

## Original Article

### Improving practicum experience of undergraduate physical education students: Paralympic sports event for children

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#### Abstract

**Problem:** The inclusion of students with disability in Physical Education (PE) classes still faces with major issues to its effectiveness. These students describe difficulties to get involved with activities in PE class and with the social interaction with peers without disability. This reality is associated, in large part, with failures in the training received by the PE teacher. In this way, practical experiences are considered crucial in preparing PE teachers for including students with disabilities. **Objective:** To report a practicum experience of teaching paralympic sports as way to improve training of future PE teachers. This practicum experience was designed through the organization and development of a paralympic sport event by undergraduate students in Physical Education course. This Paralympic sport event was developed to 200 children with and without disabilities, with opportunity to know 8 different sports: judo, badminton, wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, boccia, para athletics, wheelchair fencing and canoe. This sport event was organized by 50 undergraduate students and 27 volunteers. **Conclusions:** The experience of a Paralympic Sport event to children with and without disabilities demonstrated to be meaningful and helpful to improve practicum experience of teaching Paralympic Sports to undergraduate students in PE course.

**Keywords:** Paralympic sport, students with disabilities, Physical education; Adapted physical activity

#### Introduction

Inclusion should be understood as the right of all individuals to quality education in the regular educational system (Block, 2007; Hodge, Lieberman, & Murata, 2012). Although it is still mainly associated with children with disabilities, inclusion has now been advocated as an educational reform to meet the individual needs of all students. Its central point is the achievement of an effective learning and social participation, while reducing social obstacles which are present in the school environment (Booth & Ainscown, 2002).

However, the participation and involvement of students with disabilities in the context of Physical Education (PE) classes still face difficulties. Studies reveal that people with disabilities associate PE classes to negative experiences (Bredahl, 2013), characterized by exclusion, limited participation or even segregated practice (Alves & Duarte, 2013, 2014; Alves, Haegele, & Duarte, 2018; Blinde & MCallister, 1998; Block, 2007; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015).

This reality is associated, in large part, with failures in the training received by the PE teacher (Ko & Boswell, 2013; Morley, Bailey, Tan, & Cooke, 2005). In general, PE teachers do not feel prepared, and indicate the lack of knowledge and previous experience to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Herold & Dandolo, 2009; Ko & Boswell, 2013; Morley et al., 2005; Qi & Ha, 2012). Ko and Boswell (2013) described that pre-service courses are not sufficient to prepare PE teachers to this inclusion task. For instance, Morley et al. (2005), reported that PE teachers described the pre-service training as limited, and unrelated to their daily professional experience.

Studies in the Brazilian educational context reveal that PE teachers are not aware of what can and cannot be modified in the educational programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Aguar & Duarte, 2005; Falkenbach, Chaves, Nunes, & Nascimento, 2007; Falkenbach & Lopes, 2010; Ferreira, 2006; Fiorini & Manzini, 2014; Munster, 2013; Ramos, Brasil, Goda, Barros, & Both, 2013). In addition, Brazilian schools still have PE teachers with no training in inclusion (Ramos et al., 2013).

In this way, the practical experiences for PE teachers are understood as fundamental to their preparation to inclusion (Ko & Boswell, 2013; Morley et al., 2005; Vickerman, 2007). PE teachers described that learning experiences are not meaningful unless they are practical or participatory (Ko & Boswell, 2013). Therefore, the aim of this study is to describe one practicum experience of teaching paralympic sports as an way to improve the training of future PE teachers. This practicum experience was designed through the organization and development of a paralympic sport event by undergraduate students in PE course. This paper is presented in five steps: 1) Concepts of Paralympic Sport in Physical Education School; 2) Learning in practice; 3) We can do it; 4) The happy day and, finally, 5) The feedback.

Understanding Paralympic Sport in Physical Education School

Paralympic sport is presented to undergraduate students through a course named Adapted Sports, with 50 students enrolled annually. This course integrate the school program to all its students and aims at teaching future physical education teachers how to work with Adapted and Paralympic sports in different places and with distinct goals, like youth sports, physical education at schools, gyms and high level training.

Adapted sports course is developed through 15 weeks with four weekly hours. The syllabus (table 1) consists of Adapted and Paralympic sports pedagogy and training, history, classification system and organization of Paralympic sports at national and international level. These classes are structured in two phases, theoretical presentation (e.g., Adapted and Paralympic Sports rules, technique and pedagogy strategies), and practical experience of teaching and playing the Paralympic sport.

The undergraduate students are required to get involvement with the sport and to learn how to teach and to train for Paralympic sports. Classes were structured on playful activities and games based on fundamental elements of each Paralympic Sport. During the course, each Paralympic sport was taught by people engaged with the sport, as national coaches who play important role with Brazilian Paralympic Committee (CPB) or national sports association for people with disability.

To improve students experience and involvement with Paralympic sports, one of assignments was to watch an official Paralympic Championship (i.e., Paralympic School Games). There was also a “test event” with fewer children (40) from a public school to make sure every scheduled activity would work. This day proved to be an opportunity to improve students’ learning by the practice and to discuss the development of the proposed activities to improve them.

Table 1. Adapted Sports Course Syllabus

Class	Content
1	Adapted and Paralympic Sport History
2	Judo
3	Wheelchair Rugby
4	Badminton and Taken Voley
5	Steps of Classification
6	Sports events organization
7	Para Athletics
8	Special Olympics and Wheelchair Basketball
9	Sitting Volleyball and Fusen Voley
10	Test event
11	Goaball
12	Boccia
13	Para Swimming and Canoe
14	Paralympic School Games
15	Paralympic sport event

**Learning in practice**

The event that students were supposed to organize was scheduled for the last class of the course. This event should: 1) be created, organized and developed by the students’ course; 2) focus on Paralympic sports; and 3) involve children and youths with disability. This proposal was presented to and discussed with all students on the first class.

Also, on this first class, the first draft of the event was created. In this way, students discussed and answered the following questions:

1. What is the main aim of the event?
2. Whom is the event for?
3. Which Paralympic sports will be presented at the event?
4. How to organize this event?
5. What is the name of the event?

By the end of this class, the general ideas about these details were defined. The event aims to present the Paralympic sport as a possibility to children and youths with disability. Paralympic sports chosen will be presented and experienced by all participants. After some classes, and understanding that Paralympic sports could be practiced by all, the students decided to present the Paralympic sports not only to children with disability, but also to children without disability.

Among all the sports experienced and studied by the students of the Adapted Sport discipline, eight Paralympic sports were selected to be experienced by the participants: judo, badminton, wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, boccia, para athletics, wheelchair fencing and canoe. Choosing the event name turned out to be not an easy task. It took the students three weeks and a lot of discussion to reach a consensus: ADAPTAFEF.

This name is a mix between the word “adapt” in Portuguese (i.e., ADPATA) and the acronym of our school (i.e., FEF). After this answer the first step was completed. ADAPTAFEF was already on its way.

### **We can do it**

To organize this event, students decided to split in two groups: 1) infrastructure and support; and 2) sport groups. Sport groups were subdivided into eight subgroups, each one was responsible for the development of one Paralympic sport. At the beginning of each class, students had an one-hour meeting into these groups. All meetings groups were followed and advised by the course professor and one teaching assistant. Each group had different goals to make ADAPTAFEF possible.

#### **Infrastructure and Support**

These groups aimed to meet all structural, material and personal support needed by the event. Students started to think about important questions as how many children and youths would get involved at the event. Where these children would come from. How much the event would cost. How they would pay for that. The quantity of children and youths involved was a decision of all students and not only of this specific group. In the second meeting, students decided to invite 50 children to participate. These children would be invited from rehabilitation institutions and sports associations in our city.

The professor, who already know persons in these places, sent the invitation to the institutions and association. In this initial phase, only institutions for people with disability were invited. However, other institutions and schools became familiar with the event and asked the professor to participate. Thus, after few weeks, the event was being prepared to attend 200 children and youths with and without disability.

ADAPTAFEF would work in stations, developed simultaneously. Each sport would have three or four playful activities or games related to their sport, with a duration of 30 minutes, and the children involved could choose the sport they would like to learn. This station format, with participants being free to choose the sports, was selected to make children more comfortable to get involved with the sport they were interested. Before the beginning of the sports activities, they would have an official opening ceremony.

With this event proposal and the number of children on the day in mind we needed more people to help and check all financial needs. Students, professor and teaching assistant decided to invite other undergraduate students from our own school and from other physical education schools to participate. Those students would be invited to work as volunteer at the ADAPTAFEF. The invitation was disclosed around our campus and sent to two public universities, which readily accepted to participate. On the day of event there were 27 volunteers. All the volunteers paid the expenses related to transportation from their city to the city where the event was held. The organization of the ADAPTAFEF event provided the volunteers with uniform to develop activities and food throughout the event. The volunteer program provided opportunity for all physical education students from our own school and other schools to work together on Paralympic sport events for all. Each volunteer and participant also received a certificate of participation in the event.

The financial support was a challenge. Where would the money come from? It was time to discover and use our network. The financial support to event was used to:

1. Buy snacks and water bottles to all people involved;
2. Buy stationery material to make identifications cards, locations plate, etc.
3. Print a map of the event showing the location of each Paralympic sport station in the campus.

Students decided to write and send sponsorship proposals to companies, to sell a raffle and to make a crowdfunding action. The three actions were successful. Seven companies supported the event. With the funds, it was possible to buy t-shirts for all undergraduate students involved, snacks pack (individual cake, cereal bar, juice and an apple) for each child, ice cream, sport equipment, water bottles and stationery material. With the funds from the raffle and crowdfunding we bought some missing stationery material and pizza to celebrate the end of the day with all the students involved. University funds paid for printing the map of the event and balloons for each child.

#### **Sport group**

Sport group was divided into eight smaller groups (3-4 students), one for each Paralympic sport. These groups aimed to elaborate and developed the sports activities for their Paralympic sports station. These activities were based on the Paralympic sport skills through games, allowing and encouraging the involvement of every child. This approach aimed to make Paralympic sport possible for them.

Our school had almost all sports equipment needed by the sport groups. The equipment not available was borrowed from the sports associations involved, such as the Brazilian Canoeing Federation. Students also made some adapted equipment, for instance, mini javelins were made using broomstick and crepe paper to be shaped as a spaceship. This equipment was easy to be made, with low cost and children were interested as the javelin was similar to a space ship.

#### **The Happy day**

On the ADAPTAFEF day, activities started early in the morning. Undergraduate students from the two other universities (USP and UNESP) were officially welcomed. This meeting was entirely organized and

realized by the students. They presented the event, organized the volunteers through the stations and made everything work properly on that day.

Approximately 150 children and youths with and without disability attended to the event from one private school, one public school, one sports association for youths with disability, and two rehabilitation institutions. Each kid received an identification tag. These tags were also used to control the delivery of snack kits and ice cream.

ADAPTAFEF began through the official opening ceremony with an artistic presentation from a gymnastic group, officials' pronouncements by University and School representatives and the national anthem. With the ADAPTAFEF officially opened, children and their parents were free to choose, using the map, which Paralympic sport they wanted know. This approach was chosen because we did not know how many children would come. In addition, children arrived at different times, thus, it was not possible a rigid rotation schedule, for example.

To make this event more special for the kids, one important Paralympic athlete was invited to participate. The athlete Fernando, a.k.a. "Cowboy", from canoeing accepted to participate. This athlete won silver medal in canoeing world championship. Cowboy stayed at the canoe station through all event, talking, presenting and sharing experience about the sport with the children. He also made little canoe runs in the pool with the children.

### **The feedback**

In this section we want to talk about the students' feedback about their participation and organization at this event. As previously mentioned, this event aimed to improve their practice experience of teaching Paralympic sports. The ADAPTAFEF provided an opportunity to the students to get contact with children and to learn about teaching strategies. They learned about specific needs of children with disabilities when practicing sports.

Each student wrote a report about their participation in the event. This report contained group name, function on the day of the event, obstacles and positive aspects, and, finally, the meaning of the experience for each one. Reports brought aspects about the opportunity to deepen learning of Paralympic sport chosen; learning in practice how teach Paralympic sports; and also how to work in group.

The first aspect, opportunity to deepen learning about the paralympic sport, could be observed along all course. Each class about Paralympic sports was the first step to students. They looked for other sources and experiences to learn more about each sports. For instance, students of the canoeing group asked for one extra experience to learn canoeing, which was scheduled at a lake near the university, where we spent one Saturday morning with students and their families. It was an amazing experience for everyone.

Learning about teaching Paralympic sports in practice was the major goal of the ADAPTAFEF. Students acknowledged and reported that the goal was achieved. It is difficult to cover in only one semester the specificities of teaching Paralympic sports to children. After students' reports, we realized that this experience offered a little of this practical knowledge:

"The event gave me an unparalleled experience with regard to the pedagogical treatment of sports modalities for people with disabilities. The contact with the target public was fundamental so I could learn about some of the difficulties that can only be experienced in practice, such as communication."

"For me, there were many positive aspects of this event: being able to convey the activities to the children, making them feel able to practice the sport, learning how to handle, plan, and teach individuals with disabilities. There are no theoretical experiments that could go beyond practice."

"I think the event was very important, both for my professional and personal training. I was able to understand the importance of adaptation. I felt more confident to carry out activities for this audience after this experience. It was very pleasant to see children happy and to realize that we, professionals, have the ability to do so. The will to strive and to make a difference increase every day."

"During the preparation of the event and its realization I encountered several obstacles that, even though I spent hours thinking, I could not foresee."

"I am proud to say that I participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> ADAPTAFEF, and I hope that this event will get bigger and bigger in the next few years!"

### **Conclusion**

With all four months of experience in making ADAPTAFEF a reality, we believe that the initial goal was achieved. This experience provided practical experience of teaching Paralympic sports to all. The institutional support was fundamental to enrich and to increase the importance of the event, demonstrating that the institution has open mind to new pedagogical strategies in the construction of future professionals. ADAPTAFEF has been a proven a way to gather theoretical knowledge and apply it into practice, making classes more meaningful to students. Even though there are obstacles to make inclusion possible in sport and physical education classes, we hope that this experience be used in other universities to improve the undergraduate formation. It is important to highlight that when seeking new or adapt teaching tools to attend

students with quality and meet their needs is the role of every teacher, so the word "ADAPT" from this moment will be present in the glossary of future professionals who participated in ADAPTAFEF.

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