

A UNIVERSITY-BASED ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR HOMESCHOOLED CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

The increasing number of homeschooled students and their need for quality physical education indicates a potential to establish a university-based program for students with disabilities who are homeschooled. Children with disabilities have a prevalence to be inactive and have the potential to be overweight or obese. In addition, children who are homeschool may not be participating in regular physical activity. This article describes a homeschool adapted physical education program for children with disabilities at the University of New Mexico.

Keywords: *Homeschooling, disabilities, physical education*

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) mandates that students with disabilities have a right to a free and public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Under this law, all students receiving special education services must also receive physical education irrespective of disability status. Students who cannot safely and successfully participate in the general physical education (GPE) environment must be provided physical education by a qualified adapted physical activity educator (Lytle, Lavay, & Rizzo, 2010).



Chaapel, Columna, Lytle, and Bailey (2012) examined parental expectations about adapted physical education services and found that parents wanted their children to develop fundamental and gross motor skills such as running and jumping, as well as fitness. In the same study, some parents wanted their children to be able to transition to community-based recreational programs but were afraid of how their child with a disability might act in an unfamiliar setting. Parents may overprotect their children with regard to physical activity programs to avoid injury, or they may experience fears of what could happen if their child is not successful or has behavioral challenges (Chaapel, Columna, Lytle, & Bailey, 2012).

Chaapel et al. (2012) found that parents indicated, with regard to adapted physical activity education, the importance of participating in physical activities, a need for ongoing and frequent communication with the adapted physical education teacher and the teacher's attributes. Teacher attributes included being knowledgeable about the characteristics of each disability, as well as being able to assess the individual needs of each child and develop a program and instruction that meets their individual needs. Parents indicated they wanted an adapted physical education teacher who was caring, creative, fun, engaged, respectful, and open minded.

In 2012, 1.77 million U.S. youth were homeschooled, double the amount from 1999 (Bielick et al., 2001; Noel et al., 2013). Parents who choose to homeschool their children often focus on academic pursuits. There is no literature describing homeschooling efforts in areas of the curriculum that are ancillary to the core, such as physical education (McKethan, Everhart, & Herman, 2000). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2003) reported that approximately 14% of parents who homeschool their children do so because their children have special needs, including physical or mental health problems.

The increasing number of homeschooled students with disabilities and their need for regular physical activity indicates the potential need for established homeschool physical education programs on college campuses because these children may not be receiving opportunities to specifically develop and improve motor skills and fitness. The purpose

of this article is to discuss the development and implementation of a university-based adapted physical education program for homeschooled children with disabilities at the University of New Mexico. It is the author's intent to provide an overview of the program and how it is meeting the needs of differently abled children as well as providing an impactful service-learning opportunity for future teacher candidates in a physical education teacher education (PETE) program.

Program Description

The University of New Mexico, a large public university located in the southwest region of the United States is the setting for the Homeschool Adapted Physical Education Program that began in January 2014. In the Homeschool Adapted Physical Education Program, teacher candidates or undergraduate students in the PETE program who are enrolled in the adapted physical education teaching methods class during the spring semester of their third or junior year, serve as student instructors. At this point in their teacher preparation program, these undergraduate students have learned physical education pedagogy for teaching elementary- and secondary-level students, assessment, and classroom management and have had several hours of practicum working with students in local schools. The focus of the adapted physical education course is to prepare teacher candidates for teaching students with disabilities in general physical education classes. The curriculum of the course includes learning about a variety of disabilities, adaptations, and modifications to instruction, the history of the education of students with disabilities in public schools, IEPs, and how to collaborate with other school professionals (e.g., adapted physical educators, physical and occupational therapists, etc.). The adapted physical education teaching methods class is purposely offered as one of the last classes in the undergraduate program prior to student teaching so teacher candidates will be prepared to deliver developmentally appropriate physical education content including how to differentiate instruction for diverse populations of children.

Under the supervision and direction of the program coordinator, the UNM PETE students prepare and deliver developmentally appropriate, inclusive physical education lesson plans to participants in the program once a week for 60 minutes. Skill themes are selected by the program coordinator each week and lessons are reviewed for their level of differentiated instruction and use of appropriate instructional modifications and adaptations that will best meet the needs of the children in the class. At the conclusion of each class, the program coordinator conducts a group debrief with the teacher candidates requiring them to assess and evaluate their lessons by verbally reflecting on their teaching practice and identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

The Homeschool Adapted Physical Education Program is open to any homeschooled child, age 6-12, with or without a disability. Priority is given to children with a disability, and every attempt is made to accommodate all types of disability. In year 1 of the program, marketing information was very focused and information/applications were sent specifically to a youth development center on campus for children with disabilities. In year 2, an increase in recruitment of participants with disabilities included marketing the program to the local Children's Hospital and the homeschool physical education program at the local county parks and recreation department for recruiting children without disabilities. Enrollment is limited to the first 25 participants who apply. The challenge both years has been recruiting children with a disability who are homeschooled; however, there is always a wait list of children without a disability who are homeschooled. There is no fee to participate and the program takes place once a week in the university's main campus recreation facility for 60 minutes. Parents sign a participation waiver prior to the start of the program and are required to remain in attendance while their child is in class. The participants are greeted individually each week by the program coordinator and the undergraduate instructors. Each adapted physical education class includes a dynamic warm-up or instant activity, lesson introduction, skill practice, culminating activity and lesson closure.



The purpose of this university-based UNM Homeschool Adapted Physical Education program is to do the following:

- a) Provide a practicum experience for undergraduate teacher candidates in the Physical Education Teacher Education Program during the semester of their adapted physical education methods class;
- b) Provide a quality, adapted physical education experience for children with disabilities being homeschooled in the local area that meets the needs of each individual child and is delivered by caring, creative and respectful pre-service physical educators; and
- c) Develop fundamental motor skills and fitness of the children in the Homeschool Adapted Physical Education Program. The Test of Gross Motor Development 2 (TGMD 2) and Fitness-Gram® were used to identify the progress of the program participants with regard to fundamental motor skills (run, gallop, hop, leap, hori-

zontal jump, slide, overhand and underhand throw, striking a stationary ball, stationary dribble, kick, and catch) and health-related fitness (aerobic capacity, muscular strength, and muscular endurance).

Program Participants

This program is designed to be inclusive in order to provide valuable opportunities for the homeschool participants to socialize with their peers as well as simulate a general physical education setting for the UNM PETE students. In year 1, participants ranged in age from 6-12 years, and 56% of the program participants were male. Sixty-seven percent of the participants had a disability, and 30% were nondisabled. Disabilities included autism spectrum disorder and cerebral palsy. All were verbal and many preferred visual supports (visual schedule, pictures, social stories, etc.). In year 2, participants ranged in age from 8-10 years, 60% had a disability, and 60% were female. All were verbal and many preferred visual supports.

Value to Physical Education Teacher Education Students

Lavay, Lytle, and Rizzo (2010) stated that a highly qualified adapted physical education teacher must have the knowledge and skills for a highly qualified physical education teacher and as such, must be a physical educator first, possessing the content knowledge of general physical education with the ability to apply this information to teaching physical education to children with disabilities. By developing and delivering developmentally appropriate instruction suited to meet the individual needs and abilities of each participant, students in the PETE program at the university experience a valuable practicum experience. Teacher candidates are able to set goals, deliver differentiated instruction, and then reflect on their teaching practice through personal and group reflection. Effective best practices are modeled throughout each class by the program coordinator. During lesson planning sessions, the PETE students receive immediate feedback regarding their plans and the program coordinator can problem solve prior to the teaching of the lesson. During the adapted PE class, the program coordinator is actively supervising PETE students providing support and constructive feedback. After every session, there is a debriefing and reflection session in which the PETE students receive specific feedback from their peers as well as the program coordinator. This process is the same technique used by the program faculty in student teaching scenarios in the local public schools.

Informal discussions and remarks with PETE students regarding their experiences with the Homeschool Adapted PE program include the following:

- “I didn’t quite know what to expect prior to meeting the kids but after the first few minutes I realized they could understand me and I felt more confident.”
- “I’m really going to miss seeing the “littles” every Friday...they were the highlight of my week.”

- “This is so different from our other teaching experiences in the schools...it was fun to get to work with our (faculty) teacher.”

The program is designed to meet New Mexico beginning teacher competencies and teacher candidates are able to use artifacts from their teaching (lesson plans, video, etc.) to include in their portfolio.

Value to PETE Faculty

Providing learning opportunities for PETE students to experience “hands-on” learning is valuable but can be difficult to coordinate. Between students’ class schedules, work commitments, and personal obligations, PETE faculty may find it difficult to develop or find an appropriate adapted placement in the schools or community. One of the main benefits of the Homeschool Adapted PE program is that the program takes place at the university, and it takes place during the regularly scheduled PETE course. Since participants are homeschooled, there is no need for district approval, and most homeschool families have flexible schedules.

Characteristics of a Highly Qualified Adapted Physical Education Teacher

Lytle, Lavay, and Rizzo (2010) identified specific content knowledge areas that are necessary for a highly qualified adaptive physical educator. Although the PETE students teaching in this program are training to be general physical educators, many of the content knowledge areas stated by Lytle et al. are incorporated in this program.

- *Physical Education Content Knowledge:* The PETE students demonstrate knowledge of subject matter content and follow best practices. Safety is at the forefront of all lessons and activities. The program coordinator reviews with the PETE students any contraindicated activities.
- *Disability Studies:* During the semester, PETE students develop an understanding of different disabilities including the 14 disability categories recognized by IDEIA.
- *Assessment Methods:* Results from The TGMD and FitnessGram are used to inform instruction.
- *Special Education Laws and Individualized Education Programs:* PETE students demonstrate their knowledge of the history of the laws that govern special education, physical education and adaptive sport.
- *Individual Teaching and Learning Styles:* PETE students in this program demonstrate a variety of instructional strategies that individualize instruction, including using different teaching styles, instructional technology, tactile, kinesthetic visual and auditory modalities.
- *Adaptations and Modifications.* PETE students are required to utilize the concept of Change, Challenge, Choice (Stiehl, Morris, & Sinclair, 2000) in developing their lessons that identify adaptations and modifications to equipment, activities, games, movement patterns, and organization.

Value to Parents

The Homeschool Adapted Physical Education program provides parents who homeschool their children with disabilities the opportunity to have a positive, quality and appropriate physical education opportunity. Weekly classes are designed to provide their children opportunities to develop fundamental and gross motor skills, improve physical fitness, and socialize. In addition, skills and self-confidence attained as a result of participating in the Homeschool Adapted PE Program may transfer into positive experiences in local community-based adapted sport and activity programs.

Comments from parents:

- “We have looked forward to coming back to PE class for a year! My child loves the atmosphere and his confidence has improved greatly.”
- “I can see the improvement in my child...and each week the instructors always have such fun and interesting activities planned for the kids.”
- “This has been such a positive experience it has given us incentive to try some community program.”
- “Keep expanding the program...more classes”!

Value to the Community

This program demonstrates a creative opportunity for developing relationships with complimentary disciplines and community partnerships. Developing community partnerships strengthens relationships with stakeholders, increases visibility of university programs and provides resources and support for parents and disability advocates. This program

promotes a culture of inclusion and respect for individuals with disabilities and educates families about the importance of physical activity and provides information regarding community-based adaptive sport and physical activity opportunities.

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