

# Teachers' Learning Experiences with the Sport Education Model in Physical Education

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## Abstract

Sport Education is proposed as an instructional model addressing concerns regarding traditional approaches to teaching physical education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the reflective accounts of cohort of in-service physical education teachers after learning about, and teaching, a season of Sport Education. Four female elementary and middle school physical education teachers participated in a professional development course organized by the university and the course focused on implementing instructional models. Data were gathered from interviews with the teachers and analyzed using inductive constant comparison. The teachers reported that the Sport Education model required more planning and preparation than traditional teaching and that they were more supervising and helping than teaching. All teachers adjusted the Sport Education model according to their own understanding, the context and the group. All teachers perceived that the students were actively engaged, cooperated and learned new skills. The study showed that regular physical education teachers can through professional development effectively implement a novel curriculum model.

*Key words:* teaching physical education, model based instruction, Sport Education, situated learning

According to Annerstedt (2008), there is a Scandinavian model for physical education (PE) which is characterized by the inclusion of a large variety of different sports, and students are taught by selecting from a smorgasbord of physical activities. It is by participating in these multi-activity approaches that students are expected to learn (Heikinaro-Johansson & Telama, 2005). Although physical education generally is a popular school subject (Palomäki & Heikinaro-Johansson, 2011; Subramaniam, & Silverman, 2007), Lauritsalo, Sääkslahti, and Rasku-Puttonen (2012) showed that messages posted on the Internet discussion forums mostly referred to negative experiences from school physical education.

In response to these concerns, Metzler (2011) points out that teaching physical education should be more than teacher-centered multi-activity instruction. Kirk (2010, p. 41) also describes the idea of “physical education-as-sport-techniques” where the activities consist of the techniques of a wide range of games and sports compulsory for all pupils and where teachers mainly make all decisions in teaching. This multi-activity program informed by physical education-as-sport-techniques is misaligned with contemporary physical culture and produces similar forms of abstracted, decontextualized knowledge found in the main of sport. In addition to Kirk (2010), Hastie (2003) highlights that there is a general dissatisfaction with the multi-activity model because of an over-emphasis on the direct teaching method in which isolated skills and drills are practiced. Ward (2013) similarly argued that neither the teacher nor their students can develop a deep understanding of content if instructional units are of short duration as is the case in the multi-activity curriculum. In traditional physical education where the teacher makes all decisions, can result in some students having negative experiences, leading Kirk (2005) to argue for reform.

In practice, as in the rest of Europe and in other countries, different ball games are the most frequent content area in PE in Finland (Palomäki & Heikinaro-Johansson, 2011) and Sweden (Quennerstedt, Öhman, & Eriksson, 2008), which means that students are playing games in a more or less competitive context. The focus on playing games is not unproblematic, while Öhman and Quennerstedt (2008) found that cooperation is described by teachers as a main element in various games and exercises with the aim to improve cooperation, but is often taken for granted just by playing team sports. Furthermore, Jaakkola and Watt (2011) stated that there is a need to promote student-centered teaching styles in Finnish physical education, while they found that Finnish physical education

teachers used teacher rather than student-centered teaching styles, with command and practice styles used most frequently. Similarly, a national review of physical education in Sweden (Skolinspektionen, 2012) concluded that in many physical education classes students do not receive an opportunity to influence and to take on responsibility. Even students criticized teachers for not listening nor giving them greater autonomy or using student-centered teaching methods (Lauritsalo, 2014).

A new national curriculum will be implemented in Finland at the beginning of school year 2016-17. Although Finnish education already has a renowned child-centred and liberatory form of education (Sahlberg, 2011), one overall goal of the new curriculum is to improve student independence by providing responsibility for their own learning through an emphasis on joy of learning and students taking an active role (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015). More precisely, in physical education students should become active participants and be able to cooperate and help each other (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014). This change in emphasis is one reason why teachers need to explore new ways and solutions in teaching physical education. As evidence of this initiative to enrich PE, model-based practice and Sport Education (SE) in particular has been included in the guidelines of Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for the first time (Opetushallitus, 2014). The Finnish national curriculum leaves teaching decisions concerning activity selections and delivery to individual teachers and schools (Yli-Piipari, 2014). At the moment, the focus in physical education is more related to students' growth and development, and the multi-activity physical education curriculum will support the student's well-being and independence along with social and interactive skills (Lauritsalo, 2014). Nevertheless, Yli-Piipari (2014) concluded that there is a great need to examine the effects of Finnish school physical education (policies, curricula, instructional models, or teaching styles) on students' cognitive, social, and psychomotor development. Given that these objectives are foregrounded within Sport Education it is worth examining the model in more detail.

## The Sport Education Model

Sport Education is proposed as a curriculum model that addresses concerns regarding traditional approaches to teaching physical education (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2011; Tsangaridou & Lefteratos, 2013). Hastie and Sinelnikov (2006) concluded that Sport Education follows a democratic and constructivist pedagogy that requires substantial small group instruction, as well as features of student empowerment, decision-making and responsibility. Although Sport Education seasons have been set up in different ways in many settings, Hastie (2012) has identified five aspects central for a season in Sport Education. These include (1) a prolonged period of time in which the unit takes place; (2) that students stay on the same team for the whole unit; (3) the use of a developmentally appropriate competition; (4) that students in addition to being players take various roles and responsibility; and (5) that the whole experience takes place in an atmosphere of festivity.

Four comprehensive reviews of literature have showed the success of the Sport Education model in a variety of settings (Hastie, 2012; Hastie, Martínez & Calderón, 2011; Kinchin, 2006, Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). Wallhead and O'Sullivan (2005) made the first research summary and found that the model is effective in promoting students' participation in the student-centered learning tasks in teaching. Their review also showed that the Sport Education model, with its emphasis on members in teams, promotes students' personal and social development in the form of increased accountability, cooperation and trust. Kinchin (2006) also concluded that students appreciate Sport Education as a more attractive form of physical education compared to their previous experiences in teacher directed curricula, mainly because they feel an ownership of the curriculum. Hastie et al. (2011) reported that quantitative data from empirical motivation instruments show increased internal motivation and higher relatedness, competence and autonomy. Finally, Hastie (2012) showed that students improve skill, tactical and game knowledge, and reaffirm reports of significant student enthusiasm.

In addition to the positive findings with respect to students, teachers who incorporate Sport Education see the model as attractive because of increased student involvement and the positive effect on their own efficacy (Kinchin, 2006). Despite widespread interest from teachers and researchers from the early 1980s to the present, Sport Education remains a 'novel' idea in physical education settings, because it challenges some

core assumptions of configuration and scheduling and of the role of teachers (Kirk, 2010).

Teachers working in school learn new curriculum models in physical education primarily through in-service education or other forms of professional development. Although changes in attitude, positive emotion, efficiency and enthusiasm have been reported among teachers who tried a new model, the implementation of a new model has not always been easy and successful. For example, several studies show varying levels of alignment and adaptations when in-service teachers implement Sport Education in physical education. Ko, Wallhead and Ward (2006) found a big difference between what teachers thought about and planned during in-service education, and what they actually realized with their students. Similarly, Curtner-Smith, Hastie and Kinchin (2008) reported that teachers implemented the Sport Education model in many different ways, from a “full version” to a unit that show only a vague resemblance to the original model. In addition, pre-service teachers have indicated that working with the Sport Education model is a labor intense endeavor (McCaughtry, Sofo, Rovegno & Curtner-Smith, 2004; McMahan & MacPhail, 2007; Romar, 2013), a factor that may explain some variation in their implementation.

Despite these challenges, we must remember that the creator of Sport Education notes that there is not one best and exact way of enacting a Sport Education season. As Siedentop (2002) has suggested:

When one develops a curriculum and instruction model, it is futile to worry too much about possible misapplications or even worse, to get involved in demanding that the model has to be done in some perfect form. That is not how dissemination works in schools. (Siedentop, 2002, p. 416)

Likewise, Jewett, Bain, and Ennis (1995) have argued that models should be considered as well formulated and researched constructs that require site-specific modification, mainly through meaningful teacher reflections and actions. The work with models involves more effort and an investment of energy and commitment above and beyond normal work load and teachers expose themselves to both a personal and a professional challenge (Kirk, 1986). Casey (2012) concluded that teachers do not perceive the need to try something new because traditional methods have provided high quality physical education for decades. As an example, Kulinna, McCaughtry, Cothran, and Martin (2006) studied the Exem-

plary Physical Education Curricular model and found similar resistance to change when teachers used the district's curriculum less than half of their teaching time.

## Theoretical framework and purpose

Guskey (2002) and Hunuk, Ince and Tannehill (2012) have noted that when teachers implement a new model into their teaching, the process of their learning is gradual and difficult. Particularly in the beginning, change to increase teachers' competence and enhance student learning requires extra work. A one-day course for teachers, without any follow up and support, have shown no difference in the way teachers subsequently teach (Armour, 2010; Martin, McCaughtry, Kulinna, & Cothran, 2008). Nevertheless, it has been reported that the social nature of professional development can have some positive impact (Romar & Pettersson, 2011). Teachers will also follow a curricular model more closely if they have the administrative support from the school and the district, as well as the resources and facilities to do so (Kloeppel, Hodges Kulinna, Stylianou, & van der Mars, 2013; McCaughtry, Martin, Hodges Kulinna, & Cothran, 2006; Webster, Caputi, Perreault, Doan, Doutis, & Weaver, 2013). It is central that teachers can make connections to personal experiences during the learning process and therefore teachers need to see evidence of change before they "buy into" the change itself (Casey, 2012; Hunuk et al., 2012). Finally, Patton, Parker, and Pratt (2013) noticed the importance of active learning, as this strategy to test the worth of new ideas by implementing them into their own practice helped teachers make changes.

Challenged by these facts, this study used the situated learning framework to understand how in-service teachers' learning experiences were shaped while implementing the Sport Education model in their physical education classes. Situated learning theory assumes learning is a function of the instructional activity as well as the context and culture where the activity is sited (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Several researchers in the physical educated context have used situated learning as a theory to explain learning in general (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998) or from a model based teaching perspective (Dyson, Griffin, & Hastie, 2004; Kirk & MacPhail, 2002). The situated learning framework has also been used in describing that teacher learning is part of the process of participation in the social practice in schools (Kelly, 2006; Korthagen, 2010). In this study, situated

learning means that teachers and students are together and interacting in a variety of different ways which encourages learning to take place. Further, learners undertake activities which are relevant to the application of the learning and which happen within a culture which is familiar and in a similar context where the learning will be applied. Teachers' classroom practices and their own actions are central to learning.

Jones and Lawson (2015) used a situated learning perspective and noted that teacher learn through interactions with other adults, interactions with the students, self-reflection and structured professional development. Teachers showed situated learning by building knowledge and skills that were meaningful to and embedded in the social context of their classrooms. Korthagen (2010) noted that the process of reflection in teacher learning is both an individual process and socially determined. Teacher learning is more than transformation of new information to teachers while it also involves an ongoing construction and refinement of knowledge and understanding. In physical education, Rovegno (2003) similarly described that when teachers construct their knowledge about a certain curricular methodology, they form a cognitive understanding where they interpret, analyze, and find solutions to complex and situational problems in teaching. This emphasizes that reflection can be seen as an essential tool, which enables teachers to further enhance their expertise and how they use instructional models. Capel (2005) highlighted that reflection is a requirement for physical education teachers to be able to develop their teaching. Hall and Smith (2006) concluded that reflection not only comprises the thought processes that teachers engage in after teaching, but also the thought processes that they become involved in during instruction and in planning, and that reflection might well be a constant evaluation process that guides teachers' thinking before, during, and after instruction.

Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga (2007) argued that researchers have too much concerns about misapplications of curriculum innovation which is explained in terms of teacher resistance. While they pointed out that teaching and learning is ongoing through shared practice, and that teacher learning is the result of a growing co-constructed process, there is a need to study curriculum innovation more in detail. More studies related to teacher learning experiences of physical education curricular models (Kloepfel et al., 2013) are also needed. There is significantly less research on Sport Education in non-English speaking countries compared with those from the United States and British Commonwealth



countries. While Hastie (2012) recently published a book with studies from Korea, Cyprus, Spain and Russia, there is still no published study on Sport Education in Scandinavia. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the reflective accounts of cohort of in-service physical education teachers after learning about, and teaching, a season of Sport Education.

## Methods

A qualitative methodology was chosen as a means of obtaining deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences. All participants were member of a group of 14 teachers participating in a state funded physical education professional development program. The focus of the program was related to innovative instructional and curriculum strategies for improving physical education practice and the teachers participated in two workshops of two days each. From the first workshop, participating teachers were asked to select one curriculum model (either Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility [Hellison, 2011] or Sport Education [Siedentop, et al., 2011]), to implement in their school context. Both these models were introduced to the teachers during the first workshop by an experienced university lecturer who presented an overview. Then two school teachers with teaching experience of respective model, explained their experiences when working with the model. Of the cohort of teachers who participated in the professional development program, three elementary and one middle school physical education teachers elected to teach a unit of Sport Education within their school setting.

TABLE I. *Demographic information about the teachers*

Name	Teaching experience	Education	Specialization	Grade level	Language
Anna	28	Elementary		1 - 6	Swedish
Brita	15	Elementary	Physical Education	1 - 6	Swedish
Disa	8	Elementary	Physical Education	1 - 6	Swedish
Elin	22	Physical education		7 - 9	Finnish

One teacher came from the southern part of Finland while three teachers were from Ostrobothnia, which is located in the midwest part of Finland close to Åbo Akademi University. Three teachers worked in Swedish speaking schools and one teacher in a Finnish speaking school (see Table



1). The Finnish speaking teacher had a degree in physical education while the other three were classroom teachers. Two of the classroom teachers did however have a specialization in physical education. The teachers' teaching experiences varied from eight to 28 years. One teacher worked in a middle school (Elin) and three teachers (Anna, Brita, Disa) in elementary schools (the names of all teachers in this article are fictional). These diverse teachers implemented the Sport Education model with ball games in physical education classes from grade three to eight in both coeducational and single sex groups (see Table 2). The sequence lasted from four to five weeks with two teachers (Anna, Elin) having one lesson of 90 minutes a week and two teachers (Brita, Disa) having one lesson of 90 minutes and one lesson of 45 minutes a week.

TABLE 2. *The structure and students in Sport Education seasons*

Name	Grade	Students	Sport	Lessons per week	Duration (weeks)	Gender
Anna	6	13	Basketball	2	5	Coed
Brita	5	27	Volleyball	3	4	Coed
Disa	5 - 6	17	Basketball	3	4	Girls
Disa	3 - 4	11	Floorball	3	5	Girls
Elin	8	15	Floorball and basketball	2	5	Girls

The workshop during the first meeting included content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and active practical learning. The initial part was designed for the teachers to learn the content of the models, including how they were developed, how they were structured and how they were different from traditional teacher-directed activity-based instruction. During part two of the first workshop, the teachers participated in practical activity lessons in the gym, where pedagogical knowledge were presented related to methodologies in student-centered curriculum activities. The final part of the first workshop included a reflection-based group discussion with the experienced teacher on issues related to implementation of Sport Education in her school context. The professional development course started in October and the teachers were then expected to try the Sport Education model in their own physical education groups. At the next professional development meeting, nine weeks later, all teachers shared and discussed their experiences of using model based teaching with their students.

Three teachers were interviewed in February, due to the Christmas break and the teachers' busy schedule during January. Disa was interviewed in early June, because she wanted to implement a second Sport Education sequence in April and May. The teachers' interviews focused on their learning experience and their work with the unit of Sport Education. These semi-structured interviews were conducted by two researchers in an individual face-to-face format over a period of 30–60 minutes. Questions focused on the teacher's preparation and implementation of the model, their rationales for their practices, the impact on the teacher as well as their perspectives of student reactions. Sample questions included, "Why did you choose this model?", "What was your role during this project?", "How do you now perceive the model?", "When should this model be particularly useful?" and "How did the students respond to the model and what did they learn?"

As data were collected, the two researchers transcribed all the interviews. After the first print version, the interviews were replayed in order to exclude transcription errors. When all data were collected, the first, second, and third author first read through the interview transcripts several times to gain a comprehensive overview of the material and to look for trends and explanations. The analysis was data-driven and the themes were distilled from the data base by using inductive constant comparison to find themes describing these teachers. The first three authors met and discussed themes they had developed and shared supporting data. Particular attention was paid to any data reflecting teacher learning. When the final themes were identified, quotes from the data were used in describing the teachers.

Several strategies were used to show research trustworthiness and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Verbatim quotes from the teachers were taken in order to stay close to the data. Memos and notes were used to keep track of the data analysis which increased the confirmability of the study. For the results presentation, we chose the most representative of the selected transcripts which are identified by teacher name. Peer review and debriefing across researchers was conducted to assure credibility across findings. The peer debriefing process involved the researchers challenging each other's interpretation of the evidence.

## Results

Four themes were generated during the analysis and they were identified as (a) teacher interest and knowledge, (b) teacher role, (c) implementation and (d) teachers' perspective of student work.

### *Teacher interest and knowledge*

Teachers reported that their own interest was important when implementing the Sport Education model because their work load increased while they were not familiar with the model. Brita pointed out that the model can initially be laborious but that the teacher needs to be persistent and not give up too early. Sport Education is a new teaching method also for the students and adjustment will take time. All teachers gave the advice to other teachers that they should dare to try it which shows the challenge of the new model.

To not give up. That it may well be that this first lesson can feel very cluttered or like there is a mess and you need to allow students to get acquainted and see what it is about. That they'll try it. (Brita)

In addition to an interest in the Sport Education model, the teachers also pointed out that they needed knowledge of the model, of the content and of the students. In learning the model, the teachers stated that they needed time to learn it. Although reading study materials helped, Anna emphasized that the professional development structure, where an experienced physical education teacher described her implementation of the Sport Education model was helpful in gaining an understanding.

That you to some extent hear someone with experience of it (Sport Education) or read practical implementations rather than just theory. Because I think if you read only the theory, it is easy to think that I do not want to. (Anna)

The teachers also indicated the importance of specific content knowledge in the sport they used in the Sport Education model. Although students were expected to take responsibility for coaching, Brita mentioned that she needed to be prepared and help students during the lessons.

You are prepared for all these parts and you can intervene and you know the skills and drills. So just when you notice that this does not work, that they need some tasks and you can go and say “how would it be if you would do like this?”. (Brita)

In addition, the teachers stated that they needed to know the group and individual students in order to make the right decisions prior to and during the implementation of the model.

If you as a teacher do not know the group then problem students can disrupt the flow. They will destroy it for the whole group as well. But you need as a teacher to have an eye for it. (Brita)

### *Teacher role*

Using the Sport Education model in physical education classes affected how teachers viewed their role in two different ways. First, the teachers took control over several aspects during the planning phase of teaching with the model. All teachers selected the sport themselves and they all choose to have a ball game. All teachers also had chosen to conduct team selection without consulting the students. The teachers’ goal with respect to team selection was to make even teams, separate any groups of friends as well as to distribute the highly skilled students onto different teams. Anna also mentioned that she had taken gender into account and divided the boys and girls equally in the teams. Therefore, teachers need to know their students as Elin did when she took different student roles into account and made sure there were skilled students in each team which she could use as a referees and captains at the beginning of Sport Education sequence.

I wondered how I would divide [the students into] these teams. Because I know them. So I put someone good in basketball and someone good in floorball in every team. There must be at least one who knows floorball and one who knows basketball that you can put as referee at first. Then I instructed them a little but the captains I chose myself. And then the first referee I chose myself. I looked for who is a good referee, because I knew who can blow the whistle and who knows the rules. (Elin)

In addition to taking control over some teaching aspects, the teachers also pointed out that in some ways they were stepping back from the traditional teacher role. As Disa noted; “but now I moved and I followed different groups and discussed more with them and all that. Supervising them and all that”. In addition, Brita felt she needed to help students with skill practice as she had selected a difficult sport, volleyball. Nonetheless, she still believed she “came to have more of a supervisory role”. This other role provided the teachers with an opportunity to observe and evaluate student work. As Elin noted: “I told them that now I have, for once, the chance to stand here with pencil and paper and see how good you really can be”. This was a motivating factor for the students. Even so, Disa stated that all students did not always assume responsibility for their work and therefore she needed to push the students to do their best. Elin tried to motivate the captains to be responsible for their teams and indicated that good team work would be reflected in the grading.

### *Implementation*

All teachers made adjustments to the Sport Education model as well as the sport. The teachers perceived the Sport Education model more as an example and a suggestion than a “law” and Disa said that the Sport Education model must be adjusted based on the social and learning needs of the group. The teachers also explained that they were educated and experienced teachers who are expected to select important and relevant parts from the curriculum and that the Sport Education model is not an exception. In adjusting the Sport Education model, all teachers chose to have a four week season with one 90 minutes lesson a week, and Disa said “I think maybe you should not keep going that long with this [Sport Education] and with the same sport”. In addition, teachers excluded some parts of the model. Two teachers did not include a final tournament and Disa argued that “the group was very performance-oriented from the start and the tournament would have put further pressure on performance and taking focus away from real learning”. Anna omitted team dressing and Brita chose not to use diplomas, but students were given praise and verbal feedback instead. Moreover, Anna decided initially not to include student roles in the model; rather, students were expected to create their own roles in the teams without further instructions. The teachers also adapted the allocated time for practice and game play based on age of the students, class size, the sport and student skill level. Disa’s students did

not have game play at the end of the lesson while two teachers' students played small games every lesson. In Elin's case, she suggested that "they needed to play and let off steam, so we played then every lesson and one team served as referee when the others played".

The teachers adjusted the sport based on the sport and the group, where familiar sport needed less adaptation and less familiar sport more adaptations. Volleyball is a difficult ball game for fifth grades and therefore Brita decided to give the students a choice of what kind of ball to use.

I presented these balls and said they are very hard but they did try. They probably wanted to try but they moved quite quickly to this softer volleyball. The majority [of the students] anyway.

Most of adjustments made by the teachers were reductions of the original Sport Education model. However, Anna extended the model and her students received homework in physical education during the Sport Education sequence. They were expected to practice the skill with a family member at home and then report to the teacher during the following lesson. Three teachers were classroom teachers and they started to make connections with teaching other subject in their school. They pointed out the possibility in using the Sport Education structure in other subjects and Brita said:

I think, of course, it could be good to use it in class, in other [school] subjects. It does not have to be only in physical education. One could convert, so to say these sub parts to fit in these other subjects also.

### *Teachers' perspective of student work*

The teachers' perceptions of how Sport Education affected student work are presented in three parts; student engagement, social cohesion, and skill learning.

#### Student engagement

The teachers all believed that the students enjoyed the Sport Education model and were motivated. Brita said "They thought it was fun, that they learned something, they listened ..?". In addition, the teachers men-

tioned that students were considerably more physically active in warm up and skill practice than they were in traditional teaching.

... everyone was so active ..., I had not really thought they would be. During their warm-up exercises and skill practice, everyone was really sweating when they were done. And probably not all [students] would be that otherwise (Anna)

Disa concluded that students motivated each other to get more involved, and students who normally avoided physical activity could no longer do so. Positive student attitude was also recognized through an increased effort in independent work.

As I went into the gym, they had started with warm up. I came through the door and then they had already changed clothes and were moving, without me having said something and I was just YES. (Elin)

Anna and Disa indicated that in particular, the low skilled students showed higher engagement in the Sport Education season compared to their participation in regular physical education lessons. They both suggested that this was because students worked in small groups (teams) and they were more involved in the game compared to regular teaching where strong students tend to dominate.

... and then it was of these ... how to say from the average level and below, who enjoyed it mostly. They said that they got to the ball and it was not just the high skilled who had the ball. Rather that they could be in these small groups and practice. (Disa)

### Social cohesion

The teachers also stated that student social cohesion increased during the Sport Education sequence because each student has an important role while they are working in groups.

And then I think every student feels equally important within the group. You cannot just run over one another and there isn't someone who is just there in the corner and does nothing. Everyone will be important in the team. Each [student] is a link in the chain, so to say. (Brita)



Student responsibility was a central issue as Brita indicated, “then they learn the things about responsibility and leadership and so they learn ... to keep the group together”. While students were in small groups, each teacher noted that they were able to focus on and work with individual responsibility. Elin also described that the model was appropriate when approaching students with social problems.

Moreover, the teachers perceived that the students learned to respect each other and to cooperate by taking increased responsibility within the teams. They also learned to see other abilities in their classmates and in themselves.

Well I saw that the responsibility increased and that they had taken more into account of each other, respect each other. They learned that the team is important and this “I” thinking decreased (Elin)

### Skill learning

Although the teachers were not instructing in the more traditional way, they still felt that students learned skills during the Sport Education season. Brita said that it is easiest to teach according to Sport Education if some of the students already had good skills in the sport and could then help the lower skilled students in their teams. Elin explained that “because there were some very skilled, so they could show and the others could observe them”. This helped the low skilled student improve. The teachers believed that the increased student engagement could be attributed to the students practicing in their consistent small groups. Another factor for student skill improvement was as Anna said it was “mainly the number of lessons that contributed to skill learning”, because now they stayed with one sport longer than in traditional physical education.

## Discussion

In agreement with Hastie (2003), Kirk (2010) questioned the traditional structure of teaching physical education and suggested changes in schools as well as in teacher education programs. However, the multi-activity approach has still remained dominant in Scandinavia and particularly in Finland. As a result of this critical thinking, different curriculum models such as Sport Education has evolved. Therefore, the purpose of this pa-

per was to examine the learning experiences of in-service physical education teachers when using the Sport Education model in Finland. This was achieved through engaging a group of physical education teachers in implementing the model during their participation in a university professional development course. This provided a way to foster the development of these teachers' understanding and learning about teaching physical education and using the Sport Education model.

In accordance with previous research (Hastie, 2012; Kinchin, 2006), the findings of this study demonstrate that the teachers enjoyed teaching when using a Sport Education model. However, the results indicated that using the Sport Education model in teaching is a pedagogically complex enterprise. For teachers to be successful in implementing the model, they need knowledge of the model and the content in addition to prior experience with the students (Hastie & Curtner-Smith, 2006; McCaughtry et al., 2004). Therefore, and according to situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), while teachers delivering the Sport Education model within their actual school context, we expected teachers' previous knowledge would facilitate their implementation and understanding of the Sport Education model. The results also showed that the teachers used their situational knowledge in implementing the model.

It will take time to learn the Sport Education model and the teachers pointed out that they wanted to get to know the model in the beginning. Nevertheless, given that Sport Education can encompass any variety of content within physical education, these experienced teachers did possess the content knowledge needed to make adjustments to game rules, practice opportunities and to assist student coaches. This result is confirmed by Rovegno (1995) who concluded that teachers' content decisions and actions are linked to their conceptions of subject knowledge and learning. Thus, it showed that in a familiar culture, teachers own actions are central for their learning (Kelly, 2006).

These experienced teachers made different adaptations to the Sport Education model. They have a clear theory of action about how to teach physical education and therefore they wanted to make some changes. Teachers knew what to expect from the students and based their adjustments on students' needs, which is a practical example of how teachers' learning is situated in their work with students (Korthagen, 2010). Previous studies (Alexander & Luckman, 2001; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Ko et al., 2006) have reported that teachers modify Sport Education, and Siedentop (2002) also expects teachers to make changes. This is in

line with the Finnish national curriculum where individual teachers can make their own decisions about selecting activities and teaching strategies (Yli-Piipari, 2014). Another way of adopting the model and where these teachers showed a reflective approach (Capel, 2005) to teaching was when they also extended the original model by adding homework in their physical education classes.

The fact that the teachers adapted the model and teaching content to their students shows that these teachers reflected on their own teaching. The constant process of both individual and social self-reflection will enhance teacher learning and expertise by building knowledge that is meaningful and embedded in school practice (Korthagen, 2010). Similarly, Patton et al. (2013) used the notion of active learning, a strategy to test the merits of new ideas by implementing them into their own practice. In such cases there is a possibility for change while also researchers in physical education pedagogy (Capel, 2005; Rovegno, 2003) have pointed out that reflection can be seen as an essential tool, which enables teachers to further enhance their expertise.

The teachers' work could be seen as both maintaining and giving away control. The teachers implemented the model by taking control of planning and preparation before the Sport Education season. Again, their knowledge about students (McCaughtry, 2005) and content was used in preparing the season. On the other hand, during the lessons they acted more as supervisors and gave space to the students. This shows that experienced teachers can give away some of their control and provide more student centered teaching but still be in charge of some important parts of the instruction. Compared to traditional teacher centered teaching styles (Jaakkola & Watt, 2011; Skolinspektionen, 2012), teachers in this study used a more democratic and constructive pedagogy, which is emphasized in the new Finnish national physical education curriculum (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014) and which students appreciate (Lauritsalo, 2014).

Teachers' positive experiences in teaching are important, which has been shown in several studies (Casey, 2012; Hunuk et al., 2012). This study also demonstrated that students' increased engagement and their positive response encouraged the teachers to think about how to use the model in other school subjects (Korthagen, 2010; Rovegno, 2003). Here they saw the benefit of changing their classroom practices and handing over the responsibility for learning to students. The teachers perceived that their students were engaged on a physical and social level, which

reflects an important benefit of the Sport Education model (Siedentop et al., 2011). Of course, there is no specific student data to support this compared to a multi-activity structure. What was clear, however, was that over the course of the season, all teachers could describe several specific situations where students behaved differently, which corroborates other studies (Hastie et al., 2011; Hastie, 2012).

Some research (Kulinna et al., 2006) indicates that teachers struggle in implementing new curriculums, and teachers in this study noted that adopting a new model requires an increase in teacher work load. Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest that teachers need intrinsic motivation to do something different and make adjustments to their teaching and, importantly, counterbalance their increased work load. As Zach and Inglis (2013) noted, when teachers perceive their work with students as fruitful, they demonstrate a positive attitude to change. Therefore, to support their motivation, teachers need to receive evidence of improvements in student learning (Patton et al., 2013), which also teachers in this study reported from their work with their students. In addition, the structure of the professional development is central and it is important to create a supportive climate where teachers have the opportunity to talk about their teaching and about their ideas and where the teachers know that their views are encouraged and appreciated (O'Sullivan & Deglau, 2006, Romar & Pettersson, 2011).

Following the first session, the professional development structure did not include any formal support designed to overcome the contextual problems and facilitate implementation at their school as was suggested in previous research (Casey, 2012). This certainly meant that the teachers could and had to discover their own solutions in terms of how to implement the model. Therefore, in this study, the in-service education module could have been extended in several ways. We could have used teacher modeling, where university teacher models or created a community of practice (Hastie, MacPhail, Calderón, & Sinelnikov, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2007) in order to make change happen. However, time and budget limitation only allowed us to have a final sharing session, which still held the teachers accountable for implementing the Sport Education model.

This study contributes to the literature of Sport Education because it has been conducted in Finland in a non-native English-speaking country in the European Union. The results provide some pedagogical insights and extend our knowledge of the Sport Education model with Scan-

dinavian teachers and students. As in previous research, we found that Sport Education was a positive experience both for the teachers and their students. Teachers reported that students were motivated and enjoyed to work in groups. A positive outcome was also that the students took responsibility for the work although Sport Education was not a familiar curriculum for Finnish students. By consequence, based on these experiences, there is support for a wider introduction of the Sport Education model in Finland. While not corroborated from students themselves (who are familiar only with a multi-activity program) the voices of the teachers would certainly support this claim. While Sport Education can be seen as an innovative alternative to traditional pedagogy, we point out that it is by no means the only alternative.

This study showed, as did Romar, Haag and Dyson (2015) and Romar (2013), that the model based instruction and especially Sport Education is appropriate for the Finnish physical education curriculum. While Annerstedt (2008) has indicated many connections among physical education national curriculums in the Scandinavian countries, we suggest that the Sport Education model could provide physical education teachers in these countries with a new methodology in teaching. To be successful in this, physical education teacher education (PETE) programs must include an early exposure and teaching experience with the Sport Education model. Several researchers (Glотова & Hastie, 2014; McMahon & MacPhail, 2007; Tsangaridou, 2012) have advocated pre-service teacher education in order to facilitate the process of learning and implementing the Sport Education model.

## Conclusions

As expected, and in line with previous literature, this study indicated that teachers and students had positive experiences from a Sport Education season. The most important finding, however, was that the study also illustrated that in-service teachers can learn to teach Sport Education during a university based professional development course where teacher learning was a continuous construction and refinement of knowledge and understanding embedded in their physical education classes (Korthagen, 2010). Like the studies conducted by Curtner-Smith and Sofo (2004) and Curtner-Smith et al. (2008), professional development should instead of a one-day approach include a follow up structure where teachers

first can implement innovative pedagogy in their own teaching and then have possibilities to discuss and interact with other teachers.

Contrary to previous research (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008, Ko et al., 2006), where teachers were blamed for not following the model, we see that teachers' modifying the Sport Education model is not a problem (Amade-Escot & Amans-Passaga, 2007). The reduction and/or extension of the model can also be a sign of teachers being reflective practitioners where they adapt teaching to their actual school, content and students, which supports the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The adaptations are in line with what the creator of Sport Education, Siedentop (2002), intended. Also Jewett et al. (1995) proposed site-specific modifications through meaningful teacher reflections.

Although this research focused on teachers' experiences of the model, limitations obviously exist with respect to the interpretation. More specifically, by relying on a few in-service physical education teachers, conclusions can realistically only be made about their perceived knowledge and their teaching experiences. With this limitation it is simply not possible to suggest that all physical education teachers in Finland and Scandinavia would have similar positive experiences. This professional development initiative was part of a state funded project. However, there were no funding for teacher support during the implementation phase which is a clear limitation and needs to be addressed in future professional development plans for model based instruction. Similarly, this would provide a venue for an ongoing data collection with both interviews and observations, which could provide a richer understanding of the whole process. In addition, the teachers adopted the Sport Education model during this professional development course when they had to. However, we do not know what has happened after the course and if the teachers have continued to regularly use it or if it only was a one-time experience, although positive. Therefore, given the exploratory nature of this study, further studies should be conducted in the Scandinavian countries in order to facilitate an awareness of the possibilities and promises of this model.

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