

## Camp Includes Me: Adapting Activities for Campers of All Abilities

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**Imagine preparing a rock climbing experience during a school camp to allow participants to explore and identify their strengths by placing them out of their comfort zone.**

Now imagine that one of the campers uses a wheelchair. How could the activity be adapted? Maybe the facilitator allows a helper to assist the camper scale just the bottom of the boulder. Maybe the camper can be hoisted up the wall entirely, wearing full body harness, by experienced instructors. The camper has been accommodated by being provided with tools or support to make the activity accessible; however, the activity has also been impacted in a way that may further isolate the camper using the wheelchair. S/he is the only camper with an assistant or helper. S/he has special resources that only s/he can use. Ironically, the modifications made in an attempt to be inclusive have actually created a potential increase in disability isolation.

### Successful Participation



*During the rock climbing activity in camp, everyone, including participants who are fully mobile, was given a chance to try the hoist. Buddy instructors were available to guide those who requested for assistance. Ramps and carpets were laid so that participants on wheelchairs can navigate the steps independently.*

Creating opportunities for successful participation in a camp activity goes beyond simply providing support or additional resources to campers. Successful participation occurs when facilitators ensure that the environment is seamlessly inclusive by reducing or removing physical and psychosocial barriers, and that the activity is intrinsically rewarding for the participants with additional needs. Using modifications to ensure that the challenge of the activity matches the skill level of all participants is the key component to ensure participant success in an inclusive environment.

In the rock-climbing example, what if the hoist system was made available for all and placed alongside the group that is climbing, everyone was paired with a buddy climbing instructor, and the rock climbing was conducted indoors with a more durable surface? These modifications now create an opportunity for all campers to participate in a way that looks almost identical while still maintaining the fundamental objective and nature of the activity. This helps create an inclusive activity that allows all campers the opportunity to thrive.



### Activity Modification

After identifying barriers to the activity according to the three key elements: person, activity, and environment, appropriate modifications can be pursued using the Ecological Task Analysis (ETA) framework. The ETA framework differs from traditional directive approaches found in most physical education classes in that it was designed to provide strategies for individualizing instructions, to provide students with choice, to enhance decision-making, to increase teacher observation, and to foster discovery (Balan and Davis, 1993; Davis and Broadhead, 2007). The ETA is applicable to populations with and without additional needs. Provided below is a step-by-step approach to evaluating the key elements of activity modification.

When evaluating the **activity**, we noticed that a barrier exists for the camper with additional needs in scaling the rock wall independently. Therefore, by making the hoist system available for all (e.g., for campers who are fully mobile but are afraid of heights and therefore also unable to scale the rock wall independently) and placed alongside the climbing group, we not only make the activity inclusive for everyone, but also eliminated this barrier while maintaining the inherent nature of the activity (i.e., for self-exploration of strength when put outside of their comfort zone).

Next, we move to **environmental** barriers. We can ask questions like:

1. Are there other sensory factors (distracting noises or images) that may impact participation?		
2. Is the lighting adequate?	3. Is the activity indoors or outdoors?	4. What is the playing surface like?

In the example provided, the activity was moved from outside rock wall to one indoor for a more durable surface for all the participants who are first timers at rock climbing. The purpose of the activity (to identify one's strength when placed in challenging situation) is maintained with this environmental modification.

When we look at modifications for the **person**, we can evaluate how s/he interacts with the environment and/or activity.

1. Is assistive equipment available, such as a modified paddle for easier grip instead of a normal paddle?

2. What barriers exist within the participant's abilities that may limit successful participation?

3. Is assistive equipment available, such as a modified paddle for easier grip instead of a normal paddle?

4. Can where the person is in relation to the activity be altered - For example, in bell-boating, can s/he be seated on the side of the stronger arm for rowing?



*Facilitators deliberately grouped and arranged the participants according to their stronger arm for rowing (after consultation with their respective therapists) to ensure full-participation and enjoyment for the bell-boating activity during the camp. The Occupational Therapists also modified the paddles using towels for easier grip for some of the campers*

After modifying one element, it is very important to take another look at the other factors to see if they have been impacted. These three key elements do not exist in a vacuum and in altering one, another may need to be adjusted. For example, if the hoist is available for all during rock climbing, do the participants still require a buddy instructor?

The final step is then to look at the activity as a whole, with the modifications, and determine if the inherent nature and objective of the activity is intact.

1. Does it still look like rock climbing?

2. Are the goals of the activity still attainable?

3. Most importantly, is it still fun?



*For participants with additional needs who are able to use their upper body strength, facilitators encouraged them to make use of the self-climbing mechanism to scale the wall independently while in the hoist.*

While there is no right or wrong way to modify an activity, there are a few final considerations. Answering the following questions may help in determining if the modifications have removed potential barriers.

1. Can the camper navigate through the environment safely and equally with his or her peers?

2. Are all the resources equally accessible?

3. Does the modification allow the camper to participate in an independent manner?

4. Has the activity been normalised across all participants? (i.e., they are participating in a way that looks similar)

## References

Balan, Christine M., & Davis, Walter E. (1993). *Ecological Task Analysis—An Approach to Teaching Physical Education*. Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, 64:9, 54-62, DOI: [10.1080/07303084.1993.10607352](https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.1993.10607352)

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