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A review of girls’ experiences during sport education

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A review of girls’ experiences during sport education.

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(Department of Kinesiology, Auburn University, USA)

Abstract

This paper presents a literature-based discussion of girls’ participation during physical education lessons in the USA conducted using the Sport Education model developed by Daryl Seidentop (see Seidentop, 1994). First, a review of the literature about girls’ experiences within traditional physical education is provided and following a short historical account of the model itself. Then paper focuses more specifically on the similarities and differences of the PE experience when girls participate in “seasons” of Sport Education (Seidentop, 1994). A conclusion drawn from this review of literature is that Sport Education has the potential to involve girls in physical education more meaningfully who may have previously been disinterested or disengaged from that kind of educational experience.

NB: A sport education season relates to an instructional unit with physical education with identified outcomes for learning through sport’s experience.

Scenario

It is the beginning of the lesson in the 9th grade and Viktoria, a slightly overweight girl in a Russian physical education class, lines up for the roll call. The student roll is taken, lesson objectives are explained and the teacher gives the command for a warm up run around the gym. Everyone follows directions and begins the customary jog. As soon as the physical education teacher turns away, Viktoria opens a closet door that is located at the side of the gymnasium and quickly ducks into it shutting the door behind her. The class proceeds without further incident. Just before the end of the class the closet door opens and Viktoria hastily emerges and swiftly joins others for a cool-down. Another physical education lesson is completed.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to paper is to provide a retrospective view of girls’ experiences in PE within the Sport Education model as reported in peer reviewed literature. This study is guided by Cooper’s (1998) and Pan’s (2008) recommendations for synthesizing research which include stage characteristic
problem formulation, collection, evaluation, analysis and interpretation of data and public presentation.

**Method of inquiry**

Peer-reviewed journal articles and peer-reviewed presentations formed the basis of this review. Publications were selected from 1982 to 2009 using the descriptors of “sport education” and “girls” as key terms in data base searches. A software programme that allows simultaneous searches in multiple databases called Extreme Search was used to locate the articles and presentation report. The initial search resulted in 1175 hits in eleven databases (see Table 1). Researchers reviewed the literature and identified the studies that used Sport Education as a curriculum model and in which girls were participants. From these initial searches further journal articles were obtained through citations and references and subsequently full text versions of all identified studies were sought after. In few cases when only abstracts were available in the database the authors were contacted and asked to provide full text articles and/or presentations. We were able to obtain all articles and presentations that were identified by our search terms, although several articles were written in languages other than English. Subsequently, these articles were translated into English.

**Table 1. Extreme search results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Number of Hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC (EBSCO : Online)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Full Text</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Collection</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Source: Nursing/Academic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Research at the University of Alabama</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Library Complete</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PubMed</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded Academic ASAP</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPORTDiscus with Full Text</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Search Premier</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1175</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Girls’ experiences in physical education**

Previous research suggests that girls may have become a population that is marginalized and alienated in physical education classes (Chepyator-Thomson and Ennis, 1997; Griffin, 1985, 1993; Nilges, 1998). Some girls tend to dislike competition and an overly competitive environment while others feel threatened and incompetent in some examples (Carlson, 1995; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2002). Moreover, in physical education classes girls have fewer opportunities to respond to
questions and generally have lower participation rates than boys (Griffin, 1984). It is not surprising that many girls perceived their physical education classes to be more for boys (Solmon, 1997) and subsequently may have felt unlikely to succeed in their physical education (Solmon, Lee, Belche, Harrison and Wells, 2003).

Griffin (1984) examined girls’ participation patterns in co-educational classes and found that the majority of girls exhibited one of four non-assertive behaviour types: giving up, giving away, hanging back, and acquiescing. While non-assertive behaviour exhibited by the majority of girls may be typical, there is some evidence that suggests some middle-school girls enjoy competition and look forward to their physical education classes (Constantinou, Manson and Silverman, 2009). The girls in this recent study attributed their enjoyment of physical education classes to the competitive atmosphere created in the gymnasium. However in general, girls have typically reported being more interested in cooperative activities such as fitness and dance (Couturier, Chepko, and Coughlin, 2007).

Instances of alienation and marginalisation of girls in physical education classes described in the American pedagogy literature are not a unique occurrence and undoubtedly this trend contributes to girls’ negative perceptions of physical education. As an example, a majority of Russian middle and high school girls report feeling either “indifferent to the subject of physical education” (56.6%) or “having a negative view of physical education” (11.8%) (Kardyalis and Zuoziene, 1999). As evidenced by a number of studies in other countries, girls seem to have a more negative attitude toward physical education than boys (Anderssen, 1993 (in Norway); Arabaci, 2009 (in Turkey); Tannehill, Romar, O’Sullivan, England, and Rosenberg, 1994 (in USA)). For example, Arabaci (2009) investigated attitudes toward physical education and class preferences of Turkish secondary and high school students. While attitudes towards physical education change according to gender and age in Turkey the findings based on examining 1240 Turkish students were typical of previous research in other countries, with girls demonstrating significantly more negative attitudes towards physical education than boys (Arabaci, 2009). This has prompted a recommendation to the Turkish Ministry of National Education to make changes in their physical education curriculum in order to improve the attitudes of girls towards physical education.

A multi-activity approach to physical education continues to be prominent in the USA even though girls’ marginalization and alienation is still widely reported (Nilges, 1998; Hastie, 1998). In fact, Ennis (1999: 32) argues that “no curriculum in physical education has been as effective in constraining opportunities and alienating girls as that found in co-educational, multi-activity sport classes”. A number of curriculum models have been developed to address inequity and unfairness issues in
physical education. Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (Hellison, 1995), Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994) and Sport for Peace (Ennis, 1999) are a few examples of such models. For the purposes of this article Sport Education is focused upon.

The Sport Education model

The Sport Education curriculum and instruction model was designed to provide positive sporting experiences for children and youth in school physical education (Siedentop, Hastie, and van der Mars, 2004). The main objective of Sport Education is to provide an authentic approach to teaching sport by encompassing its essential characteristics: (1) seasons, (2) constant team affiliation, (3) formal competition interspersed with practices, (4) culminating event, (5) keeping statistics and records, and (6) festivity (Siedentop, et al, 2004). It is important to note that this is accomplished during regular physical education classes. Sport Education has been described as student-centred learning (Alexander, Taggart and Luckman, 1998) as small learning groups, called teams, are formed for the duration of the unit.

The idea of Sport Education was first revealed in 1982 at the Commonwealth Games Conference in Brisbane, Australia and the major conceptual underpinnings of Sport Education were rooted in “play education” curriculum theory (Jewett, 1989). According to his own recollection as the founder of the Sport Education model, Darryl Siedentop, the first public presentation of what the Sport Education model looked like occurred in 1985 during the Adelphi AISEP (International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education) Congress (Siedentop, 2002).

Even though, that currently Sport Education is considered throughout the world to be a viable curriculum and instruction model for teaching physical education, the first presentation of the model did not go smoothly drawing comments that it was a version of “rolling out the ball” (Siedentop, 2002). An historical timeline of the Sport Education model is presented in Table 2 which sketches the development of the Sport Education approach to teaching physical education.

Table 2. Historical timeline of the Sport Education model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Darryl Siedentop defends doctoral (P.E.D.) dissertation titled “Theory for programs of physical education in the schools” focused on play education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
late 1970 - early 1980 Siedentop together with doctoral students perform studies on teacher effectiveness and supervision. The main outcome relevant to Sport Education is the recognition that even effective practices in physical education fail to challenge and excite students.

1982 The idea of Sport Education is first revealed during Siedentop’s keynote address at the Commonwealth Games Conference in Brisbane, Australia.

1983 Workshop “Sport Education Curriculum and Instruction Model” is conducted at Ohio State. Consequently, Chris Bell, a local physical education teacher, implements the model choosing gymnastics and soccer as first seasons resulting in a first field test.

1985 First public presentation of the practical application of the model is made during the International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education (AIESEP) World Congress held in Adelphi. It draws mixed reviews with comments ranging from “rolling out the ball” to more positive reactions.

1986 First national exposure of the model by being included as an alternative curriculum model in a textbook by D. Siedentop - “Physical education: Teaching and curriculum strategies for grades 5–12”.

1986-1990 Siedentop conducts 10 Sport Education workshops at state and regional conferences with little visible results.

1990 Bevan Grant, University of Otago in New Zealand, applies and secures a grant from the Hillary Commission to support a national trial of Sport Education in the 10th grade in New Zealand high schools. The trial, headed by Bevan Grant and Peter Sharp of the Hillary Commission, is reported as a clear success (Grant, 1992).

1992 Bevan Grant reports in Quest about the success of Sport Education in New Zealand trial (Grant, 1992).


1993 Sport Education Symposium was held during AHPERD Convention in Washington, DC.

1993 State-level trials begin in high schools in Western Australia, led by Andrew Taggart and Ken Alexander, as one project of the Sport and Physical Education Research Centre (SPARC).


1994-1998 Australian Sports Commission’s Aussie Sport Unit funds a national project involving 53 teachers, the Sport Education in Physical Education Project (SEPEP). This initiative results in production of highly effective teacher materials and provokes the beginnings of a genuine research base for the model (Alexander, et al., 1998; Carlson, 1995; Carlson and Hastie, 1997;

1995  National Sport Education conference is held in Perth, Western Australia. The entire summer issue of the ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal is devoted to Sport Education in Australian physical education.

1998  A two-part series on Sport Education is published in Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

1998  Sport Education conference is held at Loughborough University in England providing catalyst for introduction of Sport Education in British schools.


2004-2005  There is enough completed research about the model to warrant review studies and publish summaries of findings (Wallhead and O’Sullivan, 2005; Curtner-Smith and Sofo, 2004).

2004-2006  Sport Education is spreading globally to non-Western countries including Korea (Kim, et al., 2006), Hong Kong (Chan and Cruz, 2006), and Russia (Hastie and Sinelnikov, 2006).

Under contract  The third edition of the Sport Education book is contracted by Human Kinetics from Siedentop, Hastie and van der Mars.

This table indicates that a growing number of studies using Sport Education globally including Australia (Alexander, et al., 1998), New Zealand (Grant, 1992), the United States (Hastie, 1998), the United Kingdom and Ireland (Kinchin, Quill and Clarke, 2002; Wallhead and Ntoumanis, 2004), and more recently in Korea (Kim, Penney, Cho and Choi, 2006), Hong Kong (Chan and Cruz, 2006), and in Russia (Hastie and Sinelnikov, 2006; Sinelnikov and Hastie, 2008). Recent summaries of research on Sport Education presented by Wallhead and O’Sullivan (2005) and Curtner-Smith and Sofo (2004) demonstrate that Sport Education is particularly effective in two areas. These are (i) facilitating student engagement within student-centred learning tasks of the curriculum, and (ii) promoting personal and social development in the form of student responsibility, cooperation and trust skills. Therefore, the discussion now turns to how sport education may make a positive contribution to girls’ experiences of physical education.

**Girls’ experiences during sport education**

The earliest research on Sport Education did not delineate results specifically by gender. The first studies to focus on girls’ experiences during Sport Education examined the potential of gender inclusiveness within the model (Curnow and Mcdonald, 2005) and participation rates and perception of PE by girls (Hastie, 1998). The latter study which was carried out in the United States reported upon 35 girls’ experiences within the unit “taking particular note of the potential for many
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girls to be marginalised during competitive sport settings” (Hastie, 1998: 160). At the end of the 20-lesson Sport Education season in this study, girls reported enjoyment from playing in co-educational teams and having an increased sense of responsibility for personal learning within the unit. In addition, girls received an equal amount playing time as boys, even though boys tended to dominate the decision making process and often assume the power roles such as captain or referee (Hastie, 1998). Harsoulas-Covin and Collier (2005) reported that those females who did take on leadership roles in Sport Education, seasons tended to focus on the need to be inclusive and promote the value of each person’s feelings rather than constructing a winning team.

During another Sport Education unit conducted in Irish primary school, some coeducational teams seemed to embrace gender differences and attempted to reconcile potential gender segregation (MacPhail, Gorely, Kirk, and Kinchin, 2008). For example, one of the participants in that study, Sarah, commented:

\[\text{We always made sure when we were practicing... with our teams we would not have all the boys playing against all the girls as that's not really fair. Boys have certain things that they can do better and girls have certain things they can do better, and you need a bit of both on each team (MacPhail et al, 2008: 351).}\]

Moreover, boys and girls had to discover various ways of reaching common ground and moving toward a common goal (Sinelnikov and Hastie, 2008). For example, as Tanya, a student from a Russian secondary school where a Sport Education season was being facilitated said during an interview, “We had to figure out how everyone could agree. We used to argue in the beginning, but now it does not take us much time to decide” (Sinelnikov and Hastie, 2008: 213).

Team affiliation, as one of the key features of the Sport Education model, has also been reported as an important contributor to girls’ enjoyment of Sport Education. As a case in point, Maxine, a female student who participated in a Sport Education unit described by MacPhail et al (2008: 350), commented, “I enjoy the team spirit that's created when you’re playing a team, and I like playing in teams more than individually, so I quite like this”. Another student from the same unit Laura noted how, “... it [the team] made you feel part of it. It made you feel nice” (MacPhail et al 2008: 350). Other benefits for female students included increased opportunities for participation, high levels of peer support and increased success in skill and social development, responsibility, and decision making (Hastie, 1998; Sinelnikov and Hastie, 2006).

Girls appreciated longer units of activity in Sport Education for the increased opportunity to participate (Sinelnikov and Hastie, 2006), commenting on their
perceived improvement, “… you got better at it because you got to keep on playing and you got to work as a team together” (MacPhail et al. 2008). Girls also recognized that “playing longer also helped the teams that did not have many good players, because they improved more” (Hastie, 1998: 166).

**Conclusion**

To recall the scenario presented at the beginning of this paper with a girl hiding in the closet to avoid taking part in physical education, on day three of the Sport Education unit, Viktoria without any prompting became engaged in the season. When asked about her participation she replied that not only did it look like fun, but she had her own responsibilities and she could do those well (she was nominated to be a statistician by her teammates). She also felt that she was needed by others and without her participation the team was at disadvantage. We are not claiming the superiority of Sport Education over any other type of instruction, but if taught properly, Sport Education has the potential to involve students who may previously have been disinterested, disengaged, and perhaps marginalized by traditional physical education.

**References**


Sinelnikov, O. and Hastie, P. (July, 2006). Russian high school girls’ perceptions of participation in Sport Education. 2006 AISEP World Congress, International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education, Jyvaskyla, Finland.


JQRSS: Acknowledgement Footnote

1. Authors Reflective Comment: I would like to thank my mentor and advisor Peter Hastie for all the support and guidance he has given me in the past several years. The critical conversations and discussions generated in the writing and review process have contributed to the development of a new line of inquiry for me that is empowering pupils and their voices in physical education.

2. Author Profile: Oleg has recently completed transition from PhD student (Auburn University) to faculty (The University of Alabama). His research interests include studies of curriculum and instructional models, motivational climate in physical education, and integrating technology into physical education.

3. Dear reader, if this article has stimulated your thoughts and you wish to find out more about this topic the authors can be contacted on: Oleg Sinelnikov: osinelnikov@bamaed.ua.edu, and Peter Hastie: hastipe@auburn.edu.