Inclusion in Physical Education: Changing the Culture

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Creating a truly inclusive environment requires a change in culture.

Standard-driven curriculum, evidence of learning through assessment, meaningful performance outcomes, and the growing diversity of student populations are transforming how inclusion is implemented and evaluated. Physical educators are raising fundamental questions regarding the most effective way to provide all students with a quality instructional program that meets individual educational needs in the context of political and social justice. A commitment to quality physical education entails a belief that each student can learn and succeed, that diversity enriches everybody, that students can learn better through involvement in a thoughtful and caring community of learners, that each student has strengths and weaknesses, and that effective learning results from the collaborative efforts of everyone (Tripp, Piletic, & Babcock, 2004).

Contemporary motivational theorists (e.g. Glasser, 1986; Maslow, 1970) stress that a child's feeling of belonging is critical, if not prerequisite, to a child's motivation to learn. Complete exclusion or removal of a student from the general education program sends the message that belonging is not a basic human right but something that must be earned. Norman Kunc (1992) describes the dilemma:

> The tragic irony…is that as soon as we take away students' sense of belonging, we completely undermine their capacity to learn the skill that will enable them to belong. Herein lies the most painful 'Catch-22' situation that confronts students with disabilities—they can't belong until they learn, but they can't learn because they are prevented from belonging. (p. 35)

Two types of exclusion exist: complete exclusion and functional exclusion. Complete exclusion (described above) is when a student with a disability is segregated from her or his peers. Functional exclusion, on the other hand, is more subtle. Functional exclusion occurs when physical educators include a student with a disability in the physical education class, but the student does not meaningfully participate in an instructional program with his or her peers. For example, a student may be "allowed" to watch others, keep score, clean the equipment room, inventory equipment, play "catch" with a paraeducator, or even help the teacher with a task. In these cases, the student with a disability does not receive the same opportunity for meaningful instruction and active participation as his or her peers. Both forms of exclusion produce the same negative result. According to Oliver (1996), disability is "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization that takes no or little account of people with impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities" (p. 22).

So what is inclusion? First, it is an attitude, a value, and belief system, not just an action or set of actions. What does it feel like to be included? Table 1 identifies children's responses when asked to identify an event in their lives when they felt included and another when they felt excluded (Falvey, Givner, & Kimm 1995). Inclu-

sion is about embracing all students, making a commitment to do whatever it takes to create meaningful opportunities for learning and to provide a community of learning where all students have an inalienable right to belong. An inclusive physical education program values interdependence as well as independence. It values its students, staff, faculty, and parents as a community of learners. Inclusion in physical education honors all kinds of student diversity (not just disability) as an opportunity for learning about how everyone can become physically active through a variety of movement and fitness activities (Webb & Pope, 1999).

Changing the Culture of Inclusion

For some physical educators, change is daunting and difficult; and in educational institutions the status quo often wins out because it is the path of least resistance. Teaching practices that exclude any student from meaningful and active participation in physical education should be replaced with a human movement and/or fitness curriculum grounded in a diverse learning environment, where all students search for personal meaning, set goals, solve problems, and inquire responsibly. Inclusion cannot be accomplished solely through the addition of a paraeducator, or the adaptation of games, equipment, time, and/or organization (Rizzo & Lavay, 2000). It requires the use of techniques and strategies based on new assumptions and representing a community culture in physical education (Lieberman, James, & Ludwa, 2004), in addition to the application of more traditional approaches. This article focuses on five key socioeducational cultural changes. The areas for change include, but are not necessarily limited to, (1) program administration, (2) evaluation, (3) instruction and curriculum, (4) long-term planning, and (5) storytelling.

Program Administration

Among the basic administrative requirements (Brown et al., 1989) of inclusion is the placement of a student with a disability in accordance with the principle of "natural proportions" (i.e., in general, no more than 1-2 students with disabilities in any one physical education class). When a student with a disability participates in physical education, he or she will have supplementary aids and services in the form of individualized programming, support personnel, special instruction, and adapted materials as needed. This is known as the principle of portability—everything and everyone follows the student (Brown et al., 1989).

Inclusion is a collaborative, student-focussed process because students with disabilities learn life skills and enjoy the opportunities to grow up with their peers in the dynamic environment that a meaningful, high-quality, physical education program can provide. Program administrators must understand that, for students with disabilities to become truly physically educated and prepared for an active lifestyle outside of school, they must be complete members of the school community by experiencing physical education naturally and spontaneously with peers (Brown et al., 1989).

Table 1. Responses to the Question, "How did it feel when you were…."	
Excluded?	**Included?**
• Angry	• Proud
• Resentful	• Secure
• Hurt	• Special
• Frustrated	• Comfortable
• Lonely	• Recognized
• Different	• Confident
• Confused	• Happy
• Isolated	• Excited
• Inferior	• Trusted
• Worthless	• Cared about
• Invisible	• Liked
• Substandard	• Accepted
• Unwanted	• Appreciated
• Untrusted	• Reinforced
• Unaccepted	• Loved
• Closed	• Grateful
• Ashamed	• Normal
	• Open
	• Positive
	• Nurtured
	• Important
	• Responsible
	• Grown up

Source: Falvey, Givner, & Kimm, 1995

Since program administrators (i.e., principals) directly influence resource allocations, staffing, structures, information flow, and operating processes that determine what shall and shall not be done within the school environment, they play a crucial role. To ensure the success of inclusion, it is essential that program administrators base decisions on principles that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in physical education. The decision to support inclusion depends largely upon the administrators' attitude, values, and beliefs (Goodland and Lovitt, 1993), which they demonstrate by the following:

• *How they make and honor commitments.* Evidence from research indicates that administrators are the most influential people that directly affect a teacher's intention toward the inclusion of a student with a disability (Tripp & Rizzo, 2006). When an administrator provides verbal and tangible support (personnel, equipment, time, and space), teachers will more likely follow the best practices for inclusion.

• *What they say in formal and informal settings.* Administrators show consistent and dedicated support for inclusion by communicating their philosophical support in all settings, whether in public gatherings like PTA meetings, small talk on campus, or faculty meetings.

• *What they express interest in and what questions they ask.* Administrators interested in physical education visit the gymnasium regularly and demonstrate a genuine interest in the students learning in this environment and the curriculum. They know and understand the value of physical education and model behaviors that show their commitment to support inclusion in physical education. Good administrators ask teachers what they need to do their job and then work diligently to get the teacher the required tools, resources, or schedules that are in the best interests of the students and the program goals.

• *Where they choose to go and with whom they spend their time.* Ignoring the influence of the physical education program, which probably has the most potential to be supportive and active in the inclusion process in schools, is tantamount to ignorance. Wise administrators understand the social dynamics of a good physical education program and spend time and energy helping to create a quality learning environment to support inclusion.

• *When they choose to act and how they make their actions known.* Supportive administrators have a very narrow tolerance for noncompliant teaching behaviors when it comes to best practices for inclusion and student learning.

• *How they organize their staff and their physical surroundings* (Nanus, 1992, pp. 139-140). The administrator is most influential in terms of the hidden attitudes toward inclusion (Tripp & Rizzo, 2006). If the special education class or students with disabilities get the trailer out back or the wrestling room in the basement, that says something to everyone. When students with disabilities don't have access to the locker rooms or must enter through the back door, this too sends a message. Good administrators ensure that the environment is prepared ahead of time for equal use by all students, and they are careful not to send hidden messages.

Evaluation

Physical educators know that they will encounter students with a range of abilities within each of their classes. Inclusion is not just about "disability," it is about diversity. Physical educators must be prepared to provide a variety of activities for their students—from noncompetitive recreational and leisure pursuits to individual goal setting, and/or competitive team games and activities. Contextual difficulties notwithstanding, inclusion requires physical educators to have an attitude of accommodation for the good of the group. That is what makes physical education inclusive and not exclusive.

Inclusion is a social process and must be conceptualized as such. One of the components of a comprehensive assessment plan in an inclusive physical education program is an evaluation model whereby student learning is measured on both improvement of group performance and individual improvement. Physical educators will need to make changes in the evaluation criteria and the system of assessing performance in order to equitably evaluate each student's contribution to the success of inclusion. Most teachers know the saying,

"What matters is measured." If teachers value inclusion, they must evaluate its success in their programs and hold students accountable for their contribution to the process. This means that physical educators must identify specific program goals and objectives that clearly state to all students what successful inclusion looks like.

Once the physical educator sets up the learning activity and states the expected learning outcomes for the daily lesson, the students can start working. In an inclusive physical education program, one of the necessary components is that students work together to achieve the learning objectives. One of the teacher's roles is to teach them how to work together and, in addition to focusing on individual student performance, to observe what is happening within groups. Figure 1 gives a sample rubric to assess performance in a group. The following suggestions define explicit teacher roles and responsibilities and offer possible interventions:

1. Ask the students to discuss the problems associated with including everyone in an activity and to identify possible solutions that can be performed, practiced, modified, and evaluated for success.

2. If a student is unable to contribute to the group work, take the student aside and ask about the situation to determine his or her perception of it. Find solutions that address the student's answer and use alternative ways to obtain student commitment or involvement.

3. Teach students the problem-solving skills that they will need to make situations more inclusive and give them opportunities to practice these skills.

4. Trust the group to resolve issues when they arise.

Another way to evaluate inclusion is to evaluate groups in alternative ways. For example, the physical educator could grade the group on the overall average of the individual goals each student set for himself or herself. In this way, group members are rewarded for assisting others to meet their goals in physical education and they are likely to create strategies to increase involvement in the process and to ensure that all students are getting their instructional needs met.

Instruction and Curriculum

Individualizing instruction may sound impossible to some physical educators. Many teach large classes, sometimes so large that it is almost impossible to teach anyone anything. Whether perceived as an administrative problem or a socioeducational issue, large classes are unacceptable for any teacher, including physical educators, and this must change. As the culture of inclusion changes, teachers must recognize that instructional challenges very often have more to do with how educational services are provided (Rizzo, Davis, & Toussaint, 1994) than with the curricular model that is followed.

Consider the arrangement of a given class. The class arrangement can vary to include one-to-one instruction, partner work or small groups, teaching stations, large groups, and self-paced one-to-one instruction (i.e., task cards). Instructional staff can include trained peer tutors (i.e., peer, cross

Figure 1. Sample Rubric for Assessing Participation in a Group				
	Always 4	Usually 3	Sometimes 2	Seldom 1
Actively cooperates in group activities through words and actions.				
Shows positive leadership in group activities through words and actions.				
Is willing to contribute to group goals by actively sharing responsibility for completion of the assigned task.				
Actively encourages teammates in a positive manner through words and actions.				
Considers the views and feelings of others through actions of compromise and discussion.				

age, athletes, seniors) and paraprofessionals to assist with instruction, while the physical educator constantly monitors the interactive relationship between the student, teacher, and environment (Davis & Burton, 1991). This instructional strategy is called "ecological task analytic teaching" (ETAT). When coupled with peer tutors, cooperative learning activities, and collaboration with others, ETAT can be used by physical educators to support an inclusive physical education environment (Rizzo, Davis, & Toussaint, 1994).

Using ETAT, the physical educator must consider student age, developmentally appropriate activities, equipment, developmental task analysis with task variations, functional tasks, activity choices, and modification or manipulation of the environment to ensure student success. It is not as daunting as it sounds, if teachers embrace the previously discussed cultural changes toward inclusion.

Inclusive physical education is often viewed as a separate initiative running parallel or even counter to other curricular and instructional reform efforts. However, promising curricular practices that foster inclusive education include multicultural education (Smith & Owens, 2000), multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1991), constructivist learning (Griffin & Butler, 2005), interdisciplinary curriculum (Purcell-Cone, Werner, Cone, & Mays-Woods, 1998), cooperative learning (Grineski, 1996), authentic assessment of student performance (Block, 1998), community building (Glover & Anderson, 2003), use of technology (Castelli, 2005), and teaching for student responsibility (Hellison, 2003).

Long-Term Planning

Student diversity (disability being one aspect of diversity) plays a critical role in 21st-century physical education programs. The question arises, "What individual student traits constitute personal advantages or disadvantages and how should they be taken into account when planning a unit of physical education instruction?" Sen's (1992) capability approach can be used to provide a framework for long-term planning aimed at developing the maximum capability of each individual to pursue and achieve well-being. "Capa-

bility" is a set of "functionings," reflecting the students' opportunity to lead one type of lifestyle or another. Thus, the capability approach focuses on the functionings of each individual. Within physical education, teachers can determine what each student's potential is to be physically active and then decide how to provide them with opportunities to achieve that potential.

In order to create inclusive physical education environments, physical educators need to consider and account for individual differences in four fundamental ways:

1. Personal, internal characteristics, such as physical and mental abilities, talents, and so forth

2. External circumstances, such as inherited socioeconomic status, assets, environmental factors, and social and cultural issues

3. Interindividual variation, such as motivation and/or differences in the ability to use commodities and resources to achieve valued outcomes

4. The different desired objectives that arise from individuals' differing perspectives of what "physically educated" means. Sen (1992) refers to this as the freedom to achieve actual outcomes that one has reason to value.

The following example shows what the capability approach has to offer an inclusive physical education program:

Students may have physical characteristics connected with disability, illness, body type, or a combination of things that make their needs diverse. While students may have the same desire to play the game of soccer, their physical characteristics will affect the way that they function. Some students may or may not have disabilities and possess the physical ability to play soccer, but lack the desire. The compensation needed for each student to participate in soccer will vary, and some will not be fully correctable even with support services and adaptations. A lot of the variability in this situation is not a factor of disability but of how students choose to use their capabilities to achieve their own valued outcome.

In the capability approach, disability is considered multidimensional and relational, in that it sees disability as only one aspect of the complexity of human diversity comparable to age or gender.

Storytelling

One of the most effective and powerful ways to transmit useful knowledge in a contextual manner that has meaning to others is through storytelling (Sapon-Shevin, 1999). This can best be described as knowledge of what worked and what did not work being transmitted from teacher to teacher, teacher to student, student to student, teacher to administrator, administrator to parent, and so forth. Storytelling is similar to the sharing of each person's own case study. Through storytelling and collaboration, physical educators can create a community of learning in a nonthreatening manner, where everyone who can affect student outcomes is invited to be both a learner and a teacher. In order to build an inclusive community, all people need to feel as though they belong and have a voice. The most important requirement for storytelling to work is to create opportunities for stakeholders in the inclusive process to talk and share. It also is extremely important that everyone have the space and permission to share, not only what is good and enjoyable related to inclusion, but also what is painful and hard. Teachers must provide a cognitive and affective safe zone for students, colleagues, and parents. Some struggle more with inclusion than others, which is normal in a diverse world. However, because community and cultural values and standards concerning what is appropriate to share vary greatly, it is also essential that everyone who shares is respectful of individual differences. Safe zones cannot be mandated; they must be created. Everyone who participates in storytelling must have evidence that their sharing will be positively received.

There are a number of formal and informal ways to create opportunities to share stories of inclusion. Formal methods include a scheduled meeting time after school at a convenient and comfortable location for a number of physical educators. The group needs to be a reasonable size, perhaps 10 to 12 members, so all members can share in a conversation. The conversation can begin with and be facilitated through the use of a prompt. For example, "New and Good" is a prompt that starts the discussion as everyone says something that is new or good about inclusion in physical education. As the community is built, the members will trust each other more and share more meaningful stories. Another formal activity for teachers is to create a "Chart of Commonalities." A giant flip chart is needed on which one person records an issue or story that is shared, followed by others who have had the same or similar experience or issue. The chart is then used to prompt discussion and record possible solutions to issues that are shared by most of the people participating. Informal methods of storytelling usually evolve out of the increased comfort level over time and use of formal methods. Informal methods are usually generated spontaneously by people when they meet or connect in some way in the hall, faculty room, or gymnasium. Important themes for storytelling include the following:

• Ways in which people are different and the kind of support and help they need and want

• How to meet the individual needs of all members of the physical education community within a context of shared responsibility, community, and connection

• Ways in which differences can become the basis for discrimination and oppression

The goal of storytelling is to acknowledge the diversity of human beings and to create dialogue that reflects on solutions that accommodate this diversity, so that every member of the physical education community can feel a sense of connection and belonging.

Conclusion

The measure of success is not whether problems still exist, but whether the problems are the same as a year ago. Changing the physical education culture in order to create a inclusive environment for all students involves rethinking taken-for-granted ideas about how physical education is organized, how students are grouped, how resources are utilized, how decisions are made, and what constitutes appropriate or meaningful physical education. For physical education to be truly inclusive, teachers must look beyond the common perception of disability and think about physical education as a diverse community of learners with various skill levels. Physical educators must also look beyond individual achievement to include group-performance assessment and look at the success of the whole class. For inclusion to become a reality, teachers must change the culture inside their physical education classes. The inclusive physical education culture is one that focuses on capability and on the kind of community support that leads to all students learning to lead a healthy and active lifestyle throughout life.

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