Classroom Adjustments: Sport

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| 00:00:00:00 | NICOLE RINEHART | So, the first thing I'd love to say to all teachers and all adults is this isn't rocket science and everybody can do it. I think sometimes when we use words like disability or autism, that they're big words and they're big labels, and teachers will often think, "Oh, I don't want to get it wrong," or "I'm not sure how to handle it. I haven't read the 400-page book on that, so I don't know." So, I just want to strip that right back and say that it's not rocket science. There's a lot of common sense here. |
| 00:00:31:24 | SERPIL | That's Dr Nicole Rinehart. She's Professor of Clinical Psychology at Deakin University's Child Studies Centre and she's passionate about including all children in sport and physical education. |
| 00:00:45:15 | NICOLE RINEHART | So, it's about never giving up, holding the bar high and holding the possibility. It's not always about getting it right. It's about agreeing to partner together to go on a journey so that child can have the best life they can. |
| 00:01:01:04 | SERPIL | I'm Serpil Senelmis and this podcast is part of an NCCD portal series. In this episode, we'll discuss some adjustments that could be made to enable students with disability to participate in sport and physical education on the same basis as their peers. Unlike other episodes in this series, we won't be focusing on one disability. Instead, we'll discuss a variety of adjustments that could be used in different environments. You'll hear more from Dr Rinehart and you'll meet Robyn Goulding who is a PE teacher with some excellent ideas. We've also got some personal stories from students with disability and a very motivational Paralympian. |
| 00:01:49:09 | SERPIL | Before we get into the adjustments, let's explore the value of sports and physical education for students. Dr Nicole Rinehart says the benefits are the same for all children. |
| 00:02:01:09 | NICOLE RINEHART | There's no different. The benefits are social. A lot of kids are learning about how to make friendships, how to understand their limits and boundaries, communication skills. How do you initiate social interactions? Mental health and wellbeing. If you're the child who's included and playing a game every lunchtime, you're going to feel pretty terrific. And then you're going to go back into the class all ready to learn. If you're the child who's sitting on the side and there's no-one to talk to and there's nothing to do, that's a very anxiety-provoking situation for young people.  And we know that, and yet everywhere this week, there'll be hundreds of kids around Australia who are in that very predicament. It sounds like an easy thing to make sure every child is participating and being included, but let's take it from the perspective of a child with autism, for example. They're sitting in the classroom. It's already hard work if you've got autism because learning takes longer and can be more challenging. So, these kids then step out of the classroom into the playground. The classroom is nice and structured. There are rules. There's a teacher there to watch and help, and provide all the modifications that that child needs. The moment a child steps out into the playground, it's a very unstructured environment.  And for that child with autism to get from the classroom to participating in a game of football or four square, they have to punch through many barriers. They have to move through communication barriers. How do they communicate with other kids what they want to play? They have to move through social barriers. So, how do they have the courage to initiate those conversations and know which groups to play with and how they're going to be accepted?  And then, if they've managed to move through all of those barriers, many of these children then have motor skill barriers. They have problems catching. They have problems throwing. And so, from the perspective of a child with autism, imagine that and how much hard work that is. Now, let's contrast that with a child who's typically developing. They literally spring out of the classroom, which they probably found easy because they don't have any learning challenges. They quickly communicate with a few friends, scope out the place socially about where they want to play and what they want to do and they jump straight into the middle of a game with their wonderful motor skills. And it's seamless and it's automatic. |
| 00:04:45:15 | JESS GALLAGHER | Hi. My name is Jess Gallagher. I'm a Paralympian, a motivational speaker, osteopath, board director at Vision 2020 Australia and ambassador for Vision Australia and Seeing Eye Dogs Australia. In terms of inclusivity in sport, it's about recognising and actually asking the student. Asking the child with a disability, "Hey, what sports do you like? We'd love to get you involved. Are you aware of adaptive equipment that we can use?" There's so much information out there in this tech age. A simple Google search of how to make your sport adaptive for an athlete with a disability can provide you that information. A simple phone call. There are so many not-for-profit organisations out there helping provide that education. |
| 00:05:29:13 | SERPIL | Jess Gallagher has low vision and has competed at the Paralympics in skiing and cycling. |
| 00:05:36:04 | JESS GALLAGHER | For me, I've never seen my low vision as that stereotype of a disability. It's just a part of who I am. It's just a characteristic. I'm also tall. I have blonde hair and blue eyes. And I have low vision. That's just who I am. Certainly I know that as an individual with an invisible disability, the way that I'm really truly able to gain connection with another individual and help them understand what I see in my world is by talking to them and explaining what I can and can't see and what particular circumstances. If I'm out on a sporting field, if I'm more than five metres away from you and you throw the ball at me, I'm not going to be able to see it. And so, perhaps, we need to have a little bell in the ball, or, perhaps, I need to stand closer and in a particular position on a netball court or a basketball court. |
| 00:06:21:18 | SERPIL | Of course, not all students are able to advocate for themselves as clearly as Jess can. Robyn Goulding is a health and physical education teacher who works closely with a number of children with disability. Her secret to success is to be consistent and not to rush. |
| 00:06:39:06 | ROBYN GOULDING | Anyone working with children and sports knows that patience is your number one skill. For example, in lessons, I do a lot of obstacle courses and climbing. And an example will be just being able to climb off the A frames. So, they'll go one step one week. The next week, it was two steps. And then two steps took a while. And then three steps. And then, eventually, they got up and over the A frame and actually were able to walk on a wooden bench across, which is about half a metre off the floor, which was a huge thing. And I think it took near on six months to get the person to be able to climb up and over. And after that, they did it every single lesson. It was their favourite thing to do. And it was a great way of also kind of, first, you have to do something else and then you can go and climb the A frame. And then it became a tool to use within the lesson to actually help them motivate for all their activities. |
| 00:07:31:09 | SERPIL | So, when you're thinking about a child living with disability and you're in a mainstream school, what should the teacher be thinking about in terms of adjustments? |
| 00:07:43:05 | ROBYN GOULDING | In order to include everyone, you probably want to be looking at the fundamental movement skills of the sports. So, you're looking at skill-based activities, and everyone can be involved in skill-based activities. It's non-competitive. You've not got people challenging you for the ball or to kind of win a point. It's very much an individualised approach. So, if you are starting off with that, then they're included from the very first lesson because it's a skill-based approach.  As you move up, you might be able to split the group into two or three groups. One class might be higher ability and they can go play the games. Some you might still work on the skill-based stuff. Your learning intentions, your goals, might just be differentiated between the different groups. But, also, sport is amazing because it's got so many different roles that children can play. |
| 00:08:32:09 | SERPIL | For a more structured approach to making adjustments, Professor of Child Psychology Nicole Rinehart recommends applying the TREE framework. |
| 00:08:40:21 | NICOLE RINEHART | The TREE model stands for teaching style. Is there something I need to do to adjust my teaching style or how I'm communicating to the young person to help them? The R is rules and regulations. Do we need to change the rules and regulations to fit this young person? Equipment. Do we need different kinds of equipment? Then the final one is environment. And teachers can use this in the classroom and outside of the classroom. |
| 00:09:08:16 | JESS GALLAGHER | And so, for example, if the athletics carnival is coming up, perhaps you have the child doing shot-put instead of running 400 metres or you have them doing a seated shot-put which is what athletes with cerebral palsy or wheelchair-bound athletes would compete in at the Paralympics. So, I think, use your creativity. Teachers are wonderful for having their creative spirit. And I think that's a great opportunity for them to go, "Alright, I'm going to think outside the box here and I'm going to come up with something and that way I can have them involved." |
| 00:09:41:13 | NICOLE RINEHART | I'll give you one of my favourite examples of all time. I was talking to a teacher at a conference and she told me this great story about this boy who had a developmental disability. And she knew that he was a really good swimmer and was swimming outside of school. But in the school environment when it came to PE, he was not participating. Rather than just forcing or overly encouraging without understanding the problem, she tried to really understand what the issue was. So, she spoke to the parents. Parents always know their children better than anybody else. And then she spoke to the child and she realised that when he was swimming outside of school, rather than going from the bottom of the pool to the top, he was going the other way from the top of the swimming pool down. And that was his routine. |
| 00:10:28:22 | SERPIL | So it was a tiny tweak that was needed at the end of the day? |
| 00:10:31:14 | NICOLE RINEHART | It was a tiny tweak. Here's the bit that I love the most about this story. Rather than getting the child to change what made it work for him, they got the whole class to do it the way he liked it because it was no big deal for the other kids. They had no problems with flexibility or change. And I think that really uplifted the classmates as well to show how they can be flexible and understanding.  So, if a child with a disability isn't playing or it's not going well for them, rather than putting the problem with the child, it's about saying, "Well, how do we change the environment, and changing the volleyball net, getting a larger ball, changing the size of the target?" Just getting right in there and making all of those changes to set every child up for success. And by supporting one child's needs through that, you're probably supporting four others that you don't even realise. It has an amazing effect. |
| 00:11:30:22 | SERPIL | So the whole class can benefit from the success of one student. To make that possible, teacher Robyn Goulding emphasises the importance of customising your adjustments for the individual. |
| 00:11:43:18 | ROBYN GOULDING | There's not really a one-size-fits-all. You might all be learning the same skills. So, for example, throwing and catching. But you might use six different balls because certain kids might have different sensory needs and they may like a spiky ball, some may like a softball. So, you can have one learning intention for the entire lesson, but it would be differentiated for every single child in the class. Everything for me goes around to that learning intention because that tells me what the child can achieve or what they're aiming for. It's almost backwards by design. That's my end goal. So, then, if I work backwards, what activities are going to help them achieve that goal? What steps differentiation do I need to then make to those activities in order for them to achieve that goal? It's the assessment, then the learning intention. |
| 00:12:28:16 | SERPIL | So, Robyn, what are some of the broad flexible adjustments that can be made in the classroom that can be pretty simply implemented, like wearing your PE clothes all day? |
| 00:12:39:11 | ROBYN GOULDING | Yeah, that's a great example. A lot of people with certain physical disabilities might struggle to change. So, if they're very conscious of the fact that they can't get changed properly, allowing them to come to school, and even their classmates, to come to school as well in PE kit, that's going to limit that moment where they're automatically segregated because it's just something that they cannot do and that's something that they can't help either. Allowing kids to come into school with PE kit and their friends as well, that's automatically inclusive. So, there's also adjustments to actually where you do PE. You can work with that child to make sure that they're in a space that they feel safe. You don't just have to do it in the PE classroom, in the gymnasium, in the hall. PE can be done anywhere and that's the beauty of sport as well. It can be anywhere on campus. |
| 00:13:28:07 | SERPIL | So let's hear from some students to find out what sort of adjustments work for them. Will has cerebral palsy which causes tightness in his leg muscles, making it difficult to walk. |
| 00:13:39:18 | WILL | Physical education is hard. I try my best at it, but it is very hard. Usually, it involves quite a lot of running, and I can't really run. So, I do an awkward jog. With cricket, I'd either do fielding or I'd bowl with my right hand, which is the hand that is the least affected. |
| 00:14:04:06 | SERPIL | Now, Miles has an acquired brain injury which makes it difficult to use his left arm and affects his walk. |
| 00:14:11:21 | MILES | My leg doesn't affect me when I'm, like, running or something, and I'm really good at sports like cricket or tennis. I use my right arm for the racket or... |
| 00:14:26:16 | SERPIL | You were telling me you've got a strong right arm. |
| 00:14:28:18 | MILES | Yes. |
| 00:14:38:04 | SERPIL | Sam is completely blind. He uses a cane to make his way around the school and occasionally on the playground as well. |
| 00:14:46:14 | SAM VALAVANIS | Well, for sports, I mainly have balls with bells in them or a ball with a beeping sensor in it that beeps so I can know where to hit it or balls with rattles in them. |
| 00:15:00:01 | SERPIL | That's pretty clever. I wouldn't have ever thought of that. How does it work? So, you hear the ball bouncing towards you, and then you can react? |
| 00:15:07:13 | SAM VALAVANIS | I can react, or with basketball, someone hits my cane onto the backboard inside the ring of the basket and I know where to throw the ball. |
| 00:15:23:05 | SERPIL | It sounds like those boys enjoy their sport and they're not going to miss out if they can help it. Sam's sound-enhanced balls are a favourite of Paralympian Jess Gallagher who encourages the use of adaptive technology and equipment when it's available. |
| 00:15:39:06 | JESS GALLAGHER | There's things like fluorescent vests. There's sporting balls that have bells in it so you can play blind cricket. In terms of physical disabilities, you've got wheelchair basketball frames, wheelchair tennis frames. All sorts of simple things that you can use the same as an able-bodied athlete would, but just with a simple tweak makes it accessible for somebody. So, I would recommend anyone to just jump on the internet and have a search. There's lots of organisations out there who will let you borrow equipment. If you want to learn how to play goal ball, which is a sport for people who are blind or have low vision, or you want to play wheelchair basketball, they'll come out and they'll teach you and they'll show you how to do it. |
| 00:16:19:06 | ROBYN GOULDING | We've got a lot of different wheelchairs that can support students for mobility. Stand-in chairs, walking frames to allow kids to try and move and walk around. But I just try and have as many different sensory pieces of equipment as possible - bigger sizes, smaller sizes - that also makes things easier or more difficult for children. Just a huge range but differentiated mainly in size and texture. |
| 00:16:43:21 | SERPIL | Teacher Robyn Goulding also adjusts sports activities to suit the age of the students. She's found it's possible to play different sporting games in high school, but she takes a more simplified approach for younger students. |
| 00:16:57:09 | ROBYN GOULDING | I guess that comes down to how I structure things like football or how I structure things like netball and go from skill-based to a game-sensed approach. Whereas, primary, it's a lot more explorative and free movement. The kids will choose a piece of equipment and then I will approach them and we'll work on a skill together. But almost in primary, the children pick the equipment that they want to play with and then I work with it. Whereas, secondary, it becomes more structured from the beginning. |
| 00:17:29:22 | SERPIL | Having a clear structure for the class, the day and the week can also be helpful in supporting all students to be able to participate in PE. |
| 00:17:38:21 | ROBYN GOULDING | Every classroom will have schedules for the whole day. And then within PE as well, I may have a schedule. For example, warm-up, stretch, game one, game two. And having a timetable for the lesson really will help the child know what's happening. If they know what's happening and they can understand what's happening, they'll be in a better space to be able to then participate in the lesson as well. |
| 00:18:01:08 | SERPIL | And like all adjustments for students with disability, Robyn emphasises the importance of clear communication with the student and their parents or carers. |
| 00:18:11:19 | ROBYN GOULDING | So, it's a two-way thing. Sometimes, parents know something that we don't. And other times, we know something that parents don't. And thirdly, there's some times that kids know stuff that we don't. So, it's communication between all three. |
| 00:18:23:17 | SERPIL | So, for success on the sports field and in physical education classes, listen to the student, be creative and create individualised adjustments. And for a gold medal performance, Paralympian Jess Gallagher recommends talking like a champion. |
| 00:18:40:21 | JESS GALLAGHER | Sometimes, it's about thinking about your own communication style and perhaps you need to add more description to things. Using those describing words provides that context. |
| 00:18:51:04 | SERPIL | Dr Nicole Rinehart cautions against just making things easy when your intention is to make things inclusive. |
| 00:18:58:12 | NICOLE RINEHART | One of the biggest challenges that children with disability and their families have is the bar being put low. So, I really want to make that distinction between making the world fit for all kids so that they can be their best. But I'm not saying make the bar low. If you just sort of run in and put a solution to modify, which is just, "Oh, let's just take the net down. Take out the expectation that the child has to participate. Let's just make it so easy for them," then that's doing them an enormous disservice. |
| 00:19:33:09 | SERPIL | And teacher Robyn Goulding reminds us that it may take time, and that's OK. |
| 00:19:39:06 | ROBYN GOULDING | Find out absolutely everything they can about the child and then it's a lot of patience, flexibility, open-mindedness. What works one week doesn't necessarily work another. So, try things two or three times. If you can communicate with a child, absolutely get them to tell you whether they like it or not. If you don't have that communication yet, then try things two or three times. It might take till the third attempt for them to do it. You can be working with one child on one goal all year and it might take them a year to achieve that goal. But then when they get it, it just makes everything worthwhile. And whether that is they've just stood up for the first time, whether that's they've walked, whether that's that they've jumped, or they've thrown and catched, or they've worked with a peer, they've said their first words, whatever it is, it's so rewarding when that light bulb kind of clicks on and everything slots into place and it just makes that time that you've spent trying to achieve that goal completely worthwhile. |
| 00:20:52:01 | SERPIL | This podcast is part of a series that highlights adjustments that could be made in the classroom to enable students with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. You can find all episodes on the NCCD portal. I'm Serpil Senelmis. Thanks for listening. |
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