Enhance Student Motivation and Social Skills:
Adopting the Sport Education and Cooperative Learning Models

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There has been much research done on the many different evidence-based instructional models in physical education (Dyson, Griffin, & Hastie, 2004; Metzler, 2011). Researchers have studied the relationship between these models and several variables of physical education such as motivation, student attitude, student behavior, and social skill development due to their relations with student outcomes (Hassandra, Goudas, & Chron, 2003; Hastie & Sharpe, 1999; Ntoumanis, 2001). Although many of the models have provided significant findings, there is a lack of evidence for teachers using such models (Hodges, Laughlin, & Brusseau, 2018). The purpose of this article is to review the essential components of two popular instructional models, the Sport Education model (SE) and Cooperative Learning (CL) model, and the positive effects they have had on student motivation, behavior, attitude and social skill development. We also discuss how professional development (PD) can improve teachers’ understanding and implementation of these models.

Student Motivation, Attitude and Behavior

Three essential outcomes of any quality physical education experience include increases in students’ motivation, their attitudes toward physical activity and physical education, and, lastly, their responsible behavior and engagement. A significant body of research exists on student motivation, attitude and behavior in physical education. Increasing students’ intrinsic motivation has been a very popular topic of motivational research studied in physical education (Hassandra et al., 2003). According to Ntoumanis (2001, 2005), it is important that intrinsic motivation is fostered and promoted in physical education because it can lead to positive outcomes such as adaptive attitudes and active behaviors into adult life. Motivation is not only listed in the National Standards as an essential outcome (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014); it is a direct predictor of student engagement (Garn, Simonton, Dasinger, & Simonton, 2017), learning (Morgan, 2019), and adopting a healthy lifestyle (Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004).

Student attitudes developed during PE experiences are also tied to lifetime activity choices. According to Silverman and Subramanian (1999), student attitudes are formed through beliefs: “For example, a student may have a strong belief that participation in physical education improves physical fitness” (p. 97). When a student has this belief, their attitude toward physical education may be more positive and less negative. The physical educator and curricular content, gender, age and grade level, marginality of physical education, and student skill-level are some of the independent variables that have been investigated in attitude research in physical education (Silverman & Subramanian, 1999). If a student has had positive experiences with their PE teacher, this will lead to a more positive attitude toward the content. Skill level seems to be a major variable that determines attitude also. It is common to see students who are lower skilled not have good experiences in PE. Providing lower-skilled students opportunities to be successful will in turn lead to a more positive attitude toward PE (Silverman & Subramanian, 1999). Both the SE and CL provide this in numerous ways.

Student behavior in PE has also been a major topic of educators for many years due to the unique educational environment physical education provides. Teachers may perceive student behavior as a barrier to teaching and learning success. Negative, disruptive and/or unsafe behavior has the potential to decrease student learning and to distract the engagement of others in the learning environment (Cottrill, Kulina, & Garraty 2009). Although negative behaviors can often be chalked up to “challenging students,” it is often a result of bored or unchallenged students during class (Rink, 2014). Research has shown that both the SE and CL can positively effect student behavior. SE and CL highlight opportunities for students to focus on their behavior while engaging in learning activities, thus drawing their attention to their responsibilities and facilitating improved social skills (Dyson & Grieskens, 2001; Hastie, 1998; Perlman, 2014). Hastie and Sharpe (1999) reported increases in student compliant behaviors and positive interpersonal interactions using SE with at-risk youth and concurrent decreases in negative behaviors reported in the phases of the unit where specific positive social interventions took place (e.g., formal competition). Use of the CL model has shown that students increased their cooperative skills and empathy and decreased both their quick-temperedness and their tendency to disrupt (Goudas & Magotsiou, 2009).

Overall, studies continue to show how use of the SE and CL models has led to improved student attitude and behavior (Goudas & Magotsiou, 2009; Hastie, 1998; Hastie & Sharpe, 1999; Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). Because these are two factors that we deal with as physical educators daily, it is important to take a more in-depth look at how we can improve student attitude and behavior in our classrooms.

In summary, although motivation is commonly referenced as a need by many teachers and students continually report low levels of motivation (Ntoumanis, Pensaard, Martin, & Pipe, 2004), motivation-prone models are not being used (Hodges et al., 2018). Reasons for this possible disconnect include the lack of true fidelity of model implementation by teachers and/or lack of teacher training in the models. While these reasons might be related in some ways, other research has shown that watered-down or incomplete versions of the model often do not lead to desired student outcomes (Curtner-Smith, Hastie, & Kinchin, 2008) and often lead to teachers “quitting” on the models and going back to traditional delivery. In fact, Hodges et al. (2018) found that only approximately 25% of teachers reported using an evidence-based instructional model (with a good portion reporting fitness education as a model). Given the evidence for models increasing student motivation, learning, attitudes, and physical activity behaviors, teachers need more support and more accountability for models-based practice. For this review and discussion, we chose to highlight the SE and CL models because they provide focus in all three learning domains and may be easily adopted in secondary and elementary settings, respectively.

Effects of the SE and CL Models on Student Motivation

There are several environmental and instructional factors that can affect student motivation in physical education (Hassandra et al., 2003; Ntoumanis, 2001). Many studies examining student motivation use the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT has helped us understand how satisfaction of basic needs leads to increased motivation. Needs satisfaction of a students’ competence, autonomy and relatedness produces greater self-determined motivation, which in turn is linked to positive affective, cognitive and behavioral indices (Ntoumanis, 2005). Teachers must utilize teaching tools and create

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environments that prompt these basic needs. Thus teachers must adopt a student-centered teaching style (Fernandez-Rio, 2017). Although this can seem daunting, with proper training, practice and guidance teachers can improve student motivation without compromising learning or activity time. One example study that focused on meeting student needs through need-supportive instruction found reductions in amotivated (e.g., not motivated) students and showed evidence of increased enjoyment and class satisfaction (Perlman, 2010). In summary, students’ motivation increases as they learn, feel important and valued, and when they are socially accepted. Instructional models such as SE and CL provide a map with instructional tools for teachers to achieve these outcomes.

CL uses social factors, group instruction and practice to increase student motivation by placing ownership of the students’ learning in their own hands (Dyson & Grienski, 2001). This is done by assigning students leadership roles and by giving students choices. With the CL model, Hassandra et al. (2003) found that several social factors were associated with intrinsic motivation, such as the PE teacher, the schoolmates, family encouragement, the media and cultural values. This is consistent with Ntoumanis (2001), who found that the use of CL connected three social factors, cooperation, improvement and student choice, to increased intrinsic motivation in students. He also found that intrinsic motivation was linked to more positive consequences. Morgan (2019) suggested the use of the TARGET framework in combination with CL principles to improve student motivation. This framework encompasses task, grouping, recognition and other intrinsic motivation characteristics needed. In addition, TARGET teaching highlights that when a student starts to recognize they are being rewarded for positive behavior, they are going to be motivated to continue behaving in a positive manner. In the physical education classroom, this can result in increased participation and improved attitude and behavior.

SE is a particularly unique model in how it has been shown to increase student motivation in numerous ways (Perlman, 2010, 2014). The use of the SE model may increase perceptions of a task evolving climate and perceived autonomy and, in doing so, enhance the motivation of high school students toward physical education (Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). Because leadership roles are placed in the hands of students, using the SE provides students increased ownership and allows them to take control of their own learning, just as in the CL model. The SE model also provides a full inclusion environment within the PE class. According to Fill (2008), providing a climate of full inclusion increased student motivation in those who were normally observed as socially isolated. SE allows for students of all abilities to play an important role within their team, which allows them to contribute to the success of that team (Perlman, 2014). When students feel less-than, in terms of physical ability, it causes feelings of embarrassment, which in turn can lead to decreased motivation and participation. Therefore, it is easy to see how the use of this model can lead to increased motivation in students.

The common denominators of success with students who experience CL and SE revolved around three key factors: (1) model implementation was full and efficient; (2) students are progressively taught and given large amounts of power and responsibility for their learning; (3) students build skills focused on social-emotional learning and relatedness to the group. Causality for this success seems apparent, meaning that the more highly trained a teacher is using these models, the more likely their students will achieve learning in all three learning domains as well as increased motivation, positive attitudes and behaviors. While teachers may be successful in getting their students content knowledge for games, sports or fitness, these models produce successful students via the development of their psychosocial skills as well.

Social Skill Development
Developing positive social development skills is a main theme of the SE and CL model that produces student motivation. Dyson et al. (2009) found that SE and CL rely on the teachers’ ability to teach, provide feedback, and build a climate that fosters positive social
interactions. If physical education teachers can use specific strategies and instructional models to improve social skills with physical skill development, they may be better able to support student outcomes. According to Dyson and colleagues (2004), the student social system is the driving force behind SE. Their data showed that socializing played an important role and that within the SE unit they participated in, they were able to interact with their classmates on a different level. This is because within SE each student must fill a role for team success. For example, students become a coach, trainer, or other roles associated with the team. Wallhead and O’Sullivan (2005) found that SE promoted personal and social development in the form of responsibility, cooperation and trust skills because of the emphasis on team affiliation. Students are taking over the leadership roles and doing the teaching and leading of their team. Perlman and Karp (2010) found this is attributed to the students feeling a sense of inclusion, that they belonged, and that their voice and opinion mattered. Because this model is student-led and allows for more choice, students seem more inclined to participate when fellow classmates lead. The SE model also allows students to cultivate an emotionally safe environment, which provides opportunities for positive social relationships with their classmates (Perlman & Karp, 2010). It is important for our students to learn how to build positive social relationships because they will need to be able to work with others in a positive manner in many different aspects of life.

CL seems to really focus on the social domain of physical education as well and promotes social learning in numerous ways. Polvi and Telama (2000) found that “social helping behavior can be learned by practicing in situations specifically organized for that purpose” (p. 111). This means social responsibility can be learned but requires a teacher who can be effective in creating lessons that instruct and promote these positive social behaviors. It is also important to understand that social learning is not just about the ability to cooperate with one another, work together as a team, or develop good social relations; social learning is also about showing care, concern, empathy, respect for each other, and encouraging another to learn (Casey & Goodyear, 2015). The social learning domain is complex and seems to be expanding every day with new techniques and possibilities. More research is needed to explore the lack of adoption by inservice teachers given its potential benefits.

Taken together, this research indicates physical educators can help students develop strong interpersonal social skills so that they can become more socially competent and aware of their behaviors in physical education and physical activity settings. This will, in turn, lead to more positive interactions between students. Social competence and responsibility appear to be an underlying premise of both instructional models and for achieving optimal student motivation. CL and SE give students the ability to positively interact with one another and support peers in their efforts to perform (Dyson & Grineski, 2001). When students feel supported and respected by their peers, this can lead to more positive attitudes, which can lead to increased motivation to participate. In addition, when students are progressively given more accountability and ownership, they tend to be more engaged and motivated learners.

Professional Development in SEM and CL and Teacher Change

Effective professional development is crucial when it comes to helping teachers better understand and implement the SE and CL learning models (Goodyear, 2017; Sinlenikov, 2009). One common theme is that professional development will provide teachers with necessary resources to help them be successful in implementing these models (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Goodyear, 2017). However, professional development must be continuous, individualized and sustained within a professional or expert community. Continuous professional development programs positively influence teachers’ practices and students’ learning (Goodyear, 2017). As a teacher, it is important to understand that quality professional development is not just about your own personal benefit but rather an investment in your students’ learning. It is not simply learning a new game or management strategy but that learning models such as CL and SE can benefit students and the quality of your program. Lastly, although trainings and practice of new models require persistence, change and improvements are feasible within one school year.

Sinlenikov (2009) found that teachers who participated in professional development for SE were more effective at implementing the model. His study showed that teachers exhibited many of SE’s specific pedagogical behaviors. This is important to note because developing new behaviors, and not necessarily relying on outdated strategies, is important to be able to make pedagogical changes as teachers. Change can be scary. As teachers, we often get stuck in our own ways and are afraid to make change, but change is constant and impossible to avoid. According to Dyson (2002), teachers must make major changes in the way they lesson plan and manage their classes in order to be able to effectively implement the CL model. It is a difficult task and can take time for a teacher to feel comfortable teaching the model (Dyson, 2002).

Teachers may wonder, “I want to try SE/CL, but what type of resources are out there?” As presented in Table 1, common areas for PD support include model texts, Internet sources, and web-based trainings. The textbooks listed provide a detailed and progressive explanation for each model and for implementation. Although reading a text can feel daunting, each text provides several examples and key procedures for using the model. Creating a professional community and tackling projects with other motivated teachers is one way to utilize the text. Practitioner-based journals such as the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (JOPERD) and Strategies: A Journal for Physical and Sport Educators, provide many articles on the steps to using both SE and CL. While our list is not exhaustive, we have provided an example for each model. The online resource list is also not exhaustive of what is available for teachers; however, these sites provide explanations, examples, and inservice teacher examples of implementing the SE and CL models. Try a simple search for the models on any of those sites for more information.

Lastly, there are several continuous-education and webinar series regarding these models. Some may require payment, and others may allow you to accrue collegiate/professional credit. Please research those opportunities carefully. Although the authors are not promoting or being sponsored by any of these resources, they have served as powerful tools for preservice and inservice teachers. In addition, these resources should be viewed as starting points for those interested in change, or for those simply wanting to get more information. Please consider the suggestions in the following section as crucial for teachers to refine or evolve toward application of either model.

Suggestions for Teachers

Our recommendations to adopting new teaching strategies include the following. First, evaluate the benefits of being a student-centered teacher (Fernandez-Rio, 2017). Consider the possibilities of having a majority of motivated, well-behaved, engaged and interested students who contribute to the learning environment. Second, do not be concerned with not knowing what to do. Instructional models such as CL and SE come with a framework of assumptions and planning materials
that can provide a map for your implementation (Metzler, 2011). Third, build a professional network, reach out to a university for partnership, and invest in professional training. Much like other jobs around the world, teaching requires upkeep and continued education. Consider immersing yourself into a professional group with a common goal of utilizing a new instructional model. Building relationships with other teachers and professionals through trainings has proven quite effective in previous research (Goodyear, 2017). Fourth, do not let the lack of instant change get you down. Much as we would tell our students in PE, you must keep practicing to improve. Sticking with your plan and reflecting along the way are keys to success. Try not to implement the full-blown model in every single class all at once. Try starting with one class at a time and easing into implementation (Dyson et al., 2004; Sinelnikov, 2009). Before you know it, you may find yourself one year into the model and all classes are functioning at a higher level! Remember that students may have been conditioned for the last 3 to 5 years about “what PE is,” and we may need to progressively teach them what it should be.

### Conclusions

SE and CL both provide many positive learning experiences for our students, and there are many benefits to using both models. We firmly believe that these models provide many benefits a traditional teaching method cannot provide. The fact that it is possible to increase student motivation and improve student attitude and behavior through the appropriate use of these models is impactful! Add to that the positive social-skill development, which appears to be the underlying factor in students’ social development and ownership for their learning. Simply put, the environment and tasks created using CL and SE develop students’ motivation. Not only can these models provide positive experiences and develop better all-around students, but they can also develop more lifelong physically active people, which is our goal.

The CL and SE are complex models that may take time for teachers to learn and implement properly without professional development (Dyson, 2002). Teachers must be willing to make deliberate changes to improve their teaching and their students’ experience. Future research should study the long-term effects each model may have on students’ lives (Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). Regardless of the benefits of these models and other evidence-based models, there is a disconnect between best practices and what is happening in gyms. Practitioners, district leaders and universities may need to create communities of in-depth professional development that is sustained through teachers’ perceptions of model implementation competency. Teachers also need to be prompted and rewarded for employing these models. It is important that we adapt and make changes to our pedagogical approach when necessary, and by implementing the SE or CL model we can provide many benefits to our students that can positively impact them for the rest of their lives.

### References


