

## Peer-Reviewed Article

### Using Social Media to Promote Adapted Physical Education Services

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### ABSTRACT

Within the profession of adapted physical education (APE) profession, there is often an identity crisis where others outside the field often misunderstand or are unaware of the positive motor and physical activity benefits that quality APE services can provide for students with disabilities (Winnick & Porretta, 2017; Wrightslaw, 2016). The use of social media offers one innovative approach to promote APE programs. Social media can be used to advocate for the importance of APE and capture a variety of teachable moments that can serve as a rich resource of ideas for a variety of stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, parents, community members). Additionally, social media can serve as a cost-effective tool to use in professional development to help teachers feel connected to others in their profession. Social media can be used to learn about new techniques, tools, resources, as well as, it helps connect in ways that were unfathomable only a decade ago. The purpose of this article was to indicate strategies regarding (a) how to use social media, (b) promotion of the field of APE, and (c) how to use it within classes.

*Keywords:* adapted physical education, social media, advocacy, promotion.

### Introduction

Within the profession of adapted physical education (APE), there is often an identity crisis where others outside the field often misunderstand or are unaware of the positive motor and physical activity benefits that quality APE services can provide for students with disabilities (Winnick & Porretta, 2017; Wrightslaw, 2016). Too often, it falls on the responsibility of APE professionals to educate others regarding being appropriately included in the special education process and to make sure that students with disabilities receive appropriate physical education services. Consequently, part of the APE professional's responsibility is to be a voice to over-

come these barriers and to help bridge the knowledge gap for other educators. APE needs to be seen as an important educational piece for students who need and can benefit from these services. It is time for APE to be included in the conversation, and social media is one platform that can help promote APE programs and make the public better understand just how important physical education is to the overall student experience.

A general lack of qualified APE teachers exists throughout the United States (Zhang, 2011). In many states there are very few APE teachers that exist, and in the states where an APE specialist is required, that person may be the only APE teacher providing services in their school or district (Wrightslaw, 2016).

Consequently, many APE teachers may feel isolated (Hodge & Akuffo, 2007). It may be a relief for APE teachers to learn that others are experiencing similar struggles and barriers, as well as empowering to learn how other teachers have overcome these issues to become effective service providers. APE teachers often do not have specific professional development available to them, so social media can also be a method to feel connected within the profession and learn of new techniques and best teaching practices.

Due to the various roles of an APE teacher, their reasons for using social media may be unique. First, the professional content required of an APE teacher is broad. The APE teacher needs to be knowledgeable regarding both physical education curricula (e.g., fundamental motor skills, leadup games and activities, sport skills, APE National Standards) and skills associated with special education (e.g., adaptations, behavior management, assessment). Second, many APE teachers are itinerant, serving multiple schools within a district. Itinerant teachers may feel isolated from other professionals as they may not spend extended time at one site. Finally, APE teachers have raised concerns with having little to no professional development opportunities available to them which focuses specifically on APE content (Hodge & Akuffo, 2007). Professional development specifically in APE may be difficult to find, costly, or travel intensive to attend. These factors may contribute to a greater and unique need for APE teachers to use social media for informal professional development purposes (Bates, Phalen, & Moran, 2016; Healy, Block, & Judge, 2014). Some school districts are financially strapped and may not be able to provide adequate funding for attendance to professional development conferences. As a wise APE professor says, “if it’s free, it’s for me!” Social media, while not a panacea, can serve as a cost-effective tool for informal professional development to assist APE teachers to feel connected to others in the profession. Social media can be used to learn new techniques, tools, resources, and connect us in ways that were unfathomable only a decade ago.

### **Promotion Using Social Media**

One innovative approach to promoting a program involves the use of social media, which can be

used to promote the importance of APE and capture a variety of teachable moments that can serve as a rich visual resource of ideas for followers (e.g., students, teachers, other professionals, families, community members). Social media are internet-based platforms that enable people to develop, share, and exchange information (e.g., text, pictures, videos) in virtual communities (Alsobayel, 2016). Professionals can sit in the comfort of their own home and view examples of best teaching practices. Social media users are also able to choose to be active users (i.e., post and comment) or passive users (i.e., view content only).

McNamara, Healy, and Haegle (*in press*) examined social media usage for informal professional development in the area of APE. The most commonly reported reasons for using social media was for networking (74%) and knowledge exchange (66%). The majority of respondents (62%) defined themselves as passive users of social media for informal professional development purposes. Nearly 50% of APE participants checked into their social media accounts 2 to 10 times a day. In regards to which type of social media was preferred, health professionals use Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter respectively (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016).

The purpose of this article will be to demonstrate various ways to promote APE services using social media. More specifically, with regards to using social media this article will detail: (a) how to get started, (b) confidentiality, (c) implementing social media, and (d) specific examples of how APE teachers are using social media to promote their programs.

### **Getting Started**

The first step in the process to developing an APE social media page is to seek permission from the school administrator (e.g., APE coordinator, special education supervisor), as one could have a private social media page and passively take in APE related content without needing any sort of approval. However, when using the site for promotion of a program, it is important for school administrators to know that social media sites are being used, as it is representative of the school or district. After approval, the school may have social media guidelines to follow. For example, social media guidelines from

California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) offer advice on site maintenance, confidential information, copyright issues, and standards of conduct. For instance, it is recommended to have a photo/video release for parent/guardians to sign, letting them know photo/videos of their child may be posted to social media, and that the parent/guardians have the legal right to deny. A photo/video release is also encouraged for university students participating in service learning programs. For an example of a photo/video release visit CSULB social media sites: @LongBeachStateAPE

### **Confidentiality**

Even with parent/guardian consent, it is still advised to blur out student faces when posting to social media. Most cellular phones and computers have built-in photo-editing capabilities for cropping photos or obscuring parts of an image. These tools can be useful when using social media, as it helps remove sensitive information before posting. Applications such as *Insta Emoji Photo Editor* (free; Srichurat, 2013), *Clips* (free; Apple, 2018), and *BlurVideoSpot* (\$.99; Chaparro, 2018) can be used to blur photos and video (see Table 1). Additionally, using a digital watermark to “sign” images helps to make photos more identifiable. A digital watermark allows the audience to locate work from specific social media sites, especially if it gets shared around the Web (see Figure 1). One example of a digital watermark that can be used is the *Watermark Photo: Add Copyright* (free; PSD2Filter Pte Ltd, 2018). Anytime information is posted on social media, be aware and sensitive to the children and parent/guardians involved.

### **Implementing Different Types of Social Media**

For those who are new to social media and upon starting it is advised to begin with only one platform to get an initial feel. Start small and slowly begin to expand to using more social media networks once familiarity has been established.

#### **Facebook.**

Facebook is the most popular social media network worldwide, with approximately 1.23 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2016; Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Manca, & Ranieri, 2016;).

Facebook has embedded-in metrics to measure its impact (e.g., Page Likes, post reach, overall engagement). This can be useful information that tells the administrator which posts were the most meaningful. A few examples of APE Facebook sites to follow include: Adapted PE Specialist, SoCal APE Specialists, and Adapted PE Specialists Preschool Group. These sites have over 1,500 combined followers who frequently post on APE issues and content. Being an active member of these and other social media groups can increase collaboration among APE teachers, knowledge, and awareness of specific teaching strategies and activities, and may further promote specific APE programs (McNamara et al., in press).

#### **Instagram.**

Instagram is used by 71% of Americans in the 18 to 24 years age group (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Instagram also has introduced a feature called Instagram Stories that lets users post photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours. A unique feature of Instagram Stories is that it appears in a bar at the top of the feed. Instagram and Facebook both have a feature to live stream, which simultaneously records and broadcasts in real time. Live stream videos can be used to show viewers unique features (e.g., live event, lecture) that allows for audience engagement, such as real-time commenting. These videos can be saved, archived, and viewed at the watcher’s convenience. Live streaming allows for viewers to become aware of great aspects of an APE program that may otherwise not have an opportunity to be disseminated, while receiving comments/feedback in real time.

#### **Twitter.**

Twitter is exceptional for its use to connect with others in conversation. For example, in APE, the hashtag #APEchatter is used to discuss concerns and respond to questions specific to the field. Other professionals in education use #educhat to discuss different questions. Many associations, such as Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE), are also starting to use these #edchats to have experts field questions at certain times and engage with physical education teachers. Hashtags can also be used to search for materials. For example, video clips and pictures can be posted to show examples of students using visual supports in APE. Any online user

could quickly search a topic hashtag (e.g., #VisualSupport) and find the specific area of interest.

### **Social Media Management**

Social media management is the act of monitoring and participating in social conversations across platforms (e.g., social listening, social analytics, social engagement; Kruse Control Inc., 2016). The social media manager serves as the voice for the program.

#### ***Hootsuite***

For professionals who are new to social media, it is advised to only choose one platform to begin to get a feel for its use. However, if programs are using multiple social media sites, it is suggested to use an application such as *Hootsuite* (Hootsuite Media Inc., 2018) to streamline this process. Hootsuite is a free application for up to three social media accounts. Hootsuite allows the user to upload a photo/video and post to multiple social media pages at once. Thus, the user only has to post once to *Hootsuite* and not independently to all separate social media pages. *Hootsuite* is a free download. To use, click the compose icon (i.e., pencil image) at the bottom center of the application. The next step is to choose pictures, text, video, or links to post. Then, click the down arrow to select which social media pages to post. Finally, click done to submit the post to multiple social media networks.

#### **Bells & Whistles**

Depending on the size of the video, some social media sites (e.g., Facebook) will not allow for photos and video to be simultaneously shared in the same post. One way around this issue is to use an application such as *Pic Collage* (Cardinal Blue Software Inc., 2011) or *Video Collage Maker* (Yaling, 2018). These free applications are also useful to show side-by-side pictures and/or video. Followers can visually see comparisons such as teaching differentiation or students using a task analysis (see Table 2).

### **APE Social Media Examples**

The following are various examples of the different ways APE professionals are using social me-

dia pages to promote their programs. Examples of social media include: (a) university setting, (b) APE teachers at a school site, and (c) national podcasts.

#### **University Social Media**

In the fall of 2017, the California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) APE program launched their social media pages (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). The desire to begin social media pages was to showcase all the positive on-campus service learning opportunities provided for individuals with disabilities at CSULB, serve as a platform for informal professional development, and promotion of the profession. The desire to promote the effective teaching methods, behavior management plans, and visual supports during service learning programs was evident. However, the professors didn't want to post these ideas and information to their personal social media pages because these ideas were the students' and the program's, not their own. Examples of current teaching practices posted to @LongBeachStateAPE include behavior management (e.g., rules, routines, reinforcement contingency, behavior charts), lesson plans with different themes, equipment modifications, and task analysis of skills.

At CSULB, undergraduate students are assigned a social media project. Students create 3 social media accounts of their choice (e.g, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Twitter) and follow 15 organizations or professionals for each chosen network. Then, students reflect (a) why did he/she chose these professionals/organizations, (b) explain new ideas learned from the professional social media networks, and (d) which (if any) social media network/s would he/she continue to use for professional purposes and why. Viewing the way various APE programs are conducted is important as pre-service teachers may complete fieldwork at one APE site and think that all APE programs are delivered in the same manner. However, being itinerant service providers, there are no two programs that are exactly alike. Social media networks can be an effective method to learn about various individuals, APE programs and different methods for delivering services and teaching classes. For example, students can follow a Paralympic athlete on Twitter and then write a reply to them with a Tweet. Or, the APE teacher can start a private Facebook group for parents or APE teachers from a dis-

trict. Teachers can use social media to learn how other programs operate and get new ideas to implement into their own program. It is important for pre-service teachers to have professional resources long after they leave the university classroom.

### **@APE\_Gymmie Instragram**

@APE\_Gymmie on Instagram is a page that was designed specifically for APE teachers around the country to share new lessons and activities from a preschool through secondary setting. Administrators of this social media page are two APE teachers in the Santa Ana Unified School District. [Gymmie, the mascot](#), was discovered 10 years ago at a preschool and since then has always been dressed in the theme for the week (see Table 4). Theme examples include: Frozen, Pirates, Emojis, Moana, and much more! It first started out as a page with pictures of Gymmie and then developed into a page for educators. The site includes pictures and videos of the content with and without students demonstrating the activities. Initiating an Instagram account has been motivating and beneficial as it has encouraged the APE teachers to continue to be creative and learn from other physical education teachers so they can post new activities for their followers. The goal for the Instagram page is to continue to post and share activities every month and provide more activities from elementary and secondary sites.

### **Podcast**

The purpose of the “What’s New in APE?” podcast is to provide insight into the profession of APE through interviews with a variety of APE professionals (e.g., teachers, parents, special educators, higher education professors). This national podcast and accompanying blog is an attempt to provide an untapped means of easily receiving updates and best practice information with regard to APE. The podcast and blog were originally formed when the creator was listening to some podcasts and found none existed dedicated to the field of APE. Since 2015, the What’s New in APE podcast has developed over 50 episodes on a variety of topics. Within the podcast, there have also been a plethora of renowned experts to discuss various topics specific to APE (e.g., disability specific, leadership, behavior management,

assessment). These panel interviews give listeners an assortment of strategies and ideas that can be practiced in various APE settings. In addition, as of 2018, the podcast and blog have received over 85,000 views. Table 5 provides an overview of the most popular podcasts that have been released.

The accompanying podcast blog includes information and resources that provide APE professionals an assortment of information they can use for advocacy and teaching. One of the biggest take-aways from listeners is that people like to hear that others have gone through something similar as they have, and connecting with others helps them get through the day. There is real sense of community among professionals through the following of the podcast. The short-term goal for the podcast and blog is to continue to record and develop at least one post every month, as well as, to start to collect more information on how people are using the podcasts and why they are motivated to use them. The podcast can be found on iTunes and Stitcher, or you can visit the accompanying blog of the podcast [mrmcnamaras.blogspot.com](http://mrmcnamaras.blogspot.com).

### **Audience**

The different audiences who engage in social media can be surprising. Besides APE teachers, physical education teachers, and other professionals (e.g., special educators, administrators) there is a wide range of other individuals who have accessed the social media platforms mentioned above, such as, pre-service university students and their parents. Furthermore, the parents of children who attend the service learning programs often follow the social media pages, some of which have left positive testimonials. In addition, these social media pages have served as a university recruiting tool for potential APE majors. Another group of individuals benefiting from social media pages are the younger cohort of university pre-service teachers who have yet to enroll in APE specific coursework. Incoming students now have visuals of what to expect when they are enrolled in the courses and teach in the APE program. In general, expanding the audience helps to raise awareness and consequently promote the APE promotion.



## Limitations of Social Media Use

Anecdotally, many learners (especially younger people/undergraduates) seem to prefer social media network learning experiences compared to other mediums (e.g., lectures, readings). However, the literature does not yet exist to determine that either one be preferred in reference to actual learning outcomes (McNamara Podcast #44, 2018). Social media networks are not a panacea for deep learning and should not replace reading books or journal articles. Rather, it can be one effective tool in the APE teacher's tool box. Although many scholars advocate for social media to be used to supplement traditional forms of learning (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2016), the literature on social media has not reached a consensus, especially with regard to professional development and the use of fully-online settings (e.g., Hew & Cheung, 2013).

Furthermore, it is difficult to truly show social media's impact on learning and challenging to determine the level of depth that occurred for each "like." For example, did someone just quickly skim a post and gain little to nothing? Or did he/she ponder the post and retain the knowledge gained from the information provided, such as a quality teaching moment? Moreover, does using technology inherently make you a better teacher?

Additionally, a textbook or journal article allows one to find exactly what he/she may need, rather than having to listen to an entire podcast or scroll through a newsfeed to find the solution he/she may be looking for. Social media can potentially be a 'rabbit hole' of information.

With social media there is also the privilege of access. Not all individuals can afford internet access or devices. In addition, when users follow social media networks, does he/she broaden his/her network, or do individuals follow the same like-minded people? It is important to broaden thinking and be open to challenges from different perspectives.

Finally, social media is limited (in some platforms to 280 characters or less), which may impact the quality of posts. Additionally, not everyone on social media is an expert and may advocate for contraindicated activities or give information that is in compliance with the law. How can we verify that an activity found on social media is appropriate for a particular situation or child? Just because someone has posted on social media, does not make it true or factual. In

addition, just because a teacher saw a new game or activities doesn't mean it should be implemented the next day in class. The activity may not be appropriate for the scope and sequence of the course at that time.

A down-side of social media is that there is no gatekeeper to ensure that content posted is accurate. In contrast, professional journal article submissions go through a review process by experts in the field before being printed. Therefore, it is important to be an educated consumer of information, particularly when garnering content from online sources.

Social media has its benefits, but it is not always an appropriate platform for learning. What social media networks can effectively do is to help promote APE programs, assist with obtaining some forms of informal professional development, and aid in feeling connected within the profession.

## Conclusion

Social media platforms can be a beneficial method to view good teaching practices and consequently help promote the APE profession. Social media can be used to demonstrate best teaching practices such as behavior management (e.g., rules, routines, reinforcement contingency, behavior charts), lesson plans with different thematics, equipment modifications, or task analysis of skills. However, social media should not necessarily be used to replace formal methods of learning, such as textbooks and journal articles. Instead, it should be used to complement topics already learned, rather than as a medium of direct instruction.

Before launching a social media site, be sure to seek permission from a school administrator or your direct supervisor. Anytime information is posted on social media, be aware and sensitive to the children and parent/guardians involved. If reluctant to start a social media page, it is advised to go slow and choose just one platform. After mastering the first page, other platforms can later be added. Part of the APE professionals' role is to educate others, especially administrators, who may not fully understand the profession, feel it is a field that should take a back seat to cognitive goals and is expendable. Being at the forefront of technology may be a way to proactively share the benefits of the APE to administrators, parents, and community members, and consequently promote the profession.

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Table 1

Wireless application technology for social media




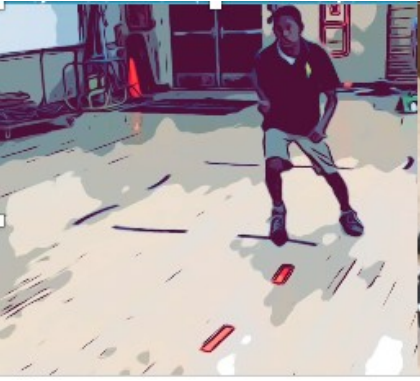


<p><i>Insta Emoji Photo Editor</i></p> 	<p><i>Insta Emoji Photo Editor</i> (Srichurat, 2013) is a photo editing application designed to add emojis to your photos. Zoom in or out of the photo for precise placement of the emoji to protect the identity of the person/s in the photo.</p> <p>Cost: Free</p>	
<p><i>Clips</i></p> 	<p><i>Clips</i> (Apple, 2018) is an application with artistic filters (e.g., Comic Book) that can be used to filter video images so individual characteristics are not identifiable.</p> <p>Cost: Free</p>	
<p><i>BlurVideoSpot</i></p> 	<p><i>The BlurVideoSpot</i> (Chaparro, 2018) application can pixilate any portion of a video by clicking and dragging. The size of the area and type of blur (e.g., pixilation, emoji) can be adjusted.</p> <p>Cost: \$.99</p>	



Figure 1. Using Watermark Photo: Add Copyright to digitally sign photo.



Table 2

Using Pic Collage and Video Collage


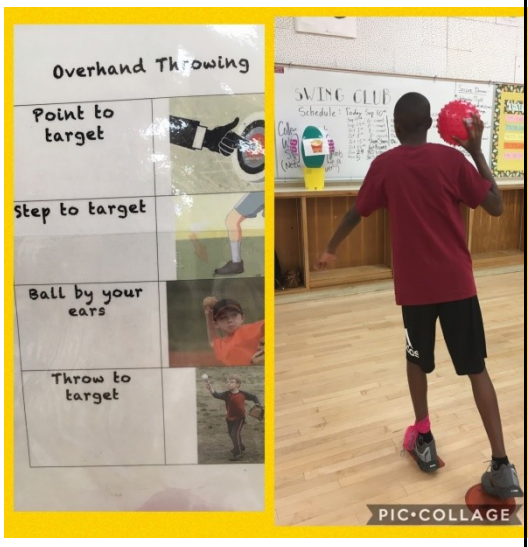
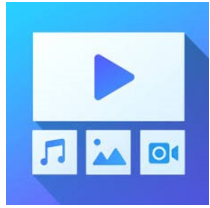

<p><i>Pic Collage</i></p> 	<p>Using <i>Pic Collage</i> (Cardinal Blue Software Inc., 2011) to show overhand throwing task card and side-by-side comparison of student performing the skill.</p> <p>Cost: Free</p>	
<p><i>Video Collage Maker</i></p> 	<p>Use <i>Video Collage Maker</i> (Yaling, 2018) for side-by-side comparison of differentiation for students. Lower functioning student (left) using a punch ball to dribble. Higher functioning student (right) using a regulation basketball to stationary dribble.</p>	

Table 3

Examples of behavior management, do-it-yourself equipment, and visual supports posted to social media for CSULB's APE program

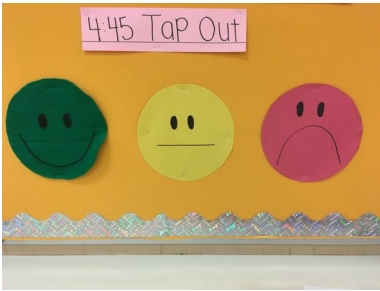


	<p>Tap in/Tap out board for teaching personal and social responsibility.</p>
	<p>Fall monster themed bowling pins made from paper towel rolls covered in tissue paper.</p>
	<p>Draw a playing card. Depending on suit drawn (i.e., club, spade, diamond, heart) perform assigned fitness activity. Number of repetitions will be associated with number on the card.</p>

Table 4

Examples of @APE\_Gymmie on Instagram



	
Gymmie, the APE mascot, at Santa Ana School District.	Example of activity ideas (i.e., obstacle course, balance beams, tossing) for a thematic St. Patrick's Day lesson.



Table 5

Overview of most popular podcast episodes

<b>Podcast Title</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b># of Episodes</b>	<b># of total views</b>	<b># of average views</b>	<b>Date published</b>
What's New in APE: Episode 1	Focused on guest's views on APE, strategies to communicate, and common obstacles.	1	2692	2692	2015
Behavior Management	Focused on behavior management, setting expectations, and sensory integration needs.	2	4890	2445	2016
ExerciseBuddy and Autism Podcast	Discuss the APE app ExerciseBuddy and the effectiveness of the ExerciseBuddy with children with autism spectrum disorder.	1	2352	2352	2015
Americans with Disabilities Act: A Perspective	Discuss the law and how it came to be, and guest's perspective of how the law affected his life, as a person with a disability.	1	2048	2048	2016
Interview with National APE Teacher of the Year	Discuss how guest became an APE teacher, how the national APE consortium benefits APE teachers, and inclusion.	1	2029	2029	2015
Parent Advocacy for APE	Focused on parent advocacy on APE from a teacher's, parent's, and student's perspective.	2	3699	1849.5	2016
Live Assessment Panel	Live recording from an APE conference focused on assessing students with disabilities in alignment with national PE standards.	3	5486	1828.67	2017

*Note.* # = Number, APE = Adapted physical education, PE = Physical education, PD = Professional Development, TGMD = Test of Gross Motor Development, IEP = Individualized education program.