Teachers as researchers investigating their PE practice!

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Larsson, Håkan; Quennerstedt, Mikael; Caldeborg, Annica; Janemalm, Lucas; Ridderlund, Sara; Segolsson, Joakim; Vesterlund, Sabina; Barker, Dean; Lundvall, Suzanne; Meckbach, Jane; Öhman, Marie

Convenors: Håkan Larsson (GIH) & Mikael Quennerstedt (Örebro university)

Discussant: Anne Flintoff

In 2011 the Swedish government invested large sums in developing the knowledge base in school and increasing the number of teachers with a postgraduate degree. The purpose of this venture was to enhance the quality of both preschool and primary and secondary education. In 2012, 200 fully government funded teachers from different subject areas started their studies to become researchers, and among them fifteen physical education teachers. This first generation of teachers as researchers recently finished their studies and are in most cases back in school working in different ways to enhance the quality of physical education (PE) in Swedish schools.

In 2014 a new group of teachers started their research journey, among those five PE-teachers who are represented by the papers in this symposium. The teachers work half-time in their schools and carry out their studies half-time within what we have called ‘Swedish research school in PE’. In this way a close connection between the daily practice of PE and research can be achieved. The research school takes its point of departure in a Swedish didactics of physical education tradition where “didactical questions traditionally are addressed by the questions what, how and why, in terms of what and how teachers teach, what and how students learn and why this content or teaching is taught or learned. Questions such as who is teaching, who is learning, when and with whom are also relevant in this context” (Quennerstedt & Larsson, 2015, 567).

Based on previous studies, we have a comparatively good picture about what is going on in Swedish PE, at least in terms of content, pedagogy, social interaction, and dominating discourses (e.g. of sport and of public health). Research shows that subject content and organization is oftentimes not conducive to learning of specific capabilities in any long-term and systematic way. The research also shows that teachers have difficulties with communicating the basic objectives of PE to students, and to break down these objectives into concrete learning objects that can form the basis for teaching as well as assessment of student learning. As Penney et al. (2011) suggests, there is a need for higher awareness of the interrelated message of curriculum, content and assessment, and to pay attention to ‘the learning of learning’ to secure learning and knowledge objects.

As presented in this symposium, the studies in the research school as a whole approach the link between the overall goals of the subject, i.e. the capabilities that students are supposed to develop in PE and the prerequisites for working with those capabilities in
the current educational setting. Since the research is conducted by active teachers, the research school also have a clear practice-based orientation. In the different projects focus has thus been on combining knowledge from the practice of PE with the Swedish didactics of physical education tradition in order to let the research questions to be shaped from within PE and not only reflecting external interests of academia or governmental bodies.

In this way the combined results from the different studies will, hopefully, engender both knowledge and a discussion about how to develop the structure, content and pedagogy of PE, especially regarding what students are supposed to learn during their twelve years of schooling. In the symposium the five teachers as researchers present their respective studies of PE-practice combining their knowledge of both research and practice, focusing on issues of competent teachers, physical touch, teachers’ communication, experiences of street dance, and assessment of complex movement.


Paper 2. ’It all depends’ – students’ experiences of intergenerational touch in PE practice (Annika Caldeborg, Örebro university)

Paper 3. Lived experiences of ‘Sense of Coherence’ in PE – What do 9th grades students discern of ’Sense of Coherence’ when participating in street dance classes? (Sabina Vesterlund, GIH)

Paper 4. What do I hear? – A study of PE teachers’ communication (Sara Ridderlund, GIH)


References