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Virtually Left Behind: The Struggles of Adapted Physical Education Through Online Learning for Students with Special Needs

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**Virtually Left Behind: The Struggles of Adapted Physical Education Through Online
Learning for Students with Special Needs**

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LS 400: Senior Capstone

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May 26, 2021

Abstract

The focus issue addressed in this Capstone Project is on improving the challenges faced by students with special needs through online modalities of adapted physical education (APE). This is an important issue for students with special needs because they are regressing because of online learning. Students with special needs need a routine and a hands-on learning environment to thrive. It is argued that if teachers, parents, and students meet certain criteria, these challenges can be improved with collaboration. The primary stakeholders' perspectives included one APE teacher and three parents, due to their relevant experience and observations of online APE and the visible effects it has had on students. Three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Based on the data, an action option is argued to be the most effective way to improve the struggles of adapted physical education through online learning.

**Virtually Left Behind: The Struggles of Adapted Physical Education Through Online
Learning For Students with Special Needs**

From the beginning of the pandemic, life has been very uncertain and abnormal for people across the globe. As a sister of twin brothers who have autism, I have seen the direct effects that the pandemic and closure of schools have had on students with special needs. It has been difficult to transition not only one but two brothers with special needs into the online learning environment. It is a type of environment they are not used to, which has created roadblocks and frustration throughout this unprecedented year.

When my family and I told my brothers the news it was hard for them to grasp what was happening. They did not understand why they could not ride the bus to school, go to the park, or swim at the community pool. They simply wanted their routine back, but we could not give them a timeline of when that would occur. It has definitely been a struggle for my family to assist my brothers during online learning. My brothers both have their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals so they have had to work in separate rooms on their own computers to not distract one another. This makes it difficult for my dad to be in two places at once and help assist my brothers and their teachers with their learning. My mom works for a preschool so she has also been teaching online from her bedroom. As for myself, I try to help my brothers as much as I can, but sometimes it is difficult with my college courses and work schedule. As for my sister, she has been away at her school so unfortunately, we do not have her extra help. As a family, we have had to constantly maneuver through one another's schedules to help give my brothers the best education that they so badly need.

Through my Service Learning hours, I was able to help assist my brothers and get my hours in, which allowed me to help and learn simultaneously. I enjoyed being able to observe my brothers' adapted physical education online class. It helped me see what my future career will look like, and view strategies that the teacher made use of. I could tell that online physical education was not an ideal situation, especially for students with special needs. At times, it was difficult for the teacher to keep my brother, Mckay¹, on-task and focused. He was not used to not having that in-person structure and routine, which meant that he did not want to do the activities his teacher had planned. I could tell that Mckay was not benefiting from what his teacher was actively providing for him. I also was aware that their physical activity levels were lacking with less movement due to the stay-at-home orders. I realize that their APE class is even more crucial now because of the pandemic, but it has become more difficult to be effective for all students.

There were instances where my brother, Mckay, did not want to participate in his APE class at all. It only occurs twice a week for 30 minutes so it is important that he makes the most of the time he is able to move his body in a structured format. Unfortunately, more often than not he was off-task and unable to focus. This is due to the fact that he is a kinesthetic learner and needs his teacher there with him one-on-one to be successful. Children with autism are typically restrictive, rigid, and obsessive in their behaviors and during activities. Unfamiliar situations where they may become overwhelmed, stressed or uncomfortable can create challenges. Typically he will get frustrated when told to do a certain movement or activity and start to throw a fit. This then distracted his brother, Troy, so we had to place Mckay in a separate room to cool

¹ All proper names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the people and places involved in this project.

down. By the time he was ready to work, the online APE session was done and he was unable to benefit from it. McKay needs structured and individualized instruction for the success of his learning. Especially during APE, it is difficult to keep him on task when his teacher is not there to be physically there with him. It is upsetting to see that his physical activity skills are declining due to the fact that online learning just does not work as well for students with special needs.

The pandemic has made me realize that there has been an increase in screen time, less overall movement, more sitting, and a decrease in human interaction. These issues have caused my brothers to regress in certain areas. This new way of remote learning has created anxious minds and physical activity is the one thing that can help resolve this by stimulating growth developmentally in students. I believe with the right tools, resources, and strategies we can help make online learning the best it can be for as long as we may need it. It is not an ideal situation but we need to make sure that special needs students are not regressing for the sake of their development.

Literature Synthesis & Integration: The Struggles of Adapted Physical Education Through Online Learning For Students with Special Needs

Adapted Physical Education (APE) is a form of physical education that is intended to meet the developmental needs of students with disabilities. APE is crucial to the development of children with special needs and disabilities. Currently, with online learning being at the forefront of students' education, it is important to look at the challenges and struggles of APE through online learning, and how to better benefit special needs students' education. Additionally, the possible solutions to this problem must be considered. The challenges faced due to the pandemic directly impact special education students, teachers, and parents.

What is the Issue?

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of uncertainty into everyone's lives. This uncertainty has largely impacted the educational aspect of children's lives, primarily in the ways of learning that have changed dramatically. The stay-at-home orders have led to a disruption in special needs students' routines and learning as well as a decrease in their physical activity levels (Yarimkaya & Esentürk, 2020). While it has been a challenge for nearly every student and teacher, it has particularly been difficult for students with special needs and their teachers. Special education is much more than just math and science. It includes education through physical activity, socialization, and life skills, all of which have been lacking in online learning for students with special needs during the pandemic. This interruption to their normal and necessary way of in-person learning has caused students with special needs to regress.

With adapted physical education also being taught virtually, it has been a challenge for APE teachers to give their students the same hands-on approach and physical education experience through a screen. Online learning can cause students with disabilities to be at a disadvantage and prompt special education teachers to be more strategic when planning lessons (Ng, 2020). The hands-on approach and in-person learning that students with special needs are so used to have been stripped from them unannounced for a year now. The benefits of physical activity are a challenge to experience through online learning. Physical activity has been shown to not only benefit students cognitively but also improve students with special needs behavior as well (Menear & Neumier, 2015). With the pandemic still occurring, this places an importance on the need for students with special needs to receive the cognitive and behavioral benefits of adapted physical education. While APE teachers are doing the best with what they can during the

pandemic, the issue is that this way of learning is not suitable for students with special needs, especially for adapted physical education.

Why is it an Issue?

To understand why online learning is a challenge for special education, it is imperative to understand the benefits of physical activity for students with special needs. Stanish et al. (2017) indicated that people with special needs, such as autism spectrum disorder, are only accumulating about 20 minutes of physical activity a day, which is considerably lower than their general education peers. It can be inferred that this amount of physical activity is declining during the pandemic. Galen from 131 A.D. who was a Greek surgeon, physician, and philosopher concluded that exercise could treat nearly every form of disease. His philosophy predicts why exercise is an even more crucial part of children's habits during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tipton, 2014). Obesity rates in children could increase due to a lack of resources and opportunities during online adapted physical education and sedentary behavior at home (Dunton et al., 2020).

Greenway and Eaton-Thomas (2020) explain how some of the effects of the pandemic will be detrimental to the learning and development of students with special needs. Routines, structure, and expectations are very crucial to children with special needs, as transitions can sometimes be difficult to manage. It is believed that the pandemic could be causing psychological distress to children with special needs because of their deprivation of a predictable routine (Jefsen, Rohde, Nørremark, & Østergaard, 2020). Not only this but the habituation of children having to stay home has also caused stress in parents, as they try to manage all the duties to give their child a beneficial educational experience. Neece, McIntyre, and Fenning

(2020) elaborate on the reason behind this stress in parents of disabled children was due to feelings of inadequate social support.

Physical activity is very important to make a habit of at a young age to live a healthy life. It is just as imperative for students with special needs to receive the same benefits of physical education and activity as general education students. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) explains that there are federal laws that state children with or without disabilities must be given opportunities to be physically active in school. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of ADA prohibits discrimination against children with disabilities and schools must provide appropriate physical education for students with disabilities. These regulations do not change despite the fact that there is a global pandemic. It is even more critical to provide special needs students with more ways to move their bodies because of the increase in sedentary lifestyles through online learning. While school systems' efforts are admirable in providing an alternative way of learning, this new way of learning may result in an increase of unhealthy and sedentary behaviors due to working and studying from home (Zheng et. al, 2020). This research proves that special needs students' low levels of physical activity by nature will continue to decline during the pandemic. Teachers and parents need to equip special needs students with strategies to move their bodies more during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What Should be Done?

As society continues to maneuver through the challenges of the pandemic, strategies and techniques need to be put into action to allow students with special needs to be successful. In order to achieve this goal, teachers and administration must come up with ways to support students' physical activity levels at home. This is not about teachers being at fault, in fact, they have stepped up and at the end of the day working through these challenges would be difficult

for anyone. For adapted physical education, this online learning struggle becomes even more prominent for special needs students. Remote learning simply is not working for SPED students, “It’s hard enough that our kids have lost the routine that they thrive and depend on, but now children with special education services are told to get onto a laptop by themselves, view teachers or therapists through a screen and hope that it works out or has some value to it” (Dennehy, 2020, pg. 1). Hence, we must give students a more beneficial experience during these unprecedented times.

There are other methods that can allow students to be active throughout their online schooling. Dunton et al. (2020) hypothesize that schools could incorporate ways to keep students physically active, through activity breaks, physically active subject-based lessons, and online physical education. While some schools are including online adapted physical education for their special needs students, it is simply not the same as in-person APE. With the inclusion of activity breaks during online learning students can stay active and eliminate sitting in front of a screen for hours on end. Special education teachers can influence students to have moments of movement as part of their breaks. As screen time has increased during COVID-19 it has been linked with prolonged sedentary bouts without disruption (Zheng et al., 2020). Including physical activity-based lessons could also help break this habit and provide a more beneficial experience.

Teacher and parent relationships are also very crucial to the success of students with disabilities. That necessary collaboration creates a sense of support and prevents students from regressing in their academic progress, especially during online learning. Parmigiani et al. (2020) suggests that the 34.02% of families that did not collaborate well with teachers experienced many more challenges. Children with special needs and disabilities tend to need someone to sit

near them and guide them through their work. This is why it is important for parents to collaborate well with teachers and be involved in their child's education during such a challenging time. Through good relationships and collaboration among teachers and parents inclusive practices were able to be implemented and carried out successfully (Parmigiani et al., 2020). Teaching students virtually through their homes have helped teachers understand their students on a more personal level. Teachers have also witnessed the correlation between lack of family support at home and the lack of collaboration with the teacher. When there is a lack of collaboration there is a lack of support for the student which causes the student to regress. Incorporating more importance on teacher and parent relationships and collaboration will increase the effectiveness of online learning for students with special needs.

Special education teachers understand what works for their students, but shifting to the online world has been extremely difficult. By providing students with resources and as much support at home, they can have a successful online physical education experience. Special needs students learn well by using visual supports, this provides students with the learning style that may be most favorable to them.

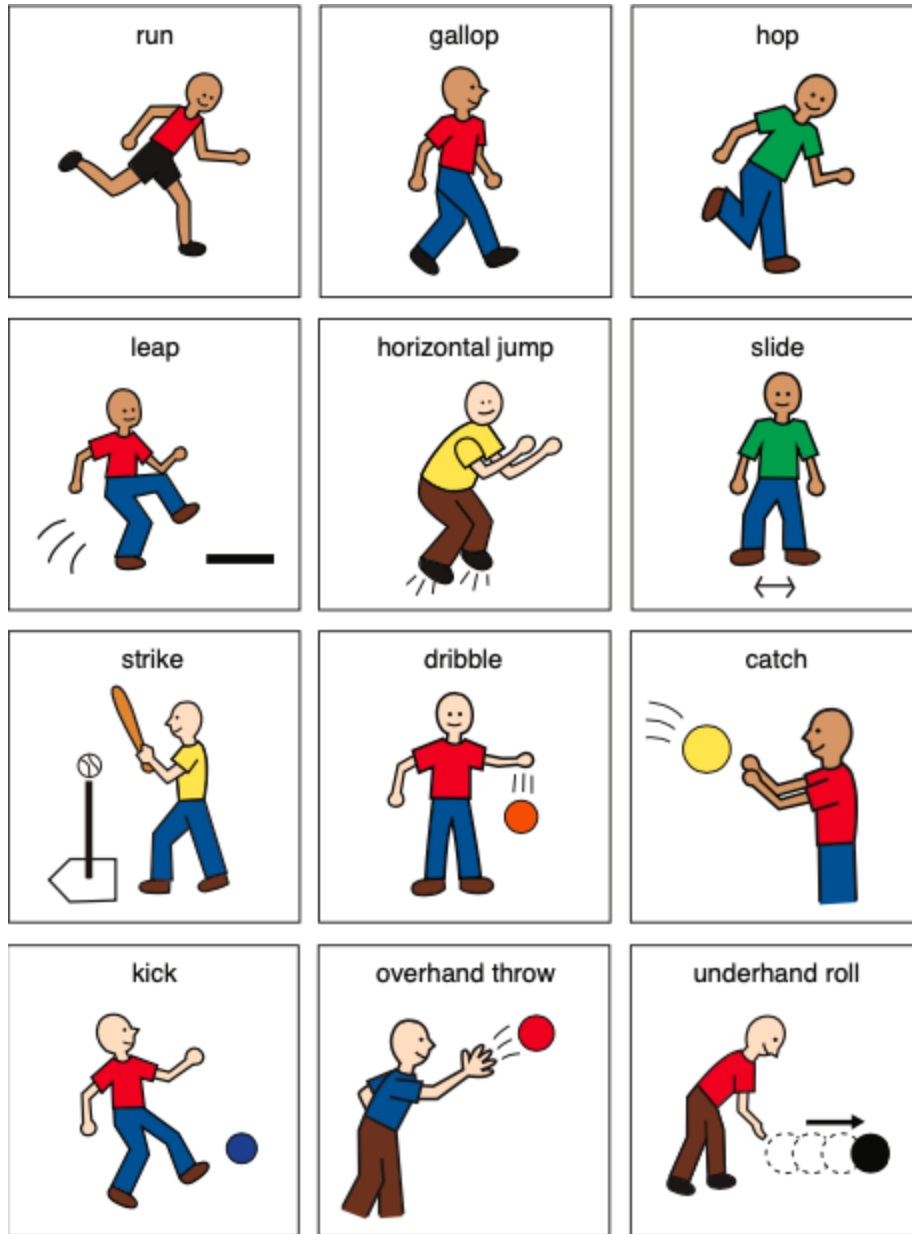


Figure 2: Visual supports that could be useful when asking a child to perform gross motor skills for the TGMD-2 assessment. Reprinted from Do You Know What I’m Saying? Strategies to Assess Motor Skills for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2015), retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.csumb.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=s3h&AN=100207840&site=ehost-live>

There are many techniques that an APE teacher can use to promote physical movement through online learning. Breslin and Liu (2015) report that children with autism spectrum disorder are visual learners and effectively understand how to move their body when it is shown in a way that they can visually see rather than just hear. In *Figure 1*, the images represent visual supports that can be used to assist students with special needs to perform motor skills. APE teachers could provide parents and students with these visual supports to have physically with them while online learning. This will minimize the stress that comes with online learning in processing information and how to do certain physical movements. Breslin and Liu (2015) also suggest using short verbal commands in addition to the visual supports to convey the meaning of the movement. This will act as a reinforcement for students with special needs so they are able to clearly understand what to do during their APE class.

It is important to understand that it may be difficult for teachers to provide these resources and options for students during remote learning. Nonetheless, I think it is still possible to give students with special needs the tools they need to be successful in their online learning classes and not feel as though they are left behind. This transition into online learning has been difficult, but Dennehy (2020) believes that special education services should be delivered to the fullest extent during the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why teachers need to provide students with the tools and resources necessary to have a rewarding learning experience, despite being in a pandemic.

Conclusion

Altogether, there are various ideas to implement into online adapted physical education to greater benefit special needs' learning experience. While some schools are still incorporating physical education for students, it is crucial to make sure that their remote experience is still just

as valuable. Educators must help instruct their special needs students to move their bodies further with unique methods and tools while at home. Figuring out what works best for each student and their individual needs is a large part of the solution. During these unprecedented times and with increased sedentary conditions, teachers, parents, and students must work together to keep special needs students' minds and bodies healthy.

Method

Adapted Physical Education is an important part of the development of students with special needs and disabilities. For this Capstone Project, I investigated how teachers of students with disabilities view APE instruction through online learning and what they thought could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant literature, I used what I learned to formulate an action that responds to the struggles of APE through online learning in a way that inspires, informs, and involves a particular audience.

Context

This research took place at a high school located in Winetown, California. Winetown is known for its championship golf courses, hot air ballooning weather conditions, and miles of award-winning wineries. California is one of the most supportive states for raising a child with special needs. The demographics of Winetown are mostly white and middle-class families with a number of people of Native American and Hispanic descent. This project is focused specifically on the special needs community and the impact of COVID-19 and online learning. Winetown Valley High School includes a total enrollment of 33% Hispanic, 49% white, and 15% with disabilities (School accountability report card, 2019). Out of the 671 students enrolled, 101 of those students have disabilities, and 99 of those students were tested in ELA and Mathematics in the 2018-2019 school year (School accountability report card, 2019). With Winetown Valley

High having a number of students with disabilities, it allows the research to be reliable and relevant to the project.

Participants and Participant Selection

The participants I interviewed were one APE teacher and three parents from Winetown Valley High. Winetown Valley High School was chosen because of the Special Education Program and the connections I have with the APE teachers and parents at the school. This group of prospective participants was invited to participate because of their relevant experience, expertise, and influence on the issue.

Taylor Roberts. An APE teacher for students with special needs and disabilities at the high school level, particularly Winetown Valley High School. She has taught for six years, but first was a substitute teacher for ten years with a focus on PE and SPED classes. Mrs. Roberts has been teaching adapted physical education for four years now. She teaches at five different schools within the Winetown Valley Unified School District. Her class sizes vary from two students to ten students, but she likes to have four to six students in her APE classes.

Cindy Newman. A white female parent of twin boys who have autism and are in Mrs. Roberts APE class. She is also a teacher aide for a special education preschool class and has been teaching there for ten years.

Mark Newman. A white male parent of twin boys who have autism and are in Mrs. Roberts APE class. He has supervised the twins during their APE online class throughout the pandemic and witnessed the effects of this type of learning.

Jennifer Smith. A Hispanic female parent of a boy who has autism and is in Mrs. Roberts' APE class. She also works with special needs children in a preschool class as an aide. She has been a teacher aide for eight years.

Researcher. This focus issue is personally meaningful to me because I have seen the challenges that my autistic twin brothers have faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, during APE, online learning has been difficult to keep students like my brothers on task and focused. I witnessed this by observing and assisting my brothers' APE online class for my service learning hours throughout the pandemic. I have a passion for physical activity and special education students so I want to see students excel in this area. Adapted physical education is heavily based on the hands-on interactions between students and teachers, so this transition has been difficult to manage and adapt. I believe having not one but two brothers with autism and being able to learn from them daily, differentiates me from other teachers and parents. I am actively pursuing a degree in Liberal Studies and a career in APE, and although I have not experienced challenges from a teacher or parent standpoint, I have a unique viewpoint due to my experiences with my brothers. I need to be mindful that my thoughts or ideas may be different from others on this issue, which is okay because it is good to have a variety of perspectives. I believe that it is important to always give students opportunities for success, so in this way, my perspectives and concerns motivate me to create change for those who may not have a voice.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

Teacher Interview:

1. Describe what it has been like to teach APE remotely. What do you see as the challenges with APE through online instruction and what are you most concerned about when it comes to this issue?
2. How much P.E. are your students receiving a week and what has been effective?
3. What is currently being done to improve APE through online instruction - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

4. What do you think should be done about APE instruction during the pandemic?
5. What do you think are the obstacles to changing the protocols of APE through online instruction for students with special needs?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about APE and/or the improvement of APE online instruction?

Parent Interview:

1. What do you see as the problem with APE through online instruction?
2. What is currently being done to improve APE through online instruction - by whom - and do you think this is good or bad?
3. What do you think should be done about APE during the pandemic?
4. What do you think are the obstacles to changing the protocols of APE through online instruction for students with special needs?
5. What has been a challenge for you as a parent?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about APE and/or the improvement of APE online instruction?

Procedure

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Interviews took less than one hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent) and took place on ZOOM. A semi-structured interview format was used, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 30 minutes to an hour to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, an APE teacher and three parents were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve APE through online learning for students with special needs. This is important because special needs students are regressing due to online learning and therefore not meeting their educational goals through physical activity, socialization, and life skills. Special needs children need to be in a hands-on and in-person learning environment to thrive. For APE to be successful it requires hand-over-hand, light touching for prompting, and gestures. With these methods being unavailable due to online learning, an alternative solution needs to be addressed. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time; effectiveness; and amount of collaboration. Time is constantly working against us, so it is important to consider how much time will be required for each action option. Effectiveness is important as it measures how each action option will impact the APE experience and success of students. Lastly, the amount of collaboration is important as it measures how much parent, teacher, and student involvement and care are necessary to carry out each action option. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

| | Time | Effectiveness | Amount of Collaboration |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Teacher and Parent Relationships | Medium | High | High |
| Use of Visual Supports/Modeling | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Activity Breaks | Low | Medium | Medium |

Teacher and Parent Relationships

Teacher and parent communication can take some vulnerability and open-mindedness. Many interviewees presented the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents for the success of special education students. The data collected supported the literature of possible solutions for fixing the challenges within online learning for APE students. Teachers and parents must work together to help special needs students succeed through online learning. As one parent interviewee communicated, parents must be involved in their child's education and help facilitate the student, especially during online APE (C. Newman, personal communication, April 4, 2021). Teachers and parents must make a collaborative effort to assist special needs students through online learning. One teacher explained that not being in-person to help her students be successful through activities and goals was the biggest challenge with online learning (T. Roberts, personal communication, March 29, 2021). This emphasizes how critical it is for teachers and parents to keep open lines of communication and work together to ensure that the child is always succeeding. However, a theme emerged across the interviews that not every parent wants to be

involved in their child's education. In Roberts' words, "Parents that are actively involved and care are very rare. I was able to see the correlation between lack of support from parents and regression in the student" (T. Roberts, personal communication, March 29, 2021). The literature states that family involvement was necessary for students to be successful through such a difficult time (Parmigiani et al., 2020). This stresses the importance of good teacher and parent collaboration for APE to be productive during online learning.

Through analyzing the literature research and interview data, one action option was made clear that teachers and parents need to have good relationships. With the unprecedented times of online learning, parents must be contributing to their child's education. Good teacher and parent relationships are critical to the potency of online learning for special needs students. This will require some time as teachers and parents will need to get to know each other personally either during class time or on their own time. While a child is sitting there on the computer, a parent should be next to them like an instructional aide since the teacher cannot physically be there. A good teacher and parent relationship would be highly effective to the student's learning experience. As for the amount of collaboration, parents must be highly involved in their child's education just as much as teachers.

Use of Visual Supports/Modeling

Students with special needs are very much visual and hands-on learners. Limiting their visual learning to a small screen has been particularly difficult for teachers and students. The use of visuals in addition to modeling has been expressed by interviewees as a useful tool. One parent expressed that it was challenging for his children to do APE activities inside the home while they needed to look at the computer screen where the APE teacher was giving instruction (M. Newman, personal communication, April 5, 2021). Special needs students need to see their

teacher doing the movement, but that can be challenging with such a small screen. Another parent shared a similar perspective on APE through the computer, “It’s very difficult for students to get motivated during APE activities with a tiny square on a screen and also have the teacher be able to direct individuals on what to improve” (J. Smith, personal communication, April 4, 2021). The fact of the matter is that special needs students are not used to this type of learning, what they are used to is visuals, prompting, gestures, etc. Using visual supports can help support students with disabilities, especially during APE. The literature reveals that without visual supports, special needs children may not fully understand what is being asked of them (Breslin & Liu, 2015). This suggests that the use of visuals can be there to guide them in addition to the teacher modeling the movement or behavior. This is not to say that a student would not feel overwhelmed with the out-of-the-ordinary routine that is asked of them during online learning. Some interviewees suggested that visual supports could be substantially beneficial but the lack of motivation and frustration within the student is still a possibility.

After examining both the literature research and interview data, a second action option emerged. With the evidence that students with special needs thrive off visual learning, it was clear that incorporating visual supports in addition to teacher modeling would be beneficial to APE. Visual supports are included to help provide direction and structure to students with special needs, which can be helpful during online learning. This option will still require some time for the teacher to create these visuals and get them to the homes of students. As for effectiveness, it will be beneficial to have that added visual support that students and parents can use to depict the fundamental motor skills being addressed. For the amount of collaboration, it will just require the teacher getting the parent accustomed to what each visual represents so they can utilize it with their child.

Activity Breaks

With the inclusion of online adapted physical education already taking place, many interviewees stated that online learning for APE just was not the same as in-person instruction. With an increase in screen time and more sedentary behaviors, a third theme was addressed, taking breaks from screen time. One teacher interviewee shared that she would have one of her students take breaks from APE by jumping on a trampoline. The breaks are usually one to five minutes and when the timer goes off they know that it is time to work again (T. Roberts, personal communication, March 29, 2021). This allows the student to take a break from looking at a screen and refocus to return to their APE instruction. One parent explained that her son is not as engaged with online APE as he would be in person (J. Smith, personal communication, April 4, 2021). Students with special needs must be moving their bodies, especially during online learning because of the increase in screen time. This parallels with the literature when Zheng et al. (2020) discussed that the total time spent in sedentary behavior was much higher during COVID-19 and online learning than compared to before the pandemic. This is important to recognize as the challenges that are coming from APE are due to COVID-19 and online learning. Activity breaks may not work for all students but they can be a useful strategy to those who need guidance in staying engaged.

To promote engagement and less challenging behavior during APE, activity breaks can be a useful tool to keep students engaged. The literature and data helped correlate the need to decrease sedentary behavior and increase engagement which led to a third action option. Activity breaks are a useful tool to give students time away from the screen to refocus their attention and effort on the APE instruction. These types of breaks do not take much time or planning as the teacher can incorporate breaks as needed. As for effectiveness, they can help give students a

necessary break, but may not solve all the challenges within online APE. There may be a bit of collaboration required among the parents, teacher, and student to figure out what type of activity break would be accessible and beneficial to the student.

Conclusion

After reviewing the three action options that are recommended for creating a more beneficial APE online learning experience for students with special needs, it is recommended that teachers and parents increase their collaboration to form a good relationship. Based on the literature research and the data that was collected in the interview process, I am positive that this is the best option to address the struggles of APE through online learning. This section will consider the concessions, limitations, and potential negative outcomes that this action option may impose.

Concessions. While I chose teacher and parent relationships as the best action option, the other two action options had substantial strengths additionally. For example, the use of visual supports in addition to modeling is aimed to directly impact the students with special needs by providing a tool they are familiar with using during in-person learning. The literature discusses that visual supports are a vital component for students with special needs to successfully interpret information, however, educators cannot always control the abilities or behaviors of students, especially through online modalities of APE (as cited in Breslin & Liu, 2015). This action option takes a moderate amount of time as well as the amount of collaboration but can be fairly effective in eliminating challenges and misunderstandings during online learning. As for activity breaks, there are benefits to the incorporation of this action option. Unlike the other options, this one would take the least amount of time to incorporate into class. However, it may not be as effective for every student's needs. Both visual supports and activity breaks are strategies that

students with special needs are fairly used to in their normal in-person routine. With the teacher not being able to be physically present with students is where it gets complex and why the need for teacher and parent collaboration and more parental involvement is necessary. Nonetheless, both action options have great capability in providing a fix to the challenges experienced in online APE.

Limitations. Although I am confident in picking teacher and parent relationships as my recommended action option, there are still limitations to consider. For instance, not every parent wants to or can be involved. This option does require teachers and parents to collaborate with parents at least once a week. This can be challenging as some parents have still had to go to work and may not be available for this level of involvement and collaboration. Parents who have full-time jobs could be at a disadvantage in their ability to be involved with their child's education. However, some parents may just view online learning as an hour for their child to be babysat, and they choose not to be involved. Forcing involvement in parents may not ensure that parents will be supportive of the student or teacher.

Potential negative outcomes. In addition to limitations, there are possible negative outcomes that could occur as a result of the action option. For example, when a concern arises teachers and parents may sometimes disagree, no matter how benevolent they are. This could create a rift in the relationship if not handled appropriately. Another potential negative outcome to consider is that teachers could witness the lack of support and care for the child when he/she is at home. With online learning, teachers can see how students behave at home and see the level of family support. In addition to this, sometimes parents will be in denial of their child's abilities and what their diagnosis actually is, so they may be hesitant and unwilling to genuinely work with the teacher. While some parents may not be able to provide support at home for their child

due to unavailability, any parent can take the time out of their week to check in with the teacher. Although there are some potential negatives to this action option, there are many alternative solutions to any roadblocks that may arise.

Conclusion. Regardless of all the limitations or potential negative outcomes, I still recommend teacher and parent relationships as the best option to ensure that special needs students are succeeding through online APE. I believe that this is the best option because of the variety of things that could be done to support the child through either hands-on support, parent and teacher communication, or access to an email and phone. The action option had the greatest effectiveness out of all the options. The literature proved that when teachers and parents collaborated, the students had a more successful learning experience. Even a small amount of collaboration and involvement is beneficial to the student's education. This option does not require a large amount of time to be successful. The parent just being there to support the teacher and student when needed would be sufficient and better than nothing. I believe that the amount of collaboration is not asking too much of the parent or teacher. It can be a learning experience for parents so they can learn more about their child and their disability. A good relationship between a teacher and parent can truly benefit the progression of special needs children. I can personally confirm this because I have seen the progress and strides my twin brothers have made because of my parents' involvement and collaboration with my brothers' teachers. This action reminds parents that they are their child's lifelong teachers at home and it starts with their support. Hence, the action option is the best solution to resolving the challenges students and teachers are facing with online APE.

Action Documentation

Adapted physical education is an important aspect to the growth and development of special needs students. With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting education for all students, it was especially difficult for students with special needs to adapt to online modalities. Online adapted physical education has limited what students and teachers can accomplish so it became clear that a solution was necessary to fix these challenges. The literature represents that students with special needs have difficulty learning without face-to-face and hands-on interaction. After researching the literature and coordinating several interviews with an APE teacher and several parents, three action options appeared. The first action option is to improve teacher and parent relationships through better communication, collaboration and involvement. The second action option is to incorporate the use of visual supports in addition to teacher modeling to better assist students visually through online APE. Lastly, the third action option is to implement activity breaks to allow students to take breaks from screens and refocus. Improving teacher and parent relationships was the recommended course of action. This option was chosen due to its large influence on assisting students, teachers, and parents through online learning in a collaborative and significant way. It was the only option that would have the greatest amount of effectiveness in improving online APE. Proceeding with this recommendation, a letter was written and emailed to the APE teacher and parents. The letter discussed that after evaluating the research literature and their interview responses, an action option developed that would improve online APE and the success of special needs students. The letter suggested the use of a phone app to help foster parent engagement and involvement, as well as improve communication and relationships between parents and teachers. Furthermore, the letter suggested the use of the app

in addition to weekly check ins, to help aid teacher and parent relationships. So far, there has been no response from the teacher or parents.

To the APE teacher and parents:

I would like to first say that it has been a pleasure working with you throughout my Capstone Project. During our time as community partners, I was able to conduct and analyze research and collect data from teachers and parents. The data I collected focused on what could help improve online APE and the success of special needs students through this modality. After analyzing the literature and interview responses, I would like to share a suggestion that I believe would be helpful in assisting teacher and parent relationships during online APE. The purpose of this letter is to share this information with you; in hopes that you find it useful.

In each interview that I conducted, it was made visible that for special needs students to thrive in an online modality, parents need to be actively involved and have good relationships with teachers. This correlated with the research literature on the focus issue. Thus, family involvement is necessary for special needs students to have a successful education. There is a wide variety of ways that parent and teacher collaboration, communication, and involvement can be fostered. One example that I feel would be beneficial is the use of a phone app such as ClassTag, TalkingPoints, or ParentSquare. Through this app, parents can stay up to date, involved, and in communication with the teacher. Regardless of which app you choose, they each foster communication between teachers and parents in an easy and accessible way that can benefit students' education. In addition to the phone application, weekly email check-ins could take place between parents and teachers to address comments, concerns, questions, and build relationships. A documentation example is given below:

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Comments?: | |
| Questions?: | |
| Concerns?: | |
| Would you like to schedule a phone call? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

In closing, I would like to thank you for your time and effort into my project. The school, teachers, and parents have been very kind and helpful in the conduction of my research as well as my service learning hours. I hope that this suggestion is one that is helpful to you and can improve online APE and online learning in general for students with special needs and disabilities. Hopefully, we are moving in the right direction to get these students back to in-person learning, full time.

Sincerely,
Madison Neff

Image 1. Screenshot of the letter sent to the APE teacher and parents with suggestions and examples to help improve teacher and parent relationships and communication.

Critical Reflection

Throughout the semester in my LS 400: *Senior Capstone* course I have learned so much. I truly did not know what to expect for this course but quickly became excited when I realized I was able to choose a topic I was passionate and interested in. Due to this, I chose a topic on the challenges of online adapted physical education for students with special needs. Both special needs children and APE are something I have grown to be very passionate about. Through my research, I was surprised to find out that the teacher I interviewed agreed that all three of the action options I had chosen were important to her classroom and something she utilized. Although the APE teacher utilized these options, they were not always successful which is why I believe my suggestion would benefit the challenges of online APE greatly. The suggestion of incorporating a phone application to promote teacher and parent relationship is something that is accessible to all. By providing more than one example of phone applications, it allows the teacher to decide which one would be most beneficial to the needs of her students and parents. At first, I was going to suggest just one app but felt it was necessary to modify that decision. The next steps to improving online APE is for teachers and parents to get to know each other from the start of the school year and continue that communication through an app and/or weekly check-ins. This will promote success for students with special needs through the online modality of APE.

Through this project, I learned what I want to incorporate and not incorporate in my future APE classroom. Many teachers and parents have the same concerns, so if they work together by collaborating and communicating many issues can be resolved. When working toward change, it just takes one voice to spark a thought or suggestion for

improvement. Due to this, I knew I needed to take action on this focus issue because of the extensive research I had done on it. I was reluctant to send a letter at first because I did not want to make the teacher feel as though she was not doing enough or doing something wrong. However, I soon realized that it was crucial for me as the researcher to take action and suggest something that could be helpful and beneficial based on my findings. Through this Action Research Project, I learned how different thoughts, suggestions, and opinions can work towards creating change. Differing opinions can actually be very beneficial and create an unbiased and collaborative solution. I learned how to work professionally with other teachers and gained confidence in sharing my opinion with others. This course and project provided me with such a great experience, new relationships, and amazing opportunities that I will take with me as I work towards being an educator.

Synthesis and Integration

My short two years as an undergraduate student at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) have been such a blessing. The required Liberal Studies (LS) coursework, MLOs, and this Action Research Project have provided me with great insight and experience as I encounter my professional career as an educator. As for the Liberal Studies MLOs, the two that stood out to me were MLO 1 and MLO 5. Starting with MLO 1: Developing Educator, I feel very confident in my ability to think, write and speak critically as I have developed through completing my project and in regards to the responsibilities of a California public educator. The Action Research Project gave me the opportunity to work with and build relationships with educators who I may cross paths with again in the future. I believe my strongest areas of improvement were my ability to

critically think and analyze and put those thoughts into a great piece of literature. As for MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist, through the Action Research Project I was able to research and analyze a topic that I was passionate about. Analyzing literature and interview data has helped my understanding of the field of education and how to be successful as a California public educator. While I move forward in becoming an educator, I believe it is important to continue to educate myself on issues within education so that I can give my students the best education possible. As I complete my Action Research Project and time at CSUMB, I have learned to never be afraid to use my voice for the greater good. As educators, we have the power to change the people's lives!

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