

2009

Educators! : physically challenged students want to have fun

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Gonzales-Medina, Juan, "Educators! : physically challenged students want to have fun" (2009). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 325.

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Project Proposal

Mainstreamed physically challenged children are not receiving a top quality education due to fact that teachers do not have the proper awareness to work with these students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 grants these children the right to a proper education. This is done through an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan), required by federal law, which allows teachers to work with their students to accomplish certain goals within a year. The problem is that some teachers perceive that they are not prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom setting, and do not realize the benefits that arise from including disabled students into classroom activities.

The project will bring teachers' awareness about the benefits that come from including disabled students in all classroom activities. In addition, the information presented should make teachers feel comfortable about teaching these individual students. Raising teachers' awareness about disabilities will be through a presentation, watching a disability awareness video, participating in discussions and in short fun activities.

First of all, I chose the issue of disability awareness in the classroom because there are many benefits that can occur by giving physically challenged students opportunities. The main reason for this is because I am a disabled student and I clearly remember that my educational experience was not that wonderful as a child. I remember my teachers excluding me from class activities because of my disability. The teachers thought that the activities would cause me to get injured. For me, being left out from participating with my peers made me feel very angry and sad. The anger was due to fact that I was not given the opportunity to run around the field and

play with my classmates. The sadness was the result of being treated as an incapable being (a worthless feeling). In school, the only thing that was required from me was to observe the activity and keep track of the score of soccer games. Secondly, I am getting involved in the issue because I want current physically challenged students to be given the opportunity to have fun and to explore their own physical and cognitive capabilities. Every child, around the world, just wants to play around and be mischievous. I believe that it is time for educators to become aware of the benefits of including these students in the class activities.

Next, those affected by the disability awareness issue are disabled students in the mainstream classrooms. Those affected might have disabilities that range from mild to severe. Unfortunately, these students suffer many consequences due to the lack of disability awareness. One consequence that occurs is that students become alienated from their peers. That is, disabled students may have difficulties with building friendships due to being excluded from class participation. Another consequence that can come out from this problem is that disabled students may also develop a low self-esteem. Coates and Vickerman (2008) discussed the studies that have demonstrated that physically challenged children held a poor self-image due to limited participation in class activities.

The reason for these consequences is because teachers might not have enough training about to get their physically challenged students involved into the class activities. French, Henderson, and Lavay (2007) state that PE teachers agree about the challenges they face when trying to develop activities for their disabled students. The point is that many teachers don't have the adequate and essential knowledge when it comes to teaching a class that includes a student with a special need.

Recently, I conducted an indirect survey on a few elementary and middle school teachers (see Appendix A). This indirect survey was conducted at two Watsonville public schools (an elementary and middle school). The survey sample consisted of physical educators and elementary teachers. The results supported my claims about teachers not having adequate experience working with mainstreamed disabled students. Most of the teachers surveyed stated that they lacked the knowledge of how to incorporate their disabled students into classroom activities. I also found that many of the teachers (mostly elementary teachers) agreed that they did not know that disabled students could benefit from participating in activities that involve physical movement. I found, in conducting the indirect survey, that most of the educators who participated were first or second year teachers. It was shocking to learn first and second year teachers were not taught enough about disability inclusion.

The main reason the problem of exclusion should be addressed is because physically challenged students deserve the opportunity to participate in classroom activities alongside their classmates. By giving these students the opportunities, they could benefit by receiving physical and social abilities which could be used their entire life. Secondly, nondisabled students could also benefit from participating with their disabled peers. Bishop (1995) proposes that there are many positive outcomes with inclusion (mainstreaming students), which includes that nondisabled students were able to see beyond physical appearance. If the problem of getting teachers aware of the benefits of including disabled students in all activities were addressed, then, every child (disabled and nondisabled) would develop greater understanding about the differences they will encounter as they get older.

Next, educators have mixed beliefs about how to provide their disabled students with an adequate education. Piletic (1998) discusses that many Physical Educators feel pressure in

adapting activities to accommodate the disabled student. This demonstrates that teachers do not quite understand that disabled students can benefit from the activity, if they would take the time to adapt their activity for the child. Hardin (2005), on the other hand, stated that teachers feel as though they do not receive enough instruction on how to best help students with disabilities. This piece of literature shows that maybe teacher education is not really preparing future teachers with how to deal having a disabled student in the classroom.

One program that has had some positive outcomes is the Sport Education model (SEM). Foley, Kim, Lieberman, and Tindall (2007) explained that the main goal of the SEM is help disabled students become competent, literate, and enthusiastic sportsperson. The model basically helps the disabled student more than the teacher. Yet, the article does mention that there are other benefits associated with this model. One benefit includes helping disabled student get socialized and improve their personal abilities (i.e. strength). In respect to the effectiveness, this model helps with getting the public (teachers and students) informed about the benefits of giving disabled students the opportunity of improve their health. Programs are out there to help teachers become more aware of the benefits of getting physically challenged students involved, yet, there still much needs to be done to resolve the problem.

Next, about 40 educators participated in the survey. When it came to knowing about the benefits that can come out from getting physically challenged students involved, about 45% (18 educators) stated that they did not have any knowledge about the benefits. In response to questions about their preparedness in educating special needs students, only 15 % (6 educators) said that they were fully prepared to teach special needs students. Lastly, when asked about their years of experience. The result revealed that most of these educators (25%) were new to the field with only one or two years of experience. The results show that more needs to be done to

educate teachers on how to be better agents by engaging their physically challenged students in school activities.

Finally, the workshop is designed to educate teachers about methods to best help their students with special needs. The workshop would reiterate some of the same information concerning disability. Teachers should understand how incorporating disabled students into classroom activities could have positive benefits. The benefits would be similar to SEM. After fully assembled, school administrators and other educators will have access to the workshop. The reason is because the content of the workshop will be inside a box.

The workshop will help educators feel more comfortable about teaching disabled students. This will be accomplished the help of two principals. The principals are from two different schools. The first principal works with elementary school (H.A. Hyde) children and his name Brett Knupfer. The second principal works with middle school (E.A Hall) children and her name is Artemisa Cortez. The only restriction is that majority of the conversations will be held late in the afternoon. In terms to their programs, Mr. Knupfer stated that the workshop idea would be great for the new teachers at his school. He reiterated that new teachers usually do not have enough knowledge about disabled students other than the physically challenge students require extra assistance. Ms. Cortez just stated that it could be something that could benefit educators at other schools.

The first sets of materials are the essentials (i.e. paper, pens, etc.), but the most valuable materials are the things inside the box. A hard copy of the workshop agenda will let attendees about what is going to happen during the event. The facilitator will have to photocopy as many pages as he/she needs. The other important piece of material inside the box is a “how to proctor the workshop” sheet. This sheet will contain all the important information the facilitator will

need to know (i.e. amount of time needed for activities). A few activities will be included to reinforce some of the information being presented during the workshop. Two different surveys will be administered during the workshop. One will be conducted before the workshop and another after. Besides the surveys, an announcement template, which can be used to promote the workshop, will be included inside the box. A 1 to 2 hour video will be inside the box, which explains the challenges and rewards of mainstreaming physically challenged students. Lastly, a professional PowerPoint will be developed for the workshop. The PowerPoint will be used to reinforce the information. Only the key points will be included on the presentation. The group (attendees and facilitator) will have to create a dialogue to present information rather than just reading off the slides. The presentation will be saved onto a disk. This will make accessing the presentation much easier for the facilitator.

The PowerPoint workshop will develop teachers' awareness about how disabled students benefit from participating in class activities. Teachers will leave the workshop more confident about having these students in their classrooms. The workshop can take place before the school year begins for new teachers as a seminar and last about 3 hours. Once fully designed, all the printed information will be placed inside the box. The goal is to present facts regarding the issues and its solutions. It should be present in a professional manner, but would use simple language to present information. Educators need to leave the workshop with a greater understanding regarding how to include their physically challenged students.

Here's a timeline about how the workshop will be developed. As soon as next week (February 23), the search for the necessary materials needed to complete workshop will commence. March will be keeping in contact with community partners. During this time, conversation will be on discussing the development of the PowerPoint. There will be another

conducted survey to see what educators would want to learn regarding disabilities. The search for a video that can show the benefits and challenges of inclusion will take place during the end of March. By the end of March to early April, the development of the PowerPoint and inventory list and surveys will begin. By mid-April, finalizing the workshop in the box will occur. By the due date a professional looking box that will/can be used to demonstrate the problem and its solution will be completed.

Lastly, a final survey and mini-quiz will be conducted at the end of the workshop. The survey would be based on what the teacher learned in the workshop. The survey will consist of a reflection. The reflection will be based on their thoughts regarding teaching physically challenged students. Besides the survey, the mini-quiz will be based upon key points presented during the Power Point. If majority of the educators left with a clearer prospective about teaching their disabled students, then, the workshop did a great job in presenting the information properly. This information will come from the survey and mini-quiz.

In conclusion, the problem that needs to be addressed is that teachers are not aware about the benefits of including their physically challenged students into class activities. My involvement and motivation is due to the fact that it is an issue that hits home. I am disabled and I remember that my teachers never included me in many of the activities. This problem can be addressed through a workshop that can be conducted before the beginning of the school year. It is important for teachers to acquire knowledge regarding how to best teach their physically challenged students. Plus, these students are like any student at a school. They just want to play and be involved in the class activities. Therefore, educators need to become confident so that they can provide their physically challenged students with an excellent education.

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Appendix A

Survey Sample: Elementary and Middle School Teachers

Number of participants: 40 (5 Middle School Teachers and 35 Elementary Teachers)

Voluntary: Yes

Questions asked: 10 questions

Optional Question: Amount of Experience

Results: All of the teachers were giving the option of responding to the number of years teaching. Interestingly enough, not all the teachers responded to this question. This was okay because I felt that the question was kind of personal. Of all the teachers only about 20 teachers answered. Most of the teachers fell into the new teacher category. By this, I mean that most of them only had about 1 to 2 year experience.

Question #3, 4, 5: Confidence

Three questions on the survey dealt with confidence teaching disabled students. It was shocking to find out that most educators do feel that confident about having special needs students in the classroom. Some of them even expressed about safety issues. That is, some educators believe that having a disabled student in the classroom might be kind of hazardous. Their views are that the student might get injured and they will not be able to help them out. On the other hand, a small amount of teacher did state that they felt confident enough to teach these students.

Question#2: Exclusion

I feel that the question that was asked was very personal and wish I would not included it in the survey. The question dealt with excluding disabled students from class activities. Everyone put N/A as an answer. Therefore, this question was not included in the data.

Questions #6, 7, 8, 9, 10: Benefit Awareness

The questions asked dealt with the being knowledgeable about all the benefits that can come out of including disabled student. Interestingly, about the same amount of educators (45%) responded that they were clueless about the benefits that appear from class participation. While are responded that they had a clue about benefits but have never seen it occur in the years teaching.

Overall:

From viewing the results, I can see that my suspicion about the issue is correct. Teacher all around the state and/or nation need to become aware about the need of including disabled students into the lesson plan. They also need to develop a greater knowledge about the benefits disabled students can received by giving providing them the opportunities to succeed. This is just some raw numbers from the survey.

Final Reflection

Introduction:

The project points out the need for educators to become aware about the issues of excluding physically challenged students in classroom activities. Some teachers perceive that they are not prepared to teach disabled students. Many of these educators also believe that their credentialing program did poorly on preparing them for inclusion.

For that reason, the project gives educators supplemental information about how to include physically challenged students in all classroom activities. This objective will be accomplished through a free, friendly workshop that will be provided to first year teachers at the beginning of each school year. The workshop addresses major topics about inclusion, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), educators' perceptions regarding inclusion, the effects of exclusion on physically challenged students, and ideas on how to include these students into the classroom activities. The project also includes two surveys, which are going to be used to measure an educator's perception about inclusion before and after the workshop.

Reflection:

The workshop, itself, has not been implemented at any schools at the present time because the design of it is to prepare first year school teachers about inclusion at the beginning of the school year. On one hand, the workshop contains important information about inclusion that can be beneficial for an educator. An educator can find it interesting that there are other educators who hold a negative perception about teaching physically challenged students, which could make them think about their own perception regarding the issue. Another wonderful feature of the workshop is the video segment that addresses

the topic of disability awareness. The video will engage participants into learning the valuable benefits of including physically challenged students in regular classroom activities. Lastly, the workshop contains three insightful discussions about the problem of excluding physically challenged students. Discussions are terrific. The workshop discussions give all of the attendees the opportunities to learn from each other. Of course, there were many flaws which can make the workshop unexciting.

For one, the workshop's PowerPoint design is very childish. It looks like a seven year old put the presentation together. The presentation design lacks that professional touch. The current design can cause the attendees to lose interest on the information being presented. Another flaw of the workshop is the graphics on the PowerPoint slides. These graphics are images that were found on clip art. Clip art images are the ones that come with Microsoft Office. The gallery contained many useful images. The problem is that some of the images are small and barely noticeable on slide. Stretching the images made it worse, in that, they contained too many pixels. This made the image look very blurry. Again, this can cause an attendee to lose interest on the workshop.

Overall, the workshop should be successful when implemented at a school. New teachers will leave with more awareness about how to include any physically challenged student into a class activity. Besides the few flaws, educators are going to find that the workshop was very informative. It is going to be more successful, especially, when someone entering the teaching field has no prior knowledge on the issues surrounding the exclusion of physically challenged children from classroom activities. After taking the workshop, an educator is going to leave with the benefits that come from including those

students in all classroom activities. The workshop is considered a big success if all attendees leave with a higher awareness about inclusion.

As an added bonus, the newer version of the workshop includes examples of some common disabilities than an educator may encounter inside their classroom. The original presentation had no examples of these disabilities. The disabilities examples that were chosen for the workshop are Cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Spina bifida, and Visual impairments. Educators are given a brief overview of each disability example. Then, they are instructed to participate in an activity and come up with ideas about the best ways to help these students. This addition to the presentation is valuable because it gives educators the opportunity to develop some ideas on how to help their disabled students.

Outcomes:

Going back to measuring success, the workshop contains two different surveys. The first survey is taken before the workshop begins. The purpose is to measure how much information about inclusion and exclusion each educator received through the credentialing program. Moreover, the last survey will measure the workshop's success. This measure comes from how much information an educator acquired from the workshop.

In order for the workshop to be considered successful, most educators have to state that the information presented was resourceful to them. They need to demonstrate that they understood the information that was presented. One source of measurement comes from a scale that ranks the workshop. Educators are given a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "not helpful" and 5 being "very informative"). If most educators gave the

workshop 5s, then, that informs the facilitator that the workshop taught the new educators about including physically challenged students in classroom activities.

On the other hand, the measurement results can also tell the facilitator that the workshop may require some improvement. Improving the workshop will be the result of educators given the workshop negative comments. If this occurs, the facilitator is required to update information as needed and/or find other activities that can be beneficial to new educators.

Analysis:

This particular workshop is unique because all the materials will be inside a box. The only requirement is for school administrators to be willing to sponsor this type of workshop. In reality, the workshop can be facilitated by any person because all the talking points are included inside the box. The facilitator may be required to buy certain supplies for the workshop, which include name tags, pencils, etc. The other nice feature of this workshop is that the information may be modified. This is possible due to the fact that the materials are provided on a disk. The only thing required is that the facilitator does some research before changing any information. On a different note, it is more beneficial for the workshop to be held at the beginning of the school year. Teachers may need to learn about the issues of inclusion before entering a classroom, so that may be more prepared for teaching physically challenged students. Running the workshop at the beginning will help the educator with future classroom preparations.

Alternatively, some components of the workshop may not be changed. The video that is provided should be used at every workshop. The video is very informative. It does an excellent job in explaining the meaning of disability awareness. Without the video,

educators are not being fully taught about how to best help their disabled students.

Another unchangeable feature is the surveys. These surveys measure the success of the workshop. If they were omitted from the workshop, no one will know if everybody in attendance understood all of the information presented. Similarly, facilitators will not have a clue on what to improve for future workshops.

Then again, the workshop may require some touchups. One important touchup that the presentation requires is a new PowerPoint design. The current design seems childish and looks very unprofessional. Therefore, facilitators may want to look for a PowerPoint design that is more attractive, and engages the audience into participation. The last touchup is to add new graphics for the slides. The facilitator may want to look for pictures that are clearer and not distorted.

Moreover, if someone were pursuing this type of workshop, the only thing to say is good luck. Creating a workshop is very rewarding, especially, when all the attendees leave with a new source of knowledge. The only issue with the creation process is time. It takes too much time in finding all of the information one may use. Time is also a factor when designing the presentation. Then again, once created, it is very rewarding to see the others learning about the presentation's information.

Learning:

The most important lesson I learned from this project was that there is much work that needs to be done to teach educators about the issues pertaining to the exclusion of physically challenged students. In order to resolve this problem, educators need to understand that exclusion of these students from classroom activities may have negative effects on that particular child. I also learned that the issue of exclusion still continues in

our schools. This problem has been around since I was a young boy. Lastly, I learned that I can make a difference. It does not matter what type of action one takes. The only important step is willingness to fight for what one believes in.

Moreover, I feel that this project has prepared me as a citizen. This project taught me to use my education to my advantage. My education has made me realize about the injustices that exist in our society. The project made me narrow on one of those injustices. This injustice is towards the physically challenged population and their education. As a citizen, the project taught me to fight for what I believe in. It also taught me that I need to be part of my community. I came to this realization when I was asked to find a community partner.

On another note, I am taking a lot of valuable tools with me. The tools are finding a problem, searching for a community partner, and working on a solution. I cannot stress enough that these tools are very important. Without them, it would be impossible to fight for change. The one tool that I want to continue using throughout my life is having a community partner. Likewise, I want to become involve in my community doing volunteer work and helping those less fortunate than me. If it were not for this project, I may not have come across any of these tools.

Conclusion:

Indeed, the project was to get educators aware about the issues of the exclusion of physically challenged students inside the classroom. This is accomplished through a friendly workshop that informs educators of what they can do to include their physically challenged students into classroom activities. Success will be measured through two surveys. These survey measures the educator's knowledge regarding the issue. The one

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feature of the workshop is that it may be presented by anyone because the all necessary materials will be included in a box. The components that may be changed are the design of the presentation and graphics. The workshop components that should not change are the video and surveys. The project taught me to become part of my community. It left the impression that change can only occur when one is willing to take on the battle. If one would fight for change, all our children will grew in a happier society without any injustices.