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Losing Touch – Teachers’ Self-regulation in Physical Education

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Keywords:	Physical Education, Physical interaction, Touching, Foucault, Self-regulation
Abstract:	<p>The question of physical interaction is especially relevant in school physical education, where a lot of the teaching and activities are based on body movements. However, the issue of 'touching' has been questioned in recent years. This paper takes its starting point in the discourse of child protection and the growing anxiety around intergenerational touch in educational settings. The purpose is to examine PE teachers' self-regulation in relation to the child protection discourse and no touch policies. What sort of strategies have the teachers developed for dealing with physical contact in their teaching? It is a matter of problematising teachers' pedagogical interactions in PE practice.</p> <p>The study takes its starting point in a discourse-analytical tradition using a methodology based on Foucault's ideas about governmentality. 23 teachers (10 women and 13 men) aged 30-63 and at different stages in their careers are interviewed. The results show two different self-regulating processes: (i) Adaptation using avoidance-oriented strategies and (ii) Resistance using downplaying-oriented strategies. The paper discusses potential consequences for PE teacher's pedagogical work if they feel that they have to protect themselves instead of operating in a way that is in the best interest for students learning and development. The study aims to contribute to the literature on child protection and 'no touch policies' and to a more multifaceted understanding of physical interaction in PE.</p>

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Losing Touch – Teachers’ Self-regulation in Physical Education

Introduction

Learning through interaction is a main theme in this special issue. In Physical Education (PE) body and movement are central, and physical contact is an essential part of interaction. The main interest in this article is to investigate how Swedish PE teachers deal with the question of *physical* interaction in their pedagogical work.¹ However, physical contact and ‘touching’ have been questioned in recent years and researchers claim that PE teachers are confused and worried about how to act towards the children and young people they teach (Piper, Garratt and Taylor, 2013b). Public anxiety associated with intergenerational touch outside the family has both emerged and increased. A number of child protection policy documents have been developed in order to guarantee a safe learning environment for children in sport- and educational settings. These documents often include rules, guidelines and codes of practice for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, for example: “*When a child is upset, try to seek ways to provide comfort and support without unnecessary or excessive physical contact*” (WOSM/WAGGS, Child Protection Tool Kit, 2007:8). Several scholars have claimed that child protection policy documents like these have led to an institutionalisation of ‘no-touching’ (Piper and Smith 2003; Piper, Garratt and Taylor, 2013a)². Jones (2004) points out that the question of intergenerational touch has become a dominant feature of the daily work in school and that teachers in general, and especially PE and preschool teachers, are confused about being around the children and young people they teach (see also Piper, 2015). A main concern of teachers seems to be the fear of being accused of sexual harassment or molestation (Fletcher, 2013; Piper 2015). Accordingly, a consequence of the child protection discourse and teachers' fears of being accused of abuse is that a good safe practice seems to be characterised by the avoidance or restricted use of physical interaction in PE practice.

¹ The study draws on interview data from the ongoing project *Don't touch! – Pedagogical consequences of the “forbidden” body in Physical Education*. The project is funded by the Swedish National Centre for Research in Sports (CIF). See Ohman and Grundberg Sandell, (2015a); Ohman and Quennerstedt (2015b).
² It is important to note that in Sweden and in other countries a no touch policy is not a legally enforced document, but a set of guidelines and recommendations.

It is noteworthy that both the policy and practice of 'no-touching' have been received differently in western societies and that concerns about intergenerational touch and levels of anxiety vary in different countries (Piper et al., 2013a). The 'no-touching policy' is probably less pervasive and corrosive in Sweden than it is for example in the UK and the US, and in Sweden debates about intergenerational touch are relatively new. Drawing on interviews with PE teachers in England, Fletcher (2013:11) describes how PE teachers work in "environments that many now consider 'risky'" and claims that teachers try to avoid "problematic incidents", "touching" and their associated risks. Similarly, Andrzejewski and Davis (2008) explore how teachers in the US make choices about when and how to engage in the risky behaviour of touching, whilst Ohman and Quennerstedt, (2015b) have shown that several PE teachers in Sweden find it important and necessary to use physical contact in their teaching despite the risks. Even though PE teachers approach the issue of intergenerational touch in various ways in different countries, they are obliged to address it and find solutions. Jones (2001) claims that a heightened awareness and confusion amongst teachers has led to feelings of self-doubt, which have resulted in an "intensification of (self)-regulation" (Jones, 2001:9; see also Pope, 2015), or as Piper (2015: 2-3) expresses it, "a range of self-protective practices".

Research has thus increasingly shown an interest in PE teachers' fears and growing uncertainties about physical contact with students. Despite this, research on *how* PE teachers deal with physical interaction, what they do, if and how they regulate themselves in relation to the child protection discourse in their teaching is lacking. Andrzejewski and Davis (2008) emphasise the need for research that focuses on how teachers have learned to read students, set appropriate boundaries and assess and negotiate risk and claim that "connections between touch behaviour, teacher-student relationship quality, and student achievement need to be explored" (Andrzejewski and Davis 2008:793).

The purpose of this paper is to examine Swedish PE teachers' self-regulation in relation to the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy. The focus is thus on the kind of strategies that PE teachers have developed for dealing with physical interaction in their teaching.

Concerns about physical contact between teachers and students are quite new in Sweden and have not been highlighted to any great extent. In relation to previous research in other countries, it is therefore of interest to study how PE teachers in Sweden deal with the issue of physical interaction. The study aims to contribute to the literature on child protection and ‘no-touching’ policies and to a more multifaceted understanding of physical interaction in PE practice. The result of the study can be seen as a tool that can be used to critically evaluate and discuss what happens in all educational practices, specifically in PE teachers’ pedagogical work and how students’ learning, development and growth is affected.

Background

The question of intergenerational touch in sport- and educational settings is complex. Research has approached this issue from different angles, for example through empirical and descriptive investigations that highlight and reveal harm and abuse in sports settings (e.g. Fasting, 2005). More recently, and from a critical perspective, scholars from different countries have pointed to some of the problematic consequences of the child protection discourse and ‘no-touching’ policy (Piper and Smith, 2003; Jones, 2004; Andrzejewski and Davis, 2008; Johnson, 2012; Piper, Garratt and Taylor, 2013a; Pope, 2015). Researchers have also shown an interest in teachers’ growing uncertainties about physical contact with students. Piper and Smith (2003) have for example warned that many schools and childcare settings in the UK are becoming ‘no touch zones’. Some research has especially focused on how the school subject of PE has been affected by the high level of anxiety around intergenerational touch (Piper, Garratt, and Taylor, 2013a; Piper, Garratt and Taylor, 2013b; Fletcher, 2013; Andrzejewski and Davis, 2008; Piper, Taylor and Garratt, 2015).³ Fletcher (2013:11) points to the tension between the practical need to touch students in PE and the discourse of child protection, which advocates a categorical avoidance of intergenerational touch.

³ In a special edition of *Sport, Education and Society* entitled “Hands off! The practice, policy, and politics of touch in sport and educational settings” (Piper, Garratt and Taylor, 2013a), a number of researchers claim that PE teachers are confused and worried about how to act towards the children and young people they teach (Piper, Garratt and Taylor, 2013b). This is further discussed in a recently published anthology (Piper, 2015) in which scholars from different countries address how protecting children from abuse has impacted PE.

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3 Taylor, Piper and Garratt (2014:5) suggest that the discourse of child protection and
4 safeguarding is governed by suspicion and thereby evokes intergenerational fear and a
5 'no-touching' policy. They claim that children are constructed as vulnerable members of
6 society and adults as 'dangerous individuals' who put children at risk (see also Jones,
7 2004). In line with this, Vikki Bell (1993:150) talks about "the consequent creation of
8 'monsters' defined by their desire for children", in which context "teachers have been an
9 obvious target" (1993:152).⁴ The mainstream discourse associated with physical
10 interaction between children and adults in education thus reproduces and maintains
11 fear and moral stress. To use the words of Jones (2004:55): "where touch is concerned,
12 teaching is a risky business". And as Pope (2015), referring to Jones (2001:9), expresses:
13 "There is an obvious paradox: that in a period when children are perhaps safer than
14 ever, there is a crescendo of social concern about childhood and children, and an
15 accompanying dramatic intensification of (self)-regulating of those professionally
16 involved with children".

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28 Piper et al. (2015) say that the fear of being alone and of being misinterpreted changes
29 the way coaches and PE teachers behave. Accordingly, an atmosphere of suspicion and
30 regulation leads to changes and *new strategies* for those professionally involved with
31 children (see also Pope, 2015). Garratt et al. (2013:12) claim that sport coaches have
32 changed their way of working as a result of this. The same applies to swimming coaches,
33 who now demonstrate a form of self-imposed regulation and control. For example they
34 avoid being alone with the children and always have a colleague present as a witness.
35 Further, they no longer dare to put their hands in the water for the simple reason that
36 parents cannot see what their hands are doing. Similarly, Piper et al. (2015:24) show
37 that swimming is a particularly risky activity, because the swimmers are scantily
38 dressed and teachers are very conscious about their gaze.

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49 Accordingly, protecting oneself from false accusation, worrying about being
50 misinterpreted, being cautious and having to think about each and every action requires
51 self-regulation and a development of new strategies. The focus in this article is on how
52 Swedish PE teachers deal with the question of physical interaction in their pedagogical
53 work and how they regulate themselves in relation to the child protection discourse and

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⁴ See also Foucault, 1988:275–277.

'no-touching' policy. They may or may not start to act in accordance with the discourse and may or may not change their practices. How teachers deal with this situation can be regarded as self-governance.

Theoretical and methodological considerations

The study takes its starting point in a discourse-analytical tradition using methodology based on Foucault’s ideas about governmentality. When talking about discourses in a Foucauldian way, as regular language rules that allow certain statements and actions to be made, an important question to ask is how dominating discourses in society impact discursive practices in terms of facilitating or restraining actions. Garratt, Piper and Taylor (2013:2) maintain that: “discursive practices are relational modalities, with networks and connections, whose ‘dispersion’ across the boundaries of different professional domains gives rise to new practices”. The public anxiety that is associated with physical interaction between children and adults has also spread to a variety of institutional activities. Using a Foucauldian inspired approach makes it possible to reflect on and critically examine the consequences of dominating discourses and how they produce ‘realities’ and specific ways of thinking and acting, i.e. what the political and social consequences might be for the discursive practice. It is a matter of looking critically at things that are taken for granted and appear to be beyond question. Hence, the concern is about “identifying the ways in which human beings are individuated and addressed within the various practices that would govern them, the relation to themselves that they have taken up within the variety of practices within which they have come to govern themselves” (Rose, 1999:43).

The characteristic feature of Foucault’s governmentality perspective is not forced governance, but a form of governance that presupposes that individuals are co-actors in their own governance. In general, he proposes a definition of the term as “the conduct of conduct”, that is to say: “A form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons” (Gordon, 1991:2, see also Rose, 1998:12). Here we can talk about governing processes with an emphasis on self-regulation, where, without coercion, people act in relation to that which is regarded as generally good and right. Self-regulation in this sense is a matter of trying to be good, right and proper, rather than bad, wrong and improper. According to Foucault (1978/91), this kind of self-

governance involves the ways in which individuals learn, apprehend, judge and regulate themselves in relation to what is generally accepted. We act in ways that seem wise and sensible.⁵

In his later work, Foucault (1994:298) encourages us to attend to those “strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others” and to understand such strategies in order to enact our games of power with as little domination as possible. More recently, Nealon (2008:71) has argued that we should pay attention to those social practices that appear to be beyond question, because “power becomes more effective while offering less obvious potential for resistance”.

One complexity that is important to mention is that people who work in organisations that prioritise safeguarding and child protection policies would probably admit to the need for appropriate physical contact when necessary. However, discourses are slippery and those who feed them are often unpredictable. When the Schools Inspectorate sets out to identify teachers whose behaviour is inappropriate or unacceptable, and when the message is ‘we just want to be on the safe side so that no teacher is doing anything wrong’, what can you expect? Piper (2015:176) puts it like this: “If coaches are told often and strongly enough that they are at constant risk of being accused of abuse, telling them that in fact they may touch young people, while still reminding them of seriously unpleasant consequences if they do, amounts to a blanket injunction.”⁶

There are reasons to believe that the child protection discourse is strong and powerful. Who would not want their child to be protected and in a safe environment? But it is not a question of legislation. In most countries, touching students in school is not illegal. It is the discourse that creates ‘no-touching’ policies, safeguarding, suspicion, fear and the promotion of children’s rights. According to earlier research, teachers need to be more risk conscious, avoid false accusations of guilt and protect themselves in the teaching situation (discursive practices). This can be seen as self-regulation. Rose (1999:11) expresses it like this: “through self-inspection, self-problematisation, self-monitoring and confession, we evaluate ourselves according to the criteria provided for us by others”. However, even if the child protection discourse is seen as strong and powerful,

⁵ This kind of governance draws on Foucault’s concept of ‘biopower’: ‘the governance and regulation of individuals and populations through practices associated with the body’ (Wright and Halse 2013:2).

⁶ A blanket injunction in this sense basically means prohibition, even though it is not enforced by law.

there is always room for resistance; a resistance that is defined in relation to the dominating discourse. Foucault (2002) expresses it as ‘The order of things’ and says that, “There is no power without potential refusal or revolt” (ab: 324), which means that resistance can actually lead to new ways of acting.

The governmentality perspective is a theoretical starting point that motivates the analysis of and facilitates a concentration on a certain phenomenon. The bottom line is that PE teachers have to deal with physical interaction in one way or another. The relationship between prescribed actions (the child protection discourse and ‘no-touching’ policy) and the individual’s own responsibility to act in line with these actions in a specific context – a *relationship between being governed by and governing oneself* – facilitates the investigation of how the processes of self-regulation are staged in PE teachers’ work.

In the analysis the central concepts of the theory are broken down into something that is empirically manageable. This also creates a bridge between the basic theoretical approach and the empirics. In the analytical work the focus is on the actions that PE teachers develop when acting in line with or against the child protection discourse and ‘no-touching’ policy. Certain actions and ways of talking about physical contact appear as being more correct, acceptable and reasonable than others. In the analytical work these actions are referred to as different kinds of strategies. Focusing on teachers’ self-regulation makes it possible to examine the different strategies used, in this case the shaping of the ‘self’ in terms of how to act or change in order to become a good and proper PE teacher.

Method and data sources

The study draws on interview data from the ongoing project *Don’t touch! – Pedagogical consequences of the “forbidden” body in Physical Education*,⁷ which explores how mainstream discourses and wider worries about abuse and child protection in society influence teachers’ pedagogical work in PE. 23 teachers (10 women and 13 men) aged between 30 and 63 and at different stages in their careers took part in the study. Three of the teachers are over 60 years of age and have been in the profession for more than

⁷ The project is funded by the Swedish National Centre for Research in Sports (CIF). See also Ohman and Grundberg Sandell (2015a); Ohman and Quennerstedt (2015b).

35 years. Two of the teachers, both aged 30, have been in the profession for a couple of years. The remaining teachers are in the middle of their teaching careers. The interviewed PE teachers worked in a total of 15 different Swedish primary, secondary and upper secondary schools in urban and rural areas. The interviews lasted for between 50 and 85 minutes and were guided by four main questions: (i) Are you familiar with the public anxiety associated with physical contact between children and adults in institutional settings? If so, how has that affected your work as a teacher? (ii) In what kinds of pedagogical situations do you think that physical contact and touching are pedagogically relevant, necessary and reasonable in a PE context? (iii) When do you use physical contact in your teaching? (iv) Have you developed any strategies in relation to physical contact in your teaching?

The analytical focus is on how the teachers talk about and negotiate physical contact in their teaching. The teachers govern their actions in some way by re-orientating, correcting or strengthening them in specific directions. In the analytical work, these actions are regarded as a development of different strategies. Based on the perspective of self-regulation, actions that are regarded as strategies for a correct way of acting have been analysed. Here, strategies refer to the actions the teachers consider in the teaching situations in which they find themselves. The resulting strategies are thus related to self-regulation. In the empirical material the strategies take different forms, such as avoidance, which is indicated by phrases like "I'm very careful about", "I am cautious when", "I have solved the problem by", or downplaying, indicated by words like "I defend the tactile", "I try to do it naturally" or "I teach physical contact from the start".

A systematic process of categorisation, guided by the analytical question of which strategies are evident when teachers act in line with or against the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy, has led to the formation of the main themes⁸. In the findings section, the terms 'many teachers', 'several teachers' and 'some teachers' are used. In the context of this study, many teachers refers to most of the teachers, several

⁸ Inspired by Casey & Quennerstedt (2014) I have used a peer examination strategy that involves asking a colleague to critically examine both the process and the findings. In this study, it meant that a colleague read the interviews independently and then together we identified and discussed the themes that regarded as relevant to the research question. There were no discrepancies in our interpretations and the cross-checking process facilitated the identification of the relevant themes.

teachers means more than half of the interviewed teachers and some teachers means more than three.

Findings – adaptation and resistance

The findings of the study indicate a complex picture. All the interviewed PE teachers say that physical interaction is an important and necessary part of PE and that they are familiar with the child protection discourse and ‘no- touching’ policy. Nevertheless, they relate to physical interaction in different ways. On the one hand, and in line with earlier research in other countries, the findings show that the interviewed Swedish PE teachers are anxious about and afraid of intergenerational touch and that this affects their daily work. It is also apparent that this kind of pressure has increased in recent years. Several teachers express a greater fear than others and say that: *“It’s one of the worst things that could happen to me. Imagine getting a bad reputation or being reported”* (middle-age male teacher, upper secondary school) or *“It’s a real dilemma and all the write ups in the paper are scary”* (younger female teacher, primary school). Anxiety is often to do with getting a bad reputation. Regardless of gender and teaching experience, most of the teachers believe that the emergence of fear has affected and limited the ways in which they work: *I am always thinking about what I am doing, I’m always aware of the risks* and *“I am more on guard now”*. More on guard means that they are aware of the problem and have in some way changed the way they work. In relation to the child protection discourse and ‘no-touching’ policy, the teachers’ self-regulation can be seen in terms of adaption by developing avoidance-oriented strategies.

On the other hand, some teachers do not think that intergenerational touch is a problem in their daily work. They do not experience the desperate fear highlighted by previous research and do not talk about “a categorical avoidance of intergenerational touch”, as Fletcher (2013:11) does in his study. They instead defend the use of physical contact in a variety of pedagogical situations in order to do a good job and help the students to achieve the goals stated in the curriculum. For example, some teachers say that more physical contact is needed in education. One teacher expresses this in the following way: *“It should not be a matter of ‘no touching’, but of more touching. Humans need physical touch”* (middle age male teacher, secondary school). When asked when they used

physical contact in their work, the answers included: "Always, it is a natural part of the work" (younger male teacher, primary school) and "When I see that someone is sad I always ask them if they would like a hug" (young female teacher, primary school). Thus, in relation to the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy, teachers' self-regulation can be seen as resistance, in the sense that they devise downplaying-oriented strategies.

The teachers thus regulate themselves and use different strategies to deal with physical interaction. These strategies are: (i) adaptation using *avoidance*-oriented strategies and (ii) resistance using *downplaying*-oriented strategies. The following section shows how these strategies are manifested in the PE teachers' pedagogical work.

(i) Adaptation using *avoidance*-oriented strategies

Avoidance is partly about what teachers do with their own bodies, but also what they do or do not do in relation to students' bodies. The teachers consider how to interact and how to regulate themselves in relation to where to touch, how to touch, when to touch, why there is a need to touch and whom to touch. This is connected to *integrity awareness* and *intimacy awareness*.

One of the problems associated with self-regulated actions is the amount and type of clothing worn by students. Like those of Piper et al. (2015:24), the findings in this study show that activities/situations in which students' clothing is minimal, for example when swimming, in the gym and in the changing room, are particularly risky for teachers in terms of where their gaze falls. It is clear that in such situations self-regulation is at work. When it comes to learning situations, teachers are more careful about making physical contact with students who are scantily dressed. This is less problematic for teachers of outdoor activities such as skiing and skating. As the teachers in the study express, it is easier to interact physically when students are wearing tracksuits rather than swimsuits, in that their clothing acts as a barrier.

How and where to look

Some teachers find it difficult to regulate their gaze and describe how careful they are when teaching students. In terms of self-regulation, they avoid looking at the students'

bodies and direct their gaze elsewhere: *"I'm very careful about my gaze. I avoid looking at their bodies and try to look elsewhere. When we have swimming I mostly look up at the ceiling"* (experienced older male teacher, upper secondary school).

The teachers think that students notice where and how they look at them, i.e. whether they are examining their body or looking at them in a professional way. One teacher says: *"I feel vulnerable and you have to watch out"* (younger male teacher, secondary school). It is also about respect for the students. Another teacher says that he has changed the assembly point at the pool. Prior to this the students had to walk 50 metres past where, *"the guys sit and watch the girls coming."* Now the assembly point is immediately outside the changing rooms so *"the students do not have to go on a catwalk"* (middle-aged male teacher, secondary school).

The teachers deal with their gaze in different ways and try to look at the students' faces or somewhere above their heads. One teacher has solved the problem by allowing the students to video record themselves. He says: *It's a big dilemma this gaze. I avoid looking at the students. But it is my job to assess what they are doing. So I have to look at them. Now I ask them to video record themselves doing a warm-up programme or a fitness training programme so that I can assess and evaluate their movements. I have solved the problem in that way* (middle-aged male teacher, secondary school).

Changing rooms appear to be risky places. Almost all the teachers are cautious and careful when passing the changing rooms. It is worth noting that while both male and female PE teachers are aware of the risks, male teachers feel more vulnerable and afraid than female teachers. Some female teachers say that they go into the girls' changing rooms now and again (in the earlier school years), albeit cautiously: *"I knock and shout. Before, I could just walk straight in"* (middle-aged female teacher, secondary school). Almost all the teachers avoid the changing rooms completely and think that changes have taken place when it comes to entering or not entering the changing rooms. Many say that in the past they always sat and talked to students in the changing room, but that they would never do that now. As with many of the other activities, the teachers are aware of where their gaze falls: *"When I pass the changing rooms I always look down at*

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3 the floor. If the changing room door is open I take a different route to the gym. I go outside
4 and walk around the building" (middle-aged male teacher, upper secondary school).
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8 The teachers point out that the changing room is a place where the presence of adults is
9 necessary because things can or do happen there. Despite this, most of them keep out of
10 the way. One female teacher says: "There's a dividing wall in our changing room, which
11 means that if I sit outside, where all the shoes are, I can hear what's being said but I'm
12 invisible" (younger female teacher, secondary school).
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18 The self-regulations that are at stake here are related to integrity and intimacy. It
19 appears that physical contact is often seen in terms of sexuality, or that the teachers
20 interpret physical contact as something sexual. This is clear when the teachers talk
21 about gaze and the changing room, even though the interview questions are about
22 physical contact/interaction. The teachers are aware of their gaze, especially when
23 students are minimally dressed. Although gaze is a sensitive issue, how, where and
24 whom to touch in teaching situations are paramount.
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32 How, where and whom to touch

33 As already indicated, the fear of being misinterpreted or accused on misbehaviour has
34 led teachers to develop different strategies in relation to the child protection discourse
35 and 'no-touching' policy. When it comes to physical contact, some of the teachers say
36 that they never touch the students with open hands but always clench them in order to
37 avoid possible sexual connotations: "I clench my fist and touch the students with my
38 clenched fist, because a clenched fist cannot be interpreted as a caress" (middle-aged male
39 teacher, upper secondary school).
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47 By saying, "a clenched fist cannot be interpreted as a caress", it is obvious in this case that
48 self-regulation is related to an awareness of integrity and intimacy in a situation in
49 which the body has become more or less sexualised. This is also clear when it comes to
50 choosing someone with whom to demonstrate moves or steps. One male teacher says: I
51 never demonstrate with the best-looking girl in the class (middle-aged male teacher,
52 upper secondary school). When working with pair exercises, showing gymnastic moves
53 or dancing, most teachers avoid demonstrating with the opposite sex. One male teacher
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says: *"If I'm going to demonstrate something with a student, or if there are odd numbers, I usually join in. But then I always choose a boy. That's just one of the strategies I use"* (younger male teacher, upper secondary school).

Both female and male teachers, regardless of their teaching experience, think that it is important to tell students that they will touch them in some of the activities and often do this before or at the beginning of a lesson, so that they have witnesses and the students' permission. Things that were previously considered natural in terms of physical support for certain exercises are now no longer obvious. Many teachers tell the students what to expect, as for example in an apparatus gymnastics lesson: *"I'm going to stand here at the side and watch because I don't want you to break your neck. If necessary I'll put my hand on your hip in order to help you over"* (middle-aged female teacher, secondary school).

In a culture in which teachers are afraid of making mistakes, the findings shows that PE teachers develop various strategies to deal with physical interaction. Here, self-regulation is largely about avoidance-oriented procedures, which include avoiding looking at a student's body, not touching with open hands, avoiding changing rooms, avoiding demonstrating with the opposite sex and avoiding touching when the students are scantily dressed. In the strategies that are devised, teachers' beliefs about the importance of physical interaction in educational settings seem to override caution.

(ii) Resistance using downplaying-oriented strategies

Downplaying is partly about defusing a situation in which physical touch is used. It would seem that here, teachers try to avoid being affected by the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy and instead emphasise physical contact as something necessary and natural in PE. Self-regulation is thus about playing down physical touch and seeing it as something natural. This is connected to *desexualisation* and *desensitisation*.

Although the teachers express a "constant awareness" of the situation, they also emphasise the necessity of physical contact in their teaching. They argue that physical interaction is an important tool in a variety of educational situations and is a natural part of the work (Ohman and Quennerstedt, 2015b). For example, the teachers talk

about the value of physical contact for creating a good learning climate and argue that their work as educators involves a professional and caring encounter. Many teachers also talk about physical contact as a social necessity in a society in which people live together. They feel that the school has an important role to play here, given that physical interaction is part of being human. One teacher says: *"I want to defend the tactile, it's healthy, it creates security. People die without physical contact and relationships. The school has a role to play here. Our subject has all the preconditions for it"* (experienced middle-aged male teacher, secondary school). The questions that can be asked here are: How are downplaying-oriented strategies manifested in the PE teachers' pedagogical work and how do they maintain physical interaction in their teaching?

Desexualisation – physical contact as a natural part of the subject

In many respects, it is a matter of desexualisation and desensitisation. This often involves defusing and desensitising a situation by acting as though physical contact is the most natural thing in the world. An older female teacher says that she is so old and has worked for so long that this is easy for her, because: *"I'm already desexualised"*. Her strategy is to try to defuse the issue. For example, when students are wrestling or boxing and need to be physically close to each other, she says: *"I know you guys think about sex, but this is actually boxing/wrestling. Physical contact goes with the subject"* (older experienced female teacher, upper secondary school).

All the teachers are aware that sensitive situations can arise when supporting students in some of the gymnastic activities and have devised strategies to deal with this. Another kind of avoidance-oriented strategy is to tell students outright that there will be physical contact during the lesson, act as though nothing is wrong and touch is no big deal: a kind of 'let sleeping dogs lie' strategy. One teacher says that he accidentally touched a girl's breast whilst helping her to do a somersault on a mini trampoline: *"I remember a specific occasion when I just happen to touch a girl's breast when preventing her from flying off the mat"* (younger male teacher, primary and secondary school). He recalls that girl looked both surprised and suspicious, glanced at a friend and then looked again at him. Although anxious about what might happen next, he decided to not to say anything but simply acted as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

In gymnastics, teachers have to support and help students with exercises and in this different parts of the body are touched. Several of the teachers do not say anything about physical contact during the lesson, because they believe that students will become more preoccupied and suspicious about physical touch if they are always talking about it. The teacher in the example above says that: *"If I happen to touch a person's thigh when I am supporting them, and have talked about this before, they might get suspicious"*. Making physical contact natural in PE, rather than a big deal, is a strategy that some teachers use.

An older male teacher uses a different kind of strategy to defuse the subject of physical contact – that of humour. For example, when teaching dance and demonstrating moves with a female student, he usually prefaces this by saying: *"Poor you having to dance with this old geezer! And then everyone laughs and thinks that it's funny, so that the whole thing is defused. And you can do this in lots of situations – with a smile on your lips"* (older experienced male teacher, secondary school).

Some teachers try to teach children physical contact right from the start and regard it as part of the profession, part of the subject and as supporting learning: *"My way of working consists of physical contact in order to create better learning situations. It is about creating a natural everyday touch"* (younger female teacher, primary school). Already in infant classes some teachers adopt the approach that physical touch is natural. For example, they might touch the children by patting them on the back, giving them a sideways hug and playing lots of games that include physical touch: *"As I said, defusing the issue is important. I work a lot with drive-car exercises. I mean, among the children. This involves one of them being the driver and is the other a car. The car has to shut its eyes and trust the driver. They have to trust each other"* (younger male teacher, primary school).

Several teachers say that the question of physical interaction is very much about relations, fingertip sensitivity, being able to read situations and being aware of when and how to physically touch a student. They believe that once you have a good relationship with the students, physical interaction is not a problem. However, if students see teachers as enemies, the physical interaction becomes a problem.

In this theme, self-regulation is largely to do with devising downplaying-oriented strategies. The teachers try to defuse physical contact by showing that it is not about sexuality, but is instead a natural and important part of the subject content. They choose not to make a big deal about it, use humour and teach children about physical contact from the start. They are aware of the need for fingertip sensitivity and of creating good relations with the students.

Discussion

The paper takes its starting point in the discourse of child protection and 'no-touching' policy and, as a consequence, the growing anxiety around intergenerational touch in educational settings. The purpose of the paper has been to examine Swedish PE teachers' self-regulation in relation to the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy. The research question guiding the study has been: What kind of strategies have PE teachers developed for dealing with physical interaction in their teaching?

The findings of the study show that: (i) all the interviewed PE teachers emphasise that physical interaction is necessary, important and reasonable in PE and (ii) all the teachers are aware of the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy. Although they are convinced about the importance of physical interaction in their pedagogical work, they deal with the question of physical contact in different ways. This means that self-regulation takes different forms and that different strategies are developed to deal with physical interaction in the pedagogical work. These strategies involve adaptation using *avoidance*-oriented strategies and resistance using *downplaying*-oriented strategies.

In line with Garratt et al. (2013), the findings show that PE teachers are afraid of their actions being misinterpreted and being accused of sexual harassment. In a culture of fear, self-regulation is largely about avoidance, such as avoiding looking, avoiding touching with open hands, avoiding changing rooms, avoiding demonstrating with the opposite sex and avoiding touching students who are scantily dressed. However, the findings also show that several teachers refuse to succumb to the pressure to step back and claim that physical contact/interaction cannot be avoided in the teaching situations.

Here, self-regulation revolves around downplaying-oriented strategies, where teachers defuse the issue of physical touch. In general, they choose not to make a big deal of it, tell their students that physical contact is not about sexuality, use humour and try to teach children from the very beginning that physical interaction is both natural and important in PE practice.

Ohman and Quennerstedt (2015) have already identified three practice-based arguments for the use of physical contact in PE, each of which focuses on a specific advantage for teachers and students. These are: (1) touching as a precondition for a certain subject content in PE, (2) touching as a way of creating beneficial conditions for learning in PE and (3) touching as a human necessity and an expression of care. In PE, where body and movement are central, it is important to ask whether the body's potential and body movements can be learned by verbal communication alone. However, it is not just about physical abilities. It is also about the general goals of education in terms of developing students' personalities, their capacity for empathy and social and moral shaping. Few of us would deny that empathy, care and developing as a human being all include physical interaction. In some learning situations, non-verbal communication in terms of physical contact may be more relevant than words. If the learning objectives stated in the curriculum are to be achieved, we also have to highlight the tensions, contradictions and implications of our zeal to protect, secure and safeguard.

It is also important to discuss what we mean by safety and protection. In the study, all the teachers point out that the changing rooms are places where adults should be present, because a lot of things do and can happen there, including bullying and violence. In reality, most of the teachers avoid the changing rooms altogether. When study's findings were presented at a seminar, a middle-aged male secondary school teacher said: *"Even if they (the girls) were killing each other in the changing room I would never go in there."* The right to be protected from various forms of abuse is obviously a human right for children and young people. Surely, students should be protected from bullying and violence and not exposed to it? In practice, the fear of sexual innuendoes seems to be prioritised over bullying and violence. If teachers are afraid of being accused of malpractice, students' social interactions may become boundless. This is especially

important to highlight if teachers feel that they need to protect themselves rather than operate in a way that promotes children's safety and protection. In this respect, Piper and Smith (2003:890) suggest that: "A moral panic has led to the production of guidelines that are concerned with protecting children from abuse and adults from false allegations, but where the needs of children are lost" (see also Piper et al., 2013).

Based on the findings, one of my main concerns is that in many situations physical interaction will simply become a question of sexuality. In the prevailing social discourse, physical contact is often seen in sexual terms. Educational environments that have become sexualised hamper teachers' pedagogical work and are not conducive to students' learning, development and growth. Some teachers maintain that physical touch is a natural part of social interaction and a natural way of communicating. However, when physical touch is sexualised, teachers risk being accused of molestation or sexual harassment. At the same time, students may also become fearful of being molested or harassed. However, the findings of the study indicate that some teachers try to play down physical touch as something sexual and claim that it is a natural part of the subject: *"I know you guys think about sex, but this is actually boxing/wrestling"*.

By using a Foucauldian inspired approach, the primary research intention is to examine the visibility of the issue in question and to critically review and discuss the consequences of the child protection discourse and 'no-touching' policy. The next logical step would be to ask "What do we do now?" This is a complex question, though, with no obvious or standard answers or solutions. Giving simple tips would only trivialise the issue. Nevertheless, the question of physical interaction is very relevant in school PE, where both the teaching and the activities are mainly based on bodily movements. If we consider physical contact as a central aspect of interaction, we need to discuss the consequences of teachers' self-regulation for their own profession and for students' learning and development. "The touch problem" should therefore be a compulsory part of teacher training. In preparing future PE teachers to deal with this issue in a professional way is important.

While not wishing to diminish the importance of dealing with problems of abuse and sexual harassment, there is a need for open discussions about physical contact in order

to achieve a more multifaceted understanding of physical interaction in PE. There is also a need to consider what a child protection perspective really means. Is a rejection of physical contact the best way of creating safe environments and is the lack of physical interaction good for students? The prevention of physical contact in learning situations is not always beneficial for students. The professionalism of PE teachers is based on notions of caring, mutual respect, educating young people to engage in positive social and sporting interactions and helping them to become good and caring citizens.

Thus, while it is important to continue to discuss the necessity of child protection, we also need to remember that striving for children's rights and security by eliminating physical contact could create a social practice that discards sound pedagogical values and caring physical interactions.

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