Exploring the meaning of fun in physical education through Sport Education

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Key words: motivation, enjoyment, perceived competence.
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Abstract

This paper reports on a sixteen week Sport Education (SE) unit with just over 70 Year 5 students (mean age 10.04 years) in one UK school during the spring and summer terms of 2001 and discusses students’ experiences of SE. Student interviews were conducted throughout the season and a questionnaire on different aspects of motivation were administered prior to, and on completion of, the SE season. We report and examine the data in relation to a number of hypothesized influences on fun and enjoyment, including being part of a team, autonomy, competition and winning and improvement in game play, social interaction and being with friends, competition and winning, perception of sport competence and autonomy.
Participation in physical activity provides physical and mental health benefits to young people (Biddle, Gorely & Stensel, 2004). There is however concern over the participation levels of young people and the links this may have with the rise in obesity rates in particular (Goran & Treuth, 2001). Physical education is seen as an important site in the promotion of physical activity because of its potential to reach the majority of young people. One of the desired outcomes of physical education is the development of lifelong participation in active lifestyles (Piotrowski, 2000; Prochaska, Sallis, Slymen & McKenzie, 2003). To achieve this aim it would seem imperative that physical education teachers somehow positively influence students’ motivation to continue in physical activity outside of school time (Weiss, 2000). A major motive (reason) that young people give for participation in sport and physical activity is fun and enjoyment (Crocker, Hoar, McDonough, Kowalski & Niefer, 2004). An argument that has been put forward is that by focusing on the provision of fun and enjoyable physical education we may positively enhance the attitudes of young people towards physical education, and ultimately physical activity participation (Garn & Cothran, 2005; O’Reilly, Tompkins & Gallant, 2001; Prochaska et al., 2003). Several studies have shown that enjoyment of physical education is positively associated with extra-curricular activity levels (Sallis, Prochaska, Taylor, Hill & Geraci, 1999; Terre, Drabman & Meydrechl, 1990; Trost et al., 1997). Other studies have reported the level of fun and enjoyment that students’ report experiencing through physical education (Laws & Fisher, 1999; Fisher, 1996; Goudas & Biddle, 1993). We use fun and enjoyment as interchangeable descriptors to portray the positive experiences that we believe physical education should strive to promote. We acknowledge that it is possible to identify distinctive phenomenological and interactive processes between the two (Podilchak, 1991).
Launder (2001) notes the major differences between the words fun and enjoyment, and implies that the major difference lies in the sense of achievement and competence that individuals gain, “(...) children can have “fun” when simply playing, no matter their level of performance, but below a certain level of competence, players will gain little enjoyment and will sensibly move on to other things” (p. 46). Siedentop (1998a) voiced concern not only with the tendency to disassociate fun and competence but also the implication that striving for competence somehow ruled out having fun, “having fun in physical education, for too many students, has come to mean doing something that is typically momentary and trivial” (p.13). Siedentop (1998a) advocates that it is the experience rather than the outcome that sustains individuals’ enjoyment in sport and that the experience of total involvement (involving competence) is likely to be a key to developing sport participation lifestyle habits.

A considerable body of literature in sport psychology has examined sport enjoyment in young people (e.g., Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel & Simons, 1993; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt & Keeler, 1993; Wankel and Kriesel, 1985; Wankel & Sefton, 1989; Weiss, Kimmel & Smith, 2001). According to Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986) the sources of sport enjoyment can be located along two dimensions (extrinsic-intrinsic and achievement-nonachievement) thus creating four categories of sources. Category one (intrinsic-achievement) represents perceptions of personal competence such as mastery, improvement, and perceived ability. Category two (extrinsic-achievement) represents perceptions of competence that arise from feedback from others or achieving recognition. Category 3 (intrinsic-nonachievement) relates to movement or competition related factors such as movement sensations and the excitement of competition. The final category (extrinsic-nonachievement) relates to non-performance or context related sources that derive from outside of the person such
as affiliation and making or being with friends. By creating an environment that maximize the outcomes in each of these categories enjoyment is likely to be enhanced. Other work has demonstrated that under experimental conditions manipulating perceived autonomy, success and competence has increased interest and enjoyment and reduced boredom resulting in increases in adherence (Whitehead, 1993).

Some would say that by concentrating on fun and enjoyment physical education is trivialised (Siedentop, 1998a). Others, such as the teachers interviewed in O’Reilly et al., (2001) seem happy to forego learning objectives for the sake of ‘fun’. We would argue that neither of these situations need arise. To maximize enjoyment is not to trivialise physical education because enjoyment has consistently emerged an important motive for participation in physical activity or sport, and is the strongest predictor of commitment, or the desire and resolve to continue participation in an activity (Scanlan, Simons et al., 1993; Weiss, et al., 2001). As an outcome then enjoyment is critical. A focus on fun does not have to equate to non-purposeful activity and a foregoing of learning objectives. As Griffen, Chandler and Sariscsany (1993) point out, important to a sense of enjoyment is a perception one is improving skills, demonstrating mastery and is being challenged - important goals within any curriculum area – goals that are not likely to be achieved without effective planning and organization of lesson content. Perhaps the problem lies more with restrictive pedagogical practices and drivers combined with a narrow perspective on fun and enjoyment as easily obtained success.

A move away from the more traditional approach to teaching physical education allows us to examine different pedagogical practices that can enhance and promote fun and enjoyment. Sport Education (SE) is one approach that has illustrated the positive experiences that pupils gain when physical education is more student-centered than teacher-centered, with some students
preferring SE experiences to previous experiences of physical education (Hastie, 1998a).

Siedentop (1994a) suggested that fun, along with play and increasing competence, can be integrated to absorb players and consequently increase the likelihood of players remaining actively involved in sport. Siedentop (1998a) refers to the work of Johan Huizinga and Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi emphasizing that it is the experience rather than the outcome that sustains involvement and enjoyment in sport and physical education. Consequently, he strongly suggests that we need to promote a version of ‘fun’ that absorbs students intensely and completely, and clearly involves competence. This paper illustrates what such a deep notion of fun may consist of. Winning has been reported by students as contributing to the fun of being involved in SE, although winning was not as important as having fun (Carlson & Hastie, 1997). An attraction of the SE model has been reported as its effectiveness in catering for highly skilled students, less skilled students, girls and less ‘popular’ students (Alexander & Luckman, 1998; Carlson, 1995).

Improved outcomes for lower-skilled students include increased opportunities for involvement and greater peer support (Hastie, 1998b; Alexander, Taggart & Thorpe, 1996; Carlson, 1995).

Hastie (1998a; 1996) reported that irrespective of the level of skill students started a SE season with, students felt that they had improved during the season. The opportunity to become affiliated with a team and student appreciation of increased responsibilities that they have for their team may also contribute to students’ fun and enjoyment (MacPhail, Kirk & Kinchin, 2004; Hastie, 1998b; Carlson, 1995).

SE has six features that are characteristic of sport (Siedentop, 1998b; 1994a; Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). The first of these is ‘Seasons’ which encompasses both practice and competition of a sport over a significantly longer period of time than is currently promoted in multi-activity physical education programs. The second feature, 'Team Affiliation', is
promoted through encouraging players and members of teams to remain in the same team throughout the season. It is important to emphasize that team affiliation refers to a team remaining the same for a season, that is, what Siedentop terms a persisting group. Also, team affiliation through sport education is not only concerned with team sports but is applicable to almost any activity, including dance, tennis and gymnastics. The third feature, 'Formal Competitions', including round robins and league schedules, are fixed prior to the season and interspersed with practice sessions. The fourth feature, 'Culminating Event' / ‘Festival Day’, establishes the best team for the season and acts as motivation for students to work throughout the season. The fifth feature, 'Scoring / Record Keeping', requires pupils to experience various roles and provides feedback and goals for individuals and teams. The final feature, ‘Festivity’, adds an important social element to the experience and enhances the meaning of participation for students.

Siedentop (1994a) listed the three primary goals of SE as helping students become competent, literate and enthusiastic sports persons. A competent sports person is able to participate as a knowledgeable games player, having acquired sufficient skill and an understanding and ability to execute strategies appropriate to the level of play. A literate sports person understands and values the rules and traditions of sports, is able to distinguish between good and bad sport practice and is willing to uphold good practice in order to improve the practice of sport. A concern of SE is sporting etiquette, foregrounding respect for opponents and officials. Such behavior expectations are too often not evident in adult forms of sport participation. An enthusiastic sports person participates in sport as part of a physically active lifestyle and in doing so highlights the importance of sport being accessible to individuals.
This paper examines the extent to which the results provided in interviews and completed questionnaires verify, contradict or introduce observations of students’ experience of SE, with particular reference to fun and enjoyment and its antecedents.

We begin with an account of the methodology of the study, the participants and the form SE took at Forest Gate Primary School. We then report and discuss the experiences of SE reported by students using data collected from interviews and a questionnaire made up of a number of elements. It is anticipated that the questionnaire data will resonate with emergent ideas from the interviews and enhance our understanding of students’ experiences of SE.

Method

The Sport Education season

All Year 5 students (mean age 10.04 years, range 9.3 – 11.0 years) from one school were involved in a SE season (16 weeks). Each week a 90 minute SE lesson was conducted outside when students from all three Year 5 classes came together. As was the procedure followed by the school for any innovation that would involve the students, the parents of all Year 5 students were notified of the SE season in a letter from the school. The letter asked that parents with any objections to their child being involved in the season to contact the school. There were no objections. This involved a total of 76 students from three classes, with children from one class being members of a composite Year 5 / 6 class. There were ten SE teams, four each from two classes and two from the composite class. Each team was co-educational and mixed ability.

Mixed ability was determined by the classroom teachers and was assured when, after the first two weeks of the SE season, only one student was moved from one team to another to balance the teams in relation to playing ability. The school is referred to throughout this paper by the
The chosen game for the SE season was an invasion game adapted from netball and basketball. A modified game was chosen to match an appropriate level of challenge to the developmental status of the learners (Siedentop et al., 2004). The aim of the game was to score a point by bouncing a ball in a hoop placed on the ground behind a back of court line. All team members were allowed to score from behind the shooting line. A free shot was awarded for deliberate contact. Opponents were to stand at least one meter away from the player with the ball. Players in possession of the ball were not allowed to move with the ball, with a sideline throw being awarded to the opposition if they did so. A ball going out of play resulted in a free throw from the sideline for the opposition. A jump ball started play. The students played 3 versus 3 during pre-season and 5 versus 5 when playing in the round-robin tournament (weeks 10 to 13) and Festival Day (week 16).
Data Sources

Interviews. The first, third and fourth authors were involved in interviewing students and teachers. Students were randomly either taken out of the classroom to talk to a member of the research team or were approached while involved in SE outside in the playground. Teachers accommodated the days and times that the research team were available to conduct the interviews resulting in students being interviewed on various days at differing times. The interview questions were exploratory in nature because SE was implemented with the intention of allowing themes to emerge through the data rather than seeking to determine the extent of particular attributes. One such theme was ‘fun and enjoyment’. The number of students and teachers interviewed, the point of the SE season at which they were interviewed and sample interview questions are detailed in Table 2. The length of student interviews varied between 7-10 minutes for individual interviews and up to 25 minutes for team interviews. Each teacher interview lasted just over 60 minutes.

From the interviews text segments were identified, category labels attached to the segments and all text segments that related to a specific category or theme sorted. Similar to the constant comparative method of analysing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the data were manually reviewed repeatedly and continually coded, looking for similarities and differences, groupings, patterns and items of particular significance (Mason, 1996). The first author completed an initial analysis of the interview data and the third author verified the choice of themes and the supporting categorizing of interview quotes within the themes. The main qualitative themes to emerge are detailed in Table 3.

Questionnaires. All Year 5 students were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of measures of enjoyment, perceived competence, achievement goal orientation, and
intrisic/extrinsic motivation. These psychological constructs were selected because they reflect important elements of enjoyment and motivation for sport and physical activity in young people (Treasure & Roberts, 1995). Demographic information (age, gender, sport and exercise participation) were also collected.

Enjoyment was measured using a modified version of the enjoyment/effort subscale from the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (McAuley, Duncan & Tammen, 1989). Perceived competence was assessed using a modified version of the perceived competence subscale from the Physical Self Perception Profile (Whitehead, 1995). Pilot work showed the participants to have difficulty with the structured alternative format so participants were asked to rate how like them each statement was on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all like me, 5 = a lot like me). Achievement goal orientation was assessed using the English (UK) version of the Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ; Duda & Whitehead, 1998). The TEOSQ produces two subscales: task orientation (reflecting the degree to which individuals define success in terms of mastery or task improvement) and ego orientation (reflecting the degree to which success is defined in normative terms, that is, by winning or outperforming others). Two subscales from the Perceived Locus of Causality scale (PLOC; Goudas, Biddle & Fox, 1994) were used to assess the degree of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted on all measures used within this study. This process yielded similar factor structures to the original for all but the enjoyment/effort scale. In this case three subscales emerged, one reflecting enjoyment (4 items) and two reflecting effort (2 items and 3 items respectively). As we were primarily interested in enjoyment only this new enjoyment scale was carried forward to the analysis.

Within the current study internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) was acceptable for all subscales (see Table 4).
Results and Discussion

The questionnaires were administered in January 2001 (before the start of the SE season) and again in May 2001 (before the end of the SE season) and on both occasions were completed when all Year 5 students were collected together in the school gym. The main findings from the pre- and post-administration of the questionnaires are provided in Table 4.

Pre-and post SE questionnaires were completed by 63 students and 62% of the sample was boys, which reflected the proportion of Year 5 boys at the time of the study. The majority of students intended to participate in sport/exercise three times a week for the next two weeks (39.7% ‘very likely’ and 27% ‘likely’) with only 12.7% rating such participation as ‘unlikely’ or very ‘unlikely’. Almost 62% of students reported playing sport (not including physical education) more than twice a week and 24% of students reported playing sport one to two times per week. Most sport participation was described by the students as being done at a ‘recreational level’ (55.6%) followed by ‘competitive level’ (27%). A minority stated that they participated in sport ‘not very much’ (17.5%). In relation to the hours a week spent participating in sport, 22.2% reported less than one hour, 23.8% reported between one and three hours, 23.8% reported between three and six hours and 30.2% reported more than six hours.

Fun and enjoyment

It is evident from the interview data that the students found the SE module fun and enjoyable. When asked what they liked most about SE, students responded “having fun” (Sally),
“enjoying it” (Colin) and “it’s fun and enjoyable” (Issac). Sally believed that the most important part of the Festival Day was “to enjoy yourself and have fun”. Billy, from the winning Invaders team, also prioritised fun and enjoyment when asked what the Festival Day was all about, “it was about having fun and enjoying the new sport that was made up in our school, having fun and playing and winning.”

The questionnaire data demonstrated that the students found SE enjoyable (mean enjoyment score 4.1/5). However, this score did not differ from the initial enjoyment rating for the previous physical education program (see Table 4). This was somewhat unexpected as the fun element of SE was prominent in student responses to questions asking them to compare SE to their previous physical education program. For example, John was adamant that SE was better than physical education because it was “different” and “more fun.” Jo elaborated “[its] very different, PE is just like jogging around and just doing exercises. Sport ed is usually playing proper matches and having fun.” This discrepancy between interviews and questionnaires might have resulted due to a ceiling effect in the questionnaire scores. That is, because the students reported high levels of physical education/sport enjoyment prior to the introduction of SE little room was left, on a finite scale, for a significant increase. This would suggest that it is not that the young people at this school did not find physical education fun, simply that SE was more fun.

Another possible explanation is that what made SE fun was not captured within the general questions about fun, enjoyment and liking that comprised this questionnaire. As a result this instrument was not sensitive enough to capture changes in perceptions of enjoyment during the SE season.

Hints at possible reasons for students enjoying SE more than the physical education program are evident in the following extract:
Interviewer: If somebody from another school was to ask you what you’ve done in sport education, how would you explain it to them?

Ahmed: Fun and that’s it, fun.

Billy: It’s like basketball and netball and it’s a lot more fun than other sports.

John: You have to organize most of the teams yourself and most of the other things we do at school, the teachers organize it.

Anne: That’s one of the best parts of it.

Ella: Basically there are five players that play in the game and it’s about a team playing another team and seeing who will win or not and it’s about working together.

These themes of affiliation and autonomy, plus other potential sources of enjoyment, will be explored in more depth in the remainder of this section. Potential sources of enjoyment will be positioned within the four quadrants identified by Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986) in an attempt to show how and why SE might lead to greater enjoyment. An overlap and entwining of sources is evident. For example, learning skills (an important source of enjoyment) is linked to teamwork and affiliation (both important sources in their own right). From an educational point of view, it is worth noting that many of the sources of enjoyment to be discussed, such as task mastery and improving skills, are also important learning objectives.

**Being part of a team**

An important source of sport enjoyment is a feeling of affiliation and being part of a team (Quadrant IV, non-achievement/extrinsic factors; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Others have linked being with friends and assisting teammates to reports of having more fun (Laws & Fisher, 1999; Carlson and Hastie, 1997). The promotion of team affiliation through SE at Forest Gate School has been discussed in a separate paper (MacPhail et al., 2004), and the link between
affiliation and enjoyment will be highlighted here. The students clearly appreciated the
opportunity to work for an extended period of time with the same group (team) and commented
how this contributed to their enjoyment through a sense of belonging, learning, and building
friendships. Maxine commented “I enjoy the team spirit that’s created when you play in a team
and I like playing in teams more than individually so I quite like this.” Laura noted how “it [the
team] made you feel part of it. It made you feel nice.” David expanded on the importance of
belonging remarking that:

Its [the team] quite important because when you are just playing football then you don’t
feel as if (…) you just get picked, you don’t feel you’re really needed. When you’re in a
team you feel like the team needs you.

Ahmed admitted “I like being in a team since Christmas because (…) you don’t have to keep
swapping teams so you get to know them and play with them.” John commented that remaining
in the same team had been “quite good because if you swap teams around all the time, then you
just wouldn’t get to know how all the other players do it and you wouldn’t be very good at
sport.” This last quote highlights some of the entwining mentioned earlier. Knowing your team
mates and what they were going to do was both a source of enjoyment and a contributor to
perceived competence (a further source of enjoyment).

Interviews with the teachers gave insight into how team membership might be improving
learning of all students through a realization that the team needed to work together to be
successful. The teachers further explained how they believed the social skills promoted through
SE brought students together as teams and accommodated those less-able students who perhaps
would not have been felt to be involved through previous physical education classes. Teachers
commented that students began communicating more with their peers and rather than dismissing
a team member who could not carry out a particular skill successfully, other team members were encouraging and advising them on how to improve. Teachers also implied student appreciation of increased responsibilities that they have for their team – a theme that will be further developed in the next section;

Teacher A: (…) having a specific role they’ve got to talk to people and it’s working very well, the children are working well as a group (…) there’s some very mixed children in that class, there’s some very good children in that group, some are really excellent at sport (…) others are very quiet and didn’t really push themselves to an awful lot before so I didn’t really see their true ability and others just couldn’t be bothered. But now, because they are part of a team and they don’t want to let their team down and because of the general working together they can’t wait to get out there on a Thursday afternoon.

Getting to know team members and developing new friendships was also highlighted as an important outcome of SE. Sue commented that working in a team that is not necessarily made up of your friends may let you find out that someone who you thought was “really horrible” is “actually quite nice.” Billy and Leigh commented that the SE teams allow you to get to know other people and make new friends. Jack admitted (…) it’s [SE] made me get a lot more friends because Isaac is in my team and before this started me and Ahmed didn’t like each other very much but now we’re best friends, just because we’re in the same team (…).

Comments suggested that the broader range of activities included within the SE approach leads to greater opportunities to get to know people and more positive outcomes. The impact of friendship within a team was also reported.
It is clearly evident that being part of a team for an extended time was an attractive and enjoyable experience for the participants. This aspect of the SE experience should not be underestimated. Social relationships such as peer acceptance and friendship quality have previously been shown to be linked to positive motivational outcomes such as intrinsic motivation and enjoyment (Ullrich-French, 2002).

**Autonomy**

There is support for the argument that the motivation of students in physical education is enhanced if teachers create an autonomy-supporting environment (Biddle, 1999). There was a lot of support for an increase in student responsibility promoted through SE, with students appreciating and enjoying the autonomy they were encouraged to have in practicing a number of roles through SE. Students appeared comfortable in dealing with the level of autonomy promoted. Claire stated, “It’s really fun because you get to do things that you don’t usually do. Like you get more responsibilities and you have to do things for your team.” Lewy believed that (...) it’s more fun than normal sport because you can work together as a team with your team rather than just picking a different one everyday. It’s more independent and not to do with teachers as much (...) it’s like the teachers aren’t bossing us about all the time. We can do our own stuff.

Jacob commented “You have to organise most of the teams yourself and most of the other things we do at school the teachers organise it.” Laura stated:

I think it’s good because you get to work as a team and you can become more independent and work out what’s good and what’s bad and work things out and do stuff that teachers wouldn’t normally let you do.
To some extent, teachers attributed student learning during SE to the level of autonomy students were encouraged to have in reflecting and discussing issues pertinent to their specific teams. As a team, students were appraising their own performance and discussing how they could improve:

Teacher M: (…) within that group they might say we need to practice going into space whereas in a group of 30 I do what the majority want or what’s in the curriculum, so they’ve got flexibility within that small group to say we’re not working cooperatively or we need to do some more passing practice and you can’t do that as a teacher and they need to practice that themselves.

**Competition and winning**

A key source of enjoyment derives from intrinsic non-achievement factors such as competition and excitement (Laws & Fisher, 1999; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Often in physical education competition has been removed out of concern for the impact of losing and negative social evaluation on students (Leah & Capel, 2000). However Siedentop (1994a) argues that the issue should not be about too little or too much competition, but about appropriate competition and asks that competition be promoted as a festival or related to the pursuit of competence rather than referring to various states of rivalry. In previous SE work winning has been reported as contributing to fun (Carlson & Hastie, 1997).

The teachers at Forest Gate were more than aware of the role of competition in SE and attempted to promote competition through match playing, emphasizing that it was important for teams to try their best rather than focus solely on winning. There was an implication that due to winning becoming more important in the SE model than in previous physical education classes, students would work harder to achieve their goal. “Winning”, “trying our best” and “having fun”
were related on a number of occasions by students, particularly on the final day of the SE season:

“The final match is going to get the cups and medals (...) so everybody is trying their best to win” (Krishna), “It [Festival Day] was about having fun (...) having fun and playing and winning” (Ben) and “It’s finals so everyone’s trying hard to win and we’re trying our best” (Katie).

The notion of team affiliation and its potential impact on winning was popular with students. Laura explained that SE meant working as a team to win as many games as possible and Mineeta stated that her team was very important to her “because if we don’t get along with our team then we won’t win because we can’t work together”. Along with team affiliation, students’ perceived sport competence was also considered a factor in relation to winning; “Without the team we wouldn’t have won” (Olly) and “Without some of the players we wouldn’t have won. I think Danny and Ben made the team quite good because they always scored the goals” (Anna).

Despite the inclusion of competition and the focus on the festival day as the culminating event, students demonstrated a significant decrease in ego orientation pre- to post-SE (see Table 4). This implies that at the end of the SE program students were less likely to define success in terms of ‘beating others’ or ‘being the best’. No significant change in task orientation was observed (see Table 4). This is not surprising as students were already high in task orientation at pre-test leaving little room for the response to increase significantly at the post-test stage. These goal orientation results suggest that including an element of competition can be motivationally adaptive (or neutral) providing the focus is on performance and effort during competition and not simply the outcome. It is possible that the nature of SE creates a climate whereby the positive elements of competition (e.g., excitement, exhilaration, challenge) can be experienced while
reducing the potential negative effects of normative comparison. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation scores also showed no change from pre- to post-SE (see Table 4).

**Improvement in game play**

From the interview data, and similar to Hastie (1996, 1998a), it was evident that most students at Forest Gate believed they were now better at physical education than they were before undertaking SE. According to Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986) these intrinsic/achievement (quadrant I) related improvements should be linked to a sense of greater fun and enjoyment. Students believed they had improved their game playing ability in a number of ways including both physical and mental skills. In many cases this was attributed to working as part of a team; “I’m learning how to get it in a short space of time (...) and how to move about (...) I couldn’t aim properly before with the ball and now I can. I’ve learnt more things than I have before” (Kieran), “I’m learning about how to pass the ball and how to move your feet when you’ve got the ball, where to go when you’ve got a space (...) my friend taught me how to do it” (Krishna) and “I’m definitely better because when we started I didn’t concentrate much on the game, I day dreamed a lot, but now my passing has got a lot better and I find it easier than when I started” (Lewy).

Personal improvement and learning skills appeared to have been enhanced by affiliation, intrinsic motivation and relatedness;

**Interviewer:** (...) you think it’s [SE] important?

**Martha:** Yes because you got better at it because you got to keep on playing and you got to work as a team together.

**Dominic:** It was good fun.

(...)
Martha: It made you feel part of it. It made you feel nice.
Laura: Made you feel like you’re doing something.

One particular student, although being a member of the team that won the SE tournament, focused on the improvement in her team’s performance rather than mentioning winning the tournament, “We were ok to start with and then we got better and we won the best improved team award” (Anna).

Isaac was one of, if not, the most physically talented Year 5 student at Forest Gate and was still able to identify characteristics of his involvement in playing sport in general that were improved by his involvement in SE;

I: Are you any better now at PE than you were before Christmas?
Isaac: A bit because now I know how to play with different team members and I used to not really.

I: Tell me about that, what have you learnt?
Isaac: I used to have one friend and I’d always pass the ball to him and he’d always pass the ball to me, I wouldn’t pass to anyone else, just him. It wouldn’t be fair but now I pass to other people.

I: How does that make you feel?
Isaac: It makes me feel happy that I’ve improved.

One of the teachers reported that students were aware of their increase in sporting competence and how this consequently resulted in much more demanding game play;
Teacher A: (…) they’re a lot more tactical, tactically aware. One of the groups was saying to me the other week ‘It’s a lot harder now’ and I said ‘Well, why is that?’ and they said ‘It’s because we’re marking properly and we haven’t got people to pass to as much and if
people can’t find a space you’re stuck’. It has become a lot harder for them and they’re handling it well.

It was not only an improvement in game play and individual skills that the young people noted, but also a greater sense of how individual differences are needed to strengthen a team and its performance. Anna commented how at the start of the SE season boys were the preferred choice of her team to play while the girls sat out. However, when the team got to know each other and it was evident that the girls “could play good and as strong as the boys” there was no clear separation between the boys and girls. Anna’s fellow teammate, Rebecca, verified the initial perceptions between the ability across genders by reporting that even when a girl was playing at the start of the SE season, boys never included her in the game by refusing to pass to any girl. However, Sarah reported that her group had made a conscious effort to address potential gender segregation and accepted the different attributes that the two groups brought to the team:

We always made sure when we were practicing (…) with our teams we would not have all the boys playing against all the girls as that’s not really fair. Boys have certain things that they can do better and girls have certain things they can do better and you need a bit of both on each team.

This recognition of competence and ability by others would enhance enjoyment through the achievement/extrinsic (quadrant II) of Scanlan and Lewthwaite’s model. Although this appeared most strongly associated with gender differences in this group there were other examples of how feedback from others enhanced a sense of competence. Emma mentioned:

I think it’s super. They think I’m a really good player because I used to play netball at my old school and I think it’s really nice that they appreciate me like that. It means quite a lot to be a member of this team.
Perceptions of competence were also explored within the questionnaire. However there were no changes in this measure from pre- to post-SE (see Table 4). A possible explanation for this discrepancy in findings is that the competence changes mentioned by the students in interviews appear to be based on the fact that they believe they have learned something specific, an aspect not included in the questionnaire used which is more concerned with a general sport competence.

Conclusion

Supporting the large volume of previous research in young people’s experience of sport and physical activity, it is clear that fun and enjoyment is a major factor in students’ experiences of SE. Although students responses to the questionnaires indicated no change in enjoyment scores pre- to post-SE the interview data illustrates more clearly that students did experience SE as more fun than previous physical education lessons. Using Scanlan and Lewthwaite’s (1986) model of sport enjoyment to explore why SE may be more enjoyable showed that the principal reasons seem to include the greater opportunities for autonomy, affiliation, and competition, plus perceived learning. While this is not necessarily ‘news’, it reaffirms the need to facilitate these factors in relation to young people’s involvement in sport and physical activity. Where this paper does contribute to developing our understanding of fun is in promoting a different way to think about fun and enjoyment within physical education. Too often fun is trivialized and we have attempted to show what a deep notion of fun within physical education may consist of. Numerous examples in this paper illustrate students’ support for the SE experience, and the related outcomes, that resulted in students’ enjoyment within physical education. Prochaska et al., (2003) argue that enjoyable physical education may increase student engagement during physical education, which in turn may increase or maintain participation in physical activity out of school. SE provides a vehicle to achieving increased enjoyment during physical education for
students of all abilities without compromising learning objectives or trivializing physical education.

The literature is weak in providing longitudinal studies of SE with persisting cohorts of learners to determine if fun and enjoyment might be sustained over time or if the ‘novelty effect’ wears off. Such research is necessary to determine the model’s longevity and if it can remain a sustained feature within the physical education/physical activity experiences of children and youth both within and beyond school.

It has long been felt that SE units have typically operated internally within a particular school or physical education program (Penney, Clarke & Kinchin 2002; Wallhead & O’Sullivan, 2005) and that there is the need to extend the model to other settings and sport cultures (e.g. inter-school events, youth sport settings, community provisions). It could be argued that the current internal positioning of SE may limit the extent of student interest, engagement, or indeed sense of authentic participation.
Exploring the meaning of fun

References


Exploring the meaning of fun


Exploring the meaning of fun


### Table 1

*Sport Education season schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>SE week</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Feb.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teachers observed and assessed ability of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Feb.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Further teacher observation and assessment of students and formation of mixed ability teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meeting with all Year 5 students to explain and discuss SE. Students informed of teams and encouraged to discuss and agree a team name. Introduction of portfolios and team display boards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>4 - 6</td>
<td>Pre-season training - teacher lead. Students encouraged to practice the role of reporter, warm-up officer, scorekeeper and equipment officer while also being an active playing member of the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>7 - 9</td>
<td>Continuation of pre-season training. The student coach of each team now lead the sessions and not the teacher. Play 3v3 within teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April / May</td>
<td>10 - 13</td>
<td>Round robin formal competition (5v5). Team tee shirts designed and printed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May / June</td>
<td>14 - 15</td>
<td>Sessions cancelled due to bad weather. Time spent concentrating on team display board and portfolio work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Festival Day. All teams played one match (5v5) to decide their finishing position. Medals awarded to all students as well as the winning team, most improved team and most improved performer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Sample interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview context</th>
<th>Sample questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 teams (15 students in total) &amp; 2 individuals (May)</td>
<td>What do you like about Sport Education? What do you dislike about Sport Education? Is Sport Education similar or different from your usual physical education class? How would you explain Sport Education to others who do not know what Sport Education is about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 student interviews (May)</td>
<td>When somebody says to you the word ‘sport’, what does it mean? Do you watch sport on television? Are you involved in sport? Is the Sport Education class like sport?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 student interviews on Festival Day (July)</td>
<td>What is happening today? What is it all about? What does this day mean to you? How important is your team to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 teams (approx. 20 students) after Festival Day (July)</td>
<td>Is Sport Education important to you? Is Sport Education similar to other school experiences? How would you explain Sport Education to someone from another school who had not been involved in Sport Education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 during season (April) teacher interviews and 1 post-season (July)</td>
<td>How did you plan the season? Are you making changes as the week’s progress? How are the students coping with Sport Education? Have there been any problems? Do you see a difference in their game playing abilities? Has your approach to teaching changed? What positive and negative impacts arose through Sport Education? Would you do anything differently if you were to do another season? What recommendations would you make to other teachers thinking of introducing Sport Education?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Main qualitative themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Reference made to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team affiliation</td>
<td>Working together as a team, competing against other teams, relations to others, investing in the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Increase in student responsibility, students appraising their own team performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept of sport</td>
<td>Nature of the activity, key characteristics of sport, sources of students’ concepts of sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived sport competence</td>
<td>Involvement in game play, learning new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun and enjoyment</td>
<td>Being part of a team, playing the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal competition</td>
<td>Winning, scoring, trophies and medals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Alpha coefficients, descriptive statistics and t-scores for psychological variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Alpha Coefficient</th>
<th>Pre-test Mean (s.d.)</th>
<th>Post-test Mean (s.d.)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>4.05 (1.12)</td>
<td>4.11 (.96)</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived competence</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>3.29 (.88)</td>
<td>3.19 (.80)</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2.16 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.26 (1.17)</td>
<td>-.58</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.21 (.98)</td>
<td>4.06 (1.07)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task goal orientation</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>4.15 (.74)</td>
<td>4.19 (.67)</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego goal orientation</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>2.93 (.92)</td>
<td>2.62 (.93)</td>
<td>2.02*</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at p<.05