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Adapting the Sport Education Model for Children with Disabilities

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If rules and equipment can be adapted to fit students' needs, so can instructional models.

The sport education model (SEM) is a student-centered curriculum and instructional model that aims to provide students with authentic and educationally rich sport experiences in physical education (PE; Siedentop, 1998, 2002; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). This model has recently been referred to as the pedagogical approach to sport education (PASE), because it allows for many curricular variations to be implemented (Bulger, Mohr, Rairigh, & Townsend, 2007; Siedentop, 2002) and provides the opportunity to infuse various concepts not found in traditional teacher-directed learning. For example, fitness concepts using the SEM can be learned through students' collective efforts in the creation of an obstacle course (Sluder, Buchanan, & Snelnikov, 2009).

The SEM originated from Siedentop's doctoral dissertation on the "play education" curriculum theory, with the objective to link collective social life and sound pedagogical practices (Siedentop, 2002). The three goals of the model are for students to become competent, literate, and enthusiastic sportspersons (Siedentop, 1998). The model has six unique features to achieve these goals: (1) seasons, (2) affiliation, (3) formal competition, (4) record keeping, (5) a culminating event, and (6) festivity. Siedentop (1998) described the six characteristics as follows:

1. Seasons are synonymous to PE units; however, they are longer and cover more depth.
2. Students are affiliated to a team (having a team name, colors, cheers, and t-shirts).
3. Students play in formal competitions such as round-robin tournaments and league schedules, with no elimination rounds.
4. Record keeping provides individual and group feedback and can help reevaluate program goals.
5. At the end of the season, there is a culminating event such as a gymnastic show or a basketball championship.
6. End-of-season festivities are created to celebrate values such as individual improvement and fair play.

The six features of the SEM can be modified to help teachers meet student needs (Knop & Pope, 1998; Penney & Clarke, 2005). The SEM can be used with a variety of physical activities such as golf, dance, fitness, gymnastics, orienteering, and bowling (e.g., Graves & Townsend, 2000; Pritchard & McCollum, 2008). A unique aspect of this model is that students learn diverse roles, such as being a coach, captain, scorekeeper, statistician, publicist, fitness trainer, equipment manager, sport-council member, or broadcaster. All students are encouraged to rotate among the various

roles. Each of these roles allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the sport or activity. Learning how to referee a basketball game or how to keep score in a volleyball match, for example, provides a different perspective than simply participating as a player. Children with disabilities, like their peers, can take on many roles in the SEM; however, it is important that the children with disabilities are included in the “playing” part of the activity as well. As described in the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2004) standards, all children should have the opportunity to participate in physical activity; thus children with disabilities should not be given solely nonparticipant roles.

In addition, SEM can help students to develop values associated with these roles. Values, in the SEM context, are defined as a set of positive behaviors and attitudes that students should be taught and be able to transfer to other domains of their life. For example, precision is an important value of the scorekeeper, while being unbiased in reporting is an important value of a broadcaster. However, it is the teacher’s responsibility to teach positive youth development, as it cannot be assumed that students will automatically adopt certain values and skills through a particular model (Holt, 2008). The teacher must thoroughly explain and help to choose the student roles. The teacher must also be well organized, teach the first few skill development lessons, and after these lessons, act as a facilitator. Clarke and Quill (2003) suggested that teachers are able to assess students more easily using the SEM.

Kirk (2006) argued that sport should be an integral part of the PE curriculum. Siedentop’s SEM is one example of how sport can be represented in PE. The SEM is currently implemented in different English-speaking countries and it has gained empirical support in the PE literature (Penney & Clarke, 2005; Wallhead & O’Sullivan, 2005). Thus, positive results have emerged through the use of the SEM in a PE context. For instance, lower and higher skilled students improved on their motor skills related to playing floor hockey over the course of a 22-lesson season with the SEM (Hastie & Trost, 2002). Spittle and Byrne (2009) compared six PE classes to determine whether the SEM influenced the motivation of eighth-grade students. Three classes conformed to SEM criteria and three classes to a traditional teacher-led approach; 115 students completed three questionnaires during the first and last week of the 10-week program (SEM) and five-week program (traditional teacher-led). (It is to be noted that SEM seasons are typically two to three times longer than typical PE units.) The main finding was that traditional teacher-led classes decreased intrinsic motivation in the students while SEM maintained existing levels of intrinsic motivation. Spittle and Byrne suggested that the motivational climate influenced the participants in the SEM because it was more mastery oriented than the traditional curriculum.

Several authors have suggested that the SEM could increase opportunities for girls, youths who are marginalized, and lower-skilled students to engage in physical activity (Clarke &



All photos by Cindy Presse

Two children practice ramp bowling.

Quill, 2003; Hastie, 1998; Penney & Clarke, 2005; Pill, 2008; Siedentop, 2002). Unfortunately, none of these articles give a thorough explanation on how these increased opportunities can be accomplished. While there is little discussion about how to teach students with disabilities through the SEM, the articles do illustrate a need to explore the potential of the SEM for inclusive PE programs. A recent study explored the effects of the SEM on youths (*M* age = 14.75) with visual impairments (Fittipaldi-Wert, Brock, Hastie, Arnold, & Guarino, 2009). The participants had positive perceptions overall of the whole sport experience and reported an increased perception of their skill level, a sense of empowerment, and motivation to participate in the activity.

Sport is an integral part of society’s cultural and social practices (Fitzgerald, 2009). Perceived benefits of sport participation for students with disabilities include social, educational, and community involvement leading to an enhanced quality of life (Block, 2007; DePauw, 2009). As a result, it is important for PE teachers to decide how to include students with disabilities in an SEM program. Furthermore, disability sports can be introduced in a PE class through the use of the SEM. Students with and without disabilities may be introduced to inclusive sports such as goalball, beep baseball, sit volleyball, wheelchair basketball, boccia, ramp bowling, and wheelchair rugby. Thus, the purpose of this article is to present suggestions on how to provide accommodations for children with disabilities within the SEM approach in a PE program. Specifically, this article gives examples of how to adapt the different roles associated with the SEM to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Player

The role of the player, an active participant on a team, is most important. Students learn how to be a team member by learning the skills and tactics needed to be successful in the activity, how to play fairly, how to support other teammates, and how to demonstrate respect for the opposing team and officials. If competition is the basis for a grade, then the play of lower-skilled students—including students with disabilities—is just as important as the play of higher-skilled students to the team’s overall success (Siedentop,

Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004). However, “low-impact” and “high-impact” modifications to rules and equipment may need to be created in order to level the playing field and allow students with disabilities to contribute to the success of the team. Fortunately, the role of player in the SEM can usually be modified for students with disabilities. Low-impact modifications allow for students with disabilities to be more successful and mainly affect the player with a disability, not the entire game and players without disabilities. An example of such a modification is to allow a child with a visual impairment who is a player in a volleyball match to catch the ball when it comes toward him or her. He or she then passes the ball to another player who uses an underhand serve to pass the ball to another teammate or over the net. An extra player can be added to make sure no one bumps into the player with the visual impairment and, if needed, the team can be allowed an extra touch when this player is involved in the point. A few other examples of low-impact modifications include allowing a player who uses a wheelchair a free pass to a teammate in soccer or a free shot at a lower basket in a basketball game, or having an extra player assist a teammate with autism or an intellectual disability around the court or field.

High-impact modifications affect all participants to a greater degree and may need to be implemented for players with more severe disabilities if simple changes do not work. Since these high-impact modifications will affect everyone involved in the game, students fulfilling the role of coach, referee, and team captain should work together to make the modifications. A student with a wheelchair who cannot successfully use a regulation-size volleyball might be able to participate in a game using a beach ball and a lower net. Clearly, this type of modification would change the game for all players. However, such modifications can be made for

the first five points of a volleyball match when this student is playing, and then a regulation-size ball and regulation-height net can be used when the player is subbed out. Modifications to sports or activities using the SEM may initially seem like a daunting task, but there are numerous resources available that demonstrate possible modifications to a variety of team, dual, and individual sports (e.g., Block, 2007; Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 2009; Mohr, Townsend, & Bulger, 2001; Siedentop et al., 2004).

It is also important to solicit input and support from all students in the class when considering modifications to accommodate students with disabilities, and to align them with the child’s individualized education program (IEP; Block, 2007). Student participation in the process of making adjustments will increase student “buy in,” thus preventing teams that have students with disabilities from feeling like their team is at a disadvantage. It is also important to ask for input from the student with a disability. This allows the student to make suggestions that he or she believes will be suitable to his or her ability. Giving students choices is a key determinant for their intrinsic motivation (Causgrove-Dunn & Goodwin, 2008), which is a construct studied in the SEM (e.g., Spittle & Byrne, 2009; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). Choice may empower students with a disability to play a more active role in their self-determination (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000).

A time-saving option in planning modifications within the SEM would be to list generic modifications to a variety of sports for different disabilities. These modifications could be distributed to physical educators within a school or district. When a teacher adopts specific modifications for a unit, the modifications should be printed and posted in the gymnasium for all students to see. Tables 1, 2, and 3 give examples of modifications for basketball and volleyball.

Table 1. Modifications for Basketball

Modifications	Intent of the Modification
Lower basket, larger target, larger ball	Reduces the distance of the target, increases size of target, reduces weight of object to allow for more success
Change the rules of scoring for all players or just for student with disability (e.g., player with disability must hit the backboard to score one point; players without disabilities must score in the typical fashion)	Allows students without disabilities to score a basket as in the game of basketball, while affording the student with a disability the opportunity to have more success at scoring
Change offensive and defensive rules (e.g., add more players, do not allow guarding, allow “free” throw-ins, etc.)	Makes scoring easier, makes defending fair, increases game involvement of all students
Change the dimensions of the court	Allows for student with less cardiovascular endurance a chance to be successful

Table 2. Volleyball Modifications for Students with Visual Impairments, Intellectual Disabilities, or Autism

Skill	Visual Impairments	Intellectual Disabilities or Autism
Forearm Pass and Overhead Set	Use brightly colored balls; use balls with bells inside; allow a peer to assist; allow a paraprofessional to assist; suspend ball for student to contact; use a lighter ball such as a beach ball or volleyball trainer; allow peers to use verbal cueing to indicate the direction of the net.	Use a larger ball; allow student to toss and catch ball instead of forearm pass or overhead set; allow a peer to assist; allow a paraprofessional to assist; suspend ball for student to contact; use a lighter ball such as a beach ball or volleyball trainer.
Serve	Use brightly colored balls; use a bigger ball; allow student to serve ball off of a batting tee; move the serving line up closer to the net; allow peers to assist; use a serve helper; use a sound device to indicate the location of the net.	Use a bigger ball; allow student to serve ball off of a batting tee; move the serving line up closer to the net; lower the net; allow peers to assist; use a serve helper; allow student to throw ball over net.
Game Play	Use rope taped to the floor to mark boundaries of court; create zones for players to stay in and have a peer assist the student with a visual impairment within his or her zone; modify rules of the game such as allowing an extra hit or allowing the ball to hit the floor once; use smaller area as the court; lower the net; allow a peer to assist.	Create zones for players to stay in; modify rules of the game such as allowing an extra hit or allowing the ball to hit the floor once; use smaller court; lower the net; allow a peer to assist; create a rule that the person with an intellectual disability or autism must contact the ball at least once before it goes over the net; allow multiple hits on one side (more than three).

Table 3. Volleyball Modifications for Students with Physical Disabilities

Skill	Persons with Good Upper-Body Control	Persons with Compromised Upper-Body Control
Forearm Pass and Overhead Set	Use a larger ball; use a lighter ball such as a beach ball or volleyball trainer; allow student to throw and catch instead of forearm pass or overhead set; allow a peer to assist; modify court boundaries to shorten distance to net.	Use a larger and lighter ball such as a beach ball or volleyball trainer; allow student to push ball down a ramp and then have a peer pick up the ball and send it to a teammate or send it over the net; modify court boundaries to shorten distance to net; lower the net; have student use a switch activation system to propel ball to a peer.
Serve	Use a bigger ball; use a lighter ball such as a volleyball trainer; move the serving line up closer to the net; lower the net; allow peers to assist; use a serve helper; allow student to throw ball over the net.	Use a bigger and lighter ball such as a beach ball or volleyball trainer; move the serving line up closer to the net; lower the net; allow peers to assist; use a serve helper; allow student to propel ball using a switch activation system.
Game Play	Create zones for players to stay in; modify rules of the game, such as allowing an extra hit or allowing the ball to hit the floor once; use smaller court; lower the net; allow a peer to assist; allow multiple hits on one side (more than three).	Create zones for players to stay in; modify rules of the game, such as allowing an extra hit, allowing the ball to hit the floor once, or allowing student with disability to use a switch activation system; reduce court boundaries; allow a peer to assist; allow multiple hits on one side (more than three).



In an inclusive basketball game (above), the children with disabilities have alternative scoring options, a pin and a lower net. Because the child with the walker (left) cannot throw the ball, she may knock the pin down to score.

Coach

The responsibilities of the coach are to provide leadership for the team (Siedentop et al., 2004). This includes, but is not limited to, conducting practice for skills and game tactics, helping to make decisions about lineups and substitutions, and reporting any team issues to the teacher or manager. Higher-skilled students tend to take on leadership and coaching roles (Clarke & Quill, 2003; Penney & Clarke, 2005). However, lesser-skilled players may have the opportunity to fulfill leadership roles through the SEM (Siedentop et al., 2004). By assuming the role of coach, students with disabilities can demonstrate their knowledge of tactics and strategies in a sport without feeling like an outsider because of limited skills. The opportunity for a student with a disability to coach a team and demonstrate knowledge of a particular sport should help in the socialization process. To illustrate, a peer without a disability may not realize that Mary, who uses a wheelchair, is a serious basketball fan who has followed the game since fifth grade. Once Mary is given the opportunity to coach her basketball team during PE class, her teammates realize that she has strong knowledge of the game and is able to design plays and suggest strategies that actually work. As a result, Mary's popularity increases and students who never spoke to her in the past may now include her in conversation at the lunch table. This prosocial behavior could result from the opportunity she had to play the role of "coach" during a basketball season in PE.

Students with certain disabilities such as autism, intellectual disabilities, or visual impairments may have more difficulty in the role of the coach. In these cases, the student with a disability can serve as a co-coach alongside a peer without a disability who is serving as coach. It is the responsibility of the coach without a disability, with support from the teacher, to include the student with a disability as much as possible in coaching activities. For example, a student with autism is co-coaching a basketball team with a student-coach

without a disability. Before the game, the coach leads the team in warm-ups and helps the co-coach with autism to lead the team in stretches. Before the game starts, the team forms a huddle, and the coach ensures that the co-coach is in the middle of the huddle listening to final instructions. The co-coach is then assisted to place his hands in the middle of the huddle while the team does a quick cheer before they take the field. Finally, the coach makes sure the co-coach is close by and listening to instructions given to players. The co-coach is also encouraged to copy the lead coach, cheer teammates on, and give "high fives" to players as they sub out of the game.

Referee

Officiating is an important role in the SEM because it can affect the quality of game play. Siedentop and colleagues (2004) recommended that students practice this role before game play begins and that rules be modified as students are first learning to officiate so that fewer decisions need to be made at one time. These suggestions also apply to students with disabilities. The role of the referee undoubtedly is more suited for students with physical disabilities, hearing impairments, or mild autism or intellectual disabilities. For instance, a student who is deaf can use hand signals to indicate fouls and change of possessions in a basketball game without ever having to hear what is happening during the game. Similarly, a student in a wheelchair can easily referee a volleyball match or softball game. Adding an extra referee can be a simple accommodation for a student with a wheelchair, who might have trouble getting up and down the court to referee a basketball game. Clarke and Quill (2003) conducted a case study where the SEM was implemented over three school terms. In this study, a teacher explained that students who take on the role of referee gain more knowledge of the rules. However, it is the role of the PE teacher to further develop this type of sport knowledge with the students.



A disability sport can be used in an SEM context. Here, students with and without disabilities play wheelchair basketball.

Similar to the idea of co-coaching discussed earlier, students with more severe disabilities can be a co-judge or referee even if they may not understand game rules. A referee with Down syndrome could try and mimic the hand signals of the head referee in a volleyball match or home umpire in a softball game. In some cases the role of referee may not be suited for a particular student with a disability, and in such cases the team, with guidance from the PE teacher, should select roles that are best suited for the student's unique needs.

Scorekeeper

The role of scorekeeper provides students with disabilities a unique way of contributing to a team's overall success. In this role, students must be alert and aware of the game as it unfolds. Not only do scorekeepers need to keep a running total of the activity, they also need to compile scores and present final scores to the appropriate person (Siedentop et al., 2004). Depending on the nature of the disability, some students with disabilities may be able to handle this task without assistance, while other students with more severe disabilities might need assistance from a peer or a paraprofessional. For example, a student with muscular dystrophy or hearing impairment might handle the duties of a scorekeeper without any assistance; a student with an intellectual disability, autism, or visual disability might need some extra prompting from a peer; and a student with severe cerebral palsy or severe autism may need support from a peer or paraprofessional to turn in score cards or use the electronic scoreboard. This is the most adaptable role for students with disabilities, regardless of the disability.

Optional Team Roles

Siedentop et al. (2004) offered other options for team roles. Some of these other roles include equipment manager, fitness specialist, publicist, and commentator. These roles may be especially attractive to students with physical disabilities, because they can succeed at these jobs without extensive modifications. For example, a student with osteogenesis

imperfecta (i.e., brittle bone disease) may not be able to participate in a unit on wrestling because of the risk of breaking a bone. However, this student would be a great candidate to serve as the team publicist. He or she could learn about wrestling from the Internet and then create flyers or even a team brochure promoting future matches of the wrestling team. Students with more severe intellectual disabilities can also succeed at these roles if provided the proper assistance by a peer or a paraprofessional. In fact, students with intellectual disabilities often participate in vocational training as part of their education. The role of the equipment manager could provide vocational experiences including sorting and handing out uniforms and other equipment to players. Sorting is a required skill for working at a warehouse, in a kitchen, in a restaurant, and at a recycling center.

Roles for Invasion Games

Most invasion-type games require a timekeeper, a statistician, a down marker, and possibly a ball retriever. These duties might seem menial, but all jobs play an important role in maintaining the flow of a game. A timekeeper is necessary to start game play, mark the end of game play, and regulate the clock during game play (Siedentop et al., 2004). Students with disabilities could easily fulfill this role. It is important to remember that students with disabilities should be active whenever possible throughout the season. To illustrate, a student with Down syndrome or autism can learn to work a score clock through a simple task analysis. A peer assistant could provide verbal cues and prompts in situations where the game is fast paced.

A statistician's role is important if one of the goals of the program is to teach students the aspect of documenting and using statistical data of individual and overall team performance. A student who is deaf or a student with Asperger's syndrome (a form of high-functioning autism) might be well suited for this role. Duties would include recording individual and team statistics, aggregating the data, and summarizing what the data mean. A student with muscular dystrophy



A child using a wheelchair during a basketball game may shoot at a pin (left) or at a lower net (right) to score.

who is well versed in various computer software applications could use his or her strengths in this area and contribute to the overall success of the team.

A ball retriever or a down marker is helpful in sports such as volleyball, soccer, and flag football. Students with mild to severe disabilities can assist in these roles. For example, a student who uses an electric wheelchair can help chase down errant balls during a volleyball match. A simple device, such as a piece of cardboard or plastic, can be placed on the front of the wheelchair to assist in collecting the ball. Likewise, a student who is deaf or blind could be guided by a peer to assist in marking the ball down in a game of soccer or flag football.

Roles for Target Games

Siedentop and colleagues (2004) identified four roles within target games. These are target judge, pin restacker/ball returner, safety judge, and course marshal. Such specialists' roles are ideal for all students regardless of abilities. For instance, a student with an intellectual disability can play the role of target judge in a game of horseshoes. The student's job would entail determining whose "shoe" was closest to the stack. Also, a student who uses a wheelchair could serve as a course marshal during a round of golf.

Roles for Performance Sports

One advantage of the SEM is that it can be adapted to a variety of sports and activities. Siedentop et al. (2004) provided examples for performance sports such as gymnastics, dance, and aerobics, and possible specialist roles in these activities including choreographer, judge, props manager, and music engineer. As a choreographer, a student with visual impairment could assist a student doing a gymnastics routine by providing a variety of music to choose from and then helping to develop the movements that will accompany the music. A student with autism could act as the music engineer, with support from a peer or paraprofessional as needed, by operating the sound system during practice sessions and competition. The same student could serve as the props manager and help performers with dispersing and collecting props used in

a performance. Such props include ribbon sticks, gymnastic mats, hoops, wands, and juggling pins.

Conclusion

This article has provided suggestions on how to modify player roles in the SEM for students with disabilities. However, it is important to remember that the child with a disability can contribute to various roles, not only to the ones that require a lower level of physical activity. The SEM is not a "one size fits all" model, and it can be adapted to meet individual needs and to provide various learning opportunities (Penney & Clarke, 2005). Apart from the different roles and decisions regarding the allocation of roles, Penney and Clarke suggested modifications to the size or make-up of the team, how teams are chosen, and the form of competition and final festivity. The SEM can be used by a physical educator for various reasons, such as for the introduction of a new sport, the development of an authentic sport experience, and the provision of social-skill development among students.

Why not use the SEM to introduce disability sports in a PE class? Perhaps local community disability groups could be contacted to provide wheelchairs for other students during a wheelchair-basketball season. Adapted sports can be enjoyable for all students, and they can help students without disabilities to be more empathetic toward children with disabilities. While there is a need to research the effects of the SEM for all students by using different methodological approaches and theoretical models (Spittle & Byrne, 2009; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005), there is a clear and tremendous potential for the SEM to benefit any inclusive PE class.

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An adapted playground for children using different equipment, such as a wheelchair or walker, can be used for a fitness season.

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