

STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SPORT EDUCATION

CLIVE C POPE¹ AND BEVAN C GRANT²

1. Department of Sport and Physical Activity Education, The Ohio State University
2. Department of Leisure Studies, University of Waikato

ABSTRACT *Since the sport education curriculum was introduced into New Zealand schools on a trial basis in 1991 many teachers have included it as part of the physical education programme. Although research to date supports the inclusion of the model as an effective way to improve student skill performance and educate students about sport, much of what we know is based on the views of teachers. However, it can be argued that our understanding of any new curriculum initiative can be enriched by considering the subjective experiences of those for whom it was developed. This paper reports on student experiences during their involvement in sport education.*

INTRODUCTION

If one function of schools is to transmit the culture of a society, and sport is a part of that culture, then all young people should have the opportunity to participate in sport as part of their education. This was acknowledged in the Physical Education Syllabus (Department of Education, 1987) by the statement, "The role of the school is to ensure that opportunities are provided for all students, regardless of their abilities to participate in sport" (p. 4). While many young people consider sport to be an important part of life (Alexander & Taggart, 1995) increasing the level of participation may be difficult because of the cost, time and effort required to participate when compared to many other leisure activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992). The challenge for schools and in particular teachers of physical education is how to make the sport for all ideal a reality.

Even though the terms physical education and sport are frequently used interchangeably (Murdoch, 1990) the two have not always been companionable "bed-fellows" (Stothart, 1987). However, in recent times it has been argued that physical education is a "foundation stone" for sport (Taggart, 1988), and "the development of good sports persons and the development of a better sports culture should be central to the mission of physical education" (Siedentop, Mand & Taggart, 1986, p. 189). In New Zealand, such amalgamation has been actively promoted by the Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness and Leisure (Government funded agency) who, along with their other responsibilities, develop and resource programmes that promote sport for all young people in both school and community. Whilst such developments are not without controversy (Tinning, Kirk & Evans, 1993), many physical education teachers now include sport education in their physical education programme.

EMERGENCE OF THE SPORT EDUCATION CURRICULUM

At the Commonwealth Games conference in Brisbane, Australia Siedentop (1982) questioned why teachers were reluctant to embrace sport in its fullest sense as a component of physical education. He argued that sport was an institutionalised form of play and in the right context had the potential to foster "an important link between the conduct of sport in a culture and the education of children and youth into the sport culture" (p. 3). While the educative benefits of sport were being promoted, Hoffman (1987) had been arguing that many physical education classes drew heavily from sporting derivatives but only provided students with "a broad range of skills at an introductory level in environments that promised little hope of success" (p. 128). If this was the case then the intended programme outcomes were probably not being fully realised.

There has been a call to change the dominant programme model of the past because much of what happened in physical education was irrelevant for many adolescents (e.g. Alexander, Taggart & Medland, 1993; Grant, 1992; Locke, 1992; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992). Furthermore, sports activities in these programmes were frequently taught without reference to the dimensions and characteristics that give sport its real meaning (Siedentop, Mand, & Taggart, 1986). There was some concern that students were being "turned-off" rather than "turned-on" to sport as a leisure activity through their experiences in physical education. It was from such a background of concern that Siedentop (1982, 1987, 1994) developed the sport education curriculum model.

The principal objective of the sport education curriculum model is to assist students to become *competent, literate* and *enthusiastic* participants and consumers of sport. *Competence* is interpreted as the acquisition of skills and strategies at the appropriate developmental level and applying these in a way that students' knowledge is enhanced and they can successfully participate in games. *Literate* is understanding the values, roles, rituals and traditions associated with sport. Differentiating between acceptable and unacceptable sports practices is an important aspect of sport literacy. *Enthusiasm* revolves around the desire to participate in the many faces of sport and nurture actions that "preserve, protect and enhance the sport culture" (Siedentop, 1987, p. 79).

To achieve this objective several key characteristics are incorporated into the design and implementation of the programme including the use of a season (20 plus lessons), fixed teams, organised competition, keeping of records, publicity, and a culminating event. In addition, the traditional role of the teacher is modified so the teacher becomes less visible as the students gradually take on more and more responsibility (eg. coach, manager, umpire). The collective experience allows students to learn about a sport, improve their sporting skills, be responsible for the organisation of their learning, and to understand and value the many roles necessary for sport to be successful (Siedentop, 1987). In essence, the students are involved in a meaningful, contextually rich experiences which are missing from the more traditional physical education programme (Siedentop et al., 1986).

RESEARCH IN SPORT EDUCATION

The first research on sport education in New Zealand involved 86 teachers from 34 secondary schools, 2368 Form Five students and 14 different sports (Grant, 1992). A summary of the data gathered from interviews with and reflective writings of teachers suggested the programme:

- Made sport accessible to all students;
- Involved all students in decision making and ensures they share responsibility for what occurred;
- Allowed students to establish realistic goals for self and their team;
- Provided better opportunities, particularly for the less skilled and not so enthusiastic students to participate in a way they achieved success;
- Placed all students, irrespective of their skill level or enthusiasm, into situations where their contribution was recognised and valued by their peers but especially their team members;
- Ensured the level of intensity while practicing skills and playing games was controlled by students rather than the teacher;
- Used organised competition effectively, and put winning and losing into a different context as it was controlled by students.

As part of this study a random sample of students from four schools (one boys only, one girls only and two co-educational schools) were interviewed (Grant, Tredinnick & Hodge, 1992). Students were generally enthusiastic about the programme and noted many differences between sport education and their typical physical education programme. These included a less dominant teacher, development of team affiliation, and the benefits of using competition in a way that added interest to the sessions. Many students claimed that making a commitment to and being a valued team participant was rated more highly than winning.

In 1994 a similar project was undertaken to investigate the implications of incorporating sport education in intermediate schools (Grant & Pope, 1995). After initial concerns about focusing on one sport for so long, students soon embraced the model and many were reluctant to end it. Again, teachers expressed surprise at the level of competence exhibited by students in accepting and fulfilling their responsibilities. Many students valued learning to referee, to score, to participate in different positions of responsibility, and just being a valued member of a team. Teachers suggested that by ensuring full and appropriate participation students learned and understood what successful participation in sport means as well as improve their skill level and performance in games.

Contemporary issues in Australian secondary school physical education and sport were addressed at a series of State and professional group conventions in the early 1990's. This resulted in a similar project to that conducted in New Zealand secondary schools (Alexander, Taggart & Medland, 1993). Data collected from 31 teachers' log books, pre and post-project interviews with teachers and post project students (n=867) questionnaires noted similar outcomes to those previously reported. Coupled with the interest and enthusiasm of teachers, this provided sufficient evidence to inspire the researchers to invite other teachers,

teacher educators and researchers to become involved in a national project. In 1994 the Australian Sports Commission funded a national trial (Alexander & Taggart, 1994) resulting in the publication of a resource guide for teachers (Alexander & Taggart, 1995).

More recently, research conducted in North America by Ormond, DeMarco, Smith and Fisher (1995) compared teaching basketball using a traditional unit approach to the sport education curriculum model. The study revealed that students who participated in the sport education model were more concerned with team unity and team strategy while the traditional unit group gave a priority to the amount of fun they were having. The sport education model offered greater improvement in student play, better application of strategic play and greater participation by students. In summary, the Australian and American findings supported the New Zealand perspective that "education about sport helps students to understand and value what is required to make sport personally rewarding" (Grant, 1992, p. 314) and the sport education model is worthy of a place in the physical education curriculum.

LOCATING THE STUDENT IN RESEARCH

Students are an integral part of the learning process. They have been described as "active receivers and mediators of classroom events" (Mitman & Lash, 1988, p. 55) who control and define what they learn in part according to their interests and energies. The content delivered through a curriculum and the manner with which it is taught becomes defined by each student. Although there has been considerable research into the thought processes of students (e.g. Wittrock, 1986), the same can not be said for the experiential aspect of learning as they have been primarily treated as passive recipients of curriculum.

While student experiences are subject to a variety of influences (and rarely sought as part of the evaluative process), Erickson and Shultz (1992) suggest "the daily construction of student experience is not understood" (p. 471). The utilisation of interpretive research could help educators understand more about student experience of curriculum. The meagre attention to this aspect of curriculum is addressed by Erickson and Shultz (1992) who assert:

...in our judgment student experience has been treated in partial and incidental ways, as researchers, teacher educators, and policy analysts consider relatively thin slices of classroom life, usually from a perspectival angle. None of these slices have been multi dimensional enough to capture students' subjective worlds as whole phenomena. (p. 466)

It could be argued the outcome of any curriculum should be investigated by considering the subjective experiences of those for whom it has been developed. One difficulty is that subjectivity cannot be captured, only reported. Nevertheless, Smith (1991) purports that by employing appropriate research tools it is possible to make a connection between the physical education curriculum and "the concrete experiences through which children first come to appreciate physical activity" (p. 46). He suggested that while this may "provide a

phenomenological challenge to our current research conventions ... it may deepen our understanding of what it means to educate children physically" (p. 51).

To date the research in sport education has concentrated primarily on the implementation of the sport education curriculum from the teacher's perspective with little attention being given to the learner's experience. The purpose of this investigation was to examine the collective experiences of a co-educational class of intermediate school-aged students while they participated in sport education.

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING THE STUDY

Context: A class of 32 Form 2 students (age 12 years) at Riverside Intermediate school in a rural New Zealand city was the site for this investigation. Because Riverside Intermediate used a modular curriculum system the class who participated in a sport education programme had not previously been together as a group. The season involved 28 consecutive lessons over a period of seven weeks during time scheduled for physical education. A modified version of touch football was chosen as the sport. The teacher in-charge [Brad] was a physical education specialist who volunteered to participate in the study. He received in-service education about sport education prior to the commencement of the programme.

Collecting Data: The teacher and students' parent(s) provided informed consent to the conduct of the research and presence of the researcher during the sessions. The researcher attended 22 of the 28 lessons as a non-participant observer interviewing students, and taking extensive field notes describing both the context and student actions in order to capture as complete a picture as possible of student experiences. The information recorded was transcribed verbatim immediately following the session. In keeping with Weinstein's (1983) recommendation of the need for multiple perspective's of experiences, the observations were supplemented by three focus group interviews (Krueger, 1988) involving eight students and conducted early in the module; mid-module and post-module. In addition, three reflective writing episodes were completed by the entire class to obtain another perspective of student interpretations about their experiences. The data collection tools were expected to balance observer input with opportunities to revisit and clarify their experiences and attend to feelings and actions that may have otherwise escaped recall (Boud & Walker, 1991).

Data Analysis: Constant comparison strategies were used to identify common themes that reoccurred during data collection. Individual student's subjectivity was blended into a representative finding by the researcher to capture the collective interest and involvement of the 32 students in the sport education programme. To ensure all student experiences were represented, attention was paid to selectivity of data. Data were constantly being analysed and classified into preliminary categories which eventually resulted in the emergence of several major themes. The themes were subjected to member checks before a typology was established (Patton, 1990). This process was adopted to confirm, modify, disregard or merge raw data into dominant themes that reflected the experiences of the class.

RESULTS

The multiple layers of conversations, observations, interviews and text have been compressed into a single ethnographic account. Although total analytic distance is never possible these results reflect an appropriate separation between researcher imposition and personal student accounts. These findings represent the integration of student experiences and researcher interpretation.

The study of sport education at Riverside Intermediate demonstrated the complexity of student experiences with curriculum. Presenting a full and detailed account of all major themes identified from the analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, to provide some insight into student experiences we have chosen to report on only three themes: (a) student achievement, (b) student liberation, and (c) student union.

Student Achievement

The nature of sport education provided plenty of opportunity for students to apply newly learned and practiced tasks. While the early season was marked by some disorganisation, the students soon learned to adapt to their roles and responsibilities. This was paralleled by an increase in the amount of time available to practice and apply aspects of the game and ultimately individual success. A strong portrayal was provided by Mark, a diminutive student who played for the Evil Goblins. He had worked tirelessly on his skills and tactics throughout the module. Initially Mark was reluctant to retain possession of the ball - despatching it hurriedly to the nearest team mate, displaying a lack of confidence. However, during the semi-finals in the later part of the season Mark reaped his reward as he side stepped his opponent and an open path to the try line. His journey was supported by cries of "go Mark go" from his team mates. While carrying the ball back after scoring, Mark was greeted by several of his team. Kate, the captain proclaimed "you deserve that Mark, you've worked really hard." Mark's grin reflected an appreciation of his captain's remark as well as a realisation that his efforts during previous sessions had been rewarded.

Being involved in one sport for a season allowed all students to make meaningful connections at a personal level between rules, skills, strategies and games. Darren detailed the importance of the rules when stating "if you're going to plant the ball it's got to be near the mark or exactly on the mark, so you don't get pulled up for off the mark." Beth related that once her team had started to develop the three player drive she "learnt how to not shepherd behind my other team mates so I wouldn't get us pulled up." The underlying influence to learning the rules and applying them to tactics was the use of a competitive format in which the students were central to organising and managing. Beth summed up the students' philosophy of the meaningfulness of competition by exclaiming "It is really important to have the competition going or else it would be really boring."

As the module evolved student knowledge and understanding of the game improved and illustrated through the playing of games by using calls such as "mark up" and "make space" during the module. These calls were accompanied by actions involving spreading across the field and running tactical options such as blind side plays. Later in the season some quite sophisticated strategies like

"the three player drive" were used and showed an advanced level of skill performance and understanding of the game. The "three player drive" was rated as a good tactic because you "roll off the line and set up the second phase" (Karen). Another advantage of the move, according to Stephanie, was that "the other team doesn't know how to defend it." It was evident that as the students skill level improved and they developed a better understanding of the sport so to did the pace at which the games were played.

Student recognition of the link between their team practices and playing games was an important reason for improvement. Many of the players used their games as a barometer to gauge their ability. For Carla it meant "you play games not very well and then as you get better... you learn all about them [playing games of touch] and have fun at the same time." David shared how improvement was linked to "playing the game properly" to which he added "you play the game properly so you know what to do next time, like if you make any mistakes you'll know not to make them next time." Building and refining personal knowledge and skills incremental over the season was a valued aspect of the module.

Part of the increase in the level of sophistication in the way the games were played can be attributed to team preparation. Some allocated roles (such as coach and manager) took on increased significance as the season progressed. Kathy brought a considerable amount of knowledge to her team. Both her parents had represented their province in touch. Although she was conversant with complex moves like the three player drive she had some difficulty "making sure they [team members] could all do it." She added that "it was more fun doing the coaching than playing it." Her success at fulfilling the role of coach was endorsed by Dylan, her team mate, who stated "Kathy just showed our team and then we were just doing it right in the games." She had transformed a relatively complex tactic into a relatively easy aspect of her teams repertoire.

Achievement became acknowledged by the students when their efforts during practice and planning were acknowledged during a game. This was illustrated by Manu's team after using a planned strategy to score a point. At the conclusion of the previous day's practice Manu had explained to his team mates that "the two waves of three players will mean that we'll have three up and three more on the second wave and this will be the plan for tomorrow, so I'm actually telling you what will happen in the game." The game on the following day confirmed the tactic and after five minutes Manu's team (The Riverside Raiders) scored their first try of the game. The exclamation by Chris that "yeah the second layer worked" was his acknowledgment of the value of good planning.

However, success was not limited to the outcome of performing skills. For Craig, the opportunity to adopt the role of umpire was an attraction because "at the beginning I really wanted to and then I thought to myself well, I don't know enough as it is right now to referee so I just gave it a go." His decision to referee was perceived as a successful venture because "They [the players] just listened and got on with it [the game]." This is one example of how the multifaceted nature of sport education promoted learning beyond the role of player. These results illustrate the use of student voices and actions to describe an alternative perspective on achievement.

Student Union

The opportunity to work cooperatively to achieve desired outcomes was an important part of the touch module. To ensure this was possible, students remained in the same team throughout the season allowing them the opportunity to establish a strong team affiliation and work collaboratively. As the season ensued a noticeable change in team dynamics evolved: the interconnection of all team members and the concentration of relationships between individual players. The change that evolved at a team level will be examined first.

At the beginning of the module teams were selected by a group of students. During the first few sessions all teams would meet in a loose and what appeared to be a non-purposeful way. The early practices adopted a similar pattern, with team members working individually or with a partner on self-initiated activities rather than as a team under the direction of a coach. The practice sites selected would be of minor concern to team members, and provided the opportunity to monitor what other teams were doing. As the season progressed, team meetings were gradually marked by close knit huddles, practices became unified and focused and eventually each team began functioning in their own space, often separating and choosing remote parts of the school grounds to carry out their tasks. This final strategy was chosen so "the others couldn't see what we were doing and guess what our moves were" (Graham). There was a significant change displayed by teams whose attention shifted from external distractions such as watching what the other teams were doing to internal matters such as discussing and practicing team tactics for the up-coming game.

Once the competition was under way, the most apparent changes in team cohesion occurred during the use of set moves during games (e.g. three person drive) and half-time team talks. The behaviour of Glenda's team, the Evil Goblins, is used to illustrate the latter trend. At half-time the Evil Goblins who were tied at 2-2 with the Riverside Killers, gathered on the 22 metre line. Glenda decreed "we've got to get back quicker and when you're taking the ball up you can just plant it and it's a lot quicker than backing up and planting the ball, it takes more time and then they've bagged their five and you won't get the others to move up so fast." The ensuing discussion overshadowed the whistles for the second half restart because they were totally absorbed in discussing strategies.

As the competition took on greater significance time devoted to team huddles increased as more non-playing time was spent analysing the play of the other teams. This is illustrated in a discussion between Peter and Kathy about the intensity of the game. To clarify Peter's expressed confusion about a tactical aspect of the game Kathy explained, "when you're right up by your trial line [she points] and you're right back here and you've got to try to defend this goal line and you plant it at the wrong time, then you've got to suffer the consequences". The discussion brought several other contributions from team members signalling their desire to be involved in something they perceived to be worthy of attention. The venue for such attention was not limited to practices or between play phases. During games team dialogue would often fill the airways as tasks were refined and adapted. Steven recalls that because he had not experienced touch before "I kept passing forward at the start...and then they actually taught me to pass it backwards or just go for the touch football, don't go all over the place because

otherwise you lose time and things." Competing regularly also gave meaning to the need to develop all aspects of the game for the collective good of the team.

Several students attributed their enhanced efforts to their team. Cheryl, who had described her early progress as "stink, because nobody passed me the ball so I couldn't get any better," later attributed her enhanced confidence to "my team mates." Her observation was echoed by Nadine who reported that she "could pass and catch it [the ball] by making less mistakes" which she attributed to "working with the same people gave you more confidence." As well as acting as a vehicle for enhancing individual performance the team influence also revealed the importance of inclusion of all team members to enhance success. David liked the way they had to "use the whole team to win", a perspective supported by Kahu who reflected on the module before deciding that "most of it's all about cooperation and teamwork." Cooperation was interpreted as a significant outcome of sport education for many students, particularly Rose, who "would recommend it [sport education] to other kids," because "it is really choice, you learn lot's from it...you may learn to cooperate much more." This admission reflected significant personal progress for her.

Using a lengthy period of time (season) gave players the opportunity to spend more time together for the purpose of a common goal. The experience enabled new friendships to be developed as well as the chance to "get to know other people and learning to work together" (Anna). For some of the class, establishing friendships became a positive outcome of sport education. Haden explained that "I didn't really know Jeff and now he's one of my friends". When questioned on what may have led to the new friendship he replied: "Just being in the same team...it's got nothing to do with how good or bad a player he is or what he does or how he plays the game, it's just that you [I] had the chance to get to know him." Many students echoed this comment when suggesting they valued working together and being able to learn more about each other. It also suggests that being involved with a small group over an extended time served as a catalyst to encourage team members to take on responsibility and attempt new tasks without fear of reprisal.

Student Liberation

One of the features of sport education is that it provided many opportunities for students to pursue desired outcomes at their own pace. The chance to create a preferred environment that helped develop skills and an understanding about touch football was appreciated by the students. The control associated with managing the touch module was acknowledged as a valued learning experience. Throughout the experience many students changed their perceptions of how they could contribute to the module because of the expectations it placed on them by fellow students. For many participants such a challenge was met with industry. For example, Martin discovered that "being a referee was really hard because they [player's] expect you to be good...I had to concentrate a lot." In spite of some initial difficulties, students expressed considerable excitement towards the control they had throughout the module. The selection of the sport took one and a half sessions because the class wanted to make sure everything was considered. Student access to decision making was an important factor. Steven summed up

the students' reaction to decision making when stating; "when you get the chance to chose what you want to do you get interested."

Sport education expanded student contributions which included "Organising rules [of the game] and most other things that teacher's do normally" (Cherie). The amount of control caused surprise for Glen who discovered "you are 90% in control of everything that you do." His reaction to the discovery of being in control was "its choice!". Lisa recognised that sport education meant that "you're in charge...like you can practice what you can, what you want to be and there is nobody putting you down because you're not really good at it [running the module]". While students valued the chance to explore their new found freedom they also acknowledged the trust that their teacher, Brad, had placed in them. Brian commented that "[Brad] gave the power to us and he really relied on us". Brian's comments were supported by Kahu who valued "being able to be trusted to do most of the work and organising most of the games." In addition to the increase in control several students developed a different view of sport.

Participating in sport education challenged many students to look beyond traditional interpretations of sport. The complexity of the module taught Jamie that "there's a lot more to sport than playing games and winning and losing but the [need for] responsibility and effort". Elle, who was a team selector, described her role as "an important part of the class...but it was difficult because so much was relying on you...I had to pick the teams evenly." Beth reported "I find this is not just us teaching you how to play sport, it's actually teaching you how to have full control over what you do." Her analysis continued by comparing sport education to her traditional physical education. She observed that "it's [sport education] much better because there is no big crowd." The group or team approach was also valued by Peter who preferred the new way because "with everything else [other subjects] you usually have to do work on your own but I work better when we are like this [in a team]." Perhaps the initial concerns of the class about only doing one sport was summed up by Kahu who reported "man... I thought that we would get real sick of doing just touch but now I think we need another module to do everything". This statement was made on the last (28th) session of sport education and Kahu's statement was greeted with congruous support by her classmates.

The Team as a Productive Unit

Co-operative teams promote achievement, particularly when there is a well defined structure, there is a climate of individual accountability and an effective reward system is adopted (Slavin, 1990). Although the term 'team' has been used in many environments most people associate it with sport. Team structures can promote individual knowledge and skills by utilising the collective abilities that each individual may contribute to the group. Although there is considerable potential in using student-centred team structures to enhance learning in physical education the domination of teacher-centred environments has created an impression of a lost opportunity (Bain, 1989). Small group or team structures can occur quite naturally in physical education and "The potential positive influence of persisting small groups seems sufficiently powerful that ways to better

implement this pedagogical strategy should be explored at all levels of PE" (Siedentop, 1991, p. 259).

The evolution of group learning using teams was marked by considerable growth. The importance of coming together as a team for a common purpose became more evident as the module progressed. The early ad hoc nature of team functioning gradually changed to become a more interactive and collaborative group. The teams began to discuss, demonstrate and practice ways to perform several complex game tactics and strategies. During the many sessions, the team leaders developed their leadership skills, creating a more positive environment for team mates. This developed confidence in a way that encouraged students to attempt more complex tasks. Consequently, students became more analytical about mastering the intricacies of playing and practicing the game of touch.

Furthermore, the transmission of knowledge, skills and strategies through the competitive nature of sport education occurred in a subtle and non-threatening way. Beth's comment that once the team had learned the three player drive she "learned to not shepherd behind my other team mates so I wouldn't get pulled up" was illustrative of how the interpretations of one or two team member's would often crystallise within the more concentrated environment of the team. The transmission of knowledge and skills between students is an important motive for participation, often interpreted as fun (Passer, 1981). Students who had experienced weekend club sport were able to pass on their knowledge to team mates. However, their message would often be too sophisticated for the inexperienced player's. Whenever this was the case these complicated messages would be reinterpreted by the less experienced players and, in turn, passed on to those who had no previous experience. Although this process took time to develop it proved to be an effective and appropriate way for the students to learn about the game.

In addition to developing a sense of belonging and loyalty to their own team the students were still willing to share ideas with members of other teams. The degree of competition did not take over the module, rather it became a focus for selective attention. The competitive nature of the module's games was contrasted by acts of co-operation. For example, it was not uncommon for a coach to teach a set move to an opposition team. Such a gesture would be unorthodox in an adult environment but for the younger participants the motive was "the games would be closer and more exciting" (Karen). Such co-operation was vital to the success of sport education because "when teams or individuals are closely matched and the outcome is therefore maximally uncertain, the playfulness is maximised and more pleasure and excitement are derived by the participants" (Siedentop, Mand & Taggart, 1986, p. 189). These outcomes were not immediate. They developed incrementally over time, supported by the extended seasonal structure of sport education.

A Matter of Time

At the beginning many of the students could not cope with the structure and nature of practices. However, the length of the module allowed for considerable adjustment to the more student centred approach to learning ensuing the team members soon turn to each other for help. This strategy was met with

widespread approval even though considerable time was required to fully adjust to the alternative pedagogical process. Fullan (1992) stresses the importance of giving students time to adjust to new innovations because:

Students will participate to the extent that they understand and are motivated to try what is expected. We have every reason to believe that, whatever the causes, students' experiences with innovations are not conducive to increasing their understanding and motivation. Nor could we expect it to be otherwise, if teachers, principals and other administrators are having similar problems. (p. 183)

The amount of time allocated to the module was defined as a positive characteristic by the class because it allowed them to develop various facets of the sport culture. For example, many of the class recognised different levels of improvement in both self and others across all aspects of sport. The variety of student interpretations of improvement signal the diverse nature of learning and the need for education provider's to acknowledge that diversity. In this study at least, sport education allowed students to develop problem solving, analysis of performance, enhanced understanding about the nature and structure of sport. Siedentop (1996) argues that the collective experiences available through sport education provides a more authentic outcome and level of accountability than typically occurs in physical education. It would appear there is a clear student preference for a link between skills, strategies and contests.

The depth and quality of student experience was made possible through extended opportunities to pursue and act on meaningful tasks. The extended 'season' seems to be a preferred option by students compared to shorter, traditional physical education units. Clearly their choice is for more of less. Such a message should alert providers to evaluate how they deliver subject material. The examination of time as a variable for learning in physical education is under represented. Harris and Yinger (1977) signal that, "researching the role that time plays in teaching and learning will not be a panacea for understanding classroom processes, but it should provide at least some understanding of an influential mechanism affecting classroom life" (p. 12). There is a need for greater examination of the impact that time may have on student learning in physical education.

Student Exposure to the Many Faces of Sport

The current culture of sport portrayed within physical education programmes resembles little of its full status. The abstinence from play (and competition) by many teachers has resulted in the sport aspect of physical education programme often restricted to a series of skills and drills of a selected code. A dominance of skills means that the chosen sport, as well as student learning, becomes decontextualized (Siedentop, 1996; Turner & Martinek, 1995). The provision of more authentic sport based programme could better promote the inherent values of participating in sport.

The value of sport as a cultural form is examined by Alderson and Crutchley (1990) who claim that although sport is a universally accepted commodity there is

at present a lack of education about the culture of sport. Their thesis is that educators should prepare young people to "make the most of sport in their lives" (p. 61) and convince those who adopt a negative stance towards sport in physical education that the prime objective is to enlighten students about the sporting options available to them in their leisure time. When suggesting this had not been successfully achieved for many students in the past Locke (1992) questioned whether the dominant model of physical education has become dysfunctional. The inference could be that curriculum planners have ignored students' voices and their criteria for what constitutes positive experiences.

The most prevalent change noted by the researcher in this study was the overall improvement by all students in game skills. According to Roberts and Treasure (1993) young people accord high priority to master their own environment and learn game skills and strategies. This shouldn't come as a surprise as learning and improving skills is a major reason why young people participate in sport (Gill, Gross & Huddleston, 1985; Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978). Although the learning of game skills is important, they are not the sole area where achievement can be acknowledged. The structure of sport education allows each student to derive improvement in such things as helping with team planning, responding to game tactics and strategies of other teams, refereeing contests or increasing knowledge about the chosen sport. All were important areas for the students at Riverside and they showed improvement in both understanding and application.

Sport education can serve as a mechanism for student participation in decision making, communicating and problem solving. Given the right contextual parameters those skills can be honed for the present as well as for the future. As Kohn (1993) argues:

It goes without saying that a 16-year-old can approach a decision in a more sophisticated way than a six year-old and therefore can usually be entrusted with more responsibility. But this fact is sometimes used to justify preventing younger children from making choices that are well within their capabilities. Moreover, the idea that we must wait until the children are mature enough to handle responsibilities may set up a vicious circle; after all, it is experience with decision-making that helps children become capable of handling them. (p. 14)

To promote student acceptance of physical education, students must be presented with openings to socialise with their peers, to contribute to a valued team environment and to develop competence in performance and social arenas. Such opportunities were clearly valued by the students participated in this study.

CONCLUSION

Although this study was limited to addressing the subjective experiences of one class, it has highlighted the significance of providing a learning environment where students will strive to achieve success even when the teacher deliberately takes a low key role. It also provided an insight into how sport education was interpreted, acted and personalised by the students when given autonomy in

striving to accomplish clearly identifiable outcomes. The nature of their experiences were demonstrated in a variety of ways as the programme unfolded. Team activities showed the importance of a positive student social system on the desire to achieve. Furthermore, acknowledging a variety of learning contexts as evident in this curriculum would appear to be more authentic than reducing the outcomes to a series of isolated skills and knowledge tests. It is after all, the manner in which students are fully involved and perceive the worth of their effort that influences their learning as well as developing an interest in, and desire to, continue participating in sport (Grant, Sharp & Siedentop, 1994).

Although little is known about the subjective experiences students derive from their involvement in sport education (and physical education) the insight gained through this research offers an alternative view as to how curriculum can be implemented in partnership with students (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). We should continue to investigate the role of students in mediating their own learning. If student subjectivity is better understood and accepted then their experiences could be given greater consideration and incorporated in the planning of future programmes. Reflecting on these findings and those of previous studies, it can be inferred that sport education does provide a meaningful educational experience for students. In the words of Rose, one of the students, "I would recommend it to other students ... it's really choice, you learn a lot from it."

REFERENCES

- Alderson, J., & Crutchley, D. (1990). Physical Education & The National Curriculum. In N. Armstrong (Ed.), *New Directions in Physical Education*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Alexander, K., Taggart, A. & Medland, A. (Summer, 1993). Sport education in physical education: Try before you buy. *The ACHPER National Journal*, 16-23.
- Alexander, K., & Taggart, A. (1994). Sport education in physical education. *Aussie Sports Action*, 5, 5-9.
- Alexander, K. & Taggart, A. (1995). *Sport Education in Physical Education Program*. Canberra: Australia Sports Commission.
- Arnold, P. (1988). Competitive sport. In P. Arnold (Ed.), *Education, Movement and The Curriculum* (pp. 56-69). Lewes, East Sussex: Falmer Press.
- Arnold, P. J. (1996). Olympism, sport, and education. *Quest*, 48, 93-101.
- Bain, L. (1989). Implicit values in physical education. In T.J. Templin & P. Schempp (Eds.), *Socialization into physical education : Learning to teach* (pp. 289-311). Indianapolis: Benchmark Press.
- Boud, D., & Walker, D. (1991). *Experience and learning: Reflection at work*. Geelong: Deakin University Press.
- Corbett, D., & Wilson, B. (1995). Make a difference with, not for students: A plea to researchers and reformers. *Educational Researcher*, 24(5), 12-17.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). What good are sports? Reflections on the psychological outcomes of physical performance. *New Zealand Journal of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 6(1), 3-11.
- Department of Education. (1987). *Physical education syllabus for junior classes to form 7*. New Zealand: Department of Education.

- Erickson, F., & Shultz, J. (1992). Students' experience of the curriculum. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum*. (pp. 465-485). New York: Macmillan.
- Fullan, M. G. (1992). *The new meaning of educational change* (2nd ed.). London: Cassell.
- Figley, G. (1985). Determinants of attitudes toward physical education. *Journal of Teaching Physical Education*, 4, 229-240.
- Gill, D., Gross, J., & Huddleston, S. (1985). Participation motivation in youth sports. *International Journal of Sports Psychology*, 14, 1-14.
- Grant, B. (1992). Integrating sport into the physical education curriculum in New Zealand secondary schools. *Quest*, 44, 304-316.
- Grant, B., Sharp, P., & Siedentop, D. (1992). *Sports Education in Physical Education : A Teacher's Guide*. Wellington: Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness & Leisure.
- Grant, B., Tredinnick, P., & Hodge, K. (1992). Sport education in physical education. *New Zealand Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 25(3), 3-6.
- Grant, B. C., & Pope, C. C. (1995). *Meaningful moments and valuable experiences: Sport education in the intermediate school* (Research Project Report): Department of Leisure Studies, University of Waikato.
- Harris, T., & Yinger, R. (1977). Time: Current directions in research on teaching. In *Meeting of the Invisible College of Researchers on Teaching*. Michigan State University: Ann Arbor.
- Hoffman, S. J. (1987). Dreaming the Impossible Dream: The decline and fall of physical education. In J. Massengale (Ed.), *Trends toward the future in physical education* (pp. 121-135). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kohn, A. (September, 1993). Choices for children: Why and how to let students decide. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 8-20.
- Krueger, R. A. (1988). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Nuwberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Locke, L. F. (1992). Changing Secondary School Physical Education. *Quest*, 44, 361-372.
- Mitman, A. L., & Lash, A. A. (1988). Students' perceptions of their academic standing and classroom behavior. *The Elementary School Journal*, 89(1), 55-68.
- Murdoch, E. B. (1990). Physical education and sport: The interface. In N. Armstrong (Ed.), *New directions in physical education* (pp. 63-78). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Ormond, T., De Marco, G., Smith, R., & Fisher, K. (1995). Comparison of the sport education model and the traditional unit approach to teaching secondary school basketball. *Research Quarterly For Exercise and Sport* [Supplement] A-66
- Passer, M. (1981). Children in sport: Participation motives and psychological stress. *Quest* 33, 231-244.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Nuwberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Sapp, M., & Haubenstricker, L. (1978). *Motivation for joining and reasons for not continuing in youth sport programmes in Michigan*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Kansas City.

- Siedentop, D. (1982). Movement and sport education: Current reflections and future images. In M. L. Howell & J.E. Saunders (Eds.), *VII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 6, 3-16. Brisbane: University of Queensland.
- Siedentop, D. (1987). The theory and practice of sport education. In R. S. Feingold, C. R. Rees, & M. Pieron (Eds.). *Myths, methods and models in sport pedagogy*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Siedentop, D. (1990). *Introduction to physical education, fitness and sport*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.
- Siedentop, D. (1991). *Developing teaching skills in physical education* (3rd ed.). Mountainview, CA: Mayfield.
- Siedentop, D. (Ed.). (1994). *Quality PE through positive sport experiences: Sport Education*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Siedentop, D. (1996). Physical education and education reform: The case for sport education. In S. Silverman, & C. Ennis (Eds.), *Student learning in physical education: Applying research to enhance instruction* (pp. 247-267). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Siedentop, D., Mand, C., & Taggart, A. (1986). *Physical education : Teaching and curriculum strategies for grades 5-12*. Palo Alto, California: Mayfield.
- Slavin, R. E. (1990). Research on cooperative learning: Consensus and controversy. *Educational Leadership*, 52-54.
- Smith, S. J. (1991). Where is the child in physical education. *Quest*, 43, 37-54.
- Stothart, R. (1987). From drill to diversity: A history of New Zealand physical education. *Asian Journal of Physical Education*, 10(5), 46-54.
- Taggart, A. (1988). The Endangered Species Revisited. *Australian Council For Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, (No 121), 34-35.
- Thorpe, R. (1990). New directions in games teaching. In N. Armstrong (Ed.), *New Directions in Physical Education* (pp. 79-100). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Tinning, R. & Fitzclarence, L. (1992). Postmodern youth culture and the crisis in Australian secondary school physical education. *Quest*, 44, 287-303.
- Tinning, R., Kirk, D., & Evans, J. (1993). *Learning to teach physical education*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Turner, A., & Martinek, T. J. (1995). Teaching for understanding: A model for improving decision making during game play. *Quest*, 47, 44-63.
- Weinstein, R. S. (1983). Student perceptions of schooling. *The Elementary School Journal*, 83(4), 287-312.
- Wittrock, M. C. (1986). Student thought processes. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (3rd Ed.). (pp. 297-314). New York: Macmillan.