



## Sport Education and Physical Activity: Recommendations for Maximizing the Model

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**Abstract:** There is a need for physical education to address two important concerns affecting American youth: the worsening social decline of communities and schools, and the increase of childhood obesity and sedentary-related illnesses. This article explores solutions to the dual challenge of increasing students' moral and social development, and increasing students physical activity levels in physical education while teaching within the Sport Education Model.

**Key Words:** Sport Education, Physical Activity, Curriculum Models, Social Development.



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### 1. The Need for Increasing Physical Activity

It is understood that that physical activity (PA) patterns become habitual during childhood, and it's possible that children's' activity patterns may continue into adulthood. Due to evidence of increasingly high levels of both adult and childhood obesity in the United States, there has been renewed effort to identify the etiology of this epidemic [1]. While poor nutrition has emerged as one contributing cause, the increasing prevalence of a sedentary lifestyle is also a major factor. Regular PA has been shown to reduce one's likelihood of becoming obese and reducing heart disease. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that children and adolescents engage in 60 min or more of PA daily, mostly at the moderate to vigorous intensity levels [2]. Unfortunately,

traditional PE practices have been called into question in regard to the amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) the class actually provides. When teaching in models outside of health-related fitness (HRF), teachers tend to use few behaviors aimed at prompting or promoting fitness. Therefore, it is possible that traditional PE curricula are deficient in providing the kinds of robust PA needed to combat these sedentary behavior trends. In this light, researchers and professional organizations have called for innovative and well-designed PE activities that achieve health-enhancing fitness. However, at the same time physical educators are needed to meet the health and fitness-related goals of PE, they are simultaneously needed to rise to the occasion to meet the social development demands of their students.

## 2. The Need for Adolescent Social Development

Quality PE programs have the potential to enhance quality of life. Participation in quality PE can help young people appreciate health, exercise, and fitness; learn about themselves and handling adversity; and experience teamwork and sportsmanship. This is a tremendously important quality of PE, as thousands of young children in America's cities are now growing up amidst a worsening problem of community social decline [3]. There is a need to address certain societal problems thought to develop in grade school. Grade school years are a critical time for developing healthy social skills. It is a time when kids begin to acquire important aspects of "who am I" in the community as well as developing the necessary social skills to be successful and productive in society. Indeed, kids who achieve social competence during their formative years in education will become more successful and healthy throughout their lives. Fortunately, many PE programs have emerged as examples of how schools can provide a positive environment for social skill interaction and development. The challenge for physical educators is to develop curriculums which address the need for accruing high levels of MVPA, and simultaneously create an atmosphere of student responsibility and social development.

## 3. Overview of Sport Education

One PE curriculum model believed to address the concern of personal and social development is Sport Education [4]. SE provides a physically and emotionally safe environment where both high and low-skilled students can succeed. SE is designed to provide authentic, educationally rich sport experiences for students in PE. SE's purposes are best achieved through combinations of cooperative small-group work, and peer teaching, rather than by total reliance on directive, drill-oriented teaching. A large body of research reflects an overall positive impact of SE on teachers and students. Students like SE because they have time to socialize, make decisions, and enjoy themselves. Importantly, students' cooperation level, and ability to make

decisions improves during SE units. This evidence suggests with proper implementation of the SE model from the teacher, students can be better equipped to handle the challenges of developing proper social practices.

### *Sport Education's Relationship with MVPA.*

To date, research examining the SE model has largely focused on gains in sporting performance and/or social development. Few studies have examined the effects of the SE model on students' [5]. Found that seventh grade boys who engaged in a lesson SE unit of floor hockey averaged 30 minutes of MVPA per 50-minute lesson. In other words, students were in MVPA for 60% of the lesson [6]. discovered students in the SE unit did not approach this level. While the evidence suggests SE is certainly a model with many social benefits for students, it is not the ideal model for physical educators to use when high student MVPA is the main lesson objective.

### *Reasons for MVPA shortcomings using SE.*

Brief or abbreviated SE units and lessons have influence on a teacher's ability to provide students with opportunities to achieve high MVPA. A teacher has little time to allocate towards fitness instruction and promoting and demonstrating fitness during the SE unit. Because of the high volume of material to cover in an SE unit and little time in which to cover it, it means that peripheral subject matter, like HRF, is sacrificed. Naturally, some of the activities and structures which make the sport in SE authentic detract from students' opportunities to achieve high MVPA. Taking on roles such as statistician, scorekeeper, attending to administrative tasks, and taking part in a season-ending awards ceremony, for example, must mean that students are denied potential opportunities to participate in MVPA. The authentic nature of SE appears to lead to a trade-off situation.

## 4. Recommendations

*Recommendations for increasing MVPA using SE.* For physical educators to accrue high levels of MVPA while still delivering a desirable curriculum model for social growth and responsibility, HRF effectiveness could be strengthened by: (1) limiting

time spent giving instruction; (2) incorporate HRF discussions during instruction and closings (3) decreasing the amount of time taken between transitions to new activities; (4) encourage faster pace during transitions and game play (5) select sports known to involve more movement opportunity (e.g. soccer instead of softball); (6) utilize small-sided games; (7) receive more training from professional development opportunities on how to adequately address the need for MVPA.

**Recommendations for Increasing Social Responsibility in PE.** Evidence also indicates that unless character development is directly addressed, the moral maturation process will not likely occur. Therefore, the physical educator has the opportunity and responsibility to create situations that will enhance the character development of children in their care. Recommendations for encouraging social development and sportsmanship in PE are: (1) physical educators should serve as positive role models of moral reasoning and sportsmanship and provide playful and healthy environments; (2) the rules and structure of sports should be modified to satisfy each participants developmental needs and growth; (3) referees and teachers should encourage, facilitate, and highlight sportsmanlike behaviors and negatively sanction inappropriate behaviors; (4) PE participants must be encouraged to join in the classes of academe with the same enthusiasm as competitive sport; (5) physical educators need to help each participant develop more advanced levels of moral reasoning as well as sport-related strategies and skills in the educational system; (6) physical educators should take advantage of non-traditional curriculum modes, like SE, which have known social benefits [7].

**Combining Models to Enhance Benefits.** Combining SE with other curricular models has shown benefits by allowing students to learn how to play well [8]. A final recommendation is for physical educators to consider combining SE with Multi-Activity (MA) to optimize the inherent benefits each model has to offer. The SE and MA models complement one another well, as students learn and train to master the skills of a given sport within the MA unit, and then develop positive social practices

while performing those skills within the context of their SE season. MA offers the advantage of direct teaching styles to teach the skills of a sport preceding the SE season. Before beginning the season the teacher may take the opportunity to build skills and confidence in the students' abilities to play the sport with success by employing drills, practices, small-sided-games, conditioned games, and full-sided games. Students are more likely to learn directly about health and fitness in MA units compared to SE units alone. Physical educators should choose multiple curricular models to meet both the sporting performance and/or social development goals of their students, knowing that one model, alone, is inadequate to address both needs sufficiently.

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