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How Inclusive Is Your Physical Education Class? Introducing the Lieberman/Brian Inclusion Rating Scale for Physical Education

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Do you want every child to feel included in your physical education class? Do you strive to create a welcoming environment for all your students? Do you wonder what else you can do to make your classes universally designed for all?

The reality today is that the majority of children with disabilities are educated within a general physical education setting (Government Accountability Office, 2010). “Integrated,” used interchangeably with the term “inclusion,” generally means that students are in the class but not always accessing the curriculum in the same manner as their peers (Florian, 2015). Thus, simply placing children in the general physical education setting without the consideration of multiple factors, including supports and services, can result in an integrated placement rather than inclusion and may have a negative effect on the experiences of students with disabilities (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015).

Students believe their teachers can influence their participation levels in activities (Bredahl, 2013; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010), and some of the factors that may hinder the shift from integration to inclusion — such as the speed of activities (Bredahl, 2013; de Schipper, Lieberman, & Moody, 2017; Healy, Msetfi, & Gallagher, 2013), allowing peers to select their own teams (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015), and a lack of adaptations and modifications for students’ needs (Shields & Synnot, 2016) — stem from teacher behaviors. Yet most children often do not feel included in integrated settings,

pointing to a disconnect between teacher behavior and student perception.

Given this disconnect, Lieberman, Brian and Grenier (2017) created the Lieberman/Brian Inclusion Rating Scale for Physical Education (LIRSPE).

Lieberman and colleagues recently published the initial psychometric properties of the LIRSPE in the *European Physical Education Review*. The full scale, including rubrics, can be found in the web supports for the book *Strategies for Inclusion: Physical Education for Everyone* (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 2018). Most recently, the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) uploaded the LIRSPE to their website (www.nchpad.org; NCHPAD, 2018). The site includes: (1) the *European Physical Education Review* research article, (2) the LIRSPE rating scale itself, and (3) a list of rubrics that align with each item to support the reliability of raters. The NCHPAD also published an instructional video that shows what each item should look like when implemented correctly.

This LIRSPE can be used to assess the extent to which teachers perform the behaviors thought to elicit students’ feelings of being included within physical education classes. This instrument has several applications, including an intervention protocol, a training tool, a teacher evaluation, a unit in a methods course, and a method for evaluating the preparation of preservice teachers. This tool can be used to enhance students’ sense of belonging and participation in the physical education setting while

providing teachers with practical solutions for improving their educational practices. The authors encourage readers to use the LIRSPE in their programs to ensure a high standard of effort toward including all children.

The Lieberman-Brian Inclusion Rating Scale for Physical Education

The purpose of this rating scale is to evaluate the *effort* made by teachers to include children with disabilities in a general physical education environment. The LIRSPE measures the actions taken by teachers to ensure students with disabilities are offered physical education opportunities alongside their typically developing peers. To illustrate what the raters look for when using this scale, here are a few of the descriptors from the LIRSPE, which are rated on a scale of 1–5:

- *Start of Class:* When the general physical education teacher welcomes the children into the gymnasium, all of the children in the class are together including the children with disabilities (children with disabilities do not walk into the gymnasium late).
- *Introduction:* Children with disabilities are sitting/standing with their peers and are included in the instructions of the introduction.
- *Warm-up:* The class does the warm-up together with children performing at their own pace (for example, children run as many laps as they can in X minutes vs. requiring X laps in X minutes).

- *Speed of Play Within the Lesson:* Speed of play is varied based on the present level of performance of all children, including children with disabilities, so as not to leave anyone behind (examples include volleyball — players use a beach ball to slow down the speed of the game; floor hockey — players use a Frisbee instead of a ball or puck; softball — players hit the ball off a tee; or basketball — eliminating the five-second rule).

- *Differentiated Instruction:* Instruction is provided in a way that allows for all students to succeed and benefit from the general program by accommodating different learning styles (audio, visual, kinesthetic, and approaches specific to the needs of the child such as tactile modeling). The lesson provides a variety of choices to execute skills (this may be done in stations, within the task, and task-to-task).

- *Autonomy Supported Instruction:* The student has opportunities to make some choices driving his/her own learning. Proper accommodations and supports are available for her or his choices (this may require some pre-teaching so children know what choices are available and may be comfortable for them to use).

- *Game/Activity/Team Sport:* Students do not pick teams. The teacher avoids elimination games. The teacher avoids having students wait in line.

- *Skill-related Feedback:* Feedback on skill performance is given throughout the class to all children when possible.

It should be noted that this instrument does not comprehensively determine whether physical education classes are inclusive because it does not measure a number of complex variables associated with inclusion, such as the nature of interactions between children with disabilities and their peers. High scores on one of these items will not guarantee that a class is inclusive, but the net positive effect of these items can demonstrate the effort that teachers are putting forth toward inclusion. Any score above a 3 demonstrates that the teacher is attempting to include children with disabilities in their classes.

The LIRSPE must be utilized during at least three physical education class periods that include at least one child with a disability. It is recommended that teachers receive the scale at least one day before it is used to prepare. Raters are asked to watch the physical education class in its entirety and circle one number (between 1 and 5 in the score column) to rate each item listed (in the descriptor column) within the LIRSPE:

- 1 = Poor: The student is not included in class.
- 2 = Below average: The student is rarely included in class.
- 3 = Average: The student is sometimes included but not all the time.
- 4 = Above average: The student is mostly included in class.
- 5 = Excellent: The student is fully included all of the time.

The final score is calculated by adding up the scores for all descriptors, then dividing that total by the number of descriptors. This determines the inclusion rating related to the effort the teacher makes to include all children. It is understood that some of these items may not be within the total control of the physical educator. (Note: If the physical educator makes a good-faith effort, for example, to get all their children to class on time but that behavior still does not occur, the rater has the option to rate that item as “N/A.”)

Because teachers’ ultimate goal is to improve learning for *all* students, it is hoped that readers will find the items listed on the LIRSPE scale useful for their own reflective or programmatic practices.

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