

FINAL SUBMISSION

Pupils' and teachers' perceptions of a culminating festival within a sport education season in Irish primary schools.

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Abstract

Background: Whilst there is considerable literature on Sport Education [SE] little attention has been afforded to an investigation into the use of a specific festival as a culmination to a season.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to examine primary school pupils' and teachers' perceptions of an inter-school festival.

Participants and Setting: Pupils from eight classes in four Irish primary schools participated in a three-month season employing the Sport Education Curriculum Model [SECM]. A modified invasion game provided the activity focus.

Data Collection: Interview data were collected from pupils and teachers prior to, during and after the festival.

Findings: Results indicated prior to the festival, pupils were, while excited and looking forward to the festival, not certain about what the day would entail. During the festival pupils reported how their team was performing and discussed elements of the festival they enjoyed most. Post-festival, pupils focused on their team's performance and spoke positively about their memories of the day. Teachers reported the success of the festival in maintaining pupils' interest with pupils keen to prepare their teams to play against other schools.

Introduction

Festivals and special events can play a significant role in communities' lives. The word 'festival' has been defined as a "...day or period of celebration" (The Oxford Minidictionary, 1991). In discussing the work of Gadamer, Grondin (2001) states:

that a festival is characterized by a certain temporality into which we are enticed.

It occurs at a given time and all who participate in the festival are elevated to a festive state and, in the best case, transformed into a festive mood...(p.45-6).

Scheibler (1999) claims "...in the festival, the focus is not directed to the individual but to their participation in something [an event]...the festival celebration is shared; participation is a sharing in an event" (p. 151-2). For Gadamer, participation is also the

essence of a festival and that everyone who attends is involved in a collective experience. In drawing an analogy with an academic conference, Grondin (2001, p.47) states that:

...beyond all the precise and soon forgotten statements, speeches and results, perhaps the essential aspect is that one is with one another (eats and drinks), that one encounters others and becomes involved with them in this being together .

In presenting his cultural analysis of festivity, Eichberg (2006) has recently offered some configurations of a festival which he bases around space, time and atmosphere. These configurations are as follows:

1. The *space* of festivity, which refers to the arrangement and location of the festival.
2. The *time* of festivity, this speaks to the place of the festival in the lives of individuals.
3. The *energy* of festivity, which refers to the practices that give the festival a particular atmosphere.
4. The *relations* of festivity, which refers to the group and inter-group relations that develop during a festival.
5. The *objectivation* of festivity, which refers to ways in which the festival is objectified [e.g. results]

As the above review would seem to suggest, whilst the term 'festival' refers to an occasion for celebration and festiveness with others, it might also be regarded as a

regularly occurring program of cultural performances, an exhibition, or a thematic competition organized around a series of acts or performances. This latter depiction could certainly apply to the notion of a 'festival' in a sporting or physical activity context, as the following attests:

Regional track meets, the local Friday night football game [inter-school match in American Football], or the Little League baseball game [organised and competitive game played by young children in leagues] have their own kind of festive atmosphere. The festive nature of sport enhances its meaning for participants and adds an important social element to the experience (Siedentop, 1994, p.9).

Most major sporting events are historically known for their festive nature with the Olympic Games or the Football World Cup as some of the more obvious examples of sporting festivals (Metzler, 2000; Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). Eichberg (2006) is of the view that both popular sport and what might be seen as lesser known cultural or folk events which incorporate activities including dance, gymnastics and games can also provide the location where people meet in festivals in order to be active.

Attention to notions of festivity has attracted some interest in physical education following claims that most teaching makes no reference to festivity and that its absence contributes to the incomplete and inauthentic teaching of sport in many schools (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). If, as Laker (2003) has stated, "The festive and celebratory nature of sport can certainly be highlighted in physical education" (p.36),

then one model of curriculum and instruction that has the potential to realise such a claim is Sport Education [SE].

SE is a model of curriculum and instruction aimed at developing competent, literate and enthusiastic sports people (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). SE attempts to incorporate many of the features of authentic sport in an effort to offer a culturally relevant and inclusive sport experience for children and youth. In his conceptualisation of Sport Education [SE] Siedentop identified the ‘culminating event’ and ‘festivity’ as two of the model’s six defining characteristics [the others being seasons, affiliation, records, and formal competition]. These six characteristics collectively are aimed at enabling a fuller, richer, more inclusive and authentic sport experience for participants.

Recent reviews have provided insight into the considerable research literature on SE (Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Kinchin, 2006; Siedentop, 2002; Wallhead & O’Sullivan, 2005). These reviews reveal that SE has been successfully adopted and adapted by a number of physical education teachers and teacher educators working in different conditions and contexts across many parts of the world. Learners from across the ability and age range are typically enthusiastic about their participation in seasons and they claim to work harder than in their previous physical education classes (Carlson, 1995; Carlson & Hastie, 1997; Grant, 1992; Hastie, 1998). Being on a team that remains together over an extended period of time is also viewed positively (Hastie, 1998) and the

social opportunities and social development within SE teams are commonly referred to in a positive manner (Carlson and Hastie, 1997)

Siedentop (1994) states; "...it is incumbent upon sport educators to find ways to help students learn to celebrate their participation in sport by creating a festive atmosphere" (p.14). Consequently, many accounts of SE typically refer to teachers' efforts to give attention to festivity by including team names, uniforms, team chants, banners, mottos, the decoration of teaching spaces, the practicing of specific rituals and traditions all of which have been incorporated to make the respective seasons festive. MacPhail, Kirk & Kinchin (2004) describe a festival which involved the presence of spectators, including families and friends. Hastie (2003) has also offered anecdotal examples of how culminating events have been promoted in some schools through the use of video-footage and barbeques, designed to replicate festive features of particular sporting events such as 'tailgating' [a traditional American gathering before/after sporting events where participants eat/drink/barbeque at the rear of their parked cars/vans].

Siedentop (1994) is of the view that within a SE season 'The culminating event should be festive, designed to provide a fitting climax to a sport season' (p. 11) and also serve as a motivator for pupil participation across an entire season. Whereas research has been undertaken on particular features of SE such as team affiliation and the use of non-playing roles [e.g. Carlson & Hastie, 1997; Hastie, 1996; 1998; MacPhail, Kirk & Kinchin, 2004], little attention has been afforded to an examination of 'festivity' and more specifically to an investigation into the use of a festival as a culmination to a SE

season. Where mention is made of festivals within the SE literature, their location often remain internal to a particular school with competition occurring across teams within the same class or perhaps include formats that enable competition across classes. What has not been forthcoming is specific research into the experiences of pupils and teachers while preparing for and participating in an external culminating festival. The potential for an external culminating festival involving a range of schools that is designed to offer an enjoyable, meaningful and authentic sport experience for pupils would therefore appear to be an attractive research endeavour. Therefore given this paucity of research, in this paper we examine primary school pupils' and teachers' perceptions of an external inter-school festival which was included as part of a SE unit in a cluster of primary schools in Ireland.

METHOD

Participants & Setting

This study focused on describing the experiences of primary school pupils and teachers in preparing for and participating in an external inter-school culminating festival within a SE season. Eight teachers [4 male and 4 female] from four primary schools voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The schools represented a range of socio-economic status and were positioned in both inner-city and suburban areas of one city in Ireland. One primary school taught through the Irish medium and was an inner-city school. Another was located in an area of deprivation in the city suburbs, and the other two schools attracted predominantly middle-class children from the suburbs. All four schools taught girls and boys.

The teachers were all non-specialist physical education teachers who had between two and seventeen years of experience in the classroom. Their teacher education included between 36 and 48 hours of physical education content. Undergraduate experiences tended to focus on games, gymnastics and dance. Some teachers had participated in a further elective involving some 52 hours of physical education in the third year of their undergraduate degree. A national in-service programme in physical education, which involved some games activities, was also delivered to some of the schools. However, SE was neither a component within their undergraduate physical education course nor a subsequent in-service focus.

Head teachers from the four schools were contacted by letter and each gave permission for two particular teachers and their respective classes to be involved in the study. Each letter sent to the Head teachers was accompanied with copies of a letter that was to be sent to the parent(s) / guardian(s) of the children involved in the SE classes and a consent form for permission that their child be involved. This letter set out the purpose of the study, the involvement of their child and included a reassurance that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. The parent letters were distributed to the children in the SE classes for signatures and returned to the Head teacher. There were no instances of any parent / guardian not giving consent for the involvement of their child in the SE classes.

Season description

There were 33 teams of pupils across the eight classes. All teams were co-educational and of mixed ability. All four schools followed a 12-13-week SE season template. In preparing each lesson of the season teachers were prompted to focus on what the pupils were to do, what the teacher was to do, what paperwork was needed before and during the lesson and what record-keeping was to be completed after the lesson. Weeks 1 and 2 consisted of introducing the concept and organisation of SE, observing and assessing the ability of pupils' individual skills and choosing teams of mixed ability. Pupils were alerted to which team they were to be in and were asked to decide a team name. Teachers introduced the notion of roles and responsibilities. Schools varied on the roles and responsibilities that were promoted within the season. While most schools chose to pursue captains, warm-up officer and coach, one school introduced an additional role of 'water boy / girl' who was responsible for the water bottles students brought with them. Weeks 3 to 6 were classed as pre-season training, focussing on skill development and within-team practice. It was agreed at the two-day in-service that this would include the teaching and practices of key competencies such as sending and receiving the ball, creating space and signalling when in space and scoring. Weeks 7 to 9 focused on tactics and strategy development in preparation for the festival. This entailed the introduction of defending and attacking through round-robin formal competitions where teams played other teams in their school to determine each team's league standing. While there was room for flexibility in the extent to which teachers promoted and delivered the particular phases of the SE season, there was no flexibility in the agreed rules of the game as it was

imperative that each school arrive at the festival with a shared understanding of how the game was to be played

Validation of the SE model

This was the first time these non-specialist physical education teachers had taught SE. Similarly reported by Hastie & Sinelnikov (2006) efforts in this study to validate the ways in which these teachers implemented the SECM in their settings can be presented as follows:

a) *In-service training and preparation.* As indicated prior to the season all eight teachers in this study received 2-days of in-service training in SE, which was delivered by the first two authors. The training addressed the rationale for SE, the key elements and characteristics of SE, some of the research findings using SE, specific assistance and guidance on designing the season, examples of articles written on SE, exemplar resource materials, and detailed lesson outlines for the different phases of a season. During the training the core non-playing roles were agreed and teachers were also encouraged to be creative in developing additional roles as necessary. At the training the ‘game-form’ that would be the focus of the season was identified. The teachers agreed on an invasion game, which included elements of basketball and netball, where a point is scored by landing the ball in a hoop placed behind a back-court line. Before the training finished the teachers also established and agreed the rules of the game. Due to the project being part-funded through the European Year of Education Through Sport (EYES), there was consensus that the game be known as ‘EYESball’ and that the season would run at each

school one lesson per week from the middle of September to the middle of December 2004 [12-13 weeks]

b) On-going support & troubleshooting. On-going support was available throughout the season with all authors being contactable by e-mail and phone. However, teachers preferred to raise questions with the individual authors when they made visits to the schools every second week during the season. Discussion between the teachers and authors tended to focus on the previous week's class and what the teachers were planning for future classes. Feedback on the actual lessons visited by the authors was minimal unless teachers requested particular feedback. The authors were conscious of being seen in a supporting role than that of a critical observer.

b) Visits to the schools during implementation. Members of the research team visited each school every other week during the season. During these visits progress with the unit lessons was discussed with the teacher and assistance given where necessary with planning future lessons. Approximately half way through the unit two lessons were observed at each school and detailed notes on the events that took place within the pupils' classroom and lesson were recorded. The researchers were particularly interested in;

- i) ways in which students were taking greater responsibility for the conduct of the lesson [assisting with organisation, management, the use of roles]
- ii) ways in which the teachers were making explicit the major characteristics of the SE model,

Table 1 provides a summary of some observations across the schools which were noted by the research team in relation to the characteristics/features of the model and that best offer indicators the teachers had attempted the SE model in their settings.

Characteristics/Features of SE	Qualitative Observations
Team Affiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils were in mixed ability small-sized sustained teams, • Teams had their own name • Teams had developed emblems/badges • Teams had allocated practice areas
Formal Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within-class matches contributed to league standings • Practice and competition games were observed in all lessons
Season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Season formats on display in all classrooms
Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • League tables developed in all classes, displayed inside or outside classrooms, with league standings evident • Several examples of profiles about individual players on teams included. • Most lessons had opportunities for teams to acquire additional points for their league standing (getting organized quickly) • Teachers had posted rules of the invasion game for their pupils.
Festivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers had developed ways to distinguish teams (e.g. coloured uniforms, bibs, T-shirts). • Examples of teams placing designs or logos on their shirts using paints/markers etc. • Teams preparing banners for the festival
Employment of Pupil Roles & Student Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core roles had been assigned to all pupils • Some teachers had included additional team-based roles such as ‘trainer’ or ‘water-person’ beyond the core roles • Some pupils collected information for their match reports • Lessons commenced with warm-ups led by pupils in their assigned space • Pupils attempted officiating alone, with another pupil or shadowed by the teacher • Equipment managers supported the collection and return of equipment, • Coaches assisted with within-team tasks/practices either developed by the teacher or by the pupils themselves [strategy sheets] • Little off-task behaviour observed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high level of physical activity evident in lessons observed. • Pupils were enthusiastic and took their roles seriously • Many examples of how pupils helped and support each other, and to a lesser extent offered physical guidance when in within-team practice • Little teacher organization and need for management intervention
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Table 1: Summary of specific observations across Schools in relation to the characteristics/features of the SECM

Organisation and arrangements for the festival

At the beginning of the season all teachers informed their classes that a festival would take place at the culmination of the SE unit where pupils would have the chance to play against other schools. The festival would comprise a half-day inter-school event held in the arena of a major university in Ireland. On the day of the festival all pupils would travel by bus from their respective schools to the university.

Just prior to the festival the teachers provided the research team with their current league standing. The research team used these standings to arrange teams from the different schools into playing courts for the festival. The two teams that were at the top of each school league played each other on court one, the teams that were placed third and fourth in each school league played each other on court two, those teams placed fifth and sixth played each other on court three and the seventh and eighth placed teams from each school played each other on court four. This resulted in eight teams being allocated to a court and allowed teams of similar abilities from each school to play each other. Each

court was divided in two to allow for more games to take place, i.e., four teams playing on either half of the court.

A couple of weeks before the festival the research team met to discuss the 'hospitality' arrangements and with, the safety and welfare of the pupils in mind, agreed a code of conduct for pupil behaviour on the university campus which was then circulated to schools for teachers to share with their pupils. This included what to do on arriving at and leaving the University, expected behaviour when playing or watching games, and the protocol for refreshments and toilet breaks.

The site for the festival was a large arena comprising four full-sized basketball courts. For pupils the arena included a first aid area, refreshment room and toilet facilities. Upon arrival at the festival each team was assigned a 'home' area in the arena (a bench or gymnastic mat) at the side of one of their playing area. Whilst the class teacher was responsible for the overall supervision of their pupils, each team was also assigned an undergraduate physical education student, who served as their team mentor marshalling and monitoring them in their area, particularly when they were spectators and waiting their turn to play and when it was their turn to get a drink and a piece of fruit from the refreshment area. The undergraduate students had been fully briefed by the research team.

On the day of the festival pupils had opportunities to fulfil their roles as captains when making decisions about starting line-ups, coaches when discussing tactics and strategy,

warm-up leaders when preparing their team for individual games, and, statisticians when communicating scores to the scoring table after each game. All teachers had indicated that pupils had experienced being referees during their respective seasons, however, prior to the festival these teachers raised some concerns about the competence/confidence of some pupils acting as referees throughout the three month season and suggested that pupils should not be involved in refereeing on the day of the festival. They were of the view that the potential excitement and/or anxiety generated by the festival could inhibit pupils' ability to officiate games involving unknown teams. All games were therefore refereed by undergraduate physical education students familiar with both the game and the rules.

The festival concluded with the presentation of certificates to the schools acknowledging the participation of every student, medals to winning team from each court and a fair play award for one of the teams. A number of representatives from many sporting bodies were in attendance in addition to physical education Inspectorate, local and national media and the national coordinators for the EYES initiative.

Data Collection

Data specific to the festival were collected through the use of interviews with teachers and pupils before, during and after the festival. Interviews conducted with teachers and pupils were semi-structured before and after the season and took place in the respective schools. Pupil interviews were random and were conducted when pupils were watching matches or were temporarily substituted or during breaks in teaching within the

respective schools. Interviews conducted while the festival day was operating were more informal and ‘on the spot’, tending to include a number of pupils being interviewed at the one time. Exploratory questions were developed by the research team, of which a sample of teacher questions appears in Table 2 and a sample of pupil questions in Table 3. All eight teachers were interviewed and some 40-45 pupils were interviewed at each point across the three phases of the study, although there was variance in the make-up of these groups at each phase.

Interview Context	Sample Questions
Teacher pre-festival	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What impact do you think the pending Festival has had upon the sport education unit? 2. What are the children saying about the Festival? What do you think they are looking forward to? 3. Have you done anything specific to get ready for the Festival? What have you said to the children? 4. Have any of the teams done anything together to get ready for the Festival? 5. What would you hope the children would get from the Festival/learn from being there? What do you expect of them? 6. What purpose does the Festival serve in a sport education unit? What benefits are there for you as their teacher? What issues do you have with it, if any? 7. What other feelings do you have on the Festival that you have not mentioned yet?
Teacher during festival	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were the children like when they got to school this morning? 2. What were they talking about on the bus on the way over? What did you hear them say? 3. What will this mean to them being here and taking part in this

	<p>Festival?</p> <p>4. What has stood out for you in terms of how your children have responded to the Festival? Any individuals come to mind?</p> <p>5. What else would you like to add?</p>
Teacher post-festival	<p>1. What memories do you have of the Festival?</p> <p>2. What are your feelings on it now?</p> <p>3. What have the children said about it since the day?</p>

Table 2: Sample of exploratory teacher festival questions

Interview Context	Sample Questions
Pupil pre-festival	<p>1. What is on your mind right now concerning the Festival next week?</p> <p>2. What is your team doing/has your team done to prepare for the Festival?</p> <p>3. What do the players on your team think about the Festival?</p> <p>4. What are you looking forward to/excited about?</p> <p>5. Are you worried about anything? If so what?</p> <p>6. What do you think the Festival will be about? What will be there?</p> <p>7. What do you think you will you be expected to do at the Festival?</p>
Pupil during festival	<p>1. What do think of the Festival? How would you describe it to someone at home?</p> <p>2. How would you describe the atmosphere in the Sports Hall?</p> <p>3. What does it/did it feel like playing the games/tournament matches here? Explain?</p> <p>4. What do you/have you liked best about it? Why?</p> <p>What do you/have you not liked about it? Why?</p>

Pupil post festival	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was it like playing in the Festival? 2. How did your team do? 3. What did you learn from being at the Festival? 4. What is your lasting memory of taking part in it?
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Table 3: Sample of exploratory pupil festival questions

Data Analysis

All interviews with pupils and teachers before, during and after the festival were transcribed. Data were analysed inductively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Data from the interview transcripts were read carefully in order to draw out themes and common elements from the data. Individual responses to questions were examined to reveal specific thoughts or perceptions that were then compared across cases. Categories were then ultimately refined to represent the factors that the pupils and teachers in this study believed to be important in relation to their experiences and views before, during and after the culminating festival.

Results

The results are presented across the three phases of data collection; before, during and after the festival in order to illustrate the factors that participants believed to be important.

Pre-Festival

The thoughts and ideas of the pupils and teachers prior to the festival can best be presented around three themes; a) ‘Hopes and fears’, b) ‘Getting ready’, and, c) ‘What to

expect'. Each of the themes is set out below and illustrated with examples from the participants.

'Hopes and fears'

From pupil interviews prior to the festival it was evident many were excited about the pending event. Indeed references to individual excitement or excitement within teams were the most common. A very frequent comment from pupils was they hoped it would be fun. Some were looking forward to the bus ride to the setting. In the main the idea of playing matches against other schools was a further re-occurring feature in many pupil responses. Lee exclaimed "...we are playing other schools as well...I can't wait to play other schools". A few pupils looked forward to being with their friends. Others like David pointed to just being involved "People think it's [the festival] nice, it's good to be in it". The opportunity to play against other pupils of a similar age was also highlighted, whereas a few considered getting out of school as what they were looking forward to the most.

While looking forward to the festival a number of pupils began to predict how they might perform. Jim summed up the views of many; "I think it [festival] will be cool and I think there will be a couple of teams and it will be hard but we might win a couple of games". A handful of pupils also expressed more anxiety. Typically their unease was put down to the thought of playing other teams from other schools, and more specifically if the outcomes of these matches were not as they would wish (i.e. they would lose matches). Mitchell commented "I'm worried about losing a lot". Some pupils were concerned with performing in front of others. Tim stated "Kind of scared cause there will be loads

watching us...like if we were doing mistakes or laughing at each other”. A few children were worried that they would not do well, as they already believed that “...I don’t think we will win cause we are not really that good cause we don’t really stay up forward”.

Some claimed to have never been to the festival setting before. Consequently, a couple of pupils were worried about getting lost. Teachers were in agreement that the festival would likely be a new and positive experience for many. Brian, a teacher, claimed:

...maybe the sheer size, the vastness...they will have never experienced anything like this....I think a lot of them will rise to it too like they will have never experienced anything like it before, they have never been given the opportunity to go out there like this...

Getting ready...

Nearly all pupils interviewed shared how their teams were preparing for the festival. The most frequent reference was to practice matches against other teams in their respective classes. Many also indicated they were engaged in some form of ‘training’ or within-team ‘practice’. Lucy described what her team had been doing:

...we’ve been practicing out in the yard and we’ve our own teams...we have our own space and our own bibs as well and we just practice the warm-up...we just do jumping jacks and stuff like that to practice.

Several pupils outlined specific skills and drills they had completed. Mary talked about her team:

We have been practicing skills and our warm-up, we have been doing a lot of warm up and playing our hardest like that...we've been, do you know, practicing for the festival and we have been playing dodgeball and practicing our passing and our shooting.

Conversely, reference to tactics and decision-making were infrequent in pupil interviews.

A few pupils hinted at the notion of working on tactics just prior to the festival.

Specifically, Tim indicated his team had worked on "who's taking the throws and who's staying back to guard the thing but not in the box". Nicole claimed her team had developed 'tactic sheets' and Michael stated "I just can't wait to see other teams and what their tactics are...we kind of have practiced the dummy passes and things like that".

Susan also outlined what was happening on her team; "...we keep changing our tactics so we can confuse other teams".

Some pupils included reference to their team discussing rules and there were isolated examples of pupils describing pictures and posters they had made and how they were advertising the festival within their respective schools.

What to expect...

Pupils were asked to give some indication as to what the festival 'would be about'. A wide-ranging set of ideas and expectations emerged from their interviews. Pupils speculated what the festival setting would be like, in that there would be a "...big pitch" [Nicola], with "...big court, chairs and things" [Dianne] in "...a very big hall sectioned off with stools" [Michael] and the presence of "food" [Steve]. David was of the opinion that the festival would include a parade.

Some pupils believed the festival would include multiple social opportunities and that there would be "...different schools, we will see people we wouldn't know and probably make friends" [Joe]. Many pupils spoke of being with their team-mates, having fun and enjoying themselves. Dermot outlined his hopes: "...excited about meeting other people and that they [other people] don't care if they win or lose".

There were some references to the reproduction of warm ups and practices that had been completed in school and in some instances to performing their team-based role during the festival [e.g. warm-up manager, captain, scorer]. Many made mention of matches, lots of other teams and "...big crowds" [Anna]. Dermot discussed the pitfalls of a possible competition format "if it's a knockout tournament and we get knocked out and we will just have to sit on the side line". The majority did speak to the presence of competition and to a lesser extent the chance to demonstrate superiority over others. Billy expressed his views "I'm looking forward to playing other schools and especially a game with my team to show that we are better". Others pointed to the presence of umpires, judges,

coaches and referees. Several pupils also talked of the possibility of prizes and certificates for the best teams.

Some pupils were very unsure of what to expect and a few claimed to have no idea what would happen at the festival. As a teacher Ashleigh stated:

I'd say they don't realise what's in store for them cause none of them would have experienced this before maybe some of the kids that do club sports but no one would have experienced anything like this before so they don't know what it's going to be like, I'd say they will be gobsmacked when they get there and see all these people and they won't know where they're going or what they are doing

The Festival Day

Brief interviews occurred with pupils on the day of the festival. These interviews took place whilst pupils were watching other games from the side-lines. The views of the pupils can best be expressed around the following themes a) 'Lost for words', b) Other teams, matches & teamwork

'Lost for words'

Pupils typically used the following to describe their initial thoughts on and reactions to the festival: 'excellent', 'good', 'fun', 'exciting', 'wonderful' and 'nervous' and from the transcripts they typically said little else. For some it had exceeded their expectations.

Several did not anticipate an event of this size. One child stated "...it was exciting when I

got here I never knew it would be like that I had a picture in my mind it would be something else but when I got there it was not like the one I pictured”. Several pupils made reference to the noise within the arena. One pupil reported: “...loud and loads of people shouting for their team and it gives them confidence and stuff”.

Other teams, matches & teamwork

Many pupils described how much they had preferred the chance to play against and meet other teams from other schools because, as one indicated “...we are so used to playing our school”. It is also worth highlighting the fact that a number described how they enjoyed just being with their team as a part of the festival and how they felt supported through spectators cheering them on. Several pupils also made positive reference to the team-work within their team and in particular the fun that had been generated from working together during the games. They specifically talked of how they passed to each other and called each other by name. Others, although worried that they knew little of the opposition, liked to see how they shaped up against rival teams, which a few deemed a more positive and appropriate challenge. One remarked “I was very glad to come here...cause it’s a big place and you can play different schools”. Although a few children were disappointed that they had lost some games, many reported how they enjoyed trying to work as a team in these matches: “You have to try your best all the time you can’t let your team down”. A number of pupils were not overly concerned if they won or lost.

Tony summed up his feelings:

I think it's deadly great buzz around the place, the kids are having a great, great crack you know that's what it is all about, its all about the kids having fun you know, what else can you do after, that you know they are all happy, so its great.

Post-festival

Brief interviews occurred with pupils approximately a week after the festival. The views of the pupils can best be expressed around the following themes a) 'What was learned', b) 'How we and others did'

'What was learned'

Many pupils believed they and their teams had benefited from becoming better at skills such as passing and catching and that they knew how to play the game according to the rules. One said

I learned its better to listen to some other people cause as Simon was saying 'oh guys we shouldn't be fighting about this'... we learned that cause we lost the game doesn't mean we are bad, we are really good.

Few references to winning were evident. What frequently emerged from pupils was a sense of satisfaction in having taken part, having tried hard, having done their best, and that they did not let their team down. One pupil noted "We were alright, we got to the semi finals and we got knocked out by the Ravens. They were very good but our team don't mind" Others claimed they had learned not to give up, not to shout at their teammates, not to take the ball all the time, and to ensure all substitutes got to play.

For a few the occasion had been 'real'. One spoke to the authenticity of the setting "it was fun and it was like we were professional over being in a real court...cause hoop ball is kind of like basketball...".

One pupil indicated their lasting memory " I think I will remember my team name and the people in my team...well we lost matches but I don't really mind you know still had fun". Whilst another put forward his ambition "Yeah, I want to be a professional player of this [EYESball] when I am older"

What consistently emerged from the post-festival teacher interviews was their pleasure in seeing individual pupils enjoying themselves. Ronan, a teacher, was typical:

...they really enjoyed it. Even though they weren't successful in the actual tournament at the festival they really enjoyed it. They were yapping about it when they came back, they were really excited about it...the whole package really enthused them...the arena is pretty impressive that they had for themselves for the day and the presentation afterwards and all that kind of stuff and even the presentation of the certificates you know these little things make a huge difference to them.

Brian, another teacher, added a parting sentiment

a lot of the girls were big time involved especially on the day of the competition itself...they've probably shaken off shyness, they wouldn't be shy for taking part in a team sport again

'How we and others did'

Pupils remained extremely positive about the festival. Many children discussed how far their team had progressed in the tournament. Many detailed both where they had finished in their respective court tournament and how many matches they had won or lost. Some gave specific scores in matches. Frequently pupils were pleased they had won some games and that they had both enjoyed and had fun working with their team. Pupils were also able to share the progress of other teams they had played against. One stated "...we did good, got to the semi finals then got knocked out. The Ravens made it to the finals and they got knocked out by the Black Sharks". Several pupils described their pleasure at getting to the final. For one pupil their parting memory was the final...as a spectator!

Discussion

The vast majority of pupils were very excited at the prospect of participating in the festival and this culmination, in the eyes of pupils, seemed to offer an incentive for many to prepare during lessons, and, in the eyes of teachers, a fitting conclusion to the unit. In some cases the festival exceeded pupil expectations in terms of atmosphere, noise, opportunities for social interaction, number of participants present and the size and space of the arena. To this end it seems evident that Eichberg's (2006) configurations of festival

were very much characteristic of this study [space, time, energy, relations & objectivation]

Before the festival pupils described some ideas on what they expected this event to be about. Indeed their prior conceptions of the festival seemed to identify with a number of the characteristics and inherent features of SE, as first postulated by Siedentop (1994) (playing and non-playing roles being undertaken, competition, records/leagues, and some attention to festivity). Whilst some teachers claimed the festival experience would be new for a number of their pupils, there were frequent positive references from pupils to having been with their friends and team-mates, having had fun, having experienced and enjoyed an authentic occasion, and feeling satisfied that they had improved in some manner be it listening to and supporting others, performing a particular skill more efficiently, or playing the game better. The opportunity to become affiliated with team-mates has been a recurring finding across several studies (e.g. Hastie, 1996; MacPhail, Kirk, and Kinchin, 2004).

General increases in student enthusiasm have been reported across a diversity of SE settings and a number of boys and girls have indicated that they tend to work harder than they did in their regular physical education lessons (Carlson & Hastie, 1997; Grant, 1992; Hastie, 1998a). There is some evidence in this study that the festival provided the motivation for some quite intense work and practice/mini-games on teams and pupils were able to share specific tasks and tactics they had undertaken, with the festival very much in mind. These included decision-making around who would occupy defensive,

midfield and attacking positions, who would take side-line passes etc. Some teams also foregrounded the importance of getting on with each other. Interestingly, the chance to not be in school for the day was something only a few pupils looked forward to the most.

Data collected before the festival indicated many pupils were particularly enthusiastic about the inter-school competition and the chance to match themselves against teams they knew little if anything about. In general the opportunities to participate in matches against other schools were clearly valued by many pupils and their teachers, as this had not been a part of their SE season to date. While novel, this might suggest a number of benefits or outcomes a) a greater consequence to these games than may have existed within the class competitions, b) a wish to know how they stack up against the opposition, c) the chance to demonstrate superiority over others. The enthusiasm for inter-school competition was maintained on the festival day and in the post-festival interviews

Tournaments and championships are common features in many team-based and individual sport experiences. These events do traditionally generate a range of emotions and experiences amongst participants. It is not uncommon to hear of high performing athletes feeling nervous before competition, not being completely familiar with their opponents, having 'butterflies in the stomach', or having travelled to an unfamiliar setting in order to compete. Indeed these responses and experiences characteristic within bona fide sport were very much evident among pupils in this study. A sense of anticipation and to a greater extent anxiety was apparent. Clearly a few pupils had little or no idea what to expect and others were quite apprehensive at the prospect of playing the

matches. It would also appear that some were quite daunted by the likelihood of being on ‘public display’ or if they were laughed at. Specifically, a few were worried about either not doing well or not doing the right thing in front of spectators (e.g. breaking rules such as not abiding by the one metre stipulation when playing).

The importance of competition in the context of SE has been reported in the literature (Grant, 1992). In this study how pupils and more specifically how their team performed in the tournament was important for many, but not for all. Fear of losing was evident in the voices of some pupils. Though on a more positive note, some claimed to be less concerned with the outcome of matches, instead choosing to either focus more on the enjoyment of being there, on the possible social benefits of the occasion (e.g. collective meeting of other people and teams) where fun was deemed more important than the competition. As Grondin (2001) has stated participants attend festivals; “because it is important to them to be there and to be with one another” (p.46). Many pupils in this study would corroborate such a statement.

Sadly, some pupils had already made up their mind that their team would not do well at the festival, quite likely informed by their previous performance and standing in their respective class.

Conclusion

The most significant conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the inter-school festival offered a positive and meaningful experience for pupils and their teachers in

order to mark the end of the season and acknowledge pupil and team accomplishments. The findings from this study therefore support Siedentop's (1994) recommendation that teachers should indeed search for fitting conclusions to their SE units.

The festival did provide a suitable motivator to encourage participation across the sport education season. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of competition in such a tournament were evident but we are encouraged by the fact that a somewhat balanced picture did emerge as to what pupils chose to prioritise. The presence of a culminating tournament did generate 'real' feelings of excitement, anticipation, uncertainty and naturally some anxiety and even a little fear.

Although pupils made reference to some features of SE, pupils' conceptions of a sport 'festival' were a little limited. The previous experiences of these pupils in terms of sport and physical activity are not known. Whether pupils in this study do not normally associate the term 'festival' with a sporting event, is also unclear, but would serve as an interesting line of future research. The role of the teacher [remember these were non-specialist physical education teachers in this study] in helping children develop a festive-oriented and inclusive understanding of participation in sport, along the lines of SE, would be worth pursuing.

A major challenge however remains for teachers in this study, in terms of addressing both the sustainability and the question 'what next'? It is quite possible that the SE experience in these schools, and specifically the culminating event, has set up an expectation in the

eyes of pupils in that all units of work in physical education should culminate in a festival of the manner described in this paper. Clearly, teachers will naturally and quite understandably find it difficult to sustain such events on a regular basis. There is, however, the possibility that anything less may not be received positively by these pupils in future physical education units of work.

Like the majority of teachers who have used SE (Alexander, Taggart and Thorpe, 1996; Grant, 1992), teachers in this study also endorsed its pedagogy. It would appear that these teachers are very keen to maintain its visibility within their curriculum. They were able to identify many benefits of the model for their pupils, and having experienced a multiple-school event first-hand, some spoke of their wish to repeat the festival in the future.

It would also be necessary to re-visit the reasons for pupils not being involved in the role of referee on the festival day. It was acknowledged earlier that there was some concern from the teachers that the potential excitement and anxiety generated by the festival might severely inhibit pupils' ability to officiate games involving unknown teams.

However, there was awareness that pupil refereeing throughout earlier parts of the season was not as effective as some of the other roles and this needs to be investigated more. An oversight in relation to the festival was the lack of involvement pupils had in designing and organizing the festival itself. Had pupils been involved to this extent it is possible that the festival would have enhanced the meaning of SE for the pupils and resulted in a sense of ownership, with pupils undertaking roles such as 'event manager' and

'publicist'. Further work on the use of culminating festivals might examine more explicit involvement of pupils.

Due to the demanding nature of teachers' lives this work may provide an opportunity to invite local community sport clubs to become involved in physical education and after-school sport. Penney *et al* (2002) have claimed that to date SE experiences have been typically confined to subject allocated time within the curriculum. Perhaps a festival of the type depicted in this study might offer some direction and possibilities to those working in youth and community sport settings who may wish to transfer sport experiences along the lines of the SE approach from a school context into these specific sport cultures.

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Acknowledgements

This project 'Sport education: an innovation in education through sport in Ireland' was part funded by the European Year of Education Through Sport and the Limerick City Sports Partnership. We would like to thank Nicola Keeshan and Elaine O'Connor for their investment in and support of the project. We would like to thank the sports arena for hosting the festivals and the undergraduate students who acted as team mentors and officials. Our thanks go to the teachers and pupils who took part in this study.

Word Count 8647