Adapting Physical Education for Students with Disabilities

Students who need extra support in physical education can learn and develop along with their typical peers if they have the opportunity and an appropriate environment for physical activity. The spirit of inclusion is that these students become part of the action even though they may require additional assistance to participate. The teacher’s role is so decide which modifications are needed and how much assistance is appropriate. This handout focuses on practical suggestions to help the teacher actively include students with disabilities in the physical education program.

**Teaching Tips for Game Play**

Adapting for object manipulation needs

* Reduce playing area size
  + Change boundary lines.
  + Increase numbers of players on a team.
* Modify Rules
  + As needed to meet the needs of the group/individual but ensure that the intention of the original game is retained.
  + Substitute kneeling or sitting for standing activities.
  + Allow for substitutions during the game.
  + Throw rather than kick.
  + Allow additional strikes/throws/kicks.
  + Change the scoring system.
* Adapt Equipment
  + Use lighter equipment; balls, racquets, etc.
  + Lower nets, targets bigger/closer.
  + Use contrasting colors or fluorescent tape/markers for students with visual impairments.
* Slow Moving Objects
  + Increase size/decrease weight of balls. Use balloons.
  + Decrease air pressure in balls.
  + Change the throwing style: toss or chest pass vs. overhand throw.
  + Rolling balls are easier to track than bouncing balls. Bouncing balls are easier to track than a thrown ball.

Adapting for mobility needs: Wheelchairs, walkers, and other walking devices

* Modify Rules
  + Provide frequent rest periods.
  + Assign player to a specific position or playing area.
  + Pair student up with a peer buddy.
  + Substitute kneeling or sitting for standing activities.
  + Substitute walking or rolling for other locomotor activities.
* Adapt Equipment
  + Balls: larger, softer and brightly colored. Ensure ball is large enough that it will not get stuck under wheelchair footplates. Use balloons.
  + Extend the handle for hockey sticks or racquets.

Adapting for cognitive or communication needs

* Break down the rules/components of a game down and introduce to the student gradually.
* Start with three game rules only.
* Repeat the concept in a short and concise way.
* Practice skills separately (handling the ball, passing the ball, shooting on goal) before putting them in a game situation.
* Use hand over hand assistance when needed (proper grip on a stick or racquet).
* Use visual aids or a written set of rules.
* Use a variety of ways to explain- verbal and modeling.
* Make adaptations as needed for students to effectively use communication devices.

Adapting for behavior and/or social needs

* Use equipment that will make the objective possible (lighter bat) and obvious (color coordinated equipment).
* Use peers to emphasize the importance of full participation- everyone has to touch the ball in order to score.
* Prepare the student for a specific team position that can be practiced.
* Acknowledge appropriate and good behavior/fair play.
* Use cooperative games when appropriate.

**Teaching Tips for Dance**

Adapting for object manipulation needs

* Use slow music with a strong, definite beat.
* Increase dancing space between students.
* Velcro, ties and ‘sticky gloves’ can be used to facilitate grasping to instruments if used.
* Clapping should be introduced slowly as it requires a higher level of coordination.

Adapting for mobility needs: Wheelchairs, walkers, and other walking devices

* Hands can do the movement of the legs.
* Use ribbons, batons or musical instruments as extensions of the body.
* Guide students with visual impairments through movements until learned.
* Physical assistance can be used when needed and appropriate.

Adapting for cognitive or communication needs

* Mapping floor patterns with tape or footprints.
* Use partners- follow the leader or mirroring.
* Allow extra opportunities for practice.
* Use precise verbal instruction accompanied by a visual demonstration and/or physical assistance.
* Videotape performance to use as visual example.

Adapting for behavior and/or social needs

* Let students use their favorite music.
* Use variable-speed players to slow pace of song to increase success.
* Videotape performance and give positive feedback (“catch them being good”).
* Be mindful that all students receive praise for the movements they create.

**Teaching Tips for Individual/Partner Activities**

Adapting for object manipulation needs

* Archery
  + Use lighter bows, rubber tips on arrows.
  + Student shoot from seated position.
  + Make larger targets, move student closer to target.
* Badminton
  + Clearly mark court lines.
  + Four players to a side.
  + Use larger lighter racquets.
  + Substitute newspaper balls for birdies (or something larger and lighter).
* Bowling
  + Use plastic/lighter equipment.
  + Have student bowl from a chair or a seated position.
  + Roll the ball through a tunnel or down a ramp.
* Croquet
  + Use plastic mallets and whiffle balls.
  + Vary distance to the wicket.
* Golf
  + Hit practice balls into nets/fence.

Adapting for mobility needs: Wheelchairs, walkers, and other walking devices

* Designate areas for participation: student using a wheelchair or a guided runner (student with visual impairment) on inside lane of track.
* Partner students with similar abilities.
* Adapt equipment (size and weight) to allow for participation from seated position in chair or on floor.
* Change the technique
  + Use alternate throwing style if limited ROM prevents overhand throwing.

Adapting for cognitive or communication needs

* Simplify rules.
* Be clear and concise: break the activity down into a number of smaller steps.
* Use precise verbal instruction accompanied by a visual demonstration and/or physical assistance.

Adapting for behavior and/or social needs

* At the beginning of activity, pair the student with a more skilled partner, allowing the partner to adjust the playing level to the needs of the student.
* Build on student success by letting them choose the activity.
* Experiment with various equipment adaptations for the best performance results.
* Alter rules for increased success: e.g. Tennis, allow multiple bounces before a return.

**Teaching Tips for Gymnastic**

Adapting for object manipulation needs

* Peer helpers are helpful when performing skills on small apparatus.
* Reduce the air pressure in a ball for easier grasping.
* Vary equipment size/weight to the abilities of the student.

Adapting for mobility needs: Wheelchairs, walkers, and other walking devices

* Front rolls: student can work on rocking/rolling, falling and landing techniques.
* Use inclined surfaces to facilitate tumbling.
* Guide students with visual impairments through activities.
* Use a wider balance beam or bench.

Adapting for cognitive or communication needs

* Student can follow a peer helper on balance beam.
* When appropriate, physical assistance to help student find the proper body position.
* Use precise verbal instruction accompanied by a visual demonstration and/or physical assistance.

Adapting for behavior and/or social needs

* Widen performance criteria to ensure success and limit frustration.