



Active Insight: Evidence in Action



Tip #843: Designing Inclusive Outdoor Learning Experiences

Overview

Outdoor learning environments offer rich opportunities for an inclusive learning environment when teachers intentionally design tasks that accommodate a wide range of abilities, sensory needs, and learning styles. Universal design principles, building flexibility, choice, and multiple means of participation in every outdoor activity, ensure that all students can engage fully with the physical and environmental dimensions of outdoor learning. Inclusive outdoor learning builds confidence, independence, and a shared appreciation for physical activity in natural settings.

Key Teaching Ideas

Inclusive outdoor design requires teachers to anticipate the range of student needs before the lesson and build flexibility into the task structure. This means offering multiple entry points, for example, a navigation task that students can complete on foot, by wheelchair, or with a buddy, and ensuring that the physical environment itself does not create unnecessary barriers. Teachers can involve students with additional needs in the planning process, asking them what would make the activity accessible and enjoyable. The goal is an outdoor experience where every student is genuinely participating, not just present.

Practical Application

- **Multi-Entry Outdoor Challenges**, Design outdoor tasks with multiple participation options, for example, a navigation course that can be completed on foot, by scooter, or with a support person, so that every student can engage at an appropriate level.
- **Sensory-Aware Activity Design**, Identify potential sensory challenges in the outdoor environment such as bright sunlight, uneven surfaces, or loud sounds, and plan modifications or alternative spaces for students who need them.
- **Buddy System Navigation**, Pair students strategically for outdoor navigation tasks so that students with additional needs are supported by a peer while still contributing fully to the shared challenge.



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- **Student-Led Accessibility Audits**, Ask students to walk the outdoor course before the lesson and identify any barriers to participation, then work together to modify the course so that it is accessible to all.
- **Flexible Success Criteria**, Define success in outdoor tasks in terms of participation, effort, and problem-solving rather than speed or distance, ensuring that all students can experience genuine achievement.

Next Steps

Visit [Active Education Australia](https://activeeducationaustralia.edu.au) for resources on inclusive outdoor learning and universal design in HPE. [Anywhere PD](#) covers task modification, sensory considerations, and differentiated outdoor experiences.

References and Research

1. Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Version 9.0). Establishes the curriculum expectations for developing movement competence, health literacy, personal and social capability, and lifelong participation in physical activity.
2. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Provides the national framework for effective teaching practice, safe learning environments and ongoing professional learning.
3. Sport Integrity Australia. Safeguarding Sport Resources. Provides guidance for creating safe, inclusive and well-supervised physical activity environments.