

Introduction

Our group used the Action Competency Learning Process to design 12 physical activity sessions for students with disabilities. We decided to teach 'Jump Jam' and we also used the school pool to teach water safety and swimming for 2 sessions. We had 4 students to teach and they were all very different so we had to make sure we got to know their abilities really well before doing too much planning.

Evaluating the steps taken

Step One (Identifying the issue) For this step we basically just listened to our teacher talk about what the issue was and read our assignment overview explaining what we needed to do. The main points I took from this step were that students with special needs might not have as many opportunities to be physically active and that it was a good thing for our class to meet them and see if we could help them. I guess this means we didn't strictly identify the issue ourselves but I don't think this mattered too much because our teacher had done some of the background organising anyway. For example we were allocated 4 students per group and our students all had downs syndrome. The issue as we understood it was to provide them with an enjoyable physical activity programme....

Step Two (Developing knowledge and insight) For this step we had to think a bit deeper about the special needs students we were going to be working with and consider our attitudes towards them. I think this step was really useful because when we had our group discussion it was obvious that one of our group members didn't really want to teach special needs students because he thought they would all be too full on and undisciplined. It was lucky we found this out really early because then we could ask the teacher for management strategies and practice them before we started teaching....

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As part of this step we also had to consider what voice the special needs students had and whether or not they even wanted to be active. Our group had a really good debate about this and my view was that it was pretty normal for school age students not to have a voice in lots of things that happen at school so it probably shouldn't matter too much for our special needs students if they didn't strictly volunteer themselves for the programme especially if it was going to be good for them. One of the girls in my group disagreed and she thought that it was human rights for people to have a say in everything they do and so the special needs students should have been asked if they even wanted to be taught by us.

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We didn't necessarily agree in the end but following this step meant we had an interesting and useful conversation which helped us understand each other better. When it came to the planning phase I started to appreciate her argument a little bit more and the process also forced us to consider the special needs students opinions in designing our activities.....

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Step Five (Planning) At first I thought this was the most important step of the process but now I realise if we hadn't done all the other steps we wouldn't have been able to plan so well. For example when we were working through step four we found out that all four of our students lacked confidence with swimming. They wanted to be able to swim but just hadn't had any formal lessons or training. We decided that this would be a great opportunity to try and build their confidence and water especially as our school is lucky enough to have its own pool. We were really nervous taking on such a big challenge but all the background work we had done in getting to know our students and finding out their abilities made it way more meaningful. For example when....

Step Seven (Reflecting and Evaluating) – In the last step of the Action Competency Learning Process we reflected on how well our plan worked. In order to do this we met with our students one on one after each session and talked to them about how they felt about the session.

If I wasn't following this process I probably would never have thought about doing this and at first didn't really see any real value in it. However the conversations I had with the special needs students were amazing and it made me feel really proud about what we had achieved. For example by the last session, one of the students we were teaching had a complete change around. At first he was really negative about the jump jam and a couple of times tried to get out of it. I found out by talking with him after the third session that he felt embarrassed about dancing in front of his friends and didn't think he was keeping up. Because of this we arranged for him to come early to the next couple of lessons and we worked one on one with him through the basic moves before the others came. If we didn't bother holding these reflection talks we would never have found out why he wasn't enjoying himself and probably would have just carried on as normal.

Evaluating the process overall

Evaluating our teaching was a really useful thing to do not just for us but for our special needs students because it meant we improved our teaching for them and learnt heaps from our mistakes. I would definitely use this model for any other teaching I do in the future because it makes you think about all the background details rather than just race ahead with planning lots of games. Next time I would probably spend even more time researching the barriers and enabler.