

## TEACHER EDUCATION

# Preservice Physical Educators' Perspectives of Sport Education

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## Abstract

*Although many researchers have investigated sport education (SE) as a curriculum model at different educational levels (Bennett & Hastie, 1997; MacPhail, Gorely, Kirk, & Kinchin, 2008; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004; Spittle & Byrne, 2009), there has been limited research on preservice physical education (PE) teachers' perceptions of SE. In particular, investigations of preservice PE teachers' perceptions of participating in activity courses in which they used the SE curriculum model are lacking. The purpose of the study was to examine preservice PE teachers' perceptions of an advanced basketball class that was taught by a novice instructor using the SE curriculum model. Participants included 38 preservice PE teacher education students enrolled in an advanced basketball class and their instructor. Data were collected through formal interviews with 10 preservice PE teachers (seven males, three females) and the course instructor. In addition, document data in the form of lectures given by the instructor, written assessments, sample practice plans, course syllabi, course outline, and grading plan were also collected. Data were analyzed by developing categories and examining them for common elements that ran throughout and tied them together. Themes were then extracted from these categories. Data were then selectively coded for examples that illustrated the themes.*

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*Three main findings were drawn from the analysis. First, the results indicate that students were empowered in the class because they directed their learning and believed that using SE would benefit them when they became inservice teachers. Second, there was a great deal of formal accountability embedded in the class, and although students were informed that they would be evaluated on their performance, they believed that effort would count more toward their final grade in the class. Third, the preservice PE teachers perceived that basketball taught with the SE model was meaningful in that it was enjoyable and they learned more about the game in contrast to their lack of learning in their high school PE experiences playing basketball.*

Sport education (SE) is a curriculum model that has received a great deal of attention in physical education (PE) with the goal being to create competent, literate, and enthusiastic sportspeople (Siedentop, 1994). The model simulates the features of an authentic sport season including team affiliation, formal competition, record keeping, a complete season (20 or more lessons), festivity, and a culminating event (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2011). As SE curriculum is different from what most students experience in a traditional PE class during which the structure and sequence of activities is the same (i.e., tasks that are focused on skill development with or without game play). Over the past two decades, there has been a great deal of interest in SE on the part of PE teachers and researchers. Resultantly, researchers have investigated the efficacy of SE in PE at all educational levels (Bennett & Hastie, 1997; Carlson & Hastie, 1997; Cruz, 2008; Hastie, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Hastie & Curtner-Smith, 2006; Hastie & Trost, 2002; MacPhail et al., 2008; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004; MacPhail, Kinchin, & Kirk, 2003; Pritchard, Hawkins, Wiegand, & Metzler, 2008; Spittle & Byrne, 2009).

The results of these studies indicate that SE as a curricular model has yielded several positive outcomes. For example, this approach enhanced student enjoyment and participation (Bennett & Hastie, 1997; Hastie, 2000; MacPhail et al., 2008; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004). It increased opportunities for social development (Carlson & Hastie, 1997; Hastie & Sharpe, 1999; Pope & Grant, 1996) and affected skill and tactical development (Clarke & Quill, 2003; Hastie, 1998b; Hastie & Curtner-Smith, 2006; Hastie, Sinelnikov, & Guarino, 2009; Hastie & Trost, 2002).

Recently, there have been calls to investigate how SE is being used in a physical education teacher education (PETE) program. Typically, in PETE programs, content and pedagogy are taught separately; however, it has been recommended that PETE program faculty teach courses within the curriculum so students are able to make connections between pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge (Jenkins, 2004; Oslin, Collier, & Mitchell, 2001). Along the same lines, there have been recommendations that preservice PE teachers be provided with the opportunity to experience SE as a participant, in such a way that subject matter knowledge can be delivered. Through this process, preservice PE teachers' understanding of the SE model is enhanced (Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Deenihan & MacPhail, 2013; Gurvitch, Lund, & Metzler, 2008; Jenkins, 2004; Kinchin, Penney, & Clarke, 2005; Oslin et al., 2001). Researchers have investigated preservice PE teachers' perceptions of teaching with the SE model (Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Deenihan & MacPhail, 2013; McCaughtry, Sofo, Rovegno, & Curtner-Smith, 2004), but the research base is limited with regard to preservice teachers' perceptions of experiencing SE as a participant. Deenihan, McPhail, and Young (2011) investigated the effectiveness of including SE in a PETE program by incorporating the SE model in a 12-week net games module that was focused on tennis, badminton, and volleyball. The results indicate that student participants believed that their experience would have been more meaningful if they had participated in a season consisting of one sport, rather than three. In addition, the instructor did not adhere to the SE model throughout the three activities that made up the season.

It is important to understand PETE candidates' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of SE to gain insight into what attracts them to the model and the likelihood of them using the model as teachers. Relatedly, it is important to understand what features of the SE model are believed to be either valuable or, conversely, problematic. The reasons cited above, coupled with the limited research regarding preservice PE teachers' perceptions of participating in a complete SE season, *warrant* further investigation. Therefore, the purpose of the current investigation was to examine preservice PETE candidates' perceptions of an advanced basketball class that was taught using the SE curriculum model for a complete season.

## **Method**

### **Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted in a comprehensive college located in the northeastern part of the country. The college has a large (over 400 PETE majors) PETE program.

Institutional review board approval was attained to conduct the research. In addition, informed consent to participate from participants was obtained. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this article to protect participants' anonymity.

Participants included 38 preservice PETE students (33 males, five females; 92% Caucasian, 5% African American, 3% Hispanic) who were enrolled in an advanced basketball class. Students in the class had previous experience playing basketball; many of them had played at the varsity level in high school, and others had played in college. The teacher, Mr. Smith, was a Caucasian male graduate teaching assistant. Although Mr. Smith had significant experience teaching and playing basketball at the varsity high school level, he had minimal experience teaching basketball using the SE curriculum model. His experience using the model was through his teaching methods course at the university and during student teaching.

### **Advanced Basketball Class Structure**

The season consisted of 33 days with the class meeting 5 days per week for 7 weeks: 2 hr 15 min on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and 1 hr on Tuesday and Thursday. The class was originally scheduled to meet for 35 days; however, class did not meet on two of the days because of university events that conflicted with the class schedule. The first three weeks of the season were dedicated to preseason tasks. The first week of class was spent explaining the components of the SE model through lecture and PowerPoint presentations. Through these presentations, students gained an understanding of the importance of team affiliation, formal competition, record keeping, and having a complete season that includes a culminating event and festivity. Students also participated in a skill assessment, learned basketball rules, and learned how to be an effective official. In addition, students learned what was expected when they were performing duty roles when not participating as a player. Students were expected to perform each duty role at least once during the season. The duty roles included officiating, keeping team statistics, score keeping, and managing equipment.

During the first day of the second week, a blind draft took place, at which time the coaches picked their roster. Player choices were based on anonymous rankings that were based on the skill assessment conducted by Mr. Smith. Once teams were selected, each picked a team name and colors as well as created a team cheer or slogan. The remainder of the second week was dedicated to the pre-season. During this time, Mr. Smith lectured about the features of the SE model and ran drills that were focused on skill development and tactical awareness as well as creating situations that allowed students to practice performing duty roles.

The regular season took place during Weeks 3 to 6. Game play took place on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and Tuesday and Thursday were dedicated to team practice and no game play. Coaches and players were responsible for creating and executing the practice plans for these days. The last week of the season was dedicated to a postseason tournament. The eight teams participated in a play-off, which led to the championship game on the final day of class. In addition, festivity was added to the season by having an awards ceremony. There were team and individual awards that emphasized hustle, team play, improvement, and attitude.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected in four ways: (a) demographic data, (b) field notes, (c) two focused formal interviews with 10 randomly selected students and the teacher, and (d) document data.

**Demographic data.** Demographic data were collected at the beginning of the study. Participants filled out a questionnaire that included questions regarding their year in school, racial and ethnic background, gender, and basketball experience.

**Field notes.** We conducted observations 15 times over the 33-day season. Field notes were written during and immediately after each observation. Field notes included descriptive and reflective observations for a given lesson.

**Interviews.** Ten students (seven males, three females) were individually interviewed before and after the season using a semi-structured interview guide. As noted, students were randomly selected for interviews. Sample student interview questions included the following:

- What are your perceptions of the sport education model in this class?

- If you were to use this model as a teacher, how would you use it? Would you do anything differently from what you experienced in the class?

Student interviews lasted between 20 and 30 min and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Document data.** Document data included lectures and Power-Point presentations given by the instructor, written assessments (in the form of online quizzes), sample practice plans, course syllabi, course outline, and grading plan for the class.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed throughout the data collection process. Interview transcripts and observational field notes were inductively coded using constant comparative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to delineate differences and similarities, which were then developed into categories. Once categories were established, themes were identified that cut across several categories. Data were then selectively coded for examples that illustrated the themes (Neuman, 1994).

**Data trustworthiness.** Data trustworthiness was established in three ways. First, triangulation was used across data sources including field notes, teacher and student interviews, and document data. Second, trustworthiness was fashioned through prolonged and regular engagement between the investigator and the participants. Finally, observations and interview data were examined to identify areas of similarity and dissimilarity between teacher and student perceptions (Merriam, 2001).

## **Results**

The results provide a perspective of how PETE candidates viewed the SE model when used in an advanced basketball class. Results from this study will be presented across three broad themes: (a) students were empowered to take control of their learning, (b) perceptions of formal accountability linked to a grade, and (c) differences between traditional PE and SE.

### **Students Were Empowered to Take Control of Their Learning**

Participants reported that they felt empowered in the advanced basketball class because while using the SE model, they directed their own learning. Participants commented that they appreciated

being able to work with their team and make up their own practice plans. Bert stated, “You get to put together your own practices and make up your own plays. Instead of having the teacher always telling us what to do, we get to do things on our own.” Jose added, “The captains are supposed to keep the practices going, but on my team everybody creates a practice plan for each week. It gives you a chance to set up practices. It gives you experience.” Corey provided further support for the importance of the practice plan. He stated, “The practices were really important for the team because after we lost games, the next day in practice we would work on things that didn’t go well so we would be ready for the next game.” Maria commented that the SE model and working as a team to develop practices enhanced her learning of tactics. Maria stated, “I learned a lot about tactics because a lot of teams were doing defenses that you don’t usually see. Trying to learn those defenses and practice how to beat them was pretty cool.” Document data in the form of practice plans provides further support of students’ comments regarding the importance of completing practice plans. Practice plans were completed with attention to detail in an effort to enhance their team’s level of play.

Participants also noted that taking on the roles associated with SE not only empowered them but also enhanced the teaching–learning environment. Marcus stated,

We had statisticians, scorekeepers, and referees. I think it was good that we had to do all of those things. You get to play games and are an athlete, but then you get to do things you would not think of, like keep track of blocks, turnovers, steals, and fouls. You don’t even think about those things when you play in physical education, but now I have to think about it.

Tricia added, “I really enjoy sport education because while you learn about the game, you also learn how to coach and referee.” Pete commented further, “I like the roles. You don’t think about stuff people do behind the scenes on the shot clock or scoreboard. It expands the class. You are learning other aspects of the game, not just rules.”

Field note data provide further support that students valued the duty roles associated with the SE season in which they were participating. Field note data from Days 18, 19, and 21, which were part



of the regular season, indicate that students were actively participating in the roles of statistician, scorekeeper, official, and equipment manager.

Participants also expressed that they were empowered by the SE model because they now had the skills to use it, as a teacher, in the future. Marcus stated, “Most kids in this class were players before, but when you get out of college and coach, you have to keep stats and referee for little kids, so it is getting me ready for the future.” Mariah noted,

I think the class is great. I have never been exposed to anything like this. I am definitely going to use it when I get out in the field. It is fun and at the same time you are learning. If you mix the fun in with learning, it takes learning to a whole new level.

### **Perceptions of Formal Accountability Linked to a Grade**

This class had a great deal of formal accountability that was linked to a grade. At the beginning of the season, Mr. Smith explained to students that their final grade would be linked to their performance in games and practice.

Mr. Smith commented on how individual statistics would be included in a final grade:

I will have everyone’s statistics in an Excel file. Each statistic is weighted. For example, points scored might be weighted as 1, but a rebound will be weighted at .6. I will rank everyone in the class and based on their ranking, their grade will be determined. They need to play well and get good statistics to receive points toward their final grade.

In addition to performance in games and practices, student performance on quizzes, good sporting behavior, and student performance in duty roles were also part of the final grade. Mr. Smith explained how these aspects would be factored into the grade:

There are a total of six quizzes, two are in the first week and are based on their knowledge and skill of refereeing. I also evaluate their duty roles in terms of doing the duty role as well as equipment and gym set up. Also, I assess sportsmanship and working together.



It was clearly explained in the course syllabus and document data in the form of PowerPoint presentations that the final grade would be based on six knowledge quizzes, graded practice plans, a team assessment of sporting behavior, and individual player statistics (e.g., rebounds, assists, and points scored) that were kept during the season. Furthermore, students were assessed on their knowledge of strategies and rules in the game of basketball through document data in the form of the knowledge quizzes.

Although a great deal of formal accountability was embedded in the class, initially students did not believe that Mr. Smith would hold them formally accountable for their performance in games. For example, Patrick commented, "He is going to look at our stats and in the end that will play a big role. But I am sure that he just watches us and will determine if we are playing hard and breaking a sweat." Maria also believed that effort would count more in her final grade than performance. She stated, "He looks to see how much effort we are putting into practice. We're not really graded on winning and losing. If I miss a shot, it is not going to hurt my grade." Dwayne added, "I don't think, in the end, the stats are part of it. I think he looks for working hard and attendance. He said in the beginning, the better you are, the better in class you will do, but I don't think he meant it."

Patrick did not agree with basing the grade on performance because he believed that some aspects of getting good statistics were out of his control. He stated,

You depend on your team for stats. So if you are handing out assists, you might not even be getting credit for it because they might not be catching it. So it is hard because you are depending on them.

In addition, some participants did not agree with Mr. Smith's grading philosophy and questioned the fairness of the policy. Dwayne commented,

Not everyone is at the same level, but everyone is playing and having a good time. Just because you or someone else might be better than someone else, you want to give them a fair opportunity and not penalize them.

Tricia added,

He watches everyone play, so he knows who the better players are and who the not so good players are. So I would say grading is a little lenient for different people. You don't want to assess someone that is not as good as the best player.

Corey grappled with the grading policy and questioned how Mr. Smith could grade people at different skill levels (i.e., those who were highly skilled compared to those that were lesser skilled but put forth good effort):

It is kind of hard because there are some kids that are really good, but there are some people that try really hard and hustle the entire time, but are not as good as other people. So it is really hard to decide how you are going to give someone an "A" and someone a "B." If someone is really good, you have to give them an "A," because they are doing what the class asks of them. But someone else might not be scoring and aren't as good, but they are trying as hard as they possibly can.

### **Differences Between Traditional Physical Education and Sport Education**

Participants indicated that they enjoyed basketball taught through the SE model and also thought that it was a much better way to teach basketball compared with their high school PE classes. Marcus commented, "In high school, we would just do 'teacher drills.' Here we make out our own plays, run our own practices, and do our own conditioning. Everything is student driven." Field note and document data from Days 1, 2, and 3 of the season indicate that the instruction was primarily teacher directed. However, field notes and document data in the form of practice plans indicate that on several days (7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 22, 25, and 27) students participated in practices that were designed by the coaches and players on individual teams. This demonstrates that students assumed progressively more control over practice tasks as the season progressed.

Several students commented that their participation in basketball in high school PE consisted of going through the motions. Mariah stated,

In high school, we just picked five people and played the game. We barely kept score. It was just go through the motions with no structure or responsibility. It was just come in and play. In this class [SE model], I walk out thinking about how I can switch around the offense or defense and how I can get better.

Maria added, “In high school, we would line up and shoot free throws, pick teams, and go. We didn’t keep track of anything, and next class we would repick teams and play a different game. We didn’t learn any tactics at all in high school.” Marcus commented further, “High school is not even the same class. In high school, they just roll the balls out. There was a time we would play seven versus seven just to get everybody to play. No set up, just a huge mess.”

Participants in the SE class believed that the tasks had meaning and that they learned something, whereas in high school PE, they did not. Dwayne stated, “In sport education, the games mean something. In high school, you don’t play games that have a lot of meaning. It is simply pick-up basketball.” Tricia added,

You learn more with sport education. In high school, you play and learn the basics. With sport education, you are learning different views, like refereeing and the rules in more depth. It is a lot more hands on. If you do your work and pay attention to the quizzes, you will learn a lot.

Dwayne added,

In high school, you walk out of physical education and do not get anything from it, but maybe some exercise. You would not leave class thinking that you actually learned something. I think the way Mr. Smith has set it up is awesome and I have learned stuff.

Each participant interviewed indicated that they enjoyed participating in basketball taught with the SE model, with most noting that it was different from their experiences in high school PE. The results indicate that the students valued the model because of the learning that took place within a supportive and enjoyable learning environment.

## Discussion

In this study, participants clearly indicated that they enjoyed and benefited from their experience in the advanced basketball class taught through the SE model. In all cases, they indicated that subsequent to the SE basketball season, they had greater knowledge and a better understanding of the SE model. In addition, participants indicated that they found basketball taught through this approach to be more meaningful than what they experienced during high school PE because they learned more about the game with respect to tactics and the roles associated with the sport of basketball (i.e., coaching, officiating, keeping statistics). In addition, results from the current study indicate that students were empowered through participating in the SE model because they had more control over their participation during the season and participated fully through their involvement in team and duty roles. The results further indicate that participants learned more about strategies and tactics because they had control over the practices and worked on weaknesses in practice that had been identified during game play. In essence, participants acquired an appreciation of the model and expressed that they believed that the model would be of value to them as PE teachers.

Many students commented that they favored basketball taught with the SE model because of the features of the model. These features include a long season, being affiliated with the same team over the course of the season, participating in duty roles, and an appropriate amount of time for practice and game play. It appears that focusing on a single sport for an entire season (33 days) allowed the participants to experience the SE model and develop greater knowledge of the model. We believe that this extended time frame also yielded positive results with regard to student engagement as well as their perceptions of the experience.

This finding supports the importance of using the SE model in the way it was intended, rather than selecting certain features of the model and ignoring others. For example, in the current study, the season was 33 days long and all of the features of the SE model were incorporated. This is in contrast to Deenihan et al. (2011), who investigated preservice PE students' perceptions of an SE season that included three sports. The results from this study indicate that the participants believed that they would have benefited from fewer activities in a single season. Because of the inclusion of multiple sports in one season, they felt rushed while participating in the ac-

tivities and thus lacked time to focus on the novel features of the SE model.

Another difference between the current study and Deenihan et al.'s (2011) is that Mr. Smith, the teacher, designed the season to incorporate all of the features of SE so participants could experience and focus on those features. Although the instructor in Deenihan et al. *intended* to teach three activities using the SE model, the instructor moved away from using SE as the season progressed. In fact, the instructor began to focus on improving the preservice teachers' ability to teach skills rather than experience all of the features of the SE model. As a result, students experienced a somewhat decreased awareness of SE. As the study progressed, they experienced more teacher-directed instruction because the instructor failed to maintain a focus on the different features of an SE season.

The results also indicate that although formal accountability was embedded in the model, many participants did not believe that their individual performance in games and practice would be tied to their final grade. It appears that although these preservice PETE candidates were told that their grade would be linked to their performance, their previous experiences in PE had socialized them to believe that grading based on performance was not done in PE, nor was it appropriate. Many participants commented that they thought they were going to be graded on effort, participation, and attendance, not performance. These preservice PETE candidates had been socialized through what Lortie (1975) referred to as the apprenticeship of observation. These participants had spent their entire K–12 education observing PE teachers doing their job, which did not include basing a significant percentage of their grade on performance. The apprenticeship of observation that was experienced by the PETE candidates in this study led them to develop the belief that it is not an appropriate practice nor fair to grade students based on performance in PE. The beliefs of PETE candidates regarding grading based on performance needs to be addressed in PETE programs. In PE, the performance grade exchange has historically been based on what Placek (1983) referred to as “busy, happy, good,” (p. 54) and this only further marginalizes PE and relegates it to a “non-essential” subject. In addition, this grading philosophy has shaped the beliefs of several PETE candidates, and if not addressed as part of their preservice education, it may lead them to continue this inappropriate approach to the performance grade exchange in PE.

The results indicate that participants believed that basketball taught with the SE curriculum model was much better than their experience with basketball in high school PE. In light of this, it is important that PE teacher educators work to expose PETE candidates to teaching models and methods that are more effective than the manner in which they experienced PE as a student. SE may be a curriculum model that alters the beliefs of PETE candidates, especially because the pedagogy that is employed in SE is drawn from sporting experiences. In addition, the model may be appealing to PETE candidates who have a strong coaching orientation because SE is a form of PE that aligns with their desire to coach (Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This research provides a snapshot of PETE candidates' perceptions of SE, but further investigation into this model is warranted. It is important to note the limitations regarding the current study. The use of one class in one university limits the generalizability of the work. The instructor, although carefully trained in the use of the SE model, did not have significant experience implementing the model. However, our observations indicate that the model was implemented with considerable skill. Researchers could examine PETE candidates' perceptions of SE in other sporting activities, such as racquet sports or track and field. In addition, teacher candidates' perceptions of SE in activities other than competitive team and individual sports such as canoeing and hiking could be explored. A mixed methods or quantitative analysis could be used to examine the qualitative findings of this study. Last, replicating and/or extending this examination of PETE students' perceptions of participating in activities taught with the SE model to multiple universities located in different geographic locales is essential to generalizing these findings.

### **Conclusions**

Using SE to teach activity classes in which PETE candidates learn skills, tactics, and duty roles associated with a specific activity over the course of a season enhances student learning and makes the experience particularly meaningful. In addition, it serves as a vehicle to challenge PETE candidates' beliefs about teaching PE, beliefs that have been shaped and formed through their apprenticeship of observation during the K–12 PE experience. In addition, because the model's structure appeals to many PE teacher candidates

based on their previous experiences with sport, it may lead those with more of a coaching orientation to teach effectively with the model and not simply “roll out the ball,” a practice which is, unfortunately, still prevalent in PE.

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