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## **Empowering children from socially vulnerable backgrounds through the use of roles in sport education**

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## **Abstract**

Sport and physical education are considered a powerful tool to empower children from socially vulnerable backgrounds (SVB). The purpose of this study was to analyse coaches' perceptions of the effect of the Sport Education (SE) pedagogical model, and use of the allocation of roles beyond player in particular, on the empowerment of children from SVB who participated in a community-based program. Participants included three coaches, the lead researcher and 31 nine- to eleven-year-olds (17 boys and 14 girls) from diverse ethnic groups (Roma, North African, Latin-American, Caucasian and sub-Saharan). A 36 one-hour sessions SE season was implemented. The data were obtained by four focus groups (before implementing the programme; at the end of the pre-season; after the first round of the formal competition; when the programme was completed) and a diary of the lead researcher who participated as participant observer. Coaches' perceived that SE roles were authentic empowering strategies to help children from SVB to have experiences of meaningful participation in a safe environment, sharing power through the responsibilities they assumed, collaboration, and challenging gender stereotypes. In order to accomplish those results, SE had a flexible implementation in terms of duration and roles assignment to become more student-centred, roles were clearly defined to guarantee a safe environment for the children coaches showed an authentic ethic of care, and gender stereotypes were broken through going beyond the equality of opportunities.

Keywords: social vulnerability; sport education; empowerment; youth work; community-based programs

# **Empowering children from socially vulnerable backgrounds through the use of roles in sport education**

## **Introduction**

Physical educators have long argued that sport provides an excellent medium, not only for the development of life skills and personal and social responsibility, but also to fight social vulnerability. Vettenburg (1998) described social vulnerability as the distorted and disconnected relations of young people with social institutions. This term grasps the complexity of social issues and put the focus on the structures in which young people live, instead of in their individual agency (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Luguetti et al., 2017). While an aspiration of physical educators has often been that the psychosocial benefits of practicing physical education and sport would be transferred beyond the sports field to everyday life, their benefits were nevertheless regarded as hoped-for by products rather than explicitly pursued learning outcomes (Holt, 2011).

Fighting against social vulnerability requires a social pedagogy of sport (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012) that, now, does not seem to be the norm in many community-based programs (Kid, 2008; Lawson, 2005; Spaaij and Jeanes, 2013). Recently, PE scholars have promoted various pedagogical models in an attempt to teach for psychosocial benefits explicitly. Some of these models have been tested with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds (SVB). Kirk (2020, p.151) defines these models as critical pedagogies for school physical education, which involve “the organization and alignment of curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment in ways that render physical education inclusive, fair, and equitable as an embodied experience for young people, in order to empower them”. Specifically, he uses the expression ‘critical pedagogies of affect’ in order to emphasize their focus on the ‘affective domain’ where the psychosocial benefits are to be found. Kirk (2020, p. 153) highlights three pedagogies of affect which

have “a critical mass of work undertaken not just by the originators of these approaches but by other scholars”. Sport Education (SE), the pedagogical model<sup>1</sup> employed in this study, is one of them.

### ***Sport education as a pedagogy of affect***

SE seeks to make all students’ sport experiences in PE more authentic (Siedentop, 1994). In order to achieve this purpose, Siedentop (1994) described a pedagogical model with six basic features (seasons; affiliation through persisting groups; formal competition; a culminating event; records are kept; festivity). Furthermore, students participating in a SE season have to perform a role apart from player, e.g., coach, referee, or manager. In social vulnerability contexts, sports-based pedagogical interventions need to be seen as sites for socialization experiences instead of causes of predetermined socialization outcomes (Coakley, 2004). In this sense, SE as pedagogy of affect can contribute to the social transformation of youth (Spaij and Jeanes, 2013). Through the dynamics that occur when putting into practice the key features of SE and the execution of the roles, students have the opportunity to live those experiences that are expected to favour their development from a psychosocial view.

Although SE has been implemented in both primary and secondary schools in order to develop psychosocial benefits, there is very little evidence of research on the impact of SE with students from SVB. Ennis et al. (1999) developed Sport for Peace, combining SE structure and roles development with strategies for conflict negotiation, the requirement that all students play during every classes, and rules guiding students’

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term pedagogical model in relation to SE consistent with Kirk’s (2013) definition while acknowledging that the originator of SE (Siedentop) did not use this terminology.

positions and responsibilities. The objective was to reduce disengagement in PE and negative interactions among students. Sport for Peace promoted shared responsibility for learning, trust, respect, and a sense of family, engaging both high-skilled and low-skilled students in PE. In another study, Hastie and Buchanan (2000) designed a hybrid approach, integrating SE and Personal and Social Responsibility (Hellison, 1995). After analysing the compatibility of goals and common structures, Hastie and Buchanan implemented this new model called Empowering Sport, in order to promote fair play. The main results from this study were the improvement of social responsibility and personal empowerment. Although these studies implemented SE with students from SVB, both were developed in PE curricular context.

Consequently, there is a gap in research on SE as this pedagogical model has not been tested in community-based programs which are developed with youth from SVB. What is more, many of these community programmes are led and implemented by youth workers and volunteers, who do not have the same pre-service education and professional development that PE teachers have, including training in the use of pedagogical models.

### ***Empowerment***

The purpose of this project was to analyse coaches' perceptions of the effect of the SE pedagogical model on the empowerment of children from SVB who participated in a community-based program. According to Lawson (2005, p. 147), "empowerment is a voluntary, collaborative process in which power and resources are redistributed and shared with the aim of enhancing individual and collective capacities, efficacy, and well-being, addressing inequities, and, where poverty is implicated, promoting social and economic justice." When individuals, families, groups, or communities are empowered, they gain a critical understanding of power and authority, services, supports and resources between themselves and their environments; they develop collective identities and social

solidarity, enabling them to mobilize for collective action; they gain resources and power, enabling them to achieve individual and collective goals; they achieve greater equity as they acquire and use their new power and resources; and, finally, they enhance individual and collective capacities to sustain their achievements (Lawson, 2005).

From a critical youth empowerment (CYE) perspective, programs oriented to empower youth should include six dimensions (Jennings et al., 2005):

- A welcoming and safe environment, where youth feel valued, respected, encouraged, and supported. Consequently, empowering environments can be described as safe, supportive, fun, caring, and challenging.
- Meaningful participation and engagement, where youth have opportunities to engage activities through which they make an authentic contribution. In this activities youth should take responsibility and decisions.
- Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, where youth take on leadership roles, and there is a progressive transfer of power to youth as they gain capacity.
- Integrated individual- and community-level empowerment, i.e., viewed as interwoven. It includes the capacity of youth for participating in community affairs, what involves collaboration and voluntary relations.
- Engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes, in which individuals and communities become emancipated and engage in negotiated actions to build community life.
- Participation in socio-political processes to effect change. Programs should emphasize societal analysis and encourage social change goals.

Due to the age of children participants (nine- to 11-year-old), our analysis is focused on the first four dimensions.

## **Methods**

### ***Settings***

This research was conducted as part of a community-based programme that has been running since 1990 in three economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods with high rates of delinquency in a city in Central Spain. The programme is run by a non-governmental organization (NGO) and is funded by several public institutions and private donations. During the time this research was conducted, the programme was providing services to 120 children and adolescents aged between 6 and 16 years.

The goal of this NGO is combating social vulnerability. At a macro level it has big national social media educational campaigns; at a micro level, it has interventions with families and children for giving them more social opportunities (e.g., access to education resources). On the other hand, they also fight the effects of vulnerability, helping youth to develop social skills, healthy lifestyles and meeting other needs. For example, they work healthy habits (diet) with both children and parents.

### ***Participants***

Three coaches, one male and two females, and the first author (Luis) took part in the study. All three coaches were trained and experienced youth workers. The mean age of the youth workers was 33.33 years and their mean length of experience in social work was 11.33 years. The mean length of their participation in the programme was 7.33 years. In Spain, youth workers are highly trained in the field of psychology and sociology but tend to lack training in education. However, the three youth workers in the current research project were qualified Outdoor Educators and had been responsible for organising sports and leisure activities throughout their time in the community programme. Luis took part in this study as a participant observer, collaborating with the

coaches in the design of the lessons, helping them to train in one of every three sessions, leading the focus groups, and writing a diary. This decision was taken to maximise the resources available to implement the programme, and thus benefit the children taking part. In addition, this decision also offset the youth workers limited experience in SE programmes.

The SE season was implemented in three neighbourhoods where there were large Roma and immigrant populations. The 31 nine- to eleven-year-olds (17 boys and 14 girls) registered for the SE programme formed a multi-ethnic group: 11 were of Roma origin, six were North African, six were Latin-American, five were Caucasian and three were of sub-Saharan origin. We obtained the informed consent of the children's parents or guardians, the youth workers and the non-governmental organization, where we informed that young people would be involved in an activity-based programme as the normal course of events, which had low risks for the young people in comparison to other forms of activity-based programme. In the introduction session, we also informed and got ethical approval from the young people that were about to participate in an innovative programme that was implemented in collaboration with the University.

### ***Programme***

A SE season comprising 36 one-hour sessions was implemented. The initial proposition was to implement two seasons over these 36 sessions. However, in view of the children's initial uncertain response to a programme of these characteristics, it was decided to progress as fast as the children's learning would permit. Given that the implementation of the programme was slow, after the first six sessions, the researchers and youth workers opted to administer just one season. The SE season was scheduled as shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]



The season was implemented in three neighbourhoods (working areas within the project site). There were two teams (Lightening Cubas, Carretas Bears) in two of the neighbourhoods where the project run and two teams in the other neighbourhood (Flying Ringo, Savages). All students remained in their teams during the SE season. Once the formal competition had begun, each team held their training days in their own 'neighbourhood' and competition days were held in the different neighbourhoods on a rotating basis. The fact there were only four teams meant that keeping motivation high was difficult and so it was decided to restrict the formal competition phase to just two rounds. However, the preseason included two clinics and the participating children's cooperative self-construction of their own ringos (Méndez-Giménez et al., 2016) that enriched the festivity atmosphere. The clinics comprised two special training sessions delivered by volunteer pre-service PE teachers who were presented as advanced players. In those clinics new games were taught and children had the opportunity to play with and against advanced players.

The game chosen for the SE season was ringo, a Polish net game. Ringo is similar to volleyball but played simultaneously with two projectiles (ringos). The main rules of ringo are: (a) the ringos are simultaneously served from the baseline of each half of the court; (b) the players have to avoid the ringo touching the ground in their half of the court; (c) the players cannot pass the ringo to one another; (d) once they catch the ringo, they have to send it over the net as horizontally and as quickly as possible; (e) if a team throws the ringo and it lands outside the court, the opposing team scores a point; (f) each time the ringos are in play, two points can be won, one for each ringo. The number of players participating varied across the season (2 vs 2 y 3 vs 3), as did the score needed to win, which varied from 11 to 15, depending on how quickly the participants were able to organize the match, and thus, had more time to play. This particular game was chosen for

three reasons. Firstly, because of the low level of technical difficulty involved, which meant that all the participants, in a few sessions, could enjoy the game. Secondly, because the game was new to all the participants, which helped avoid initial differences between male and female participants. Thirdly, because, as a net game, the lack of physical contact between players encouraged the girls to take part.

The competition consisted of a round robin tournament. In each team, the roles assigned were 2nd coach (the social worker was the first coach), fitness specialist, referee (2), scorekeeper, publicist and manager. Committees could not be formed as the players with the same role all trained in different neighbourhoods. Brief coordination meetings, however, were held among the referees before the matches to ensure there was consensus on the rules.

Prior to implementing the SE season, the youth workers took part in a 20-session training course together with a group of primary and secondary school teachers. The course comprised eight hours of theory and 12 hours of practical sessions, consisting of a reduced version of the same SE season that would subsequently be implemented during our research. While the SE season was being implemented, weekly meetings were held with the aim of solving problems, checking progress, planning the next week's sessions, and establishing and introducing concepts and protocols. These meetings served to ensure the application of the different benchmarks proposed by Metzler (2011) and Sinelnikov (2009). Luis developed this task in two ways at those meetings. First, he evaluated the items on the checklist that had been put into practice in the two previous seasons, for coaches to correct possible mistakes. Second, he reminded the coaches of the key items in the following two sessions and made recommendations on how they should deal with them.

### ***Data sources and analysis***

The data were obtained by two methods. Luis organised four focus groups with the youth workers: (1) before implementing the programme; (2) at the end of the pre-season; (3) after the first round of the formal competition; (4) when the programme was completed. In each of these focus groups, which lasted between 75 and 90 minutes, an open analysis format was followed, using open-ended questions, as shown in Table 2.

[Table 2 near here]

Luis also kept a diary of his experience as a participant observer, including field notes and participation in focus groups. This diary, as well as his thoughts about the same points addressed in the focus groups, included his perceptions on the organisation of the season, the influence of the social setting and different things that happened over the course of the programme. We used data from the diary to corroborate coaches' perceptions.

Focus groups data were transcribed verbatim, and qualitative analysis of data was conducted using Atlas.Ti 9. First, a conventional content analysis was conducted (Hsieh, & Shannon, 2005). The researchers' aim was for the categories to emerge from the data, avoiding preconceived ideas. The questions were open-ended and were used to delve deeper into the most significant aspects suggested by the participants' responses. After a preliminary reading to obtain a general overview, the data was read in greater depth, where the researchers highlighted the exact words used to express key thoughts and perceptions. Subsequently, they generated the coding that emerged from the reflections, and finally sorted the codes into categories and subcategories (Tesch, 1990). The results of the analysis were related to the experiences of learning to use SE these

coaches had and the empowerment of children from SVB through SE. Second, for this paper we did a thematic analysis of the empowerment of children from SVB from CYE perspective (Jennings et al., 2005).

## **Results and discussion**

In this section we show some examples of how SE roles have, from the coaches' perspective, the potential to expose children from SVB to empowering experiences. Roles are one of the critical elements of SE (Siedentop et al., 2020). A successful development of any SE season depends on the appropriate performance of roles (García López and Gutiérrez, 2016). For this reason, the analysis of empowerment in this study takes as a reference point the roles implemented in this SE season. In this sense, coaches appreciated how SE roles could help children from SVB to live experiences related to safety and meaningful participation, equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, collaboration, and both boys and girls face gender from a different perspective.

### ***Roles, safety, and meaningful participation***

Safety and meaningful participation are the first dimensions of the children's empowerment we identified from coaches' reflections on this SE season. The coaches recognized that the behaviour of these socially vulnerable children could be unpredictable and disruptive. The fact was that any unexpected event that occurred during the lessons could trigger disruptive behaviors, sometimes violent in nature. This behaviour was many times due to a lack of limits. The more boundaries of their responsibility were defined, the lower the probabilities of the occurrence of disruptive behaviours. The children felt safe when they knew the rules, when they knew the limits of the activities they had to do. Clear rules are crucial when working with children and youth from SVB (Haudenhyse et

al., 2012). As roles responsibilities were clearly defined, it helped children to know what they had to do in the key moments where they had to interact with other peers:

Pilar: A. needs a responsibility during the match. If I don't give it to him, the problems come. As he assumes that he must be responsible for a task, he is able to focus on that task. (FG 3)

Victor: J. was really watching out for the explanation of the role. He was watching the record sheet, seeing the referee's gestures during the match, and then he refereed very well. (FG3)

The children perceived how coaches' expectations of them were high, which was a supportive stimulus for them to engage with their own roles and, consequently, with their teams. From both the coaches' and the lead researcher's point of view, it usually resulted in meaningful participation and behaviour changes:

Pilar: When we assign them the role, they realize that they have a responsibility, and maybe that has made them feel protagonists" (FG3)

Pilar: When we made the presentation of the roles, a boy, who is one of the most disruptive, said that he wanted to be a referee. We said: 'ok, as long as you respect your team you can have that role'. Every time you remind him that he is the referee and what the referee is for, he himself alters his behaviour and fulfils his obligations. They have learned to be consistent with what they have decided. (FG4)

Luis: I notice that the program is being useful in the changing attitude of some children when developing their role. For example, J. is one of the most violent and less assertive. He cannot be controlled. Any setback drives him crazy and violent. However, when he plays his role as referee, he transforms. He perceives the positive expectations created towards him and tries to respond positively. In this

sense, the role of referee, which involves that the rules of coexistence have to be fulfilled, make him change his attitude completely. During the time that the game lasts and he is refereeing, he shows himself as a fair child, who reflects on the decisions he makes and whose reactions are somewhat calmer. (Diary, 17/05)

The SE season appeared like a safe social environment to these children, as they felt encouraged and supported by role development. In terms of psychosocial well-being of participants, a safe environment could be more relevant than actual activities (Biddle, 2006). On one hand, this environment allowed these socially vulnerable children to have a chance to experience feelings of success (Haudenhyse et al., 2012). On the other hand, such an environment made participants feel as if they belonged to a family-like community: “they have changed their attitude a lot and they have worked a lot... They have understood that we are a team, everyone has to participate” (Pilar, FG3). Ennis et al. (1999) found similar results. Students participating in Sport for Peace felt a sense of trust expressed as a bond between teammates (Ennis et al., 1999).

### ***Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults***

The most significant difference in the authors' form of SE compared to the original proposal (Siedentop, 1994) was that the roles were assigned by the coach (youth worker) of each team. Students did not assign roles by themselves, as coaches considered they were not responsible enough, and, therefore, it could be chaotic. On the contrary, coaches did the roles assignment following the empowerment personal goals for each child. In the cases in which the children had a clear behaviour issue that needed to be addressed, the most appropriate role was considered in the planning meeting. If coaches considered that the participant could meet the expectations that each role generates based on the responsibilities the child had to develop, it was assigned. Thus, some participants who

were more likely be disruptive received the role of referee, or those who were introverted but were perceived by educators as possible positive leaders, were given the role of coach.

As a result, every child had to face and make decisions in multiple role related situations. This was empowering in most cases:

Víctor: Roles like coach and referee have been planned and taught correctly, so they worked very well. It is very positive to work on all difficulties or individual behaviours of each child. J., for example, a child who has so many problems of discipline, respect and compliance with rules, we gave him the role of referee, and the final result has been that his responsibility has increased a lot because he was the one in charge of discipline. (FG4)

This does not mean that child-directed activities were not supported, at some level, by the coaches. On the contrary, children participating in this SE season needed a higher guidance from their coaches. Discussing role learning, María explained how she helped a boy who was score keeper and had serious difficulties with writing:

María: When this happens, you help him to reflect that 'you have to try' and finally he does it well. And in the same game, he said 'but you stay here with me and you help me', and I said 'look A. You're going to do it well. You write the names here, you know what score each action is, how teams score.' Soon he did it alone and very well. But at first, he felt insecure. (FG4)

In these situations, coaches were able to read what was going on, be patient and act on the child's real problem, which they considered was mainly insecurity. To do so, they trusted them, helped them realize that they could complete the task successfully, and gave them all the time they needed. The progressive transfer of responsibilities in role learning is one of SE's basic pedagogical strategies (Siedentop et al., 2020). Jennings et al. (2006) also establish that transfer of power should increase as youth gain capacity. A

key question here is the role of adult leaders, who should be able to create and maintain a balance between support and control. Jennings et al. (2006) suggested that one way of favouring this balance is setting high expectations, as we already described in the first theme of this section. On the other hand, Messias et al. (2005) highlighted formal contracts, activity monitoring, and communication of specific program guidelines and expectations as key strategies for teachers to share power with students, which are featured strategies in SE in general, and in this SE season.

### ***Collaboration***

The voluntary relations implied in collaboration are a form of integrated individual- and community-level empowerment. One of the main consequences of delegating responsibilities to children through roles was the improvement of voluntary relations among equal partners, which we could mainly appreciate in the development of problem-solving skills and the decrease of disruption in their teams. J.'s case is a clear example of behaviour change during the program implementation, especially during games. The development of the role involved the desired effects, with very positive results. Víctor reflected on this change:

Victor: I appreciated changes in behaviour of those children who have perceived high expectations on them. It had a spectacular effect on them. (...) How well they have accepted defeat today and how little they have quarrelled. At some point they have complained but remember their continued violent reactions of previous days.  
(FG3)

This can also be observed in different roles, and not necessarily related to the affective domain. A.D. was the boy with serious literacy problems we mentioned before, and as such he avoided reading and writing in public. This boy was the oldest of all groups, and María explained his difficulties to perform the role of score keeper:



María: My team's score keeper was A.D. When I explained his duties, he looked very confident. But when the first pre-season match came, he said he did not want to be score keeper. As he realized he had to write down in front of so many people he said no, he was not going to do it. It's a recurrent dynamic for A.D., he always says he is not going to be able to do it right. (...) I had to intervene and finally he did it well (FG4)

The cases of those children who had behaved so violently and managed to control themselves are an obvious improvement in assertiveness. Assertiveness is defined as the ability to deal with the situation by expressing ideas and feelings without hurting others (García-López & Gutiérrez, 2015). A low assertiveness can derive in passive responses (inhibition, no action at all; and avoidance, fleeing from or avoiding the situation instead of dealing with it) or aggressive responses (threats and physical and verbal aggression). In the studies of SE by García-López et al. (2012) and García-López and Gutiérrez (2015) assertiveness improved significantly. These changes were mainly observed in passive attitudes. However, in our study coaches alluded to aggressive behaviours. The studies of García-López et al. (2012) and García-López and Gutiérrez (2015) were carried out with children who were not especially disruptive, so SE was able to help them in the direction of avoiding passivity. In this case, the children needed greater control over the violent reactions, so this program was able to impact on them in the direction they needed. To sum up, beyond the outcomes coaches observed in the SE sessions, these children could experience how the structure, protocols and social practices of SE helped them to live a social space where all teammates could benefit.

### ***Role empowerment and gender***

Although not enclosed in one specific dimension of CYE, one of the most notable cases of improved behaviour and empowerment was that of the girls. They suffered what

Connell (2008) described as hegemonic masculinity, how social practices are configured to guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. The situation of the girls in the programs was aggravated by the violence of the boys.

Luis: The way boys shout them (girls), inhibit them, they deal with such a strong sexual load... It has impacted me so much. (FG3)

Luis: Today we had a very violent session in Cubas. A. and J. have been insulting girls all the time. Girls put up with it, but there comes a time that they can no longer, and their reactions are as violent as theirs (boys). (Diary, 22/03)

Next, Victor presents the case of M., an African girl who played the role of coach. The colour of her skin was an additional difficulty to that of her gender. During the SE season, we intervened in an attempt to strength her attitude:

Victor: In Cubas I assigned the role of coach to M. because she was the most committed, the one who always attended training, the one that showed the best attitude in it. At the beginning, the difficulties I founded were that M. had authority over her classmates, that they accepted her as a coach, as a captain, as a woman, as a black woman ... As a woman because it is true that, at first, she did receive a lot of pressure from the partners when making certain decisions, such as placing the team in the game or when proposing some activity after the warmup. (FG3)

In this situation we find again a similar process of reflection, letting them take their time, and supporting self-confidence. The results under these circumstances are diverse. During the matches, under the observation of the rest of the teams and the pressure of defeat those strategies seemed to work; in training sessions these improvements are not so easily perceived:

Victor: But then... I have mediated in that discussion. During the match they (boys) respected very much that she was the captain and they accepted her very well. During the training session not so much, but we are working on it, right? We are on the way. (...) M. is very good at keeping the team all together, and her teammates are responding well. (FG3)

Once the season started, the coaches perceived that there were no real differences, neither in technique nor in tactics, between boys and girls. However, the boys treated the girls in a humiliating manner, continually scorning their contributions to the team. In some cases, we decided that activities that helped children to open their eyes and see what is happening were necessary: boys needed help to appreciate girls' worth, and girls need to realize that they can be on the same level as boys, or higher. An activity that we proposed to all teams in one of their training sessions was a boys versus girls match.

Luis: J. and F. (boys) played a game against C. and M. (girls). The girls started winning the first points of the first set. The boys reacted by insulting and messing with them. They felt self-conscious, pressured, and inhibited. From a participatory attitude, focused on the game, they quickly moved on and get defensive. Finally, the boys won the first set. Then, I spoke to the girls. I motivated them and worked on their self-esteem. I simply told them not to let themselves be influenced by boys, which is what they want; they are as good as them or even better. Like in a movie, they won the second and third sets. (Diary, 22/05)

Victor: The training session in which girls played a game against boys, and girls won, has been a turning point. The girls grew up. Until that time, it was as if the girls were in the background. (GF3)

In a previous SE study, Hastie (1998) already highlighted that boys tended to dominate decisions and the power roles (captain and referee). Parker and Curtner-Smith

(2015) concluded in their study that simply employing SE did not guarantee less sexism, less hegemonic masculinity nor more equality. This example shows how teachers and coaches have to go beyond simple equality of opportunities in order to bring about more fundamental change (Eder & Parker, 1987). But finding teachers who can do that is not an easy task. Chen and Curtner-Smith (2015) showed that preservice teachers who developed the SE model failed to detect and fight sexism, as they were not prepared enough to treat hegemonic masculinity face to face with their pupils and did not gain any advantage from SE structures. Conversely, Chen and Curtner-Smith (2013) did find sexism and masculine bias was largely rejected and combatted by two in-service teachers during the four SE seasons observed. These researchers argued that the reasons why teachers succeed were the relatively liberal version of the model delivered and their experience dealing with the actual and potential effects of hegemonic masculinity in their SE units. For example, they provided a more equitable experience for pupils in role assignment, as they made sure that roles more central to a season (e.g., referee) were allocated equally to boys and girls by providing a “set of guidelines” for teams to follow during their role “elections” or by selecting pupils to perform some of the key roles themselves. In the same way, we observed how coaches participating in our study, due to their experience combating social vulnerability as youth workers, their emotional labour and the decisions made on role assignment, were able to create an environment where it was possible to combat gender inequality.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to analyse coaches’ perceptions of the effect of SE on the empowerment of a group of children from SVB. We think it has possibly been one of the strongest stress tests to which this pedagogical model has been exposed. The

result is that SE is not a panacea, but adapted in an appropriate way, it can become a very powerful pedagogical tool for this type of programmes. Although it is true that the results offered in this study are limited to a specific case, we sought to provide evidence of how an adequate application of roles offers children from SVB to have empowering experiences of participation in a safe environment, sharing power, collaboration, and challenging gender stereotypes. Given the hostile environment in which these children live, we cannot be sure that the benefits observed by coaches and researchers can have continuity beyond the limits of the program, and issue central to other pedagogies of affect such as TPSR (Hellison, 1995). However, such experiences are the basis of a contribution to the very transformation of children living in these SVB (Freire, 1979). We must keep in mind that when considering the empowerment of children with this profile, it is advisable to adopt a ‘small wins’ perspective. According to Weick (1984), the strategy of small wins allows educators not to become overwhelmed and paralysed by the scale of the challenge social vulnerability of the children they work with presents, and to focus on accessible and realistic objectives.

There are other issues we would like to emphasize from the implementation of SE in this study, that highlight the potential of SE to become a critical pedagogy of affect. First, there was a flexible implementation of the SE model in order to apply a student-centred pedagogy. For example, the season was as long as coaches considered necessary, which allowed children to have time to learn their roles and put them into practice properly. Another example was that coaches (youth workers) did the role assignment to fulfil the pedagogical aims for every child. Second, coaches showed a great capacity to love the children they were working with, what we could observe in the positive expectations that they always maintained about the children, as well as in the tireless patience that they showed in their relationship with them. Those pedagogies

of love seem to be an essential component of teaching and coaching when the priority is to challenge inequities and the necessity is teachers and coaches to be perseverant (Lugueti et al., 2019). Third, going beyond the equality of opportunities was necessary to break the dynamics of gender stereotypes; in this sense, some activities aimed at ‘opening the children’s eyes’ were very useful. And fourth, the clear definition of the roles guaranteed every child knew their responsibilities during training seasons and matches, what created a safe environment for children who lack it in their everyday life.

SE has shown it is a tool with great educational potential for working with youth from SVB, especially for the younger participants. SE routines and protocols (organization, roles...) expose these children to a powerful pedagogical stimulus which fits to their empowering needs. Although Harvey et al. (2014) concluded that SE *per se* is not enough to teach ethical conduct, one of the findings of our current study with socially vulnerable children is that the SE architecture itself made a big contribution to participants’ learning in this study. For these children, being able to adapt to SE routines and protocols (organization, roles...) means succeeding itself, due to the high level of disruption they have in their lives. We consider that the age of the students and the possibilities for development it implies has made the difference. From our view, children improved their responsibility when developing roles, which is consistent with previous studies in which SE has been used (Fernández-Rio & Menéndez-Santurio, 2017; Hastie, 1996; Hastie & Buchanan, 2000).

Future directions of research include the coordinated implementation of sport education with other programs focused on health and education. Working with youth from SVB cannot be divided into watertight compartments. These children should be exposed to positive stimuli as much time as possible, and a coordinated effort from pedagogical agents is needed.

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Table 1. Season Schedule.

<b>Lessons</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>1 - 2</b>	Introduction to SE and ringo
<b>3 - 8</b>	Preseason. Role assignment. Introduction of 2 <sup>nd</sup> coach, fitness specialist, and manager roles. Teaching ringo tactics and skills.
<b>9 - 16</b>	Preseason. Intra and inter-squad pre-season matches (2 vs 2). Introduction of referee, scorekeeper and publicist roles. Team t-shirts designed and painted.  Easter break
<b>17 - 34</b>	Season. Round-robin formal competition (progression to 3 vs 3). Ringo clinic (two sessions, led by university students). Elaboration of the teams' own ringos (two sessions).
<b>35 - 36</b>	Culminating event preparation and celebration.

Table 2. Sample Questions for Focus Groups.

Topic	Sample questions
<b>Role of sport in the community-based programme (only first focus group)</b>	<p>What are the aims of the sport activities in the programme?</p> <p>Was the programme effective in achieving these aims?</p> <p>What are the main difficulties you typically found?</p>
<b>SE features and roles</b>	<p>What problems did you have when implementing the pre-season matches?</p> <p>What problems did you find in incorporating the referee role?</p> <p>What aspect of the referee role do the children find most difficult?</p>
<b>Personal and social responsibility. Fair-play</b>	<p>What problems did you find when implementing the fair-play accountability system?</p> <p>Are you finding the plenary sessions at the beginning and end of the sessions to be effective? Why?</p>
<b>Others</b>	<p>Are you finding it hard to prepare the sessions?</p> <p>What do you think the children are finding most difficult?</p> <p>What was the impact of a father's intrusion at the training session?</p>

