

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AS MEANS OF PROMOTING THE HEALTH OF THE HANDICAPPED

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Abstract

In tiny given society, the problem of Die existence of the handicapped individuals and how best to promote their well being .should always be acknowledged by individuals, corporate bodies and the government alike. This paper recognized physical activities as means of achieving the above objectives. It gave the concept of handicaps and their types. It also discussed the types of physical activities for each category of handicapped individuals and guides for teaching the handicapped. Furthermore, the role of physical activities to the upliftment of the health of the handicapped was also highlighted.

Introduction

The very existence and in short, astronomical increase in the number of handicapped individuals in the society today calls for urgent attention from all and sundry. Okcke (1995) observed that due to technological advancement and related factors, the number of handicapped persons in the society has almost doubled what obtained in the last two decades. He further advised that every society should try as much as possible to integrate the handicapped persons in almost all its programme of events. The integration of the handicapped individuals with those who arc not handicapped has a lot of far reaching positive effects on the lives of the handicapped.

lize (1996) observed that apart from psychologically freeing their minds from thinking that they are rejected group of people in the society, it helps a lot in their physical, social, emotional and menial developments. It is important to stress that one of the greatest mistakes which many people (especially coaches who are not well trained) make is to underestimate the capabilities of the handicapped. Many research reports have shown that if the physical education and exercises are well planned; taking into consideration the integration of the handicapped from the beginning of the plan, there is every likely-hood that the handicapped will perform very well in most sports.

It is in line with the above view that Nnadi (1989) regretted that the handicapped are most of the time not considered during the initial planning of physical education programmes. He however advised that the handicapped formed a reasonable segment of the human society and should not in any way be ignored during the planning of anything that is beneficial to the society. He stressed that such neglects manifest themselves in ways most sports equipment and facilities are designed. Most of the sports equipment and facilities are designed for those who are "normal" and not the handicapped. For example, most of the athletic fields, pitches and the like are designed for the "normal" and not the handicapped. Considering the role of physical exercises to the handicapped, every effort should be made to ensure that they participate in physical education and exercises and do so happily.

Meaning Of A Handicapped Person

The word "handicap" has been defined by many authors from different disciplines, Iyi (1979) has defined it as anything likely to lessen one's chances of success; example, poor eyesight is a handicap to a student. Similarly, in the field of Physical Education, the meaning remains the same. A handicapped person is one who because of certain physical, mental, social or cultural disability cannot benefit from the types of education or exercises provided for the "normal" person. The severity of handicap cases differs from one individual and also from one type of handicap to the other.

The handicapped child may have a permanent or temporary disability. Handicapping conditions may be as a result of either disease, accident or heredity. For example, a man who had his right hand cut off during an accident has been handicapped. Such a person may never in his life perform those activities that need two hands for its performance. Similarly, an individual who because of the disease of the eye lost his sight has been handicapped. He or she may not be able to read or write again in his or life. These handicapped people's lives can be improved upon through physical education and physical activities that are well planned.

Kinds Of Handicap

Kinds of handicap are as follows:

- (i) Physical handicap One can be physically handicapped as a result of disease, accident or

heredity. Such person finds it difficult to use the affected part of the body, (ii) Emotional handicap - An individual who suffers from this handicap is emotionally unstable.

He or she finds it hard to control his/her emotions, (iii) Mental handicap 111 is has io do with defects in one's brain. Many things can make one to

have this problem. In some people who have mental handicap, it may be due to birth injury while in some others, it might be attributed to heredity, accident, illness, taking drugs and other related factors. Iyi (1979) warned that anything that has negative impact on the brain cells can lead to mental handicap, (iv) Social/Cultural handicap - This can occur when one changes his/her residence or is isolated.

When one does not have knowledge of the social/cultural norms, he is regarded as having been socially/culturally handicapped.

Types Of Physical Activities For Each Category Of Handicap

The handicapped children or adults either consciously or otherwise seek help to reduce or completely overcome their impairments. To offer such help, Nwegbu (1999) maintained that, adjustment and adaptation in the education programmes must be made. Physical activities have to be grouped according to the nature of the handicap. Physical education programmes serve as an avenue for educating the atypical child to face and recognise his abilities as well as his limitations and to adjust accordingly.

Many physical activity programmes are available for the handicapped. It is important to note that almost all the activities that a normal child can participate in, are also available either directly or indirectly in adapted form to the handicapped. The selection of the activity should strictly be guided by the limitations and capabilities of the specific handicap.

(a) *Mentally And Emotionally Disabled* - Mental retardation is a condition characterized by faulty development of intelligence, which impairs the person's ability to learn and adapt to the demands of the society. Emotionally disabled child on the other hand is characterized by behaviour patterns that have a detrimental effect on his adjustment. Both the emotionally and mentally disabled usually manifest many of the same characteristics like low motor fitness, poor body mechanics and low vitality - hence the need to treat them at once.

Activities

Activities suitable for the mentally and emotionally disabled are as follows: 4
Relaxation exercises such as sleeping on the ground and keeping still. 4 Balance exercises such as climbing, walking on beams, creeping under boxes. 4 Weight lifting, long distance races, hitting a ball against the wall to displace aggression.

- Activities of low organization like hopping, catching, track and field, boxing, soccer and tumbling.

(b) *The Physically Disabled* - There are many forms of physical disability but the major ones that mostly constitute the handicapping conditions are:

- The blind and partially sighted;
- The deaf and hard-of-hearing; and
- The motor disabled.

i The Visually Impaired (The Blind And Partially Sighted).

People who fall into this group always tend to withdraw from the society. They prefer individual and dual sports to team sports - hence, the following physical activities have been recommended for them.

(a) Dancing and rhythmic activities, (b) Wrestling, weight lifting and tug of war (c) Gymnastics stunts, tumbling and floor exercises (d) Throwing events (e) Relay races (!) Distance running: This is very good for them. Vodola (1976) reported that Harry Cordellos, a sightless distance

Physical Activities as Means of Promoting the Health of the Handicapped

runner ran the Boston Marathon with a sighted partner in 1975 in 2 hours, 57 minutes, 42 seconds, (g) Swimming is also another good activity for them.

- ii **The Deaf And hard-Of-Hearing** Even though people in this group do not need special type of physical education programme, they have special needs that can be met with extra little planning. Due to their hearing defects, they must have to depend maximally on their visual apparatus.

Activities

1. Balance Exercise - This may include among others, the adapted stunts and tumbling, walking on low beams, rhythmic activities.
- I. Group dances, games and sports should be designed for them in order to meet their social and competitive needs. Vodola (1976) reported that Welma Rudolf despite her birth auditory defect and polio was triple gold medallist in the 1960 Rome Olympics in both 100m, 200m and 400m relays. It is also necessary to advise here that when a deaf child is involved in sports requiring the use of sound or whistle from an official, a nearest team-mate should be assigned to inform him when such sound or whistle is administered. Alternatively, some sign language can be developed for easy communication.

- iii **The Motor Disabled** - People in this group are with orthopaedic deviations. This may be permanent impairment of joints, bones, and amputations and spinal related problems. Out of the above handicapping cases, only amputees pose real problems to physical education because of postural alignment and general body balance.

Activities

- (a) Activities for the above group of people include activities performed from wheel chair such as archery, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, hockey etc.
- (b) Single arm amputees can take part in dancing, sprints, distance races, tennis etc.
- (e) When amputees are provided with braces and clutches, they can participate in archery, shooting, basketball, badminton and gymnastics.

Guides For Teaching The Handicapped

The success of any physical educator in teaching his skills to the learning - be they "normal" or "handicapped" people lies on his ability to individualise his teaching in order to meet the unique needs and interests of each learner. According to Galahue (1976), demonstrations and pictures, verbal stimulation, uses of concrete objects are some of the various sensory approaches to teaching the handicapped. It is also important that the teacher for the handicapped established a very conducive and attractive learning environment. The environment should be the one, which makes the learners feel to learn, to produce and to explore (Daniels and Davies, 1975). The teacher should be able to start with the child at whatever level he is, and take him forward as far as he can. Below are suggested approaches to teaching the handicapped child.

- (a) Activities that help the child overcome his lack of confidence and a sense of failure should be selected.
- (b) Select activities that contribute to the needs and interests of the child.
- (e) Activities should be selected or designed, so that the child is seen competing with himself and his previous performances, rather than against others.
- (d) Select activities that each child can do easily in order to assure, at least, a minimum of success. This is because, when there is no sign of success coming his way, he gets frustrated and may decide to stop participating in such activities.
- (e) Select activities that are at an appropriate functional level for each child to avoid frustration.

Physical Activities And The Development Of The Handicapped

One of the cardinal objectives of physical education in general is the promotion of the health of the participants -- whether the participants are handicapped or not. Physical activities have the following contributions to make to the handicapped:

1. **Physical Development** Participation in physical activities can bring about the following changes; in the lives of the handicapped child or adult:
 - (a) **Muscle strengthening** muscles that have become weak can be made strong again by certain physical activities. Through physical activities, those with amputated limbs and the like are taught

- ways of compensating for their losses by strengthening the muscles of the other limbs so that the body can be well supported.
- (b) Postural correction -- Exercises help greatly to correct postural defects by helping the affected individual to maintain body balance and alignment. This aids in the improvement of self-image.
 - (c) Organic Development - Through exercises, organs have better working efficiency. Example, exercises increase the heart volume, stroke volume etc.
 - (d) Increased Body Coordination - The handicapped child by participating in programmed activities improves on his body coordination.
2. Social And Emotional Development - According to Crowe (1977), the social and emotional development implied making personal adjustment, group adjustments and adjustments as a member of a society. It has been well established by researchers that activities in physical education programme offer one of the best opportunities for making the above adjustments. The handicapped if not helped to have a sense of belonging to the society, will get frustrated, lie sees himself as an odd person who is not qualified to associate or do what other "normal" people do. It is only physical activities or education programmes that can bridge this gap. Winnick (1979) wrote that giving the handicapped a chance for successful learning of basic sports skills or game might change the concept of individual inadequacy and result in an improved social outlook. lie maintained that once a skill is learnt and the performance is acceptable by the group, the desire for group activity increases. This will lead to an improved total social and emotional well-being of the person.
 3. Mental Development - Physical education has the potential weapons to help the participants develop mentally. It is obvious that every activity to be performed by the handicapped has its underlying principles, which must be learnt and mastered by them before they can really perform such activities well. When they are involved in learning these principles and how to apply them correctly, they help to improve their mental capacity to learn also things outside such activities and in turn, their general intelligence.

Conclusion

The need of the handicapped people in any society should be given serious attention with a view to minimizing the problems they pass through in their lives. The present paper has shown that physical activity is one of the surest ways to help the handicapped to live a normal life and do so happily with other members of the society. The government, corporate bodies and rich individuals should please establish activity centres that can do this noble job for the society. It is also important to mention that these activities can achieve the above discussed objectives on the handicapped if they are well planned and administered. This means that both correct and adequate facilities, equipment, personnel etc. should be employed.

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