

Elementary Students' Views and Experiences on Sport Education in Cyprus

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Sport education is a curriculum and instructional model designed to offer authentic, educationally rich sport experiences for girls and boys in the context of school physical education (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop, Hastie, & Van der Mars, 2004). The literature on sport education suggests that most of the studies examining its effectiveness are within middle or secondary schools and there are fewer studies on the perceptions or representations of the model by students in primary settings (Hastie, Ojeba, & Luquin, 2011; Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). This study presents findings related to primary students' representations and practices of sport education. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe Greek-Cypriot students' perceptions and experiences of a basketball season that followed a sport education format. Twenty-two (22) year—6 students (11- to 12-year-old), 12 boys and 10 girls, from a public primary school in Cyprus, participated in the sport education unit which lasted thirteen (13) lessons. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documents (unit and lesson plans) and were later analysed inductively (Patton, 2001). Results suggested that students in this study were successfully affiliated within their teams and appropriate opportunities were created for autonomous and meaningful learning. In addition, findings revealed that during the lessons there was a joyful and positive atmosphere which enabled all members to work hard as a whole in order to achieve their goals. Based on our results we have drawn the following two conclusions: first, the model of sport education enhanced the level of participation and motivation of students towards physical education; second, the participants in this study encountered meaningful learning experiences during the implementation of the sport education model.

Keywords: Sport Education; Primary Students; Primary Physical Education; School Physical Education

Introduction

During the last two decades researchers have underlined the importance of rethinking and reorganizing the way of delivering instruction in physical education (Kulinna, 2008; Rink, 2010; Rink & Hall, 2008). In recent years, scholars in sport pedagogy have begun to study programmes and models that may influence student learning and make these experiences more positive. Scholars have pointed out that instructional models are considered as more inclusive and suitable approaches that can be used by physical education teachers in providing effective instruction to all students (Kulinna, 2008; Lund & Tannehill, 2010; Metzler, 2011). One pedagogical model that has drawn considerable attention from teachers and researchers is the sport education model (Hastie, 2012; Hastie, Ojeba, & Luquin, 2011; Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005).

Sport education is a curriculum and instructional model designed to offer authentic, educationally rich sport experiences for girls and boys within the context of school physical education. The primary aim of sport education is to help students to become competent, literate, and enthusiastic sports players (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop, 2002; Siedentop, Hastie, & Van der Mars, 2004). The innovation of the model stems from the fact that the experiences which are offered, are well-rounded and authentic rather than the typical events in physical education; since students not only learn to play games, but also learn

to coordinate and manage their sport experiences (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop et al., 2004). The sport education model combines some key instructional features that differentiate it from the traditional physical education model. Students work in the same group throughout the length of the season and are given responsibilities and different sport related roles such as player, referee, captain, statistician, coach, etc. (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop et al., 2004).

The model of sport education has become well-known all over the world and contributes to the renewal and improvement of knowledge in teaching physical education in a more meaningful way (Hastie, 2012; Hastie et al., 2011; Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). Today there are several examples of how the model has been implemented in English-speaking countries such as New Zealand (e.g., Grant, 1992), Australia (e.g., Alexander & Taggart, 1995), United States (e.g., Hastie, 1996; Mowling, Brock, & Hastie, 2006), United Kingdom (e.g., MacPhail, Kinchin, & Kirk, 2003), and Ireland (e.g., Kinchin, MacPhail, & Ni Chroinin, 2009). As Sinelnikov & Hastie (2010) indicated more recently the model has been implemented in non-western contexts including Korea (e.g., Kim, Penney, Cho, & Choi, 2006) and Russia (e.g., Hastie & Sinelnikov, 2006; Sinelnikov & Hastie, 2008, 2010). Findings from these international studies have reported positive results of the practical validity of the model. In New Zealand, for example, Grant (1992) reported that the implementation of the sport

education model in high schools was successful and meaningful for teachers and students. Australian sport education research has also found that the model was beneficial to all participants and reported improved motor and social outcomes for many lower-skilled students (Alexander & Luckman, 2001; Alexander & Taggart, 1995).

Studies in the United States suggested similar results. Findings suggested that during sport education seasons students enjoyed taking administrative roles, showed a distinct preference for remaining in the same team for the entire season and they enjoyed their experiences in the sport education unit more than their regular physical education lessons (Hastie, 1998, 2000; Hastie & Buchanan, 2000). Evidence suggests that the sport education model has also been employed successfully within British school physical education programmes. Results indicate that the sport education model has given pupils a more authentic and less abstracted learning experience; enabled students to have more time to play and practice for skill learning, and that the sport education model has the potential to produce an educationally and morally desirable conception of sport (Brunton, 2003; Kirk & Kinchin, 2003; MacPhail et al., 2003; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). More recently, the sport education model has also been implemented in Korea and Russia. Kim et al. (2006) indicated that the sport education model has been successfully applied in a Korean middle school. Participants of the study pointed out that the model offered them unique opportunities to actively participate in class discussions and decision making situations. Hastie & Sinelnikov (2006) found that Russian students were actively engaged in motor tasks, demonstrated significant competence in the officiating and coaching roles associated with the season, developed significant team affiliation, and that they thoroughly enjoyed their participation in the season.

The summary of research on sport education (see reviews by Hastie et al., 2011; Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005) indicated that most of the studies examining its effectiveness are within middle or secondary schools. Today there is some evidence suggested that sport education can be achieved successfully by third, fourth, and fifth-grade students (Hastie, 2012; MacPhail et al., 2003; MacPhail, Kirk, & Kinchin, 2004, 2005; Mowling et al., 2006). Results from these studies suggested that the opportunity to become affiliated with a team was an attractive feature of the elementary students' physical education experiences. Additionally, research indicated that the model facilitates student learning and increases social skills such as student responsibility and cooperation (MacPhail et al., 2004; Mowling et al., 2006). While research on sport education includes few examples at the elementary level, only a small number of these studies have been conducted in non English-speaking countries in the European Union (Hastie et al., 2011). In his recent book entitled "Sport Education: International Perspectives" Hastie (2012) has included two studies from non English-speaking countries in the European Union one from Cyprus and one from Spain. Tsangaridou (2012) investigated the experiences of a Year-4 students' class (7 to 8 year olds) within a developmentally appropriate Sport Education unit and found that the features of the sport education model seem to contribute to young students' learning, enjoyment and participation in physical education. Similarly, Ojeba, Luquin, & Hastie (2012) found that with practice and experience in the sport education model third-year Spanish "students

were able to make decisions for themselves and even plan complex strategies" (p. 112).

Given the potential of the sport education model to provide meaningful learning experiences to school students and having in mind the limited account of this model at the elementary level, especially in non English-speaking countries in the European Union; this study presents findings related to Year-6 students' (11- to 12-year-old) representations and practices of sport education in Cyprus. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore Greek-Cypriot students' perceptions and experiences of a basketball season that followed a sport education format. This investigation was undertaken in order to extend our knowledge base on sport education. These results may serve to broaden our understanding of sport education and further on, to assist efforts to develop international pedagogical insights and perspectives.

Methods

Participants and Setting

This study focused on describing elementary students' perceptions and experiences of a basketball season that followed a sport education format. A qualitative research design was chosen in order to understand and provide details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative research designs (Patton, 2001). Participants in this study were a group of 22 Year-6 students (11- to 12-year-old), 12 boys and 10 girls, from a public primary school in Cyprus and an elementary classroom student teacher. None of the students in this class had had any experience with the sport education model. Informed consent was obtained from all the students' parents or guardians before the participants took part in the study. In addition, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the students throughout the study. The student teacher participated in the study voluntarily. He was assigned by his University to the specific school and class and he had the responsibility for teaching all subjects on the elementary core curriculum during the student teaching experience. The student teacher decided, with his mentor, to teach a basketball unit during his physical education lessons using the sport education model. The season was designed and taught by the student teacher and its duration was thirteen 40-minute lessons. The physical education facilities and equipment were adequate in the specific school.

Lesson Content

The students participated in a unit of basketball according to the key principles of the sport education model (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop et al., 2004). Consistent with the model the students were divided into teams that remained together throughout the duration of the season. The first and last lesson of the season were devoted to assessment. In the second lesson the teacher presented the model to the students and then he divided them into teams. In particular, four teams were created and six formal competitions were scheduled. The season culminated in play-off matches where the first team played against the third and the third against the second one. The winner of the play-offs was also the season winner. During the season, the students also participated in administrative roles as officials, captains, scorekeepers and trainers. The complete outline of the basketball season is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1.
Sport education season plan.

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Teacher responsibility</i>	<i>Student responsibility</i>
1	Diagnostic assessment	Class leader/Assist students with the stations.	Complete all the exercises in the stations and fill the sheet according to their performance.
2	Introduction to S. E. & creating teams	Class leader/Present teams according to the data that was collected. Explain the roles.	In teams they built their teams' id (Select: colour, name, country, stadium, supporters' name, date, etc.).
3 - 5	Triple threat: Pass-Shoot-Lay-up. 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd formal competitions	Class leader/Provide a range of activities for warm-up. Further observation referee adviser. Oversight the overall organizations. Provide feedback.	All the students: Learn the skills and tactics. Team roles. Trainers: Lead the team in warm-up. Scorekeepers: Fill the match sheet. Officials: They point out the contraventions.
6	All star game Revision lessons 3 - 5.	Facilitator/Advises the officials, the organizers and the trainers.	All the students: Learn the skills and tactics. Team roles. Organizers: Class leaders. Trainers: Lead the team in warm-up. Scorekeepers: Fill the match sheet. Officials: They point out the contraventions.
7	Man to man defense 4 th Formal Competition	Present the new defensive tactic. Asking for man to man defense.	The same roles as in lessons in 3 - 5, but different students take over different roles.
8	Zone Defense/5 th Formal Competition	Present the new defensive tactic. Asking for zone defense.	The same roles as in lessons in 3 - 5, but different students take over different roles.
9	Revision of zone and man to man defense. 6 th formal competition	Facilitator/Advises the officials, the organizers and the trainers.	Every team had to decide how they will defense. Team roles: Same as before.
10, 11	Play-offs	Programme manager: Oversee the overall organization of competition, assess students on their skill, and officiating.	Perform playing, team and duty roles.
12	Awards ceremony	Master of ceremony: Design and make the awards, conduct the awards ceremony.	Participants.
13	Formative assessment	Class leader/Assist students with the stations.	Complete all the exercises in the stations and fill the sheet according to their performance.

Data Collection

Data collection involved completing interviews (group and individual), questionnaires, observations, and documents. The interviews' main goal was to look into the children's perceptions regarding the implementation of the sport education model. The group interviews took place at the end of the season with representative students from the four groups and its duration was approximately 20 minutes. The individual interview, with all students, also took place at the end of the season, and lasted about 10 minutes. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for later analysis.

Two different questionnaires were also filled out by the students. The first questionnaire was given to the students before the implementation of the sport education season. They were called to answer questions relative to what they imagined/expected they would gain through this specific unit of instruction. The second questionnaire was filled out after the implementation of the sport education season and students were called to express their feelings about different aspects of the model (i.e., their new roles, their duties, etc.). Students were asked if they had learned the rules, if they had developed their abilities, if they had collaborated with each other and how satisfied they were with their efforts.

Observational data were collected by a non participant ob-

server. Field notes were kept for all lessons on events and activities relevant to the purpose of the study. Finally, documents such as unit plan and lesson plans were collected for later analysis. Since the study was conducted in non-English-speaking country, the researchers translated the data into English before the data analysis. A professional translator assisted in the translation process of each quote appearing in the results section.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data from all sources—interview transcripts, questionnaires, observational field notes, and documents—were analysed inductively (Patton, 2001). More specifically, all the data sources were analysed individually and then compared across data sources. Through multiple and careful examination of the data, the key links, properties, themes, and patterns in the data were identified in order to locate common categories.

Based on this process, the data were organised and sorted into major thematic clusters.

To ensure the soundness of the data collection and analysis, three strategies were employed (Patton, 2001). First, triangulation was used to ensure that the findings were accurate. During the data triangulation a piece of evidence was compared and cross checked with other kinds of evidence (i.e., comparing interview evidence with field note evidence). More specifically,

data were triangulated across sources by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents. Second, negative case analysis, the process of scrutinizing disconfirming instances in the data, was used to refine or revise tentative themes and hypothesized relationships (Patton, 2001). The search for discrepant cases serves as a cross-check on data analysis and prevents the matching of emerging themes and evidence that support only favourite interpretations. To minimize these effects, a careful search was made for discrepant cases. Third, a peer-debriefer was used to share developing interpretations and to challenge the researchers to support interpretations with data.

Results and Discussion

The students' views and experiences of a basketball season that followed a sport education format are organized and presented as a set of five major themes: (1) a parallel learning: skill and tactical development; (2) team affiliation; (3) experiencing diverse roles; (4) personal and social growth; and (5) a positive learning atmosphere.

A Parallel Learning: Skill and Tactical Development

Based on the data it seems that the participants perceived that sport education provided them opportunities that can increase their participation level as well as their skill and tactical development. Marios, for instance, said to the interviewer: "Being a member of my team and playing 'real' basketball with points and referee made me want to improve myself game by game". According to the field notes, questionnaire and interview data all students had equal opportunities for participation during the lessons. "Lower skilled students and girls seemed to have equal opportunities for improvement. None of them was marginalized. All members of the teams interacted positively with each other and seemed to enjoy their participation in the game situations" (field notes). Evelyn's interview segment illustrates the students' views:

Usually, in the physical education lessons, most of the girls do not want to participate in the activities. We used to stay in the classroom. Now we want to play because we can see that game by game we become better players and we help our team.

Stelios reported that during previous lessons they had individual activities and nobody helped each other. Another student, Costas, declared that if he played for the progress of his team, he improved his skills as well. Although these students wanted to win the title of the basketball championship, their valuable effort and their equal and active participation during the game-play according to fair-play was also important.

Sport education offers the opportunity to the teacher to cultivate motor skills and tactical sophistication at the same time. The following field notes were recorded while the teacher was trying to emphasize to the students the significance of the "changing direction" strategy during team games situations.

Students practiced "the changing direction" task. They were moving around the general space and when the teacher clapped they changed direction. After a few minutes students were asked to find a partner and practice the same task with their partner. One student was the offender and the other the defender; after few trials they switch

roles. Students seemed to enjoy and to understand the importance of the specific strategy (field notes).

Based on our data it seems that the participants were able to develop not only their skills but also their tactical knowledge and understanding of the game of basketball. It also seemed that sport education provided the participants with opportunities to develop their game-play competency. The participants managed to execute strategies appropriate to the complexity of each game. The field notes suggested that students were very interested in tactics. This advanced their self-improvement and as a result their team progress. Students through this sport education basketball unit, came in touch with offensive strategies such as the triple threat (pass, lay-up, shoot) and with defensive ones, such as, man to man and zone defense. During the course of the unit students were taught the advantages and disadvantages of each tactic. Data from this study suggested that the students were able to critically select specific tactics which seemed to be suitable for the specific situations. The following interview extract demonstrates the logic behind the selection of a specific tactical approach:

Today I'll be the coach of my team so, I thought that we can play zone defense in order to keep Wildcats away from the basket, because as we noticed in their previous match, they are not good shooters and they mostly prefer the lay-ups.

The following observation segment highlights that the students had many opportunities to practice tactical strategies during the specific unit of instruction.

The students joined their teams and started playing modified games. They used several offensive and defensive strategies during the lesson. All students were actively involved and they seemed to communicate nicely with each other during the game situations (field notes).

Findings of this study also indicated that students started to understand the value of tactics and identify them in game situations. Despina said that when she was watching basketball on television, she could not imagine that players had certain choices. Through this offensive strategy (triple threat) students could understand at a lower level how a professional player thinks. Similarly, Danai reported that "every time that I had the ball, I was trying to choose the best solution for me and my teammates". Through regular competition, participants understood the strategies, improved their personal abilities, their decision-making and their team performance. It seems that the nature of the model provided opportunities to students for motor skill and tactical development.

Team Affiliation

Siedentop (1994) proposed that during a sport education season students are divided into teams and these teams kept the same structure and the same members for the entire season. In creating the teams, the teacher in this study took into consideration the participants' skills (1st lesson: diagnostic) and their friendships. Gias said: "I am very happy because I will play with the same classmates for all the championship. This is good because each time, we will not lose time to create teams as before". David concluded on what Gias had said: "We used to waste time trying to find new teams but now we will be ready to play". Students were involved in the team development tasks

(2nd lesson). They created their teams choosing a logo, colour, name, home-town, country, stadium name, supporters' name and foundation date. Four mixed-sex teams were created and each team had its unique identity (colour, name, hometown, stadium name, nickname of their fans etc.), which was an added motivation for the students.

The participants enjoyed the creation of teams because they had never done anything similar before. Adrea, for example, indicated "I love my team, our logo, our colour everything, everything! I am so excited! Me and my team-members are waiting for the opening of the season. We are ready to win". Analyzing Adrea's words we have to draw attention to the fact that she immediately felt part of her team and this is what we call "team membership". All students, in this study, whether expert or novice, boys or girls, wanted to participate and each student wanted to feel that he/she was an active member of a team which worked hard towards common goals.

Students, through their teams, built a unique social system among the members of each team and among the other teams. The literature confirms that the sport education model relies heavily on cooperative learning strategies (Alexander & Luckman, 2001; Siedentop et al., 2004). During this unit of instruction, a framework was also implemented in which students had the opportunity to cooperate, appreciate, respect and help each other. Furthermore, students were committed to themselves and the rest of their teammates by signing contracts. Through these social systems, students developed their communication skills, they made plans as a team, and they took reasoned decisions as a team. Observational data suggested that the participants of this study were affiliated well with their teams and proper opportunities were created for their autonomous and meaningful learning. The following field notes provide an illustration of how students interacted during the instructional times.

The students formed their teams and started practice. They were working in pairs. One of them was practicing and the other was giving him/her skill feedback and positive reinforcement, such as, "Costa turn your body to the side", "keep going", "good job", etc. Students were working very cooperatively and autonomously in their teams. The teacher was moving around and actively supervising the students (field notes).

Experiencing Diverse Roles

In sport education, students learn diverse roles that help them better understand all the elements and the factors that contribute to a successful sport experience (Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop et al., 2004). In the traditional approach of school physical education students are only players. Sport education participants are more likely to play multiple positions and take over several roles (refereeing, keeping score, trainer, captain, coach). Through this variety students see the sport from a much broader perspective (Kinchin, 2006; Lund & Tannehill, 2010; Metzler, 2011; Siedentop et al., 2004). During the season, every participant knew in each fixture which role he/she would take on. This policy contributed to the students' equal participation. The outline of the participants' positions and roles undertaken is presented in **Table 2**.

All teams also had the same number of boys and girls. Furthermore, a trading procedure took place shortly after the teams were announced. Each team had the right to change only one player from its current roster. Only two teams changed one

Table 2.
Participants' positions and roles.

Lesson	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Member 1 st	P	P	P	R	S	T	P	P	P	R
Member 2 nd	P	P	R	S	T	P	P	P	R	S
Member 3 rd	P	R	S	T	P	P	P	R	S	T
Member 4 th	R	S	T	P	P	P	R	S	T	P
Member 5 th	S	T	P	P	P	R	S	T	P	P
Member 6 th	T	P	P	P	R	S	T	P	P	P

Note: P: Player; T: Trainer; R: Referee; S: Scorekeeper.

member each. Two girls decided to change their positions. This change was approved by the rest of their classmates. According to the field notes, this trading procedure offered students the chance to make long-term plans for their team and decide how each member could contribute to the team's progress. Data collected through questionnaires demonstrated that students acknowledge all the roles that were offered to them. Ninety-four percent (94%) declared that they wanted to be players. Eighty-two percent (82%) was impressed by the role of umpire, while eighty-three percent (83%) indicated that they enjoyed being scorekeepers. Seventy-seven percent (77%) preferred the roles of coach and captain of the team.

Findings of the study indicated that the participants liked their experiences of taking several roles during the specific unit of instruction. Going through this process students indicated that they were more able to make connections and transfer their knowledge to real sport situations. The following interview extract highlights the importance of taking different roles during physical education lessons.

I never took into consideration the referees. Now, as I can see, their decisions are very important. When I was watching basketball I did not use to pay attention to them because nobody had ever tried to explain to me how important they are.

Another advantage of diverse roles is that each role constitutes a motivation. These roles offer a special opportunity to the participants because small-sized teams need everyone's contribution for success. Each role that is offered is autonomic and students are responsible for their duties, so everybody has to work hard for his/her improvement and his/her team progress. As Christos noted "through the roles each student must try to help his/her classmates, so everybody must work hard". According to the data all students were active participants and made valuable contributions to their teams. Evidence from the field notes, indicated that the students tried hard in undertaking different roles for their team and personal success. "Students performed properly to their assigned roles and gave their best effort in helping their teams" (field notes). In addition, during the season, heightened attention and motivation levels were identified for most students. Analyzing the field notes, it was noticeable that students who, in the past, would not enjoy physical activities were more engaged through the adoption of specialized roles as part of a team. Carina explained how the diverse roles motivated her to enjoy her participation in physical education. She explained,

I never wanted to participate in physical education activities. I am not good at all. But through the way that we

played there were some roles that I love. I want to be an umpire or a scorekeeper. I hope to play all the other sports such as football and handball in this way. It was very interesting.

Personal and Social Growth

The social opportunities and social development within sport education teams is commonly cited in a positive manner and this has been most evident from the peer teaching and cooperative learning features of the model (Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). Being part of a team, students developed a strong sense of belonging, which increased the level of interaction and cooperation between them (Kinchin, 2006). This model develops qualities such as leadership, teamwork, peer support and active pursuit of socially responsible and equitable participation and, as a result, students reach their social objectives (Kinchin, 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005).

Finding from this study suggested that the model offered the opportunity to students to bond closely. Participants made new friends. Herika, for example, said: "I started to hang out with my teammates during the breaks. I did not know all of them very well. Through the team, I made new friends. I like it". In addition, it seemed that the structure of the model gave the opportunity to students that had argued before to get along. Based on the data of this project two students who did not get on well had to cooperate for their team's progress. These two persons played together and they over-came all their previous problems. Dimitris noted:

When I first heard the teams' members I felt a bit strange. I did not have a good relationship with one of my teammates. But through our team we did it. We became friends again for our team's progress! We apologized to each other and now we are best friends again. We come to school together as in the past, talking about our plans for the next fixtures.

In facilitating students' levels of positive social behavior, the two points system for a winning game, one point for a non-winning game and three points to the team which was playing according to the fair-play rules were used in the study. In talking about fair-play, descriptions of good relations among the team-members and among the teams were discussed with the students. In addition, students have to respect each other and the referee's decisions. Results indicate that this point system made participants react in a positive way in consideration of the team's progress. During the first three lessons, the teams did not manage to win these three fair-play points. After this short period, participants worked hard and took reasoned decisions for their own good. After the mid season, all the teams won these three points in every game. Florentzo, for example, declared "I am really excited when my team gets these three points regarding the fair-play. I do not care if we lose or win. What is important is to try hard, do our best". Resolving Florentzo's emotions we have realized, what Siedentop (1994) wishes for this model. Sport education students do not play only to win, they also play to participate actively and gain authentic and educationally rich sport experiences.

A Positive Learning Atmosphere

The sport education key features - seasons, affiliation, formal competition, culminating event, record keeping and festivity-

created an appropriate and a motivational atmosphere for learning. Based on our data the atmosphere during the sport education lessons was positive and students seemed to be actively involved in their tasks. Statements such as the following dominated the observational data. "The teacher created a positive climate in the lesson". "Students seemed really motivated". "Students were actively engaged in their teams" (field notes). The following observation example also highlights some aspects of the learning environment during the specific unit of instruction:

Students were practicing a drill in their teams. They really seemed excited about the drill. Two students were challenging each other. The teacher was moving around the teams, giving feedback, reinforcement, and teaching cues to students. The interaction between the teacher and the students as well as the interaction among the students was very positive (field notes).

The following observation segment is another example of the joyful, positive, and supportive atmosphere which occurred during the specific unit of instruction. This positive environment seemed to help all members to work hard as a whole to achieve their goals.

Students seemed to appreciate their teammates' efforts. During the lesson, the higher skilled participants did not dominate the activities and the possession of the ball during the modified game situations. All members are of equal worth in their team and all these students take on important roles and duties during the lesson (field notes).

During the interviews, the participants explained that a positive social climate appropriate for learning was created in their class through the sport education. Students commented that the structure of the model provided them with new experiences. Sophie reported that: "It was one of the first times that my first goal was to try hard, to work hard and to help my teammates and the other teams to succeed". When Sophie was asked why she felt this way she commented on her special feelings for this basketball unit. In addition, Demetris said that during these weeks, he felt that physical education was more interesting and better organized than before. He underlined, that he came to school every morning looking forward to seeing his friends and to discuss the championship and their teams. Based on our data it seems that this model created a positive atmosphere during these physical education lessons. During this sport education basketball unit, two special-festive competitions also took place. First, in the middle of the season, an all-star game lasting 80 minutes and the culminating event that had the play-offs format. It is also important to underline that every fixture of the sport education unit permitted all students to participate. Based on our data the participants seemed to have enjoyed their effort and this festive spirit helped them to cooperate and share responsibility for the league duties. These features created a positive climate in which the participants could play basketball well and appreciated its rules, rituals and traditions. Results from this study confirm the suggestion that the festive nature of sport allows all students to participate, enjoy fully and promote the highest standards of positive good behavior (Kinchin et al., 2009; Siedentop, 2002).

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explore elementary Greek-

Cypriot students' views and experiences of a basketball season that followed a sport education format. This study makes a contribution to the literature of sport education due to the fact that it is one of the few studies that have been conducted at the elementary level in a non-native English-speaking country in the European Union. Findings from this study provide some pedagogical insights and extend our knowledge of this innovative model with young students. Our research has shown that the participants perceived that sport education provided them opportunities that can increase their participation level during the specific unit of instruction. Results suggested that students in this study affiliated well with their teams and appropriate opportunities were created for their autonomous and meaningful learning. Findings of this project have also indicated that the model offered the opportunity to students to form close bonds. Being part of a team, students developed a strong sense of belonging, which increased the level of interaction and cooperation between them (Kinchin, 2006). Participants in this study seemed to enjoy the affiliation of team membership and the chance to contribute to the team's success. These findings are in agreement with findings from other studies indicating that sport education offers students the opportunity to learn from a variety of perspectives (Hastie et al., 2011; Kinchin, 2006; MacPhail et al., 2003; Mowling et al., 2006; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005).

Findings of the study also indicated that the participants enjoyed their experiences of taking several roles during the specific unit of instruction. Going through this process students indicated that they were more able to make connections and transfer their knowledge to real sport situations. These findings supported findings from other studies indicating that participants who experienced the sport education model, learned diverse roles that seemed to contribute to a successful sport experience (Kinchin, 2006; Kinchin et al., 2009; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005). Our findings also indicated that during the lessons there was a joyful and positive atmosphere which helped all members to work hard as a group to achieve their goals. Results from this study confirm the findings from previous research indicating that the nature of sport education allows all students to participate, enjoy fully and promote the highest standards of positive good behavior (Hastie et al., 2011; Hastie & Sinelnikov, 2006; Kinchin et al., 2009; MacPhail et al., 2004; Mowling et al., 2006).

Based on our results we have drawn the following two conclusions: first, the model of sport education enhanced the level of participation and motivation of students towards physical education; second, the participants in this study encountered meaningful learning experiences during the implementation of the sport education model. The results of this study add to the sport education literature by indicating that the model of sport education can be an alternative vehicle to traditional pedagogy. The findings can also extend our knowledge and understanding of the implementation of the model with elementary school students in different contexts and cultures. Finally, the findings may serve to further facilitate efforts to develop programs which are contextually appropriate while accounting for young students' needs and interests. As previously pointed out, research on sport education includes some examples of sport education developed with elementary school students, but only a small number of these studies have been conducted in non English-speaking (Hastie et al., 2011). As Hastie and Sinelnikov (2006) noted "we have little knowledge of how the model

might be interpreted and responded to by students in countries with a non-western sport culture" (p. 132). Kim et al. (2006) also pointed out that "it is notable that to a great extent SE literature has to date reflected physical education literature more broadly in being dominated by western voices and research within English-speaking countries. Language has invariably proved a barrier and limitation to potentially very informative cross-cultural pedagogical debate" (p. 362). Studying the implementation of the sport education model in a plethora of contexts we might be better able to decide whether students in sport education programs have gaining quality and positive educational experiences.

This study represents an effort to provide an account of elementary school Cypriot students' experiences during the implementation of a sport education unit. Quality teaching and examples of good programs are of high interest to the international educational community (Hardman, 2001, 2008; Kulinna, 2008; Lund & Tannehill, 2010). Hardman (2008), for example, pointed out that there are very few representations of good practice in schools in European Union countries and he argued that it is important to explore and report such examples. Given the exploratory nature of this study further studies should be conducted in other non-native English speaking countries in order to facilitate an awareness of the possibilities and promises of this model. In addition, as has been suggested in the literature, having a better understanding of the experiences and views of students concerning sport education, as part of school physical education, potentially could inform the delivery of quality curricula (MacPhail et al., 2004). On the basis of the findings presented in this study, we suggest that there is great value in providing meaningful learning experiences to our students. Accordingly, we agree with Siedentop's et al. (2004) statement and we hope that those students who experience positive learning experiences in school physical education curricula programmes "would prefer to continue to participate actively, because they have come to value the experiences and enjoyment derived from participation" (Siedentop et al., 2004: p. 8).

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