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Students' views on the purpose of physical education in upper secondary school.

Physical education as a break in everyday school life – learning or just fun?

Previous research shows that students have a widespread understanding about the purpose of physical education (PE), including learning about movement, health and also PE as a break from other school subjects. The present study aims at examining more closely the break perspective in light of interview data from 26 students, whose statements in interviews that focused on PE in upper secondary school in Norway, reveal that the view of PE as a break from other school lessons is also a valid understanding among students when they are approaching the end of PE in their schooling. We have asked what kind of learning the students' views on PE as a break from other school subject *are*, or *may* be, in light of the Norwegian curriculum in PE in upper secondary school and to changes in the 2012 curriculum, which aimed to reduce performance stress and too much hunt for good grades. We present two interpretations of the interview texts – PE as 'the movement moment' in everyday school life, and participating in fun activities together with good friends, and a third interpretation, which we describe as a relatively invisible view of knowledge goals among the students about training and lifestyle and critical awareness about sport cultures in the society. We argue that a view of PE as 'a movement moment' in everyday school life contributes to modifying the view on PE as a break from other school subjects and to seeing it as a relevant learning perspective. On the other hand, a modified break-perspective should be merged with knowledge and critical lenses on training, health, lifestyle and sport cultures in society, so that the students' views on the purpose of PE all in all contain important knowledge and reflections they should have, according to the Norwegian curriculum in PE.

## Introduction

In earlier research it has been found that students have differing views on the purpose of physical education (PE) in school. Smith and Parr (2007) found in their study of students in lower secondary school that they had many views on the purpose of PE, in which enjoyment, fun, health, sports and education for leisure were more or less prominent themes. In another study, Redelius and Hay (2012) found that students believe that it is important to train sports skills and acquire knowledge about physical activities and health. There was near-universal

acceptance among the informants in Smith and Parr's study that PE served as a *break* from other academic aspects of school life and was a context in which they could have fun and enjoy themselves by participating and interacting with friends. The students' views on the purpose of PE centred very much on the supposedly non-educational purposes of PE, as the view of a break from other academic aspects should be regarded as non-educational, according to Smith and Parr.

Similar results to Smith and Parr's findings are featured in more research, for example Cothran & Ennis (2001) and Tannehill, MacPhail, Walsh & Woods (2015), and a later Norwegian study of primary and secondary school, where 41.7 per cent of 3226 students in a nationally representative sample from Years 5-7 and 8-10 in lower secondary school responded "Agree completely" or "Agree" to the statement that PE is given in school to provide a break from other school subjects (Moen, Westlie, Bjørke & Hammer, 2018). Moen et al.'s study thus indicates that having a break from theoretical subjects and sedentary work in school is a way of looking at PE that is shared by a relatively high number of students in Norwegian primary school. The break perspective includes the opportunity to move, talk, engage and have fun with others – class characteristics that are generally in short supply throughout the rest of the day (Cothran, 2010). A study by Xxx, Xxx and Xxx (2016) also indicates that students in upper secondary school in Norway viewed PE as a break from other school subjects, although the number of informants was small.

Our study aims at examining more closely the break perspective in light of interview data from 26 students in upper secondary school in Norway. We ask what kind of learning the students' views on PE as a break from other school subject *are*, or *may* be, in relation to the Norwegian curriculum goals in PE in upper secondary school, and particularly to changes in the 2012 curriculum, which aimed to reduce performance stress and too much hunt for good grades in the subject among the students (Vinje, 2016).

The research that shows that students look at PE as a break from other school subjects, corresponds with research on students' sense of meaning in PE. A review of research literature on students' sense of meaning in PE classes (Beni, Fletcher & Ní Chróinín, 2017) shows that students experience activities in PE as *meaningful* when the activities are fun and entertaining. If they at the same time involves activities with good friends, then there are apparently particularly good grounds for having positive experiences in PE class. Beni et al. found in the research literature that regardless of the school level, meaningful experiences in PE is often interconnected, for example that fun and social interaction can either impede or enhance each other. The interplay between meaningful experiences is therefore especially important when analysing the students' views on the goals in PE because meaningful PE experiences may not necessarily depend on all criteria being present in an experience or on any one of these criteria, but rather on the way they intersect and are combined, layered and interpreted by learners and teachers alike. In addition, Beni et al.'s review shows that the students experience that the PE class is relevant and interesting when it provides challenges and in some cases competition, and that they improve their motor competence.

Furthermore, scholars argue that gaining experience with a broad range of activities in different activity contexts, and experiencing self-confirming and competent interactions with others in PE classes, are important for finding value in PE (Mikalsen & Lagestad, 2018). On the other hand, having an ambivalent relation to PE classes, having less experience of acceptance and belonging among peers, or not feeling able to take part in the peer fellowship as a competent associate, seems to inhibit a student's capability of finding value in PE. In previous research it has in addition to this been examined that different pedagogical approaches may promote the students' sense of meaningfulness in PE classes. A study in a Norwegian school shows that an activist pedagogical approach in PE lessons may develop the sense of meaningfulness, as one of the findings in the study shows that involving students in the process

of designing the curriculum is of great importance for their experiences of meaningfulness, especially for students who dislike PE (Walseth, Engebretsen & Elvebakk, 2018). Another study points to how involving students in PE lessons is very important for students' experiences of meaningfulness and well-being in PE (Xxx, 2017a). Earlier studies from other countries have also found that the use of different pedagogical approaches, such as game-centred approaches and sport education instructional models, contribute to students finding value in PE, both when it comes to young students (Fry, Tan, McNeill & Wright, 2010) and students in upper secondary school (Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004).

Looking at earlier studies, a variety of views on the purpose of PE is found, where the view of PE as a break from other school lessons is also a valid understanding among the students. As the basis for examining the break perspective in PE we use data from interviews with 26 students in upper secondary school. In the interview study, we asked the following question about what students think about the purpose of the subject in upper secondary school: Which view do students have on the purpose of PE when they are approaching the end of PE in their schooling?

To provide a broader background for the study, we will outline research literature, which has created a dividing line between PE as a break from academic aspects of school life and PE as learning. We will also explain the Norwegian context for the study, where we will examine the section on the purpose of the subject in the Norwegian PE curriculum. In discussing the background for the study it is also relevant to mention that earlier research has little focus on upper secondary school students' views on the purpose of the PE subject, and that there has been little discussion on the break perspective in upper secondary school. It has also been little discussion on the break perspective from another angle than the non-educational one.

## **Tradition of light and fun activities in PE**

Previous research have shown that PE teachers express concerns whether students are active enough during the lessons and enjoy the PE classes (Placek, 1983). The ‘activation discourse’ still seem to dominate the teacher’s way of reasoning their task where teachers express ‘being active’ and ‘having fun’ as their guidelines for teaching (Larsson & Nyberg, 2016; Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008). There is a concern that the teaching is too little concentrated on important goals such as motor learning and health in the PE curriculum (Redelius, Quennerstedt & Öhman, 2015). In one study it is revealed that PE lessons seems like a physical training session with aim of trying out different kinds of sport activities and sport skills (Larsson & Karlefors, 2015). In another study it is found that enjoyment of PE is high among students and that enjoyment is positively correlated to duration of PE class. Longer classes are associated with higher enjoyment (Woods, Tannehill & Walsh, 2012). Furthermore, when looking closely at videos from PE classes on YouTube, it is found that there is an overemphasis on fun in PE classes at times, which allows students to sit around on the sidelines to chat, wrestle or ‘mess around’ with peers during the classes (Quennerstedt, 2013). According to Quennerstedt, these activities have no focus on any learning goals in PE. Redelius et al. (2015) claim that it is virtually a tradition in PE that the classes must include activities that are light and fun, and that the teacher, due to this tradition, should not spend time on raising the student’s awareness of learning goals in PE. The teaching goals therefore often emphasise the aim of creating a relaxed and safe atmosphere so that the teaching is well organised and that the student does not have a negative experience from the classes. Spending time raising the students’ awareness of for example exercise and health contributes to making PE boring and complicated instead of fun and simple (Larsson & Karlefors, 2015).

Redelius et al. (2015) argue, however, that if the teacher formulates precise goals for the teaching, relates the learning activity to the purpose of the subject and presents the goals in a good way to the students in their classes, the students are better able to understand what they are expected to learn. Articulating goals appear to help students to understand what teaching is all about because the language constructs sense and meaning and allows students to relate to the educational aspects of PE. It thus has an effect when concrete learning goals are presented because the students' awareness of the purpose of the subject is raised, and this increases their awareness of the fact that PE has learning goals.

#### The Norwegian context and PE curriculum

In the PE curriculum for the Norwegian school, the subject has a stated purpose in which importance is attached to activity and exercise based on personal backgrounds and aptitudes. The curriculum also focuses on meaning-making in connection with the movement activities. The subject is important for exercising the ability to undertake physical motor activities in a wide sense (not only traditional sports activities), and the teaching should also promote positive self-understanding and identity with the body. The student should experience the joy of movement, inspiration and self-understanding through bodily movement, outdoor activities and in common activities with others, and in the final part of the teaching in upper secondary school importance should be attached to positive movement experiences and good bodily self-perception to promote a lasting physically active lifestyle (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2015).

The PE curriculum in the Norwegian school includes the view that bodily learning and identity are a concern for education. The view on bodily learning and identity means that it is

not the activities or what certain curriculum areas ask young people to do that makes such activities educational, rather the movement experience *per se* (Stolz, 2014). Such view on movement experience *per se* suggests that bodily learning experiences inherently have great importance. A student participating in PE class is understood according to this view as a *bodily subject* in an active learning and experiential process in the subject (Arnold, 1979). As a bodily subject the student is considered to be able to collect information about the surrounding world using a number of senses and to develop *experience-based knowledge* about herself or himself in bodily movement (Annerstedt, 2001).

In the context of the PE-student as a bodily subject we point out that important information about oneself in bodily movement is obtained through the kinaesthetic sense (Annerstedt, 2001). The kinaesthetic sense is important for everyone as it is the source of information about personal movements which is only available while in movement. When transferred to a teaching situation in PE, this view suggests that a student may feel and experience bodily movements, but not fully before performing the movement itself. The kinaesthetic sense gives a student access to his or her own movements to experience and to know what he or she is actually doing. In addition, the teacher may teach the PE students that the human body is more than a movable object, which can be manipulated to nearly everything with use of different training methods. The teacher can teach that a human being is a bodily subject, who may experience PE activities as meaningful and through active participation in PE impacts on self-development and identity formation (Ommundsen, 2016).

The idea of kinaesthetic perception corresponds with attributes of physical literacy, which states that a physical literate person has the ability to identify the essential qualities that influence the effectiveness of movement performance, and furthermore, that sensitivity to and awareness of embodied competences leads to fluent self-expression through the movements and non-verbal communication with others (Whitehead, 2010). It also corresponds with the



attributes of physical literacy, which states that physical literate individuals will have a well-established sense of self as embodied in the world and that they, together with a perceptive and empathetic interaction with others, will engender positive self-esteem and self-confidence.

### *PE in the Norwegian school was reformed in 2012*

The curriculum in PE in the Norwegian school was reformed in 2012 after a debate on whether the subject put the students under stress in relation to expectations for sports achievements and physical performance abilities, and where it was claimed that teachers were most interested in activities that could be observed and measured so they could document the skills and performance levels of the students and award them fair grades (Vinje, 2016). Students and teachers were critical, stating that the curriculum made the students nervous, and teachers as well as students called for a change as it had a heavy sports focus and added performance pressure in PE classes. PE should rather, like Thorburn and Stolz argue in a later article (Thorburn & Stolz, 2017, p. 721), 'derive greater meaning from learners' movement experiences and help learners to understand better both their own identity and the ethos of the school context and environment they share with others'. An important change in the Norwegian curriculum in 2012 was therefore that the *efforts* of the students in class were made relevant. The education authorities in Norway defined effort as follows: If the student shows knowledge with a view to improvement and his/her development, challenges his/her own capacity and works intently without giving up (even if no immediate progress is achieved), the student demonstrates effort in PE (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2012). Effort is considered to be important in the PE subject in the Norwegian school, particularly with

respect to key purposes of the subject, identity formation and to have lifelong joy of movement and a physically active lifestyle.

Furthermore, the curriculum goals are based on the principle that it is not reasonable to expect that all students will achieve an equally high degree of goal attainment in terms of absolute practical knowledge and skills due to different backgrounds and aptitudes for body movement and performance ability in sports. Competence goals were introduced in the 2012 curriculum for upper secondary education, requiring that a student must be able to plan and carry out training for personal body development and health. Thus, competence goals that set absolute practical requirements for activities, such as sports activities outside PE classes, were not featured as much in the new curriculum (2012) as had been the case with the teaching practice based on the old curriculum (2006) (Vinje, 2016).

A relevant interpretation of the curriculum in PE is thus that in various movement situations and movement environments in PE, the student's awareness should be raised to learn about the body, and that through the teaching, students will be able to see their potential for experiencing joy of movement, learning skills and having a physically active lifestyle. Bearing this in mind, the student should be able to value - and appreciate - PE-activities, choose forms of activity and arenas in sport cultures in society, which fit his or her interests for the future and within which enjoyment and meaning are found, at the same time as they should have critical thinking about these sport cultures.

## **Method**

To study the views of students with respect to the purpose of PE in upper secondary school we interviewed 26 students who were in the final semester of the second year of upper secondary

education. The interviews were semi-structured research interviews where viewpoints on the purpose of the subject were key themes (Hartas, 2015).

### *Sample and data collection*

Our sample in the interview study consisted of 13 boys and 13 girls, all students in the same upper secondary school. These informants were taking different education programmes, both university preparatory and vocational programmes. All the informants had PE classes with the same number of teaching hours. The curriculum from 2012 was the foundation on which the teaching they received was based. In the Norwegian school not all students have PE in their third and final school year in upper secondary education, therefore we interviewed students in their second upper secondary school year.

The informants had different PE teachers. One criterion for recruitment to the study was having different physical conditions measured by maximum oxygen uptake in connection with a study of physical activity and PE in the school, using low and high scores for oxygen uptake measurements followed the division by Nes, Østhus, Welde, Aspenes and Wisløff (2013). Difference in physical fitness may influence students perspective of a physical active subject as PE (Xxx et al., 2016) By choosing participants in opposite ends of the range of physical fitness, the sample may represent what Creswell (1998) describes as an appropriate sample, based on the assumed difference between the participants (respectively high and low physical fitness). With such a strategy, views on the purpose of PE were examined from the views of students with different physical capacities. The questions in the interviews were organised into an interview guide featuring several questions about the purpose of PE, but particularly under the topics 'goals and purpose of the subject' and 'the teacher's assessment activities'. The study is

based on data from a research project using interviews with students from upper secondary schools, where students view on the purpose of PE was an important issue. The study was reported to and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Data Protection Official.

The informants were asked to comment if something was said during the interviews, which suppressed or inhibited them from stating what they wanted, or whether they felt that something had been left unsaid, including anything about the purpose in PE. This data checking was performed at the conclusion of each interview. No new data emerged in the conclusion when it came to the nature and purpose of PE. The students were also assured that information from the interviews would not be disclosed to other students or school staff. Each student was interviewed once, the interviews took from 45 to 60 minutes and they were carried out in the school the informants were attending.

#### *Data analysis and interpretation*

The data analyses were conducted by three scholars. In our analysis we were aware that the students' views were first and foremost reflections on the subject as they experienced it from the teacher's teaching plans and practice. We studied the transcripts of the interviews and sorted the students' own assessments and opinions on the purpose of PE. In this context we note that the informants probably responded with their immediate reflections when asked about the purpose of the subject, and their responses could have been more comprehensive if they had been allowed to prepare in advance. On the other hand, the responses offer insight into the students' immediate thoughts and – perhaps first and foremost – these immediate thoughts may be interesting in an analysis of their perceptions of the purpose of PE. We also included other sections of the interviews where the purpose of PE was illuminated. The analysis also touched

on variations in perceptions of goals, as well as perceptions in combination with each other (Beni et al., 2017), in addition to understandings among the students in categories of goal perceptions (Hastie & Glotova, 2012). We hereinafter designate these *interpretations* of the interview texts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We allowed space for complexity, individuality and nuances from the informants, which might provide elaborations on or possibly contradictions to findings from earlier research on students' views on the purpose of PE.

The analysis process complied with principles for qualitative interpretation of meaning of interview data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), which in brief means that opinions and statements in the interview were identified according to the student's views on the purpose, and then abbreviated, condensed, coded and categorised into analytical units and then reconstructed with the curriculum goals of PE in mind. First and foremost, opinions and statements from the parts of the interview where goals and purpose of the subject and the teacher's assessment activities were illuminated, were collected into the analytical units. The analysis and interpretation also followed hermeneutic principles, which means that the interpretation process led to deeper understanding of the statements in the interview based on changing between full and partial understanding about the pupils' view of the purpose of PE and on understandings without contradictions and logical flaws (Kvale, 1983). Repeated readings and listening to the audio files led to additional elaborations and nuances in the understanding of the students' views on the purpose. The process was open and transparent in terms of procedure and assessments made along the way, and all the authors contributed to discussions during the analysis work, ending in the interpretations we are presenting and discussing in the next section.

## Interpretations and discussion

The first interpretation relates to the students' expressed need for movement activity in the course of the school day, the second interpretation describes the view about taking part in fun activities together with friends, while the third interpretation relates to somewhat we actually did not find in the interview transcripts but claim to be a relatively invisible view on the PE goals about exercise, lifestyle, health and sport cultures in society.

### *PE as 'the movement moment' in everyday school life*

The first interpretation is that students relate PE to a perceived need for physical activity in the course of the school day. Several informants stated in the interviews that the day in school is often monotonous and sometimes boring, and that PE class provides the opportunity to be physically active. The analysis thus finds similar ideas compared to earlier research showing that students tend to see PE as a break from other school subjects, and that the PE class gives them the opportunity to be physically active in the course of the school day (Moen et al. 2018; Smith & Parr, 2007; Cothran & Ennis, 2001; Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008, Xxx, et al., 2016). The informants stated the relatively clear view that PE should comprise activity classes, and that in general it should offer varied and fun activities in the classes. The informants generally thought that PE classes should offer the opportunity to move, carry out fun activities, 'move your body' and find release from the need to be active.

The students' view of unwinding from other school subjects, or PE as 'the movement moment' in everyday school life, as we find it relevant to call it, is further illustrated with statements from informants who like challenges in PE classes (similar to Beni et al., 2017), and who feel it is important to be able to carry out hard physical training and show 'guts' in class: 'It's of course the hard training that I like [...]', one informant stated. 'And by that I mean that

it hurts no one to pump some iron near the end. We only have PE once a week’, another informant stated. ‘PE is my best subject, only because I’m allowed to move’, a third informant stated.

As Beni et al. (2017) discovered, we also found that the competition element offers tension and meaning for some students, such as this informant, who said that: ‘When you’re on a team and win, that’s really fun’. Students found that it was also important to have a variety of activities, as well as versatility. Trying new types of activities was also important. The statement this next informant made captures both these ideas:

‘I like that there’s lots of variety, so it’s not the same every week. That would only make PE classes very dull eventually. For me it’s best to have some variation, so that I have something to look forward to and try something new’.

In our analysis we also found that students want the *feeling* of accomplishing something in PE class activities – to master something on some level or other. Many of the informants stated that they have the sense of mastering in PE, and therefore they find PE a fun subject. Satisfying the need for movement activities while also experiencing a sense of mastering was pointed out as important and meaningful by many informants. This finding also corresponds with earlier research, which shows that PE is relevant and interesting for students when it provides challenges and leads to improved motor competence (Beni et al., 2017).

#### *Fun activities together with friends*

The second interpretation of the interviews is that PE provides fun activities to be enjoyed with good friends, where they can also cultivate comradeship and social togetherness. This interpretation is also in line with earlier studies showing that students see PE as an opportunity

to have fun and enjoy themselves by participating and interacting with friends (Smith & Parr, 2007; Redelius, et al., 2015; Tannehill et al., 2013; Beni et al., 2017; Moen et al., 2018). One informant stated: 'It's fun to be with other students, and [...] work out and have fun in PE'. PE is fun, while the body is being used and there is a feeling of actually managing to accomplish something. One informant stated that PE contributes to a good class environment and sense of social togetherness. Being physically active with classmates creates comradeship, and in PE you can be more quickly acquainted with your classmates, another informant stated: 'I came to a new school where I didn't know very many people, and then PE is a nice way of getting to know your classmates'. A third informant stated that her co-students' well-being and learning in the subject were important, not only for her own enjoyment and learning. She stated: 'I have always wanted to give a little helping nudge to those who are not so good'.

Earlier studies have also illuminated and discussed the importance of a good social environment and good social contact as important factors for participation and engagement in PE (Smith & Parr, 2007; George & Curtner-Smith, 2016, Redelius, et al., 2015). The social aspect is also important for progress and learning in the subject (Kinchin, MacPhail & Ní Chróinín, 2009; Maivorsdotter, Quennerstedt & Öhman, 2015). In this connection we mention that a case study of a small school in Norway found that the students pointed precisely to social interaction as important for well-being in PE (Xxx, 2017a). Good social interaction, which is characterised by closeness between students and teachers, created good conditions where the students could feel they were seen by the teacher and the other students, and this contributed to a greater wish to attend and participate actively in PE. We will also add that our findings correspond to attributes of physical literacy, which states that awareness of embodied competences leads the student to fluent self-expression through the movements and non-verbal communication and leads to perceptive and empathetic interaction with others (Whitehead, 2010).



*Invisible view on exercise, lifestyle and health, and no critical awareness about sport cultures in society*

Our *third* interpretation of the interviews is that only a few reflect on how it is important to be able to practise principles for getting exercise, being active and training to achieve relevant individual goals about bodily development and health. The analysis also reveals the informants' lack of critical awareness about sports cultures in society. Our analysis also here exhibits agreement with earlier research, which shows that the teaching in PE does not raise the level of awareness of a lifestyle with exercise and health living very much (Larsson & Karlefors, 2015). To the informants in Larsson and Karlefors' study, the subject should not present so much knowledge that it could end up making PE boring and complicated. Our data also supports the view that 'the idea of exercise (in PE) is about fun' (Redelius, et al., 2015), and that the teacher should not spend time making the students aware of learning and about key knowledge areas in the subject, such as health, even in upper secondary school. Only one informant mentioned that it is useful for physical conditioning and health to acquire knowledge about the body and exercise, while another stated that PE is good preparation for practical working life. A third informant reflected that effort should be important for achieving a good grade in the subject, but did not continue this line of thought in the direction of seeing the importance of practical knowledge about good training methods if one is to have progress according to one's own aptitudes and background.

In addition, the analysis reveals only little critical reflection and assessment of various considerations relating to organised sports as well as the general recreational culture in the students' local communities. The analysis shows that this critical attitude is touched on only

to a little degree in the interview texts from the informants. There are no statements supporting such a critical attitude directly, for example where someone mentions or refers to the competence goals in the national PE-curriculum where the students should be able to reflect on, assess or even reject ideals of the body cultures in sport and training centres. Hence, there appears to be few reflections showing that the informants believe it is important to have knowledge and critical reflection ability in important areas, and again this is called for in the curriculum. Our interpretation of the data is thus a negative interpretation in light of the changes in the Norwegian curriculum in 2012, where these changes were aimed at improving the students' knowledge about and creating awareness of exercise, a healthy lifestyle and sports cultures. There were few statements from the informants which reflected the view that it is important to acquire these competences.

*Students' views on PE as the 'movement moment': A view on a (good) 'break' from academic aspects of school life – and a relevant learning aspect in the Norwegian PE-curriculum?*

The interpretations of our data correspond well with earlier research on students' views on the purpose of PE in school in Norway (Moen et al., 2018), as well as in other countries (Larson & Karlefors, 2015; Smith & Parr, 2007; Cothran & Ennis, 2001; Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008, Tannehill et al., 2013). Our first interpretation also points out that upper secondary school students consider PE to be a break from other school subjects. This point of our analysis means that a discussion about PE as a break from the academic aspects of school life, or learning subjects, is also relevant when considering the teaching practice in upper secondary school. Based on the first interpretation of the interviews, we will further discuss if the break perspective – or what we call 'the movement moment' in everyday school life – has relevant

learning aspects in light of the curriculum goals in upper secondary school in Norway. More particularly, we will discuss what kind of learning the students' views on PE as 'the movement moment', *are*, or *may* be, in light of the Norwegian curriculum in PE, and particularly to changes in the 2012 curriculum.

Bearing our analysis in mind, like other researchers we could be concerned about the students' (lack of) understanding of what is important knowledge in the subject, where they think that PE is not an arena for the acquisition of important skills and knowledge relating to exercising, lifestyle and health and sports cultures in society. Our analysis shows that the students have no clear view when it comes to learning motor and sports skills, nor to acquiring knowledge about exercising, lifestyle and health and a critical awareness about sports and training cultures in society. Moreover, we could have a critical eye on how PE is primarily associated with having fun and taking part in entertaining activities with friends, i.e. that the students relate PE to fun activities and not to the individual training of skills and acquiring knowledge. But we do not find reason to be overly concerned about this type of student experience and views on PE because the informants' views may be related to the importance the Norwegian curriculum attaches to promoting positive experiences of movement activities and meaning-making in connection with varied forms of activities in PE. For many of the informants it seems that the joy of movement, and the willingness and motivation for movement are experienced to quite a large degree in PE classes. This is frequently experienced in activities together with good friends. The statements made by the informants suggest that they do not experience dispiriting expectations for performance in the classes, nor does it appear that they believe that it is important to have skills goals defined by external criteria from, for example, sports fields outside PE, which was a suggested problem area in PE teaching prior to the new curriculum in 2012 (Vinje, 2016). We therefore interpret the activities in PE classes, here

practised in a wide sense, as meaningful for many of the informants who participated in the study.

Such a viewpoint and experience may be related to how the movement activity is perceived as a positive movement experience per se (Stolz, 2014), and further, the view of the student as a bodily subject in an active learning and experiential process in PE (Arnold, 1979). Likewise, it may be related to the view on collecting information about the surrounding world using a number of senses and developing experience-based knowledge about bodily movement (Annerstedt, 2001). We will argue that the movement activities are important in themselves and have positive importance as well as learning value for many of the informants, even though the informants do not appear to be very aware of this learning perspective, as they do not explicitly express anything about their importance in terms of learning outcome. The informants reported that they experienced varied activities, and the PE classes were experienced as a good opportunity to express the wish to move and to try many activities. A recent longitudinal study of the well-being perceived by young people in PE in the school in question also shows that well-being generally is found to be good among the students (Xxx, 2017b). Another aspect is that the informants did not report a concern about measuring skills in classes, which in turn suggests that they did not experience much performance pressure due to testing and measuring (and social comparison) of their skills in PE classes.

Our analysis thus indicates that the informants perceive PE classes as an arena for positive experiences and learning more than only in a relatively limited health and/or sports skills and performance perspective, precisely due to the fact that they view PE as ‘the movement moment’ in everyday school life. We argue that the students are given the opportunity to participate in a variety of movement activities, to develop their joy of moving and to experience positive social interaction with friends (with some exceptions). Such a learning experience is also positive with respect to the intentions in the Norwegian PE curriculum. An important reason

for changing the curriculum in 2012 was to create the joy of moving, motivation and inspiration in relation to dancing and sport activities and reduce performance stress and too much hunt for good grades in the subject among the students.

We thus argue that, on the one hand, it is not very problematic that students find PE as ‘the movement moment’ and see it as a fun activity to share with good friends. On the other hand, we are concerned that students in upper secondary school have an invisible view on knowledge about exercise, training and lifestyle and a lack of critical awareness about sport cultures in society. It is thought provoking that the informants, who are attending upper secondary school, do not reflect on these goals in PE. The informants do not appear to reflect on these knowledge areas in a way that would suggest they are presented in a structured way in the teaching, or in a way that shows the students have acquired knowledge and action competence in these areas.

#### *Perspectives for further studies*

As with other research, our analysis lays the foundation for further research on the effects of students’ learning by formulating concrete learning goals and not least presenting these in a good way to them in class (Redelius et al., 2015). If the teacher formulates precise learning goals for the teaching and presents these well to the students in the teaching situation, the students will be better able to understand what they are expected to learn. There is reason to support this educational principle as seen in our analysis of the interview texts. For teachers, this principle should be taken to heart and performed in practice, and PE student teachers should practise formulating learning goals that are understandable for the students and which are presented in a comprehensible manner in the teaching. A reasonable way of doing this should not impede the will to move and experience the joy of moving, as well as the students’

motivation. We find that there is no contradiction in this didactical field, but rather that it is feasible to combine organising PE activities for the students with a presentation of the learning goals in the classes.

However, new issues spring from the educational principle of presenting and creating awareness of learning goals in PE. Research which shows that presenting learning goals to the students has an effect also suggests follow-up questions about the way in which the learning goals are perceived by the students and what it means to them to work on attaining the goals in PE. Even if the teacher presents learning goals in a good way, research tells us little about the *manner* in which the students understand them, or whether their strategies for reaching the learning goals are productive. An activist approach in teaching methodology (Walseth et al., 2018) may be constructive and may open for involving the students in learning activities with concrete learning goals. Other approaches may also be successful, for example game-centred approaches and sports education instructional models (Fry et al., 2010; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004), but first this needs to be researched.

## Conclusion

We have presented three interpretations of the content of the interview texts – PE as ‘the movement moment’ in everyday school life, participating in fun activities together with good friends, and a third interpretation, which we describe as a the informants’ relatively invisible view of curriculum goals about training, lifestyle and sports cultures in society. We argue that a view of PE as ‘the movement moment’ in everyday school life will contribute to modifying a view on PE from being a break from other school subjects (and a non-educational perspective) to being a relevant learning perspective. Understanding forms of expressions such as ‘carry out

fun activities' and 'move your body' in the direction of movement experience per se rather than a non-educational perspective will contribute to modifying a break perspective in a constructive way. On the other hand, this view should be merged with students' knowledge and critical lenses on training, health and lifestyle and sport cultures, so that the students' understanding of PE all in all contain important knowledge and reflections they should have in upper secondary school, according to the Norwegian curriculum in PE.

Finally, we point out that in future research we should devote more attention to the effect of informing about and presenting learning goals in the teaching, explaining the criteria for goal attainment and raising the students' awareness about what striving to attain goals means in upper secondary school. This will require more detailed studies on whether the students' strategies for reaching the learning goals in the teaching and the purpose of the subject are constructive and lead to their goal attainment.

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