

Can engagement with Sports and Physical Activity influence pupil well-being?

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Frontispiece

The work presented and contained within this research project has been produced by the student. This research project and investigation has been conducted in accordance with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David guidelines for ethical research and has been created with the support of reading, personal research, the views of children and staff members in schools and with the guidance and support of University lecturers. This piece of work is being submitted for the ECAD6003 module at UWTSD and is the personal work of the student. It is understood that failure to reference other authors constitutes plagiarism and every effort has been made to avoid this outcome.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research project aims to develop awareness, knowledge and understanding of the potential impact that encouraging children to participate in sport and physical activities (SaPA) may have on their subjective well-being (SWB). Crucially, this research investigates whether a link exists between participation in SaPA and the individual's SWB and what a link between the two themes could mean for the primary education sector in the future.

Indeed, the author of this research project has a passion for the development of children's SWB and the nurturing of all children. Through personal experiences, the author's own SWB has developed significantly as a result of continued engagement with SaPA throughout school and University. The author is highly motivated to discover whether their personal experience can be replicated in children. If so, this will form a large part of the author's pedagogy moving forward in their career as a teacher.

The hypothesis for this research arises from the new curriculum for Wales, which endeavours to develop "healthy and confident" individuals through six Areas of Learning and Experience (AOLE) (Donaldson, 2015: p. 29). Through the Health and Well-being AOLE, children are to be encouraged to participate in physical activities across the curriculum and through a range of real-life experiences (Donaldson, 2015). Thus, children will no longer just be 'physically active,' but will also discover the benefits of remaining physically active throughout their lives and become "physically literate" (Donaldson, 2015; Whitehead, 2010: p.1). This is argued to occur through a "learning by doing" approach to SaPA (Beard and Wilson, 2006; Dewey, 1859-1952; cited by Pound, 2006).

However, as SaPA and SWB are themes that will be explored throughout the research project, it is essential that they are first defined.

Defining 'SaPA'

"Healthy development of both body and mind depends on activity and experience" (Palmer, 2015: p.57).

The NHS states explicitly that children between the ages of 5 and 18 should engage in a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity every day to maintain a "basic level of health" and "remain healthy" (NHS, 2018: p. 1). Additionally, the NHS argue that "being active for at least 60 minutes a day is linked to better general health, stronger bones and muscles, and higher levels of self-esteem" (NHS, 2018: p. 1).

The NHS therefore recommends that children participate in physical activity regularly in order to ensure that these children develop in a healthy and holistic way (NHS, 2018). This also satisfies Donaldson's purposes of the new curriculum: to generate "healthy and confident" individuals (Donaldson, 2015). This argument is also supported by Downward and Rasciute, who outline the growing importance placed upon pupil engagement in SaPA in public policy and the argued physiological and psychological benefits of such engagement (Downward and Rasciute, 2011). Benefits of participation with SaPA are suggested to include "reducing anxiety and depression" in participants, in addition to the reduction in the health costs for "obesity, cardiovascular diseases" and other conditions (Downward and Rasciute, 2011: p. 331). Not only this, but from the analysis of data obtained from research into the field of SaPA and SWB, the social interactions that occur during participation in physical activity, together with the physical act of engagement with sports, were identified as being factors that can improve an individual's SWB (Downward and Rasciute, 2011: p. 345). This could be due to the suggestion that PE is "socially constructed" in its nature (Green, 2008: p. 38; cited by Griggs, 2012: p. 34; Kirk, 2010).

Defining 'Subjective Well-being'

SWB is a term that is very difficult to define (Dodge et al, 2012; Dinisman and Ben-Arieh, 2016). This is in part due to the growing amount of research being conducted in the field of well-being and the attempts being made to both define and accurately measure an individual's SWB (Dodge et al, 2012; Banerjee et al, 2016; Dinisman and Ben-Arieh, 2016). Part of the difficulty in defining SWB may be as a result of the widely debated factors that influence an individual's SWB. Some argue that poverty and disadvantage experienced by the child and those around the child may contribute to an individual's sense of SWB (Bradshaw and Main, 2016; WG, 2011). Others argue that the children's ability to show "independence, respect for others," resilience to challenges and a healthy attitude to new experiences and learning demonstrates an individual's SWB (Donaldson, 2015: p.28; WG, 2015b). These factors are sometimes referred to as personal, social and emotional skills, where children are able to identify and cope with their own emotions and relate to the needs and emotions of others (OECD, date unknown; Banerjee et al, 2016; WG, 2008a). Conversely, others suggest that "too little is known about the factors that contribute" to children's well-being and, thus, continuing to investigate potential influencing factors on an individual's SWB should be the focus of further research (Dinisman and Ben-Arieh, 2016). Despite these debates, for the purposes of this research, SWB is taken to mean the

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individual's "evaluations and feelings about their life" (Bradshaw, Main and Rees, 2016: p.125). Simply put, this is the extent to which children feel happy, "at ease" and demonstrate "self-confidence" in their lives (Early Learning HQ, date unknown: p.1)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Part A

Currently in Wales, physical education requirements and skills are identified in the Welsh Governments' (WG) Physical Education (PE) and the Foundation Phase Framework curriculum documents (WG, 2008b; WG, 2015a). However, prior to the passing of the Education Act of 1988, the status of PE and those who delivered the 'subject' could be seen to be at an all-time low (Houlihan and Green, 2006). Research demonstrated how PE was often overlooked by schools and the general view held by many members of school communities that: PE did not contribute to the development of children; PE was not a topic that should be focussed upon within school; and that those who believed that PE and PE teachers have

a fundamental part to play in the education of every child, that they provided an essential basis on which active life for work and leisure could be built for everyone, then, clearly, they have to think again (Spectator, 1975: p.93; cited by Houlihan and Green, 2006: p. 3-4).

Whilst the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 established PE as a compulsory subject, it was only attributed a foundation subject status (ERA, 1988: p.2). Despite the passing of such legislation, Houlihan and Green present the numerous debates that continued to emerge regarding the importance of the PE curriculum in relation to other curriculum areas, such as the humanities and the core subjects (Houlihan and Green, 2006). Some even argue that the PE curriculum has not evolved greatly from its emergence in the middle of the twentieth century and, thus, development needs to occur in this area of the curriculum (Kirk, 2010: p.94). These debates convey the contrasting opinions held by many members of school communities and those in Government in the 1990s, with many individuals continuing to oppose the PE curriculum as a result of a lack of documented evidence for the benefits gained by children through engagement with PE (Houlihan and Green, 2006; Hardman, 2008).

Significantly, "Learning through PE and Sport" (2003) began to detail the potential benefits that children could receive as a result of participation in physical activity, arguing that such engagement can develop children's "desire to learn and make progress," alongside enabling children to demonstrate "good levels of positive behaviour" (DFES, 2003: p. 3-4). These outcomes were argued to be achieved through "high-quality PE and school sport" (DFES,

2003: p. 3). In order to provide children with such “high-quality PE” experiences, recommendations have recently been made to the WG regarding the importance of providing teacher trainees, and their institutions, with essential information regarding the benefits and importance of PE and details of effective pedagogy relating to PE’s delivery in schools (DFES, 2003: p. 3; National Assembly Wales, 2019). The clear recommendation made by the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) that PE should be made a “core subject” within the new curriculum reflects the critical importance that is attributed to PE by current policies in Wales, possibly as a result of the growing awareness of increasing childhood obesity rates, health concerns and the importance being placed upon challenging these issues in Wales (NAW, 2019: p. 41; BBC, 2019a). After all, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 desires for a future Wales that is “healthier” and “globally responsible” (WG, 2015b: p. 3).

Yet, despite the growing awareness and concern over the rising number of overweight and obese children in Wales and the Health and Behaviour in School-aged Children’s (HBSC) goal to improve the “health and well-being of young people,” recent reports by the BBC suggest that PE still receives less than the highly recommended 120 minutes of PE per week in many schools timetables (HBSC, date unknown: p. 1; BBC, 2019b). This contrasts the findings of Ofsted, who suggested that 69% of schools provided two timetabled hours of PE each week (Ofsted, 2018: p.13).

However, Haydn-Davies argues that there are currently too many purposes detailed within the PE curriculum in order for real progress and benefits to be gained by the children (Haydn-Davies, 2012). For instance, some of the purposes of the PE curriculum are argued to include: to prepare children for “secondary physical education”; for enjoyment and the wholistic development of a child; to stop “children becoming obese”; to name a few (Haydn-Davies, 2012: p.27). Interestingly, the purpose of providing children with knowledge of physical activities and the benefits of such activity is identified by Haydn-Davies as being achievable without engagement in such physical activity, thus contrasting the very purpose of such instruction in PE (Haydn-Davies, 2012: p.27). Thus, PE needs to have a clearer purpose if PE is to prove to be meaningful and beneficial to children, or the ‘subject’ of PE risks “extinction” (Kirk, 2010; cited by Haydn-Davies, 2012: p. 34). Wainwright et al suggest that the priority purpose of the PE curriculum should be to satisfy the “fundamental right for all people to participate in meaningful physical activity across their life course” (Wainwright et al, 2017: p.436).

Adopting Donaldson's directions for PE provision in schools could satisfy the arguments made by Kirk, Haydn-Davies and Wainwright et al (Kirk, 2010; cited by Haydn-Davies, 2012: p. 34; Wainwright et al, 2017). Indeed, as the new curriculum seeks to get all children physically active throughout the school day across the whole curriculum and timetable, rather than subject specific sessions, children have the potential to develop their knowledge and understanding of healthy lifestyles and develop a greater sense of well-being throughout their daily school life (Donaldson, 2015). This engagement with physical activity, via Donaldson, is one of many factors involved in the process of becoming "physically literate," alongside "motivation, confidence, physical competence and the knowledge and understanding of maintaining physical activity throughout life" (Whitehead, 2010: p.1; Donaldson, 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Part B

Indeed, children are argued to have a right to be physically active and healthy (Edwards et al, 2018: p.S430). This argued right is reflected by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Promoting the Emotional Health of Children and Young People publication that details how “access to opportunities for physical activity, active play and sport” is a crucial factor that must be afforded to all children in order to ensure their SWB is developed (DCSF, 2010: p.32). Estyn cite Ysgol Bryn Deva as a school that is demonstrating excellent practice in the field of pupil attainment and well-being as a result of a “Touching the Sky” fitness and activity club (Estyn, 2016). Here, children participate in regular SaPA as a method of increasing their SWB, with pupil achievements being celebrated and rewarded (Estyn, 2016). This effective practice for developing children’s SWB is supported by the claims made by Smedegaard et al who argue that the link between sports, physical activity and SWB is well-established and that regular engagement with SaPA can promote an individual’s SWB through the development of their self-esteem and social skills (Smedegaard et al, 2016: p.2).

This is not to say, however, that SaPA are the only influencing factors upon a child’s SWB. Rather, Siegel suggests that physical activity is one of seven crucial factors that influence an individual’s SWB and ability to be healthy (Siegel, 2019). These seven factors form the “healthy mind platter” (Siegel, 2019: p.1). Additionally, other research suggests a wide range of factors are involved in comprising an individual’s SWB, including “friends, economic situation, appearance and self-esteem” (The Children’s Society, 2018; Dinisman and Ben-Arieh, 2016; WG, 2011).

How do we measure children’s SWB?

Many authors suggest that there are usually two categories that an individual’s evaluation of their SWB fall into: “cognitive elements” and “affective elements” (Albuquerque, 2010: p.1; Diener, 1984; cited by Bradshaw, 2016: p.125; The Children’s Society, 2018; Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002: p.63; cited by Sabato and Kogut, 2019: p.335-350). “Cognitive elements” refers to an individual’s thoughts and evaluations about how satisfied they are with their life as a whole (Albuquerque, 2010: p.1; Bradshaw, 2016: p.125). “Affective elements” refers to the individual’s feelings regarding their life, with the “positive affect” generating pleasant

emotions such as “joy and affection” and the “negative affect” generating negative emotions such as “anger or guilt” (Albuquerque, 2010: p.1; Bradshaw, 2016: p.125). Thus, individuals who experience greater “positive affect” elements will have a greater sense of SWB than those who experience greater “negative affect” elements in their lives (Albuquerque, 2010). Together with “life satisfaction,” Albuquerque argues that psychologists “measure” an individual’s SWB using the “positive and negative affects” experienced by the individual (Albuquerque, 2010).

Laevers developed two scales in an effort to measure children’s well-being: the Leuven scale of “Emotional Well-being” and the Leuven scale of “Involvement” (Early Learning HQ, date unknown). Both scales range from a score of 1 to 5, with one being extremely low and five being extremely high (Early Learning HQ, date unknown). However, it must be noted that these scales involve the observation of children’s behaviour by adults and is objective as a result. This may challenge the accuracy of determining a child’s SWB as the views and feelings of the child are not incorporated into these scales.

Importantly, Newland et al argue that much literature that has been written on the topic of children’s well-being focus more on the objectional views of adults about the child’s manner and behaviour, rather than the subjective measure of asking the children themselves about how they are feeling (Newland et al, 2019) This is a gap in current research into children’s well-being and a clear weakness, argued by Newland et al, in current literature surrounding the topic of children’s well-being (Newland et al, 2019). Not only this, but Newland et al further argue that much literature focusses on the “negative affect” elements of children’s well-being, as opposed to the “positive affect” elements (Newland et al, 2019). Thus, the extent to which a fair representation of children’s SWB is questioned by Newland et al (Newland et al, 2019).

The future of children’s SWB.

The National Mission for Wales clearly documents the priority afforded to the holistic development of children across Wales through the development of pupil SWB (WG, 2017). Whilst it is true that the current curriculum seeks to foster a child’s sense of social and emotional well-being, as identified in the Foundation Phase Framework (FPF) and the Personal and Social education documents, Bradshaw et al acknowledge that children in the UK score particularly poorly in international comparisons of children’s SWB (WG, 2015a; WG, 2008; Bradshaw, Main and Rees, 2016). Furthermore, as children age, the SWB of these

children is suggested to deteriorate (Bradshaw, Main and Rees, 2016: p.123-124). Moreover, the most recent Good Childhood Report of 2018 highlighted, through analysis of the current SWB of children in the UK, that children were becoming less satisfied with life as a whole since the year 2009 (The Children's Society, 2018). This is a worrying argument, particularly when considering that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 both sought to develop children's SWB as a priority (UNCRC, 1989; WG, 2015b).

On the other hand, Donaldson's proposed new curriculum for Wales seeks to embed SWB of all pupils through the Health and Well-being AOLE (Donaldson, 2015). This may address the current issues surrounding children's SWB in schools, as well as by making the development of children's SWB one of the very purposes of the new curriculum (Donaldson, 2015).

Indeed, pupil voice and inclusion are key themes of the new curriculum for Wales and, as a result of listening and responding to the views of children in decisions that affect them, the weakness of current SWB literature, highlighted by Newland et al, may be addressed as a direct cause of asking the children what they are feeling, rather than making objectional observations about their actions and behaviour (Donaldson, 2015; Newland et al, 2019).

Chapter 3: Methodology

It is essential that ethical guidelines and practices are considered and adhered to at all times (Grigg, 2016). This is to ensure that results from the research are reliable and have been obtained appropriately from the participants. Brooks et al argue that, despite early claims made by some that ethical questions within educational research were “absent from debate,” the recent discussions between the Government, international agencies and the education sector has led to developments in legislation and practice so as to avoid any ethical issues from arising and to ensure that ethical standards are met (Burgess, 1989; cited by Brooks et al, 2014: p.4; Brooks et al, 2014). Indeed, Universities and other institutions conducting research often produce their own ethical code of practice which researchers must comply with (Palaologou, 2016). Appendix 1 (A1) details the author’s University ethics form approval. Furthermore, A1 demonstrates the author’s awareness of ethical procedures detailed by the University and outlines the author’s best intentions to abide by these guidelines throughout the research project.

Crucially, when conducting research in Education through the involvement of children, other legislation must be recognised and followed by researchers (Palaologou, 2016; Punch, 2009). One such policy is the British Educational Studies Association (BERA) and their published ethical code of practice (Palaologou, 2016; BERA, 2018). Indeed, protection from harm, the right to withdraw from the research and the gaining of consent from participants are key themes detailed within the BERA ethical code of practice and, consequently, were constantly reinforced by the author to all participants (BERA, 2018). Not only this, but the UNCRC sets out the rights of all children in the UK (UNCRC, 1989). As a result of these rights, researchers must ensure that all of the rights of the child are respected throughout their research (UNCRC, 1989; Brooks et al, 2014). This formed a significant part of the author’s research methodology. Thus, through oral discussions and a written cover letter provided to staff and children at the electives school, all participants were informed of the purpose of the author’s research and of their personal rights to remain anonymous, to be protected from harm and their ability to withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason (BERA, 2018). Appendix 2 documents the cover letter provided.

The author conducted the research in the elective school after being authorised to do so as a result of the approval of the author’s ethics form and research purpose. (A1) The author utilised a variety of research methods throughout the research project in order to gain a wider

range of data from the participants. However, the suggestion that no single research method “is ideal,” as all research methods have “inherent strengths and weaknesses” posed a challenge to the author at the beginning of the research project (Abowitz and Toole, 2010: p.108). To overcome this challenge, the work of Punch recommended that utilising “mixed methods” may allow for the overlapping strengths of the different research methods to mitigate the weaknesses of each research method if it was used on its own (Punch, 2009: p.290). Resultantly, the author used “mixed methods” of research throughout the research project.

The author used the following research methods: questionnaires; observations; interviews; and learning walks (Abowitz and Toole, 2010; Connolly, 2016; Brooks et al, 2014; Punch, 2009; Baker and King, 2013). This was to gain both qualitative (“mainly words”) and quantitative (“numerical”) primary and secondary data (Grigg, 2016: p.226).

Questionnaires were distributed on Google Forms: one questionnaire for pupils and a different questionnaire for staff. (Appendix 3 and 4). Indeed, online questionnaires offer the potential to reach a larger range of individuals in a reduced time frame (Brooks et al, 2014; Connolly, 2016). However, it can be argued that participants may struggle to withdraw their questionnaire, should they wish to, as well as it being difficult to establish if respondents are being truthful in their questionnaire responses (Brooks et al, 2014; McLeod, 2018).

The author received 56 completed responses from Key Stage 2 children, as well as 13 completed responses from staff members (Poole, 2019). The children were briefed about their participation in the questionnaire in child friendly language and in accordance with the University and BERAs ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018).

However, it should be noted that the author submitted a link to the online questionnaire to all staff members via email during the author’s first week of attendance. Then, in week two, it was recommended that the author should also ask staff members to complete the questionnaires through a QR Code link to the questionnaire. As a result of this, it is possible that some staff members may have completed the same questionnaire more than once. This must be considered when drawing conclusions from the responses obtained from staff members.

Additionally, the author utilised a semi-structured interview with selected children. As Connolly acknowledges, the “semi-structured” interview holds the potential for the author to gain information and data from the interviewee that the author had not considered or expected

to receive, whilst also ensuring that certain key questions and areas for discussion can be asked during the interview process (Connolly, 2016: p.141). Furthermore, an “unstructured interview” was also conducted by the author in order to gain a variety of answers and opinions from the interviewees in an open-ended discussion about the research topic of physical activity and SWB (Connolly, 2016: p.142). This proved to be a valuable method of research, despite the risk of the interview deviating into an unexpected or “irrelevant” direction (Connolly, 2016: p.142). On reflection, it may have been beneficial to record the interviews in order to obtain the exact words used by the interviewee in order to ensure complete accuracy in the responses given.

Appendix 5 and 6 detail observational notes of children and notes made by the author from the unstructured interview.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The following chapter will be split into several themes that emerged from the analysis of the research results. Appendix 3 and 4 (A3 and A4) contain full details of the online questionnaires. Appendix 7 (A7) details the semi-structured interview schedule, with Appendix 8 (A8) showing observational notes made by the author that documents some children's experiences during and after engagement with physical activity. Appendix 9 (A9) details the author's notes made whilst undertaking a learning walk in the electives school.

It is significant to note that all percentages provided in the following section are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Attitudes towards SaPA

After analysing the responses to the questionnaire, it was immediately clear that children in the electives school held SaPA in high regard. A substantial 43% of children strongly agreed with the statement that sports "were really important" to them, with a further 34% of children agreeing with the statement in question 4 (Q4), A3 (Poole, 2019a: A3). Only one response (2%) strongly disagreed with the statement, with a further two responses (4%) disagreeing with Q4s statement. Thus, it could be argued that an overwhelming number of children identified SaPA to be a key aspect to their lives. This contrasts the argument of Palmer, who suggests that children feel a "dwindling interest in physical exercise" and activity (Palmer, 2015: p.62). The most frequent responses regarding the importance of sports to the individual were that sports were important because "they were fun" and that engagement with sports "helps to keep us fit and healthy" (Poole, 2019a: A3). A few responses included statements such as "it is tiring" and "I do not do sports and so it is not important to me," though these were not accompanied by statements regarding why they do not do sports, which would have been beneficial to the research project (Poole, 2019a: A3). Whilst it was encouraging to hear that children view SaPA to be "really important" to them, only one response indicated the child's awareness of the physical benefits of engaging with SaPA, namely the development of the muscles and the body. Thus, in order for children to become "physically literate," more input needs to be offered to children in order to raise their awareness of the physical and emotional benefits of engaging in SaPA so that they can potentially make healthy choices throughout their lives (Whitehead, 2010: p.1).

This view is compatible with the findings from the staff questionnaire (A4) where 100% of staff either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement in Q2 that schools “should provide opportunities for pupils to participate in PE and sports related activities” (Poole, 2019b: A4). Pupils supported the claims made by the staff as a result of documenting the wide range of sporting activities that they have had the opportunity to participate in during their school life, such as those outlined in Figure 1. This is evidenced in the responses to Q2 A3.

2. Have you ever participated in any of the following sports during school time?

56 responses

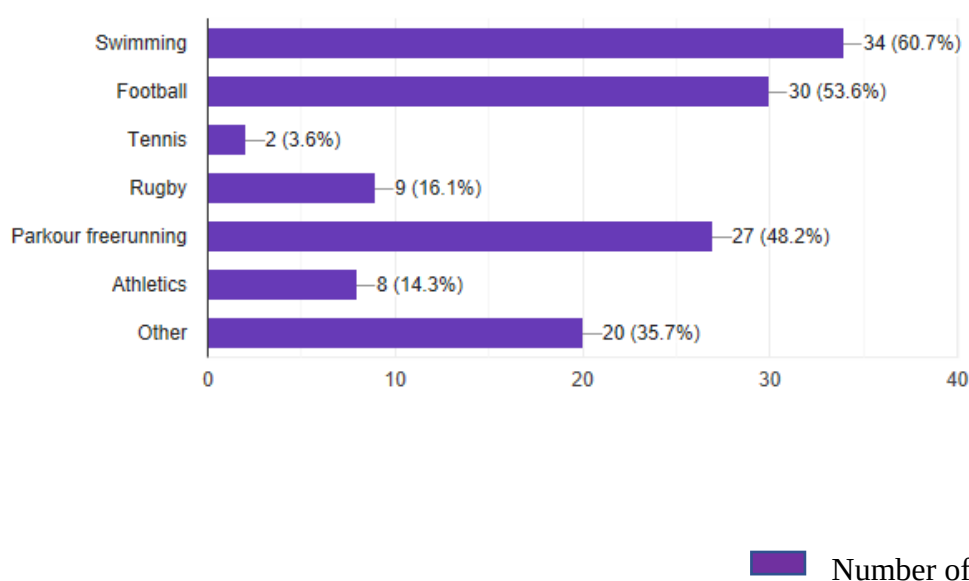


Figure 1.

Interestingly, the author’s results suggest that the average time allocated to involving pupils in SaPA in an average week differed (Please see Q7, A4). Just over half (54%) of staff reported that pupils were involved in SaPA for between 31 and 60 minutes in an average week, whereas 39% of staff detailed that pupils were involved in SaPA for 61-90 minutes in an average week. This is complementary to the argument made by the BBC, revealing many schools do not provide the recommended 120 minutes of physical activity in their timetables (BBC, 2019b). It is also significantly less than the guidelines set out in the National Assembly for Wales (2019) that states that children should engage in “a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity every day” (NAW, 2019: p.13). Only one response indicated that children were involved in sports for over 121 minutes in an average week, despite Ofsted documenting that 69% of schools observed provided 120 minutes of SaPA in the school

timetable (Ofsted, 2018). It would have been a valuable addition to the research if the author had inquired as to the reasons for this current timetabling of SaPA provision in the electives school, despite the clear positive feeling of staff and pupils alike for increased opportunities to engage with SaPA during the average school week.

Yet, despite the contrasting opinions relating to the average time allocated to SaPA in the electives schools' weekly timetable, it was clear that the vast majority of staff (92%) either believed or strongly believed that the children would benefit from further opportunities to engage in SaPA during their school lives (Q8 A4). This feeling was echoed by the children, as 55% strongly agreed that they would "like to participate in more sports activities during school time," and an additional 29% of children agreed with this statement (Q10 A3) (Poole, 2019a: A3). This further contradicts Palmer's argument that children are becoming disinterested in engaging in physical exercise and activity (Palmer, 2015). On the other hand, this still does not address the issue of raising children's awareness of the physical and emotional benefits of engaging with SaPA in order for children to become "physically literate" (Whitehead, 2010: p.1).

Attitudes towards SWB

Children's SWB was clearly a priority in the electives school. Indeed, numerous strategies, pedagogies and interventions were in place to ensure that children receive the support and the provision they needed to develop their SWB. A vast range of these strategies and pedagogies were reported in response to Q4 A4. Some of the strategies included: "Check-ins and check-outs at the beginning and end of the school day; Emotional Learning Support Assistant (ELSA) meetings; restorative practice; and support from a Family Liaison Officer" (Poole, 2019b: A4). Estyn detail how regular check-ins and assessments of pupils SWB constitutes excellent practice in Wales (Estyn, 2018). Interestingly, though, some responses indicated that "yoga; a mile a day run; and mindfulness challenges" were among the strategies utilised to measure, assess and promote children's SWB (Poole, 2019b: A4). This certainly suggests that a link between SaPA and SWB exists. This suggestion is further strengthened by the responses obtained from Q6 A4. Indeed, one staff member reported that "the mile a day run" was the most beneficial strategy utilised to promote children's SWB (Poole, 2019b: A4). Together with the "check-ins and check-outs," the SWB of children was regularly measured, assessed and updated in the electives school (Poole, 2019b: A4).

As a result of the numerous strategies and pedagogies in place within the elective school, it was not surprising that 85% of staff attributed pupil well-being a score of 10 out of 10 in terms of importance, with the remaining 15% documenting a score of 8 out of 10 for importance, in Q4 A4. When asked to explain their reasoning for the scores, it was commonly reported that “children who are happy and have good well-being are more willing to learn, achieve higher outcomes and develop resilience to challenges” (Poole, 2019b: A4). This is complimentary to Donaldson’s “healthy and confident learners” who can demonstrate resilience purpose of the curriculum (Donaldson, 2015: p.30). One staff member argued that pupil well-being “should be at the heart of the classroom,” with another arguing that pupil well-being “is fundamental to a child’s learning” (Poole, 2019b: A4). These statements are supported by Every Child Matters, which presents a case for the holistic development of all children and enabling them to reach their full potential through a focus on children’s SWB (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003).

Is there a link between SaPA and SWB?

Best practice suggests that if children’s opinions are taken into account when delivering the Health and Well-being AOLE in Donaldson’s coming curriculum, the results from Q3 A3 should certainly be considered (Donaldson, 2015). Indeed, as 39% of children strongly agreed that they “really enjoy participating in sports” within school and a further 45% of children agreeing with the statement, it could certainly be argued that SaPA promotes the effective development of many children’s SWB and, to this end, a link between the two may exist (Donaldson, 2015; Poole, 2019a: A3). From interview notes detailed in A7, all of the children involved in the interview enjoyed participating in sporting activities. Reasons for this enjoyment ranged from the enjoyment gained from “keeping active,” to “talking to friends” (Poole, 2019c: A7). As Green claims that SaPA and PE are “socially constructed” in nature, this social aspect of SaPA is reflected in the results obtained from Q11 A3, shown in Figure 2 (Green, 2008: p. 38; cited by Griggs, 2012).

11. "Would you prefer to participate in sports activities..."

56 responses

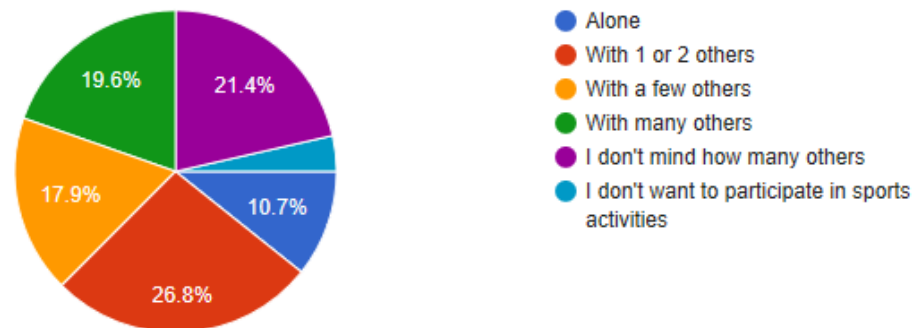


Figure 2.

The most frequent response indicated by figure 2 was participation in sports activities with one or two others (Poole, 2019b: A3). However, the children who either did not want to participate in sports at all or who wished to do so alone accounted for 14% of the total responses. Thus, the remaining 86% of children either reported that they would like a specific number of other children to be present when doing sports, or that it did not matter to them how many other children were present. As a result of these findings, it may be reasonable to conclude that social interaction with their peers, as well as support gained from their presence, may be a crucial factor for engaging children in SaPA and, consequently, can contribute to the children's SWB.

When considering the definitions of SWB provided by Albuquerque and Bradshaw, it is observed that the experiencing of positive emotions over negative emotions is desirable for the development of children's SWB (Albuquerque, 2010; Bradshaw, 2016). Significantly, children often reported experiencing positive emotions such as "happiness" and "excitement" when participating in SaPA. This is evidenced in the responses to Q7 A3. Negative emotions, such as "anger" and "boredom" were among the least common responses to the question. Therefore, in accordance with the definitions of children's SWB provided by Albuquerque and Bradshaw, SaPA can be argued to increase experiences of positive emotions and, thus, develops children's SWB (Albuquerque, 2010; Bradshaw, 2016). After all, Csikszentmihalyi claimed in his influential research that engagement with an activity that is sufficiently challenging and stimulating leads children to a state of "flow," a state of happiness, total concentration and absorption in the activity being experienced (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; cited

by Beard, 2015: p.353). It could be argued, then, that providing children with opportunities to experience “flow” would actively develop their SWB as a result of the range of positive emotions experienced within this state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; cited by Beard, 2015: p.353). Consequently, if SaPA provides a platform for this “flow” experience to occur, SaPA should form an essential part of the coming curriculum for Wales, especially when considering the priority afforded to the development of children’s SWB identified in the National Mission for Wales (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; cited by Beard, 2015: p.353; Donaldson, 2015; WG, 2017).

However, it must be remembered that some of the children in the research project did not want to participate in further sporting or physical activities and, indeed, did not enjoy doing so. Moreover, some children experienced negative emotions when participating in SaPA, such as “anger” and “boredom,” in addition to feeling “shy” (Poole, 2019a: A3). When observing children participating in SaPA using the Leuven scales of well-being and involvement, in accordance with the approved ethics form (Appendix 1) and the University and BERA guidelines, some children did not effectively engage in the session and indicated very low levels of well-being and involvement (BERA, 2018; Early Learning HQ, date unknown). This reinforces the comments made by some children in their responses to the questionnaire in A3.

Nevertheless, it could still be argued that a link between SaPA and SWB exists. However, this link does not exclusively generate a positive effect for all children. Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that these children’s SWB would deteriorate if provided with greater opportunities to engage with SaPA as a result of the negative emotions that they experience during such sessions. Thus, for these children, it may prove to be more beneficial to investigate why these children experience negative emotions during SaPA and explore new pedagogies to allow for positive emotions to be experienced by these children. This should form an area for further research in the future.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research paper aimed to develop awareness, knowledge and understanding surrounding the topic of SaPA and investigate whether a link exists between encouraging children to participate in sport and physical activities and their SWB. These aims reflect the author's personal experiences and interest in the field of sports, physical activity and children's SWB, with these terms being examined in Chapter 1.

In order to achieve these aims, the author reviewed a wide range of literature relating to the topic of SaPA and the topic of children's SWB, as detailed in Chapter 2. Additionally, the author utilised a variety of research methods, whilst always adhering to the BERA guidelines of ethical research and practice in addition to the Universities own code of ethics (BERA, 2018; A1). Furthermore, the recommendations made by Palaiologou guided the author to conduct the research project in accordance with guidelines provided within alternative legislation, such as the UNCRC (Palaiologou, 2016; UNCRC, 1989). "Mixed methods" of research are argued by some to mitigate the weaknesses of some of the methods of qualitative and quantitative data gathering, such as a potential lack of honesty in questionnaire responses, or not receiving a large response rate to the research (Punch, 2009: p.290; Grigg, 2016: p.226; McLeod, 2018; Abowitz and Toole, 2010). These methods of research were examined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 examined the results obtained. Presenting and discussing these results revealed several key themes: children and staff attitudes towards SaPA; children and staff attitudes towards SWB; and the possibility of a link existing between SaPA and children's SWB. Much evidence obtained from the research project seemed to suggest a positive link between engagement with SaPA and the child's SWB (Poole, 2019a: A3; Poole, 2019b: A4). Contrary to the arguments made by Palmer that children are not as interested in participating in physical exercise and activity in the modern world, the vast majority of children reported that sports were "really important" to them because they were "fun" and kept them "healthy" (Palmer, 2015; Poole 2019a: A3). In fact, a significant 84% of children either agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to participate in more sports and physical activities during school, with 100% of staff reporting that it was important to provide children with opportunities to participate in SaPA during the school day. However, it was evident that more input regarding the advantages of engaging with SaPA and the affect that this can have on the

children's SWB throughout life could prove to be valuable for children in schools, in order for them to become "physically literate" (Whitehead, 2010: p.1).

However, despite the recommendations by the NHS and reports made by the BBC and the NAW, only one staff member reported that children participate in the recommended 121 minutes of sports or physical activity per week (NHS, 2018; BBC, 2019b; NAW 2019; Poole 2019b: A4). Therefore, the author recommends that future research should be conducted to discover why this paradox between the desire by staff and pupils to participate in more SaPA and the current timetabling arrangements for SaPA sessions exists across Wales.

It must be remembered, though, that the coming curriculum for Wales may address this timetabling issue as a result of the formation of the 6 AOEs, including Health and Well-being, as well as the National Mission for Wales seeking to increase standards of attainment and well-being in children through this new curriculum (Donaldson, 2015; WG, 2017).

Additionally, whilst the majority of children and staff reported support for further opportunities to engage in SaPA, with a view to developing the SWB of children, some children detailed how negative emotions were experienced during such sessions (Poole 2019a: A3). Thus, more research needs to be undertaken in this area in order to discover why children may hold negative views towards engagement in SaPA and what could be trialled in order to develop these children's attitudes towards SaPA.

With the coming curriculum for Wales on the horizon and the WG's mission to increase children's SWB in schools across Wales, this research project recommends that increasing the opportunities afforded to children to engage in a variety of sports and physical activities can achieve the successful development of children's SWB and the goals set out by Donaldson, Kirsty Williams and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act: to produce "happy and confident" individuals who are "resilient" to challenges and can ensure a "prosperous" future for Wales (Donaldson, 2015; WG, 2017; WG, 2015b). As one response to the questionnaire aptly stated, "children's well-being should be at the heart of the classroom" (Poole, 2019b: A4).

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