the most isolated technical tasks, for example, “Manuel was able to catch the ringo several times” during the first pre-season sessions (Lucía’s journal, 22/01/24). However, they hardly participated during friendly matches. “In the case of Manuel, he was present on the court, but he didn’t touch the ringo one single time in the whole match”. Actually, the match became a 3 vs 2 rather than a 3 vs 3 (Lucía’s journal, 05/02/24).

Once this barrier was detected, Lucía and Jorge decided to take action, preparing a supplementary activity to be done at home. The idea was based on the following assumption:

If they practise throwing and catching at home, when they come to a match, they will perceive themselves as more competent and they will increase their participation. To do so, Jorge prepared some instructions, we recorded an example video and we lent each of them a ringo (Lucía’s journal, 06/02/24).

It was assumed that both students’ families collaborated in this strategy, since the students informed us they had practised and Martina confirmed she had seen Manuel playing ringo with his father at a city park (Interview 2 with Martina). In the following weeks, special attention was paid to Manuel and Jaime’s performance during matches, looking for evidence of their motor progress. A series of advances and setbacks was observed. While one day it was found that “Jaime has been able to

catch and throw the ringo several times during the match” and “Manuel has participated in his serving turn” (Lucía’s journal, 19/02/24), the following day it was observed that “He didn’t take part in the game one single time” (Lucía’s journal, 20/02/24). Towards the end of the season, it was found that Jaime had improved his game and we could even think that he was aware of his progress, as it was described during the semi-finals: “Jaime looked and smiled at me when he scored a point in the semi-final” (Jorge’s journal, 04/03/24). This small win is explained by a combination of strategies: practical tasks used to teach the sport content (design of corrective tasks, García López and Gutiérrez, 2017), which have fostered an intervention more focused on these students, family collaboration (Sortwell *et al.*, 2023), and the use of video to teach motor skills to students with ASD (Taheri-Torbati; Sotoodeh, 2019).

Finally, talking was a key aspect in the students’ progress, both in the research participatory design and in the ethics of care-related tasks conducted by the educators. In the final interview with Martina, when highlighting the positive aspects of the intervention, Jorge mentioned that “The communication with them and with the rest of people involved [...] sometimes, just by talking and asking, you can make progress” (Interview 2 with Martina). This relationship among Manuel, Jaime, and the ethics of care is summarised in the following entry:

I was sitting on a mat with Manuel and Jaime, explaining to them that they should pay attention to the lines of the court, since they would have to referee. After the class, I was walking and thinking that they may not be able to do it this season, but I kept trying, once and again, and it wasn’t hard for me. I think it was then that I finally understood the concept of ethics of care, which I had read from Kirk (Jorge’s journal, 04/03/24).

To sum up, it was decided to call this section Progress Will Come referring to the hope that this type of intervention, sustained over time, could lead to greater progress in the future, following the line set by this study. As stated by Haegele and Maher (2023), human experiences are complex, ambiguous and uncertain. Therefore, it was assumed that given the starting situation, it would be very complex to achieve such progress with just a one-quarter intervention with this goal.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The pursuit of inclusion of students with ASD, described in this paper based on the educators’ perception, has proved to be a complex, multifactorial, and unstable process. This pursuit of inclusion process was composed of constant advances and setbacks. The majority of those setbacks were not attributable to the students, but to the educators’ idiosyncrasy, the lack of communication among the different professionals involved, and the lack of knowledge of their classmates.

With regard to the advances, it was observed that the combination of SE main characteristics, routines, and rituals, together with attention to diversity and ethics of care specific strategies, allowed for some moments of inclusion throughout the season. It must be noted that complex processes, like the one described in the present study, must be addressed through a combination of pedagogical strategies

that can contribute to several areas and also to the design, follow-up and assessment of educational programmes from a more global perspective.

Lastly, it must be mentioned that this research presents several limitations, so its results cannot be generalised. Firstly, the own study's nature. Besides, only two specific students were studied in our case, so further research with larger samples is needed, to obtain stronger conclusions.

Two other limitations can be pointed out. The first one is related to the intervention's duration, of only three months, which did not make it possible to check whether the improvements achieved would persist over time. And the second and last one is the fact that the specific characteristics of students with ASD may require different strategies. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the characteristics of the students with ASD before designing the educational programmes. Far from giving a one-size-fits-all solution, this study intends to lay the foundations for similar future research, which will need to adapt to the context where it is conducted.

REFERENCES

- ABELLÁN, Jorge; SEGOVIA, Yessica. Aprendiendo a enseñar mediante el modelo de Educación Deportiva en centros de educación especial: de la teoría a la práctica. **Retos**, v. 59, p. 138–145, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v59.106909>
- AINSCOW, Mel; BOOTH, Tony; DYSON, Alan. **Improving schools, developing inclusion**. London: Routledge, 2006. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203967157>
- AL JAFFAL, Mohammed. Barriers general education teachers face regarding the inclusion of students with autism. **Frontiers in Psychology**, v. 13, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.873248>
- BEAMER, Jennifer A.; YUN, Joonkoo. Physical educators' beliefs and self-reported behaviors toward including students with autism spectrum disorder. **Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly**, v. 31, n. 4, p. 362–376, 2014. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2014-0134>
- BLOCK, Martin *et al.* Exploring future research in adapted physical education. **Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport**, v. 92, n. 3, p. 429–442, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2020.1741500>
- BLOCK, Martin; FINES, Abby. Examining physical activity for individuals with disabilities through a social justice lens. **Kinesiology Review**, v. 11, n. 1, p. 80–87, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2021-0052>
- BRAUN, Virginia; CLARKE, Victoria. Using thematic analysis in psychology. **Qualitative Research in Psychology**, v. 3, n. 2, p. 77–101, 2006. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- CARR, Wilfred; KEMMIS, Stephen. **Becoming critical: education knowledge and action research**. London: Routledge, 2003. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203496626>
- CASEY, Ashley; KIRK, David. **Models-based practice in physical education**. London: Routledge, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319259>

DEVÍS, José. Socially critical research perspectives in physical education. *In*: KIRK, David; D.; MACDONALD, Doune; O'SULLIVAN, Mary (ed.), **The handbook of physical education**. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006. p. 37–58. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608009.n3>

DINISHAK, Janette. The deficit view and its critics. **Disability Studies Quarterly**, v. 36, n. 4, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v36i4.5236>

EISENMENGER, Ashley. Ableism 101: What it is, what it looks like, and what we can do to fix it. **Access Living**, Dec. 12, 2019. Available at: <https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/ableism-101/>. Accessed on: Nov. 3, 2024.

ENNIS, Catherine. Creating a culturally relevant curriculum for disengaged girls. **Sport, Education and Society**, v. 4, n. 1, p. 31–49, 1999. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332990040103>

FERNÁNDEZ-RÍO, Javier; IGLESIAS, Damián. What do we know about pedagogical models in physical education so far? An umbrella review. **Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy**, v. 29, n. 2, p. 190–205, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2022.2039615>

FIRST, Michael *et al.* DSM-5-TR: Overview of what's new and what's changed. **World Psychiatry**, v. 21, n. 2, p. 218–219, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20989>

GARCÍA LÓPEZ, Luis Miguel; GUTIERREZ, David. **Aprendiendo a enseñar deporte: modelo de enseñanza comprensiva y educación deportiva**. Barcelona: INDE, 2017.

GARCÍA LÓPEZ, Luis Miguel; KIRK, David. Coaches' perceptions of sport education: a response to precarity through a pedagogy of affect. **Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy**, v. 27, n. 4, p. 353–367, 2022a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2021.1891211>

GARCÍA LÓPEZ, Luis Miguel; KIRK, David. Empowering children from socially vulnerable backgrounds through the use of roles in sport education. **Sport, Education and Society**, v. 27, n. 6, p. 676–688, 2022b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1897563>

GORDON, Victoria; PENNINGTON, Colin. Tips for including individuals with autism in physical education. **Journal of Physical Education Recreation & Dance**, v. 93, n. 1, p. 58–60, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2022.2006021>

HAEGELE, Justin. Inclusion illusion: questioning the inclusiveness of integrated physical education. **Quest**, v. 71, n. 4, p. 387–397, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2019.1602547>

HAEGELE, Justin *et al.* Barriers and facilitators to inclusion in integrated physical education: adapted physical educators' perspectives. **European Physical Education Review**, v. 27, n. 2, p. 297–311, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X20944429>

HAEGELE, Justin *et al.* Universal design for learning in physical education: Overview and critical reflection. **European Physical Education Review**, v. 30, n. 2, p. 250 – 264, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X231202658>

HAEGELE, Justin; MAHER, Anthony. Male autistic youth experiences of belonging in integrated physical education. **Autism**, v. 26, n. 1, p. 51–61, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211018637>

HAEGELE, Justin; MAHER, Anthony. Toward a conceptual understanding of inclusion as intersubjective experiences. **Educational Researcher**, v. 52, n. 6, p. 385–393, 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231176287>

HASTIE, Peter; CASEY, Ashley. Fidelity in models-based practice research in sport pedagogy: a guide for future investigations. **Journal of Teaching in Physical Education**, v. 33, n. 3, p. 422-431, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2013-0141>

HORTAL-QUESADA, Ángela; SANCHIS-SANCHIS, Roberto. Autism spectrum disorder in physical education in primary school: a systematic review. **Apunts: Educación Física y Deportes**, n. 150, p. 45-55, 2022. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.\(2022/4\).150.06](https://doi.org/10.5672/apunts.2014-0983.es.(2022/4).150.06)

KIRK, David. **Precarity, critical pedagogy and physical education**. London: Routledge, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429326301>

LAMB, Penny; FIRBANK, Dianna; ALDOUS, David. Capturing the world of physical education through the eyes of children with autism spectrum disorders. **Sport, Education and Society**, v. 21, n. 5, p. 698 – 722, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.941794>

LI, Yilin; LI, Weidong. A review of research on ethic of care in physical education and physical activity settings. **Journal of Teaching in Physical Education**, v. 40, n. 1, p. 109-117, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2019-0143>

LIEBERMAN, Lauren *et al.* **Universal design for learning in physical education**. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781718235199>

LIEBERMAN, Lauren; BEAN, Lauren; GRENIER, Michelle. Developing a Universal Design for Learning Pedagogy: Perspectives of Students with and Without Disabilities. **Journal of Teaching in Physical Education**, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2024-0015> (ahead of print)

MARAVÉ-VIVAS, María *et al.* Hacia la inclusión del alumnado con TEA en educación física: investigación-acción en un programa piloto. **Retos**, n. 42, p. 66-76, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v42i0.85845>

MAZEFSKY, Carla *et al.* The role of emotion regulation in autism spectrum disorder. **Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**, v. 52, n. 7, p. 679–688, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2013.05.006>

McMAHON, Jenny *et al.* Children with autism in a sport and physical activity context: A collaborative autoethnography by two parents outlining their experiences. **Sport, Education and Society**, v. 25, n. 9, p. 1002-1014, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1680535>

MENÉNDEZ, José Ignacio; FERNÁNDEZ-RÍO, Javier. Hybridising sport education and teaching for personal and social responsibility to include students with disabilities. **European Journal of Special Needs Education**, v. 32, n. 4, p. 508-524, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2016.1267943>

MIHAJLOVIC, Christopher. Perceptions of collaboration between general and special educators in Physical Education. **Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly**, v. 41, n. 2, p. 306-329, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2023-0104>

MISZTAL, Barbara. **The challenges of vulnerability: in search of strategies for a less vulnerable social life**. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230316690>

NODDINGS, Nel. In defense of caring. **The Journal of Clinical Ethics**, v. 3, n. 1, p. 15-18, 1992. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/JCE199203103>

NOWLAND, Lindsey; HAEGELE, Justin. The self-efficacy of physical education teachers to teach students with disabilities: a systematic review of literature. **Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly**, v. 40, n. 4, p. 758-780, 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2022-0135>

ORGANIZACIÓN DE NACIONES UNIDAS - ONU. **Objetivos del desarrollo sostenible**. [Ginebra]: ONU, 2015. Available at: http://www.un.org/es/millenniumgoals/pdf/2015/mdg_2015_s_summary_web.pdf. Accessed on: 31 Oct., 2024.

PÉREZ, Víctor; FUENTES, Jorge; DEVÍS, José. El análisis narrativo en la educación física y el deporte. **Movimento**, v. 17, n. 4, p. 11–42, 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-8918.24402>

PUSHKARENKO, Kyle; DUNN, Janice C.; GOODWIN, Donna L. Physical literacy for children labeled with autism spectrum disorder: Mothers' experiences of ableism, exclusion, and trauma. **Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly**, v. 38, n. 4, p. 525–545, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2020-0123>

RAMÍREZ-FORERO, Blanca Isabel *et al.* Barriers and facilitators to the inclusion of autistic students in integrated physical education: a Colombian perspective. **International Journal of Developmental Disabilities**, p. 1–10, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2024.2399376>

SANSI, Ahmet; NALBANT, Sibel; OZER, Dilara. Effects of an inclusive physical activity program on the motor skills, social skills and attitudes of students with and without autism spectrum disorder. **Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders**, v. 51, n. 7, p. 2254–2270, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04693-z>

SHIELDS, Nora; SYNNOT, Anneliese J.; BARR, Megan. Perceived barriers and facilitators to physical activity for children with disability: a systematic review. **British Journal of Sports Medicine**, v. 46, n. 14, p. 989-997, 2012. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2011-090236>

SINELNIKOV, Oleg. Sport education for teachers: professional development when introducing a novel curriculum model. **European Physical Education Review**, v. 15, n. 1, p. 91-114, 2009. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X09105213>

SMITH, Brett; McGANNON, Kerry. Developing rigor in qualitative research: problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. **International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology**, v. 11, n. 1, p. 101–121, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357>

SORTWELL, Andrew *et al.* Planning and pedagogical considerations for teaching children with autism spectrum disorder in physical education. **Kinesiology Review**, v. 13, n. 2, p. 302-312, 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2023-0015>

SPENCER-CAVALIERE, Nancy *et al.* A part of and apart from sport: practitioners' experiences coaching in segregated youth sport. **Social Inclusion**, v. 5, n. 2, p. 120–129, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v5i2.889>

TAHERI-TORBATI, Hamidreza; SOTOODEH, Mohammad Saber. Using video and live modelling to teach motor skill to children with autism spectrum disorder. **International Journal of Inclusive Education**, v. 23, n. 4, p. 405–418, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1441335>

TANT, Maxime; WATELAIN, Eric. Forty years later, a systematic literature review on inclusion in physical education (1975-2015): a teacher perspective. **Educational Research Review**, v. 19, p. 1-17, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2016.04.002>

TARANTINO, Giampiero; MAKOPOULOU, Kyriaki; NEVILLE, Ross D. Inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities in physical education: A systematic review and meta-analysis of teachers' attitudes. **Educational Research Review**, v. 36, p. 100456, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100456>

TEH, Elizabeth *et al.* Effects of physical exercise interventions on stereotyped motor behaviours in children with ASD: a meta-analysis. **Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders**, v. 52, p. 2934-2957, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05152-z>

WANG, Lijuan. Perspectives of students with special needs on inclusion in general physical education: A social-relational model of disability. **Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly**, v. 36, n. 2, p. 242-263, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2018-0068>

WEICK, Karl. Small wins: Redefining the scale of social problems. **American Psychologist**, v. 39, n. 1, p. 40–49, 1984. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.39.1.40>

Resumen: La búsqueda de la inclusión del alumnado con trastorno del espectro autista en educación física supone un desafío para el profesorado, que debe buscar respuestas pedagógicas para atender a sus necesidades educativas. El objetivo de este trabajo es explorar la percepción del profesorado involucrado en el desarrollo de una temporada de educación deportiva en un grupo de educación secundaria en el que estaban integrados dos estudiantes con autismo. Se obtuvieron datos cualitativos a partir de diarios reflexivos, entrevistas, grupos focales y notas de campo, que fueron analizados considerando los componentes de la inclusión en educación. Los resultados indican que las características esenciales del modelo han contribuido incrementar la presencia, participación y progreso del alumnado. Además, las estrategias relacionadas con la ética del cuidado han contribuido a mejorar las actitudes del profesorado y el resto de los compañeros. Estos resultados sugieren que la educación deportiva, acompañada de otras estrategias específicas pueden contribuir en la búsqueda de su inclusión.

Palabras clave: Educación Física. Necesidades educativas especiales. Pedagogía crítica.

Desde já agradeço.

Resumo: A busca pela inclusão de alunos com Transtorno do Espectro Autista na Educação Física apresenta um desafio significativo para os educadores, que devem buscar respostas pedagógicas para atender às suas necessidades educacionais. Este estudo tem como objetivo explorar as percepções dos professores envolvidos no desenvolvimento de uma temporada de educação esportiva em um grupo de ensino secundário que incluía dois alunos com autismo. Dados qualitativos foram obtidos a partir de diários reflexivos, entrevistas, grupos focais e notas de campo, que foram analisados considerando os componentes da inclusão educacional. Os resultados indicam que as características essenciais do modelo contribuíram para aumentar a presença, participação e progresso dos alunos. Além disso, estratégias relacionadas à ética do cuidado ajudaram a melhorar as atitudes dos professores e colegas. Esses achados sugerem que a educação esportiva, acompanhada de outras estratégias específicas, pode contribuir para a busca da inclusão.

Palavras-chave: Educação Física. Necessidades Educacionais Especiais. Pedagogia Crítica.

USE LICENSE

This article is published as Open Access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license, which allows its use, distribution and reproduction in any medium as long as the original work is properly cited. More information at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that this work involves no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jorge Abellán: Conceptualization; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Original draft writin.

Lucía Reyes: Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Original draft writin.

Irene González-Martí: Investigation; Methodology; Review and editing.

Luis Miguel García López: Funding acquisition; Data curation; Supervision; Review and editing.

FUNDING

This work is part of the National Research Project: *"Application of a salutogenic physical activity program for adolescents from socially vulnerable contexts."* Project reference PID2021-122886OB-C21, funded by MCIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ and by FEDER, European Union.

RESEARCH ETHICS

The research project followed the guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the Social Research Ethics Committee of the University of Castilla-La Mancha. Authorization reference number: CCEIS-689861-G0P7.

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY

Research data is only available upon request.

HOW TO CITE

ABELLÁN, Jorge; REYES, Lucia; GONZÁLEZ-MARTÍ, Irene; GARCÍA LÓPEZ, Luis Miguel. Towards the Inclusion of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Sport Education and Ethics of Care. **Movimento**, v. 31, p. e31018, Jan./Dec. 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-8918.144294>

EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY

 Alex Branco Fraga*

 Elisandro Schultz Wittizorecki*

 Mauro Myskiw*

 Raquel da Silveira*

 David Hortigüela Alcalá**

 Pedro Antonio Sanchez Miguel***

* Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Escola de Educação Física, Fisioterapia e Dança, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

** Universidad de Burgos, Burgos, Spain.

*** Universidad de Extremadura, Caceres, Extremadura, Spain.