

2014

## Field of dreams : sports equality for children with special needs

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Running Head: FIELD OF DREAMS

**Field of Dreams: Sports Equality for Children with Special Needs**

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### **Abstract**

Currently, there is a lack of equal opportunity for children with disabilities to participate or succeed in both school and club athletics. These programs have a positive effect on the development of children, especially those with disabilities, giving all a chance to socialize and exercise. Society forgets that children, regardless of their ability, deserve the right to grow in an athletic community with their peers. After speaking with parents, faculty, and the children themselves, a conclusion was made that physical activity is an extremely positive experience for the children so that they too can realize they are capable of playing and having fun. To address this issue, an adaptive soccer clinic was run through California State University, Monterey Bay Athletics to provide exposure to sports and share the love of the game with all children. Children with disabilities have the right to participate and it is important to raise awareness that *everyone* can be a part of sports.

### **Field of Dreams: Sports Equality for Children with Special Needs**

Summer of 2005, I was gearing up to start my final year of grammar school and feeling strongly about my passion for volleyball. My friends and I were rocking out to the radio on our way to University of the Pacific Volleyball Camp on a warm July afternoon. During the first session of camp while I was mastering my jump serve, I landed on the back of another girl's foot and was only a few degrees away from completely breaking my ankle. As a result of my injury, I was forced to be on crutches for a week while all my teammates participated in the rest of our volleyball specific sports camp. I quickly learned to accept the fact I was going to be extremely dependent for the rest of the week, as I could not even walk and carry things at the same time.

My life had changed in an instant I now had to rely on my friends to carry my meal tray, sleep with my foot elevate, shower on one foot, and take my life much slower. Getting to and from the gym became a dreaded activity, one because it took me nearly twice as long as everyone else and two because once I arrived at the gym, the only thing I was allowed to do was sit on the sidelines and watch my friends and teammates compete and have a good time. Through this experience I learned the value in being able to compete in athletics and how frustrating it is to continually be a spectator of the game. I expect what I went through, although short-lived, was similar to what children with special needs are faced with every day during physical education class and the lack of adaptive after school sports programs; constantly being forced to be a spectator, instead of having the opportunity to participate.

Throughout my entire life I have been involved in athletics, trying a wide range of sports from swimming, to soccer, to cross country, to basketball, and finally deciding to pursue

volleyball. As most students in school I began playing sports with children from my school, and I ended my career after playing 4 years of collegiate volleyball for California State University, Monterey Bay. I could never imagine my life without having had the opportunity to play sports because they have allowed me to continue to be active, but also helped me grow into a stronger person.

If I had not played volleyball, I may not be the person I am today. Through volleyball, I gained confidence, learned time management, progressed in communicating with my peers, became a leader, and found out more about how I learn. The benefits I experienced as a result of playing sports and participating in athletics have changed my life. Sports will continue to change the lives of able-bodied children very dramatically, so it does not make sense for society to cut away programs encouraging children with special needs to be physically active. Children with disabilities will not be given the equal opportunities to be an active member in their early stages of self-discovery without sports education.

### **Why are adaptive physical education programs important for children with special needs?**

Including students in regular mainstream physical education is believed to be an issue because, “a common misconception is that children with disabilities are susceptible to trauma...fear of injury frequently remains a barrier to participation” (Murphy, 2008, p.1059). Facilitators, faculty, and staff are scared these children are going to get hurt, and is largely the reason why children with special needs are pushed back into the classroom instead of getting to participate; to protect them. Children with special needs become the

scorekeeper, benchwarmer and cheerleader rather than a participant. When in reality, almost any sport or physical activity is possible for these students with proper modifications. Including students with disabilities helps make them have a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves which translates to their confidence, along with getting to play with their peers which helps strengthen their social skills. Parents are attesting to these benefits after their child has joined an APE program saying, "...he gained confidence, he learned how to make friends, he got involved...self-confidence and the skills and sports and everything they've given our son" (Turner, 2013, para. 10). Children across the country can be a part of these programs, and reap the benefits like socialization and self-confidence. Unless these children are given to opportunity, they will never know the possibilities for themselves.

### **Benefits in Socialization and Self-Confidence**

Students with disabilities are not participating in more physical activity programs because they do not have the confidence in themselves or their skills. It is important for all children to make the most of each opportunity they are given, and it is said, "...children who feel good about themselves and have good self-esteem are in a far better position to take advantage of learning situations" (Laker, 2000, p. 94). Through physical education, the goal is to help children foster good self-esteem while also having a love of physical activity and sports.

Parents of children with disabilities have reported, growth in their child's self-esteem regarding both athletic ability and in life. Regarding physical activity in general, but more specifically physical activity has multiple benefits for children aside from just exercise. The Department of Education and Science comments on this, "PE's

contribution to the social and ethical aspects of personal developments can be considerable, involving as it does co-operation and competition. Games, with their codes of rules, give experience of actions within structured situations, and of personal initiative within an accepted framework” (as cited in: Laker, 2000, p. 16-17). Being a part of a sports team can really affect a person’s self-worth and is also contributes to growth in the social and ethical areas of child’s life. By denying these children the chance to participate, they are missing out on these crucial opportunities for development within themselves.

Being categorized as struggling students in the classroom often hurts their self-esteem, so finding strengths in other areas of their lives helps boost their confidence. For example, consider the point that “...the hands-on aspect of sports leads to cognitive skill improvement in children with disabilities. This allows children to discover and access strengths that cannot be challenged in the traditional classroom setting” (Cognitive Skills Benefits, n.d. para. 2). Being a part of athletics and sports along side their peers has much more cognitive benefits than the regular class opportunities. Special needs children are those students described as needing the most attention and practice in the classroom, thus more people should be advocating for equal opportunities in physical education and extra-curricular activities.

### **Preventative Step of Labeling and Stereotypes**

Some people believe that sports are dangerous for children with disabilities because they can get hurt or they are more “fragile” than full-functioning people. Members of handicapped sports teams speak on the issue saying, “If they play on a team with other disabled kids, they're on a level playing field...It helps with self-esteem, self-

confidence, not to mention health. It's nothing but a plus" (Jones, 2007, para. 21).

Children with disabilities participating in extra-curricular activities have the chance to build confidence in themselves that can be translated to other areas of their lives. If they are noted as a disabled child rather than a child with a disability, they often are not given the equal opportunity they are entitled to through the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 stating, "all children with handicapping conditions have available to them a free appropriate public education..." (Winnick, 2000, p. 12). Every child is granted the opportunity to participate in all elements of public education despite their appearance and how they may be labeled.

Children are labeled and stereotyped throughout their lives. Part of fighting the battle for these young children is to encourage others to believe there is nothing wrong with them, but rather they just do things differently. A big moment of momentum was the implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 which "replaced the term 'handicapped' with 'disabilities'" (Winnick, 2000, p. 12). Disabled is a better way to describe people with cognitive or physical differences because it implies they are still functional and focuses on what they can do, instead of what holds them back. Empowerment for children with disabilities is largely a strong sense of self, but also the perception and acceptance of others.

Between thirteen and twenty percent of children from birth to age 18 have a diagnosable mental health disorder (Children's Mental Health, 2013, para. 4). That is nearly one in every five students having some kind of behavioral or cognitive disability. Because the numbers have grown since 2000, "estimated 10 to 20 percent of elementary schoolchildren in the United States have behavior or learning problems that prevent their



learning successfully” (Cheatum, 2000, p. 136). Often the labels being used to describe children with disabilities have a negative connotation and emphasize what the children is not doing, rather than what they are capable doing. This labeling lowers their self-esteem, and can hurt their over all learning experience and capabilities; whereas contrastingly, “children who feel good about themselves and have good self-esteem are in a far better position to take advantage of their learning situations” (Laker, 2000, p. 94). This makes sense when thinking about teens and young adults as well, the better people feel, the better they are able to perform; and the same concept applies to young children with disabilities who are highly susceptible to teasing and labeling from their peers.

### **Benefits of Adaptive Sports Education and Opportunities**

Through out the recent years and the state of the government’s budget, extracurricular activities are being cut across the country, one of them being physical education. Because of this loss within the classroom, parents are looking for programs outside of schools to help their children get all the benefits of physical activity. By not participating in any kind of athletics, children with disabilities are not meeting their allotted amount of time of physical education each week. The lack of physical education is hindering students’ ability to understand and learn about healthy lifestyles, and their importance in everyone’s life. “Physical education can contribute to pupils’ understanding of the benefits leading a healthy active lifestyle through the way that it is taught, through extra-curricular activity opportunities and through cross-curricular links” (Williams, 2011, p. 79). Children cannot learn about the benefits in a healthy lifestyle if they are never given the chance to do so. Physical education goes outside of just regular exercise. It is a cross-curricular lesson that can be taught in many different classroom

settings. Schools need to be innovating in incorporating physical education concepts in other subject areas to make up for the losses and cuts spreading across the country.

Exercise on a regular basis, help children, “feel less stressed, feel better about themselves, feel more ready to learn in school, keep a healthy weight, build and keep healthy bones, muscles, and joints, and lastly sleep better at night” (Exercise for Children, 2014, para. 1). Children are not only suffering the losses of exercise, but also all the benefits on well-being , on the “mind, body, and soul.” Physical education is an outlet of energy, helps maintain physical fitness, but most importantly it gives students the opportunity to learn about what it means to be healthy. This concept is the first step in decreasing the rise of childhood obesity. Cutting extracurricular activities and physical education is a vicious cycle that affects the whole child.

With all the restrictions holding children out of physical education like budget cuts, learning disabilities, large classroom sizes, and the growing intensity of academic state standards, children are forced to look outside of the classroom to reach their allotted amount of physical activity, which is “engaging in moderate to vigorous activity for at least 60 minutes on a daily basis” (Exercise for Children, 2014, para.3-4). By forcing children to look elsewhere to get physical activity, schools are contributing to a sedentary lifestyle and childhood obesity. The State Department of Education tried to make physical education a core subject with the reasoning being that “physical education in school is the only sure opportunity for all school-aged students to access health-enhancing physical activity and the only school subject area that provides education to ensure that students develop knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in health-enhancing physical activity for life” (Strauss, 2013, para. 7). If physical education

continues to lose its importance within schools, children are not gaining the knowledge to help them live a healthier lifestyle. This puts pressure on parents to teach their children these important topics at home. So, unless parents step up and are making a conscious effort to inform their children, students all across the country are missing out on the education and exercise that comes along with physical education in schools.

Unlike able-bodied children with no cognitive or physical disabilities, children with special needs do not have options for extracurricular activities outside of school and very limited options and opportunities in the school setting. By not offering them options, society as a whole is increasing the gap between these two groups of children. Athletes with special needs are repeatedly left out of these activities because they “have limited recreation skills, which greatly restricts their ability to participate in community activities and interact with peers who do not have disabilities” (as cited in: Block, 2000, p. 7). By continuing to leave these children out, it is impossible to bridge the gap between these groups and we are further alienating them from the rest of society.

### **How are we including special needs children in physical education?**

The goal is to have all students participating in some kind of physical activity throughout the week because it increases concentration and focus, improves classroom attendance and behavior, and boosts academic performance (Letsmove.gov); however, with the current situation in California and the lack of funding for physical education, many students are not getting their allotted time. The student population that is suffering most is those students with physical or mental disabilities. So much time is spent helping these children with special needs catch up with their school work and social skills to

match their peer group, that physical education is often forgotten and/or over looked by the instructors. Because of this, getting children with disabilities to participate is only half the battle faced by educators and facilitators of physical activities. The other important aspect is the main focus of the group of participants with the goal: to treat all the participants equally no matter diversity within the group.

Raising awareness of the benefits of adaptive physical education (APE) programs, which are defined as, “physical education which has been adapted or modified, so that it is as appropriate for the person with a disability as it is for a person without a disability” (What is Adaptive Education, 2008, para. 1) is very important to facilitating the changes that need to be made in the classroom. Whether it be through building specific programs for children with special needs or using an inclusion method, defined as, “the process of educating students with disabilities along with their general peers,” (Rouse, 2009, p. 2) all children need exercise. No matter how you look at it, children with special needs should be getting physical activity during the school week, not only because it benefits their health and well-being, but also because they are entitled to it through The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 which stresses that “all children with handicapping conditions have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education (including physical education) and related services designed to meet their unique needs” (Winnick, 2000, p. 21). Although there are laws that entitle children with disabilities to equal opportunity, including physical education, there is not anyone mandating the lack of effort into putting this law into action. With child obesity on the rise and the health of Americans deteriorating, it is more important than ever to help foster an active lifestyles for every student.

**Adaptive Physical Education (APE) Specific Programs**

Driven by Title 9, and the quest for equal opportunity for students with disabilities, there is a recent push to provide more programs to allow these children to participate in extracurricular activities just like able-bodied students. One way to solve the issue of the lack of programs is to add sports teams specifically catering to students with disabilities as part of the athletic department. Although many children with disabilities have the ability to participate in athletics, not all are that fortunate. When specific modifications need to be made in order for these students to successfully participate it is called adaptive physical education (Block, 2000). Specific programs are built for children with disabilities because it normalizes being physically active, competing along side their peers in a way that is most comfortable for them.

**Sports Leagues and Competition.** It is believed that the issue many students with disabilities have is not necessarily the lack of skills, but the fear of playing against full functioning and able-bodied opponents (Jones, 2007). One of the best ways to encourage students with disabilities is to build programs specific to their needs. Children with disabilities cannot participate on able-bodied teams if they are not geared towards their individual needs, do not have specific modifications, or if their peers will have an advantage. Creating leagues with all special needs students levels the playing field and lets all participants have an equal opportunity for success.

The 1978 Amateur Sports Act has had one of the largest impacts on the community supporting athletes with disabilities. The Act states its purpose was to “encourage and provide assistance to amateur athletic programs and competition for handicapped individuals, including, where feasible, the expansion of opportunities for

meaningful participation by handicapped individuals in programs of athletic competition for able-bodied individuals” (USOC *constitution*, 1989, p. 2). Because of this new recognition, the United States now allowed for individuals with disabilities participate in representing their country in world-wide sports competitions specific to athletes with physical or cognitive disabilities. By law, there has to be equal opportunity for children with disabilities in physical education within the classroom, but furthering the equality gives hope. Offering world-wide sport competitions such as, the Paralympics, World games for the Deaf, International Special Olympics, and Paralympics/World Championships for the Mentally Handicapped (Depauw, 1995, p. 84), to adults with disabilities encourages children to be physically active at an earlier age because there is hope that they too can be an athletic hero like their peers.

**Individual and Group Programs.** Organizations who have dedicated their efforts to building APE programs for children with disabilities have found success in building individual or group plans with the proper modifications. An example is Individualized Movement and Physical Activity for Children Today (IMPACT), a program for special needs children, based out of Oregon State University. John Driver, the program director, speaks to his program’s success saying, “...coordinators are able to make special modifications for each child based on their needs” (Turner, 2013, para. 9). It is important to build a specific plan to fit the needs of each student because he or she most likely will find success, which translate to other areas of his/her life. Non-competitive sports programs that are individual or group based, teach children the value in physical activity and help them find success individually rather than a win or loss.

Group and individual programs alike, promote independence from an aide or mentor, as they can now function in an environment built for their success, but most importantly, these children become leaders to each other. To see this kind of personal growth, Rouse (2009) in his book titled Inclusion in Physical Education, discusses a method called inter-exceptionality inclusion. This strategy of inclusion is not by able-bodied peers, but rather differing levels of intellectual disabilities (ID) with one another (Rouse, 2009). Adaptive education programs at varying levels, are still managing to combine the athletes to reap even greater benefits in physical education. Rouse notes that the higher-level skilled students in the scenario are lending a hand to help out the other students. These are moments of the most impacting growth that can only be fostered in APE specific programs because often children with disabilities are cast aside because they are not like their peers.

### **Inclusion Method**

Another way to include special needs kids in physical education within the classroom is through the inclusion method. By The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), the United States' special education law, students with disabilities are entitled to physical education. With this law in combination with *free appropriate education* (FAPE) which requires disabled students to have the same educational opportunities as their peers (Rouse, 2009) there should not be any reason for children not to received their allotted physical education time through out the week. The inclusion method refers to the "merging of special and general education," (as cited in: Block, 2000, p. 30). This means having children with special needs work along side the mainstream students. The inclusion method is more than just placing a child with

disabilities into a regular physical education program, it suggests “each student’s unique educational needs be met through adaptations to the curriculum and with the provision of supports” (Block, 2000, p. 33) and with the hope to teach both parties about inclusion, acceptance, support, cooperation, and team work. This method can be very beneficial for both parties because it is teaching life lessons early on about people who appear to be different than oneself. It is important to know the difference in effort and outcomes for mainstreaming and inclusion. Mainstreaming places students in a classroom with the intension of the child being in the regular classroom with full-functioning students without any kind of extra support (Block, 2000). Both mainstreaming and inclusion involve a child with disabilities entering a regular classroom with their peers; however, mainstreaming requires for the students to be fully independent, whereas inclusion allows for more of a guided or supported setting.

**Reverse Mainstreaming.** A specific method used for personal development for both able-bodied and disabled children is known as reverse mainstreaming, defined as, “...peer facilitators come into a self-contained environment to assist students with disabilities...they follow the students into a general education setting” (Rouse, 2009, p. 13). This strategy teaches students with disabilities how to accept help from their peers, but also creates a level of competition and motivation to perform well in front of their peers. For the able-bodied students, they learn tactics to help others and the value of patience when assisting someone with disabilities. Overall, this technique is useful because it exposes both parties to the other, helping foster more accepting youth.

**Least Restrictive Environment.** There are several aspects of the inclusion method, one of the major ones being a least restrictive environment, which is a crucial



aspect of introducing a child into the mainstream classroom. Because of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by law students must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Henley, 1999) which is described as, “individuals with disabilities are educated with individuals who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from regular physical education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of the child is such that the use of aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (as cited in: Winnick, 2000, p. 13). This type of modified inclusion puts children with disabilities in the mainstream setting so long as they are independent and do not require an aid. They are permitted to participate along side their full-functioning peers as self-sufficient students. This method puts children with disabilities in as many mainstream classes as possible, which is why it is thought of as the step between full on mainstreaming and being a part of special day classes.

The main difference between LRE and regular inclusion is that the LRE approach, “advocates education in the most normal/integrated and appropriate environment” (Winnick, 2000, p. 22). In other words, this method provides the students with a disability to be put in a setting where they will succeed most independently, and continue to give them support in the areas they still need to strengthen before being placed in a full-functioning classroom fulltime.

**Rational for Inclusion.** According to Stainback (as cited in Block, 2000, p. 32), the three main reasons to rationalize the inclusion method over APE specific programs, and those are: 1) instructional needs vary among all students 2) a dual systems cause competition and duplication and 3) dual systems foster inappropriate attitudes. To

summarize these points, having separate programs is really a waste of resources. Any time there is a group of students working on a new skills, there is going to be variation in how fast the students learn and their ability to learn the skill, so it makes sense to include children with disabilities because they are not necessarily going to be any further behind than one of their peers. Having a dual system where both an APE and mainstream program exist within a school often causes competition for space, duplication of the same skill, and inappropriate attitudes towards the other group. These attitudes may range from disabled children being called “special” or “retarded” by their peers, but even worse, teachers can assume that the APE class is filled with less capable students and thus focusing more attention on the mainstream class. This is a sad reality, and it is believed that by using the inclusion method that these students will be placed on a more equal playing field.

**Benefits of Inclusion.** There are many reasons for why it is believed by some that the inclusion method is the most beneficial for students with disabilities, and the most well-known reason is because of socialization. Many children with disabilities are in a classroom most of the day learning to be at the same level as their peers in academia, so they miss out on the opportunity to socialize. Often, participating in inclusion physical education provides that outlet to develop relationships and socialize while also working on motor skill and physical strength/agility (Rouse, 2009). By participating along side of their counter-parts, students with or without disabilities are encouraged to interact with one another. Hopefully because of inclusion within physical education, there will be more acceptance in environments like the cafeteria, on the bus, at recess, and stretching to off campus as well.

### **Method Section**

For this Capstone Project the researchers investigated how parents of children with special needs view adapted sports programs in and outside of schools, and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they have learned and formulated an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience. Typical school setting physical education are run with students with disabilities as permanent scorekeepers, cheerleaders, or little to no exercise because there simply are not enough resources to provide for their specific needs. These students are often neglected because it is commonly believed that they are unable to “properly” and “safely” participate because they are “lacking” some of the required skills. The reality is that these children are being labeled as a disabled child, which emphasizes their differences, rather than a child with disability, which highlights that they too are part of our society instead of an outcast. In order to help decrease the epidemic of unequal opportunity for children with disabilities, it was decided to run an adaptive soccer clinic for youth in Monterey County to get physical activity and give them an opportunity to play sports with a peer group of more equal skills.

### **Context**

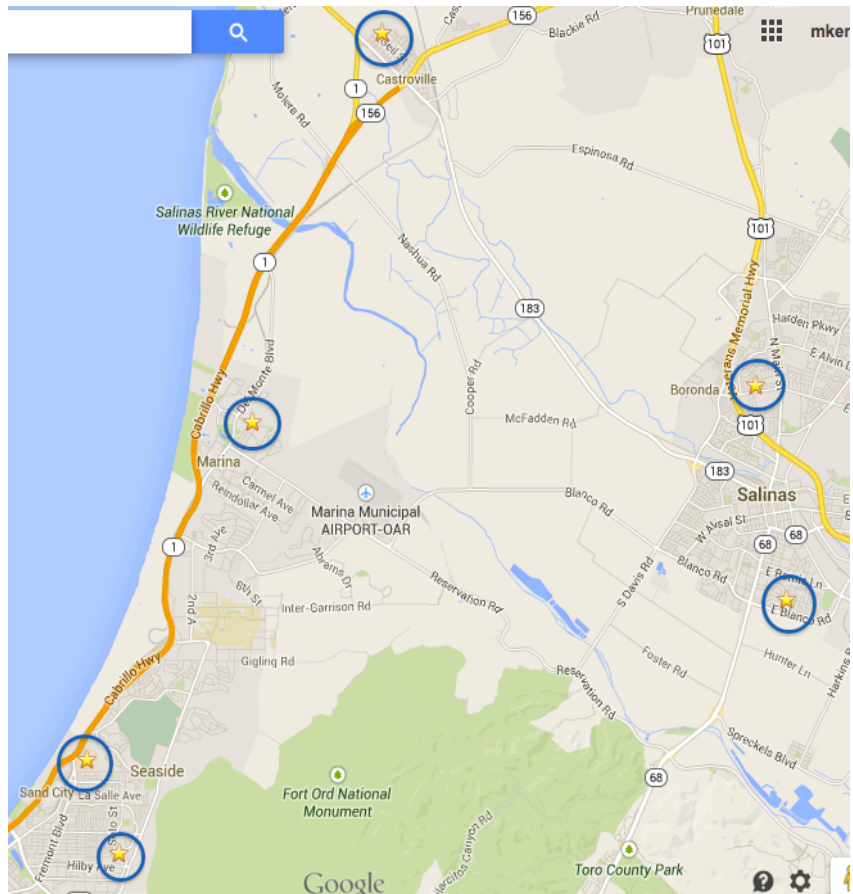
After learning more about physical education and the benefits of special needs students, it is believe that physical education and exercise is the route that all students need to be taking to develop themselves more as individuals and as members in a large group. When involved with physical education, there seems to be a sense of growth within each individual student, along with their self-confidence as well. All children use

P.E. time or recess to let out excess energy and blow off steam, thus making it that much more important for students with special needs.

## Participants and Participant Selection

To gain participants for this project, we reached out to schools all across Monterey County. With aggressive flyering at local schools, community hotspots and our campus, word of mouth,

social media, and community partners, we got the small community of parents with children with special needs to start talking about our clinic. Our efforts were not about “selecting” participants because our goal is to provide adapted physical education to everyone interested. All our efforts encouraged seven



brave young athletes out to our clinic on May 3rd. We had two elementary students from Monterey Peninsula School District (MPUSD), two elementary students from Salinas Unified School District, two high school students from MPUSD, and one middle school student from North Monterey County Unified School District. The age range was from five to eighteen, and we had only two participants with any experience in soccer. The

map above highlights the schools we received participants from, it is apparent that our campaigning helped us to gather participants from opposite ends of the Monterey County. Each of the blue circles on the map has a star inside of it, marking the location of a school. This information tells us how far we were able to network, and which areas potentially did not receive information or flyer at all

### **Researcher**

We have both worked in several elementary classrooms where the entire class suffered because of the lack of knowledge and background on how to best help students with disabilities. Being athletes and minority in the classroom, we have used sports as an outlet our entire lives, so we are well versed in encouraging more young people to as well. We have an interest in making all classrooms flow more cohesively without leaving any students behind through sports and physical education. All children deserve the opportunity to benefit from all the advantages of physical activity and exercise.

Working closely with many mainstreamed young girls on the volleyball court as a coach and being a strong leader and certified coach of TOPSoccer, a Class 5 Soccer organization designed to help children with disabilities have the opportunity to play soccer, we have a lot of experience coaching and being involved in sport. We have both participated in and led sports clinics in the past; thus making us qualified to lead clinics and facilitate learning of soccer for our participants. We are interested to see more of the differences when working more closely with special needs students compared to full functioning participants, and how we can better meet their needs a our focus group during the clinic.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

Interviews taken during this aspect of the project seemed to vary from other projects, in that interviews were more conversational. This technique was used to gain a more personable viewpoint on the topics, rather than having a specific templated interview. Using this method encouraged the interviewees to realize that everyone is on the same side, and working to build programs to help children with special needs. The information gathered during these interviews gave a greater insight to the importance of the project. Along with this, interviewees were able to more openly and creatively express their ideas and opinion on the subjects.

While templated interviews ask specific questions, the open interview allows the interviewee to run with topics they have more interest and/or knowledge in. The interviews turned into conversations where the interviewee set the pace and got to speak more freely on their own thoughts and concerns. Information was more easily gathered this way because the interviews were short and sweet. Our strategy was to very loosely follow a set of questions for faculty and parents of children with special needs. For faculty or staff the questions were as follows:

- 1) How much P.E. or physical activity do your students get on a weekly basis?
- 2) What kinds of activities do your students participate in?
- 3) What kinds of activities have you tried that your students enjoyed? And what activities do you think they would enjoy participating in?
- 4) What are the reactions of your students when they participate in physical activity? Is there a difference in their behavior in the classroom?
- 5) If available, do you think parents would take action to help their child be able to participate in physical activities outside of school (after school or on the weekends)?
- 6) What are your personal thoughts and opinions on sports programs for children with disabilities outside of school?
- 7) Would you be interested in speaking about any of these questions further in a face-to-face interview?

In speaking with parents, we again, kept it conversational, but really focused on getting a better idea of the kind of physical education program their child was currently enrolled in, how much exercise their child was receiving on a weekly basis, whether or not they would be interesting in an adaptive physical education program, and for clinic parents, if they would attend again. The following are the questions we loosely followed in interviewing parents:

- 1) What sort of physical activities does your child participate in?
- 2) What have been your experiences with Adapted Physical Education (APE) for your child?
- 3) What is being done by the schools to improve the physical education or APE experience for your child? How do you feel about what is being done?
- 4) What would you like to be done to improve P.E. or APE for your child at school?
- 5) If there is not an APE program at your child's school, how would you feel about one being implemented? Why?
- 6) What do you see as the challenges or barriers to implementing such a program?
- 7) Would you be interested in having your child participate in additional physical activities outside of the classroom as an afterschool program or weekend activity?
- 8) What are your thoughts on APE programs built specifically for children with disabilities? What are your thoughts on including children with disabilities into mainstream P.E. or sports programs?
- 9) Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding inclusion P.E. or APE programs?
- 10) What is the biggest roadblock you have faced in trying to get your child to be physically active inside and outside of school?
- 11) Have you thought about improving or altering the P.E. or APA program at your child's school?
- 12) Do you notice a change in your child's behavior (i.e. focus, academic performance, socialization, etc) after they are physically active for 30 min+ or on a regular basis?

## **Procedure**

The first step in completing this project was getting the okay to run an adaptive sports soccer clinic through the pre-existing "Otter Pup Sports Camps" run by the CSUMB athletic department. Once Kirby Garry, athletic director at CSUMB, gave his approval for the program, the whole process really took flight. Flyers were made to outreach to community partners like STAR RIDERS in Marina and the Monterey County

Special Olympics, as well as local schools in all of Monterey County's school district. To help run the clinic, volunteers were needed, so via CSUMB athletics, nearly twenty student athletes and a coach were gathered to help the cause and provide more individualized help for the athletes participating.

A large part of this project was understanding the clinic from all perspectives, so the entire clinic was documented with video and pictures, along with the use of social media sites like Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag #OtterPupStars. This helped the researchers track the entire clinic from multiple perspectives of the staff and volunteers, while videographers interviewed parents to gain valuable feedback and capture special moments like children's faces while scoring goals.

Post clinic, surveys were sent out to volunteers to see if an impact was made on them after working with children with special needs. Researchers were able to go back in and look at video interviews from parents to get their feedback and opinion on how the clinic was run.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from these interviews was qualitative. Thus, the interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes regarding, the need for programs for children with disabilities, interest by athletes to participate and time spent exercising.

### **Results**

After the interview process was completed, there was hardcopy information and data to analyze from seven interviewees amongst the undocumented conversations with nearly thirty people who have been or just started working with children with special needs. There was a wide variety of people interviewees, ranging from: teachers of



children with special needs, parents with children with special needs, volunteers of the event, athletes themselves, to faculty and staff who work with children with special needs outside of school in an athletic setting. The responses have been categorized into further subheadings based on common emergent themes.

### **Lack of Physical Education Programs**

Naturally, the pull for this project was because of a focus issue, and in this case it is the inequalities in physical education for children with special needs. Not only is there a discrepancy in the amount of time children with disabilities are getting to exercise compared to their mainstream peers, but there is also a lack of adaptive physical education (APE) programs for these children outside of school. Sadly, most children with special needs are forced to sit out or be so severely modified that they are not able to gain the benefits in exercise. An aide of an autistic class of School X, describes his experience with adaptive physical education programs for his students by saying “...I know of a few students that participate with sports programs. In High School we had a special ed student help our team with equipment and water duties” (Personal Communication, April 28, 2014). Through our interviews it was apparent that there was a needs for APE programs in the Monterey region, yet there has been little effort to create one. Many of the children are struggling to even have the opportunity to “graduate” from scorekeeper and water boy. Most programs offered are small community based parent groups offering support for one-time events.

Some of the events that are offered to children with special needs are not small enough or properly staffed to give each athlete the one-on-one attention they need in order to feel comfortable and be properly supported. Part of working with children with

special needs is to make sure that the needs of the individual child are met, thus taking the time to get to know them and work with them is half of the success. A parent of a child X in the clinic commented on this saying, “....because very often people end up ignoring my son because of his resistance and go on to others” (Personal Communication, May 3, 2014). Some children require a little extra push, and it is important to remember that each child may not learn the same way, and celebrating differences can make the difference for these children.

### **Desire to Participate**

Even though adaptive physical education and sports programs are scarce in the Monterey region, there is a huge interest. Parents and volunteers, both expressed that there was a desire for these programs, and all were eager to help. Through our clinic, our goal was to inform our community within the CSUMB athletic department of the lack of equality for children with special needs in a sports setting. The community on campus grew immensely after the day of our clinic, and is now eager to fight for the cause, by encouraging our campus to host more events such as these in the near future.

Post clinic, there were already requests for more clinics. Parents and volunteers alike were eager to share their opinion about the clinic. In communicating with our parents, one expressed his gratitude and was inspired to help with the cause in the future. In an email Parent of child X stated,

“So, I would like to offer my assistance to any future events that you're running for special needs children. It's very difficult to get good turnouts for these things, because many parents feel like I do. But, both my wife and I work in education... and we both would like to assist in promoting any other of these great camps that you may want to run in the future” (Personal Communication, May 4, 2014).

Parents and volunteers alike, gained something from the clinic and was seen as a great learning opportunity by all. While the athletes got to enjoy soccer, the volunteers became exposed to these children, and were able to see them in a new light. They were all able to learn that these athletes are the same as the rest, and are now committed to fighting for equality. The volunteers were excited for more opportunities such as these. Volunteer M stated, “I had so much fun! When are you guys hosting another clinic, and how can we get more of our team involved in helping?” (Personal Communication, May 4, 2014). After the clinic, it was important to hear feedback from our volunteers, and we were excited to hear of their excitement and eagerness to become more involved.

Through the success of the clinic, the clinic was given other opportunities to help spread awareness and become involved with the special needs community. Prior to the clinic communication lines were opened with the Special Olympics director, and used her input and resources to help campaign. After seeing the success of the Otter Pup Stars clinic, the clinic was asked to have a soccer station at the 2014 Monterey County Special Olympics. Here volunteers were encouraged to continue to help participate and spread sports equality. Volunteers worked many hours and worked with over 465 children with special needs on the day of the event. After the event the director of an APE program sent us an email saying,

“Thank you so much for putting on the soccer clinic at the Special Olympics. I have gotten back so much positive feedback about your participation. The students usually have a lot of wait time between events and the soccer was just the right activity and you guys are so good with the students. I look forward to working with you in the fall and getting CSUMB students involved” (Personal Communication, May 11, 2014)

After this email, volunteers were even more excited as they could now see the differences they were making. Many are still raving about future involvement and are excited to participate further.

Through this event, Otter Pup Stars was able to gain more opportunities to work with this special population. At the event, local schools approached the booth and faculty members were thrilled at the idea of their students learning soccer skills at the Olympics. Some even asked if the Otter Pup Stars clinic would do private trainings at the schools. The goal is for the children to be exposed to different sports, and learn about the values of sportsmanship. With these great opportunities, the clinic is already reaching out to more volunteers to continue this process as our organization grows.

### **Impact and Raising Awareness**

The entire goal of the project was to build a more closely knit community in the Monterey region for parents and children alike to experience athletics. The secondary hope was to encourage more people who are not directly linked to children with special needs to get involved and not only help raise awareness of the issues, but also fight for the cause. Volunteers were having realizations about the functionality of these children, which was part of the education process we were hoping to draw out of college student volunteers. Volunteer C reflected on her experience with the athletes and said, “Many of the children with special needs had so much joy and loved just having someone to play with. This was a good reminder they are normal kids just with different abilities, traits, and challenges” (Personal Communication, May 7th, 2014). She was able to realize how similar the athletes that participated are to everyday mainstream athletes, and not much was done to adapt the games to ensure each child would succeed.

Other volunteers had their eyes opened to the opportunities in working with children with special needs. Children with special needs and athletics are not typically words one would hear in the same sentence, but on clinic day, it they were everywhere. Some of the feedback from volunteers was that helping out at the clinic made them realize this was something they were interested in, and found great joy in doing. Volunteer E was so thrilled about her time with Otter Pup Stars, she was considering going into the field. She commented on this,

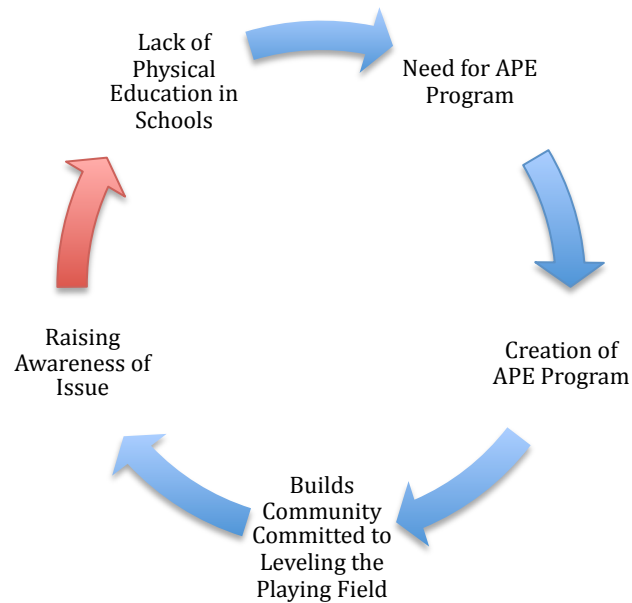
“It made me realize I was being ignorant. There is nothing to be afraid of, these kids aren't out of control, they just need a little more encouragement and sometimes a little bit of help. It made me so much more willing to work with kids who have special needs. It has also made me consider going into adaptive physical education. This was something that forced me to open my eyes and helped me find something that I really enjoy doing” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014).

This was a huge step in moving forward with our clinic. As facilitators, it was a goal to open the eyes of others, which would encourage everyone to see these children with disabilities, as functional athletes, rather than athletes who require accommodations. In this case in particular, it was possible, and hopefully Volunteer E can use the Otter Pup Stars program as an example to build an APE program where she lives.

## **Conclusion**

The issue starts with the lack of physical education in schools, and cycles around. Through budget cuts and ill-prepared staff members, students with special needs miss

out on vital learning opportunities.



While these are issues, they can be solved with the implementation of adapted physical education programs. There is a huge need for these programs within local schools, in order to help foster the growth and development of our students through the usage of sports. Once the programs have been created, communities can see a growth in the commitment that members have towards this strict population. Getting the support of the community for programs such as these is vital, because without support these programs will slowly die. Through this program, the community can keep these programs alive and thriving. If they are committed to the process they are now a community full of members who are spreading awareness about the inequalities these children face. By leveling the playing field, we are creating the opportunity for these children to be active members of their community, members who are eager to live a healthy lifestyle through the support of sports.

The cycle comes back full circle when the community involved sees the inequalities in physical education and sees the need for more outside programs. With

each turn of the cycle, a new APE program is build or tried to give these children with special needs the chance to be an athlete. Some programs succeed and can help and foster new programs in the future, while others die out. No matter the end result, each new circle brings in a larger community, a new strategy, and more hope to create a more level playing field for all athletes.

### **Identification and Evaluation of Action Options**

With the current budget cuts in schools, children are missing out on “extra” programs such as physical education, which is plays a vital role in the enhancement of a child’s overall education, whether it be socially or physically. Often, children with special needs are forced to sit out of activities because they are not considered to be mentally or physically able. Sadly, a population that is considered to need the most attention is suffering the consequences of society’s ignorance to the importance of physical education. In hopes of bringing more attention to the physical education deficit within schools, people are beginning to reach out and create options and programs to ensure children with disabilities are getting the appropriate time participating in physical activity that they are entitled to, mandated by state and federal laws.

### **Action Options**

Depending on the needs of a variety of students, specific programs have been developed to include children with disabilities in the classroom. Three options discovered to help bring students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in sports programs were: 1) “pull-in” programs or inclusion P.E. at school; 2) Adapted Physical Education (APE) programs and clinics outside of the classroom; and 3) APE programs designed

specifically for children with special needs within school. Inclusion and “pull-in” programs are designed to have children with disabilities participate in physical education with fully functioning mainstream students. In successful “pull-in” programs, teachers explain the lesson and then act more as facilitators of the activity as there is equal learning and sharing occurs between all the students. Children with disabilities are participating just as much in physical activity as the rest of the students, thus teaching both parties to work alongside one another. APE programs outside of schools, can be anything from clinics to entire sports leagues designed specifically for children with disabilities. These programs range from individual learning plans to group and team exercise and competition. Trained and licensed teachers with a background in APE create the programs to help the participants exercise in a facility just for them and on an equal playing field with their peers. There is more freedom because the government is not required to support, fund, or watch over these activities. APE programs within a school are specifically designed programs within school hours for children with disabilities to participate in as a replacement for their regular P.E. time. These programs require government funding and support as well as adapted equipment for the students to use on a regular basis. APE within the school helps students get individualized and specific exercise during regular school hours. Teachers are trained and have an appropriate background to help the students grow in their motor skills at a slower pace.

### **Evaluation of Action Options**

In order to evaluate the action options provided, there had to be some standard criteria to base the critique on. The evaluation criteria selected were, the cost of the program being implemented, the impact the program could have, and the sustainability



and longevity of the program. Cost has a significant impact on the element of evaluation because with the current budget cuts in schools and recession in the United States, there is less funding to provide physical activity of children with disabilities especially since its importance is not widely known. Impact refers to the people who will be a part of and be affected by the program set in place. Community, faculty and staff, children with disabilities, full functioning students, and parents or guardians of these students are all important parties that can and will be affected by the programs set in place inside or outside of schools. Lastly, the sustainability of a program is important because building a great program for one year is not going to help as much as designing a program that is set to stay in place for many years. Having a program that can withstand many years of use will help all the people impacted and hopefully, continue to benefit everyone. In table 1.1 the action options are being evaluated based on the criteria on a high, medium low scale.

Table 1.1	Cost	Impact	Sustainability
“Pull-In” or Inclusion P.E.	High	High	Medium
APE programs/clinics outside of school	Low	High	High
APE programs through school	High	Low	Low

In terms of cost, a program would receive a high if it required a lot of private or government funding to keep it running. A medium rating would mean the program can be full-functioning without a significant amount of money; however, cannot survive entirely on volunteers or donation. A low score would mean the program does not require much money to be successful, and could thrive on very little money. Some things taken into account when evaluating cost were, government funding, private funding, grants,

cost to participate, need for adapted equipment, salary of staff and faculty, and use of volunteers. Assessing the impact of the programs on the students or participants involved was the most important evaluation criteria. The number of students reached, faculty needed, and knowledge gained by parents and community was used to evaluate the impact of a program. High ratings would mean each of these groups was impacted by the program, a medium rating meant two or three of the groups were impacted, and a low rating indicated that one or no groups were impacted. For sustainability, there were several factors used to rate this category, including a steady flow of participants using the program, available staff and faculty, volunteers willing to help, cost and appropriate budget of the program, and success of the program and satisfied or unsatisfied customers/participants. A high in this category means the program is expected to last for many years, a medium rating would mean there is hope the program will last because two or three of the criteria are met on an annual or monthly basis, and a low rating would mean, the program is rocky because it relies heavily on all the criteria being met.

**“Pull-in” and Inclusion Programs.** These types of programs are expensive because of the strict public school guidelines put in place by the government. Being a government program requires them to have more regulations, but allows them to receive funding and support. Teachers must be educated on how to incorporate a child with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. Besides certain equipment, students will need the support of all teachers to fulfill their IEP. An IEP is an Individualized Education Plan. IEPs help students fulfill educational goals that would be harder to achieve without support. Specialized equipment may need to be purchased to adapt some games, to make

them more easily achievable. Teachers must collaborate and be educated on the student and their IEP goals for the year.

All individuals that attend the school can be impacted by this action, which is why it has been marked as high. Teachers and faculty will be impacted, because they must accommodate these students within their classrooms or in everyday campus life. The entire student population is impacted because students must learn to work with students with disabilities in their daily school lives. In classrooms and during physical education, these students will have to learn to adapt with this new population of students. This can be a great learning opportunity for both full functioning students as well as those with special needs because students will learn to be leaders and followers; allowing students to experience new roles in the classroom.

Pull-in inclusion is not very sustainable because the program depends heavily on government funding, and the programs cannot survive without help, thus it gained a ranking of medium for the sustainability category. Teachers and students will have to become more involved and become accepting of all students. Teachers and parents often question if this method is truly beneficial, if the success of the program is based on how others react and work with students with special needs. Teachers must also be extremely patient, and must learn to include these students within everyday class life. This method can pose to be a challenge for a diverse classroom, where every student learns and succeeds in different ways and rates. Thus the success of the program and its ability to be sustainable relies heavily on how people react to one another and the benefits of the program; making it either very affective or a terrible disaster. There is too much dependency on people's interpretation to receive a high rating.

**Adapted Physical Activity Programs Outside of School.** These programs earned a low rating, because they are significantly cheaper because these leagues are not funded by the government, but rely instead on fundraising and sponsorships. These programs have the opportunity to join with local leagues and organizations. Local soccer, baseball, swim, or other athletic organizations can create an alliance where they rely on one another for financial support. Leagues are cheaper to run when they have a partnership in which they share one another's gear and field locations. All of these costs can be kept to a minimum with a functioning support system.

The people benefitting from this action include all participants in the program as well as the volunteers from the community, parents, staff and faculty running it, thus earning it a rating of high. The program will obviously benefit the children with special needs being included or having their own separate leagues, but many others will gain something from this. Parents will get the opportunity to watch their children grow and develop, while watching from the sidelines. Volunteer's benefit by supporting the cause to raise awareness of the inequalities that occur in athletics. These able-bodied volunteers learn to coach and work with children with special needs. This has been proven to be very beneficial in the development of these children as well. Schools also benefit from this because there are now other options for education and development outside of the school systems.

Sports camps and clinics outside of school is a more sustainable option because these camps rely on community members for support. Within most communities there will always be volunteers to help with these programs. High schools and junior high's are great places to look for support and volunteers. These students are usually in need of

community service hours and will be a more positive source. Through connections with other local leagues and the community there will be a greater support system. These specialized programs can also run off of donated or shared equipment to help lower costs. The cost is minimum because of fundraising and donations, and with a steady flow of volunteers to run it, APE sports camps and clinics received a high rating.

**Adapted Physical Education in Schools.** This type of program is a great opportunity for students, but is really expensive. This section was graded as being high in cost. This program also needs significant government funding to keep it running. Many schools in fact have begun to cut out these programs because of funding issues. The programs must be funded, but teachers must also be trained and educated. Certain credentials will be needed to teach this subject, and this requires a higher teacher salary. IEPs would also need to be followed closely to ensure that students were achieving these goals. Although expensive, these programs are great for children with disabilities. It gives them a chance to succeed on a level playing field. The programs are adapted to help the child succeed, and they get time to learn without their able-bodied peers, all during school hours. The learning is more unique and personal. The cost to have the program is extremely expensive for the school and government; however for parents it is a convenient way to get their child individualized learning at a lower cost.

The impact of these programs received a lower score because children with special needs are the only ones who develop and they receive the biggest impact as a result of the program. Teachers can be impacted by the difference they are making in their students lives, and so can other students who help out during class. These people gain experience and knowledge of working with children with disabilities. It also

received a low score because it does not make as big of an impact on everyone else as the other options do. The population served from this action is very impacted, yet so small, that it did not receive a higher rating.

Sustainability wise, this section also received a low score. The success of the program relies so heavily on the willingness or ability of the government to support or fund the program. In recent years these programs have become a dying breed for many schools and districts, since there is less and less money being funneled to physical education programs every year, let alone adapted programs. Lack of funds also means a lack of equipment available for the students. Although there will be no adapted equipment, there is still opportunity for the equipment to be shared with the mainstream education programs, which gives the program hope; but with moderate to severe disability, recycled equipment is not going to be enough.

### **Evaluation of Evidence**

In order to complete this project, extensive research was done to ensure that the action would truly be beneficial to children with special needs. Over countless hours of researching, a conclusion was made that sports were extremely important for these children. It only made sense now to create a program that would fulfill all of these benefits to these children. Countless sources were able to express positive outcomes and benefits when children with special needs participated in physical activity, however, some stuck on in particular.

One of the most valuable pieces of the research conducted was to learn why physical education is so important to children. The State Department of Education wanted to make physical education a core subject because, “physical education in school is the only sure opportunity for all school-aged students to access health-enhancing

physical activity and the only school subject area that provides education to ensure that students develop knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in health-enhancing physical activity for life” (Strauss, 2013, para. 7). Research showed that both physical education and adaptive sports programs are important in the fact that they promote lifelong healthiness. It is important for these children to develop and grow physically, while learning skills that will allow them to lead healthier lifestyles through activities. An action needed to be taken that offered physical activity to the participants because the research showed that was the most important aspect of the project.

Physical education and outside sports organizations also proved to be extremely important to a child’s cognitive and social development. Research showed that there are more than physical benefits, which allow for these children to learn valuable life lessons and skills through sports that allow them to grow and function in and outside of school. These skills that they acquire, “promote social factors such as how to interact with peers, play cooperatively, take turns, deal with anger, follow directions, listen quietly, stay on task, and behave appropriately” (Block, 2000, p. 263). All of these skills can help students with special needs interact with people outside of the school environment, which is extremely important.

Often times it is forgotten that these children with special needs are still just growing children. There is too much focus on the disability itself and the limitations these children have, rather than celebrating their abilities. Adapting sports and recreational activities is not as challenging as many people tend to believe. A community can easily come together to support the needs of these children. With so many physical and mental benefits, these programs should be more easily accessible and implemented into more

community programs. The research supported that there is an overall lack of opportunity for these children. Through parent and community support, these options can be made possible.

### **Decision Making**

After weighing the options for implementing a program and talking with stakeholders and parties involved, we recommend running an APE sports clinic. The APE clinics are low in cost, make an impact at the community level, and it is the most sustainable option of the three presented. Through the athletic department at California State University, Monterey Bay and their Otter Sports Camps/Clinics, creating an adapted sports clinic was made easier because an umbrella organization was willing to make this clinic a part of their existing program. This decreased the cost of organizing a clinic because the set up process was already completed. Additionally, with established connections for equipment, volunteers, grants, and fundraising, an adapted clinic would contribute to the success of the existing program. To achieve a greater level of impact, we will reach out to student-athletes and middle school peer groups to help raise awareness about adapted physical activity and get some socialization and peer interaction for the participants that they would have gotten if the “pull-in” or inclusion option was chosen. Because we chose to add on to a preexisting program, we are more likely to have a sustainable program. With an abundance of student-athlete volunteers to help out every clinic, and the athletic staff to assist in grant proposals and fundraising, it seems as though this program is properly budgeted and set up to have available money in the long run.



In selecting this choice, we made the assumption that people would be interested in participating and volunteering to make the clinic possible. Hopefully through advertising and word of mouth, we can fill up the clinic and appeal to many volunteers as a cause worth their time and resources. By raising awareness with this clinic, we are assuming that people will care about our cause. To battle this we are hugely advocating for our program by sharing our knowledge with others.

### **Our Position**

All three options are extremely important for the development of children with special needs. All programs will aid these children in achieving their goals, but there are both positive and negatives to all options. Option two, which is clinics and programs outside of school, seemed to score the highest. This method seems to be the best in regards to cost, impact, and sustainability. Although this was the best, the other two have great benefits as well. The “pull-in” inclusion method allows students that are able-bodied and disabled to participate in physical education together, rather than being segregated. Through this method, both groups can learn and grow from one another. Their involvement in one another’s education can also create a tighter-knit community. The third option, Adapted physical education programs in schools, is also a great opportunity. This program is expensive, but extremely beneficial for students with disabilities. In these programs, there are hired and trained teachers that are highly educated in this field. The support and education being taught by these individuals would be the best education possible. It would be safe for students because of the more individualized attention involved.

One large assumption that threatens the second option, which is outside sports clinics and programs, is finding a community partner. This particular one relies solely on the communities' ability to provide volunteers and support for these specialized leagues. Without funding and support from the community and its businesses, these programs cannot survive. Programs can be started, but need to be maintained by individuals who are willing to work free of charge. One negative outcome of this option would be the overall lack of community partnership. The organization without a sister league there for support, will need more money and funding. If a partnership cannot be established then the program fails. This is seen as a major flaw, as we are assuming that the community will be there for support financially and physically.

### **Conclusion**

Through our personal experiences, we have discovered that when it comes to programs such as these, the community really does listen. Sometimes these ideas are not a part of a person's everyday thought process. The general population does not think of the benefits and needs of supporting or founding these specialized programs. Community members often times need a little inspiration and a slight push to getting these organizations formed and running. We understand the flaws of our idea, but realize that any idea will have some flaws to it. For our particular capstone, starting a community based organization, which we would name Otter Pup Stars, based on a previously established Otter Pups program. This option seemed to be the best option for us in regards to financials, impact, and sustainability. There are strengths and weaknesses in all options, but the second option is more reliable, even during harsh economic times. With the help of our community partners at CSUMB, we feel that our program can succeed and benefit

the community. Because our organization is available to the entire community, school funding or resources no longer divide us. The Otter Pup Stars program is an opportunity for all children with disabilities in the Monterey district to enjoy athletics. While being involved in our program, friendships and partnerships are formed that can help the program survive and thrive for many years to come.

### Action Documentation and Reflection

Our goal was to initiate support through sports to the children with special needs in the greater Monterey region. Through this action we hoped to encourage parents and children to participate in sports settings, whether it be in a school or outside sports program. We hoped to expose our athletes to the wonderful benefits that sports have to offer, both physically and mentally. Besides encouraging these children to participate, we also hoped to reach out to the general population at CSUMB to stress the importance of these programs. Many of our volunteers had never been around children with special needs, especially in a sports setting. The picture above is from the website of *Special Kids Crusade*, a local parent run



community group supporting extracurricular activities for children with special needs.

Our clinic was featured on their website as an option for children with special needs to participate in an adapted athletic program.

Through our Otter Pup Stars program, we were able to promote equality for all children to participate in sports, while proving to the general public that regardless of ability, these children deserve an equal shot at participating in sports programs that allows them to grow and develop. Reaching out to our athletic department was important to not only us, but to the athletes that helped participate. Our athletes who have strong backgrounds in competitive settings began to realize the lack of opportunity these children face on a daily basis. The inequality helped them realize that they to take a stand and promote these programs by helping out and spreading the word about sports equality.

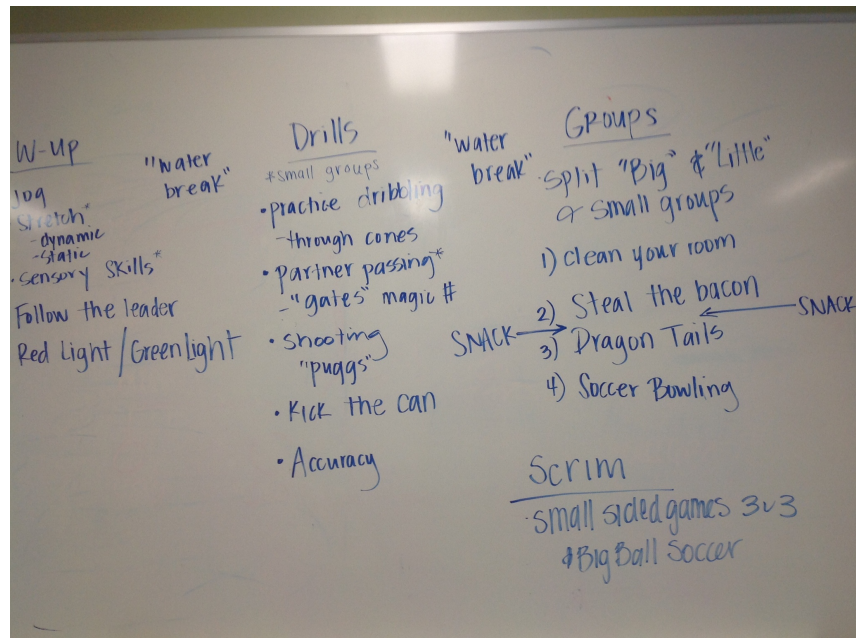
Going into our clinic we had created a well thought out camp that included stretching, skills and drills, games, and even snacks. We felt prepared going into the camp with an extensive list of adaptive drills and games available to our incoming athletes. The night prior to our camp, we held an informational meeting for our volunteers that gave them a quick run through of the camps schedule and lists of games and activities. Feeling confident, we went into Saturday morning with butterflies in our stomach and a great sense of preparedness.

On clinic day, not every many things went according to the plan we had made. No amount of prep time could have gotten us ready for our athletes. Warm-ups and ice-breaker games were scheduled to last thirty to forty five minutes, and only lasted for ten as our athletes began complaining of tiredness. Rolling the soccer ball on the ground became quite the crowd please, so we had to think on our feet to keep the athletes active.

Breaks were frequent and drawn out, and every break seemed to require snacks, water, and lots of hugs. The games we had set up either lasted an hour or for the most part, failed completely. Although nothing went according to plan, we could not be happier with the results of our play day.

As much as we were prepared, what we realized is that being prepared will only get an individual so far in this business. Creativity and flexibility are key components to coaching children with special needs. The games encouraged our volunteers to demonstrate new techniques and strategies, and most of the games needed to be adapted and modified. Everyone participating learned that we could not prepare ourselves completely for the camp. Most of the games played depended on each athlete's abilities and desire to

participate. Others such as "kick the can" or "dragon tails" were enjoyed, and loved by all. For next time, we will create more games that



encourage certain aspects of the game that we hope to teach. An example would include more passing games, that require sharing the ball and collaborating with teammates to achieve certain goals.

Time constraints was our biggest obstacle to overcome while working on this

project. With only a semester to research, plan, and execute, we had to strategically plan to allow ourselves enough time to campaign to the community about the Otter Pup Stars Clinic being offered, which was the hardest part. While we immediately got to business planning, we feel as though we did not have enough time to outreach to school and raise awareness about our clinic. Our athletes came from all over Monterey County, but many parents mentioned that they were not informed of the event until a week prior. This seemed to be our only fallback, and we hope to begin the campaigning process much sooner for our future clinics.

As our society gets further involved with technology, for our future clinics, we will continue to use social media to portray our volunteers perspectives. Creating a hashtag and encouraging everyone involved to “post, post, post” was our big genius idea, because now any time our clinic is searched on the internet, information about our clinic

is available. This aspect of our clinic was very beneficial in spreading awareness and informing the public on the social injustices our children face when we neglect to provide them with opportunities in sports settings. Social media also gave allowed our volunteers to use

their private accounts to help spread the word about our clinic through their eyes. The



documentation provided by our volunteers allowed the media to see adaptive sports programs from their point of view. #OtterPupStars was used leading up to our clinic, during the clinic, and even after. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, all used our hashtag to document the entire event, any of these social media websites can provide people inquiring about the program instantaneous primary sources. As facilitators of this program, we also used this, as a way to learn how our volunteers felt about the program. Looking up the hashtag after the event brought us great joy when we got to read about how much fun everyone had. Volunteers raved about the event and are extremely eager to continue to the program and participate in future activities.

### **Critical Reflection**

This project was a huge eye-opener for me. I was able to realize the major discrepancies in physical education facing schools today. I learned things on a daily basis about children with special needs and the push for equality in physical education. I am now very passionate about the subject area, and wish to pursue special needs APE programs for the rest of my life. I did not quite capture the impact volleyball has made on my life, and in researching and taking action for this project, it is now very important for me to bring those same opportunities to children all over the world regardless of their functionality. All children have abilities, and it is my job as an educator to draw out the abilities of each one of my students. In researching information about my topic I stumbled upon a quote by Jim Abbott that I think truly represents my capstone project: "It's not the disability that defines you; it's how you deal with the challenges the disability presents you with. We have an obligation to the abilities we DO have, not the disability." This quote represents my project and all of the goals Dori and I had because

through opening the eyes of others, we hope to encourage everyone to see these children with disabilities as athletes that are just the same as everyone else.

As I get older and challenge myself to work for change to be the difference I want to see in schools, I will look back on this project and remember that it taught me to see each child in my classroom as an individual with a different background, and take it upon myself to find a way to teach him/her in the best way possible for them. My goal is to be an educator who thinks creatively and encourages her students to do so as well. Part of thinking outside of the box is to find ways for every one of my students to succeed and experience fulfillment while in the classroom. As far as my involvement in athletics, I want to continue to be a part of Otter Pup Stars and work towards building a competitive, multi-sport league for children with disabilities to compete against their peers in their favorite sports. I hope to see the clinic grow every year, and with each year make an impact on more volunteers. Half of the battle is getting people to share the same passion, compassion, and care as I do for the cause, and by pairing up volunteers each year at the clinic we will continue to increase the size of a community that cares.

### **Liberal Studies Themes**

In the regard to the context of the Liberal Studies Major, this project has proven to be valuable in helping me become a better future educator. Some of the themes from my coursework in this class are developing educator, becoming a diverse and multicultural scholar, teaching me innovative technological practicing, how to be a social justice collaborator, and being a subject matter generalist.

**Developing Educator.** It was important for me to build upon my pre-existing skills upon each year that I attended college. New courses meant new material, and



everything I learned has helped develop me further as a future educator. Major Pro-Seminar helped me get my first real experience in teaching a classroom along with Geology and Physical Education for Elementary Teachers. In these classes I had to plan and present my own lessons to a class and not only practice my competency in the subject material, but also practice my speaking and leadership skills. It was in my Major Pro-Seminar that I was first exposed to different perspectives and strategies for teaching. We touched on different types of teaching like Waldorf, Charter, and Private schools to help me better understand the setting I want to teach in for my future.

**Diversity and Multicultural Scholar.** One of the classes that I found to help me understand more diverse perspectives was multicultural children's literature. The class really emphasizes the importance of literature in teaching diversity to young students. Books are a great tool in exposing children to the diverse culture in our world without making it a serious conversation; simply reading a book about a child of a specific background will expose students to new cultures or teach them more about their own. Social Foundations of Multicultural Education helped me learn more about the history of multicultural education, or lack of it that students faced all across America. I was exposed greater thinking about events like Brown vs. Board of Education and Crystal City Walk out. Learning about them in class opened the door to the perspectives of different people and learned about movements within schools to fight inequalities.

Immigrants and Equity Issues in Education gave me a lot of information about many different cultures across the world. By having this background knowledge, I will be more understanding and encouraging of my students to bring their cultures into the classroom and their homes. This class was the first step of educating myself on the

cultures of potential students I will have, and in what ways I can be more culturally competent in teaching them. I hope to bring the knowledge I gained in this class to my future classroom of diverse students.

**Innovative Technological Practitioner.** Social Foundations for Multicultural Education was the first class that I took which exposed me to the growing usage of technology in the classroom. With the use of two Smartboards and a mobile computer I was able to practice using Prezi, Doceri, and my iPad all for learning purposes. Dr. Waltz encouraged me to use a different method of presentation for each of assignments we were given throughout the year. This allowed me to have actual practice with the teaching tools of the future and get more familiar with them before stepping foot into a classroom. The days of projectors and chalkboards are over, and the world of education is shifting towards more technology. As educators we need to properly be trained to use these materials of the future in the classroom.

**Social Justice Collaborator.** Senior Capstone was the class that taught me the most about social justice and working towards a cause I am passionate about. Through Immigration and Equity in Education I learned about how certain racial and ethnic groups struggle to have their needs met in the education system, but through my research for Senior Capstone, I was able to grasp the concept at a more real level. Children with special needs have their own set of limitations and restrictions in the education system, and as a future educator I hope to break the barrier and educate my fellow teachers on strategies to better incorporate children with special needs into the mainstream classroom, especially in physical education. I hope to continue to expand the Otter Pup Stars

program annually, and eventually create a community more aware of equal opportunity for children with special needs.

**Subject Matter Generalist.** One of the major benefits of the Liberal Studies program at CSUMB is the variety of subject matter we are able to cover while in the undergraduate program. While each class allowed us to go in depth in the subject material, we were offered a wide range of classes to better prepare us for any type of classroom setting we may encounter in the future. I enjoy math, science, and the arts in particular, but it was challenging and interesting to learn about subject material I am not as strong in. The opportunities I received while taking classes were endless, and I am grateful for all the information I was able to gain in many course subjects.

**Future Plans.** I will be starting the credential program at CSUMB in the Fall of 2014, and plan on staying to teach in Monterey County for at least a few years after I finish the credential program. I plan on continuing to contribute to raising awareness about adaptive physical education programs by being active member of the athletic community in the county as well coaching high school or middle school volleyball and continuing with the Otter Pup Stars sports clinic to help children with special needs have an athletic community of their own. The hope is to build the program with each year we participate, while helping with Special Olympics as well. My long-term goal is to continue teaching, while building up an adaptive sports league with either soccer or basketball for this region. In supporting a sports league, I hope to make a statement and inspire other CSUs to start adaptive youth sports program to help student-athletes understand the opportunity they are receiving by being a college athlete. The more people I can reach with this capstone project, the more people I can hopefully gather to stop the

inequalities facing youth with cognitive or physical disabilities, and bridge the gap between every student in the public school system.

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