

# DISABILITY SPORTS AND HEALTH; GAMES AND ACTIVITY MODIFICATIONS: ERASMUS INTENSIVE PROGRAM

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## Abstract

Studies from Europe, Asia, and the U.S. suggest that physical education majors are typically exposed to only one introductory-level adapted physical education (APE) course, and this is not enough preparation for future PE teachers who will no doubt work with children with disabilities. The Erasmus Intensive Program (IP) “Disability Sports and Health: Games and Activity Modifications”(DSH-GAM) was created and implemented in Turkey, in part, to address these issues. Erasmus IP short programs are 10 days to six weeks in duration and include students and professors from higher education institutions of at least three different countries. The specific aim of the DSH-GAM was to train undergraduate and masters students to be leaders who will serve individuals with disabilities to develop their independence, confidence, and their fitness through participation in community sports and recreation. The purpose of this paper is to review the DSH-GAM, how the program was developed and funded, how participants were recruited, and finally the summary of the activities used in the program.

**Keywords:** *disability, sport, recreation, physical education, teacher education*

*“A soul cannot be disabled.”*

—Erasmus Student

## Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) affirms the right of children with disabilities to be valued equally, treated with respect, provided with equal opportunities within the mainstream system, and experience full and effective participation and inclusion in society. Article 30 specifically refers to physical activity within formal and informal educational institutions. According to Article 30, States Parties shall take appropriate measures (a) to encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in

mainstream sporting activities at all levels; (b) to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation, and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system (Özer et al., 2013).

The Turkish government signed the UNCRPD on March 30, 2007. It was confirmed on December 3, 2008, by the Turkish Senate. Its passage was reported to the United Nations on September 28, 2009. However, adapted physical education (APE) as a service in Turkey is not in compliance with UNCRPD. The number of physical education (PE) teachers in special education schools are insufficient (483 PE teachers in 1080 of special education schools), and there are few physical education (PE) teachers for special education classes in most regular primary schools. In addition, staffing of a full-time PE teacher is not mandatory for special education and rehabilitation centres. Clearly, most children with disabilities in Turkey are unable to access appropriate and qualified PE classes.

Although the 75% of children with disabilities in Turkey are being taught in inclusive settings, research is still limited regarding how successful inclusion is in PE classes. Ozer et al. (2013) found secondary school PE teachers’ attitudes toward including children with intellectual disability in their PE classroom was ambivalent. Other studies found similar results of preservice PE teachers (e.g., Sungu & Ozer, 2012). For example preservice PE teachers showed favorable attitude on the “benefits” and “feelings” of including students with disabilities included into the general PE classroom, but undecided on “supports” and “acceptance,” and unfavorable on “fears” of having including a child with a disability in their PE class. These findings are similar to research conducted in the United States (Block & Obrusnikova 2007; Klavina, 2008; Jerlinder, Danermark, & Gilla, 2009; Combs, Elliott, & Whipple, 2010). A possible explanation for the lack of more positive attitudes toward inclusion is the amount of inclusion-related courses required in physical education teacher education (PETE) programs around the world. For example, only one, two-credit special education class and one, three-credit APE class are required to complete the PETE program in Turkey. The lack of instructional time al-



*Erasmus programs are 10 days to two weeks in duration.*

located to training PE teachers of the physical activity needs of children with disabilities may be one reason for the ambivalent attitudes. Studies from Europe (Ozer et al., 2013), Asia ( Qi & Ching Ha, 2012; Jeong & Block, 2011), and the U.S. indicated that physical education majors are typically exposed to only one introductory-level adapted physical education (APE) course (Hodge & Jansma, 1999; Piletic & Davis, 2010).

Erasmus Intensive Program (IP) was created, in part, to address these issues. Erasmus IP is a subsidiary Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) that was designed to enable people at any stage of life to engage in stimulating learning experiences, and develop APE education and training programs throughout Europe. Erasmus IP short programs are ten days to six weeks in duration and include students and professors from higher education institutions of at least three participant countries. Consequently, this program provided additional training necessary to address future PE teacher's attitudes toward inclusion. One outcome of Erasmus IP was the "Disability Sports and Health; Games and Activity Modifications"(DSH-GAM) a 39288,73 € grant-funded under Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) by European Commission. The budget covered organizational costs, travel, catering, and accommodation costs of the students and the lecturers.

### Background of the Program

The first Erasmus IP on APA, "Development of Adapted Physical Activity in the World" (DAPAW) was held at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey, in 2012. Inspiration was derived from The European Diploma Program of Adapted Physical Activity (EUDAPA) which was held at Haaga Helia University Erasmus partners. In this program, both students and teachers attended from different Erasmus university partners in the program. Dilara Ozer from Turkey was invited to teach at the inaugural EUDAPA program by Jyrki Vilhu, coordinator of the EUDAPA in 2010. Özer had the opportunity to observe first hand the enthusiasm of the students in the program and what they were learning. In addition, she observed the professors involved in the program from around the World and the different information, experiences and teaching styles they brought to the program.

The students enjoyed the multicultural environment and improved their friendship and their English language skills. Using the EUDAPA model, the first DAPAW program was implemented successfully. Feedback from this first program along was used to refine the program. In addition, five students from the first program, four from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University in Turkey and one from Sofia National Sports Academy in Bulgaria, followed other APA programs including the advanced APA courses in Haaga Helia University, Palacky University (Czech Republic) and National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" in Bulgaria.

A DAPAW Facebook group page was created. It is amazing to know that their interaction both personally and professionally is still continuing. Ayşegül AKSOY attended DAPAW and then became project assistant for the DSH-GAM, with great encouragement by Dilara Özer. The success of DAPAW and its products ([www.dapaw2012.com](http://www.dapaw2012.com)) provided justification to propose a continuation of the APA project.

### Purpose of the Program

The aim of the DSH-GAM was to train undergraduate and masters students to be leaders who will serve individuals with disabilities to develop their independence, confidence, and their fitness through participation in community sports and recreation.

**Learning outcomes** were for students to have the following skills: (a) know the adaptation concept and apply to the material, program, sports environment; (b) know the rules and principles of disability sports; (c) have the necessary skills to teach disability sports to people with disability; and (d) be able to use different techniques teaching sports to people with disability.

### Partners and Participants

Partner universities of the Erasmus IP included Palacky University, Olomouc-Czech Republic; National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski", Sofia-Bulgaria; Sams-Bari University, Bari- Italy; Haaga-Hellia University, Lahti-Finland, and Gedik University, İstanbul-Turkey. Each university had its own coordinator to organize students, teachers and their travels, and the program in accordance with the project's coordinator, Martin Kudlacek from Palacky University, Stefka Djobova from Sofia National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski," Dr. Piero Portincasa from Sams-Bari University and a great assistance of Viviana Zito and Jyrki Vilhu from Haaga-Hellia University elected the appropriate students according to required criteria which included English language proficiency, previous experience (volunteer work, attended courses, lessons, etc.) as well as their willingness to participate in the program. A total of 24 students participated in the program, 6 from each partner university and 8 from Gedik University. Three students had disabilities, one student with visual impairment, one student with spinal cord injury and one student had cerebral palsy. Only the student with visual impairment was accompanied by his personal assistant. Successfully including students with disabilities in the IP created real inclusive learning setting in accordance with the content of program.

## Project Venue

The program took place in Active Life Centre (ALC) in Istanbul. Founded in 2012, the centre is designed to promote the rights of children with disabilities with opportunities to participate in physical activity in the Pendik Municipality of the Pendik District. The program was offered at Gedik University. The ALC provided access to approximately 165 children with disabilities and practicum opportunities for Erasmus students to teach after completing theoretical classes. The Erasmus IP students' accommodation was arranged at the dormitory of Gedik University. Istanbul Electricity, Tram and Tunnel General Management (İETT) provided students with shuttle-bus transportation.

## Program

As recommended by (Özer et al., 2013), training adaptations and empowerment practices applied to real cases during the APA coursework, as well as organized practicum sessions where adapted teaching practices and provision of support (e.g., peer tutoring) could be practiced. Moreover, APE educators have consistently advocated practical experience that emphasize interactions between future physical education professionals and individuals with disabilities (Hodge & Jansma, 1999). Based on the results of these studies, the program was structured as 76 hours of theory (54%), and 64 hours of practicum (46%). The one-month program was comprised of the following four modules: (a) Introduction to Disability Sports, (b) Comparative Studies in Disability Sports, (c) Disability Sports, and (d) Special Olympics and Health. Therefore, the total of 16 ECTS credits were awarded for completion of the program. Lectures within the first module included *Inclusive Outdoor Activities*, *Principles of Adaptation in Disability Sports*, *History and Philosophy of Disability Sports*, *Paralympic Games*, *Accessibility and Adapted Equipment*, *Wheelchair Sports*, *Sitting and Wheelchair Dance*, *Adapted Winter Sport*, and *Halliwick Technique*. On the first day of the program all students gathered in the football field for "Inclusive outdoor activities" lecture, that was taught by Jyrki Hamalainen from Haaga-Heilia University, Finland. This lecture helped students get to know each other and build camaraderie and friendship. Afterward, Dr. Martin Kudlacek, from Palacky University, Olomouck, Czech Republic, presented basic wheelchair maneuvers and fundamental wheelchair basketball skills. Next, Dr. Tiina Sihvola presented wheelchair dancing. International Night, organised by the Tuzla Municipality, was held at the end of the first week which provided the first of many social events for students and lecturers. The students introduced their country, culture, music, and traditional dances. Each group from partner countries introduced a traditional dance from their own culture. After the International Night, students appeared to open up and engage with other groups from other partner countries instead of being only with in their own group as it was the case at the beginning.

*"First time in my life I was in a wheelchair and experienced moving in it."*

—Erasmus Student

The second module of the IP, *Comparative Studies in Disability Sports*, contained the lectures *APA in European Countries—Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria and Turkey*; *Sherborne Developmental Movement (SDM)*; *APA and Ageing*; and *Rhythmic Activities for People with Disabilities*. In the context of the lecture *APA in European Countries*, students prepared presentations about Disability Sports in their own countries before arriving in Turkey. They presented their presentations as a group of each country during the week. It provided an interactive participation activity and opportunity to practice speaking English, as English was everyone's second language. In addition, each student was able to assess their country's APA strengths and weaknesses. Students visited The Metin Sabancı Rehabilitation Centre for Children and Youth with Spasticism and observed APA applications from Turkey. Moreover, they had their first experience to work with children with disabilities during the SDM lecture. It helped them to get physically and emotionally closer, not only with each other but also children with disabilities. One of the popular classes of the week was Rhythmic Activities, which included enjoyable practices during the class by Dr. Vivi Zito from SAMS-BARİ University.

The third module of the IP was *Disability Sports*, which contained the lectures *Badminton for People with Disabilities*, *European Policy in Disability Sports*, *Wheelchair Basketball*, *Goalball*, *Judo for People with Visual Impairment*, *Orienteering*, *Principles of Disability Sports among People with Visual Impairment*, *Cerebral Palsy (CP) Sports*, *An Inclusive Approach to Disability Sports—Examples from Practices*, and finally *Swimming—Adaptations and Applications*. During this week, the Pendik Municipality Wheelchair Basketball Team joined the wheelchair basketball lecture. The team and Rositza Tzarova from Sofia National Sports Academy demonstrated inclusive basketball. Students also visited Cebeci Sports Facility in the European part of Istanbul for a swimming lecture. This facility consisted of seven training halls, an Olympic swimming pool, a hydrotherapy pool, a gymnasium, a football court, a fitness center, a congress hall and dorm for the athletes. Erasmus students tried several teaching/training techniques to include persons with cerebral palsy. Professor Duran Arslan taught the "Watsu Technique," a water therapy that he uses with people with CP. Students also met many Turkish Paralympians and Olympians including *Beytullah Eroğlu*, the Paralympian swimmer from Turkish National Team.

The module title of the last week was *Special Olympics and Health* and included *Introduction to Special Olympics: History, Philosophy, and Principles*; *Unified Sports Program*; *Lifestyle of Persons with a Disability*; *Gymnastics and Acrobats on the Horseback for People with Disabilities*; *Exercise and Fitness in Prevention of Cardiovascular Diseases*; *Physical Activities and Sports in Prevention of Psychiatric Problems*; *Teaching Strategies in the APA*; *Autism and Sport*; and *Paravaulting* (adapted horseback riding). During the last week students visited the Ballica Horse Club for the Paravaulting lecture, which was given by Jana Sklenarikova, from Palacky University, Czech Republic. The students also met Ayşenur Türkay, the owner of the Ballica Horse Club, and were given a briefing and tour that includ-



*Students reported that they enjoyed and learned much in the practical classes.*

ed the barns and the training field. Professor Sklenarikova taught students how to touch, get close to clean the horses' shoes, and groom the horses. This was followed by students completing each of these activities. Next, Dr. Jana Sklenarikova taught students how to stay on horseback, how to stand on horseback, and other activities. At the end of the lecture, a professional rider provided a demonstration, an unexpected surprise from Ballica Horse Club.

In addition to the course of studies, weekend trips were scheduled to introduce the historical and natural beauties of İstanbul, including Taksim Square, Blue Mosque, Piere Loti, Galata Tower, Grandbazaar, and Princess Islands.

### **DSH-GAM from the Perspective of Erasmus Students**

*“My mind changed about people and culture of Turkey: now, I feel warmth! It is admirable!”*

—Erasmus Student

The day before the last day of the IP, students were asked to give feedback regarding their cultural, social, and professional experiences during the IP. Feedback from students indicated they improved their English speaking skills and learned about each other's cultures and languages, includ-

ing religious, linguistic, and cultural differences. They noted that they began to perceive those differences as an important part of social richness. They enjoyed meeting new people, visiting İstanbul, especially boat trips, Taksim, and Kadıköy. Strong friendships were established, and each one engaged in value-added life experiences.

*“I have noticed each country has different culture but all people from different cultures moved together. Everybody gathered under the umbrella of the DSH-GAM.”*

—Erasmus Student

As professional contributions of the IP, Erasmus students learned how to teach children with disabilities, new games/practices for people with disabilities, new methods of teaching, new theoretical approaches, and the principles and rules of adapted sports and equipment. The professors received positive reviews, and students experienced using a wheelchair and multisensory room for the first time. Almost all students reported that they enjoyed and learned much in the practical classes.

*“I learned very interesting games for people with disabilities and my experience in this Project will help me to apply to my country.”*

—Erasmus Student



*Their experiences in the program positively affected students' attitudes toward people with disabilities.*

The DSH-GAM appeared to help students understand and accept differences and remove prejudices related to disabilities. Some students indicated that they had no contact with children with disabilities before, and their experience in the program positively affected their attitudes toward people with disabilities.

*“Even if the people look different, their feelings are similar.”*  
—Erasmus Student

## Conclusion

*“Adventure is almost finished but new friendships are just started.”*  
—Erasmus Student

The DSH-GAM provided an infrastructure to build the APA program as a modular within the physical education teacher training, coaching, and recreation training program at the bachelor's or master's level. Students learned how to teach children with disabilities, new games/practices for people with disabilities, new methods of teaching, new theoretical approaches, and the principles and rules of adapted sports and equipment thanks to the IP. The DSH-GAM helped students understand and accept differences, remove prejudices related to disabilities by letting them have contact with children with disabilities and positively effected their attitudes towards people with disabilities. They improved their English speaking skills, and learned about each other's cultures and languages, including religious, linguistic, and cultural differences and began to perceive those differences as an important part of social richness. Consequently, highly qualified graduates from these programs are expected to teach more effectively; and improve the lives of people with disabilities.

With the aim of dissemination of the results of the project, a CD, a brochure, and a hand book involving all processes of the project was prepared. Additionally, a website overview-

ing the project was created ([www.dsh-gam.com](http://www.dsh-gam.com)). In total, 32 students participated and received 16 ECTS credits. Twenty-six lecturers were provided including 20 from partner universities. Finally, cultural and professional integration was made possible between lecturers and students on an international level and this integration enabled students to get a better education in the field and raise the quality of disability sports in these countries. It is expected that the transfer of knowledge will be made possible and this will positively affect the long term education quality at these universities.

### Authors' note:

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