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ABSTRACT

The newsletter offers guidelines for conducting playdays or large group activities for handicapped students. Among the factors to consider when planning activities are total number participating, levels of physical and mental abilities, age span, sex, and assistance needs. Activities should meet the needs and interest of the students, include a game or sport with which students are already familiar, include new programs students like to try themselves or see others perform, not include sports or activities teachers considered inappropriate for their groups, and match ability levels represented in groups. Other considerations include staffing, facilities and equipment, refreshments, transportation, lead up and followup, scheduling, onsite preparation, publicity, cohesiveness, first aid, and financing. Appended are sample schedules. (SB)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

## ORGANIZING PLAYDAYS AND LARGE GROUP ACTIVITIES

by Susan J. Grosse

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◆ Susan J. Grosse, physical education teacher at Frederick J. Gaenslen School (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), is a long-time and regular contributor to AAHPER publications and periodicals. This is the second Practical Pointer in which she has shared her wealth of knowledge and experience with other teachers and leaders in the field. Contents of materials developed and written by Sue Grosse are always thorough, practical, complete, and reflect that rare ability to mold and communicate theory and practice. Each of us is indebted to Sue Grosse for her willingness to take time from a very busy schedule to share approaches and techniques she has found successful for organizing and conducting playdays and large group activities. Those who gain and benefit the most from her efforts will be countless individuals with various impairments, disabilities, and handicapping conditions who have new, more, and higher quality opportunities to participate actively in playdays, field days, sport days and similar types of activities.



The scope of a playday or large group activity involving a number of students encompasses almost everything regularly found in physical education classes in which these students participate in the same or similar activities. Great for boosting school spirit and togetherness, playdays and large group activities give students chances to relate to large numbers of peers, some of whom they may be meeting for the first time. Such activities also foster group interaction and cooperation as members of each team work toward common goals. Opportunities for participation in sports and games that can only be played by large groups are provided. Participants have the fun of being involved in special events, are offered changes in daily class routines, and are given opportunities to apply many skills learned in physical education classes.

However, beneficial playdays and large group activities take a great deal more preparation than regular classes to make them successful. Several basic decisions must be made regarding students, activities, staff, and facilities. Additional details to be considered include those related to refreshments, transportation, lead-up and follow-up activities, scheduling, on-site preparation, publicity, direction of events, first aid availability, and last but not least, financing. No doubt about it, playdays and large group activities are hard work, but well worth it when one realizes contributions they make to physical educating the children involved.

### Deciding Basics

#### Student Participant

Even though an event is planned to accommodate a large group of individuals, some selection should be made to insure that numbers don't become unwieldy and that age range included is not too great. Many persons planning their first playdays want to include as many participants as possible. While this is a generous thought, in reality some limitations should be brought to bear if all participants are to achieve maximum benefits. Consideration should be given to--

Total number participating. Only as many students as can be kept active should be included. Nothing is more deadly than having large numbers of children sitting and watching because there are too many participants for the size of the facility and/or the amount of equipment. If an activity includes formal competition, particularly in individual sports some sitting and waiting can be expected and are necessary for recovery of athletes.

Levels of physical and mental abilities. Even if play is just for fun, games are much more interesting when teams are reasonably evenly matched. If teams sent from different schools retain their own identities, organizers of the event should attempt to invite and seed competition accordingly. However, in many playdays students from different schools or classes are mixed into teams. In these cases students get changes to meet new people their same age. Whoever arranges teams should make sure that each team has a full range of abilities and is balanced against the others. This may take considerable time and effort but insures much more interesting play for participants. When there is an extremely wide range in abilities it may be advantageous to set limits as to who is included in a particular playday. However, many students, even those more severely limited, can participate in and enjoy such events right along with their more capable peers.

Age span. Ages of students invited in part dictate activities to be planned. Important differences exist in physical abilities, interests, and previous experiences of elementary school age youngsters, middle school students, high school age individuals, and adults. What age groups to include is a decision that must be made. The elementary school age group is probably least likely to benefit from playday type experiences. Children in this age range can function in large groups but often only for limited periods of time. These children are still learning basic skills and need more individual help than many large group settings provide. At this age children are not yet into the competitive phase of sports and therefore should probably not be included. Middle school, high school, and adult populations can all benefit from large group experiences. If the total population to be served is quite small, all three of these groups can be included in a particular event. However if the population is large it is probably best to limit groups included. Additional factors to consider include needs and interests of participants themselves. Many adults do not like to be included in kiddie events and most younger students do not have sports backgrounds to participate with adults. The more specific the age group the easier it is to tailor activities to satisfy needs and interests of participants.

Sex. Is the activity to be co-ed? By rules of Title IX it should be. However, if dressing facilities are needed, for swimming particularly, be sure that everyone can be accommodated.

Who needs assistance? Most handicapped students can participate in large group activities with minimal assistance. They can physically get themselves from place to place, follow simple directions, and possess behavior that is reasonably good. However, a segment of the population with severe involvements may need additional help. Some may be in wheelchairs and unable to push themselves; they need help getting from place to place. Others may have severe perceptual problems and need a companion to help keep experiences organized. Behavior may be a problem for some students, particularly in new settings with more people than usual. For a large group of deaf students, additional interpreters may be necessary. Blind students may need assistance in getting around in different locations. Whatever the case, the number of students who require extra help needs to be determined ahead of time and enough people provided to give one-to-one help when and if needed.

### Focus of the Activity

Free play is fine for recess but the larger a group, the more difficult it is for students to organize activities themselves. Any playday or large group activity needs careful structure and preplanning. Needs and interests of students must be considered. A balance must be achieved to accommodate fun activities in learning environments so that the specific natures of events can be determined.

Needs and interests of students. An excellent source to provide input in this area is the physical education staff person currently working with individuals to be invited. From this person the following information can be obtained--

--Activities with which students already familiar. These make the foundation of the program. Starting the program with a game or sport already known helps students feel more at home and relaxed in new settings.

--New activities students like to try themselves or see others perform. It may be necessary to give teachers time to go back and survey their groups. Some programs have limited access to certain types of equipment, for example, and may not be able to offer a sport in school but can briefly acquaint students with it at a playday. This may also be the only opportunity for students to see live some little known sports such as fencing or riflery. If a playday is to take an entire day some time is needed for sit-down relaxation where demonstrations of these sports can be provided.

--Sports or activities teachers consider inappropriate for their groups. Again individuals in the best positions to judge needs and abilities of groups are regular teachers. In some cases students just may not be ready to try a particular sport. Some sports, because of dangers involved may be on a school's list of activities that are not allowed. A particular activity may be part of a school's curriculum but students have not come to that point in their instruction yet and the teacher may wish that it be put off. Whatever the case, a multitude of activities can be chosen so that exclusion of a few should not cause undue problems.

--Ability levels represented in groups. Regular teachers can help group teams if several schools or classes are to be mixed and can provide data on how many students need additional help to participate.

Learning can be fun. A familiar comment heard in planning meetings is, "Let's get the kids together and give them a day that is really FUN!" The implication is that the rest of the time physical activities for these children are drudgery. Quite the contrary; most children with various handicapping conditions lead happy, healthy lives and are already participating in many fun activities. A playday will probably be an entirely new experience for them and as such a learning experience of vast dimensions. Whether or not it is fun depends on how successfully the student is able to function in a large group environment. This does not mean that students need to have everything done for them--to avoid frustration; that they need to be winners at everything--because they wouldn't understand losing even when a good effort is made or that they need to be given something because they participate--because they would not enjoy themselves otherwise. Children with various handicapping conditions do things for themselves and have fun at the attempt as well as the success; they can lose and enjoy competition because they know, they did their best, probably better than ever before. The most precious thing they can take home is the happy feeling of having been a part of such a good time. Those memories will last long after a paper or ribbon is lost.

Types of events. Large group activities can be grouped into four basic categories--

- Sports playdays provide a good format for first experiences with large groups. Several schools or classes are invited and for purposes of competition teams are mixed with students from every school on each team. Emphasis is on group interaction and cooperation, fun rather than serious competition.
- Sports competitions require that students have some previous sports experience. Schools or classes retain their own individual identities and compete against each other. More emphasis is on the competitive structure and each student's part in it.
- Special theme events are more suitable for in-school activities involving large groups of students. Activities usually center around special theme, such as a holiday or a different idea, like a Trivia Day.
- Special sports events consist of unique, one-of-a-kind activities such as sports competition between students and staff or students and local celebrities. This is also more suitable for in-school rather than inter-school participation.

Each of these events can be run on either a half day or a full day basis. Sample programs are included in the Appendix, pages 12 to 15.

### Staffing.

The larger a group of participants the larger the staff needs to be.

Planning committee. This group should consist of regular physical education teachers of students to be invited and persons responsible for over-all administration of the event. Functions include deciding events and activities, scheduling and determining facilities, equipment, and additional staff needed to stage activities. Teachers are responsible for preparing their students (refer to the section on lead-up and follow-up activities, page 9) and people administering the program for taking care of the rest of the details (refer to the next section).

Running the playday. Though job descriptions differ depending on types of activities the following represent tasks that may need to be considered--

- Setting up equipment and preparing the site.
- Pre-event paper work--i.e., programs, name tags, directional signs.
- Greeters to meet students and show them where to go.
- Someone to check in participants, hand out name tags, distribute programs.
- Announcer.
- Event directors--individuals to run each event.
- Officials--rated officials should be used if the event is interschool competition or competition against celebrities for example.

--People to provide one-to-one assistance where needed and as determined ahead of time.

--People to assist in moving groups from place to place.

--People to assist with toileting and feeding if needed.

--People to assist with dressing if a change of clothes is needed and to assist with wraps.

--Clean up crew.

Sources of help might include--

--Community volunteers.

--University students.

--Local sports personalities.

--Parent groups.

--Regular school personnel and administrators.

All personnel should be thoroughly briefed ahead of time regarding their functions, supervised if necessary (depending on types of jobs and experience of the person), and shown appreciation after events are over.

### Facilities and Equipment

Part of the success of any large group event depends upon physical conditions.

An appropriate facility should be accessible to persons in wheelchairs or on crutches if they are to be part of groups included. This means not just accessible entryways but also bathrooms and all areas of the building where activities are to be held. Facilities should also be large enough to accommodate group activities. If a school's gymnasium is small, adjacent halls can be used for simple games while students await their turns in the gymnasium.

Equipment should be gotten out of storage rooms and readied ahead of time. Necessary modifications--based on recommendations of regular teachers--not guess--should also be made in advance. Items which need to be borrowed should be arranged for before the day of the event and returned to the lending agency promptly after the event. If any borrowed equipment is damaged, it should be so noted and the lending school compensated for repair.



## Filling in Details

### Refreshments

Activity makes participants hungry. Whether an all day event or just an afternoon, food may be a part of the program. When deciding whether or not to serve a snack or lunch the following guidelines may be helpful.

- Feeding help. How many youngsters need assistance with eating, either supervision or complete feeding? Check with regular teachers to find out.
- Allergies and alternate selections. Certain handicapping conditions result in dietary restrictions, sugar free diets, or calorie reductions for example. Arrangements should be made so that appropriate foods are available to these children.
- Special utensils. Many children with handicapping conditions can eat independently if adaptations are made in their eating utensils. Accommodations may be as simple as straws for drinking or bibs to take care of the mess to special silver. If advance notice is given regarding types of food, proper items can be brought along with students.
- Where to eat. Is there sufficient space to provide room for eating? Can tables and chairs be set up for those that cannot sit on the floor or bleachers?
- Who brings food? Three systems have been used with success--
  - Students bring food from home, either bag lunches and drinks if an all day event or sack snacks. A variation is to have each student bring a snack to share with the group--a bag of potato chips, a dozen cookies--and a mass feed is provided.
  - Students bring a specified amount of money ahead of time; this is collected and used to provide the same lunch for everyone--this takes a little more work on the part of staff. Sometimes a school can take regular lunch money so that the cafeteria staff can make sandwiches to replace the lunch students would eat if they had stayed in school.
  - The host institution provides lunches. If they are not capable of doing it themselves they can solicit contributions from local food chains.
- Clean-up. Be sure to allow time for clean-up. Students need chances to wash and trash taken care of before activities are resumed. Remember, these are learning experiences.

### Transportation

If these activities are in-school events, transportation is obviously no problem. If travel to another site is necessary, special arrangements must be made. Each school system has its own intricate methods for getting busses. Keep

in mind, however, that scheduling should be done well in advance and verified several days before the event to avoid problems with the bus company. Determine in advance who pays the cost of busing. Possible sources of funds include the sponsoring group, individual school's funds (field trip, booster club, school system's funds (intramural or athletic budgets in addition to exceptional education), local community agencies, and the bus company itself. Before transportation of private cars is considered, careful note should be taken of local and state regulations on insurance and liability.

### Lead-Up and Follow-Up

Once the program is established, regular teachers can plan lead-up and follow-up activities for involved students. These may include--

- Announcement of the special event. Let students know where they will be going, when, and what they will be doing once they get there. This information should go out as part of parental permission forms needed for all students who participate.
- Student planning. Involve, if at all possible, participating students in selecting activities.
- New games. If students are to play any new games or ones in which they might not have participated for a long time, it might be wise to teach or review these activities ahead of time. If events are designed for students to do for the first time, review and preteaching are not necessary.
- Rules review. If serious sports competition is to take place, students should be aware of rules which govern these sports, particularly rules affecting disqualifications.
- What to wear, what to bring. Once a program has been established, teachers can advise students about types of appropriate and safe clothing for participation. Directions can also be given for bringing anything else, such as lunches or snacks.
- Follow-up. After the playday teachers should sit down with students who participated and discuss their reactions to it. What did they really enjoy? What did they dislike? What would they like to do again? How could the day be improved? Make note of these comments for use in planning future events.

### Scheduling

Once general program content has been decided, it needs to be put into a workable time framework. When making the schedule the following should be considered--

- Participation time. If more than one activity is to take place, be sure to allow sufficient time for students actually to do each activity. Explanations, group organization for participation, and distribution of equipment all take time. Students should have sufficient time to

Staff check-in. If additional volunteer helpers are used, they should arrive ahead of participants and be ready to work when students arrive.

Accessibility. Be sure all building entrances, locker rooms, and elevators are unlocked and ready for use and that lights are turned on.

Parking. Be sure a loading space is clear and ready for buses.

### Publicity

Any large group playday or interschool sports competition is a newsworthy event. Announcements and requests for coverage can be sent to school papers, system-wide newsletters, city papers, and local radio and television outlets. Keep in mind, however, that not all students have permission for their pictures to be used for such purposes. Before any picture taking is arranged, school authorities should be contacted regarding rules on permission. For any serious sports competition results should be sent immediately to persons responsible for local sports coverage. If they have been advised in advance of the nature of the competition they will probably be happy to print results.

### Direction of the Playday

From the onset one person has to be responsible for pulling all loose ends together. Such a person makes initial contacts, runs meetings in an organized, constructive fashion, sees that all pre-event plans are carried out, supervises site preparations, runs the total operation the day of the activity, sees to it that the facility is left in the condition it was found, and makes sure that appreciation is expressed to all who helped make the event a success. This job needs a person who is willing to work with a variety of people who may have differing opinions. This takes a responsible person who can get the job done, not someone who will leave it to others. Direction an event receives often determines its success or failure.

### First Aid

Any large sports event necessitates availability of first aid supplies and someone trained in their use. First aid services should be easily accessible but in an area somewhat secluded so that an injured person can be cared for in relative quiet. At the start of the activity, everyone should be made aware of the whereabouts of the first aid area and it should remain open during the entire day. The local chapter of the American National Red Cross may be contacted for assistance as many chapters have groups of people who run mobile first aid stations at community events.

### Financing

Last but not least, what is all this going to cost? If all help is volunteer, the activity run in school during school time, and all food and transportation donated, it costs nothing! From there the price can rise indefinitely. Contributions can be solicited from local community groups, school system athletic departments, parents clubs, service and civic organizations. If necessary an entry fee can be charged. However, this will probably limit the number of students who participate.

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APPENDICES

Sports Playday

An all day interschool event was held at the field house of a local university. Three schools sent a total of ninety students, ten to fifteen years of age with various physical and multiple conditions.

- 9:30 Arrive and distribute name tags
- 9:45 Welcome
- 9:50-10:30 Play for Fun--Parachute Activities  
Three large chutes with three teams of ten students per team and three staff member to each chute.
- 10:30-11:15 Play for Fun--Relay Races.  
Nine relay teams of ten students per team were prematched for ability; students from different schools were mixed. These same teams were used for parachute play. One staff member was assigned each team.
- 11:15-12:15 Lunch and Toileting  
Students brought bag lunches; soft drinks were donated by a local company.
- 12:15-1:15 Try a New Sport

- |             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| Water Polo  | Raquetball     |
| Bowling     | Golf.          |
| Disco Dance | Carnival Games |
| Frisbee     |                |

Prior to the event students were asked their first and second choices; they were programed for one activity based on their choices. The list of activities from which to choose came in part from student selections.

- 1:25-2:00 See Something Different
- |              |                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Martial Arts | Afro Dance                           |
| Fencing      | Wheelchair Slalom                    |
| Trampoline   | Diving                               |
| Archery      | .Exercise Physiology/Weight Training |

Suggestions for sports in this category were also obtained from students ahead of time. They were then given two choices, of which they saw one.

- 2:00 Load buses and leave.

Of the ninety students, twenty-five needed one-to-one assistance; this was in addition to staff members assigned to activities in the morning. During the afternoon one staff member was also assigned to each activity group. Staff consisted of personnel from participating schools; university students provided one-to-one help.

Sports Competition

An all day interschool track and field meet was held at an orthopedic school with one visiting school. Approximately fifty students fourteen to eighteen years of age participated.

9:00 Arrive and check-in

9:15 Warm-ups

9:45 Preliminary Competition

Wheelchairs - 50 Yard Dash  
Walkers - 50 Yard Dash  
Crutches - 50 Yard Dash  
Wheelchairs - 220 Yard Dash  
Walkers - 220 Yard Dash  
Crutches - 220 Yard Dash  
Walkers - High Jump  
Walkers - Long Jump  
Wheelchairs - Long Jump  
Wheelchairs - Slalom  
Shot Put  
Softball Throw

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Final Competition

The top two finishers from each heat of dashes and top six from each field event qualified.

Wheelchairs - 50 Yard Dash  
Walkers - 50 Yard Dash  
Crutches - 50 Yard Dash  
Wheelchairs - 220 Yard Dash  
Walkers - 220 Yard Dash  
Crutches - 220 Yard Dash  
Walkers - Shuttle Relay  
Wheelchairs - Shuttle Relay  
Mixed Team - 440 Yard Relay  
Walkers - High Jump  
Walkers - Long Jump  
Wheelchairs - Long Jump  
Wheelchairs - Slalom  
Shot Put  
Softball Throw

2:30 Awards Ceremony

Staff members from participating schools served as timers and scorers with help from the school system's central office personnel.

Special Theme Event--Trivia Day

This was a half-day in-school event in which about sixty students ten to fifteen years of age with physical and multiple conditions participated.

12:30

Organization and team set-up.

Teams were pre-arranged so that they were evenly matched.

At the start of competition each team was assigned a pie shaped portion of the floor, marked off with cones. Each team had to stay within its part of the floor the entire time.

12:40-2:20

Continuous Trivia Competition.

Clean the Yard. Every soft nerf and whiffle ball available was dumped onto the floor. Object was for each team to clean all balls off its section of the floor. All teams participated at the same time by throwing balls onto other teams areas. At the end of a specified time the winner was declared as the team with fewest objects in its section of the floor.

Mat Stack. Each team got one five by eight mat. How many people could they get on it? To break ties, tape was used to reduce usable mat space.

Balloon Break. Large container of balloons was placed in the center of the floor. Walkers ran and got one balloon which had to be broken by someone in a wheelchair.

Rope Maze. Each team was tied up with a continuous rope. The first team getting free won.

Mummy Wrap. Team picked a mummy and then wrapped it with toilet paper--neatest and fastest job won.

Etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc.!!!!

An infinite number of trivia type games could be described. They are fun things that students don't do everyday in physical education classes; by their nature they emphasize group cooperation. At the end of the afternoon the team with the highest total points--seven for first, five for second, three for third, and two for fourth and fifth--is the winner. Standings contribute towards intramural awards given at the end of the school year.

Special Sports Event

An all-school team of twelve students ten to twenty years of age with physical and multiple conditions played a regulation basketball game against local television news personalities who played in wheelchairs. The event was held at school with about 200 spectators. The team was picked ahead of time from open try-outs judged by persons in physical education and sports but not from the school itself. Prior to the game art classes made pep posters and home economics classes prepared refreshments. Invitations were sent to parents and special programs were printed. A cheerleading squad was also organized for the event.

- 12:30            Gymnasium open for spectators.
- 12:35-12:50    Home team warm-up.
- 12:50-1:00     Visiting team warm-up.
- 1:00-1:55      Basketball game.
- 2:00-2:30      Refreshments and autograph signing.

Rated officials donated time for the game and the television station gave several minutes of coverage on the evening sports show.