

Collaboration Between Special and Physical Education

The Benefits of a Healthy Lifestyle for All Students

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Mr. Smith is a high school physical education (PE) teacher who has an average of 40 students in each class period. His classes are diverse, each including at least one student with a disability. His students are diagnosed with a variety of disabilities, which results in a wide range of cognitive and physical challenges in a PE classroom. One of the students has a one-on-one paraprofessional who assists him throughout the school environment. Others attend with their classroom peers but seem to need more support than students without disabilities.

Ms. Garcia is an elementary PE teacher who sees her students only one to two days a week for 30 minutes. Her classes are smaller, but she must compete with the lunch and assembly schedules on top of her already limited schedule for PE class. She has a variety of students with multiple abilities who may need physical accommodations as well as emotional ones.

Often, Mr. Smith and Ms. Garcia are unsure how to support their students and provide them with meaningful experiences. They realize some students with disabilities do not fully participate in their classes, but they are not sure how to make appropriate changes.

Moreover, during recent professional development, Mr. Smith and Ms. Garcia have learned about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). They recognize that in order to align their instruction to CCSS and to meet the needs of all of their students, they will have to collaborate with other professionals at their school.

Benefits of Physical Education

PE has holistic benefits for all students, including those with disabilities, as it supports the development of three critical learning areas: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective (“Adapted Physical Education,” 2012; Bailey, 2006; Burgeson, 2004). PE is potentially the main source of physical activity and the development of physical skills for many children and youth (Bailey, 2006; Burgeson, 2004). In other words, PE class is where students have a chance to learn the importance of an active lifestyle and advance their physical skills. According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2013c), an active lifestyle has numerous benefits, including (a) increasing blood to the brain,

(b) increasing mental alertness, and (c) helping to maintain a positive attitude. Exercise increases the heart’s ability to maintain efficiency and prevent illness, allowing students to attend school more often (NASPE, 2013c). Regular exercise also raises students’ self-esteem and decreases their chance of developing depression or other mental illnesses (NASPE, 2013c). A survey conducted by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and NASPE demonstrates that collectively, teachers, parents, and students consider PE a key component of a school day (Burgeson, 2004). Students who participate in PE will benefit holistically and may experience more success throughout their school years and adulthood (Burgeson, 2004).

Most students spend an average of 6 hour sitting, from the time they travel on the bus or car to school to the time they head home from school. This substantially contributes to the daily amount of time spent inactive. The majority of time spent in school, students are asked to sit down, sit still, be quiet, and listen. Such inactivity can be very difficult for many children but can be exceptionally difficult for a student with limited physical mobility, intellectual or social delays, and

sensory impairments. This may lead them to get off task and ultimately decrease their opportunity for success ("Adapted Physical Education," 2012).

Physical education has holistic benefits for all students, including those with disabilities, as it supports the development of three critical learning areas: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), people with disabilities have an increased chance of health difficulties. Obesity rates for children with disabilities are 38% higher than for their peers without disabilities; furthermore, adults with disabilities have a 58% higher chance of being obese than adults without disabilities (CDC, 2010). All children should be receiving quality PE. Arguably, students with disabilities need to have access to PE more than students without disabilities due to already diagnosed health and mental difficulties; however, the majority of students who receive special education services in a self-contained setting do not receive quality PE (Block, Taliaferro, Campbell, Harris, & Tipton, 2011).

Several factors can contribute to the higher obesity rates of students with disabilities. In particular, students with disabilities may have limited access to healthy food, have difficulty chewing or swallowing food, take medications with side-effects such as weight gain or changes in appetite, possess physical limitations or experience pain with movement, or accessible environments (CDC, 2014). A study by Chen, Kim, Houtrow, and Newacheck (2009) examined the prevalence of obesity rates for specific conditions and found that, when compared to the 12.2% obesity rate of students without disabilities, students with asthma (19.7%), hearing/vision disabilities (18.4%), learning disabilities (19.3%), autism (23.4%), and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (18.9%) were at higher risk for

obesity. Although a high percentage of students with disabilities spend more time in school than their peers without disabilities (i.e., special education services support students ages 3 through 21), they are spending less time in PE and more time working vigorously to keep up with the curriculum (Burgeson, 2004). This situation is even more problematic when one considers legal regulations. The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006) specifies that students with disabilities must be "afforded the opportunity to participate" in any PE program that is available to their typically developing peers, with the exception of students with disabilities who are enrolled full-time in a separate facility or who need specially designed PE as prescribed in their individualized education program (IEP; 34 C.F.R. 300.108[b]). In such cases, "the public agency responsible for the education of the child must provide the services directly or make arrangements for those services to be provided through other public or private programs" (34 C.F.R. §300.108[d]).

All students need not only adequate movement but also a mental break from working in the classroom. PE has the potential to give students with disabilities a chance to get out of their seats and move, which can serve as a mental break. Some may argue that in the elementary setting, recess allows these breaks; however, recess alone is not sufficient in teaching children the necessary skills and knowledge to sustain an active lifestyle (NASPE, 2013a).

Situations like the one experienced by Mr. Smith and Ms. Garcia are not uncommon; in fact, they occur all too often across the United States. Many teachers like Mr. Smith and Ms. Garcia would like to include students with disabilities in their PE curriculum and give them quality instruction. However, some teachers struggle to meaningfully include students with disabilities due to lack of preparation and support.

Some school districts make specific efforts to align Common Core

standards with PE. For example, PE programs can incorporate domain-specific phrases and content vocabulary such as *warm up*, *aerobic*, and *small twitch muscle*.

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In addition PE supports students' college and career readiness through the mastery of fitness components, weight control, safe strength training activities, understanding the benefits of an active lifestyle, and learning time management skills in order to schedule exercise. Physical activities may be especially challenging for some students with disabilities and for the PE teachers who are unprepared to support individuals with exceptional learning needs in their classes (Block et al., 2011; Smith & Green, 2004).

Need for Collaboration

According to a qualitative study conducted by Smith and Green (2004), many teachers felt unable to deliver *appropriate* PE to pupils with disabilities due to the lack of support and information from the rest of the educational team. The definition of a *team* emphasizes individuals from a variety of disciplines and experiences with unique expertise getting together in order to reach specific goals (Friend & Cook, 2010). School staff members need to support each other as a team in order to achieve meaningful outcomes for their students (Kowalski, Lieberman, & Daggett, 2006). Duchardt, Marlow, Inman, Christensen, and Reeves (2011) noted that, "No longer can a teacher in a classroom with diverse learners meet all the educational, social, and emotional needs of his or her students. It takes collaboration among all professionals in

Figure 1. Building Collaboration With Physical Education Teachers

- Provide information to the physical education teacher on students' strengths and share ideas for appropriate adaptations.
- Provide guidance to the physical education teacher on how to set appropriate expectations based upon students' strengths and abilities.
- Include the physical education teacher in the IEP process (Kowalski et al., 2006).
- Collaborate with the physical educator, physical therapist, school psychologist, and social worker to discuss how IEP goals can be supported through physical education.

a school system to educate all students" (p. 189). Thus, the special educator should facilitate collaboration among team members, including the physical educator.

Special educators and physical educators will enhance the quality of their students' PE if they collaborate on a regular basis (Kowalski et al., 2006). Physical educators are often left out of developing students' IEPs, thus experiencing a "disconnect" in the IEP process (Kowalski et al., 2006). PE should be an integral part of each student's development, and physical educators should not be excluded from the IEP process (Kowalski et al., 2006). Special educators should prevent this negative situation from occurring as it indirectly affects the outcomes of students. Figure 1 presents specific ideas for improving collaboration among special and physical educators.

Clear and constant communication between special and physical educators is a great way to also ensure students' safety in PE classes. When physical educators are informed about medical challenges students experience, they can better prepare the PE environment and curriculum. Most special educators work in school districts that do not have certified adaptive physical educators (Block et al., 2011; Lytle, Lavay, & Rizzo, 2010). In addition most regular PE teachers do not have the necessary experience working with students who have disabilities (Block et al., 2011; Smith & Green, 2004). Therefore collaboration is the key. Figure 2 presents additional collaboration strategies for special and physical educators.

One important area for collaboration is safety of students with disabilities during physical activities. Establishing

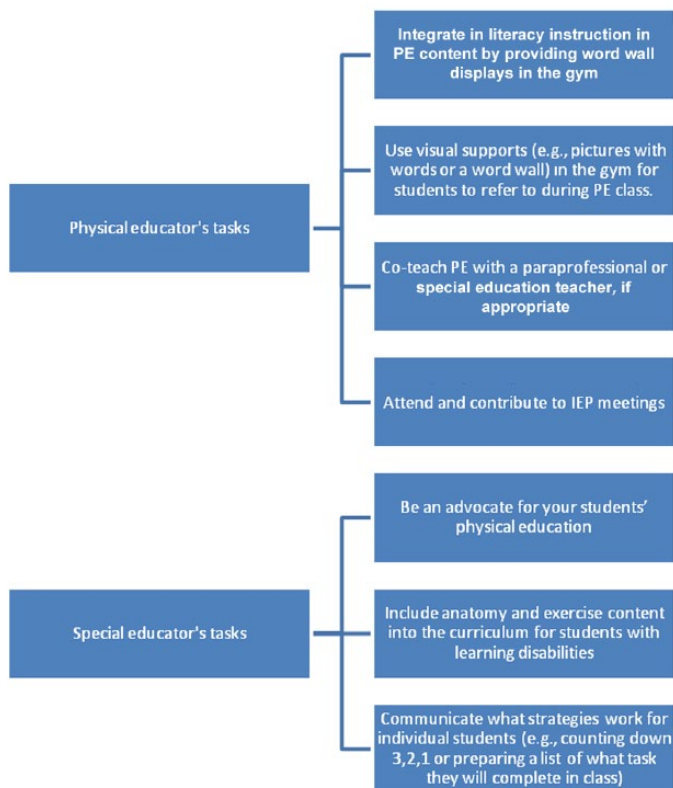
rules and following safe routines is critical to ensuring students' safety, regardless of whether they participate in PE class independently or with the support of an adapted PE teacher, a special educator, or a paraprofessional ("Adapted Physical Education," 2012; Lieberman, James, & Ludowa, 2004). It is critical to include paraprofessionals in all collaboration efforts between special and physical educators. Although the safety of students with disabilities is primarily the responsibility of the special educator, teacher assistants are given multiple tasks related to supporting students at risk or those with identified

disabilities in inclusive settings (Giangreco & Broer, 2005).

At the beginning of the school year or when a new student with disabilities joins a class, there are several collaborative strategies that could be in place to eliminate safety risks:

- Special education teacher, paraprofessionals, and PE teacher should familiarize themselves with the student's IEP (Kowalski et al., 2006; Lieberman et al., 2004).
- All professionals need to understand the student's strengths, weaknesses, needed modifications, and medical

Figure 2. Collaboration Ideas Between Physical Education and Special Education Teachers



history (“Adapted Physical Education,” 2012).

- Collaboratively, the team should establish goals for PE and discuss any relevant health concerns (Kowalski et al., 2006).
- Special educator should train the PE teacher and paraprofessionals to support students’ particular physical needs (e.g., how to safely transfer a student out of and into a wheelchair; “Adapted Physical Education,” 2012).
- Any staff member assisting a student in PE class should wear comfortable and safe clothing, avoiding high-heel shoes, skirts, dresses, and any other clothing that may limit movement.
- Special educators should treat the PE teacher and paraprofessionals as team members and include them in all decisions related to health and physical well-being (Kowalski et al., 2006; Lieberman et al., 2004).

Mr. Smith and Ms. Garcia realize that alone they may struggle to provide appropriate physical education to students with disabilities; thus, they need to collaborate with special educators in their respective schools. Such collaboration may entail classroom observations, consultations, reading research studies, contacting other PE teachers outside of their school, and professional development at live or video conferences, such as state American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD) conferences.

Practical Solutions

The first step for all teachers is to realize that PE and physical activities have the potential to benefit all students. Next, they need to recognize the need for collaboration across the fields. Last, it is important to have a solid grasp of practical strategies to incorporate physical activities and collaboration practices into every school day.

At the elementary level, PE goals should aim to improve locomotor skills; object control skills; and perceptual

motor skills, including body awareness, spatial awareness, and balance (Kowalski, Pucci, Lieberman, & Mulawka, 2005). Aquatics, rhythm, and dance are also important at this age level. At the secondary level, sport skills, physical fitness, aquatics, lifetime activities, and community-based activities are more appropriate and standard (Kowalski et al., 2005). Each student will be at a different level in PE, just as they are in the general classroom. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of skills to teach, paired with potential adaptations, video examples, and alignment to the CCSS.

All PE instruction should be based on a quality assessment to ensure students’ safety and success (Kowalski et al., 2006). Special educators and physical educators should determine what modifications, if any, are needed to improve all students’ weaknesses and help them meet the NASPE standards and CCSS.

Some strategies employed by PE teachers may include the following:

- Provide the necessary support to students with disabilities when giving assignments in or out of PE class (for a list of potential adaptations, see Table 1).
- Access opportunities for professional development (Figure 3 has a list of professional development resources that special educators can share with their physical educators).
- Include more nontraditional sports and activities (e.g., Four Square, dancing, or yoga) along with traditional games.
- Encourage students without disabilities to be leaders or peer partners during activities that may present a challenge for students with disabilities (Lieberman et al., 2004).
- Encourage students with disabilities to demonstrate their strengths as teacher assistants as appropriate (“Adapted Physical Education,” 2012).

Ms. Garcia’s number one priority is to give her students as many opportunities as possible to exercise outside of PE class. She makes sure to

include lifetime activities, such as yoga, step aerobics, wall ball, cycling, aquatics, and nature walks, that can be done individually in and out of school. She also makes sure to include more traditional lifetime sports, like golf, basketball, cone ball, rock climbing, and softball for her students so that they can learn appropriate sportsmanship and team skills when they exercise with others.

There is a variety of strategies for special educators to help their students reap the benefits of physical activity and prevent further health complications. The following steps will allow you to provide these benefits to your students:

1. Collaborate with a PE teacher as well as a physical therapist to create safe physical activities for all students (see Figures 2 and 3 for a list of specific collaboration strategies).
2. When creating a student’s schedule, include 2- to 5-minute “movement breaks” at the end of each hour or unit to provide opportunities for physical activities (“Adapted Physical Education,” 2012).
3. Suggest to general educators to include movement breaks in their classes for all students.
4. Many students, including those with autism spectrum disorder, benefit from sitting on an exercise ball rather than a chair to help control sensory-based behavior (Mays, Beal-Alvarez, & Jolivet, 2011).
5. Include a movement corner in the resource and/or general education classrooms for students to complete timed activity breaks when necessary.
6. To include parents in the PE process, have students complete activities with their parents or siblings as homework (Kowalski et al., 2006; Table 2 includes helpful resources).
7. Encourage students to go outside at recess and participate in physical activities, such as soccer games, jump rope games, Four Square, or imaginary games with their peers.
8. Get involved in creating inclusive community-based physical activities (see Table 2).

Table 1. Resources for Aligning Physical Skills Instruction With Adaptations and CCSS

Skill	Potential adaptations	Video examples and web site resources	CCSS to alignment
Elementary			
Locomotor skills: Walking Running Jumping Hopping Skipping Sliding Galloping Leaping	Provide one-on-one support Provide wall or bar support Provide line/jump rope guide Focus on functional movements of the individual Provide pictures with definitions	<i>Physical Education: 8 Basic Locomotor Skills</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVJel-cmvV0) <i>Sliding</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhfs4JxNRE) Additional videos on YouTube's Adapted Physical Education Channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2r9DMOa-PoD4JmJbCB2l_A)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.1.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1
Flexibility and balance	Stretch <i>all</i> body parts Teach students to listen to their bodies Stretch to a mild discomfort (stretching should not be painful) Offer peer or teacher assistance Collaborate with physical therapist for individual safe stretches Use personal wheelchair to stretch the core Use yoga mats, straps, and resistance bands	<i>Exercise Video for People with Intellectual and Physical Disabilities</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQOilFnoyfc&list=UUPXEjqHlk40Yltj_qX4dQ&index=3) <i>Yoga for Individuals with Disabilities</i> (http://www.nchpad.org/295/1834/) <i>Yoga ~ for ~ Individuals ~ with ~ Disabilities</i> <i>WheelChair Yoga—Health and Wellness</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4go9rsnKNmA)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2.D
Coordination: Object control Body awareness Spatial awareness	Use balloons to catch Use large exercise balls Use a ball on a string Have students catch a ball rolling down a ramp or chute Use a bounce pass and say the student's name	<i>Fun Games for Kids Online</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vemSjflkg4) <i>Adapted Physical Education Class</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5hTa3X4u1A)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.5
Attention and motivation	Provide short and clear instructions Assign small tasks Use bright objects Include word walls and instructional cards for each activity Eliminate distractions Post a student's personal goal where they can refer to it Include sports and games that student enjoys Keep a consistent class structure	<i>Flxercise—Fun Active Learning for Kids</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oravQUX2oV0) <i>Literacy in Physical Education: Word Wall</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9eDgcMZdf4) <i>Fitness Card Game</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NutT1juXPjQ) <i>Brain Gym Exercise for Students</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5ChXC-rHLE)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1
Aquatics	Use visual schedules Provide assistive technology supports (floatation belt, water noodle, barbell, etc.) Use verbal cues ("Reach for the sky," "High five," "Blow your bubbles," etc.) Use visual cues	<i>Swim School: Real Look Autism Episode 12</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqjYfG55ic)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Skill	Potential adaptations	Video examples and web site resources	CCSS to alignment
Secondary			
Sport skills: Volleying Dribbling Batting Kicking Catching	Use bigger or softer balls Provide a tee for hitting Alternate hands Provide wall support Provide a variety of cues Provide Velcro straps for wrist and equipment Provide clear tactile markings Perform skills while sitting	<i>Volleying</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXadB58eM94) <i>Hitting with Baseball Bat</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbJVU5pqBYy) <i>Kicking</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uM_TWT6PeY) <i>Creative Hula-Hoop Ideas</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLMECVRU6LE)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B
Physical fitness: Cardiovascular Muscular strength Muscular endurance Flexibility	Use adapted cardiovascular machines Provide peer mentors Use larger equipment Offer fitness plans and logging stations Provide handout Use Braille mats	<i>Modified Core Strength Workout</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulnYI8qgM3k) <i>Adapted Physical Education for Students with Disabilities</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag6kPuVeHbU) <i>Adapted Physical Education Pushup Equipment for Students</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPzXJ3Nqi-k)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.6
PE homework and assignments	Collaborate with PE and classroom teachers Overlap assignments where appropriate Allow supported time to log exercise, calculate heart rate, reflect, or complete class reading	<i>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Physical Activity Log</i> (http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/pdf/physical_activity_diary_cdc.pdf) <i>Pedometers, HRMs, Bikes, & Trikes</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSJ3AE7Z5Oo)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.6
Outside of physical education			
General and special education class	Include activity breaks Integrate grade-level content	<i>Fuel Up to Play 60 tools</i> (http://school.fuelup60.com/tools/view.php?id=15749467) <i>Action Words</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF9qrV7P8tk)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.3
Lifetime activities	Run/walk for time rather than distance Use sounds to help guide students to their goal Teach independence	<i>Staff Training for Physical Education for Children with VI</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77fyMsRWYs) <i>Adaptive P.E. Games for the Blind and Visually Impaired Students</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB9eCkh4Ryk)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.D

Note. CCSS = Common Core State Standards; PE = physical education.

Figure 3. Professional Development for Adaptive Physical Education

Adapted Physical Education (APE) Webinars
<http://www.shapeamerica.org/prodev/webinars/adapted/>
 Adapted Physical Education Assessment Scale (APEAS) II: Adaptive PE Assessment Scale
<http://www.shapeamerica.org/prodev/workshops/adapted/apeas.cfm>
 Adaptive Physical Education National Standards (APENS) Certification
<http://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/adapted/>

Table 2. Family Activities and Community Resources

Website	Type of resource
www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/health-and-wellness/fitness	Physical fitness activities for families for children with autism
https://kidcompanions.com/children-with-special-needs-benefits-of-physical-activities-and-adaptive-sports/#.U2FpyCghF8F	Ideas for physical activities and adaptive sports
http://health.oregonstate.edu/IMPACT	Individualized Movement and Physical Activity for Children Today (IMPACT) program and video
http://www.specialolympics.org/build_communities.aspx	Special Olympics information
http://www.mindbodysolutions.org/yoga/adapative-yoga/	Adaptive yoga information

9. Never use physical activity as a punishment or negative consequence when a student is misbehaving or has not done what has been asked. According to NASPE (2009), exercise used as punishment is a form of corporal punishment due to the physical pain (physical or mental) put on a child as a penalty for disapproved behavior.

Now that Mr. Smith and Ms. Garcia have adapted PE strategies and collaborated with other professionals, they feel confident that all of their students regardless of ability level may be successful PE participants. Moreover, they understand that with a meaningful PE curriculum, their students have a better chance to engage in an active and healthy lifestyle and therefore improve the quality of their lives.

Final Thoughts

The PE classroom has the potential to be the main place for children to learn how to live a physically active life. Students with disabilities need

academic as well as functional skills in their education so that they may be successful contributing members of society. Due to differences in circumstances and abilities, some children will have full-time jobs, some will graduate from college, and some may have families; however, everyone, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, culture, strengths, or weaknesses, will have a body to take care of for the rest of their life. All students should have an opportunity to lead a meaningful life to the greatest extent of their physical abilities, and it is our job as special and physical educators to prepare them for it.

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