

How to Develop Disability Awareness Using the Sport Education Model

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Disability simulation exercises can promote the acceptance of students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

Mrs. Rodriquez has been a physical education teacher at Betsy Ross Middle School for 17 years. She is always looking for ways to update her curriculum for the benefit of her students, so she went to a workshop on the sport education model (SEM) sponsored by her state association. She loved the idea and could not wait to implement it in the fall. Not long after the workshop, Mrs. Rodriquez noticed that two of her students, Jessica and Fernando, were not interacting with their peers during recess. Jessica is a cheerful student with Down syndrome and Fernando is a quiet student with cerebral palsy who uses a wheelchair independently. Mrs. Rodriquez and other faculty at the school had often talked about how beneficial a disability awareness day would be for the student body, but had never actually organized one. Mrs. Rodriquez thought back to the workshop and decided to embed disability awareness into SEM for the entire physical education curriculum in the fall term.

Mrs. Rodriquez utilized the SEM during her second unit of the fall, in which she taught floor hockey in all her classes. During this time she also incorporated a disability awareness component to increase student knowledge and awareness of children with disabilities. In her class with Jessica and Fernando, students had made the decision to use large Frisbee disks as pucks. Another game modification implemented by the students was the delayed defense rule, in which players could choose three, five, or 10 seconds of delay before a defender could approach them in a game and to have one person in a wheelchair on the team opposite Fernando to equal out the playing field. Everyone shared the responsibility of making floor hockey a fair and fun unit. Jessica loved being both the announcer and a referee. Fernando loved being on offense and being in charge of updating league standings and statistics after the day's game play had concluded. Overall, the SEM was a huge hit in all the classes and the students succeeded in becoming more aware of ways to include their peers with disabilities.

The above scenario is a success story that demonstrates how the SEM can be used properly. Everyone wins when the SEM is appropriately implemented to introduce disability awareness and to facilitate inclusion.

One of the goals of *Healthy People 2010* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2000) is to decrease the disparity in physical activity among individuals with disabilities. Currently it is estimated that 13 percent of students in the United States have individualized education programs, or IEPs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). It is the position of the Adapted Physical Activity Council (APAC) of the American Association for Physical Activity and

Recreation that students with disabilities should be included in general education to the maximal extent possible (Tripp, Piletic, & Babcock, 2004). More than ever, it is now very likely that children with disabilities will find themselves in general physical education classes, recess, and extracurricular sports. To ensure successful experiences in these settings, it is important for the teacher to provide an environment of acceptance that will give all individuals the opportunity to be physically active.

For this to happen, it is important that students without disabilities acknowledge and have a positive attitude towards students with disabilities (Mullen, 2001). Acceptance by teachers and fellow students is one of many barriers that individuals with disabilities encounter (Tripp & Rizzo, 2006; Wong, Chan, DaSilva-Cardoso, Lam, & Miller, 2004). To reduce this barrier, it has been suggested that a change of attitudes might be accomplished through education and disability simulation exercises (Grayson & Marini, 1996).

Some research indicates that physical education is a natural setting to change students' attitudes by offering disability awareness in the curriculum (Loovis & Loovis, 1997). An ideal disability awareness curriculum would last more than one lesson and would give students a chance to analyze the issues and barriers facing individuals with disabilities (DePauw & Goc Karp, 1994). The SEM complements the disability awareness curriculum by allowing the student to take the responsibility for the modifications needed. Simply stated, the SEM (table 1) does an excellent job of breaking down barriers of what some may call the "traditional model" of physical education to include *all* children. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, it will show how to use the SEM as a vehicle for disability awareness; and second, it will show how inclusion naturally fits into the sport education curricular model.

Goals and Objectives of the SEM

The main goals of the SEM are for students to become *competent, literate, and enthusiastic* sportspersons (Siedentop, 1994). For a student to be *competent*, he or she must be able to understand and appreciate strategies that are common during game play, thus becoming skillful in successfully carrying out such strategies. Examples of strategies may include spatial awareness, defending space, offensive and defensive support of teammates, and correct decision-making during play. In short, the individual must become "knowledgeable" of game play by developing skills and fitness that are specific to particular sports.

To be a *literate* sportsperson, the student must understand and value the specific rules, rituals, and traditions within sport or general game play. Examples within the SEM include anything from officiating a game (knowing when and how to enforce the rules of the game) to identifying the origins or unique aspects of the particular sport (i.e., invasion games as compared to net/wall or target games). Additionally, the student must learn to tell the difference between good and bad sport behaviors and understand the importance of effective

Table 1. Characteristics of Siedentop's Sport Education Model

<i>Seasons</i>	20 lessons, or more
<i>Affiliation</i>	Keep the same teams throughout the season, and maybe throughout the year.
<i>Formal Competition</i>	Interspersed with a formal schedule developed prior to season play.
<i>Record-keeping</i>	Statistics that provide feedback, goals, standards, and authentic assessment for both students and teachers.
<i>Festivity</i>	Team names, uniforms, cultural celebrations, and—as applied to disability awareness—a celebration of athletes who compete with disabilities.
<i>No Elimination</i>	Full participation at all times from all students.
<i>Diverse Roles</i>	Multiple roles for all students, such as coach, referee, owner, captain, announcer, etc.
<i>Culminating Event</i>	Provides climax to the season and a chance to reflect on previous goals.

leadership, as well as teamwork to solve problems (either related to game performance, to other player behaviors, or to both). It is in this part of the SEM process that students with and without disabilities can brainstorm about ways in which they must modify a sport to ensure that everyone is included. For example, in the opening scenario, Fernando was given 10 seconds before he had a defender on him for the floor hockey unit. This was determined by his classmates before the unit started. This type of decision making demonstrates how the SEM can complement any disability awareness program.

Lastly, to be an *enthusiastic* sportsperson, the student is encouraged to voluntarily participate, protect, and enhance the notion of sport at all levels—whether in youth sports, high school athletics, or professional sports. The underlying goal is to think critically about sport and act responsibly to create a more fair and just society. By doing so, students develop the capacity to make reasoned decisions about sport issues, as compared to many individuals who may not have grasped the true spirit of sport.

The Importance of Disability Awareness Through the SEM

One of the long-term goals of the SEM is "to make sport more widely accessible so that gender, race, disability, socio-economic status, and age are not barriers to participation" (Siedentop, 1994, p. 6). The issue of disability is particularly



To increase disability awareness, teachers can apply sport education to a disability sport such as goalball (left) or to an inclusive version of a general sport, such as soccer, in which students take turns in a wheelchair (right).

important now that physical education classes are becoming more inclusive, as a result of the “least restrictive environment” rule, mandated by federal law. The SEM may be a useful way for physical education teachers to include all children successfully. Additionally, the opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in sports and recreation programs are increasing. But what may not be obvious is the socialization that is needed for students to truly understand and appreciate individuals with disabilities. The SEM greatly helps both teachers and students to value “sport in all its forms for all the people” (Siedentop, 1994, p. 6), in that it can successfully provide disability awareness in a realistic and appropriate setting: through sport and game play.

The positive aspects of the SEM are many. It has the ability to challenge and help change misconceptions that students may have about individuals with disabilities; it has the power to increase socialization between peers with and without disabilities; and it provides an understanding of the barriers or challenges that individuals with disabilities may face during game play or a sporting contest. Most important, the SEM serves as the perfect means to encourage and teach respect among all children, regardless of their gender, race, disability, socioeconomic status, or age.

Benefits of SEM in an Inclusive Class

Using the SEM benefits all students in an inclusive class. These benefits fall into the following five categories:

Leadership Opportunities. The SEM is a natural way for all students to experience leadership through refereeing, coaching, managing, being a captain, or being an announcer. These opportunities are provided in a safe and educational atmosphere, and they may promote the ability to exercise leadership elsewhere.

Modifications. The SEM provides an opportunity for the class to decide on appropriate sport modifications, such as to equipment or rules. For example, in the opening scenario, Fernando and Jessica’s class decided to use a Frisbee as a puck, and they used a delayed defense to give some students more chances for success. This step in the SEM allows all students, no matter their ability, to be fully included in each class.

Team Experiences. Often students with disabilities do not have many opportunities to be part of a sports team. The

SEM gives them this opportunity through each sport offered in their curriculum. This experience may help them to feel more comfortable about going out into their community and joining a team, or joining a disability sport organization.

Disability Sports. Along with the benefit mentioned above, all the students in the class can learn about disability sports as these sports are embedded into the curriculum. This gives them a better understanding of sport for everyone.

Experiences in the Community. The modifications made to certain sports can be generalized to other settings very easily. The skill of working together as a class and ensuring that all students are included can be replicated in the community, in each child’s neighborhood, at the bus stop, and at local parks. The likelihood that students with disabilities will be involved in these community activities is greater when they and their peers know what needs to be done in order to include them in a variety of sports.

The SEM as a Disability Awareness Program Model

Lieberman and Houston-Wilson (2002) identified several beneficial outcomes of a disability awareness program: (1) increased acceptance by students without disabilities of their classmates with disabilities, (2) increased socialization among all students, and (3) improvement of the perceived abilities of individuals with disabilities. These outcomes are all consistent with the goals and objectives of the SEM. Through the use of the SEM in a disability awareness program, students without disabilities are able to experience the three different levels of awareness (exposure, experience, and ownership) as suggested by Wilson and Lieberman.

Level 1—Exposure. According to Wilson and Lieberman (2000), students should be exposed to individuals with disabilities through a variety of methods during this initial level of a disability awareness program. Examples of these methods may include in-class guest speakers, video presentations of disability topics, or web exploration assignments for students. The idea, of course, is to bring out into the open any early questions that students may have about disabilities in general, or about individuals who have disabilities. The sport education model is very well suited to accomplish this exposure, though it may not do so exactly

Table 2. Sport Education Model Example of Indoor Circle Soccer

Game Format

Equipment: While not always available, in order to get a true sense of the disability, wheelchairs are a must. Try asking around to see if wheelchairs may be borrowed for the duration of your SEM season. If not enough chairs are available, this activity can still be accomplished using scooter boards.

Team size: 6-7 (or even smaller-sided games with teams of 3-4).

Actual players on court: 5 (one must always use a wheelchair/scooter).

Court dimensions: If space is an issue, Circle Soccer allows for more opportunities for children to play and experience both the game and the challenges of the disability.

Game length: Anywhere between 5-8 minutes (children in the wheelchairs/scooters will become fatigued).

Substitutions: Open.

Basic rules of play: No ramming wheelchairs/scooters into other players. Keep an imaginary three-foot "bubble" when able-bodied players attempt to guard players in wheelchairs/scooters.

Soccer Skills (for players using wheelchairs/scooters only)

Passing and scoring: Two-handed pass/shot, bounce pass/shot, and baseball pass/shot

Dribbling: While using the wheelchair/scooter, players may be allowed to "cradle" the ball for approximately 3-5 seconds, or you can require a "dribble" (like in basketball) every few yards.

as described by Wilson and Lieberman.

Embedded within the SEM are unique characteristics that combine certain aspects of sport and the familiarities of an educational setting. The incorporation of "student roles" in a sport education experience plays a significant part in exposing students to issues involving disability. Traditional student roles within the SEM are captain, player, team manager, official/referee, scorekeeper, and statistician. More specialized, and in some cases optional, student roles are team nutritionist, trainer, and team publicist (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004). However, what makes the SEM unique is its flexibility for adding or modifying the specific duties of these different roles. Take the role of team publicist, for example. Generally, this person is in charge of creating short biographies of his or her teammates. These biographies usually include information about the teammate, which in some cases might be slightly fabricated in order to make it more fun for others to read. These biographies are then posted on the team's section of an overall league bulletin board. A teacher (or in the language of the SEM, the "league commissioner") could also have the team's publicist contribute to the bulletin board by including information about disabilities involving, for example, the use of wheelchairs. Teachers may award team points for daily informational updates on famous wheelchair athletes, wheelchair sports programs, or results of local or state competitions. This serves quite well to expose students to issues of disability. A teacher may even create an entirely new student role entitled "sports information director," for example. The options are truly open to the teacher.

Level 2—Experience. Simply stated, at this stage of a disability awareness program, students are given opportunities to

actually experience sports associated with a certain disability. Using the sport of soccer, for example, children engaged in the SEM will experience indoor soccer while using a wheelchair (table 2). Depending on the available resources in the local community, acquiring enough wheelchairs for every student will most likely be very difficult. Therefore, instead of having one wheelchair for every student, one wheelchair may be supplied to each team with students alternating in and out of the chair as the game progresses. The wheelchairs must always stay on the court and be used throughout the game. In some instances, teachers have opted out of using actual wheelchairs and have substituted floor scooters.

Level 3—Ownership. As stated by Wilson and Lieberman (2000), at this uppermost level of a disability awareness program, "students take it upon themselves to ensure that individuals with disabilities are being treated fairly and equally by society" (p. 30). Such actions match nicely with the sport education model and the development of the enthusiastic sportsperson. For example, as part of a competition among different class periods, students may earn team points or awards by selecting certain disability sports and offering opportunities to individuals with and without disabilities in the community to play in small "mini-tournaments." Instances of these mini-tournaments may include the aforementioned indoor wheelchair soccer, basketball, or softball, or something a bit less mainstream such as sit-volleyball, sled hockey, or goalball (Davis, 2002). The goal is twofold: (1) to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to engage in various sport-based activities, and (2) to give individuals in the community the chance to experience and understand various disabilities through play. One great example is for a school to set up a wheelchair basketball game during the

half-time of a high school game. The purpose would be to increase opportunities for children from the community to play the sport and provide exposure for the children with disabilities and the sport.

Disability Sport Versus General Sport

When developing a sport education season geared towards disability awareness, the teacher must decide whether to choose a specific disability sport such as sit-volleyball or goalball, or a general sport such as soccer or track-and-field. One benefit of selecting a disability sport is that it will allow more exposure for students simulating a specific disability. It will also introduce students to new games and ideas. However, a disability sport unit does not challenge students to find ways to modify sport or work toward inclusion, an opportunity that a general sport unit does provide. The limitation of a general sport unit is that students rotate their time simulating a disability, thereby limiting their experience with the disability simulation. The best option is to have two seasons, one of a disability sport and one of a general sport. If disability sport is unfamiliar to the teacher, it might be best to choose a general sport and add a modification, such as basketball with two wheelchairs, or indoor soccer. Davis (2002) explains exactly how to include disability sports in inclusive classes.

Summary

In the end, using the sport education model to facilitate disability awareness allows students to travel full-circle in their understanding of sport, serving as activists for all who appreciate “sport in all its forms for all the people.” By means of the SEM, physical education professionals can develop not only competent, literate, and enthusiastic sportspersons, but individuals who are capable of making a positive impact on society and its relationship with sport.

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