

UDL in Secondary Physical Education: “Making Connections with the Community and Advocating for Transition.”

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of providing adequate transition services in secondary physical education (PE) to students with disabilities and how this process can be facilitated through the use of Universal Design for Learning principles (UDL). It also aims to provide secondary physical educators with ideas on how to help their students with disabilities reach their PE transition goals by the implementation of a Universal Design for Transition framework (UDT).

Conclusion: Per federal law, IDEA, every student with a disability has the right to an appropriate transition process once they reach age 16. Collaboration and good communication between professionals involved in transition planning will determine its success. Using UDL principles through the implementation of the UDT framework in PE could help physical educators help their students reach their transition goals.

Keywords: Physical Education, Adapted Physical Education, Universal Design, Community Integration, Transition Planning

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on Public Law 108-446, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA), students with disabilities, ages 3 to 21, have the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (IDEIA, 2004). In addition, these students have the right to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), a document used as an educational guide to help them achieve their short—and long-term goals. Further, when students with disabilities turn age 16, they are entitled to have transition goals as part of their IEP. Community integration goals related to recreation and leisure must be included as part of this process. The transition process is when young people with disabilities complete secondary school and prepare to transition to adult life in post-school environments (Flexer et al., 2013; Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018). Transition services are defined in IDEIA as follows:

The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that: (A) is designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preferences and interests; and (C) includes instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Flexer et al., 2013, p.41).

According to IDEA, there are four essential elements of the transition process. First, these services must be based on the needs of the student. Second, these services must be designed with a results-oriented process. Third, these services must be a coordinated set of activities. Finally, these services should promote the transition from school to post-school activities, including recreation and leisure. These four elements represent the framework for an effective transition services program, so these services must be goal-oriented and focused on the student’s interests and needs (self-determination). In addition, specialists should design these services to promote community integration. Physical educators can significantly impact this community integration process, especially in recreation and leisure. For these reasons, general physical education (GPE) and adapted physical education (APE) teachers at the secondary level must find ways to promote an effective transition process (Krebs & Block, 1992; Modell & Megginson,

2001; Roth & Columna, 2011; Samalot-Rivera, 2023; SHAPE America, 2016).

Transition services have been discussed in APE literature since the 1990s. One of the most critical aspects mentioned is the role of the APE teacher in the transition process (Krebs & Block, 1992), in which they mentioned that APE teachers should prepare all students for adult life in their communities. Krebs and Block (1992) also mentioned that APE teachers should promote students' independent community living through lifelong physical activity. Further, the Society of Health and Physical Educators of America (SHAPE America, 2016) and the National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities (NCPEID, 2020) also support the importance of transition services. SHAPE America does this through its position statement about providing transition services to students with disabilities in PE, and NCPEID does this through its Adapted Physical Education National Standards (APENS).

Another topic of interest discussed in the APE transition literature has been the barriers or issues of transition implementation. For example, APE teachers not being invited to IEP meetings to write transition goals, lack of preparation and professional development opportunities on the transition topic, and lack of support in the overall transition process from school districts (Krueger et al., 2000; Samalot- Rivera & Lieberman, 2017; Samalot-Rivera et al., 2023).

Further, models and strategies on how APE teachers can help students with disabilities achieve their transition goals have been proposed. Some of these ideas include "*Life After School: A Transition Model for Adapted Physical Educators*" by Modell & Megginson (2001). In this model they presented the competencies of community integration, functional programming, technology, and advocacy, to reduce architectural, attitudinal, and programmatic barriers to participation in sports, recreation, leisure, and social skills. "*Taxonomy of Transition Programming in Physical Education*", by Roth & Columna (2011). They proposed infusing APE into SE established transition practices (Program Structure, Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, and Family Involvement) in order to promote a solid collaboration between school professionals, parents, and community agencies. "*Going Places*", by Lieberman et al. (2006), provided transition guidelines for community – based physical activities for students who have visual impairments, blindness, or deaf blindness. This project emphasizes and provides guidelines on the importance of physical activity, health, and social inclusion. Lastly, "*Functional Approach to Transition Planning in APE*" by Samalot-Rivera, (2023, 2024), were steps to follow emphasizing the important of assessment (e.g. ecological inventories), self-

determination, establishment of long and short-term goals, and the implementation of appropriate social inclusion strategies promote an effective transition from school to the community for youth with disabilities through the APE class are provided.

When discussing transition services for youth with disabilities, the focus should be on developing the skills necessary for them to become active and independent members of their communities (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018). More specifically, regarding APE, providing youth with disabilities with the knowledge and skills to use their leisure time effectively and be physically active in activities of their choice in the community (NCPEID, 2020; SHAPE America, 2016). Given that transition in APE focuses on community integration (inclusion), self-determination (choice making), and proper use of leisure time, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles are proposed to eliminate inclusion barriers and increase access to transition services and success for all students (Kennedy & Yun, 2019; Lieberman et al., 2021; Lieberman et al., 2024; Scott & Bruno, 2018). For these reasons, this article aims to discuss the importance of providing adequate transition services in secondary PE to students with disabilities and how this process can be facilitated using UDL principles. Further, to provide secondary physical educators with ideas on how to help their students with disabilities reach their physical education transition goals by implementing a Universal Design Transition framework (UDT) (Scott & Thoma, 2024; Thoma et al., 2009).

2. UDL, UDT and Transition in Physical Education

For quite some time now, special education (SE) and APE teachers have advocated using UDL principles during planning and instruction to promote effective inclusion practices. In addition, they have mentioned that by implementing the UDL principles of engagement, representation, and expression, inclusion barriers related to accessibility, attitudes, and communication can be eliminated (Kennedy & Yun, 2019; Lieberman et al., 2021; Lieberman et al., 2024; Rose & Meyer, 2006; Scott & Bruno, 2018). One of the main goals of UDL is to make learning accessible for all students, including those with disabilities, so that they can meet their academic needs in general education settings, which is one of the main objectives of the transition process (Center of Applied Special Technologies [CAST], 2018). The three main principles of UDL are multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression (CAST, 2018). Multiple means of engagement is the reason for learning. This refers to how students participate and are motivated to learn. In this fundamental component of UDL, teachers can get each student's attention, engage them with the task, and maintain their interest. For

example, playing sitting volleyball as part of a volleyball unit or playing beep baseball as part of a softball unit. This decision can be made based on students' needs and interests, but all students can participate (Lieberman & Grenier, 2019). Multiple means of representation refer to how information is presented to students (it is the what of learning). Understanding that each student perceives and incorporates information differently (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile stimulus, or a combination) is important. For example, videos with subtitles, figures, symbols, sign language, music, audio cues, Braille documents, demonstrations, or a combination can be used. In other words, it means finding a way to communicate and deliver the information effectively to the whole class and for them to understand the intended goal of the lesson. An example in the PE class could be using a tactical board to determine a specific activity (boundaries, positions, players, etc.). Multiple means of action and expression refer to how students express what they learn (it is the how of learning). Using UDL, each student can express what they learn differently and is provided with options. In PE class, this could be accomplished by allowing students to complete the assigned task in the way that they believe is more effective or the way they prefer (e.g., kicking instead of throwing or throwing underhand instead of overhand).

In the SE field, Scott and Bruno (2018) used a conceptual framework created by Thoma et al. (2009) called Universal Design for Transition (UDT). The UDT framework was created to guide and promote a barrier-free transition process using UDL principles. In addition, this framework is used to blend academic and transition concepts to help special education professionals meet the educational and transitional needs of students with disabilities. The UDT framework prepares individuals with disabilities for life after school through self-determined planning, instruction, collaboration, and support (Best et al., 2015; Scott & Thoma, 2024). Further, Scott and Thoma (2024) indicated that the UDT framework should be used concurrently with culturally responsive teaching principles, considering students' home and community cultures when planning and instructing for transition. Therefore, teachers can provide students with disabilities with meaningful and relevant experiences considering their culture and identity.

There are four principles highlighted in the UDT framework which are self-determination, multiple means of assessment, multiple life domains, & multiple resources and perspectives:

1. Self-determination: the focus is on students' interests and needs when setting goals for their adult life. Within the UDT framework, self-determination allows students to make choices regarding their transition outcomes, which can be based on their strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and community cultural experiences (Best et

al., 2015). Therefore, teachers must teach students self-determination and self-advocacy skills and present them with opportunities to learn and experience the real world. Taking students preferences into consideration increases the chances of success when learning new task and specially those related to community integration (Cunningham & Linder, 2015).

2. Multiple means of assessments: this refers to the use of different types of assessments to evaluate students' needs, skills, and desires for adult life (Scott & Bruno, 2018). Matching the general education curriculum to student transition-related goals, real-world tasks, and allowing them to value and demonstrate their personal and community knowledge are essential components of the assessment process (Scott & Thoma, 2024; Thoma et al., 2016). The collection of evidence across a variety of skills and transition areas can be used to make important decisions about students' transition goals and measure their progress. Ecological inventories with discrepancy analysis is one of the most used assessment instruments in the transition process (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018 (Fig. 1).

3. Multiple life domains: teachers prepare students for all transition areas, such as education, careers, independent living, leisure activities, and any other area needed to prepare them for life after school (Scott & Bruno, 2018). Providing students with the opportunity to experience and learn about all these areas is the key to success for being prepared for real life after the school years.

4. Multiple resources/perspectives: It involves the collaboration of professionals and personnel from different sectors, like school, community, and home, to have others' points of view, ensuring that all perspectives are considered to support the student in the transition process (Scott & Bruno, 2018). Considering what they and their families value, this principle is essential to consider students' life outside school (Scott & Thoma, 2024). As professionals, it is our responsibility to consider aspects related to students' home and community culture. This understanding empowers students intellectually and emotionally, helping them realize that their cultural heritage is also valued (Kieran & Anderson, 2019).

One of the most critical areas in the transition process is community integration. The opportunity to go through different experiences in the community while students still in school is essential in the transition process. These should be real experiences in which each student begins interacting and learning to navigate different environments as independently as possible

while still in high school. Recreation and the appropriate use of free time are fundamental to this development area. In addition to learning how to go to the supermarket and use an ATM or a public transportation system, young people with a disability must learn to use sports facilities for recreation and physical activity through the PE/APE class. This way, they can maintain active and healthy lifestyles while integrating and socializing with others in their community. Taking UDT framework principles into consideration when planning for transition in PE can facilitate the community integration process and achievement of transition goals for students with disabilities. Table 1 illustrates how UDT principles align with key elements of transition services and outlines the responsibilities of physical educators. This framework will help clarify the proposed steps in the following section using UDT to facilities a barrier-free transition process.

Table 1

UDT and Physical Education

UDT Principles	Essential Elements of Transition Services	Physical Education Teachers Responsibilities Related to Transition
Multiple Life Domains	Coordinated set of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify or create after school activity programs that students can participate in. • Collaborate with IEP team members to talk and discuss the student transition goals for recreation and leisure. • Bring community programs to school to showcase what is available in the surrounding areas such as Taichi, Dancing, Yoga, etc.
Multiple means of assessment	Result Oriented Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments should be meaningful and related to areas of interest and transition goals.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of assessments should be used in all domains to measure student level of performance and progress towards transition goals. • Assess students within their ability level matching the general education curriculum to student transition-related goals and real-world tasks (Scott & Bruno, 2018).
Self-Determination	Based on Student Needs and interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore what is available in the surrounding community that is available to your students. • Develop Ecological Inventories and share with students (e.g. bowling alley, ice rink, judo dojo, etc.) • Use self-determination questionnaires to identify student's interest. • Conduct students and parents' interviews. • When appropriate, do curriculum narrowing to focus on students' areas of interest and transition goals.
Multiple resources / perspectives	Promote the transition from school to post-school activities (recreation and leisure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and teach self-advocacy (Childs & Lieberman, 2021).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development for staff related to the needs of students. • Provide more opportunities for social inclusion within the school and community. • Make connections with community groups or agencies. • Learn to utilize facilities in the community for recreation and leisure.
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3. UDT, Transition Planning and Physical Education

According to Winnick and Porretta (2022), the main purpose of APE is to promote the self-realization of students with disabilities as well as to provide optimal personal development. In this way, it contributes both to the development of personal interest and to the development of the necessary skills to effectively integrate into society. By working with the fundamental skills of movement, management and body image, physical fitness, and skills in different types of group and individual activities (e.g., sports, rhythm and dance, swimming, etc.), the main purpose of this class is achieved. As in other subjects, APE teachers must project long-term and short-term goals as part of each students' IEP. Once each student reaches 16 years of age, transition goals must be included as part of each students' IEP. Through the transition process, we can help young people with disabilities live a dignified life as independently as possible, as well as help them in their process of community integration.

Further, in 2016, SHAPE America released a position on transition services in PE for students with disabilities. The statement emphasized that PE programs should aim to develop students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for maintaining active and healthy lifestyles. It also highlights the importance of PE in fostering sportsmanship, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence among these students. The organization acknowledges the important role of PE in the transition process but notes that students with disabilities often receive insufficient PE services when it comes to transition.

SHAPE America states that high school students with disabilities should receive PE services in community settings planned and implemented by APE teachers. In addition, this organization outlines best practices for implementing transition program including offering community-based PE services, involving parents or guardians in the transition planning process, documenting specific transition goals in the PE classroom, focusing on doing activities independently, choosing realistic and accessible experiences that encourage lifelong physical activity, and selecting the level of assistance needed to achieve the student's goals.

Considering the crucial role that PE plays in the emotional well-being of students with disabilities during their transition, and the benefits of applying UDT principles into transition planning and instruction, a series of suggestions or steps will be outlined to promote a smooth transition from school to the community through the PE class.

Step #1: Identify Students Interest and Needs:

- Ask each student about their sports, recreation, and physical activity interests and preferences. In this step, you can offer several options to facilitate the process, such as a student interest questionnaire. It's important that students express what they would like to do in the future.
- Ask parents, and/or guardians about the interests and goals they have for their child regarding PE, recreation, and sports.
- Ask about the availability of programs, services, and facilities for physical activity in your community. Make contacts with recreation specialists and other movement professionals with whom you can create alliances and collaborations.
- Investigate activities available in their community and in which your peers with and without disabilities participate.

Step #2: Develop Long and Short-Term Transition Goals and Identify Student Present Level of Performance

- Use a variety of assessments like for example Ecological Inventories (Figure 1) to determine the student's present level of performance (strengths and areas to improve) related to the activities of interest. This should cover multiple life domains including recreation and leisure activities to be done in the community as independently as possible.
- Identify student's transition long term goals based on the information obtained from the assessments. What are the skills

that students need to develop to complete the targeted tasks as independent as possible in the real world (community).

Figure 1

Ecological Inventory with Level of Independence

Activity Lifting / Weight Training	Perform Independently	Perform with some assistance V-verbal, P-physical B-Both	Did not perform
1. Identify gym entrance			
2. Present ID at the counter			
3. Identify and enter the locker area			
4. Changing clothes			
5. Identify exercise machines to use			
6. Perform the assigned routine for the day -Chest -Back -Shoulder Quadriceps			
7. Clean exercise area once is done with each machine			
8. Identify and enter lockers			

9. Changing clothes			
10. Identify exit and exit the premises			

Step #3: Provide Opportunities to Experience Transition

- Plan according to students' long and short-term goals.
- Provide activities that are like the ones that they will do in the community (Faulds & Beddoes, 2023).
- Teach students steps to follow and the skills that they need to learn to effectively complete or perform the desired activities. The use of ecological inventories is recommended (Figure 1).
- Teach students how to use the facilities where they will perform the targeted activities. When possible, provide students the opportunity to visit and use those facilities so they have real life experiences.
- Teach students about rules, equipment, and how the activities are typically performed in the real world. Make and teach modification as needed.
- Teach students the set of desired social skills expected in those environments.
- Make sure students understand what they need in the community- self advocacy (Childs & Lieberman, 2021).

Step 4: Measure Student Progress and Determine Next Step

- Periodically assess the student's progress using different assessment instruments (formative assessment).
- If the student's performance is above or below the established goal, develop more or less complicated ones to promote student success opportunities. In other words, increase or decrease the goal's complexity level as needed.
- What is the student's current level of performance at the end of the academic year compared to their transition long-term and short-term goals?
- In what areas does the student develop, and in what needs follow-up?

- What suggestions do you have for students to achieve their transition goals in the upcoming academic year?

Infusing these steps into your program will ensure a well-rounded program that can prepare all of your students for life after school. Every young adult deserves to be as prepared as possible and reach their potential in their chosen activities and sports.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Through this article, we provided ideas, concepts, and strategies for transitioning from school to the community through the PE class. As mentioned on several occasions, every student with a disability has the right to an appropriate transition process once they reach age 16. Collaboration and good communication between professionals involved in transition planning will determine its success. One of the most critical areas to work on during the transition process is the area of community integration related to recreation and adequate use of free time. General and adapted physical educators are the professionals responsible for working on the recreation and leisure transition goals. By implementing UDT principles when transition planning, physical educators should be able to provide and facilitate the transition process for their students with disabilities. We encourage teachers to consider the provided guidelines to teach their students with disabilities in a barrier-free and inclusive transition process that is based on students' self-determination and prepare them for community integration.

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5.2 Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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