

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SPORT AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN AGED 6-15 YEARS

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### ABSTRACT

Physical Education (PE) and School Sport (SS) in South Africa demonstrate extremes and inequities. Contrast is visible in all aspects of South African life, but most significantly in education. White and urban schools are relatively problem free, whereas black and rural schools have been adversely affected by the past governments' apartheid and separate development policies (Walter, 1994). Some schools have well developed facilities, while the majority have next to nothing. PE teachers are qualified in some cases and grossly unqualified in many others. PE programmes in white schools and urban cities offer a wide and balanced variety of activities while in others opportunities are limited to a few movement activities. As a school subject PE has been neglected, misunderstood, seen as being of little importance and regarded as inferior when compared to other subjects in the school curriculum (Walter, 1994). In order to find out the status of PE and school sport among school children aged 6-15years, we administered the Sport in Education (SpinEd) project questionnaire (Bailey, 2005) to 897 school children in two provinces and contrasting geographical locations in South Africa. The questionnaire focused on five main themes/domains that refer to specific aspects of children's development and understanding through PE and school sport, i.e. physical development, lifestyle development, affective development, social development and cognitive development. The results showed some disparity in the perception and understanding of PE and SS among the respondents' age group and geographical location, specifically with regard to 'feeling' about PE and SS, 'values' (importance) of PE and SS, 'comparison' of PE and SS with other school subjects and 'self-rating' on PE and SS. Responses to each of the five themes/domains varied across age group, and geographical location, indicating the fact that children need to achieve the five most important developmental competencies – foundational (knowledge), practical skills (psychomotor), reflexive (affective), physical (growth) and social skills for holistic development and for PE and SS to adequately address the needs of post-independent South Africa.

**Key words:** Physical Education, holistic development, new South Africa, reflexive competency, school sports.

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### INTRODUCTION

In 1978, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1978 enacted the International Charter on Physical Education and Sport, which among other things declared that all children have the right of access to Physical Education (PE). The declaration was informed by the fact that PE has the potential and responsibility to contribute to the education of the whole child in a holistic way and to promote life long education. Compared with other school subjects, PE has unique features and serves all children irrespective of their ability.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective we need little convincing on the values of PE and Sports in their various forms in the lives of people. These values have been proved beyond doubt. PE is globally considered an important element in the schools educational function. It is widely acknowledged to play an important and irreplaceable role in the child's development, help to satisfy children's need for movement and physical activity and promote harmonious growth and development (Decker, 1985).

These objectives and many others are laid down in most countries by national or regional educational authorities and are contained in official texts. These objectives are aimed at introducing children to physical activities and sport as “means of personal fulfillment and source of hygiene, health and well-being” (Dekker, 1985).

The values of quality PE are also contained in other numerous publications and policy documents (Svoboda, 1994; ICSSPE, 1999; AFAHPER-SD, 1999 & 2003; UNESCO, 1999; Talbot, 2001; Bailey & Dismore, 2005a). These publications emphasize some of the numerous positive contributions of PE to total education process and to the physical, social, mental and psychological aspects of a child’s life. Despite these acclaimed values, PE and Sport have suffered series of serious set-backs in many countries. The current situation has been beautifully summarized by Hardman as follows:

“Physical Education has been pushed into a defensive position. It is suffering from decreasing curriculum time allocation, budgeting controls with inadequate financial, material and personnel resources, has low subject status and esteem and is being ever more marginalized and undervalued by the

authorities” (Hardman, 2001).

There are visible contrasts in all aspects of South African life, including PE. Whereas white suburbs due to the legacy of the past government’s apartheid and separate development policies (Walter, 1994) have well-developed PE and sport facilities with qualified teachers, offer a wide and balanced variety of activities, the reverse is the case in black schools (Amusa & Toriola, 2005). Black schools have been adversely affected in almost all spheres of education, including PE and sport. In South Africa PE as a school subject has been neglected, misunderstood, seen as being of little importance and regarded as inferior when compared to other subjects in the curriculum. In the new South Africa however, the post-apartheid government has realized that PE can be used to make a contribution in the reconstruction, development and planning (RDP) programme. PE has the potential to provide many valuable experiences for children (Amusa & Toriola, 2005).

After independence in 1994 the South African government reorganized the administration of sport in the country, with leadership provided by the Ministry of Sport and Recreation,

Department of Sport and Recreation and the South African Sports Commission (SASC) at the national level and Department of Sports, Art and Culture at provincial levels (Amusa & Toriola, 2005). Since independence, the promotion of school sport has been carried out by several organizations like the United School Sports Union of South Africa (which organizes primary school sports), and the South African Students Sports Union (which coordinates sports at the tertiary level). Opportunities are also made available for individuals with disabilities.

In 1995 a new policy on sport and recreation which focuses on general and overall development of sport and recreation among all South Africans was published. In relation to PE and sport within education, the policy emphasized that:

1. PE and sport present children with life skills in a way that is unsurpassed by any other activity, and
2. Increased physical activity leads to improved scholastic performance (National Department of Sport and Recreation, 1995).

Despite these developments very little progress has been made to further develop PE and SS beyond the pre 1994 level. Rather the

condition is becoming deplorable with PE and SS almost totally neglected. Also, very little cooperation exists between the departments and ministries responsible for PE and SS at national and provincial levels.

Various studies have illustrated in diverse manner the perception of children (and even adults!) regarding the values and importance of PE and SS (Templin & Schemp, 1989; Bob, 1990; Pintrich & Schrauder, 1992; Gensemer, 1995; Brusted, 1993; Carlsen, 1995; Portman, 1995; Haywood, 1991; Sit & Lindner, 2000; Chang & Phillips, 2002; Fung & Ng, 2004). These authors assert that current perception and value judgment about PE and SS can serve as a useful tool for self-regulated learning and can also influence learners' decisions to participate in physical activity outside the classroom. Various studies (Brustal, 1993; Sit & Lindner, 2000, Chang & Phillips, 2002; Fung & Ng, 2004) have also indicated that several factors such as gender, grade level, age-group, geographical location and socio-economic status of parents influence the perception of children and their decision to participate in PE and sport. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the perception and understanding of the values of PE and SS among South African children

aged 6-15 years residing in two geographical locations and provinces.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

The sample for this study consisted of 897 students drawn from primary and secondary schools in various districts and municipalities in Gauteng and Limpopo Provinces of South Africa, who voluntarily participated in the study. Participation was on voluntary basis. Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study which was to gather a range of data related to their feelings towards PE and SS, views on the importance, values of PE and SS and their understanding of the outcomes of participation in PE and SS. The sample size was important firstly to ensure adequate representation of the population and secondly for practical consideration of time and cost, i.e. the manageability factor (Thomas & Nelson, 2001).

Specifically, 20 schools in the two provinces, and from eight districts and four municipalities were sampled with due permission from the Department of Education and district circuits. Of these, 14 schools were located in the north (Limpopo Province) and six were situated in the South (Gauteng

Province). The schools were chosen to represent a broad socio-economic spread. The researchers targeted students in three age categories (7-10 years; 11-14 years and +15 years), and ensured that the questionnaires were duly completed by both male and female children in the relevant age groups. A detailed breakdown of the sample by gender and age is presented in Tables 1a and b.

Table 1 (a): Number of participants by gender and age

Gender	Number	%
Female	466	52
Male	431	48
Total	897	100

(b)

Age Group (yrs)	Number	%
7-10	178	19.8
11-14	469	52.3
15+	250	27.9
TOTAL	897	100

### *Design*

The case study design was adopted for this study. The method was adopted because the research covered contextual conditions (Bailey & Dismore, 2005); it enabled the research team to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within the real-life context (Yin, 2003) and finally the design permits various

forms of analyses to be done on the data (Platt, 1994).

### *Instrument*

The instrument used in this study was an adaptation of the questionnaire from the research conducted by Bailey and Dismore (2005a). The questionnaire was designed to provide valuable information and develop an overview of the perceived benefits and understanding of PE and SS in two provinces of South Africa. The first part was designed to seek demographic information. The second part provided quantitative and qualitative data on four broad aspects of student perception and understanding of PE and SS:

- (i) general feelings towards PE and SS
- (ii) self-perception of the subject
- (iii) value of and outcomes from PE and SS (i.e. physical, social, affective and intellectual outcomes)
- (iv) importance of PE and SS compared to other school subjects.

The questionnaire was also structured to ascertain potential differences regarding ages and genders of the students in the two provinces. The questionnaires were first piloted with 125 students and 97 students

attending primary and secondary school in two districts in Limpopo and Gauteng provinces, respectively. The pilot study was undertaken to ensure a thorough comprehension of the questionnaire items. As a result of the pilot study, interpretation of key terms/words on the instrument to Tshivenda (Limpopo Province) and Afrikaans (Gauteng Province) as well as in English Language was perfected through cross translation. A team consisting of PE and SS teachers and section heads were given adequate instructions on the administration of the questionnaires to the sampled schools.

### *Data analysis*

The case studies approach utilized both qualitative and quantitative analyses and which also included group and individual interviews and informed discussions which were carried out in order to determine the students' perceptions of the benefits and outcomes of participating in PE and SS. Data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively using SPSS 12.0 for Windows. Qualitative analysis was used to report participants' responses during the interview and discussion sessions.

## RESULTS

The results of this study are presented under the following four broad areas by age group and region:

- Feeling towards PE and SS
- Perceived competence in PE and SS
- Comparison of PE with other selected school subjects
- Perceived outcomes of PE and SS

### *Feelings toward PE and SS*

The students were requested to express their feelings about PE and SS. The results are indicated in Table 2 (i-ii). Overall, there is overwhelming passion for the subject across age groups in the two provinces. In general, 423 students (90.2%) aged 11-14 years, 198 students (79.2%) aged 15 years plus and 167 students (93.8%) aged 7-10 years in both provinces indicated having positive attitudes towards PE and SS. These account for 87.8% of the total sample. Specifically in Limpopo Province, 106 (99.1%) 7-10 year olds, 248 (98.8%) 11-14 year olds and 117 (96.7%) 15+ year olds indicated positive feelings towards PE and SS. In Gauteng Province, 61 (85.9%) 7-10 year olds, 175 (80.3%), 11-14 year olds and 81 (62.8%) 15+ year olds expressed positive feelings towards PE and SS (Table 2ii).

### *Perceived competence in PE and SS*

The students were asked to rate their competence in PE and SS. The results are shown in Table 3 (i). The overall perceived rating of competence in PE and SS is far higher in the North than in the South. Higher values of perceived rating of students' competence are found among age group 7-10 years compared to the other age groups in the two provinces.

### *PE and SS compared to other school subjects*

The students were asked to rate the relative importance of PE and SS against some selected school subjects. All schools in South Africa operate a national curriculum. Overall, the students indicated that some of the other school subjects were more important than PE and SS. This is a scenario across geographic locations (North and South) and age groups. Specifically, mathematics and science were perceived by majority of the students as more important than PE and SS (Table 4i-iii). Interestingly, all the age groups across the two locations perceived both mathematics and science as more important than PE and SS.

Table 2 (i). Respondents' feelings about PE and Sport in schools by age group

Age Group		How do you feel about PE and SS?					Total
		I love it	I like it	Not sure	I don't like it	I hate it	
7 - 10	Count	112	55	5	3	3	178
	% within Age Group	62.9%	30.9%	2.8%	1.7%	1.7%	100.0%
11 - 14	Count	213	210	35	7	4	469
	% within Age Group	45.4%	44.8%	7.5%	1.5%	.9%	100.0%
15 +	Count	96	102	22	13	17	250
	% within Age Group	38.4%	40.8%	8.8%	5.2%	6.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	421	367	62	23	24	897
	% within Age Group	46.9%	40.9%	6.9%	2.6%	2.7%	100.0%

Table 2 (ii). Respondents' feelings about PE/Sports (regional location by age group)

Region	Age Group (yrs)		How I feel about PE/SS			Total
			Positive	Not Sure	Negative	
North	7 - 10	Count	106	1	0	107
		% within Age Group	99.1%	.9%	.0%	100.0%
	11 - 14	Count	248	1	2	251
		% within Age Group	98.8%	.4%	.8%	100.0%
	15 +	Count	117	0	4	121
		% within Age Group	96.7%	.0%	3.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	471	2	6	479
	Age Group	% within Age Group	98.3%	.4%	1.3%	100.0%
South	7 - 10	Count	61	4	6	71
		% within Age Group	85.9%	5.6%	8.5%	100.0%
	11 - 14	Count	175	34	9	218
		% within Age Group	80.3%	15.6%	4.1%	100.0%
	15 +	Count	81	22	26	129
		% within Age Group	62.8%	17.1%	20.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	317	60	41	418
		% within Age Group	75.8%	14.4%	9.8%	100.0%

Table 3. Participants' rating of perceived competence in PE and SS

Region				How good do you think you are at PE and SS?					Total
				Excellent	Good	Not sure	Not so good	Poor	
North	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	57	35	5	5	1	103
		% within Age Group	55.3%	34.0%	4.9%	4.9%	1.0%	100.0%	
	11 - 14	Count	69	157	8	15	0	249	
		% within Age Group	27.7%	63.1%	3.2%	6.0%	.0%	100.0%	
	15 +	Count	37	69	3	7	4	120	
		% within Age Group	30.8%	57.5%	2.5%	5.8%	3.3%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	163	261	16	27	5	472
			% within Age Group	34.5%	55.3%	3.4%	5.7%	1.1%	100.0%
South	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	22	31	13	3	1	70
		% within Age Group	31.4%	44.3%	18.6%	4.3%	1.4%	100.0%	
	11 - 14	Count	47	115	34	17	1	214	
		% within Age Group	22.0%	53.7%	15.9%	7.9%	.5%	100.0%	
	15 +	Count	20	46	27	16	14	123	
		% within Age Group	16.3%	37.4%	22.0%	13.0%	11.4%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	89	192	74	36	16	407
			% within Age Group	21.9%	47.2%	18.2%	8.8%	3.9%	100.0%

Table 4 (i). Participants' responses on the importance of Mathematics compared to PE and SS

Region				How important is Mathematics compared to PE and SS?				Total
				More important than PE and sport	As important as PE and sport	Not as important as PE and sport	Not Sure	
North	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	69	33	2	3	107
		% within Age Group	64.5%	30.8%	1.9%	2.8%	100.0%	
	11 - 14	Count	138	83	9	18	248	
		% within Age Group	55.6%	33.5%	3.6%	7.3%	100.0%	
	15 +	Count	65	40	5	12	122	
		% within Age Group	53.3%	32.8%	4.1%	9.8%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	272	156	16	33	477
			% within Age Group	57.0%	32.7%	3.4%	6.9%	100.0%
South	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	45	13	10	2	70
		% within Age Group	64.3%	18.6%	14.3%	2.9%	100.0%	
	11 - 14	Count	163	40	7	7	217	
		% within Age Group	75.1%	18.4%	3.2%	3.2%	100.0%	
	15 +	Count	88	27	9	3	127	
		% within Age Group	69.3%	21.3%	7.1%	2.4%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	296	80	26	12	414
			% within Age Group	71.5%	19.3%	6.3%	2.9%	100.0%



Table 4 (ii). Participants' responses concerning the importance of science compared to PE and SS

Region		How important is science compared to PE and SS?				Total	
		More important than PE and SS	As important as PE and SS	Not as important as PE and SS	Not Sure		
North	Age Group 7 - 10	Count	37	61	5	2	105
		% within Age Group	35.2%	58.1%	4.8%	1.9%	100.0%
	11 - 14	Count	123	80	15	22	240
		% within Age Group	51.3%	33.3%	6.3%	9.2%	100.0%
	15 +	Count	58	45	10	8	121
		% within Age Group	47.9%	37.2%	8.3%	6.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	218	186	30	32	466
		% within Age Group	46.8%	39.9%	6.4%	6.9%	100.0%
South	Age Group 7 - 10	Count	31	14	5	3	53
		% within Age Group	58.5%	26.4%	9.4%	5.7%	100.0%
	11 - 14	Count	111	69	30	8	218
		% within Age Group	50.9%	31.7%	13.8%	3.7%	100.0%
	15 +	Count	80	31	11	3	125
		% within Age Group	64.0%	24.8%	8.8%	2.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	222	114	46	14	396
		% within Age Group	56.1%	28.8%	11.6%	3.5%	100.0%

A total of 296 students (71.5%) from the south (Gauteng) and 272 (57.0%) from the north (Limpopo) emphatically indicated that mathematics is more important than PE and SS (Table 4i). Similarly, 222 (56.1%) and 218 (46.8%) students from Gauteng and Limpopo Provinces, respectively indicated that science is more important than PE and SS (Table 4ii). Results on comparison between PE and SS and English language are at variance with those of mathematics, and PE and SS. A total of 273 (57.8%) and 110 (26.9%) students from Limpopo and Gauteng Provinces,

respectively admitted that PE and SS are as important as English (Table 4iii).

The results concerning Geography and other school subjects are at variance with those of English, Mathematics and Science. The curricula of schools in South Africa include subjects such as History, Art, Religious Education, Foreign Language, Music, Citizenship and Design and Technology. In general, majority of the students in the two geographical locations and across the age groups believe that PE and SS are as important as these other school subjects.

Table 4 (iii). Participants' responses concerning the importance of English compared to PE and SS?

Region			How important is English compared to PE and SS				Total	
			More important than PE and sport	As important as PE and sport	Not as important as PE and sport	Not Sure		
North	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	21	79	4	2	106
		% within Age Group	19.8%	74.5%	3.8%	1.9%	100.0%	
	11 - 14	Count	96	124	9	16	245	
		% within Age Group	39.2%	50.6%	3.7%	6.5%	100.0%	
	15 +	Count	36	70	7	8	121	
		% within Age Group	29.8%	57.9%	5.8%	6.6%	100.0%	
Total		Count	153	273	20	26	472	
		% within Age Group	32.4%	57.8%	4.2%	5.5%	100.0%	
South	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	33	20	11	3	67
		% within Age Group	49.3%	29.9%	16.4%	4.5%	100.0%	
	11 - 14	Count	147	52	13	5	217	
		% within Age Group	67.7%	24.0%	6.0%	2.3%	100.0%	
	15 +	Count	77	38	6	4	125	
		% within Age Group	61.6%	30.4%	4.8%	3.2%	100.0%	
Total		Count	257	110	30	12	409	
		% within Age Group	62.8%	26.9%	7.3%	2.9%	100.0%	

### *Perceived Outcomes of PE and SS*

The students were requested to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements regarding the outcomes of PE and SS. The statements range from the impact of PE and SS on health and fitness, performance in school work, social development (making new friends), respect for self and others to using PE and SS to prepare for sports competitions. The results are shown in Table 5 (i-iv). Majority of the students in the two provinces and across the age groups agreed that PE and SS keep them fit and healthy, help

them to perform well in other school subjects, serve as a forum to make new friends, encourage them to go to school, help them to prepare for sports competitions and encourage them to be part of the school. The emphasis on agreement to the above values of PE and SS was stronger among students in the Limpopo Province.

A qualitative questionnaire was administered separately to allow the students to indicate their activity preferences within PE and SS. Answers to the questions suggest diverse

Table 5 (ii). Participants' responses on whether or not PE and SS help them to do well in school

Region				PE and SS help me do well in school			Total
				I agree	I disagree	Not sure	
North	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	98	7	1	106
			% within Age Group	92.5%	6.6%	.9%	100.0%
		11 - 14	Count	205	21	24	250
			% within Age Group	82.0%	8.4%	9.6%	100.0%
		15 +	Count	93	13	14	120
			% within Age Group	77.5%	10.8%	11.7%	100.0%
		Total	Count	396	41	39	476
			% within Age Group	83.2%	8.6%	8.2%	100.0%
	South	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	44	18	5
			% within Age Group	65.7%	26.9%	7.5%	100.0%
		11 - 14	Count	80	91	46	217
			% within Age Group	36.9%	41.9%	21.2%	100.0%
		15 +	Count	47	49	31	127
			% within Age Group	37.0%	38.6%	24.4%	100.0%
		Total	Count	171	158	82	411
			% within Age Group	41.6%	38.4%	20.0%	100.0%

Table 5 (iii). Participants' responses on whether or not PE and SS help them to make new friends

Region				PE and SS help me make new friends			Total
				I agree	I disagree	Not sure	
North	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	103	2	2	107
			% within Age Group	96.3%	1.9%	1.9%	100.0%
		11 - 14	Count	217	21	10	248
			% within Age Group	87.5%	8.5%	4.0%	100.0%
		15 +	Count	111	6	4	121
			% within Age Group	91.7%	5.0%	3.3%	100.0%
		Total	Count	431	29	16	476
			% within Age Group	90.5%	6.1%	3.4%	100.0%
	South	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	48	12	7
			% within Age Group	71.6%	17.9%	10.4%	100.0%
		11 - 14	Count	153	37	27	217
			% within Age Group	70.5%	17.1%	12.4%	100.0%
		15 +	Count	79	30	18	127
			% within Age Group	62.2%	23.6%	14.2%	100.0%
		Total	Count	280	79	52	411
			% within Age Group	68.1%	19.2%	12.7%	100.0%

Table 5 (iv). Participants' responses on whether or not PE and SS teach them to respect other people

Region				PE and SS teach me to respect other people			Total
				I agree	I disagree	Not sure	
North	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	103	4	0	107
			% within Age Group	96.3%	3.7%	.0%	100.0%
		11 - 14	Count	199	27	22	248
			% within Age Group	80.2%	10.9%	8.9%	100.0%
		15 +	Count	96	11	15	122
			% within Age Group	78.7%	9.0%	12.3%	100.0%
Total			Count	398	42	37	477
			% within Age Group	83.4%	8.8%	7.8%	100.0%
South	Age Group	7 - 10	Count	45	10	10	65
			% within Age Group	69.2%	15.4%	15.4%	100.0%
		11 - 14	Count	135	43	39	217
			% within Age Group	62.2%	19.8%	18.0%	100.0%
		15 +	Count	77	32	17	126
			% within Age Group	61.1%	25.4%	13.5%	100.0%
Total			Count	257	85	66	408
			% within Age Group	63.0%	20.8%	16.2%	100.0%

Whereas rugby, swimming, cricket and netball were favoured in the south, soccer, athletics and netball were preferred by students in the north. The students expressed positive values regarding the preferred sports, games and physical activities.

## DISCUSSION

The fact that PE and SS have the potential to make significant contributions to the overall development and education of children is not in doubt. The relationships between PE and SS and vital developments in life cognitive, affective and psychomotor have also been documented (Hardman & Marshall, 2000; Hardman, 2001; Fung & Ng, 2004, Busto,

2005; Amusa & Toriola, 2005). Of all subjects in the school curriculum, PE is the only educational experience in which the focus is on the body, physical activity and physical development (Department of Education & Science, 1991). Researches that have evaluated the physical fitness characteristics of children in different countries have not only provided data on the relationships between children's growth and development and PE and SS, but have also stressed the need for PE and SS to be used to keep children physically active (Belgium: Ostyn, Simmons, Beunen, Renson & Gerven, 1980; Canada: Mirwald, 1980; Kuwait: Al-Sarheed, 1996; Nigeria: Toriola, 1992;

South Africa: Monyeki, Toriola, Monyeki, Brits & Pienaar, 2004). In these countries, (except in South Africa), PE and SS have remained the primary vehicle for children's participation in physical activities in compliance with national education policies. Recent trend throughout the world have shown a marked decline in the state and status of PE and SS (Hardman & Marshall, 2000; Hardman, 2001). Consequently, there is a decline in children's involvement in physical activity, a decrease in fitness in teenage years and a growing preference for sedentary activities such as television viewing and computer games to sports participation (Toriola, 1992; Toriola & Toriola, 1997; Hardman & Marshall, 2000; Hardman, 2001; Monyeki et al., 2004).

Global perceptions about the utility values of PE and SS vary from one country to another. In most cases the researches have identified the utility values of PE and SS in their studies (Kushkan, 1983; Templin & Schemp, 1989; Bob, 1990; Gensemer, 1995; Hammed, 1996). In the present study, the students evaluated the value of PE and SS on socialization, physical fitness and cognition (knowledge). The students also provided information concerning PE and SS in five areas: general feelings towards PE and SS, perceived value

(importance) of PE and SS, their perceived competence in PE and SS, the preferred aspects of PE and SS and perceived outcomes of PE and SS.

A total of 84 % of the students by age group indicated that they love the subject, while 83.4% stated that they like it. The younger age group (7-10 years) indicated more passion for the subject than the other two age groups. Only few students indicated that they were unsure about their feelings towards PE and SS. The students' positive responses towards the subject were not surprising. They only reiterate the passion children have for physical activity. As a forum to express this passion, they regard PE and SS as important. When asked to express their feelings towards the subject in their own words, the positive responses included physical and social benefits, physical fitness benefits and development of strength. These results support previous findings and global perspectives on the utility values of PE and SS (Bob, 1990; Toriola, 1992; Bernard & Pearl, 1993; Strand & Reeder, 1996; Monyeki et al., 2004). Few students however expressed negative feelings towards PE and SS, giving reasons such as injuries, pain and unpleasantness of PE and SS activities.

The positive reactions of the students are similar to those reported in a recent survey by Bailey and Dismore (2005b) among English, Colombian and Japanese children of similar age groups.

The students unlike adults were not emphatic on being excellent in PE and SS. A significant percentage across the age groups, and locations however rated their competence in the subject as good. This is consistent with the perception on the utility values of the subject as reported by Bailey and Dismore (2005b).

Schools in South Africa offer a wide range of subjects to students of all ages. The relative importance of PE and SS compared with other school subjects was also rated by the participants. It was not surprising that subjects that are offered for matriculation examinations were rated higher than PE and SS. These include mathematics, the sciences (including physical sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology) and English language. This finding confirms the current practice in which PE is excluded from the school time table. A sizable proportion of the students across geographical locations and age groups however expressed that PE and SS help them to do well in other school subjects. This finding questions the legitimacy of favouring

other school subjects at the expense of PE and SS. Majority of the students also agreed that PE and SS are as important as other school subjects, like music, art, technology and foreign language. Therefore, they recognised the interrelationship between PE and SS and other school subjects as well as the contribution of PE to intellectual development. Therefore, teaching PE and SS is as crucial to a child's development as any other academic endeavour (Chapman, 2005).

The students' rating of the perceived outcomes of PE and SS is interesting. In general, the students across the age categories and geographical locations were consistent in their responses concerning the outcomes of PE and SS. For instance, a very high percentage (93%) concurred that PE and SS keep them fit, while a similarly high proportion (92%) agreed that PE and SS prepare them for sports competitions and make them physically active. In the social domain, 82% agreed that PE and SS enable them to be part of a larger group. These results further support the students' perception of the utility value of PE and SS. If the subject was perceived to be useful to them it follows then that it impacts positively on their lives.

It is unusual for policy makers to seek learners' views regarding their perceptions of school subjects. If this can be done in South Africa, PE will definitely be reintroduced into the curriculum and time tabled. Discussions on education reforms including revamping the PE and SS curriculum should commence without delay. The students' voices should be heard when planning the curriculum (Fung & Ng, 2004). Doll (1970) had earlier expressed the sentiment that students are the "consumers" of education and therefore, deserve to be heard.

The preferences of activities within PE and SS were a reflection of the dominant sports and physical activities in the geographical locations studied. Whereas rugby, swimming and cricket are mostly favoured by white students from the south (Gauteng Province), the predominantly black students in the north (Limpopo Province) preferred soccer, athletics, netball and cultural activities. When the activity preferences of the age groups were examined a similar pattern was observed. The patterns of the activities when combined should provide insight into designing PE and SS curriculum content.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to assess the students' perception of PE and SS and their understanding of the outcomes of the subject. Notable findings pertain to the outcomes and utility values of PE and SS. The results suggest that the students see PE and SS as a useful subject that could help them to develop their fundamental motor skills as well as learn activities which could be continued outside of school. Although some of the activities preferred by the students are not presently offered in the school curriculum, their suggestion poses a challenge to curriculum development in PE and SS.

Education reform presents enormous challenge given the overall positive feelings of the students concerning the values of PE and SS. As consumers of education, the perceptions and expressions of the students on the values of PE and SS should inform a revamp and provision of quality PE and SS in South Africa. The findings of this study support the belief that a "curriculum based on the students' perception, preferences and value orientation could result in a more meaningful and dynamic PE and SS programme" (Fung & Ng, 2004).

The finding can also be used as a starting point in evolving a discourse towards thoroughly revising school PE and SS curriculum.

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