

Irish primary school teachers' experiences with Sport Education

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Abstract

Recent reviews illustrate the considerable literature on Sport Education (e.g. Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). However, research on the experiences of non-specialist physical education teachers attempting Sport Education is limited (MacPhail et al. 2005; Strikwerda-Brown & Taggart, 2001). The focus of this research was to investigate non-specialist teachers' views on Sport Education, and identify what possibilities might exist regarding Sport Education in the context of primary schooling. Eight teachers [4 male and 4 female] from four primary schools in Ireland volunteered to take part. Following in-service in Sport Education, all teachers delivered a unit of work in their schools. Data were collected using individual teacher and focus-group interviews and each was visited during implementation. Findings indicated Sport Education was an entirely new teaching and learning experience for these teachers which they found to be professionally rewarding and pedagogically refreshing. Teachers discussed high levels of enjoyment displayed by their pupils. An enthusiasm for exploring the integrative potential for Sport Education was evident and many teachers wished for more examples of how the characteristics of Sport Education could be further integrated across the primary curriculum.

Key words: Sport Education; primary education; physical education

'I am just getting the enjoyment that the kids are getting from it ... they have an extremely disadvantaged background and a lot of the children have very difficult home lives and the only normality they have in their lives is what they do in school from nine to half two ... this Sport Education has brought it on another step for some of them. They are really enjoying coming to school to just take part in the games and the fun, they love the responsibility of warming up their team or bringing out the equipment. It's all the various facets that are involved. They really enjoy it' [Terry, primary school teacher]

Introduction

The purpose of Sport Education is to develop competent, literate and enthusiastic sportspersons (Siedentop et al., 2004) by simulating to the extent possible several features of bona fide sport [affiliation, seasons, competition, records, culminating event, festivity].

Pupils remain on the same team for the entire season, which is considerably longer than regular units of physical education. As units unfold there is a progressive shift in responsibility to individuals/teams to lead and direct within-team practices and inter-team

competitive games which conclude with a festive culminating event. Sport Education permits opportunities for pupils to undertake team-based roles (captain, coach, warm-up leader) to support the organizational and pedagogical features within the model [peer teaching and cooperative learning].

Recent reviews illustrate the considerable literature on Sport Education (Curtner-Smith & Sofu, 2004; Kinchin, 2006; Siedentop, 2002; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005) and reveal it has been successfully adopted in many parts of the world. However, research has tended to focus upon children within the upper middle to high/secondary age and to a lesser extent those within upper elementary/primary (Mowling et al. 2006). Whilst there are examples of Sport Education seasons with children as young as nine (Mowling et al. 2006; Kinchin, MacPhail & NiChroinin, in press), some have questioned the suitability of Sport Education for even younger learners and some caution has been expressed in relation to when reasonably full forms of Sport Education might be appropriate (Metzler, 2000). These cautions are somewhat compounded by the fact that primary physical education is often taught by non-specialists. As Hardman & Marshall (2000) stated; "A common scenario across the world is the practice of having qualified 'specialist' physical education teachers at secondary level and 'generalist' teachers at elementary level" (p.218). Some writers have put forward ways in which a 'foundational' element for Sport Education might be established through making connections with early years and foundation stage guidance within England and Wales. This element is based around the following features; a) developing and using routines, b) sustained groups and affiliation, and, c) encouraging and developing responsibility (Kinchin & Kinchin, 2005).

On a global scale concerns have been expressed regarding the lack of specialist physical education teachers teaching in primary schools and the need for their continued professional development (Hardman & Marshall, 2000). In England and Wales time devoted to physical education has often been lost due to pressures to meet literacy and numeracy targets (Harrison & Warburton, 1998). Teachers typically receive limited time and course content [as little as 8 hours] in their teacher preparation (Oxley, 1998; Warburton, 2000) and the extent to which this input meets teachers' needs has been questioned (Carney & Chedzoy, 1998). Such a position led the Central Council for Physical Education and Recreation [CCPR] to challenge government to ensure a minimum of 30 hours of initial teacher education in physical education (CCPR, 2004).

A report on the status of physical education in Ireland by the Houses of the Oireachtas (2005) draws attention to the need for investment within the primary sector to support implementation of the curriculum. The report adds; "it is a simple fact that Ireland lags behind other nations in the provision of physical education. The time allocation, financial allocation, original training, on going training and on going improvement of PE infrastructure is considerably less than in most countries" (p.34). Primary teachers in Ireland complete physical education components as part of a three year undergraduate degree. While there is some variation between institutions most primary teachers receive less than 50 hours of physical education experiences. Continuing professional development is based around a voluntary 5-day course, normally at the end of the school year. Physical education is not provided in all primary schools and the quality and breadth of delivery varies as many teachers do not feel confident or competent teaching

physical education (Deenihan, 1990, Broderick and Shiel, 2000, McGuinness and Shelly, 1996, DES, 2002; MacPhail and Halbert, 2005). A recent report by the Inspectorate found 95% of beginning teachers felt well or very well prepared to teach physical education (DES, 2005). There is no policy on delivery of physical education by specialist teachers at primary level. Many schools depend on the support of National Governing Bodies which leads to overloading of the curriculum with the games strand (Fahey et al, 2005).

One hour per week is allocated to physical education in Irish primary schools. Six strands are included: games, athletics, dance, gymnastics, outdoor and adventure and aquatics. Teachers are recommended to deliver 4-5 strands per year in two units. A unit is recommended to last 5-6 weeks. The time required for effective delivery of a strand of the primary school PE curriculum by a primary teacher through Sport Education is available. Sport Education is not included within the methodologies and approaches recommended in the primary school physical education curriculum.

Whilst the importance of early learning experiences has been highlighted (Kirk, 2005), improvements physical education provision in a number of primary schools in England and Wales have been reported (OFSTED, 2005). The ongoing in-service in physical education (2005-2007) seems to be improving the provision of a broader and more balanced physical education programme in some Irish primary schools but it is too soon to tell if the current in service programme will have lasting impact on provision. Sport Education was not included within the in service programme.

If teaching physical education remains mostly in the hands of non-specialists, Sport Education's visibility and future at this stage could be dependent upon efforts amongst these practitioners to learn and sustain what might be considered an unfamiliar curriculum model. The potential for Sport Education has been highlighted with some claiming it; "...to be more integral to the central purpose and ethos of primary schooling" (Taggart, Medland & Alexander, 1995, p.16).

There are examples of units taught by specialist physical education primary teachers overseas (e.g. Bell, 1998; Bell & Darnell, 1994; Curnow & MacDonald, 1995). The experiences of non-specialist physical education teachers attempting the Sport Education model for the first time in their programmes is limited (MacPhail et al. 2005; Strikwerda-Brown & Taggart, 2001) and provided the rationale for this study which describes the experiences and perceptions of eight non-specialist primary physical education teachers delivering Sport Education for the first time in four primary schools in Ireland. The research questions were; what are these teachers' views on Sport Education, and, secondly, according to these teachers what possibilities exist regarding Sport Education in the context of primary schooling?

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Settings

Eight teachers [4 male and 4 female] with between two and seventeen years of teaching experience from four primary schools voluntarily agreed to take part [one male and one

female teacher from each school]. The schools represented a range of socio-economic status. One taught through the Irish medium and was located in an inner-city setting and another school was located in an area of deprivation. The remaining two suburban schools drew predominantly middle-class children from their catchments. All teachers had received 36 and 48 hours of undergraduate physical education focusing on games, gymnastics and dance. Some had participated in a further 52 hours of physical education in the third year. Sport Education had featured in their undergraduate course or in-service development.

In-service training & establishing the game focus

All teachers received two days of in-service training in Sport Education delivered by two of the researchers. This training addressed the rationale for Sport Education, presented the key goals and features, and summarized some of the research using Sport Education. Specific assistance and guidance on designing the season was offered including lesson outlines at different phases across a season. During the training teachers agreed the 'game-form', which was an invasion game including elements of basketball and netball where a point is scored by landing the ball in a hoop placed behind a back-court line. The game rules were also agreed and all teachers taught weekly sessions between mid-September and mid-December 2004 [total of 12 sessions].

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured teacher interviews mid-way through the season and a focus group interview with all teachers also towards the middle

of the season. Individual interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour and the focus group interview lasted 45 minutes. Further short interviews with teachers took place either just before or just after the festival. All individual and focus-group interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. Each teacher was visited on one occasion with field notes taken to record as many events and conversations as possible. These events included tasks that individuals/teams completed and the content of any teacher explanations/demonstrations and feedback interactions with the class. Conversations between pupils and between the teacher and pupils were noted.

Appropriate permission and consent were obtained before the study commenced.

Pseudonyms are used in this paper to protect the identities of all subjects and settings.

Data Analysis

From the individual interviews, focus group interview and field notes text segments were identified followed by the attachment of labels to these segments. All related segments were converted to a specific category. Employing a constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the data were read and re-read in order to generate similarities, or patterns. Categories were then ultimately refined to represent the factors that teachers in this study believed to be important in relation to their first efforts to implement Sport Education.

Results

The thoughts and ideas of the teachers can best be presented around five themes teachers believed to be important

a) Enjoyment and involvement All teachers made mention of pupil enjoyment which they perceived was through the implementation of Sport Education. As Donna stated: “I know they are enjoying themselves and enjoying it. They can’t get enough of it really”. Teachers believed pupils were more interested and motivated than in their previous physical education classes. Terry summed up the views of many: “The kids have enjoyed it you know, they got a lot out of it”. The teachers attributed enjoyment to some specific features of the model. Teachers consistently shared how their classes enjoyed being on a team, coming up with their own team names, designing shirts and logos/crests/badges and having more of an active role within the class. The many opportunities to play games during unit sessions were also enjoyed. In particular Sophie remarked: “They do love it. They love playing matches. When its five minutes aside we play and then you switch and they really enjoy playing matches”. Nadine spoke positively of some of the routines she was using in her class: “I think it was the whole process...coming up with the rules...they loved it, and the training, they loved the training sessions and getting their own little section and doing their bit of training...”

All teachers referred to some of the managerial and organizational benefits of using Sport Education, in particular pupil support with tasks such as collecting equipment and undertaking warm-ups. Ronan added:

The one thing that has come out of this is the regulatory of it I suppose. They know the set formula and they love that. They know exactly where they are going and it gives them confidence because if they weren't sure about something this week they are going into the same group next week and they can sort it out.

Consequently, lessons began sooner and teachers were of the view more lesson time was available for physical activity, which they believed pupils liked.

Teachers noticed that their pupils were more involved during the lesson with particular mention made to those who were considered 'less skilled'. Kyle indicated: "It was motivating and showed them how to participate in a team sport, especially the children who wouldn't otherwise be involved in team sports." James added, "I was also excited about it as it gives the weaker children, as I mentioned a chance to see that sport is not just participating to the best of their ability". Sophie outlined one of the highlights for her; "The weaker person achieving success is I think is one of the highlights that I have". The season also appeared to increase participation levels across the physical education lessons. Terry articulated this as being attributed to the promotion of team affiliation, "... in the past out of those thirty-seven kids you might have twenty of those thirty-seven kids drifting around the edges because they have never been involved ... whereas this gives them a great opportunity of team affiliation and getting involved".

The teachers' accounts also indicated pupils had made some additional adjustments with a view to enabling access to all learners, such as being unable to shoot before everyone in the team has received a pass "They [girls] all have to get involved so much because it is three on three ... and the way the rules have been set up ... there are no kids sitting on the

sidelines isolated. They have to take a pass ... they have to take part because of the rules” (Terry).

References to girls’ participation during the Sport Education season continued. Kyle reported it was the: “...physical game itself that one particular girl did not like and that she was like that with any activity they covered in PE”. He did believe however that her pursuing a role external to that of a player during Sport Education increased her inclination to take part in the lessons. Sophie and Terry also supported the pursuit of roles as an attraction to girls investing in the lessons,

... there have been about four or five girls in particular that have really gotten into it and they really like the idea of them having a role. They are saying ‘Look, I am on a team and I have to do this’ ... There are a couple of the warm-up officers, they are girls, and they are kids with no particular interest in sport, but because they are assuming responsibility over a group, they have taken a great interest and they want to learn new stretches and different exercises that they can do with their team. (Terry)

Aimee reported the result of deliberately allocating one of the captaincy roles to a girl who would be very quiet in the class but was interested in sport: “Her mum has come in to say that she has come out of herself and is really chuffed with getting this role and being a captain and I think she has improved, even in class and with the other girls as a result of being captain”.

b) Them more...me less Teachers spoke to their managerial and instructional roles and in particular how these had changed through Sport Education as the season unfolded. Sophie reported how previously taught physical education;

Normally when I was doing PE, let's say if you were playing basketball, I would do my drills and the worst thing about drills is you have a couple of people standing in a line (...) and you are going to have more discipline problems if there are people standing in a line looking at someone doing it instead of actually doing it themselves.

The changes to this approach were evident in the earlier lessons of the Sport Education season as Sophie explained:

...very much teacher-directed. So you have to direct them. That was at the start, it was very much you...we would say this is the best way to do that...the children have reached a point now where they can go out and where it all runs smoothly and they are the ones running it now. At least when they are coming out they know that they are the ones doing it. They are not doing it because I have said to do this.

Teachers admitted children were used to them being in charge in lessons, particularly in relation to organising groups, undertaking warm-ups and completing practices. Donna and Terry talked about backing away from these activities as the season progressed:

I was kind of standing back. It was brilliant really. They picked up that whole taking it over very well...that is more coming from the children now. I am standing back now at this stage. I am literally handing them the sheets and saying count the scores and the referees count the whistles and I think I am beginning to see that it is working... (Donna).

... instead of me being the focal point or the centre and everyone watching what I am doing or who I am putting on particular teams, they know when they go out that it is the team assuming responsibility, they go into their groups, they are the ones that should be refereeing the games. It's more or less their organizational skills that are going to decide how this game works. I am there if there is a major problem we just overview it (Terry).

Some teachers spoke to changes in the organisation in their class; "Before I would have got the equipment out and I would have got two people to help me. Now...We've got four..." (Ronan). Terry stated: "They get the hoops out, they bring the balls out, they bring their little gear out and they get themselves into their designated training spots"

Aimee also reported on some new experiences for her; “They [pupils] are used to a teacher telling them what to do...but they are improving as time goes on...I feel redundant now because they know what to do and you’re here ‘ok, de dum, de dum...’”.

Less direct instruction was also evident in Nadine’s recollection:

...the kids are working on their own. I’m not screaming and shouting at them what to do and they’re working on their own basically and I think that’s great. And also when they’re in charge of it themselves they tend to look after it more.

James, as a less experienced teacher, claimed to find it harder letting go of the class as he explained:

James: As a primary teacher you tend to structure a lot of your lessons and tend to keep control and like having control over the class...when I am teaching I like to know what’s going on and I like to know that there is a development there in what I’m teaching. I like to know after a days work I have goals achieved. In terms of teaching in sport education I am finding it difficult...In terms of teaching in college we experienced introducing things and introducing new ways of exploring older ideas...

Researcher: Right and what do you find when you are actually teaching sport ed?

James: That you are not teaching.

c) Assuming responsibility Reference to notions of pupil responsibility, and in particular how pupil decision-making resulted in a sense of ownership of the Sport Education unit for the students, was evident in all teacher interviews and was a factor that initially attracted the teachers to Sport Education:

I think the major difference [between previous PE and the Sport Education unit] is the responsibility is more on the children’s shoulders in that I’m not as vocal or I’m not as central to the running of the PE lesson. They have taken the responsibility for themselves ...it was a chance to put a lot more opportunity on the children in that there would be more input from the children than from me or Sophie, the other teacher, standing at the top of the hill or yard and just dictating to the children ... the children were assuming responsibility for what they were doing as well as that they were taking a lot more interest in what was going on around them (Terry).

While Donna had expressed initial hesitation about devolving responsibility to the pupils, many teachers also spoke at length about the use of team-based roles in Sport Education. The inclusion of captains, coaches, managers, warm-up leaders, equipment managers and referees were apparent in all unit settings. A few did include other roles such as ‘kit-bag job’ and ‘water-boy’. There was unanimous support for the use of roles and the opportunities for children to fulfill these roles on a regular basis:

Oh they were thrilled with that [roles]. They loved the idea of a job, a title, so they were thrilled with the idea of jobs...The first four who came in with bags were given the kit bag job, like bringing the kit in and out and the same with the water, plasters and first aid...The framework is very good for them and they all feel included you see, even less athletically able would feel included and they feel that their position on the team is validated by other duties (Kyle)

Like many Donna and Kyle were of the view that their pupils were taking these roles seriously. Donna added: “I think they just listen to each other...Seeing that they are getting points for this and I think that is working well like it is actually being recognized and rewarded”. Kyle reported:

I saw that the captain and vice-captain were able to exercise their authority over their team players. They were willing to tell their team mates to stand in their groups or else they would be put on the sideline for a few minutes”. There was concern that it would be the more ‘aggressive and forceful’ students who would be successful in undertaking certain roles but in encouraging the quieter students they were as capable of assuming responsibility of the role they pursued.

In the main teachers used accounts of individuals performing their roles to illustrate their support and they claimed to take much pleasure in seeing the growth in their pupils and that; “Some of them had come out of their shell” [Terry]. Ronan shared the following about one of his pupils undertaking the role of captain:

Ronan: ...I am spoilt and they just lapped it up but one team would be the Leopards. Their captain is a gentleman... he is just fantastic and you can just see it. I wouldn't have thought the captain would be so important but his attitude just filters through the team and he is fantastic.

Researcher: He is taking it seriously?

Ronan: He is taking it very seriously but just that he has got the best attitude going. He is absolutely brilliant...I have to say but he more than any team has stood out

Donna discussed a particular coach she had been impressed with:

There is probably a coach in particular. He is brilliant like and he surprised me because I wouldn't of put him in that role like. That was the role he liked. The team picked him and he would be on the team that are top with points for organization. He gets them doing different things and he comes up with different things and he comes up with good ideas for them and they are listening to him and he is listening to them...

Sophie shared an account of some girls and one particular boy in her class:

...the girls would come up and say, 'oh this is better' or 'we've decided to do this drill'. If someone comes up to you like Ron...He is a boy who came up to me and said today is the best day of my life and this is the best thing that has happened to me all week' and I was like 'good man'. He would come up to you and say 'I thought this drill at home' and I'm saying 'excellent..

All teachers discussed problems they perceived with the role of referee. Ronan talked about working as a 'buddy' with some of the referees as one strategy to develop their confidence and ability to officiate. The problems with referees and refereeing were more severe in some settings than others as Donna indicated; "because I was actually refereeing whereas now they are refereeing it. I have been trying to set some of them to blow the whistle, they are afraid of it but they are getting better at it...". Other teachers refereed for the majority of the season. Kyle explained that disputes over refereeing decisions in his class had led to unnecessary time-wasting. Aimee also talked of particular difficulties: "Referees as I said earlier, I find a lot of them, that you have to

intervene and kind of get the kids focused at different points because they are finding it difficult to be authoritative”. Terry explained that some pupils would question the teacher about any decision and that there was a tendency for some to go to the teacher rather than their peers if a decision needed verification.

d) *New Thinking* All teachers claimed Sport Education was a new model of curriculum and instruction for them in which to shape teaching and learning in physical education. Sophie’s comment was indicative: “I had never heard of Sport Education before...it’s better than the way we would have tackled PE before.” Teachers were all supportive of the in-service they had received, [where they had first learned about the model] which had provided them with: “...a clear framework of what we had to do” [Sophie]. Ronan also set out what he had learned and saw in a new approach:

Basically what I got from the in-service was that it was a more holistic approach to sport in that you weren’t just playing the sport involved. Many different aspects of the actual game aside from playing the actual game...and thus resulted in a very different way to deliver physical education...I definitely like Sports Ed.

In all cases teachers claimed Sport Education had led to a positive change in their teaching and a new found positive attitude in many children (particularly those who teachers claimed were less interested in and motivated by physical education in the past), compared with previous time in physical education;

It’s very, very different to the old way we did PE...In general every lesson. It’s just the equipment and when they see the equipment officer going, all you can hear is ‘yes’. They know they are out again to get involved whereas in the past there was a tendency of ‘oh god’ with some of the girls. They just didn’t enjoy it, whereas now you have all the kids enjoying it. (Terry)

traditionally when you line them up and pick them off the wall, you have to pick the four or five most skilled in to the captains to select and then when it comes down to picking the last three or four kids they are always the same three or four kids who are last picked and they know this themselves. So when it comes to Sports Education I think the kids really enjoy the security of being on a fixed team. They feel secure in their team groupings. They feel justified with their place. It's like a shelter to them, they are never again going to be the last person at the wall [Teacher focus group].

For some the experience had led to a change in their thinking about teaching the subject.

Donna, who admitted hating PE in the past, reflected on her physical education teaching experience:

I'm not a major sports fan myself, like, but we'd go out to the hall and we'd assume that the kids would know the rules of the game... We probably never explained to them... it was just going out playing a game basically and the kids who weren't into sport didn't enjoy it... Whereas now, no matter what the game is... I think that has proven like that everyone can play it, no matter what your ability is and you can learn together and, you know, I suppose, just work as a team... it was a learning experience for us.

Some teachers shared an initial concern that a unit of work over ten weeks would not retain the attention of Year 5 students who were used to completing five- to six-week blocks of PE. However, they reported that students had not become bored during the unit and attributed this to the many components of a Sport Education unit and not only a focus on the activity itself.

Teachers also shared evidence that students were addressing 'new thinking' in their relationships with each other. Sophie reported that there was a noticeable reduction in the number of students who were choosing to disengage themselves from the lesson, primarily due to the realization that everyone had to be involved, to some capacity, in the team. She also noted a reduction in the reluctance to take guidance from their peers.

Aimee reported a significant change in the extent to which students were now complementing each other within the physical education context, which she attributed to students developing and working as a team over the duration of the unit.

e) *Again and elsewhere* During the season some teachers such as Nadine had integrated Sport Education with other elements of the curriculum: "...we had an art lesson on the making of their crests". Art had proved popular in Sophie's setting to construct and develop team banners, logos and badges in readiness for the festival and, while admitting that she had not yet integrated Sport Education with other elements of the curriculum that this did not mean she would not do so in the future.

During brief post-festival interviews all teachers expressed a desire to continue with Sport Education. A number of teachers made reference to some initial interest from other colleagues in their schools. Sophie referred specifically to a member of her senior management team:

The principal has approached me on several occasions and said how feasible it is for this to be put throughout the school. It could get rid of discipline problems because they [students] are taking ownership of it and if you make it interesting enough for them... they are really going to want to succeed and they are not going to waste time doing things they shouldn't be doing.

The teachers indicated they would apply the model to other physical activity areas (e.g. hockey) , or continue with select features of the model (e.g. using sustained teams, assigned practice areas and uniforms) or attempt Sport Education with "...a more challenging group ... and in a classroom situation" [Terry].

Some teachers either shared the potential for Sport Education transferring to other aspects of the primary curriculum (e.g. group research work in history) or gave specific examples. Kyle referred to arts and crafts where; "...they [pupils] are responsible for the material and their own work, both to hanging it up to dry and to retrieve it afterwards...".

Nadine recounted her efforts:

I've noticed that it [Sport Education] doesn't have to be, its not actually in sport, but for example in other subjects the kids, lets say, are sorting themselves in teams for example, in science they're able to work on their own that bit more and they assign themselves, let's say if I put them in groups, they assign themselves someone in charge, someone to take down the information and there's no fighting about it because they know they can change it around and they just seem to get on well with each other in a group situation now than they had before.

Sophie was of the view that; "If it works in PE then it should work across the board" and

James mentioned that Sport Education's focus upon social interaction and development had implications for delivery of social and personal education and also noted value in applying the team concept to the topic of debating.

Ronan's parting comment summarized his perceptions of having taught the model; "Just fair play to the people who organized it and brought it to our attention and definitely keep going because as I say it (Sport Education) has a future in primary schools"

Discussion

In respect of the key components of Sport Education, many of the findings from this study are not dissimilar to previous research (Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). This research demonstrates that the known outcomes of the model for both teachers and pupils which have been documented within the research can be achieved by

practitioners who are not from physical education-specific backgrounds. The findings in this study continue to support both the flexibility and robustness of Sport Education in an increasingly diverse range of settings (Kim et al. 2006; Sinelnikov & Hastie, 2006; 2008). Sport Education was an entirely new teaching and learning experience for these teachers which they found to be both professionally rewarding and pedagogically refreshing. Teachers admitted previous teaching of physical education had been almost entirely teacher-led. Whilst the release of direct instruction was initially a little difficult for some (Kinchin, Penney & Clarke, 2001), in time the teachers began to recognize and largely embrace the development of a new facilitating role and were now "...standing back..." (Donna) as their pupils progressively took greater responsibility for the lessons. Given Sport Education is designed to permit greater depth in coverage of the content over an expanded set of lessons, (Siedentop, 1994), for all teachers this 12-lesson unit was far beyond anything they had taught before in physical education. Their concern that pupils would get bored with these extended curricular arrangements were unfounded.

Teachers discussed high levels of enjoyment displayed by their children. The many social opportunities for and potential to enhance social development as a function of Sport Education teams, commonly cited in a positive fashion (see Carlson & Hastie, 1997), were also apparent in this study. It was evident Sport Education permitted these teachers to discover abilities and dispositions in some of their pupils which they had not previously seen. Teachers' accounts point to the range of ways in which pupils responded to the expectations for participation in this curriculum. This was particularly noticeable in the development of teams, the degree of cooperation between team-members, and the

emergence of greater ownership and learner responsibility. Teachers' accounts claiming increased levels of responsibility and decision-making among pupils during the season corroborate comments from other pupils (Hastie, 1998). The participation requirements characteristic of Sport Education enabled many more pupils to be involved in the lesson, which teachers admitted had not been the case previously. This point seems pertinent to the increased participation observed in some girls who seemed to gain in confidence and were more willing to participate (Carlson, 1995)

Pupils were willing to follow specific routines in terms of class management. They took direction from their peers and met and indeed exceeded their teachers' expectations concerning the use of pupil roles. The teachers' descriptions of some pupils demonstrating leadership and taking their roles seriously have been observed elsewhere (Hastie, 1996.). Research in Sport Education has suggested the use of team-based roles brought some pupils a sense of 'being in charge' (Brunton, 2003). It should be acknowledged the use of some roles has not always been successful. There are examples where the 'power-oriented roles' such as captain or coach have been more attractive for some (Curnow & Macdonald, 1995) at the expense of other team members and examples where some pupils have refused to take direction from peers (Pope & O'Sullivan, 1998).

Being 'in charge' when fulfilling one of the team-based roles proved problematic. There was less progress and success using the role of referee. Whilst teachers used some strategies to support the referee (e.g. acting as a 'buddy') and claimed slow improvement, there was still evidence the teachers were mostly refereeing towards the end of the

seasons due to a perceived lack of confidence being exhibited by pupil-referees [e.g. a fear of blowing the whistle]. Teachers justified their intervention over disputes with refereeing decisions on the grounds that lesson time would be lost. Players appeared to by-pass the referee and instead remonstrated with the teacher, which in part might be attributed to previous physical education lessons. A more complete knowledge and understanding of the role of the referee appeared absent in this study. Metzler (2005) has outlined further suggestions including passing a rules test and learning simple to more complex examples of refereeing which might have been useful in this instance. Hick's (1998) example of 'Good Sport Checkers' may have also been helpful to both address positive and negative sport-like behaviour, and reinforce the importance of accepting decisions. It is not known if the role of referee was perceived as less attractive as captain or coach, but the importance of the referee came to the fore when inter-team matches were played and players began to see the consequences of matches. On occasion professional development with teachers might need to foreground the development of this key role which if not implemented reasonably successfully can lead to an intensification of the sorts of inappropriate within-competition behaviours the model is seeking to confront and ultimately minimize.

There was a certain level of curiosity conveyed by the teachers in each school in relation to Sport Education and a strong suggestion the model can be articulated as a teaching methodology to address the strands of the primary curriculum in Ireland. The following quote was indicative;

“The children are more responsible for building their own learning [through Sport Education] and this is part of our new curriculum. I think this Sport Education is a new aspect to the new curriculum and possibly something you could bring in to develop the new curriculum, to explore the new curriculum with the children”
(James)

This study suggests Sport Education can provide a catalyst for a range of integrative activities. Hastie (2003) has described how this model supported cross-curricular outcomes in Australia through integration with social studies and Sinelnikov et al. (2005) reported how a bicycle safety curriculum was grounded in the Sport Education model. Teachers in this study provided many further examples where the expectations for peer teaching, group work and the use of group-based roles in Sport Education were being transferred to other content areas where group work was being used [e.g. science]. Classroom time also allowed pupils opportunities to work in their teams on activities which enhanced the festive element of the season (e.g. making banners, team crests) and reinforced the persisting learning arrangements. Interestingly, it was observed consistently across the settings that the classroom was where team crests, team lists and records were posted, league standings maintained and competition schedules publicised and in some of these classrooms pupils were observed sitting in their teams wearing their respective coloured t-shirt. It is believed these daily reminders of the season plus the artefacts being developed quite likely added to pupils' excitement and enjoyment. That the persisting teams were developed and sustained in both the classroom and on the playground may serve to help connect learning in these two different teaching spaces.

An enthusiasm for exploring the integrative potential for Sport Education was evident in exit interviews and many teachers wished for more examples of how the characteristics

of Sport Education could be further integrated across the curriculum. At exit, there was a strong sense these teachers intended to continue using Sport Education in their teaching both in and out of physical education. Sinelnikov & Hastie (2008) in their account of Sport Education within the Russian context point to; “The growing international interest in sport education...” (p.219). At the same time as seeking to develop competent, skilful and enthusiastic participants in sport-based physical education (Siedentop, 1994), we are of the view that this study demonstrates the even greater flexibility of and potential for Sport Education to support engagement with and participation in other areas of schooling, in this instance the primary curriculum. We would therefore encourage teachers and researchers to continue to investigate the integrative potential of Sport Education and the rich array of outcomes which might be possible with sustained group arrangements. Teachers in this study were not only able to make a genuine attempt to implement Sport Education within physical education time but also demonstrated an interest in and ability to transfer specific expectations and learning arrangements characteristic of this model to the classroom in quite creative and imaginative ways.

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