

Physical Education and the Ideal Body – A Norwegian Perspective

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Abstract

One of the aims of Physical Education (PE) in Norway is that pupils are to develop a positive body image to enable them to assess the ideals of body and movement that may influence their self-esteem, health, nutrition and lifestyle. Previous research suggests that the way a topic is implemented in PE, is not necessarily in accordance with the intentions expressed in the curriculum. There are indications that PE is often implemented as a technically oriented athletics subject with clear performance requirements and wide use of physical tests. Such practices support an objective and outward-oriented concept of the body, which may, in turn, increase the pressure related to body image that many pupils experience.

The portrayal of the body image in the media, the goal formulations in the PE curriculum, and how the pupil's body has been envisaged in the subject in the past will be discussed. The theoretical perspective relates to the body paradigms of René Descartes and Maurice Merleau-Pontys. These contrasting views are fruitful in a discussion of the challenges facing PE in relation to the current ideals of the body. The conclusion is that the Norwegian PE curriculum is in accordance with a subjective and holistic bodyparadigm. This perspective corresponds with Merleau-Pontys phenomenological philosophy of the body and can serve as a multi-faceted approach to the pupils body and movement and thereby help them to establish positive and realistic images of their own bodies.

Keywords: Physical education, PE curriculum, Body ideals and learning, Dualism, Virtuality

Introduction

One of the aims of Physical Education (PE) in Norway is to develop students' positive body image through bodily learning, enabling them to assess standards and ideals of body and movement that may influence their self-esteem, health, nutrition, and lifestyle (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). Previous research suggests that the way a topic is implemented in PE, is not necessarily in accordance with the proposed definition of bodily learning prescribed in the curriculum. There are indications that PE is often implemented as a technically oriented athletics subject with clear performance requirements and wide use of physical tests (Lyngstad, 2013; Stolz, 2014). Such practices support an objective and outward-oriented concept of the body, which may, in turn, increase the pressure related to body image that many students experience (Rysst, 2010; Bakken, 2019). It also seems to be a learning practice in PE based on external motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

This article will discuss the portrayal of body image in the media, goal formulations in the PE curriculum according to bodily learning, and historical perspectives on the student's body. The theoretical perspective is based on an appraisal and a comparison of the body paradigms of René Descartes (1992) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). These contrasting views are fruitful in a discussion of the challenges facing PE in relation to current body ideals. We seek a way to align the Norwegian PE curriculum with a subjective and holistic body paradigm as

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described in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body. We hope that this multi-faceted approach to the students' bodies and movement can thereby help them to establish positive and realistic images of their own bodies.

We are living in a culture that focuses on body performance and appearance. An overarching reason for this is the fact that the postmodern person is no longer limited by external religious restrictions. The body has been secularized, in that it is up to people themselves to create their body identity (Synnott, 1993; Giddens, 1997; Bauman, 1998). Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1938 -) suggests that peoples' identity, including that which is related to the body, develops in relation to the rapid changes associated with modernity, which has meant that traditional signs of identity have been replaced by more relative social-identity markers. He problematizes our all-inclusive virtual-communication society, and the cultural transformations that are taking place in the form of rapid changes in lifestyle, values and conceptions.

We also live in a technological and media age in which media culture, in particular, seems to be a key provider of the premises for our conceptions of body, conceptions in which an ideal body image dominates. In the current social media, emphasis is on athletic performance and on a "perfect" body, based on appearance. In both cases, it is the body as an object of beauty or performance that is stressed. Both for adults and youths, this has resulted in an enormous focus on body, and in turn on pressure related to body (Juvin, 2010; Sæle, 2021). The French philosopher Hervé Juvin (2010) claims that the body is the only remaining identity project in the western world that can be considered certain. The economic and technological development in the West reflects a body-liberation project that has inverted Descartes' dualism. No longer are the thoughts or the soul distinct from and superior to the body, but the body is superior to the soul; or rather, the soul has become *the body skin*. According to Juvin, "Those who spoke of human capital used to divert quickly into immaterial capital: mind, intelligence, creativity, innovation, values. They were wrong. The body is all that remains to us of the real". He writes (*ibid.*, p. 36-37):

Western philosophy and religion had worked in common to put down a body that was the 'profane garment of the soul', an enemy of eternal salvation being capable of desire, capable of pleasure and folly, hence of sin [...] a body cut off from heaven and from God, unlike its equivalent elsewhere, in India and China for example. Its most emblematic representation is still the painting by Hieronymus Bosch, of Saint Anthony being assailed by earthly temptations. Now this curse is turned inside out; the body capable of giving and receiving pleasure is capable of goodness in that it gives that very pleasure and gives it again, takes it and takes it again, calls for it and shouts about it. We are close to making pleasure a duty, almost an obligation; the slaves of entertainment, of satisfied leisure, of sporting or amorous performance, on the track, in saunas or clubs, follow without knowing it Talleyrand's maxim – 'every day not devoted to pleasure is a day wasted' – to the point of letting it become a new source of pressure, stress even.

In addition, there are many, particularly women and girls, who have negative body images (Rysst, 2010; Bjørnebekk, 2015; Wasylikiw & Williamson, 2013). This dissatisfaction with body tended to increase with age. It has been suggested that many are not satisfied with their bodies because the requirements related to appearance are demanding (Breivik, 2013). This low self-image is also related to the fact that some suffer from weight problems. For example, it has been demonstrated that those who engage in little physical activity are also among those who are least satisfied with their bodily appearance (*ibid.*). Sigmund Loland points out that the current body ideal is also closely linked to "a logic of discontent" (2006, p. 64). Moreover, in a visual, Western culture health is idealized not only as a bio-medical condition, but as an image, a "look." Health has become a social symbol (Synnott, 1993). The healthy image with the sporting body as the paradigmatic expression is cultivated almost to the extreme (Wachter, 1985). One problem is that to most people, these are virtually unattainable health and body ideals. The cult of health and fitness creates what Johansson terms "a logic of discontent" ("misnöyets logik"; Johansson, 1998). The French philosopher René Girard has come up with the concept of *mimetic desire*, that all man desires objects because others crave these, a term Girard further explains in his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (1966). He talks about the great mimetic capacity of human beings, that we imitate other people's desires. When people imitate each other's desires, they may wind up desiring the very same things; and if they desire the same things, they may easily become rivals, as they reach for the same objects. The desire is nurtured by comparison with the others. That may help explain why body and fashion ideals at different times and in different cultures have been varied (Morris, 1998).

Physical Education in Norway – a body-discipline project?

When PE was made compulsory in Norway in 1926, it was conceived of and implemented as a body-discipline project, with a goal to educate boys to be good soldiers (Augestad, 2003; Olsen, 1980; Rønbeck & Rønbeck, 2012). The body was trained according to a military model based on Swedish Ling gymnastics. Activities such as marching and parade were fixed elements, and qualities such as self-control, precision and order were emphasized. In 1939, the military discipline was replaced by a discourse of health and hygiene. It was no longer the strong soldier's body that was in focus, but the fit and healthy body. An extension of this health discourse was an increased attention on the pupils' physiology and anatomy, and on the idea that physical exercise lay the foundation for good health (Augestad, 2003). Parallel to this, was an increased attention to athletics in school, as well as in society in general. Gymnastics and outdoor life had previously been included in PE, and at this point activities such as ball sports and athletics were added. At the core of this development was the practice of training for proficiency badges, and the view that the pupil's body was a measurable and competition-oriented entity.

In the 1970s, the cultural perspective in PE, emphasizing activities such as play, sports, outdoor life, dance and drama was included. This perspective still prevails (Rønbeck & Rønbeck, 2012). The reform pedagogies of that era guided PE toward a more expressive, aesthetic and rounded view of bodily expression, with the inclusion of dance and movement (Jensen & Gurholt, 2007). In this way, two distinct perspectives on the body existed side-by-side. One was an outward perspective that depicted the pupil's body as an objective, athletic entity, and the other was an inner perspective that took seriously the pupil's existence as an embodied subject. The previous curriculum seems to perpetuate the inner, subjective view of the pupil's body (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014). In the previous curriculum, in the subsection of the curriculum entitled *Exercise and Lifestyle*, the health aspect was also emphasized, without a specific link to the life skills aspect. In this subsection the focus was on the importance of the pupils developing a healthy exercise culture. In relation to this issue, a number of critics have claimed that the subject was presented as an athletics and health subject and was in danger of promoting an outward-oriented perception of the body (Ommundsen, 2008).

It seems that PE belongs to a tradition that has emphasized both an instrumental, reductionist concept of the body, and a more holistic and integrated concept (Jacobsen, 1966; Augestad, 2003; Rønbeck & Rønbeck, 2012). The subject curriculum reveals a depiction of the pupil's body as a disciplinary project, legitimized by military, health, athletic or expressive goals. In other words, PE has not been unambiguous on this issue. What about PE today?

The Norwegian Physical Education Curriculum

In *The Norwegian Curriculum for Physical Education* (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020), it is specified that the pupils are to develop a rounded, positive and independent identity in relation to their body. Nevertheless, there are those who would like to see an even greater focus on this aspect in the curriculum. To understand this position, a closer examination of the curriculum is necessary. In the curriculum it is stressed that the goal subject is to promote a broad form of bodily development: "Physical education is a key subject to stimulate lifelong enjoyment of movement and a physically active lifestyle based on one's own preconditions. Physical education shall inspire physical activity in all aspects of life and inspire lifelong enjoyment of being physical active" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). This is closely linked to the pupils' identity in relation to their body, as the curriculum goes on to state that (ibid.): "The subject should contribute to the students learning, sensing, experiencing and creating with the body. [...] Physical education promotes critical thinking about body ideals that can affect self-esteem, health, exercise and lifestyle".

It is evident that this emphasis may be useful in understanding the ideals of the body that have prevailed over time. The development of pupils' identity in relation to their body is also, as we see, understood as a balanced form of education about the body. The quote has clearly a focus on the pupil's body as an experienced entity, a perspective that is emphasized when it is stated that the subject should contribute to the students "learning, sensing, experiencing and creating with the body". It can be perceived in the way that the students are to develop a sense of self-awareness and a positive perception of the body. In the subsection of the curriculum, entitled the core element: *Movement and physical learning*, it says:

Students should become familiar with being on the move alone and with others based on their own interests and intentions. Students explore their own identity and self-image and reflect on, and think critically about, the connections between movement, body, exercise and health. Physical education provides space for physical learning through play and exercise in outdoor life, dance, sports activities and other movement activities. Physical learning is about versatile motor learning, development of body consciousness and stimulation to the joy of movement.

There is also a new interdisciplinary subject in PE, the so-called *Public Health and Life Mastery*, which supports the goal that the subject should be oriented around physical learning and bodily awareness. Life skills are linked to promoting good mental and mental health and giving students tools to make responsible life choices. It is also emphasized here that the subject should promote a positive self-image that can give students a secure identity. Students will also gain knowledge about different perspectives on movement activities and health, as well as learn to manage health as a resource that benefits the individual and learn to make choices that are good for their own and others' health throughout life.

At the same time, it is first at Level 10 that explicit mention is made to the ability to reflect upon the body as phenomena, in relation to various body parts. According to the curriculum, pupils should be able to (ibid.): “explain how different ideal body types and different physical activity cultures influence training, nutrition, lifestyle and health”. The curriculum also states that pupils are to learn to interact with others physically, and to learn about body parts and personal hygiene. Thus, there is little in the curriculum stating that pupils are to reflect upon the body as social phenomena.

The curriculum also states that pupil's identity in relation to their body is closely linked to various movement cultures, such as “play, outdoor life, dance, sports activities and other movement activities” (ibid.). *Sports* are included here, which is generally associated with the athletic cultural heritage in the form of, for example, ball sports and athletics; this is an athletics tradition that is considered more closely associated with the view of the pupil's body as an outwardly- and performance-oriented entity. In other words, sports activities will continue to be promoted in the subject, but in the new curriculum it has received less attention. However, mention is also made of concepts such as *play*, *dance* and *outdoor life*, which are activities that focus more on pupils' gaining experience using their senses and are thereby more closely associated with the view of the pupil's body as an inwardly- and experience-oriented entity. It is also specified that Sports Activities in the curriculum should be considered a broad category that encompasses various forms of activity (including dance), and that ideally, such activities should also stress movement, play and creative activities, athletic activities that will vary depending on the local setting and will take into consideration individual interests. If we take a closer look at the competence goals in the subject that focus on the body aspect, these can be summarized in the following:

Level 2: explore your own bodily movement in play and other activities, alone and with others

Level 4: understand bodily differences between oneself and others, and include others in various movement activities

Level 7: understand differences between oneself and others and participate in movement activities that can be adapted not only to one's own predispositions, but also to those of others

Level 10: reflect on how different representations of body in the media and society affect movement activity, body identity and self-image

Level 2 upper secondary school/high school: perform training on your own and reflect on how physical activity can promote good mental and physical health and contribute to a health-promoting lifestyle after finishing school and in future working life

Level 3 upper secondary school/high school: describe and discuss connections between movement, body, exercise and health in society

It should be added that, in the general curriculum, the concept of development is clearly addressed in the goal that education is to prepare children, youths and adults to fulfill life's tasks, and to provide them with the necessary proficiency to master their life situation (Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet, 2006). An important aspect of such mastery is to establish a realistic and positive body image. The Ludvigsen Commission's report, “Pupils' learning in the school of the future”(Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2014), stresses that, in future, life proficiency will be related to the ability to collaborate and reflect, as well as metacognition skills.

This also applies for the body. PE in schools is subject to the legal requirements for adapted learning, which means taking into account the multitude of bodies and concepts of body that a school class represents.

Moen & Rugseth (2018) have analyzed the current Norwegian national curricula in PE and the Norwegian Bachelor in Physical Education and Sport program (BAPE), viewed from an objective and subjective body perspective. The analysis shows that the subjects open up for a broad understanding of the body, while at the same time it appears to a lesser extent in the learning outcomes whether the subjects can be understood from different theoretical perspectives. The article also discusses how different perspectives on the body can establish an opportunity for developing PE as an inclusive subject for learning and development for all students.

It is evident that the subject currently emphasizes various aspects of the pupil's body, with the aim that pupils should develop a positive and healthy identity in relation to their body. This is seen in a life-long perspective and focuses on education and learning related to the body that builds upon the pupil's body as a subjective, experienced entity. Reflections on the ideal body has been included as a new aspect in order to meet the social challenges children and youths are facing. However, at the same time, the body as a theme for reflection is given little space in the new PE curriculum. In addition, the current curriculum continues to focus explicitly on the pupil's body as an object in relation to performance and health.

A central problem for discussion in the field of education research is the notion that there is a lack of agreement between theory and practice (Unneland, 2009). The gap between theory, in the form of a specific rational expressed in official documents (reports, curricula, memos, etc.) and practice in the field, seems to be a problem for PE as well (see, for example, Moen, 2011). Lack of agreement between theory and practice in PE is also a familiar problem in international research (Kirk, 2010; Stolz, 2014).

The Cartesian body – the pupil's body as a performance body

The Cartesian depiction of body and movement can be traced back to the philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) and his thesis *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). In brief, he wanted to prove God's existence, and in the end had to conclude that the only thing that could constitute objective knowledge was the fact that one could not question "that one doubts". This gave rise to his famous *cogito* thesis, which was a realization that he arrived at by drawing logical conclusions based on unreliable empirical data: that bodily senses deceive us to reliable, objective thinking (Descartes, 1951; 1992). He ended up, therefore, with an ontological, hierarchical, dualistic anthropology; a splitting of the person into a cognitive substance (*res cogitans*) that was superior to an extensive bodily substance (*res exentia*). Descartes claimed that there must be a connection between these two entities, which he then localized in the *glandula pinealis*, or the king gland, which he claimed helps to explain, for example, the sense of pain (1992, 6,20).

This dualistic anthropology allows for a perception of the human body as a sealed, mechanical entity. He limited the body and its sensory apparatus, with its associated movement ability, to that which includes the spacious and outer. This is why he ended up with a mechanical understanding of body and movement, and compared these with the works of a clock (Descartes, 1992, 6,17, own translation):

It is like a clock that is made of wheels and weights. It obeys nature's laws no less if it is poorly made and does not show the right time, than if the clock in all its parts satisfies the maker's requirements. In the same way, when I consider the human body as a machine, composed of bones, nerves, muscles, arteries, blood and skin, and so organized that – even though there was no soul in it – it would perform exactly the same movements as it performs now, even when my will is not guiding it, and that without the help of the soul.

Descartes' mechanical view of the human body and movement has made a decisive ideological contribution to the development of modern medicine and athletics, disciplines that traditionally have related to the body and its activity as an objective, instrumental entity, independent of a person's psychological, emotional, social and spiritual aspects (Loland, 2000; Sæle, 2014). In addition to sports topics related to training and tactics, athletics has taken up medical topics such as anatomy and physiology, as well as elements of science and mathematics such as (bio-) mechanics and nutrition.

This is a body paradigm that some claim has been carried into PE as a school subject (Engelsrud, 2010; Lyngstad, 2013; Stolz, 2014; Standal, 2015). A Cartesian body perspective focuses on the measurable and effective performance body. Such an outward view of, and approach to, the pupil's body represents a reductionist view of the body and humanity. This may contribute to a loss of a personal sight of the processes that pupils go through on physical, emotional, mental and social levels. In other words, a mechanical view of the body does not take into consideration the feelings, thoughts or expectations that may be churning inside the head of a young and often uncertain pupil's body.

PE that stresses an athletic body and performance

Many practice PE as an athletic subject, or as what David Kirk (2010) characterised as «physical education-as-sport-technique». In Norway, the subject has been criticized for its inability to revise the content and practices related to learning (Moen, 2011; Standal, 2015). It is claimed that the subject is still dominated by traditional sports, particularly in upper- and lower-secondary school, which contributes to the favouring of those who practice such sports outside school. This applies to boys in particular. This form of traditional sports-based PE teaching is also known to stress pupils' technical competence in sports and to measure proficiency in this (Hundhammer, 2005; Andrews & Johansen, 2005; Säfvenbom, 2010; Säfvenbom et al., 2014).

This imbalanced focus on sport contributes to a view that the pupil's body is first and foremost an objective, performance-based entity. Some claim that the current teaching practice in PE encourages such an objective view and portrayal of the pupil's bodies (see, for example, Säfvenbom, 2010; Lyngstad, 2013; Stolz, 2014; Standal, 2015). According to Säfvenbom, PE has its roots in a knowledge perspective that includes specified athletic disciplines, and concludes that the competence goals in the subject curriculum express products that are deductive in nature and base on values found in preventive medicine and athletic practice (ibid., p. 164). We also see that PE teachers associate health primarily with physical health, and less to mental and social health (Mong, 2019).

Others have pointed out that the legitimization of the subject rests upon a narrow and instrumental health perspective that reflects a Cartesian, objective view of the body (see, for example, Dowling, 2010; Ommundsen, 2008). This instrumental view of the body is also expressed in the elements of the Norwegian perspective on learning PE that implement a one-sided, technical and instrumental assessment of pupils (Vinje, 2008; Risøy, 2013). Jonskås (2009) points out that large classes and lack of time for planning and assessment are likely reasons for teachers' reliance upon physical tests. Such tests are effective solutions when teachers are under time pressure and struggling to gather an adequate basis for assessment. Jonskås also maintains that testing and measuring of pupils is the simplest assessment methods because they are concrete and objective; it is simple for the teacher to set a grade based on how quickly pupils run. As an extension of this dominant focus on sports in PE, there is also a discussion of the subject from a gender perspective, which concludes that it has a traditional, masculine orientation (Klomsten, Marsh & Skaalvik, 2005).

Pressure related to appearance and negative focus on the body in PE

The association of PE in schools with pressure and negative focus on the body is a subject that has been widely discussed. Lyngstad (2013) links the current exacting body fixation in the media to PE, stating that:

When PE establishes the body as object in this manner, this helps to reinforce the way the body is portrayed by the media and other social actors, as an object that can be created, changed and worked on in an effort to achieve symbolic value. [...] The subject can, at the same time, help to support the great, global body industry that envelops today's children and youth, rather than helping the pupils to make sensible choices with regard to the pressure they experience regarding their body in everyday life.

Many, particularly girls in lower-secondary school, feel that they are under negative pressure related to their body, and, as a result, do not attend PE classes (Andrews & Johansen, 2005). This may be related to the issue of showering after class. It may seem like a great paradox that increasing numbers of children and youths avoid "showering together", or shower with their cloths on, while we live in a society that is becoming steadily more liberal, in which (half) naked bodies are often portrayed (Bjørnebekk, 2013; 2015). The number of pupils who shower wearing underwear, or shower at all, is decreasing. It's a trend we see both in public pools and health centers, as well as for PE.

There can be a variety of reasons why pupils do not shower at school, such as poor hygienic conditions, inadequate time allocated for showering, fear of being photographed or simply uncertain or negative portrayal of their own or fellow pupils' bodies (ibid.). Bjørnebekk cites pressure related to the body as one of the primary reasons why young people in lower secondary school do not shower. They do not necessarily say that they experience pressure from fellow pupils, but the girls in Bjørnebekk's study wanted to hide from what they felt was a "negative", judgemental gaze. Bjørnebekk considers that this negative view of one's own body could confirm and strengthen an already negative body image in the young. She also maintains that society has changed; a few decades ago, it was not a problem to shower "in public" and at school (own translation):

The first picture from the past is followed by another of the line in the women's shower at the swimming pool on Saturdays. The dense steamy air is filled with the chatter of girls and women from 3 to 80. Naked. And there is not a single Brazilian waxing in sight. We see all of the strange female bodies. We knew what we were supposed to do after a swim in the pool and after athletic training. We needed to wash. With soap and without cloths. Of course, this lesson might be painful since we grew at different rates and were too tall, too plump and too flat chested, and we started menstruating at different times. But from the first gym class, the gym teacher was there to watch that we all did what we were supposed to and did not dawdle. It was an education in the naturalness of the body. We could see with our own eyes that there was a great variation in what was usual.

Implicitly, one learned to relate to others' naked bodies in a natural way; of course, this was not unproblematic, but still: one learned to deal with bodies of all shapes and ages. The cultural practice in relation to the body was linked to real and natural encounters with the many naked bodies of peers, as well as of all ages.

In this chronicle in *Aftenposten* (ibid.), Bjørnebekk stresses the paradox that, in spite of their electronic access to innumerable forms of sexual practices involving the body, modern youth find it difficult to expose their naked body to peers in the shower. According to Bjørnebekk: "Young girls have seen *Triangle*, and while they know all about anal sex, they have never seen their class girlfriends naked."

At the same time, there are girls who are interested in body building in PE (Walseth, Aartun, & Engelsrud, 2015). Walseth et al. found that girls applied to PE a body discourse that derived from fitness culture. This was an important motivator for physical activity, and they thought that PE ought to stress fitness more than traditional ball sports. The authors refer to a study by Seippel, Sletten and Strandbu (2011) that stresses that an increasing number of young people choose to train at a health center when they are old enough. According to this study (ibid. p.13):

The girls' construction of their body seemed to be embedded within the dominant beauty and fitness discourses, along with the body ideals that these discourses reproduce. Their body had become a showcase for their identity, even though this obviously represents only one layer of identity construction. From the girls' perspective, exercising was a way of shaping that body; they were influenced by the official health admonishments that there is a close link between exercising and losing weight. Their goal was to focus their training on achieving the beauty ideal of a fit and well-shaped body.

An alternative image of the body in PE – the phenomenological body

Some have reacted to the singular, masculine sports focus and the instrumental assessment of pupils' performance, and instead suggest a view of PE as primarily a learning and development subject (Moen, 2011). According to this view, the nature of the body is considered to be subjectively experienced. This requires a distance from a Cartesian portrayal of the body with its reductionist and instrumental understanding.

Several writers have confronted Descartes' objective portrayal of the body, including the French Philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1906-1962), who claims that the body is first and foremost a subjective, experienced entity (1962). He maintains that there is an integrated collaboration between the body and the consciousness, in which our consciousness is formed through our bodily presence and activity *in* the world. In other words, he views the body from a phenomenological perspective, in which the body, and not in the sense that Descartes meant, is the starting point for our knowledge of reality. The body is not, therefore, something we *have*, but rather something we *are*: life lived in the world.

Why, then, does PE today not reflect this phenomenological perspective, which the subject curriculum seems to stress? One key reason may be the fact that the subject has traditionally been considered to have a lower academic status than other school subjects, and has also, therefore, been discussed and studied less (Stolz, 2014). Steven A. Stolz claims that PE suffers from a legitimization crisis in education (2014, p.1):

Historically, the discipline area has struggled for legitimacy at most, if not all, educational levels due to the damaging claims made by critics who argue that PE is a trivial pursuit and thereby non-serious compared to other forms of knowledge and understandings that are considered to be educationally worthwhile.

Other central reasons that have been suggested are the fact that PE as a school subject is strongly anchored in the athletic education tradition, and that social media are a central provider of an instrumental and outward-oriented body paradigm (Lyngstad, 2013; Engelsrud & Nordtug, 2015).

A body- and mastery-oriented learning environment

According to Stoltz, the reason why the subject has lacked credibility and legitimacy is partly an inability to produce a well-founded explanation of the subject's practice. This is changing and alternative concepts of body are being suggested that are based upon, and take into consideration, the pupils' subjective approach to body. Maureen Connolly (1995) has compared phenomenology with PE. She states that the most important area of responsibility for a PE teacher is related to the body. Building upon the ideas of phenomenological philosophers, Connolly discusses the clear similarities between phenomenology and PE. She concludes that the subject and the body have been understood within the natural-science paradigm. If one is to ensure good teaching in the subject, one must, as a researcher, apply narrative methods and listen to the pupils' authentic experiences in the subject, in relation to body.

Lyngstad (2013) takes the same phenomenological position as Connolly, and stresses that it is essential that PE develop an environment where the pupils are portrayed as an embodied subject who creates personal meaning by *learning* and *being* through physical activity. Lyngstad (2013) adds that, in their own ways, both Annerstedt (2001) and Molander (1996) disallow Cartesian dualism in their view of the body, and therefore they pointed out also that the acquisition of knowledge must be considered on the basis of a non-dualistic view of the body. In addition, bodily existence must be taken seriously.

According to Ommundsen (2006), PE teachers who set up a learning climate based on internal motivation and mastery will emphasize values such as equality and recognition among students to a greater extent, regardless of their skills. This will be in contrast to the PE teachers who emphasize a learning climate based on external achievements and competition. These are also teachers who are not very open to pupils' co-determination and who have a tendency to favor pupils who do well in sports. In the study by Ommundsen and Kvalø (2007), where they examined a sample of 194 pupils who were in the 10th grade at 5 different secondary schools in Norway found that PE teachers who are perceived as supporting autonomy have a positive influence on the pupils' perception of competence and autonomy. Their study also showed a positive relationship between autonomy-supportive teachers and students' intrinsic motivation.

Several studies have been carried out on the importance of mastery in PE (see for example Ligestad et al., 2018) and creating mastery expectations in students, often based on Bandura's Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Coping requires that there is an interaction between the individual's inner thoughts, feelings and expectations, the experiences they have had in various situations and the feedback the individual has received from the environment - what Bandura calls *a triadic reciprocity* (Bandura, 1997). We see that for students to be able to master, it will require that they involve their inner thoughts and motives for learning. Ligestad et al (2018) showed that it is important for the students' further learning that they are shown, and that they receive attention and feedback from the teacher. But this requires the teacher to be able to adapt the teaching to the pupils' areas of interest and skill level. In this connection, they emphasize how important it is to have teachers who see learning through the pupils' eyes, and pupils who see teaching as the key to their own learning.

Others have criticized Descartes' view of the body, not only because it makes the body an object for thought and therefore something one can manipulate – which underestimates people's basic sensory experiences and need for inner motivation - but also their body-thought-soul holism. In relation to PE, this view is associated with a pedagogical portrayal of the pupil's body as something one can “direct” and approach as a mechanical, performance-oriented athletic entity.

Several refer to the Scottish philosopher Peter Arnold, who claims that PE's most important task is to advance learning about the body *in* motion, and not learning *about* the body or *through* the body, although these have clear points of connection (Arnold, 1979). This portrayal of the body may be considered phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), or what Annerstedt (2001) has termed *embodied consciousness* or *actional movements*; in other words, bodily actions have developed through reflective thought processes and later been stored as automatic utterances. Annerstedt maintains that this is also evidence that body and consciousness are not distinct entities in a human's life but are rather integrated like complementary entities because people inhabit the world with their body and thoughts at the same time.

In *movement literacy*, Øyvind Standal (2015) has developed an alternative didactic model that takes into consideration pupils' embodied learning and experience with movement. With the concept *movement literacy*, he limits the perspectives to PE, building a didactic model based on Margareth Whitehead's concept *physical literacy* (2007), which she developed to include most of what is considered physical activity. This is a basic education concept that builds upon a holistic and existential view of humanity, and that seeks to confront the Cartesian paradigm (Standal, 2015, p. 24). Whitehead defines the concept as follows (ibid.): "as appropriate to each individual's endowment, physical literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the lifecourse". The approach taken to physical activity in this perspective is very broad, taking into account pupil's experience in relation to their body.

Conclusion and consequences

A shift in perspective from the student body understood as an external phenomenon to being an internal matter, will also contribute to a shift from an externally motivated to a more internally motivated learning strategy towards students. Furthermore, one can ask what are the didactic consequences for PE if it is based on a more holistic perception of the body? It means that the PE teacher must take seriously both their own and their pupils' bodily presence in the subject and reflect upon all of the pleasure and distress this may involve. If the subject goals are to be taken seriously, it is essential to shift from an objective to a subjective culture and understanding of the body. We need teachers who are able to communicate the variety of bodies that make up a class, as well as the pleasurable and distressing practices related to the body. We need teachers who focus on embodied experiences, as these emerge for the pupils during PE classes, and who make room for trial an error. The PE teacher must see all of the pupils, teaching in a discreet manner that "sees" each individual and not just those who perform well and who have a positive image of their body. This will again mean that the teacher is able to facilitate learning that is based on the students' inner motivation. If one is to connect with all of the pupils, including those who have a negative relation to their body, we need teachers who are trained to reflect on the current ideals of the body with their pupils, and who have the ability to adapt their teaching practice to their pupils' actual competence levels.

It is essential to emphasize a motivating teaching atmosphere that opens for inclusion, autonomy and mastery. This may be demanding at a time when ideal body images and performance ideals seem to dominate society, particularly in a subject that seems to suffer due to a Cartesian body paradigm. If we are to believe what Girard (1966) says about *mimetic desire*, there is still hope that pupils can achieve a critical and thoughtful relationship to their own and others' bodies in PE. On the other hand, it is a challenge for teachers to lay the foundation for a learning atmosphere that includes all pupils; one in which there is a place for conversations about current ideals of the body, and for a wide variety of practices related to the body. This will require attention not only to the technical, motoric and physiological aspects of the subject, but also to the psychological, social, emotional and moral aspects. In order to find out pupils' experiences of themselves in relation to the subject, it is important that the teacher is able to communicate several of the processes that come into play when one is physically active. This multi-faceted approach to body and movement will constitute a positive didactic development in an effort to help pupils establish positive and realistic images of their own bodies.

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