

Key Features of the Sport Education Model

Siedentop D., Hastie P. and Van Der Mars H. (2011)
Complete Guide to Sport Education (2nd Edition).
Leeds. Human Kinetics

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any refn).*

Sport Education is a curriculum and instruction model designed to provide students with authentic experiences that are thorough and enjoyable and that contribute to their desire to become and stay physically active throughout their lives. The Sport Education model was developed in the early 1990s. The features of the model that distinguish it from traditional approaches to teaching physical education are as follows:

1. Units, or seasons, are longer than typical physical education units. Elementary seasons typically last from 10 to 12 class sessions whereas middle and high school seasons typically last from 18 to 20 class sessions.
2. Students are organized into mixed-ability teams at the start of a season and maintain their affiliation throughout the season. Every effort is made to ensure that teams are as equal as possible in relation to the activity for the season.
3. Students on each team learn multiple roles. The exact roles for each season change depending on the activity. In addition to each student being a player, typical roles for sport seasons are coach, equipment manager, referee, scorekeeper, and statistician. Other roles would be used for other activities (see pages 123-126).
4. Activities are typically modified so that all students can learn and be successful. Games are often small sided compared with the parent form of the game (e.g., 3v3 soccer, 2v2 volleyball).
5. Teams are gradually introduced to the activity for the season, focusing on the techniques and tactics needed to perform adequately in the activity.
6. The season typically consists of a series of competitions; for instance, a soccer season might start with 1v1 competitions, then 2v2, and finish with a 4v4 final competition. Dance or weightlifting seasons would start with easier dances and lifts and move toward more difficult dances and lifts.


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Following the New Zealand and Australian trials, Sport Education continued to spread throughout the world, with particular interest shown in England, Japan, and South Korea, where the model is now used routinely in many schools. More than 50 published research studies have continued to show positive outcomes for both students and teachers (Kinchin, 2006; Penney, Clarke, Quill, & Kinchin, 2005).

It is important to understand that the use of the term *sport* in Sport Education is best represented by the international movement known worldwide as Sport for All, which developed after the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published the *International Charter of Physical Education and Sport* in 1978. This movement recognizes many forms of physical activity as sport. Thus, activities for fitness and pleasure, such as dancing, outdoor pursuits, orienteering, and cycling, fall within the Sport for All movement. Table 1.1 shows the range of activities that have been done using the Sport Education model.

A major goal of Sport Education is for students to become competent in an activity that is thoroughly enjoyable and gain confidence in performing in the activity throughout the duration of the season, thus motivating them to continue to learn and improve, thus increasing the chances that they will seek opportunities to participate in their discretionary time. It is our conviction that this goal is less likely to be achieved in the typical format for school physical education with short units in which the parent forms of games are used for competitions (e.g., 5v5 basketball, 6v6 volleyball).

The longer season used in Sport Education provides sufficient time for students to move beyond the introductory phase of learning an activity and develop sufficient skill and understanding such that the activity becomes fun for them. Figure 1.2 shows the format for a 21-lesson season in team handball as well as the team roles and the degree to which festivity contributes to student enthusiasm.

Much of the meaning in sport, dance, and other forms of physical activity comes from the affiliation developed within teams. Although many teachers who use Sport Education create teams for each new season with the aim of ensuring even competition, some elementary programs (Darnell, 1994) create teams that stay together for

Table 1.1 Completed Sport Education Seasons

Sport	Sport Education seasons
Aquatics	Water polo, swimming, diving
Bat-and-ball	Baseball, cricket, softball
Boules and bowling	Ten-pin bowling, bocce
Dance	Dance by the decades, folk dance, aerobic dance
Skirmish	Paintball
Flying disk sports	Ultimate Frisbee
Football	Australian rules, American, rugby, soccer
Gymnastics	Artistic gymnastics, gymnastics, rope jumping
Handball	Basketball, team handball, foursquare, volleyball
Hockey	Field hockey, floor hockey
Mixed discipline	Biathlon
Adventure	Orienteering, bicycle safety
Weight training	Girls' weightlifting
Target sports	Archery, golf

Girls and boys who have experienced a well-done Sport Education program from 4th through 12th grades should be reasonably well skilled in a variety of sport, dance, and fitness activities; more likely to become and stay involved in physical activities during discretionary time; able to differentiate between good and bad sport practices whether in youth sport, school sport, or community sport; and more likely to become engaged with local sport organizations as adults to ensure that child and youth sport programs are designed to enhance the well-being of those participating. Thus, our goals for Sport Education are to educate players in the fullest sense and to help them develop as competent, literate, and enthusiastic sportspersons.

A *competent* sportsperson has developed sufficient skill to participate in games and activities satisfactorily, understands and can execute strategies appropriate to the complexity of the activity, and is a knowledgeable game player. Through Sport Education, students learn to be comfortable and competent performing in increasingly complex forms of sport, dance, and fitness activities. They grow in their abilities and confidence by gradually being introduced to appropriate techniques and tactics for the activity and by having ample time to improve through practices and competitions.

A *literate* sportsperson understands and values the rules, rituals, and traditions of sports and other physical activities and has learned to distinguish between good and bad practices within those activities, whether in children's sport, youth sport, school sport, or professional sport. A literate sportsperson is both a more able participant and a more discerning consumer as spectator or fan. Becoming literate about sport practices and others forms of physical activity is a prerequisite to ensuring that sport and activity programs for children and adolescents are educationally sound and contribute to a safer, saner sport and activity culture.

An *enthusiastic* sportsperson behaves in ways that preserve, protect, and enhance sport culture, whether it is a local youth sport and physical activity culture, a school sport and physical activity culture, or a community sport and physical activity culture. Enthusiastic sportspersons want to participate because they have come to value the experiences and enjoyment derived from participation. They have developed a strong sense of self-efficacy, which is a major factor in helping people to become and stay physically active throughout their lives. We would expect that students who have experienced a physical education program using the Sport Education model would be more likely to become volunteers in child and youth sport programs and to take an active role in seeing that sport and physical activity programs are widely available within their communities.

These goals are ambitious. They not only embrace the Sport Education of children and young people but also can have profound meaning for the health and vitality of the general sport and activity culture of communities, regions, and countries.

SPORT EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

Long-term goals are realized through regular and consistent achievement of short-term goals. Sport Education objectives are achieved through the experiences of students during their participation in Sport Education seasons throughout the school year. The following objectives would be pursued during each Sport Education season.

- *Develop sport-specific techniques and fitness.* To play volleyball well, students must learn to pass, set, spike, dig, and block. We refer to these actions as **techniques** (Lauder, 2001). To play volleyball well, students also must be able to move quickly, jump, and have a certain level of stamina. We refer to this as **activity-specific fitness**. For example, the techniques and fitness needed to play soccer are different than those needed for volleyball and different still from those needed for an activity



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Students learning the game using the parent form of that sector get few opportunities to practice fielding, throwing, batting, and softball tactics. In this text you will learn ways of teaching softball skills and tactics in smaller sector spaces so that you can multiply your students' opportunities to practice the skill and tactics and to produce faster-paced contests.

■ *Share planning and administration of sport experiences.* In Sport Education, students learn a variety of roles other than performer, including coach, manager, referee, judge, statistician, trainer, and publicist. The roles team members take on will increase with their experience participating in the Sport Education model. In middle and high schools, teachers often create a sports board with appointed or elected student members. The sports board plans the season and also adjudicates differences that might arise between or within teams. This typically produces two outcomes: ownership and empowerment. Students develop and show a sense of ownership for the success of their own experience and that of their classmates. Students who are empowered for the responsibilities of developing and implementing a Sport Education season take tasks more seriously and are more likely to be accountable for the success of the season. In too many physical education programs, the only responsibilities students have are to obey class rules and do what the teacher tells them to do.

“What impressed me most was when I asked the captains to come up with a drill, and they went home and made them up for their teams. As a result, we have a drill named after one child, called the *Ricky drill*, because it was such a great drill. Now every team does it.”

Middle school physical education teacher, United States

■ *Provide responsible leadership.* For a Sport Education season to be successful, students must provide leadership within their teams; thus, leadership becomes an important objective. The student roles of coach and manager are particularly important. Each coach works with teammates to decide what team members will participate at various levels of the competition, to supervise team practices, and to resolve any conflicts that might arise within the team. Managers make sure that equipment is in the right place at the right time and that team members who are referees and scorekeepers get to the right competition venue at the right time to perform as a duty team. Not every student will be a coach or manager each season, but during the course of a school year, most students will have the opportunity to fulfill these roles. In early Sport Education experiences, teachers start with small leadership tasks and then gradually broaden the roles as students develop leadership skills.

■ *Work effectively with your team to pursue common goals.* Students are members of their team for the duration of a season. In most cases, team membership changes from season to season in order to ensure that teams are as even as possible in terms of the teammates' skills for the particular sport or physical activity. Teams cannot be successful unless each member of the team contributes in the role of player, in duty-team roles, and in whatever role is played within the team (e.g., coach, manager, fitness leader). A major educational benefit of the Sport Education model is that students have to work together to achieve common goals, and they typically achieve that by working hard to fulfill their specific role on the team. Team camaraderie and spirit are promoted when teams create a name, color, and cheer and begin to work together to do as well as possible during the season.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPORT EDUCATION AND YOUTH OR INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORT

Sport Education in school physical education differs markedly from how sport is typically organized and conducted in youth, community, and interscholastic sport programs. In Sport Education, all students participate equally at all points in the season. Sport Education teams have no first string and substitutes; all participants get equal playing time. Students also learn the diverse roles described in the previous section. Sport Education typically uses small-sided teams so that students get considerably more opportunities to learn the techniques and tactics needed to play the game well. The activities are almost always modified to enable students to have success, particularly in the number of players per side and the modification of the activities themselves (e.g., lower nets or baskets, shorter fields). This is what we refer to as *developmentally appropriate involvement*. When activities are played in the parent form, skilled students tend to dominate and other students are much less involved (Siedentop, 1998).

We have had success with elementary soccer seasons that start with a 1v1 competition. To play 1v1 competently, students have to learn dribbling, tackling, shooting, and the defensive tactic of staying between the opponent and the goal. We then move to a 2v2 contest where passing and trapping are added along with tandem defending. A final round of competition might be 4v4 with more sophisticated tactics and the introduction of goalkeeper skills.

We always protect the primary rules of the game while changing the secondary rules. Basketball, for example, is an invasion game emphasizing eye-hand coordination, moving the ball through dribbling and passing, and scoring by shooting. Secondary rules such as the size of the team, size of the court, height of the net, and size of the ball are changed to better fit the developmental capabilities of the students.

Finally, a major difference from other forms of child and youth sport is the diverse roles that students learn and perform in Sport Education. As mentioned, students are not only players but also coaches, managers, referees, scorekeepers, statisticians, and other roles that depend on the activity. For instance, in dance seasons, roles would include music selector, choreographer, and costume designer.

NATURE OF COMPETITION IN SPORT EDUCATION

Competition is fundamental to the sport experience. The term *noncompetitive sport* is a contradiction, but we have all witnessed abuses of young athletes in the name of competition. Some coaches and even some parents try to convince the youngsters that a win-at-all-costs approach is most appropriate. In Sport Education we try to create developmentally appropriate competitions. The evidence of what children and adolescents want from their competitive experiences has been consistent for many years (Siedentop, 2002). Young people want to get better at the sport, to be with friends and make new friends, and to have fun doing it. Winning and losing do not appear to be as important to young participants as they are to some of the adult coaches and parents.

We believe in the value of developmentally appropriate competition in Sport Education. We have learned important lessons from studies of what children enjoy and value when they organize informal player-controlled games (Coakley, 2007). First, they want action, especially action that leads to scoring. Second, they want personal involvement in the action—player-controlled games have no substitutes.



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WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY ABOUT SPORT EDUCATION?

Kinchin (2006) completed one of the most thorough reviews of published research on Sport Education. The specific student outcomes noted in these 50 studies were as follows.

- Students preferred Sport Education over their previous physical education experiences, and students who first experienced Sport Education reported that they hoped their teacher would continue to use the model.
- General increases in student enthusiasm were reported across a variety of Sport Education settings.
- Both boys and girls reported that they worked harder in Sport Education.
- Teachers reported that students had better attendance, were more appropriately dressed for activity, and were less likely to avoid participation.
- Students liked the longer Sport Education seasons because they had more time to learn the activity, more time to play it, and more time to be with teammates.
- Students expressed loyalty to their teams and didn't want to let their teammates down.
- Lower-skilled students reported appreciation for teammates who encouraged and supported their development.
- Lower-skilled students seemed to particularly benefit from their Sport Education experiences.
- Girls tended to gain confidence and be more willing to participate.
- Most students reported that they had improved in terms of developing better techniques and applying tactics.

“ I definitely liked my rookie experience teaching Sport Education. A few weeks into the after-school class I found myself thinking, “What would I be teaching and doing if they weren't preparing for competition?” I really liked the structure and routine that it provided and the kids were very focused and learned a lot.

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Elementary school teacher, United States

GETTING STARTED IN SPORT EDUCATION

The chapters that follow provide ample guidance for teachers to learn various ways of organizing their program using the Sport Education model. You will find that our recommendation for teachers who are new to the model is to plan a basic form of the model and then gradually add to its complexity. We suggest picking an activity that you know well and that your students are likely to enjoy. As with any new approach to curriculum and instruction, it is important that the initial experiences be positive for your students and for you. The online resource includes several planning worksheets to guide you through your first effort. Start small, do it well, and then build on it. That is our advice, which comes from the many teachers we have worked with to initiate a Sport Education approach to their physical education curricula.