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ORIGINAL

INITIAL TRAINING FOR INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION: SITUATION, PROSPECTS AND COMPETENCIES

LA FORMACIÓN INICIAL PARA UNA EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA INCLUSIVA: SITUACIÓN, PROSPECTIVA Y COMPETENCIAS

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ABSTRACT

This study tried to find out about the present situation of the Initial Training (IT) and the prospects to draw up a competencies framework for Adapted Physical Activity (APA) professionals. Interview and non-participant observation were applied, from an interpreting perspective. Seven IT and APA reputable experts, all of them experienced in university activity, took part. In addition, the authors attended a national conference of experts where issues related to the purpose of this study were discussed. The discourses of the experts were examined in line with the categories previously defined. That analysis leads to the conclusion that value judgements on IT are conditioned by perceptions of specific realities. The experts identify basic elements for a competencies framework, including attitudes as an important constituent part, although they are not specific enough about which ingredients would make a fundamental framework of competencies for PE teachers who must apply APA.

KEY WORDS: Physical Education, Adapted Physical Activity (APA), Undergraduate Initial Training, Competencies.

RESUMEN

Este estudio pretendió conocer la situación de la formación inicial (FI) y las perspectivas de establecer un perfil de competencias en la formación de profesionales de actividad física adaptada (AFA). Desde una perspectiva interpretativa, se utilizó la entrevista y la observación no participante. Participaron siete reconocidos expertos en AFA y FI, vinculados con la universidad, y se asistió a un encuentro nacional de expertos que debatían temas vinculados al propósito del estudio. Los discursos de los expertos fueron analizados en su contenido, con la orientación de las categorías definidas previamente. Dicho análisis permite concluir que los juicios de valor sobre la FI están mediatizados por las percepciones de realidades concretas. Los expertos identifican elementos básicos para un perfil de competencias, con un fuerte componente actitudinal, aunque se detecta falta de concreción sobre cuáles serían todos los ingredientes fundamentales de un perfil competencial del docente de EF que enseña AFA.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Física; Actividad Física Adaptada (AFA); Formación Inicial de Grado; Competencias.

1. INTRODUCTION

Backed by UNESCO, the *Conferencia Mundial sobre Necesidades Educativas Especiales: Acceso y Calidad*, took place in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. Two papers, highly relevant for education and for persons with disabilities, were presented in that Conference. Both of them, as pointed out by Saleh (2004), *The Salamanca Statement* and *Framework for Action*, constitute the "key that gives confidence and global strength to the task of placing the subject of "inclusion" in the world's agenda" (p. 27).

Since then, institutional statements, reports, rules and recommendations reflect the cultural and social progress made by the rights of persons with disabilities awareness. Leisure, exercise and sport activities have not been left aside in that institutional reference framework of inclusion policies. And it is admitted as such for instance by the ratification treaty of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, issued in New York on 13 December 2006, and adopted by Spain in 2008 (BOE, 2008). In that ratified treaty of the Convention of the United Nations, the Spanish State points out that "for persons with disabilities to be able to take part in sport, leisure and recreation activities under the same conditions as any others" (art. 30), a series of measures will be taken, among which it is worth mentioning those leading to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities, the organization by themselves of specific sport and recreational activities, equal access to activities and facilities, and special dedication to children with disabilities. Those measures, as underlined by Cid (2008), must emphasise, among other aspects, the recognition that, to persons with disabilities, exercise and sport activities mean "a special opportunity to boost their harmonious development..." and to tight "friendship and understanding links" (page 135), and become a primary need, as for the rest of the people, although far too often "we human beings are specialists in turning (primary) needs into real works of art" (page 94).

Undoubtedly, all institutional statements, and particularly those measures taken, are necessary and inevitable, but they are not sufficient if they are not backed by other measures seeking to push society as a whole to adopt the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to make real the social inclusion and cohesion principles expressed in national and international statements and recognitions. With that purpose, one of the most important processes that must take place — not only to reach deep knowledge of the situation of persons with disabilities and APA, but also to raise awareness, promote, organise and implement quality plans and projects— is the continuous improvement of training of those professionals who must contribute to make true those projects set down in official statements and papers. Nevertheless, in spite of the relevance that those training processes have for the implementation of quality programmes, teachers' ability to conduct inclusion projects, as highlighted by Mendoza (2009), are put into question in teaching and training settings. In addition to that lack of proper training, the persistence of prejudiced believes and ideas are also barriers that hinder good standards action in Adapted Physical Activity (Sánchez

Palomino, 2007).

Training deficiency as much as disbelieve in the possibilities that persons with disabilities have to improve themselves by means of physical activity are worsen by the poor attention given to this issue in Sport and Physical Activity Sciences (SPAS) research (Pérez, 2009). Finally, that deficiency becomes apparent by the fact that there is no consensus of opinion as to what knowledge, competence and skills should be developed by those physical activity professionals who are to work in that field, and particularly those Physical Education teachers whose classes include persons with special educational needs. That absence of a framework of competencies is the reason why, in part, PE teacher training has been considered inadequate in the past (Hernández y Hospital, 1999), and today there is not yet a clear consensus of opinion on the knowledge and skills guidelines that should make the basic abilities which would-be professionals must acquire.

However, in the last two decades, some attempts to draw up a framework of competencies have been made. In the 1990s, Jansma and Surburg (1995), among other studies, identified the competencies to be achieved by an APA specialist taking part in a specific training project within a doctorate course. Thus, apart from showing a skill to draw up adapted curricula and proving wide knowledge of the disability limitations and the physical and motor achievement standards of persons with disabilities, the post-graduate must also prove a wide knowledge of APA literature, a skill to carry out assessment and to programme courses for would-be professionals in APA, good knowledge and skills to assess Adapted Physical Education resources and curricula, and possibly to prove advanced knowledge of the legislation related to education of persons with disabilities (page 313). It is an ambitious identification of competencies, to be sure, as it is proper to a postgraduate course, and should be taken into consideration, but it needs to be adapted to the demands of undergraduate training.

A mention is due the *European Inclusive Physical Education Training* (EIPET), which took place some years afterwards. It was a two-year project (2007-2009) carried out with the support of the *Centre for Adapted Physical Activity* in Ireland (EIPET, 2011). This project defines the competencies that PE Teachers must have to deal with Inclusive Physical Education. The eleven competencies listed are linked to the key knowledge and skills which make their basic substratum.

Beyond institutional studies, several authors —few of them though—, have also made some attempts to define a competencies framework for physical activity professionals. Among other studies it is worth mentioning, for instance, those by Reina (2010) which include the professional need to understand the diversity and the conceptual bases of disability, and even their ability to “design plans, projects and programmes adapted to the social and cultural context of any community” and their “skill to prepare, choose and make adapted materials for the target community and context” (p. 112).

It is also necessary to highlight some research papers that focus on the

perception teachers have of their own competencies when they have to tackle all inclusive Physical Education classes, namely Díaz del Cueto, 2009, and Silva, Duarte and Almeida, 2011. In both cases, the authors reveal first hand reports of teachers who frankly refer to their doubts and deficiencies to cope with mixed ability settings and explain how the possibilities of inclusion of pupils with special needs are compromised by the teachers' own insufficient training.

Because of its relevance, it is necessary to make a final mention of some precedents to those studies carried out with the support of the *European Federation of Adapted Physical Activity* (EUFAPA), a body that has contributed with its projects to promote a forum of discussion on APA. Among its projects it is worth to highlight one entitled *European Standards in Adapted Physical Activities* (EUSAPA, 2011) which started in 2008. One of the main aims of the project is an attempt to describe the professional competencies under three areas of action: Adapted Physical Education, Adapted Sports and Leisure Activities, and Adapted Physical Activity for Rehabilitation. Placing its focus on these three areas, the EUSAPA project tries to meet the needs of APA in the member countries; to establish quality academic standards defining specific competencies and learning levels that should be achieved through training, and finally to try to develop a European reference framework with regard to the standards of professional training in the three areas set out in the project. Unfortunately, there are not any Spanish universities among the institutions that are carrying out the project, which somehow reflects the need to encourage the implication of our institutions in this field by increasing studies and research leading towards a better understanding of APA and persons with disabilities in our country, an aim towards which this study is trying to make some contribution too.

Nowadays, in an international context marked by a process of change, adaptation and convergence of university curricula within the European Higher Education Area, identification of the current situation of physical activity related to persons with any form of disability constitutes a compelling necessity, but likewise the task of shaping some sort of consensus on the competencies that Physical Education Teachers must prove to be able to take part in good quality Inclusive Education schemes.

2. OBJECTIVES

Consistent with that setting, this paper tries to analyse and reveal what is the present situation of Adapted Physical Education (APA) in Sport and Physical Activity Sciences Initial Training(IT) of professionals in Spanish universities. Therefore, the fundamental aims of this study are:

- To find out and verify the perception of reputable experts on the initial training within SPAS undergraduate studies of would-be teaching professionals of Physical Education to be able to take part in teaching and learning programmes including persons with disabilities.

- To identify from the experts' discourses the fundamental ingredients which, in their opinion, should be comprised within a competencies framework as a reference tool to give guidance and help in the assessment of training plans and schemes carried out by universities.

3. METHOD

The study was carried out from a qualitative research perspective, focusing on the interviews to a group of outstanding national experts in the fields of APA and training, but also on the non-participant observations taken at the Experts National Conference in Leon, Spain, in March 2011. It is basically the analysis of the contents of the discourses of experts, recognised as such in their working fields and in their circles.

3.1 Participants

A total of 7 experts in APA were selected according to the following criteria: academic qualification; direct involvement in the field of physical activity and persons with disabilities, and teaching experience. What all these experts have got in common is that they have completed postgraduate Physical Education studies and that they teach or have taught university courses in APA, adapted sport, attention to special educational needs or similar. In addition, all of them are or have been university lecturers with a diverse range of teaching experience in private or state universities in Spain. All the chosen experts currently have some kind of engagement in the disability field and are significantly involved in APA and contribute to its progress and development. In summary, these are the participants (their names are coded):

Expert 1 (EXP-1). Man; more than 30 years teaching experience in Physical Education and APA. Author of several publications in that field. He has been a teacher at all levels of the education system: Primary School, Secondary School and University. At present his professional engagement is at University.

Expert 2 (EXP-2). Woman; more than 20 years of engagement and commitment in the field of persons with disabilities. Author of publications in that field. University lecturer in APA to would-be professionals of Physical Activity and Sport for a significant part of her professional career. Now she is engaged in the field of administration related to persons with disabilities.

Expert 3 (EXP-3). Man; more than 15 years of jobs linked to Adapted Physical Activity and Sport. Author of published works in that field. University senior lecturer in undergraduate and postgraduate courses in APA. At present he is engaged in university teaching, administration and research related to Inclusive and Adapted Physical Activity and Sport.

Expert 4 (EXP-4). Man; more than 10 years professional experience in APA and Adapted Sport. University lecturer in undergraduate courses specializing in

Adapted Physical Activity and Sport subjects. Expert in paralympic sports. Counsellor and researcher in that field.

Expert 5 (EXP-5). Woman; more than 10 years professional experience in APA and Adapted Sport in formal and informal settings. Author of published works in that field. At present she is giving an outstanding contribution to undergraduate and postgraduate courses in subjects related to Sport and Physical Activity and Persons with Disabilities.

Expert 6 (EXP6). Man; more than 10 years teaching experience in Physical Education. At present he is a Secondary School PE Teacher in a school that includes pupils with intellectual disabilities. He is also part-time university lecturer in sport training subjects.

Expert 7 (EXP-7). Man. He is the youngest of the group. He is a person with a disability. He is a high performance paralympic athlete. He has got recent experience as a student with a disability in a PE class. He has got a degree in PE and has taught PE subjects at university since 2010.

Therefore they make a group with experience and expertise in the issue at hand from different perspectives, with special interest in the inclusion of persons with disabilities and, in all cases, they have university and non university teaching links in their professional careers. Therefore, they have sufficient knowledge to meet the main aim of this study: to analyse the present situation of IT and the necessary framework of professional competencies that must result from that training process.

3.2 Research tools and techniques

The survey method was carried out in this case through semi-structured interviews to obtain the perceptions and opinions of the key reporters or experts.

The non-participant observation method was applied at the Experts National Conference in Leon in March 2011. Since the agenda of the event was not available well in advance, it was not possible to prepare beforehand an accurate tool to collect information. Nevertheless, attention was focused on gathering information about APA training problems and any experts' talks or statements that might deal with the issue of competencies that would-be professionals should develop.

3.3 Data processing

Two major strands divided into several categories were established to analyse the interviews with the experts: first, IT of PE Teachers and, second, the outline of professional competencies proposed by the experts. The first strand comprised the following categories: IT standards, problems and progress, issues to be included in IT and IT structure. As for the second strand, the

categories were: the importance given by the experts to its definition; past attempts to identify a competencies profile; the structure such profile should have, and the experts' opinion on which should be the fundamental competencies.

3.4 Ethical aspects

All participants were told about the features of the research work, its aims, their part in the project and the relevance of their participation. Also, in the case of the interviewees, relevant written permits were requested before the interviews were recorded (permits were signed).

4. RESULTS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

According to the general structure of the interviews carried out and the system of categories described in the method section, the report of results is divided into two major parts: the perception the participants have of the IT of PE Teachers and the outline of professional competencies held by the experts.

4.1 IT of PE Teachers

4.1.1 About the present situation of IT

All the interviewed experts unanimously hold that at present APA training is insufficient. The following statement is a valid example:

“PE Teachers have a huge deficiency in their IT with regard to the disability world as I have been able to ascertain in very many occasions” (EXP-1, EN-10March2011).

Some of the experts think that the very same teachers who must carry out classes or projects related to APA feel that they have deficiencies in their training, which is demonstrated in the actual teaching training practice (EXP-5, EN-28April2011). That poor perception of competence makes also one of the conclusions of the research carried out to find out about what self-assessment serving teachers make of their own competence when they are teaching in all inclusive settings (Díaz del Cueto, 2009). As this author points out: “PE Teachers themselves feel they have a poor level of competence when they have to handle a diversity of contents in order to help pupils develop their full capacity, taking also into account their personal features” (p. 340). Likewise, the feeling about the real possibilities of playing one's part in the inclusion of persons with disabilities with a minimum guarantee of good standards is apparent in the discourses of the Brazilian PE teachers too, who point out that the participation of these persons is compromised by the teachers' own abilities (Silva, Duarte and Almeida, 2011).

In that sense, in spite of the long time past since Hernández Vázquez and

Hospital Tort (1999) completed their study on attitudes and professional development of *Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO)* teachers in Barcelona—in which teachers' pedagogical deficiencies to deal with special educational needs students were revealed—the interviewed experts confirm the shortfalls in the training system of present and future professionals.

However, there is no agreement among the experts when trying to identify the reasons for the deficient training revealed by reality. The number of credit points awarded to APA related subjects seems to be one possible reason, but some experts think that it is the deficiencies on the training practice rather than insufficient training hours what should be considered. In that sense, the opinion of one of the experts comes to the point when he says about the graduates:

They acquire a basic training, whether it is better or worse it is arguable, I believe they acquire the minimum training to deal with a disability, in this case (...) it depends on the curriculum, it depends mainly on the approach to that subject (EXP-3, EN-1April2011).

Likewise, they put the stress on the lack of consensus on the essential objectives for basic training, explaining that a sufficient initial training “depends on what college we are talking about, but I do believe it, they have got the basic training” (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011).

As it has been several times pointed out, few hours of training are a reality and a hindrance, although some experts put it into question, but there is more consensus when pointing out that the deficiencies of a specific teaching approach are more relevant, and also the lack of touch with the reality of people with disabilities and their link with physical activity (EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

4.1.2 About problems and progress in Initial Training

With regard to the development of Initial Training in recent years, as concerns APA, the experts refer to a series of problems, obstacles or reluctance that have hindered its development in the education system. Among the most important, they point out some problems related to the curricula and the heavy influence of what is traditional or the predominance held by some IT contents. So, what is held as a hindrance to the positive evolution of APA subjects is “the allotment of teaching hours or credit points to the degrees” (EXP-6, EN-31March2011), further more:

The big problem is the absolute lack of training in APA and the lack of interest, by and large, among university teachers. We are often told that we cannot afford the time to talk about adapted sport, because the credit points for sport subjects have been reduced far enough already (EXP-4, EN-2March2011).

In conclusion, according to the experts, on the whole these contents have little

value for universities, therefore *“the lack of required and specific subjects in the curricula has made this field even more unknown”* (EXP-5, EN-28April2011), thereby closing the circle that prevents it from being more present in the curricula. This view is clear and explicit in the following statement:

The curricula of different universities do not seem to appreciate enough the training contents of what might become a speciality within PE. The tug of war between different departments to stockpile credit points for traditional subjects prevent new strands of teaching and research with a professional future from finding their natural place, and it is very difficult to fight against that (EXP-1, EN-10March2011).

Indeed, APA training has not found it easy to make its way through in the university environment. However, according to several experts, this does not seem to be the only problem that has held up its evolution, and they underline that one of the important limitations for the improvement of IT is *“a lack of social awareness of the disability issue”* (EXP-5, EN-1April2011), something which may seem surprising since the Act that allowed integration within the mainstream education, the LOGSE (General Arrangement of the Education System Act), is twenty years old now (Gutiérrez and Caus, 2006). Certainly, as Villagra (2008) points out, laws may facilitate changes, but changes are not achieved by just changing laws, “those teachers who are part of the institution must have the will to change” (p. 70).

This lack of social awareness is made obvious by the different protagonists of the educational process. On the one hand, the experts underline the existence of *“some reluctance... misgivings, lack of sensitivity, and our own colleagues must realize how important it is to provide for these people”* (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011), on the other, they point to the pupils themselves who must share the educational settings with colleagues who have a disability, and they see as a difficulty *“the very same motivation of pupils with regard to this issue, they see it as something alien to them”* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

Resources and infrastructures make another barrier that, according to the experts, has to do with an inadequate development of initial training. And also, as Gutiérrez and Caus (2006) believe, “pedagogy and facilities, that is, the context, must be adapted to attend to the educational needs of special pupils” (p. 4), but also universities should have the resources and facilities to make simulation and practise possible, which must make the foundations of training, but some experts declare that: *“in some Faculties we lack the equipment for practise”* (EXP-7, EN-16March2011), and *“we have got building barriers, a sports hall is on lower ground, there are stairs and the one on a wheel chair cannot get there...”* (EXP-2, EN-Feb2011), all of which prevents training from being up to standard.

Finally, some experts draw attention to the lack of studies and research in this filed, as well as their circulation, as one more hindrance for teachers to make progress in IT of APA:

An astounding lack of regard as far as academic and scientific production is concerned (...) in my view maybe there is no interest on our part, on the part of the very same qualified body (EXP-3, EN-1April2011).

There are few teaching aids, publications, and so on... there is some research being made, but there is little access to that information, little circulation (EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

That lack of research is confirmed by other authors who stress *“the need to increase research efforts in order to understand the factors, conditions and processes that explain that some schools are more successful and appear better prepared to make progress in the right direction”* (Villagra, 2008, p. 65).

All these circumstances give some experts reason to be critical with a possible improvement in APA in recent years:

I cannot perceive any progress in IT of PE teachers, the latest curricula have shamelessly alienated IT (...) training subjects in this speciality have been made optional (sic) and that effectively holds back the quality and the quantity of trained people in this speciality. (EXP-1, EN-10March2011).

However, this opinion is not shared by all the experts, but any possible improvement has remained, it seems, within the basic aims, as it can be inferred from the following opinion of EXP-2: *“at least now we know that it exists, or that they have to be taken into account (...) and they have realised that that training has to be offered to meet their needs”* (EN-14Feb2011).

Nevertheless, the current stage of the development of new curricula is seen by different experts as important for the improvement of training in the field. The following statements are an example of that opinion:

Common core subjects which all undergraduates must undertake for their training are being introduced (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

The changes in the European framework of higher education, which have made us consider what we are doing, have been a spur (EXP-3, EN-1April2011).

Therefore, this seems to be a favourable time to introduce improvements in APA Initial Training. Not only the curricula changes can favour now a boost to the APA Initial Training of PE teachers—as it is emphasised by the experts and some authors (Reina, 2010)—, but also *“there are more and more activities, conferences, seminars, master courses which contribute to make the issue better known”* (EXP-4, EN-2March2011),

which tells us that this reality is gradually finding its way into society. In that regard, it is worth pointing out that *“there are official master courses (as for*

instance the UAM Master Course) *aimed at special population and there is a specific programme focused on the field of disabilities which gets enrolments from countries all over...* (EXP-4, EN-2March2011).

4.1.3 Key issues to be included in initial training.

And together with the opinion that “ignorance and little awareness can cause unsympathetic behaviour which can turn into attitudes of rejection and avoidance” (Ríos, 2007, p.363), there is a point which clearly gathers general agreement, which is the need to introduce in IT those contents that help to raise awareness in would-be professionals of people with disabilities, their rights and the need to overcome the different barriers which hinder their true inclusion. As EXP-2 points out, *“the first thing is to raise undergraduates’ awareness of the situation...”* (EN-14Feb2011) and, eventually, that undergraduates gain higher *“social consciousness”* (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

With that purpose, some means to raise awareness are the following:

Situations, experiences of disability or impaired perception, or movement or decision-making [sic] (...) place them in a position of simulated disability (...) and not just place them there but make them reflect on it (EXP-3, EN-1abril2011).

And at the same time:

Those contents aimed at raising undergraduates’ awareness of a given disability will help them find the way to adapt their classes to prospective pupils with any kind of disability (EXP-7, EN-16March2011).

There is no doubt that attitudes attract a great deal of the opinions of the experts: *“another important and significant issue should be attitudes, or the training of teachers on personal attitudes towards this kind of pupils”* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011). Likewise, the experts stress that it is essential for would-be professionals to keep actual contact with persons with disabilities throughout their training programme; that would make an exceptional means to achieve the desired awareness. So, they suggest that:

Student teaching, for instance, should include a certain number of hours devoted to PE classes with at least some integrated or included pupils with disabilities (EXP-4, EN-2March2011).

And it is stressed over and over again that this kind of work will ease the improvement of some factors in connection to the attitudes of the undergraduates:

Another important and significant issue should be attitudes, ...personal attitudes towards this kind of pupils” (EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

There is no doubt that the attitudes issue takes up a great deal of the reflections of the experts, running the risk that they may give to understand that the problem of training and inclusive education might be solved just with a positive attitude. Thereby, the experts are requested to offer information on other key issues, which gradually brings up mentions of what basic knowledge of different kinds of disability should be attained throughout the initial training process:

A good basis on the features of this kind of pupils (...), without that basis, without understanding the origin on a social level, on a psychological level and on a motor level, we may have a problem(EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

A future teacher must have a basic knowledge of the terminology in use (...) and also of the basic features of the various disabilities (EXP-7, EN-16marzo2011).

As far as method is concerned, they underline how important it is to give undergraduates the necessary tools and resources they must put into practise when they become teachers. There are references to *“tools that help them learn how to implement those adaptations”* (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011), or how important it is that *“a prospective teacher becomes familiar with the materials used in a great many adapted sports”* (EXP-7, EN-16March2011). Also, there are more specific issues pointed out like the importance of *“including methodological points related to one session”* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011) and, in short, that all of them are tools contributing to boost the *“self-learning capacity”* of the pupil with a disability (EXP-4, EN-2 March2011).

Another relevant idea which should be included in IT has to do with the present social reality of adapted sport and the possibilities of APA in society, and with the aim of giving guidance to disable students in their autonomy once they leave the academic field, as it is proposed by the Educational System (LOE, 2006). Hence, it is pointed out that *“you must have the tools to respond to that social demand for sport”* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011), and that *“it is very important that once we know the profile of each disability, we must know the sport potential offered by the wide scope of sports for each disability”* (EXP-7, EN-16March2011).

What is striking is the scanty mentions of the contribution of different associations or national and international bodies. Although it is only fair to admit that at the León Experts Conference (AEMNE-Leon2011) it was firmly proposed to launch some means —a web site, for instance— to share all the studies and research carried out by associations, federations, etc., as well as their links on line.

4.1.4 Structuring Initial Training

A required basic training on APA and the possibility to complete it with elective subjects is the option that most experts prefer, as other specialist authors

likewise do (Ríos, 2009; Reina, 2010). And that is apparent in the discourses on APA subjects:

They should be required in all curricula because all undergraduates should go through that training programme and find that learning about the profile of people with disabilities is fundamental (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

I think it right that there should be a core subject and all undergraduates should take this subject about persons with disabilities. (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011).

I think elective subjects are interesting because they can deal in a more specific way with issues which are not included in core subjects (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

Nevertheless, some experts point to other possibilities which, not being against the general proposal, offer a new perspective of cross-curricular training which contributes to strengthen the development of the necessary abilities, when they are dealt with by several teachers in coordination. In that regard, they point out that:

Every subject should deal with the inclusion of persons with different disabilities, as it is contemplated in the new degrees curricula. (EXP-4, EN-2March2011).

Cross-curricular, different subjects should include this issue in order to give it different viewpoints (EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

Within that context, the need to stress the development of a “special” or specific teaching method comes up again—an idea already expressed when analysing the general awareness of APA—in the cross-curricular training framework, as well as the issue of adaptation of contents which is another key point of curricular and teaching training:

For example, the subject of didactics should include a part where special didactics should be taught... or the basketball teacher, who knows something about persons with disabilities, and since he masters his subject, he must know how to carry out the adaptations (EXP-2, EN-14feb2011).

In short, experts go for integral training which should comprise some basic training (a required subject) strengthened by some cross-curricular training included in the rest of the subjects and to be completed by some elective training which students should choose according to their own pathway. Thus, let us end this part with the opinion of one of the experts: *“It should drift towards normality, that is to say, it should drift towards becoming integrated and unnoticed within each subject so that undergraduates take it as something normal within the diversity of society”* (EXP-4, EN-2March2011).

4.2 The competencies profile to be developed

4.2.1 The relevance of setting down a competencies profile

As it is pointed out in the introduction to this article, few studies have seriously undertaken the task of drawing up a framework of competencies which APA professionals must possess and, more particularly, those PE teachers who must deal with students with disabilities in the curricular development of their subject. The conclusions of works by different authors (Alejandre, 2007; Reina, 2010) point out that vacuum and also the need to draw up a competencies profile. This idea is supported by the experts who took part in our study and who unanimously emphasise not just its relevance but also the need to come to a consensus to give guidance to initial training.

Not only do I consider it important, but also indispensable, because this subject is hardly developed in our country, mostly as far as employment is concerned and that results in little or no interest on the part of the Education Authority to set down some training guidelines in universities (EXP-1, EN-10March2011).

It is not only possible, it is necessary, there should be a well defined set of competencies to be developed by the undergraduates (EXP-6, EN-31marzo2011).

However, notwithstanding the consensus on the importance given to defining a competences profile, some experts foresee what might be the difficulties of designing and consolidating it, and they doubt such profile may be set down: “...so long as there is not a specific concept of APA, what is fundamental?...”. Although they specify that it is essential to tackle the job as swiftly as possible:

Yes, that would be positive proof that they are working to train persons who will professionally deal with that issue (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

Nevertheless, from our non-participant observation at the Experts National Conference in León (AEMNE-León2011), we can confirm that although there is a group of people working hard to improve teaching standards for persons with disabilities, there is not a sound footing on which any studies in this field may find solid basis, more particularly any studies and research papers aiming at fixing a common competencies profile that might aid in the planning of APA courses in the Spanish universities diverse curricula.

Maybe, some of the keys to understand the lack of perspectives leading to the design of a competencies profile must be found in the very same novelty of the term. Thus, while the importance of its design is stressed, there are doubts about one's own capacity:

At university level we are the last ones to set out work on the competencies approach, that is, I must plan the competencies I have to create in my students... I haven't been trained on that myself (EXP-3, EN-1April2011).

4.2.2 Attempts to set down a competencies framework

As a matter of fact, some of the experts taking part in our study show little knowledge with regard to attempts, forums and research under way to define a competencies framework to train people who are working in APA. Nevertheless, some of them mention some activities carried out years back:

In Spain, a lot of years ago there was a Spanish Association of Human Movement and Physical Activity (AEMNE), we all took part in there, education teachers as well as Science of Sport university teachers, and the purpose was to find a common track and to bring all views together (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011).

However, as it is seen on the latest meeting of the association report (AEMNE-León 2011), where we were guests, it has been a valuable and creative initiative, but not developed enough nor used in practice, thereby it is undergoing a new planning and launching process. At this stage, in the absence of national initiatives which last long enough to reach consensus on key points to set down any competencies frameworks, some of the experts declare to have some knowledge of the international initiatives:

The EUSAPA, which is a low-grade copy of the American version, offers a national certificate of basic training in APA which every professional should get (EXP-3, EN-1April2011).

Nevertheless, they also say that such proposals must be taken with the caution due to implementing that sort of initiatives in a specific professional field, since “...that professional is not defined in the professional regulation”, but finally, it is admitted that initiatives of that kind are valuable to lead the internal debate and, in conclusion, “...envisage what someone in a specific field should know” (EXP-3, EN-1April2011).

4.2.3 Fundamental competencies for setting out a training profile and its organising framework.

Although there is no clear agreement on a possible outline of a competencies framework, the experts' discourses can be classified under the three preceptive stages of any teaching project: planning, teaching and assessment. An arrangement which at the same time must include those elements that make competencies a mixed identity, that is, knowledge, abilities and attitudes, which are integral to any professional task.

In that regard, the experts emphasise once again a key ingredient of the

competencies in this field, which is professional attitudes. Matching the perspectives of other authors who regard attitudes as a basic premiss to take part and contribute to the upbringing and development of persons with disabilities (Ríos, 2007), the issue of awareness of people with disabilities is mentioned as a priority in the discourses of a number of the interviewed experts:

Awareness of people with disabilities, empathy, the teacher must believe in what he is doing (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011).

To be aware of the social reality of people with disabilities in all the areas of their development and act accordingly (EXP-1, EN-10March2011).

That very same idea is found in those discourses which always emphasise the ability to *“try by all possible means that the inclusion of a student with a particular disability is feasible”* (EXP-7, EN-16March2011), because it is a fact that the students are present in the classroom or in the gym, and so this battle may seem to have been won long ago, but it is well known that “being there” does not necessarily mean “belonging there”, an inclusive attitude on the part of the teacher is essential to substantiate that reality (Echeita y Homand, 2008).

Beyond the attitude “ground”, as we have pointed out above, trying to define a competencies outline that initial training must develop does not seem to be an easy task, and basic knowledge and the application teachers should make of it get mixed up in the discourses. At the same time, from those ideas it is possible to infer a proposal of aims, although in some cases they are given from the viewpoint of the university teacher and, in some others, from that of the undergraduates. In that context, expressions like *“give the student a general outline of the person and the disability”* (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011), or *“to know and to understand the historical evolution of APA for persons with disabilities”* (EXP-4, EN-2March2011), clear the way for expressions that come closer to the proposal of competencies:

To implement the equal opportunities and fundamental rights for men and women, the principles of equal opportunities and universal access for persons with disabilities and those values that belong in a culture of peace and democratic values (EXP-4, EN-2March2011).

When it comes to specifying points of contents, adapted sport is the only reference mentioned by some of the experts. The student *“must know at the very least what adapted sport consists of”* (EXP-3, EN-1April2011) and his training must enable him *“to become a booster of the development of adapted sport”* (EXP-7, EN-16March2011).

Although it might be argued that these ideas stand aside of the educational area, we consider that, on the one hand, schools must instil in all their students a series of healthy habits and, on the other, they must give information about the possibilities of physical activity out of the educational system and timetable.

In that regard they refer to *“an efficient management, mostly to do the planning, preparing sport activities, within their area”* (EXP-5, EN-28April2011), thus opening a wide scope of possibilities of participation to people with disabilities.

Curricular design and development is vigorously stressed by the experts, emphasising its importance and making several references to competencies development as part of a specific teaching method, in order to:

Do the planning or defining the objectives, to design teaching-learning situations for these students to have the same possibilities of success as any other (EXP-6, EN-31April2011).

To have the basic knowledge to draw up and apply curriculum adaptations to prospective needs related to disabilities (EXP-1, EN-10March2011).

To plan any project to be carried out, because it is essential that there is a pattern of what is to be developed in persons with disabilities (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

And such competencies get again further reference when they deal with the issue of including in the training programmes the design of curriculum materials that give more efficiency to an all inclusive teaching-learning process: *“the creativity competence that a PE teacher may have when designing, for instance, new materials, because there is a lot of research to be done yet”* (EXP-5, EN-28April2011). Creativity when it comes to designing and creating new materials, will give the teacher the ability to find new ways to carry out all sorts of activities, the possibility to renew and bring up to date his course plans, the opportunity to continuously motivate his students to always take part in every prepared activity and the advantage to save money, given the high cost of many adapted materials.

The direction and management of tasks in PE lessons is the right time to put into practise the knowledge, abilities and attitudes comprised in the competencies to be applied in teaching and learning processes. The experts do not clearly deal with the topics related to key knowledge issues, particularly their application, and they define a profile which has more to do with the attitudes of the professional: *“that person must be very dynamic, very active, that is, he must have a very sharp mind...”* (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011), or he must stand out in *“social competence”*, a mention made when pointing out that teachers must develop a social commitment, which is specified as *“the way to establish relationships and communication with students... since many times it is not easy to establish that communication”* (EXP-5, EN-28April2011).

On more precise ground, with regard to teaching practise, they refer to a professional who is capable of *“developing resources to distinguish situations”* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011) when it comes to giving autonomy and, more or less, conducting activities, depending on the specific characteristics of each student. These resources are specified by some of the experts: *“I find it*

essential to handle specific resources of adapted sport or PE, adapted materials, and also to cope with technology because major breakthroughs are being made which bring better working conditions for people" (EXP-5, EN-28April2011). Likewise, they stress how important it is that the teacher has the ability to make it possible for *"each student to find his own profile of motor performance or his own profile of adaptation to the group"* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011).

In the area of assessment, following the idea that reflection about practice is one of the keys to teacher professional training and development (Fraile, 2004), the experts refer to a professional who is capable of using the *"feedback after reflection, what is useful and what is not..."* (EXP-2, EN-14Feb2011) to improve the applied proposals. Other experts insist on the need for training to focus its attention on the development of assessment competencies, referring at times to *"the existing problems to assess a curricular adaptation"* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011), although they go beyond the assessment of particular cases when they say that *"the different bodies should coordinate their work to monitor those adaptations"* (EXP-6, EN-31March2011), which seems rather unlikely, on the other hand, since at the moment that subject does not have the importance that others have to justify so much effort. However, we can see that other authors (Ríos, 2007) highlight the importance of a coordinated job for any action to be really successful, declaring that *"assuming diversity will imply to turn it into a collective job, in which every member of the school community should get involved"* (p. 217).

With regard to the latter point, although some authors like Castejón (2010) also explain the importance of self-assessment within the teaching job when he declares that *"self-assessment and reflection are joint processes in good teaching standards"* (p. 68), and that, besides, the competence of reflection is evident in the statements of the interviewed experts, we must say that the specific competencies to be included in IT are not clearly defined.

5. CONCLUSIONS Y PERSPECTIVES

This study has focused on reputed experts' perception of the initial training that prospective physical education teachers have to be able to practise inclusive teaching for persons who have some kind of disability. To that purpose, by means of semi-structured interviews, the experts have set out their knowledge of the initial training situation and the key issues that it should comprise, and they have also tried to specify a possible outline of professional competencies.

When it comes to establishing the most relevant conclusions it can be underlined that, although there is a certain agreement about how insufficient student teacher training is, some experts question such insufficiency on the basis of the subject development that different universities offer. Beneath the surface there is an underlying positive opinion about the improvement achieved by inclusive educational training, an opinion which is based on the better knowledge of reality that working in all inclusive settings applying APA gives, and also about the improvement of the training of trainers of would-be

professionals and, on that account, the university teaching in that field. However there are clear obstacles to a permanent evolution of that improvement, such as not very favourable believes in the expectations of what can possibly be carried out with persons with disabilities and the real value of physical activity for their social and personal development.

Nevertheless, its inclusion into initial training as a required subject in the new curricula is well regarded by the experts, since it opens the way to basic training for all students, although all of them point out the need to include some elective subjects to complement that basic training. In order to improve that training, all the interviewed experts as well as those who attended the Experts National Conference in León agree unanimously about the need to boost the development of research strands on APA and the persons with disabilities.

The experts call our attention to the need to place initial training in a direction based on an precise competencies framework agreed by consensus. However, they are aware of the poor progress made by different attempts to draw up a developed competencies framework in initial training, by international initiatives like EUSAPA, as well as by national ones like AEMNE.

In this regard, although the experts agree on some of the points of what might be understood as a proposal of design of competencies in initial training, it must be stressed that they are incomplete proposals in which, by and large, they only mention some of the elements which at present comprise the concept of competence (knowledge, ability and attitude). Among such elements, the experts agree to highlight attitudes as the key substratum of professional competencies for inclusive physical education. Awareness of the social reality of disability as well as a positive attitude towards this issue make in their opinion the key elements to carry out any action with the basic requirements for good education standards.

In order to define the knowledge contents of the fundamental competencies, issues related to terminology, characteristics of persons with disabilities and their context and features of adapted physical activity should be taken into consideration. That knowledge should enable professionals to display their abilities, as a practical component of competencies, and apply adequate and valid techniques and tools to assess the needs of their students, and that would lead the way to complement it with another competence: designing, planning and implementing curricular adaptations at all levels, taking them as a must and an essential competence in an initial training process. The ability to adapt tasks and activities to the specific educational needs of students in PE classes would complement the application of curricular adaptations and render it possible.

The demands of the experts about the competence of appropriately using adapted materials in activities with persons with disabilities go along these lines too, with a view that these persons achieve key knowledge and gain confidence and attachment to the practice of physical activity.

The experts have not overlooked a key issue for good standards of teaching practise. They point out that knowledge and skills should be applied to assess

their own planning and adaptations and teachers should keep a self-critical frame of mind to enable self-evaluation as well as the improvement and professional development of teaching.

It must be pointed out that a reduced number of experts also talk about a competence to conduct and coordinate actions, persons and institutions in order to get persons with disabilities involved in the educational process, although there are some difficulties to make a clear and precise definition of it.

In conclusion and to sum up, it is difficult to formulate an agreed judgement on the possible progress made by PE teaching initial training since the Salamanca Statement (1994). There is no doubt that the absence of a clear competencies framework to be developed by initial training adds to the difficulty of analysing the current situation of training, since the lack of any agreed criteria for such framework allows each expert to make his judgements from not sufficiently explicit conceptual perspectives.

One of the contributions of this study has been to explore the experts' discourse to find possible agreements and disagreements, or lacunae in some cases, which may serve as a starting point to define a competencies framework to underpin initial training subjects, but also to give that training the test that might decide to what extent there are enough possibilities for student teachers to achieve the key competencies.

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