

ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Using Paralympic School Day as a Model for an Adapted Physical Education Professional Development for Physical Educators

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Abstract

The successful inclusion of children with disabilities into general physical education (PE) depends in large part on the attitudes and competence of general PE teachers. Unfortunately, many PE teachers' undergraduate preparation is insufficient when it comes to including children with disabilities. In-service professional development can provide specific information about inclusion that can make up for the lack of training during undergraduate training. This paper presents a guide for the use of the Paralympic School Day (PSD) program, a disability awareness program targeting school-age children without disabilities, in the development of an in-service PE teacher training. It begins with a summary of PSD and contact theory, on which PSD is based. This is followed by specific information on the development of a PSD-focused in-service training that uses Paralympians and PSD activity stations to reduce prejudicial beliefs and help general PE teachers understand the importance of supporting students with disabilities in their programs.

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Perhaps the most important factor in successful inclusion of children with disabilities into general physical education (PE) classes is the attitude, training, and competence of PE teachers (Block et al., 2016; Özer et al., 2013; Reina et al., 2019). PE teachers who feel they have had good academic preparation and positive hands-on experiences have higher levels of perceived competence toward working with students with disabilities (Obrusnikova, 2008; Özer et al., 2013; Tripp & Rizzo, 2006). Unfortunately, many PE teachers' undergraduate training and clinical experiences are inadequate to prepare them for teaching PE to children with disabilities in inclusive settings (Hersman & Hodge, 2010; Wilson et al., 2020). In general, PE teachers feel that inclusion is ethically the right thing to do, but they also feel that lack of knowledge and experiences during teacher training presents barriers to including children with disabilities into their programs successfully (Pocock & Miyahara, 2018).

Participation in in-service professional development programs can make up for the lack of training during undergraduate preparation. In-services can help general PE teachers gain specific knowledge and competencies to accommodate students' needs and facilitate social acceptance by peers without disabilities, which in turn may improve PE teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Many PE teachers do not feel prepared for inclusion and want more in-service opportunities to improve their knowledge and teaching skills (Haegele et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2020). Most school districts offer regular in-service opportunities for their teachers, although it is often the case that there are no presentations specific for PE teachers. However, when in-service training is made available, it may offer opportunities for PE teachers to learn how to best serve children with disabilities.

Interestingly, only three studies (only one in the United States) have specifically examined the effects of an in-service on attitudes and knowledge of PE teachers toward including students with disabilities, and only one found significant effects on improving self-efficacy of participants. Reina et al. (2019) provided 18 hours of training over a 3-week period with PE teachers in Spain. The training resulted in a significant improvement in the participants' self-efficacy and beliefs toward inclusion. Unfortunately, Taliaferro and Harris (2014) with a 1-day workshop (in the United States) and Haegele et al. (2018) with

a 2-day workshop (in Brazil) did not find significant improvement in self-efficacy or attitudes toward inclusion.

Perhaps these in-service workshops were missing more hands-on, positive experiences and interactions with people with disabilities. Taliaferro and Harris's (2014) in-service focused on children with ASD, and the workshop included lectures, discussions, and group work, but no interactions with people with disabilities. Haegele et al. (2018) provided lectures, discussions, and some hands-on demonstrations for using visual support and for modifying fitness and soccer activities. It was unclear if the demonstrations were activities in which participants watched or in which they participated with people with disabilities. Reina et al. (2019) included interactions with Paralympic athletes in the last session of their 6-day workshop (3 hr/day across 6 weeks), and participants played various Paralympic sports with Paralympians. Interestingly, only Reina et al.'s study found significant improvement in self-efficacy and attitudes. Teachers are able to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of individuals with disabilities and the importance of making accommodations in general physical education through direct interactions with people with disabilities, which surpasses the mere learning of facts about disabilities.

Paralympic School Day

Paralympic education is one of the primary goals of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), with a specific goal of increasing awareness and understanding toward individuals with impairments (IPC, n.d.-a). One of the primary mechanisms the IPC uses to promote Paralympics education is the Paralympic School Day (PSD) program. PSD was established in 2004 on the basis of the belief that through education about the lives and abilities of individuals with impairments, those without impairments would develop an increased awareness and understanding about those with impairments (McKay, 2013). The PSD program consists of three goals (IPC, n.d.-b):

- create an environment where students are able to experience realistic and holistic portrayals of disability sports and the athletes who play these sports;
- engage learners through an array of activities and teaching modalities that would reach a diverse community of learners,

- allowing them to challenge and find meaning in their own beliefs and experiences; and
- provide an opportunity for reflection.

The PSD program is available on the IPC website and consists of 19 activity cards, which are divided into the categories of respect for sporting achievement, respect and acceptance of individual differences, sport as a human right, and empowerment and social support in sport (IPC, n.d.-b).

The use of the PSD program as an intervention for attitude change toward individuals with disabilities has been well researched over the past 2 decades (Liu et al., 2010; McKay et al., 2015; McKay et al., 2019; Panagiotou et al., 2008; Xafopoulos et al., 2009). These studies have primarily focused on the attitudes of children without disabilities toward individuals with disabilities through the use of quantitative measures, with the exception of McKay et al. (2019), which has examined qualitative reflections from the participants. Overall, findings have shown that participation in a PSD program can result in positive attitude change toward individuals with disabilities, although the results have not always been statistically significant (Liu et al., 2010; Panagiotou et al., 2008; Xafopoulos et al., 2009).

Theoretical Foundation: Allport's contact theory

Experts in Paralympic sport, disability, and pedagogy developed the PSD program through several established theories (McKay, 2013, 2018). Most notably, Allport's (1954) contact theory provided the foundation for PSD. Allport's contact theory proposed that positive social contact under the right conditions could lead to a reduction in prejudicial beliefs between members of the majority and minority groups (McKay et al., 2018). In the context of the PSD program, members of the majority would be the participants without disabilities and the minority would be those with disabilities.

Allport (1954) identified six key variables for optimal conditions to lead to a reduction in prejudicial beliefs. Of these, equal status, cooperation, meaningful interactions, and community/authority support are essential and have been well researched in the field of attitude change (McKay, 2018).

Equal Status

Equality is crucial for meaningful contact to take place (Allport, 1954). If there is a power differential between the two groups, either in role or status, existing stereotypes may be reinforced (Allport, 1954). Equal status between the athletes and participants is needed for meaningful and intimate interactions to take place (McKay, 2013). Many of the activity cards uphold the equal status requirement by having participants learn new skills or share past experiences.

Cooperation

To have maximum benefits for prejudicial belief reduction, activities in which members of the majority and minority groups are participating need to emphasize cooperation rather than competition (Allport, 1954; McKay, 2013; Panagiotou et al., 2008). The PSD activity cards are designed to create experiences where participants work with Paralympians toward a common goal (McKay, 2013). Activity cards throughout the PSD program seamlessly weave cooperative and collaborative activities with which to engage and empower participants.

Meaningful Interactions

It is important that members of different groups have meaningful and intimate contact (Allport, 1954). Intimate contact provides the opportunity for participants to learn about each other and identify similarities of interest (Allport, 1954). Meaningful contact is a key component to the PSD programming, and the program encourages Paralympian involvement with PSD events (McKay, 2013). Opportunities for meaningful interactions during PSD events can be increased with athletes leading the stations. This allows participants to learn from those who are different from themselves as well as to have the opportunity to engage in conversation and ask questions, which allows for a deeper level of learning about one another.

Support From Authority

The fourth essential condition of Allport's (1954) contact theory is the need for support from authority. This condition can take on a variety of forms. For a school to host a PSD program, there needs to be some level of support from school leaders. Many schools also make a commitment to addressing the need for diversity, equity, and

inclusion education among students and staff. The PSD program helps to develop a school culture that strives for equitable practices that best serve all students. Aside from approval from school officials to allow for a PSD program to be conducted, these school leaders can actively participate in the event with the students to reinforce the expectation of inclusive practices (McKay, 2013).

While numerous research and practical papers have been published related to PSD, one gap in the literature has been the application of PSD to the professional development of PE teachers. The PSD program provides plenty of hands-on experiences in which participants interact with Paralympians while learning various Paralympic sports and instructional accommodations. Meaningful contact with people with disabilities is one of the key tenets of contact theory, and these meaningful interactions can lead to improved attitudes and confidence of PE teachers toward including children with disabilities in PE. This paper presents a guide for the use of the PSD program in the development of an in-service PE teacher training. This PSD-focused in-service training utilizes a variety of the PSD activity cards as well as emphasizes alignment with the four essential conditions from Allport (1954) for reducing prejudicial beliefs (equal status, cooperation, meaningful interactions, and community/authority support).

Planning the PSD In-service Day

The first step in hosting an in-service that uses the PSD model is to identify the setting. Two options include (a) having the in-service at a local school or nearby facility during a professional development day or (b) having the in-service as a workshop at a state or regional physical education conference. Both options are good choices, with the local option allowing for a more locally focused event with guest athletes and perhaps children from the community and the workshop at a conference reaching a broader group of PE teachers across multiple communities. The other advantage with the state or regional conference is that participants can learn to conduct a PSD-focused in-service back in their community.

Funding is another consideration for conducting the in-service. Costs for conducting a PSD in-service include paying for Paralympic athletes (travel, hotel, stipend), renting or purchasing wheelchairs and other adapted equipment (e.g., Goalballs and blindfolds),

and paying fees for facilities including janitorial staff. Local sports teams such as a wheelchair basketball team might be able to provide wheelchairs, whereas a school for the blind should have Goalballs and blindfolds to lend. School districts often pay for the cost of in-services they host, although they may balk on providing funding for Paralympians. The cost of the facility should not be an issue, as the in-service would be hosted at one of the schools in the district. All costs, with the exception of cost for the facility for a workshop conducted at a conference, will be incurred by the workshop developer. Small grants through private foundations could also fund some of the cost of the program.

A Sample PSD Teacher In-Service Training

This section outlines a sample PSD teacher in-service training for a hypothetical school district, Cavalier County Public Schools. This hypothetical school district employs 50 PE professionals, divided between 23 elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, the county employs 10 PE paraprofessionals who will also be attending the in-service training. The training will be held at one of the county high schools, where the program planners have reserved several spaces to execute the workshop, including the main gymnasium (with the curtain down for use of two full courts), the auxiliary gymnasium, the wrestling room, and two classrooms located near the activity spaces. The program planners reserved six spaces, and with 60 attendees they are planning on separating the group into six groups of 10 participants to rotate through six activity stations. The size of the groups rotating through the stations is somewhat dependent on the equipment available for use during the stations. For example, if the planners can secure only eight sport wheelchairs, changing the number to eight participants per station would allow for 100% involvement and no wait time. If this were the case, perhaps a seventh station would be offered to accommodate the smaller number of participants per station. This hypothetical in-service will last for 3.5 hr (8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.) on the morning of a teacher workday. The morning will start with an introduction (15-minute), and then participants will rotate through the six stations at 30-min increments. A final 15-min closing debrief will conclude the in-service. If the hypothetical school district had a larger number of faculty attending the in-service, program planners might propose a

morning and afternoon session option to split a larger group in two, or they might add additional spaces and stations to keep the groups around 10 participants each.

While planning this in-service for the Cavalier County School District, program organizers utilized the PSD goals, with slight modifications for teachers as the audience. Modified goals included

- create an environment where teachers can experience realistic and holistic portrayals of disability sports and the athletes who play these sports;
- engage teachers in an array of contact-based activities that focus on Paralympic sport education, awareness, and inclusion, allowing them to challenge and find meaning in their own beliefs and experiences, and to translate these new understandings and skills to increased inclusionary practices; and
- provide an opportunity for skill development, knowledge acquisition, and reflection.

With these goals in mind, and with consideration of the space, time, and budget, the program planners for this hypothetical in-service training began to consider stations and recruit athletes.

To start the station and athlete determination process, the planners reached out to the local adaptive sport club and recruited three local athletes to join the in-service facilitation team. In addition to helping facilitate, the club offered to bring 10 sport wheelchairs for use in teaching wheelchair basketball. The program planners were keen on including wheelchair basketball, as it is highlighted in multiple studies that use the PSD framework; however, the equipment constraints are clear. Had the planners not been able to bring chairs into their in-service, they would have reached out to a local university that had sport wheelchairs for inclusive recreation use, to possibly determine if the in-service could take place as a partnership between the university and the school district. With the wheelchairs secured, the planners reached out to a Paralympian from the Wheelchair Basketball team to join two of the local athletes in facilitating that station. While still tentative, the stations were starting to come together at this point!

Next, the planners secured volleyball equipment from the high school PE department at the host school and determined that they would lower the net to meet sitting volleyball regulation rules and then would reach out to a Paralympian from the Sitting Volleyball team to recruit as a facilitator. Sitting volleyball would tentatively be the second station offered. During the aforementioned outreach to the local adaptive sport club, the planners learned that one local athlete had a background in Goalball (sport for those with visual impairments) and was willing to facilitate Goalball skills and game play. The planners determined that Goalball would be the third tentative station and would be in the auxiliary gymnasium. While the host school did not have Goalball equipment, the PSD station card listed the modified equipment needed. The planners found a great article about offering Goalball lessons in the PE setting and using existing PE equipment to create a realistic Goalball setting (Laughlin & Happel, 2016). The planners also reached out to local universities to determine if they had Goalball equipment and contacted the state school for the deaf and blind to ascertain if they could borrow equipment for use at the in-service.

During this tentative planning process, the program planners noticed that they currently had three stations that represented the first PSD value, “respect for sporting achievement.” These were Wheelchair Basketball (Station Card 5), located on one side of the main gym; Sitting Volleyball (Station Card 4), located on the second side of the main gym; and Goalball (Station Card 3), located in the auxiliary gym. With this in mind, the planners reviewed the PSD activity cards and selected one station from each of the three remaining PSD value categories, as a holistic PSD offering includes stations representing each of the PSD values. From the second PSD value (respect and acceptance of individual differences), the planners selected Station Card 8, A Fairy Tale: Discussion About Inclusion, which would be executed in the wrestling room and would be facilitated by two of the district’s guidance counselors. The main goal of this station is for students to gain respect for the uniqueness of all human beings and to express their feelings and opinions related to ability and disability, including assumptions, experiences, and societal norms. Other facilitators considered included university professionals who specialize in inclusion and disability sport education,

equity and diversity professionals with experience facilitating discussions about othering and breaking down biases, and community professionals specializing in diversity and inclusion conversations. The wrestling room offered a comfortable location to sit in a circle on the floor, distraction free, and have an honest and open dialogue challenging the paradigm through which participants view disability and disability sport.

The final two stations were in the two classroom spaces. From the third PSD value (sport as a human right), the planners selected Station Card 16, Paralympic Games, and recruited a Paralympic swimmer to facilitate a presentation and Q and A about the Paralympic experience. This presentation included topics such as the fanfare and majesty of the opening and closing ceremonies, what it is like living in the athlete's village, experiencing the thrill of the size and scope of the stadiums and facilities, and the experience of standing on the podium as the national anthem plays. While a swimmer was recruited for this hypothetical day, the nature of a station in the classroom setting that does not need specialized equipment opens a wide range of athletes for recruitment across all Paralympic sport offerings. Finally, from the fourth PSD value (empowerment and social support in sport), Station Card 19 was selected, where an "Athlete's Story" is brought to life. A Paralympic soccer player with cerebral palsy was recruited for this intimate discussion about their life, specifically focusing on their K–12 school experience, including the good, the bad, and the ugly that he experienced in the school and sport settings.

The manner in which these six stations were selected was fluid, as the process of reserving space, securing equipment, and recruiting athletes resulted in changes and modifications throughout the planning process. At the forefront of the planning were the four components of Allport's (1954) contact theory, as meaningful, collaborative, equal status contact that is supported by the school division is key to successful execution of the PSD in-service. In addition, each station included a portion of Q and A time and an opportunity for the teachers participating in the in-service to consider and troubleshoot how to utilize PSD and general skill modifications and inclusion strategies in their own PE classes. Station descriptions

for the six stations selected can be found at <https://www.paralympic.org/the-ipc/paralympic-school-day>.

Recruiting Paralympians

The hypothetical PSD-focused in-service briefly touched on the recruiting process of Paralympians. This section dives deeper into the considerations and strategies for navigating this process. The IPC recommends having Paralympians present at the event (McKay, 2013). While local, national, or collegiate athletes are great additions to a PSD event, a Paralympian can speak to the Paralympic experience firsthand.

A common barrier to conducting a PSD event is figuring out how to contact the athletes. A variety of organizations can aid in this process. The Team USA website hosts biographies on all Paralympians along with links to personal websites and social media pages. Through use of personal websites and social media, you can begin a dialogue with the athletes. Move United is another resource for finding athletes. Move United is a nonprofit that promotes parasport opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Move United maintains a national network of over 200 parasport clubs, and you can search for clubs in your local area (Move United, 2022). Local sport clubs can recommend and help connect the PSD planner to athletes in their area.

Additional characteristics of the athletes need to be considered in the recruitment of Paralympians for a PSD-focused in-service for PE teachers. The age of the athlete is important to consider. PE has changed drastically over the years, and as a result, it is important that the athletes are young enough to share their relevant PE experiences within the past 2 decades. This means that the athletes would need to have been born after 1990. Another rationale for this age recommendation is that the most recent reauthorizations of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) starting in the mid 1990s emphasized the need for children with disabilities to have greater access to the general education curriculum, including general PE (Block et al., 2020). As a result, children with disabilities attending schools from 2000 on were likely to experience inclusion in general PE, and as young adults, they would be better able to recall and share their experiences when they were included in general PE.

Another consideration is the onset of their disability. Many Paralympians acquired their disability later in life and possibly even after they graduated from K–12 education. To provide the in-service participants with the most relevant perspectives of navigating general PE as a student with a disability, the athletes need to have had their disability while in school, whether the disability is congenital or acquired at a young age. Recruiting athletes with both congenital disabilities and acquired disabilities is a valuable consideration, as both offer a wealth of firsthand experiences in physical education and physical activity settings.

It is also important that athletes participating in the PSD event have different disabilities. This allows for diverse perspective sharing as well as a way of continuing to challenge the participants' beliefs of disability by creating an environment in which the participants have the opportunity to engage in meaningful contact with athletes with a variety of disabilities. The hypothetical PSD-focused in-service intentionally includes activity cards that highlight different parasports. It is important that there is a variety of parasport experiences provided. This increases the participants' knowledge of parasport opportunities for students with varying disabilities.

By now, the PSD planner has determined a list of potential Paralympians that are best suited to meet the needs of this PSD-focused in-service event. Next, there are more logistical tasks that need to be addressed such as travel and accommodation costs and if the athletes require guest-speaker fees. If there are funding constraints, the PSD planner may need to recruit Paralympians who are geographically conveniently located. The PSD planner will also need to provide to the Paralympians contracts that outline their roles and responsibilities during the event.

Summary

This paper provides the reader with a guide to developing and hosting their own PSD in-service for PE teachers. Although the PSD program was created for children without disabilities, the program can be used as a model for developing an in-service that can help PE teachers develop an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of disability sport and the abilities of individuals with disabilities. What makes the PSD-focused in-service so unique are carefully planned activities in which PE teachers experience disability sports

and have positive interactions with Paralympic athletes who play them. It is hoped that after participating in the in-service, PE teachers will develop better attitudes toward children with disabilities and be more willing to engage with and accommodate these children in their general PE classes. In and of itself, accommodating children with disabilities in general PE through provision of different equipment and subtle modifications to rules is not particularly difficult. However, in keeping with Allport's contact theory, PE teachers will more likely want to implement these accommodations and support children with disabilities in their classes if they have had positive contact with individuals with disabilities, in this case positive contact with Paralympians.

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