Improvement Of Motor Skills In Physically Handicapped Children After Inclusion Essay, Research Paper

Motor abilities can be defined as innate and enduring. Motor skills, however, can be learned and developed through repetition. Combining a number of motor abilities develops these motor skills, and with practice these skills become perfected. In children, these skills are unfamiliar at first, but once used in everyday and recreational activities, they become ordinary and effortless. However, some children are born with less developed motor abilities, and some skills never become natural and effortless; these individuals are characterized as physically handicapped. The result of combining these lower-level abilities creates an inferior level of motor skills in physically handicapped children. Therefore these children will never be at quite the same level as those children with normal motor abilities.

For this reason, some handicapped children are not able to participate at the same level of physical activity as their peers. Kasser, Collier, and Solava (1997) address the consequences of this lack of involvement: ?The resultant inactivity negatively affects developing children in many ways, especially their physical health? (p. 50). Kasser, et al. (1997) suggests inclusion as a solution to this issue, and mentions the positive effect that including disabled children in physical education classes has on the children?s value in the eyes of their peers.

In these cases when handicapped students are involved in activity classes, specialists become involved in helping the student improve their motor development. In most of these cases, the physical educator and a physical therapist work together to improve gross motor performance and fitness (Kasser, et al., 1997).

The physical educator helps build upon the child?s social, emotional, and motor development and brings the know-how in the area of effective teaching. On the other hand, the physical therapist focuses on the child?s functional motor skills. The physical therapist also has an understanding of functional and age appropriate sport activities that will motivate the individual to take an active role in improving his or her own motor skills (Kasser, et al., 1997). This will also enhance the handicapped child?s self-esteem, as well as their gross motor skills, when they see that they are participating in the classes along with their peers.

In a study done by Block and Vogler (1995) on including handicapped children in physical education classes, the issue of self-concept and motivation was addressed. This study stated ?self-concept and motor performance were favorably enhanced in inclusive settings for both children with mild and moderate disabilities? (p. 41). Kasser, et al. (1997) also recognizes this, but adds that the rate of learning in handicapped individuals compared to typical students is much lower, and therefore must be considered when establishing the number of skills that are taught in that class or period of time.

As an older sibling of a handicapped child, I have seen the results of what both these articles discuss. Block and Vogler (1995) discuss the concept of having the handicapped child work on a more fundamental skill as the rest of the class participates in the actual sport itself: ??students with varying abilities can all be accommodated in the same physical education setting? (p. 42). My younger sister was often involved in physical education classes with the rest of her peers in high school, and as they played five-on-five basketball (closed movement) she worked on dribbling and catching the ball (open movements).

This is an example of establishing a sport specific motor skill. By combining fundamental movement skills, handicapped students (especially at the middle and high school level) learn sport skills and acquire the benefits associated with acquiring motor skills. There are three main benefits that are tied to these sport specific skills.

The first of these benefits is the idea of motivation. By learning a socially valued and usable skill, handicapped students feel there is more purpose to what they are learning (Kasser, et al., 1997; Block and Vogler, 1995). For example, the educator and therapist could have the student using a computer program that helps them develop reaction time. An alternative would be involving the handicapped individual by teaching them in the gym with the rest of the children, allowing them to improve their reaction time via a specific sport skill. Although both of these examples don?t take the idea of repetition and rehearsal into consideration when calculating and evaluating response time, there is still the component of motivation. The handicapped student is much more likely to want to perform a skill with his or her peers, than using a computer program.

A second benefit to learning sport-specific skills would be that it is an all-purpose play activity that can be used in shared situations (Kasser, et al., 1997). By understanding the basic concepts of a sport, such as dribbling, catching, or throwing, the handicapped student has the ability to become involved in what his or her peers are doing on the playground or out of school. My sister, for example, did not grasp or attain many sport skills in elementary or middle school because she was not included in certain regular physical education classes. Therefore, when there was an opportunity out of school or on the playground to be involved with her peers, she was not included because she was not able to do any of those skills attributed to the activity.

Lastly, a benefit to grasping a sport-specific skill is that it enables the individual to be active throughout their lifetime (Kasser, et al., 1997). Some handicapped individuals may not have the same opportunities for physical activity as they had during their school days. And since these students can only be in the public school environment until the age of 21, there is a large portion of that individual?s lifetime left for the living. If these sport specific skills can be acquired through inclusion in regular physical education classes, then the likelihood of an active and healthy lifestyle later in life is greater than if the handicapped person had very little previous experience and acquisition of specific sport skills.

In many situations, handicapped children are left out of regular physical education classes because of the stigma attached to the population. However, ideas such as lasting fitness, an increased self-concept, and practicing or performing a motor skill in an environment that is moving (and not exceedingly stable and repetitive) can be attained by including the physically handicapped child in a regular physical education class.

Having a sister that has had a lack of opportunity to be introduced to these concepts makes me all the more aware of the differences that lie between the two of us. I see a need for her to develop certain skills and coordinated movements; she a 20 year old woman with the coordination of a 6 year old, and that fact makes me feel even more strongly about the concept of inclusion. Motor skills can be learned through practice and repetition. It is important to provide physically handicapped children the opportunity to practice these movements and acquire them in an environment that is the least restrictive and most natural for them.

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