



Accessing Physical Education Courses

Case study 5: Graham

What was the challenge?

Graham has cerebral palsy, which means he has a slightly unsteady gait and his balance is affected. He drags his right leg slightly, but he is quite mobile and can move around reasonably freely. His muscles in his right leg are not well developed due to degeneration of the tissue. In contrast, he has good upper body strength.

Graham was desperately keen to choose Physical Education at Intermediate 1/2 as he had really enjoyed the subject in first and second year. However, his parents were not very keen for him to choose Physical Education as an option. They were very concerned that Graham might be humiliated in front of his fellow students and that he would not be able to cope with the demands of the Course and thus not gain a result for all his hard work.

The parents met with the school's guidance staff as well as the Physical Education department to discuss the situation. They were not easily persuaded that Graham could manage the Course, never mind achieve a grade at the end when he sat the exam. The staff from the department explained the make-up of the Course in terms of the activities that would be covered. They stressed that he had experience in these activities and was already competent and able to work practically. They emphasised that Graham would never be put in a position where he would feel uncomfortable in front of the class, and that he would be treated the same as his fellow students. Where any pupil struggled, tasks would be differentiated according to the ability of the pupil, allowing them to work at their own level. They also took into account his written work in other subjects, which was not a problem as far as they were concerned. Graham's parents eventually agreed to allow Graham to proceed with the Course. Needless to say, he was delighted and so was the department.

How did Graham access the Course in class?

At the beginning of the Intermediate 1/2 Course, all pupils in the year group covered three activities: football, gymnastics and swimming.

The Course began with swimming and so health and safety issues were discussed with Graham at the start. Graham managed to get himself in and out of

the pool and could swim front crawl and a recognisable breaststroke, but was limited on his back where he felt very uncomfortable. Graham was able to use his legs to a certain extent but a strong arm action, which is the main form of propulsion, certainly helped his strokes. He struggled to maintain his performance over more than 15 metres in his front crawl, which was his best stroke. However, by working hard he improved not only his technique and times but was able to swim non-stop and increase the distance he could cover.

Graham now gets out of breath less. In his breaststroke he also improved both his technique and stamina to such an extent that he is now achieving a good grade overall for his swimming with a score at Intermediate 2 level.

In gymnastics, Graham was able to perform simple movements such as forward rolls and simple balances. For part of his Course, Graham had to devise and perform a sequence of movements using different pieces of apparatus. This involved getting on and off apparatus as well as changing direction. The routine Graham performed started off with him:

- ◆ jumping on to trampette to get on to a box top (which he executed very well)
- ◆ performing a shoulder balance on top of the box
- ◆ coming off the box onto the floor, changing direction with a half-turn and performing a forward roll along a mat

Graham then finished with a backward roll. The whole routine was captured on video and was performed in front of the whole class. This was a major achievement which allowed Graham to show that he could carry out and perform simple gymnastic movements with control and fluency.

The final activity was football, which was performed indoors. Graham struggled to a certain extent to move around the pitch but was able to carry out simple passes to team mates. He also was happy to be the goalkeeper where lack of movement was less of a problem for him. Again, his performance was captured on video. This was the activity in which he performed to a lesser level than the other two.

How was Graham assessed?

Graham is a very good athlete and has been involved in participating for the National Disability squad, where he runs. He is also now included in the National squad in swimming.

In consultation with the department it was agreed to insert athletics into the Course to allow not only Graham, but also other pupils, the opportunity to gain achievement in another activity, hence increasing the options available. The Course Arrangements state that the practical performance mark is based on marks gained in two activities. This helped Graham as he was competent in swimming and, with the addition of athletics, he could access good marks in both activities. His performance in each activity was then measured against the performance criteria to determine his overall performance mark. This was exactly the same for all pupils. The key point in the application was the context in which

Graham was performing. Graham was able to select, adapt and combine his skills in contexts offering a wide variety of options.

How successful was the delivery of the Course?

So far, Graham has thoroughly enjoyed the Course. His parents are delighted that this is the case, and very much appreciate the support and work of all the staff in the department as well as the help and friendship shown by the other pupils in the class. His fellow pupils treat him as equal and make little allowance for him, especially in football! When the Senior Verifier for performance visited the school to watch him perform, he was very impressed and had no doubt that Graham was performing at Intermediate 2 level.

The delivery of the Course was a success because the department could offer activities in which Graham could participate in and where he could access good marks. He felt part of the class and appreciated the help from staff in the department with whom he formed a very good relationship.

What advice would you give other teachers?

The PE staff are skilled in differentiating tasks to ensure pupils can access a Course. Delivering PE to a student with a specific physical impairment has encouraged the staff to differentiate by response. This may mean being innovative in activities or the department having to purchase special equipment in order for the student to show their skills in the activities in the Course.

Finally, we would emphasise the importance of good dialogue with parents, pupils and staff.