Inclusion and Exclusion in the Landscape of Physical Education
A case study of students’ participation and non-participation along with the significance of the curriculum approach in secondary school physical education
Jensen, Mette Munk

Publication date:
2017

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Download policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Inclusion and Exclusion in the Landscape of Physical Education:
A case study of students’ participation and non-participation along with the significance of the curriculum approach in secondary school physical education

PhD dissertation

Mette Munk
Inclusion and Exclusion in the Landscape of Physical Education:
A case study of students’ participation and non-participation along with the significance of the curriculum approach in secondary school physical education

PhD dissertation

Mette Munk

Health
Aarhus University
Department of Public Health/Section for Sport Science
ENGLISH SUMMARY

In focus of this thesis, is the variety of students’ participation and non-participation in physical education (PE) and processes of inclusion and exclusion instigating this variety. The objective of the thesis is twofold; first, to determine how inclusion and exclusion processes are manifested in secondary PE classes and second, to understand how the curriculum approach is reflected in students’ positions of participation and non-participation in PE.

The thesis addresses two major gaps in the literature on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. Firstly, although research has raised awareness of the diversity within different groups of students, studies tend to focus upon single ‘issues’ such as gender, ethnicity or skill level in explaining why students do or do not participate in PE. Yet, studies that utilize a social-relational approach to explain how inclusion and exclusion processes are enacted in relations between students and in relations with the curriculum approach are few and far between.

Secondly, PE research still has a long way to go to embrace insights into the dynamics of students’ participation and non-participation. Only limited attention has been placed on empirically examining the significance of the curriculum model and how curriculum change is experienced from the students’ perspective. Moreover, the curriculum model suggested in this thesis seeks to challenge the narrow focus on competitive, performance-oriented sport characterizing other widely used curriculum models in PE.

The thesis is designed as a qualitative single case study. The case in focus is defined as the inclusion and exclusion processes in physical education occurring in the bounded context of a strategically selected secondary school. The data collection took place over two consecutive school terms and included weekly observations of the PE lessons, focus group interviews (including filling out sociograms) with the students and individual interviews with the PE teachers.

On the basis of Jean Etienne’s and Lave Wenger’s social theory of learning, or more specifically their conceptualisation of learning in communities of practice and
landscapes of practice, the analysis reveals how the relations between the students in PE, the relations between the students and the traditions and values of practices held by the teacher in PE, as well as students’ peer group relations within and outside PE, and students’ relations to the broad range of communities to which PE connects, shape inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

Moreover, the analysis shows that the mastery-oriented curriculum model offered in this thesis has the potential to transform exclusion processes in PE. More specifically, providing empirical evidence for students’ experiences of an educational framework for learning in PE, the thesis shows that not only do the particular visions of what constitute PE as a subject, have implication for who are included but also for how we come to view and define what it means to be included.

Hence, by considering the relational, multidimensional and dynamic nature of students’ participation and non-participation in PE, the thesis offers a rethinking of how inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE.

The social-relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE developed in this thesis may be used for the critical evaluation of existing practices as well as the design of future initiatives, not only in the context of PE but also in related contexts in which the goal is to promote inclusion in physical activity.
DANSK RESUME

I fokus for dette projekt er folkeskoleelevers mangfoldige deltagelse og ikke-deltagelse i idrætsundervisningen samt de inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesser, der ligger til grund for denne variation. Afhandlingen har dels til formål at undersøge, hvordan inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesser manifesterer sig i udskolingens idrætsundervisning og dels at afdække, hvordan den didaktiske tilgang i idrætsundervisningen afspejler sig i elevernes deltagelsespositioner og ikke-deltagelsespositioner.

Afhandlingen retter sig især mod to væsentlige mangler i den internationale forskning. For det første har der i forsøg på at forklare, hvorfor eleverne deltager eller ikke deltager i idrætsundervisningen været en tendens til at fokusere på isolerede elevkarakteristika som f.eks. køn, etnicitet og færdighedsniveau. På trods af en øget opmærksomhed på den kompleksitet af forskelle, der eksisterer inden for forskelle grupper af elever, er det dog fortsat kun meget få studier, der har gjort brug af en social-relationel tilgang til at forklare, hvordan inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesser udspiller sig i elevernes relationer til hinanden og til den didaktiske tilgang i idrætsundervisningen.

For det andet synes forskningen endnu at have lang vej i forhold til at favne dynamikken i elevernes deltagelse og ikke-deltagelse. Der har kun været et begrænset fokus på empirisk at undersøge betydningen af den didaktiske model i idrætsundervisningen, og på hvordan ændringer didaktiske ændringer opleves i et elevperspektiv. Desuden forsøger den didaktiske model, der foreslås i denne afhandling, at udfordre det smalle fokus på konkurrencepræget og præstationsorienteret sport, der kendegner andre udbredte tilgange i idrætsundervisningen.

På grundlag af Jean Etiennes and Lave Wengers sociale læringsteori, eller mere specifikt begreberne om læring i praksisfællesskaber og praksislandskaber, afdækker analysen, hvordan relationerne mellem eleverne i idrætsundervisningen, relationerne mellem eleverne og de traditioner og værdier for praksis som idrætslæreren er bærer af såvel som elevernes venskabsrelationer i og udenfor idrætsundervisningen og elevernes relationer til de praksisfællesskaber idrætsundervisningen er forbundet til, former inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesserne i idrætsundervisningen.

Analysen viser derudover, at en mestrings-orienteret tilgang til idrætsundervisningen har et stort potentiale i forhold til at transformere eksklusionsprocesserne i idrætsundervisningen. Gennem empiriske undersøgelser af elevernes oplevelse af en didaktisk model, der har fokus på idrætsfagets faglighed, viser afhandlingen, at forskellige opfattelser af idrætsundervisningens formål, har indflydelse ikke blot på, hvem der føler sig inkluderet, men også for den mening, vi tilskriver begrebet inclusion.

Ved at tage højde for den relationelle, flerdimensionale og dynamiske karakter af elevernes deltagelse og ikke-deltagelse i idrætsundervisningen, bidrager afhandlingen således til en nytenkning, af hvordan inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesserne udspiller sig i idrætsundervisningen.

Indsigterne fra denne afhandling bør finde anvendelse ikke blot i folkeskolens idrætsundervisning men også i beslægtede kontekster, hvor målet er at fremme inclusion i idræt. Den social-relationelle forståelse af inklusions- og eksklusionsprocesser, der i denne afhandling bliver udviklet, vil således forhåbentligt inspirere til en kritisk evaluering af eksisterende idrætspraksis samt informere udviklingen af nye initiativer.
Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to the people who have played an essential part in the research and writing of this thesis, and in my everyday life as a PhD student.

First of all, I would like to thank the participants; the students and the PE teachers. Thank you, for welcoming me into your PE classes and for sharing your experiences with me. A special thanks goes to Conni Mikkelsen, for being generous with her time, and for showing interest in the research project.

I would also like to thank the Danish Ph.D. Council, which made this thesis possible.

A special thank you goes to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Sine Agergaard. I am grateful for her care and understanding, for the critical and generous feedback on my work, for all her commitment and support, and for her engagement in my development as a researcher. I also want to thank my co-supervisor Jesper von Seelen for providing me with valuable feedback on the research articles and on earlier drafts of this thesis.

A thank you also goes to Dr Eimear Enright and colleagues at University of Queensland, School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences. Thank you for the great hospitality during my stay, for including me in discussions with your research, and for providing me with great feedback on the thesis.

To Knud Ryom; thank you for our many inspiring discussions. It’s been a pleasure and a great motivation for me to share an office with you.

My final thanks goes to my family; to Peter for your understanding, support and incredible patience, and to Peter, Magnus, my mum and dad, and my brothers and their families for always believing in me and for reminding me, that love and family is what life is really about.
# Table of Content

**ENGLISH SUMMARY** ...................................................................................... i

**DANSK RESUME** ........................................................................................ iii

**Acknowledgments** ....................................................................................... v

**CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Overview** .................................................. 2
1.1 State of the Art .......................................................................................... 2
1.2 Theoretical Perspective .......................................................................... 5
1.3 Research Design and Methods ................................................................ 6
1.4 Overview of Thesis and Articles .......................................................... 7
1.5 List of Articles ......................................................................................... 8

**CHAPTER 2: State of the Art and Contributions** ................................... 9
2.1 From Single-Categorical to Multidimensional Understandings of Inclusion and Exclusion in PE ................................................................. 9
2.2 Examining the Significance of the Curriculum Model......................... 11
   2.2.1 Changing the Multi-curriculum Model of PE .................................. 12
2.3 Accessing Students’ Experiences in PE ............................................... 14

**CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Framework** ...................................................... 17
3.1 The analytic Concepts of Inclusion and Exclusion ................................ 17
3.2 A Social-Relational Perspective on Inclusion and Exclusion Processes .......................................................... 18
3.3 Social Learning Theory ......................................................................... 20
3.4 The Community of Practice of PE ....................................................... 21
   3.4.1 Legitimacy .................................................................................... 22
   3.4.2 Meaningfulness .......................................................................... 23
3.5 The Landscape of Practice of PE .......................................................... 23
   3.4.5 Strengths and Limitations ............................................................ 25

**CHAPTER 4: Research Design and Methods** ......................................... 27
4.1 The Case Study Design ......................................................................... 27
   4.1.1 Choosing the Case ..................................................................... 29
   4.1.2 The Curriculum Change ............................................................ 30
4.2 Methods .................................................................................................. 32
   4.2.1 Observations ............................................................................. 33
   4.2.2 Focus Group Interviews ............................................................ 36
   4.2.3 Teacher Interviews ................................................................... 41
4.3 Strategies for Analysis .......................................................................... 42
4.4 Ethical Considerations .......................................................................... 45

**CHAPTER 5: Results** ................................................................................. 48
5.1 Overview of Findings ............................................................................ 49
5.2 Summary of Article 1 (The Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Physical Education: A Social-relational Perspective) .................................................. 50
5.3 Summary of Article 2 (Listening to Students’ Silences – A Case Study Examining Students’ Participation and Non-participation in Physical Education) .................................................. 51
5.4 Summary of Article 3 (The Inclusive Potential and Challenges of Replacing a Performance-oriented with a Mastery-oriented Curriculum Model in Physical Education) .................................................. 54
5.5 Discussion of Findings .......................................................................... 57
   5.5.1 Demonstrating the Social-relational and Dynamic Nature of Inclusion and Exclusion Processes in PE .................................................. 57
   5.5.2 The (Lack of) Manifestation of Social Categories ......................... 59
CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Overview

Looking into the sports hall. A large group of students are engaged in playing dodge ball. The ball moves between the students. Students move around and try to avoid being hit. At the far end two boys have been sitting down chatting for a while. Another boy has climbed the wall bars to watch the game. Suddenly one girl leaves the game. She finds a tennis ball and starts dribbling. In the corner closest to the door, four girls are gathered around an I-phone. They are not dressed for physical education. My eye catches a boy. He puts a lot of effort into getting the ball. Jumping, dancing and shouting. But he is ignored. My attention moves to a girl. Her eyes follow the game. The ball is coming in her direction and it ends in front of her feet. For a moment her eyes flicker. Hesitantly, she bends down. She wavers and hands the ball over to a nearby student. The music stops playing. The lesson is over. Some students look relieved, others disappointed.

It is this variety and richness in the students’ participation and non-participation in physical education (PE) and the processes of inclusion and exclusion instigating this variety, that is the focus of this thesis. The objective of the thesis was twofold; first to determine how inclusion and exclusion processes are manifested in secondary PE classes and second to understand how the curriculum approach is reflected in students’ positions of participation and non-participation in PE.

In this thesis inclusion is generally defined as those processes, which promote students’ participation in PE, while exclusion is those processes that promote students’ non-participation. Yet, this thesis will draw attention to diverse ways in which students participate or not in PE, reflecting that inclusion and exclusion are not simple positions imposed on individual students from the outside.

1.1 State of the art

In Denmark only limited attention has been given to PE as a qualitative field of research (Hammershøj and Schmidt, 1999). However, the interest seems to be growing. Thus, within the preceding 10 years, three doctoral theses have been published; an action research project on the use of digital resources in PE teacher education (Elbæk, 2010); a multiple case study on ‘quality learning and practice’ in
PE (von Seelen, 2012); and an action research project aimed at ‘developing next practice in secondary school PE’ (Hansen, 2017). Notable, von Seelen (2012) is the only study conducted in Denmark with a research question specifically focused on students’ non-participation. Yet, in von Seelen’s (2012) thesis, findings related to students’ non-participation were a single finding amongst many research outcomes. Moreover, the approach adopted in von Seelen (2012) to the less-skilled students in PE reflects a broader tendency towards focusing upon a single ‘issue’ such as gender, ethnicity or skill level as explanation of students’ non-participation in PE; an approach that has been widely critiqued in the international literature on PE (Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002a; Penney and Evans, 2002; Stidder and Hayes; 2013a).

The lack of research into students’ non-participation in PE, however, does not reflect either the size or the significance of the problem in Danish secondary schools. A quantitative survey conducted among secondary PE teachers in public schools in 2011, showed that even if it is compulsory for all students to participate in PE on average up to 30 % of the students are authorized or unauthorized as absent from PE (von Seelen and Munk, 2012). These numbers do not, however, include those students who are physically present in PE, but who, more or less blatantly avoid participation and involvement (see, for example, Carlson, 1995; Griffin, 1984; 1985). Although these results might not have been particularly surprising to Danish PE teachers, they attracted political attention and so were significant for the funding of this thesis. Thus, the thesis was funded by the Danish Ph.D. Council; a political council which has the remit to maximize learning outcome for all students in elementary schools.

In contrast to the situation in Denmark, internationally, students’ experiences in PE have been an on-going focus of research since the mid 1990s (Dyson, 2006). Moreover, several of these studies have concentrated on aspects of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE (for examples, see, Dagkas and Armour, 2012). Despite the impressive and significant knowledge base provided by these studies, in recent years a number of limitations have been highlighted regarding questions pertaining to who, how and why exclusion is happening in PE. These limitations, to a large extent, originate from the emphasis placed on the structural limitations to students’ participation (MacDonald et al., 2012) such as the gendered nature of PE (for a
review, see, for example, Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Green, 2008; Penney, 2002b; Stidder et al. 2013), the (physical) abilities that are recognized and awarded especially in the context of ‘PE as sport’ (Hunter, 2004; p.181; see, for example, Evans, 2004; Evans and Penney, 2008, Wright and Burrows; 2006), and an incompatibility between PE practices and the students’ cultural traditions and beliefs (for a review, see, Harrison and Belcher, 2006; Green, 2008). Hence, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, perspectives other than the single-categorical perspective prevalent in this line of research are necessary (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002a, Penney & Evans, 2002; Stidder & Hayes, 2013a).

Although significant, this theoretical conceptualization of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE is not the only motivation for the thesis. At least as important is the contribution that the thesis makes to applied curriculum research in PE. Thus, this thesis considers and empirically explores a new PE curriculum model; a model designed to address students’ non-participation in PE. Adding to Kirk’s (1999: 69) argument that PE ‘informs and is informed by’ the overlapping fields of sport, exercise and physical recreation, this thesis suggests that school itself may also support the meaning of PE as an educational subject with defined learning objectives. Although the potential of connecting PE to educational processes has been discussed extensively among researchers in relation to addressing students’ non-participation (see, for example, Gard et al., 2013; Penney and Chandler, 2000; Tinning et al., 1994), empirical evidence of students’ experiences of such changes are rare (Cothran and Ennis 2001; Penney, 2006). More particularly, to the best of my knowledge, a curriculum model emphasising the educational objectives in PE has not been empirically examined with a perspective to its significance for inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

It is against this backdrop of lacking theoretical conceptualization of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, and empirical examination concerning the dynamics of students’ participation and non-participation in PE, that I developed this thesis. Hence, the purpose of the thesis has been to examine students’ participation and non-participation in PE and the significance of the curriculum approach in order to contribute to understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion processes of PE.
The research questions that guided the thesis were:

*How do inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE?*

*How is the curriculum approach reflected in students’ positions of participation and non-participation in PE?*

1.2 Theoretical Perspective

The social-relational perspective utilized in this thesis builds on Emirbayer’s ‘Manifesto for Relational Sociology’ (1997). A social-relational perspective rejects the notion, that actors can be defined in separation from their social relations. Rather, what actors are doing should be understood as intermeshed with the social relations in which they are embedded (Emirbayer, 1997). As actors are placed within relationships and situational contexts that change over time and space, a relational perspective precludes the notion of stable social categories found in much research on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. Instead, it serves as an important corrective to the ‘one-dimensional analyses’ of gender, ethnicity or skill level as a means of explaining the processes of inclusion and exclusion, that has characterized the majority of studies within PE (Kirk, 1999: 64).

Following from the social-relational perspective, in this thesis inclusion and exclusion processes are described not with attribution to individual students’ actions, but to actions unfolding in the relations between students and between the students and the teachers in the specific context of PE. Moreover, rather than assuming students’ interests, goals and preference schedules to be fixed, given in advance and conformed to specific social ideals, they are believed to develop and derive their meaning from students’ engagement with other social and/or sport communities. Hence, taking a social-relational perspective this thesis is based on the basic premise that inclusion and exclusion processes in PE develop in interplay with the relations between students, the relations between students and the particular values and traditions of practice brought forward by PE teachers and the relations between PE and other spheres of students’ lives.

As the theoretical framework for developing a social-relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, this thesis builds on Jean Lave and Etienne
Wenger’s theory on social learning. More specifically, the thesis draws on their conceptualization of learning in *communities of practice* and *landscapes of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). These concepts provided a extensive framework for analysing the relational, multidimensional and dynamic nature of students’ participation and non-participation in PE.

### 1.3 Research Design and Methods

This thesis is designed as a qualitative single case study. The case in focus is defined as the inclusion and exclusion processes in PE occurring in the bounded context of a strategically selected secondary school. The secondary school was located in a socially deprived neighbourhood and had a high percentage of students with an ethnic minority background. Moreover, as in most other Danish schools, girls and boys were mostly being taught together, rather than in separate groups. As these are all characteristics known from earlier research to promote students’ non-participation in PE, the thesis purposively selected this setting (for reviews on youths’ participation and social inclusion in sport and PE, see Dagkas and Armour, 2012; Green, 2008; Stidder and Hayes, 2013b)

Whereas research on inclusion and exclusion in PE usually tends to focus mostly on the groups of students who are excluded, from a social-relational perspective this focus might potentially restrict our understanding of these processes and the way we tackle the problem (Abrams and Christian, 2007). Therefore, students in diverse positions of participation are included in this thesis.

The research project underlying this thesis was organized in two parts.

- **Part 1** focuses on how inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE. As the main objective was to develop a social-relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, this part of the research project was largely interpretative.

- **Part 2** focuses on how the curriculum approach is reflected in students’ positions of participation and non-participation in PE. Based on the empirical and analytical work of Part 1, in part 2 we developed and implemented a new
PE curriculum model, in which the main focus was to support the meaning of PE as an educational subject with defined learning objectives. The main objective of part 2 was to examine how students changed their position of participation and non-participation in PE during the implementation of the new curriculum model. Thus, this part of the research project was largely evaluative.

The data production took place over two consecutive school terms corresponding to part 1 and 2 of the research project (see also figure 1). During the course of the first school term, I observed the PE lessons, interviewed students in focus groups and interviewed the PE teachers individually. Likewise, in the course of the second school term, I observed the PE lessons and interviewed students in focus groups.

![Figure 1: Overview of the organization of the research project](image)

1.4 Overview of Thesis and Articles

In this thesis, I first provide a review of the research and literature that the thesis is inspired by and aims to embellish (chapter 2). In chapter 3, I present the theoretical framework that guided the research and in chapter 4 the research design and the research methods utilized. Chapter 5 is a presentation and discussion of the thesis’s most important findings. Finally, chapter 6 contains the conclusion and the future perspectives of the thesis.
1.5 List of Articles


CHAPTER 2: State of the Art and Contributions

In this chapter, I review those areas of PE research that have motivated and shaped this thesis and describe some of the missing links that led to the development of the present thesis. As comprehensive reviews are provided in each of the three articles, this chapter should be read as a summary of literature supporting the issues studied and the contributions provided by the thesis. As a consequence there are overlaps between the reviews provided in the articles and the following sections.

In the first section, I give a brief outline of the ways in which research has typically approached questions related to inclusion and exclusion processes, and the ways in which this approach significantly influenced the way I articulated and designed this thesis. In the second section of the review, I consider the main contributions provided to the field of curriculum research through this thesis. Situating the thesis in this line of research, I briefly outline the theoretical arguments in favour of the curriculum approach empirically examined in this thesis. In the third section I point to the ways in which this thesis also contributes to the expansion of current understandings of students’ silences, and how such an expansion might add insights to inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

2.1 From single-categorical to multidimensional understandings of inclusion and exclusion in PE

The outcome, place and justification of PE are issues of contested debate among teachers, theorists and policy-makers alike (Armour & Jones, 1998; Green, 2000; Kirk, 1992). Despite the contested nature of PE, still there seems to be a general agreement that every child should have the opportunity to participate in PE and to enjoy and benefit from such engagement (Bailey, 2005). Studies conducted both nationally and internationally, however, have shown that not all students participate in PE and that even among the students who attend classes, many find it an irrelevant, distressing or even humiliating experience (Dyson, 2006).

Looking into the ways in which research has typically approached questions of students’ participation and non-participation in PE, two limitations slowly emerged. To a large extent both of these limitations are related to the social critical perspective that has been adopted by many studies since the early 2000s (Devis-Devis, 2006). As
further argued in the following, the applied critical perspective has been reflected in how research on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE is typically approached, in how processes of inclusion and exclusion are typically conceptualized and in how the non-participating students are usually portrayed.

With regard to the way that inclusion and exclusion processes have typically been conceptualized, except for a few papers (see Cothran 2000; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; MacDonald et al., 2012), PE literature generally takes the line that exclusion is something *done to* students. In particular, this perception becomes apparent in the way students are more or less explicitly perceived of as passive victims suppressed by powerful processes of exclusion over which they have no or only limited control.

Likewise, in the PE literature the social critical perspective is reflected in the prevalent use of Pierre Bourdieu’s work (Devis-Devis, 2006). Although, Bourdieu endeavours to detach from structural determinism, one might argue that a stronger focus is placed on structural reproduction than on subjective negotiation and choice in his theoretical conceptualizations (see, for example, Järvinen, 2013; Rasborg, 2013). As such Bourdieu’s theoretical framework has provided for insightful analysis of the social and cultural structures internalized by students in PE and how these structures limit students’ possibilities of participation (Hay, 2005; Hay & Hunter, 2006; Hay & MacDonald, 2010a, 2010b; Hunter, 2004; Koca et al. 2009). However, Bourdieu-inspired analysis has left little room, I argue, for analysis of how students themselves shape their positions of participation or non-participation in PE.

The way the non-participating students have been portrayed in most studies, did not fit well with the non-participating students, I met in this research project. To many of these, non-participation seemed an active, voluntarily and in some instances purposeful choice rather than an enacted restriction. As such these students did not appear as passive subjects dominated by structures and processes of exclusion, but rather as active students that *opt for* non-participation in PE.

In regard to the research approach adopted by many studies, another overt limitation traceable to the critical perspective is the emphasis given to single categories such as gender and ethnicity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002a; Penney & Evans, 2002; Stidder & Hayes, 2013a). As such research has tended to see students as
possessing singular, unitary identities rooted in not only gender, (for a review, see, Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Green, 2008; Penney, 2002b; Stidder et al. 2013) or ethnicity, (for a review, see, Harrison and Belcher, 2006; Green, 2008) but also skill level (see Carlson, 1995; Griffin, 1984, 1985; Grimminger, 2013; Portman; 1995a, 1995b). Moreover, these fixed attributes have been used to explain students’ actions, interests and participation levels in PE. Although this line of research has provided significant insights into the processes whereby students are excluded from participation, it is now generally acknowledged, that the excluded groups belong to more than one category and hence, cannot be identified and described in single-categorical terms (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002a; Penney & Evans, 2002; Stidder & Hayes, 2013a).

Following this acknowledgement, categorical research is criticized for ‘creating new and as potentially damaging stereotypical images and understandings as those that we are seeking to avoid and/or challenge’ (Penney, 2002a: 115), and as such may be potentially harmful to the participation of whole groups of students. Therefore, it is widely recognized that more awareness of the multidimensional nature of students’ participation and non-participation is necessary in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002a; Penney & Evans, 2002; Stidder & Hayes, 2013a).

It is on this background that the thesis sets out to produce a theoretical understanding of students’ participation and non-participation in PE.

2.2 Examining the Significance of the Curriculum Model

It has been frequently noted, that one of the main challenges for researchers is to link theory and outputs to specific practical recommendations for intervention (Abrams and Christian, 2007). In line with this critique a theoretical conceptualization of inclusion and exclusion processes offered in this thesis, might be argued to have no or only limited impact on day-to-day practice in PE (Williams, 2000). However, this thesis does not end with the theory. Rather, in an attempt to make the thesis relevant and applicable to practice, a main outcome is the development and empirical examination of a new PE curriculum model in which my theoretical and empirical insights on students’ participation and non-participation are embraced. Thus, as the
ground to inclusion and exclusion processes are to be found in the dynamics within various relationships, so, I argue, are the solutions.

2.2.1 Changing the Multi-curriculum Model of PE

Turning to the literature, studies have shown widespread application of the multi-curriculum model in PE (Ennis, 1999). Questions have been raised from many quarters regarding the appropriateness of this longstanding activity-based structure as a basis from which to promote inclusion in PE.

First, the multi-curriculum model is characterized by a structure in which students are introduced to a large number of sports in the hope that every student will find interest in at least one of these activities, and will be motivated to sustain their participation in the activity beyond school (Kirk & Kinchin, 2003). The requirement to introduce many activities during a limited number of PE sessions means that only a short amount of time can be spent on each activity. Moreover, the educational sequences across lessons, units and grades are weak and non-existent, the instruction and supervision of game play limited and student ownership and leadership opportunities minimized (Ennis, 1999). This all serves to limit and constrain students’ learning, and hence, many students struggle to ‘develop the necessary appreciation of the activity, the specific movement patterns required in each and an understanding of how these patterns are employed in context’ (Murdoch & Whitehead, 2013: 63). Moreover, the emphasis on offering students a range of physical activity experiences means that to many students PE has become recreational and the educative intent of their experiences essentially indeterminate (Gard et al. 2013: 111). As such PE has come to be perceived by students as well as teachers as a release from rather than as a part of the academic content of education (see, for example, Cothran and Ennis, 2001; Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Green, 2000, 2008).

Second, evidence has been provided that the multi-curriculum model is seldom meaningfully connected to learning in different activity contexts, to learning in PE and other school subjects, and to learning in PE and experiences beyond schools (Penney, 1999; Penney and Chandler, 2000). Hence, exclusion in PE has been attributed to the decontextualized and inauthentic nature of learning typical of the multi-curriculum model, which limits the transfer of knowledge and competence to
other spheres of students’ lives and makes learning seem valueless, irrelevant and meaningless to students (see, for example, Ennis, 1996; Fernández-Balboa, 1997a, 1997b; Kirk 1993; Kirk & MacDonald 1998; Murdoch & Whitehead, 2013; Penney & Chandler, 2000).

Third, concern has been expressed that the activity-based structure of the multi-curriculum model and the role of PE merely to provide experiences, prompts a focus on students’ performance and achievement in specific sports (Hardman, 2006). The reaffirming of the connection between PE and sport, or what Green (2008) denotes the ‘sportification of’ PE, serves to narrows students’ images of how physical activity ‘should’ be carried out (Redelius and Larsson, 2010: 698) and to legitimate particular sorts of knowledge (Evans, 1990; Penney, 2013). Thus, the established knowledge boundary reinforced through the multi-curriculum model has been blamed for assigning value to particular learners and hence, to maintaining a particular social order (Evans, 1990; Penney, 2013; Redelius and Larsson, 2010).

As the multi-curriculum model and in particular the dominant practice of PE as sport-techniques, fundamentally limits who can fully access PE and reap its rewards, it has been argued that ‘doing things differently and doing different things in the name of PE’ is the key to extending inclusion in PE (Penney, 2013: 7). However, as argued by Redelius and Larsson (2010: 698) finding forms that cannot easily be associated with competitive sports and which may challenge the hierarchies of knowledge and the social hierarchies, which prevail inside the subject, necessitates that alternative methods of instruction as well as alternative content of teaching are found. However, as stressed by Locke (1992), to do so, require that we replace rather than merely attempt to repair, the dominant models of PE.

For the development of such a replacement, one possibility suggested by a number of researchers within PE is a curriculum model that emphasizes the educational elements of PE (see, for example, Gard et al. 2013; Penney and Chandler, 2000; Tinning et al. 1994). Of particular note is the comment made by Tinning et al. (1994) that ‘physical education needs to be conceptualized as an educational process, positioned within educational discourses and drawing upon educational arguments’ (quoted in MacDonald and Brooker, 1997: 159).
However, arguments in favour of such an approach have been mostly theoretical (for an exception, see MacDonald and Brooker, 1997). This seems to reflect a general trend within curriculum research. Hence, only a few studies have attempted to describe and evaluate curriculum models (Siedentop et al. 1994). More specifically, examination of curriculum change from the students’ perspective has been emphasized as a research area in need of development (Cothran and Ennis 2001; Penney, 2006).

Therefore, an important contribution of this thesis is the empirical examination of a mastery-oriented curriculum model that emphasizes the educational objectives of PE. In particular the thesis explores a) what kind of participation opportunities that this model provides and b) students’ experiences of and responses to such opportunities.

2.3 Accessing Students’ Experiences in PE

As evident from the outlined research questions and the preceding discussions, this thesis is positioned along with the increasing volume of research interested in accessing students’ perspectives of their PE experiences (Dyson, 2006). As such this thesis is premised on the view that students should be positioned as subjects of research rather than objects (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000).

In the early 1990s interest in listening to students’ views was prompted by general social movements ‘seeking to vindicate’ children’s rights (Greene and Hogan, 2005: xii). Thus, emphasis has been given to the importance of enabling children to express their views on matters and decisions that affect themselves (Hill, 2005). As a response to the invisibility and striking muteness of children in educational research up until the 1990s, recent decades have witnessed an increasing interest in and enthusiasm for the concept and practice of ‘child-voice’ (Harker, 2012). This development has been further reinforced by research showing that children and young people appreciate the opportunity to be involved and listened to (Hill, 2006; Stafford et al., 2003) and by research showing that ‘adult perceptions of what children think, do or need may differ from what children themselves say’ (Hill, 2006: 6).

The growing interest in student perspectives evident in current PE research has naturally motivated the development of methods that enable us to better access students’ experiences (O’Sullivan and MacPhail, 2010). To this end, one essential
consideration appears to be that of silence (Cook-Sather, 2006; Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Lewis, 2010; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1998). In particular, thinking of silence, not as an absence of empirical material, but as empirical material filled with meaning and serving specific purposes, Poland and Pederson (1998: 293) remind us that ‘what is not said may be as revealing as what is said, particularly since what is left out, ordinarily exceeds what is put in’.

To be more specific, listening to, critically reflecting upon and taking students’ silences into account, may be one way of circumventing the risk of reducing students’ voices and insights to any ‘single, uniform and invariable experience’ (Silva and Rubin, 2003: 2). Likewise, it may be a way to avoid the mistake of ‘uncritically ‘essentialising’ [students’] experiences by assuming that they are free to represent their own interests transparently’ (Spivak, 1988, quoted in Cook-Sather, 2009: 12). Following from this, analyses should not just stop at the reported views of children, as their views might denote something more about the social and structural positioning of the young people than about their true experiences (Todd, 2012: 196).

Within PE research, the relevance of attending to student silence has been indicated in research highlighting the impact of the hidden curriculum, on the reproduction and reinforcement of inequalities (see, for example, Fernández-Balbão, 1993; Oliver and Lalik, 2004; Sandford and Rich, 2006). Importantly, what this line of research also offers is the interpretation that, the hidden curriculum serves to silence students on matters concerning their participation and non-participation in PE. The hidden curriculum refers to ‘the tacit messages, the daily regularities, the relations, and the norms and values that lurk undetected, behind, and beyond the content of daily lessons and subject matters’, and from the research to date it is apparent that the messages embedded in the hidden curriculum are often not recognized by students (Dodds, 1985, quoted in Fernández-Balbão, 1993: 232). As such it becomes difficult for students to voice just how much the attitudes, the beliefs and the body practices reinforced by the hidden curriculum restrict their participation in PE.

Student silence was, however, not an initial focus of this thesis, rather a focus that emerged during the data analysis process. In this process, it became clear to me that the students’ silences offered a unique opportunity to extend the thesis’s social-relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes. In particular, taking
into account not just the voiced but also the silent, provided access to the hidden set of meanings embedded in the everyday exchanges between the students that had an impact on their actual experiences of participation and non-participation in PE.
CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Framework

The frequency of use of the term ‘inclusion’ in education has grown rapidly over the last 15 years, and with it the range of meanings associated with the term. It is a vague term, open to an assortment of understandings and interpretations within a range of contexts, usually resting on a set of values embedded within a community and a range of practice (Hick et al., 2007: 96).

In this chapter I first outline my approach to and definition of inclusion and exclusion. In the section that follows I define my utilization of a social-relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. Finally, I describe how my conceptual frameworks are derived from Etienne Wegner and colleagues’ work on communities of practice and landscapes of practice, and I argue how together these concepts provide a extensive social-relational framework in which to understand inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

3.1 The analytic Concepts of Inclusion and Exclusion

Inclusion and exclusion are contested concepts. Thus, for different academic and policy constituencies, the terms have different definitions and meanings. As indicated by the citation opening this chapter, definitely, this also holds true within the field of education. Tracing the direction of development in approaches used to understand inclusion in education, Hick et al. (2007: 98) note that two dimensions of difference have emerged; first, definitions have moved from having ‘an initial focus on the inclusion of learners with disabilities to a wider focus on all learners. Second, conceptions of exclusion have moved from ‘a specific concern with exclusion from school, to a broader concern with exclusion from participation in society beyond school’. Following from these distinctions, this thesis is concerned with developing the capacity of PE to include the whole group of students in mainstream classes. As such the thesis does not have a focus on special educational needs, and it is not concerned with broader societal issues of inclusion.

In my process of defining inclusion and exclusion, I quite early came to realize that, within PE, like in other fields of research (see, for example, Abrams and Christian, 2007), there is still a lack of clarity and consensus over what is meant by ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ (Penney, 2002a). Hence, these concepts seem to mean different things
to different researchers. The picture became even more obscured by apparent conflations between exclusion and other related terms such as alienation (see, for example, Carlson, 1995; Kirk and MacDonald, 1998; Spencer-Cavaliere and Rintoul, 2012), marginalization (see, for example, Dyson, 2006), and disengagement (see, for example, Ennis, 1999; Stidder and Hayes, 2013b). As argued by Dominic Abrams and Julie Christian (2007) in the preface of the ‘Multidisciplinary Handbook of Social Exclusion Research’, however, ‘achieving a single overarching definition of exclusion may not be desirable as different approaches to conceptualizing exclusion may be suited to different purposes and contexts’. That said, given the ambiguity of the concept within PE research, there might be merits in working towards more explicit definitions of inclusion and exclusion and towards a shared language for understanding what it is. In particular this might prove useful in regard to thinking about where, when and how changes to the PE curriculum might be most effective.

In defining as well as analysing the inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, I was inspired by the efforts to conceptualize processes of inclusion and exclusion within such diverse fields as education, housing and social policy research (Abrams et al. 2007; Taket et al. 2009). What these very different strands of research seem to share is an acknowledgement that processes of inclusion and exclusion are fundamentally relational, and as such, that the grounds and solutions to exclusion are to be found in the dynamics within various relationships. Moreover, they generally agree about a number of elements central to research on inclusion and exclusion, yet, not seriously employed within the field of PE. That is, research should be relational, multidimensional and dynamic, and that it should recognize agency (see, for example, Abrams and Christian, 2007; Clapham, 2007; Millar, 2007).

3.2 A Social-Relational Perspective on Inclusion and Exclusion Processes

The work of Mustafa Emirbayer, a professor of sociology and ‘one of the most vocal advocates of the relational approach in the social sciences’ (Erikson, 2013: 222), proved inspirational for the social-relational perspective pursued in this thesis. More specifically the thesis builds on Emirbayer’s (1997) ‘Manifesto for Relational Sociology’. Emirbayer is not the only representative of relational sociology. However, he is a key player in laying out the features of a relational sociology and his name is quoted frequently in the scientific debate on relationalism.
Emirbayer (1997) asserts that the key question facing sociologists today is the choice between substantialism and relationalism. Most basically, the relational perspective can be viewed as a reaction against the idea that it is substances or essences that constitute the fundamental and legitimate units of analysis. Moreover, relationalism rejects the notion, that individuals, as pre-given or self-subsistent entities, can be defined independently of social relations. Rather, from a relational perspective, what individuals are doing should be understood with attention to the social relations in which they are embedded (Emirbayer, 1997).

In opposition to substantial ideas of unchanging and detached individuals or structures, from a relational point of view, relations always change individuals (Emirbayer, 1997). As such, what comes out of social practices and processes, or what Emirbayer terms ‘transactions’, are new individuals and new relations between actors. Moreover, rather than perceiving relations as ‘static ties among inert substances’ from a relational perspective these are dynamic in nature and unfold in on-going transactions (Emirbayer, 1997: 289). As such, the units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, and significance, not from internally stable concepts or predictable actions, but from the ‘changing functional roles they play within these transactions’ (Emirbayer, 1997: 287).

I find this a particularly important point in relation to the categorical approach taken by much research on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE and to which some critique has been directed. Thus, while a categorical approach presumes that entities within the category will act in a predictable or norm-following manner, the relational approach places the actor within relationships and situational contexts that change over time and space and as such precludes the notion that inclusion and exclusion can be explained in terms of stable social categories.

Moreover, as relational research does not attribute processes of exclusion alone to ‘detachable elements’ such as gender, ethnicity and skills (Dewey and Bentley, 1949, quoted in Emirbayer, 1997: 286), constituent elements are always envisioned in connection with the actions within which they are involved and vice versa. Emirbayer (1997) provides an illustrative example of what this implies in regard to conducting
No one would be able to successfully speak about the hunter and the hunted as isolated with respect to hunting. Yet it is just as absurd to set up hunting as an event in isolation from the spatio-temporal connection of all the components (Emirbayer, 1997: 289).

To parallel this example from a relational perspective it is not possible to meaningfully isolate the excluded and the excluder from the exclusion process. Likewise it would be absurd to examine the exclusion process as an event in isolation from the ever-changing relations between the excluded, the excluder and the exclusion process itself.

What all this means to the relational approach taken in this thesis, is the primacy given to contextuality and process (Emirbayer: 1997). The exclusion processes are described not with attribution to social categories, but to actions unfolding in the relations between students and between the students and the teachers in the specific context of PE. For instance, exclusion is not attributed to students’ gender or skills in themselves but to the changing functional role that gender or skill level play in that process. Moreover, rather than assuming students’ interests, goals and preference schedules to be fixed, given in advance and conformed to specific social ideals, they are believed to develop and derive their meaning from students’ engagement with other social and/or sport communities. As such this thesis is based on the premise that inclusion and exclusion processes in PE develop in interplay between the relations of the students with each other, in the relation between the students and the traditions and values of practices represented by the teachers in PE, and in the relations between PE and other spheres of students’ lives. While this way of understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion in PE differs from more traditional understandings, it offers significant opportunities for new knowledge production and proves an important basis upon which to inform future PE practices.

3.3 Social Learning Theory

The social-relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes developed in this thesis is mainly based on Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s (1991) social learning theory. Originally, their theory was developed in the context of studies of traditional
apprenticeships such as midwives, tailors, quartermasters and butchers. The focus of these studies was the relation between masters and apprentices and the processes by which apprentices move from peripheral toward full participation in the social and cultural practice of the craft.

Their relational view on learning is evident in several ways. Lave and Wenger view learning not as a process of internalization that takes place in heads, but as a process of increasing participation in communities of practice. Hence, the primary focus in Lave and Wenger’s theory is neither the individual nor social institutions. Rather it is the relations between agents as these unfold in social practices of which learning is an integral part. As such their theory focuses attention on how learning implies evolving, continuously renewed sets of relations.

Lave and Wenger offer a framework for thinking about learning as a process of social participation. I connect this concept of participation with the concepts of inclusion and exclusion that form the focus of this thesis. So, I explicitly define inclusion as those relations, which promote students’ participation in the learning processes of PE and exclusion as those relations that promote students’ non-participation. Having established this connection, in the following two sections, I describe in more detail how I use two key concepts; the concept of a community of practice and the concept of a landscape of practice, as the theoretical framework for analysing the relational, multidimensional and dynamic nature of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE

3.4 The Community of Practice of PE

Community of practice is a core concept in Lave and Wenger’s social theory of learning. Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of interaction and collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a: 1). Importantly, learning does not need to be intentional; it could be an incidental outcome of member’s interactions (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a: 2). Following from this description the group of students and teachers in a PE class would be an example of a community of practice. Thus, although, the theory was originally developed on the basis of case studies in apprenticeship crafts, in line with Lave and Wenger (1991) and others (see, for example, Kirk and MacDonald, 1998), I find that the theory is also beneficial for an
analysis of schooling as well as other specific educational forms.

Utilizing the conceptual framework developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and further elaborated in Wenger (1998), entails the assumption that the position of participation and non-participation taken up by students in PE are shaped by two conditions; on the one hand, the legitimacy that students are ascribed or not by other students in PE, and on the other hand, the extents to which students experience the practices, the values and the learning outcomes in PE as meaningful.

3.4.1 Legitimacy

In regard to the first, the concept of legitimacy focuses attention on the social relations between members in a community of practice. Thus, being ascribed legitimacy, or more broadly speaking being recognized by other students, is crucial for the position of participation or non-participation taken up by students in PE. If students’ contributions to the community of practice in PE are not recognized by other students and/or by the teachers, according to Wenger (1998: 203), these students will develop ‘an identity of non-participation that progressively marginalises them’. So, for students to experience a continued sense of legitimacy, they must have an opportunity to interact with other students, to negotiate the meanings, practices and values of PE and to develop ‘the knowledge, the skills and the dispositions’ internal to the practice of PE (Kirk & Kinchin, 2003: 230). In this thesis, I specifically identify the ways in which students gain legitimacy and are deprived of legitimacy in PE, and as such illustrate, how inclusion and exclusion processes in PE unfold in the relationships between students.

Early in my empirical data production process, I began to wonder whether all the non-participating students in PE were actually being excluded, and concomitant, if other pathways were at least as significant to students’ non-participation? Thus, initial analyses indicated that, rather than being excluded, exclusion appeared as a deliberate act of some students; that is an active choice not to participate in PE. As such, implied in my definition of inclusion, the opposite of inclusion is not exclusion, but rather non-participation. To make this distinction, is not to say that some students are ‘agents of their own misfortune’ or that students do not deserve to be helped (Clapham, 2007). Rather, I make the distinction in an effort to move from the
prevalent understanding in the PE literature, that exclusion is something that *happens* to students, toward a more embracing interpretation of the concept also taking into account the processes whereby students *resist* inclusion and/or *opt for* exclusion resulting in them becoming non-participants.

3.4.2 Meaningfulness

To explain and understand the decision made by some students, not to participate in PE, I came largely to rely on the second of Wenger’s (1998) conditions for participation; the concept of meaningfulness.

Through the use of this concept Wenger (1998) acknowledges that not all members of a community of practice desire to become central participants, and as such in the case in focus exclusion might be a choice taken by students themselves, because they do not find participation in PE meaningful.

According to Wenger (1998: 68) experiences of meaninglessness evolve through social practices in which excessive emphasis on formalism is given without corresponding levels of participation or conversely through social practices in which explanations and/or formal structure are neglected. In the case of the students in PE, therefore, choosing not to be a participant in PE might be a way for students to show their meaningful engagement in other competing communities of practice and/or their non-identification with the meanings, values and practices negotiated within the community of practice of PE.

Interestingly, the legitimacy and experience of meaningfulness that the students might gain by participating in PE can also be considered in relation to the potential of achieving legitimacy and experience of meaningfulness by not participating in PE. Here it is useful to refer to Wenger’s (1998: 168) observation that one community of practice may not only be developed in relation, but even in opposition to another, and as such, that membership in one community of practice may imply marginalization in another.

3.5 The Landscape of Practice of PE

Wenger introduced the concept of a landscape of practice in 1998 (Wenger, 1998), however it was substantially extended in Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015). The extension
was made in response to the previous focus on learning within single communities of practice and in particular to the acknowledgement that this focus risked obscuring the multiple communities to which members belong (Hutchinson et al. 2015). Thus, as the landscapes of practice consist of many different communities of practice, the metaphor ‘ensures that we pay attention to boundaries, to multi-membership in different communities and to the challenges we face as our personal learning trajectories take us through multiple communities’ (Hutchinson et al. 2015: 2). This conceptualization acknowledges that learning not only takes place within single communities of practice but also at the boundaries of multiple communities of practice within the landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015b).

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) based their writing on a workshop in which the intention was to explore ways of improving the learning of practitioners in fields such as teaching and nursing. Conceptualizing these fields as landscapes of practice, the workshop focused at the learning that goes on at the boundaries between the different communities. It was recognized, for example, that students engaged in practice-based learning need to integrate learning in academic settings and learning in workplace contexts and to manage the transition of learning across boundaries; that is transitions between different work roles and between different areas of practice (Fenton-O’Creevy et al. 2015). Drawing the analogy to PE, as a practice-based subject, students face the challenge of connecting learning ‘in, through, and about’ PE (Arnold, 1979). For instance, students need to integrate learning in practice with learning through tactical game plans with academic learning about ball games and their function in society.

Also following from the concept of a landscape of practice is the acknowledgement that learning in communities of practice is affected by participants’ multi-membership in other communities of practice within and outside a particular landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015b). Hence, while the concept of a community of practice forces us to pay attention to the relations between students within PE, so the concept of a landscape of practice, helps us to consider how the dynamic relationship between PE and wider social and physical activity contexts might also influence the positions of participation or non-participation taken up by students in PE. The group of students and teachers are members of the community of the PE classes, but at the
same time they are also part of other, related communities of practice, such as sport and leisure clubs. Defining PE as a landscape of practice, therefore, provides a framework for analysing how students draw meaning from other communities of practice and the ways students interpret and make sense of their participation and non-participation in PE.

Noticeably, fostering students’ learning at the boundaries between different communities of practice, you become aware that balancing the needs of the different communities can become a double-edged sword. Some boundary encounters might appear as meaningful ‘learning assets’ (Wenger-Trailner and Wenger-Trailner, 2015:b: 18), but at the same time they might cause misunderstanding and confusion arising from the different and sometimes competing regimes of competence, values and meanings differentiating the communities of practice within a landscape (Wenger-Trailner and Wenger-Trailner, 2015). Frequently noted within PE are for instance the tensions arising between practices of PE and practices of performance sport (see section 2.2.1).

3.4.5 Strengths and Limitations

In short, utilizing the social learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and further elaborated in Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trailner et al. (2015), provided a extensive framework for analysing inclusion and exclusion processes in PE; it enabled me to include in my analysis the relational, multidimensional and dynamic nature of the exclusion processes; it also proved viable for analysing exclusion as both something that happens to students and something that is chosen by students, and so for expanding prevailing notions of exclusion by embracing both passive and more active exclusion processes.

Moreover, using Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trailner et al. (2015) as the theoretical framework for this thesis, the concept of inclusion is linked with participation and even more importantly with participation as learning. I find this a particular strength, since participation as learning is implied by the actual concept of physical education.
However, to use the concept of a community of practice in a way not similar to its origin requires care for the broader framework and underlying principles (Wenger, 2010). One particular concern lies with the definition of PE as a community of practice. This concern is closely linked to a central critique directed towards the concept of a community of practice lacking conceptual clarity (Handley et al. 2006). Lave and Wenger (1991: 121), however, propose that their concept ‘obtains its meaning, not in a concise definition of its boundaries, but in its multiple theoretically generative interconnections with persons, activities, knowing and world’. Still, the ambiguity of the concept, throws into question what constitutes a community of practice and in particular, if PE is strictly speaking a community of practice. Despite this ambiguity, my analytical definition of PE as a community of practice did prove empirically applicable and offered a means to obtain new insights.

Another critique has been directed towards the community of practice approach in regard to the loss of analytical sharpness in the transition from an analytical concept to an instrumental one (Wenger, 2010). In certain dimensions, I agree with this critique. For instance, I was rather challenged with how to operationalize the term ‘participation’. So although to some extent variations in the degree of participation are explained using the ‘qualifying terms’ of marginal, peripheral and full participation, it leaves some definitional confusion in relation to knowing when an individual is or is not participating in a community of practice (Handley et al. 2006: 649). As further noted by Handley et al. (2006: 649) ‘the danger is that of potentially conflating those who participate (though marginally) with those who, technically, do not’. To this end, I find my first article serves an important purpose in terms of qualifying the definitional attributes of the modes of participation specific to the context of PE. Moreover, clarifying these attributes helped, I argue, to ease the tension between ‘participation’ as an analytical and an instrumental concept. In particular, Lave and Wenger’s concept of ‘participation’ became the direct inspiration for the development of the curriculum change initiated in the thesis, as well as the basis for evaluating students’ changed positions of participation and non-participation.
CHAPTER 4: Research Design and Methods

In this chapter I begin by outlining the specific research design underlying this thesis. In the next main section, I describe the research methods utilized and clarify my main considerations in regard to the process of applying the methods.

4.1 The Case Study Design

Because of its strengths, case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education. Educational processes, problems and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice. (Merriam, 1998: 41).

Given the purpose, research questions and theoretical framework of this thesis, I chose to design the thesis as a case study. My reasons for that are multifaceted, however, all, in one way or another, contained within the ingenious words of Sharan B. Merriam, one of the leading case study methodologists within educational research.

Merriam concludes that the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case. In defining a case, Merriam refers to Miles and Huberman (1994: 25) thinking of a case as ‘a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context’. Following these thoughts my case can be defined as the inclusion and exclusion processes in PE occurring in the bounded context of a secondary school. Following my attempt to obtain an in-depth understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, I decided to focus on a single case. Hence, it was the PE classes in the secondary school that spatially ‘fenced in’ the case (Merriam, 1998: 27) and determined what was to be studied, or in Miles and Huberman’s words ‘the edge’ of the case (1994: 25).

Temporally, two consecutive school terms bounded the case; the first taking place from January to June 2014 and the other from August to December 2014. In the first school term the intent of the research project was largely interpretative. Thus, the objective of this part of the research project was to determine how inclusion and exclusion processes manifest themselves in secondary PE classes. Moreover, based in how students’ described and made sense of their own and others’ position in PE, the
thesis aimed to develop a typology of students’ participation and non-participation in PE. This first part of the research project served as the knowledge base on which a new PE curriculum model was developed.

The curriculum model was implemented in the second school term in which the intent of the research project was largely evaluative. The curriculum model might be perceived of as an intervention, however, as this term can suggest the use of randomized controlled trials, I prefer to perceive the curriculum model as an embedded unit of analysis. The expression is derived from Yin (2014), according to whom an embedded case study involves units of analysis at more than one level. At the highest level, the unit of analysis in this thesis are inclusion and exclusion processes. However, as these are evaluated on the basis of a changing PE curriculum model, the PE curriculum model might be perceived of as a second level of analysis (see figure 2).

![Figure 2: Case study research design with an embedded unit of analysis [adapted from Yin (2014)]](image)

This second level of analysis, I argue, further enhances the insights of the single case. However, as stressed by Yin (2014), a major pitfall in analysing embedded units of
analysis occurs when one fails to return to the larger unit of analysis. What would happen then is, that the original unit of analysis (inclusion and exclusion processes) becomes the context and not the target of the study (Yin, 2014: 55). To avoid this, I evaluated the curriculum approach at the level of the original case; that is in relation to how it interacted with inclusion and exclusion processes in the secondary PE classes.

4.1.1 Choosing the Case

Following Bent Flyvbjerg’s (2006) argumentation, a representative case might have been the most appropriate strategy, if the aim had been to describe how frequently students’ took up a position of non-participation or how many students’ took up a position of non-participation in PE (2006). However, giving both the interpretative and the ‘action-oriented’ perspectives of the thesis, an unusual or an extreme case in which the studied phenomenon is particularly prevalent would seem to offer the richest information (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 229). According to Flyvbjerg (2006:229) in extreme cases one can expect more actors and more basic mechanisms to be activated. Therefore, to extend current understandings of and solutions to students’ non-participation in PE, my intention was to choose an extreme case; a case in which the exclusion processes was unusually strong.

Based on this selection criterion, I ended up with a co-educated, public school situated in a medium-sized city in Denmark. Just like other Danish public schools, the selected school enrolled students from 6 to 15 years of age. These students were divided into pre-preparatory classes: 0–3rd grades, intermediate stage: 4–6th grades, and lower secondary school: 7–9th grades. The focus of the research project was the 6th – 8th grades (as the thesis was conducted over two school years, in the second part of the research project these classes are designated 7th-9th grade). At each grade, two PE teachers; one female and one male, taught the PE classes. These teachers had between 4 and 25 years of teaching experience.

The lower secondary school was notable in two respects: The large number of students from socially deprived backgrounds and the relatively high percentage of students who belonged to an ethnic minority group (approximately 40%). The ethnic minority students originated from Turkey, Somalia, Iraq, Morocco, Iran, Albania, the
Philippines, Serbia and Syria, as well as Denmark. As it is known from earlier research that non-participation in sport and PE is especially prevalent among girls, teenagers, ethnic minority students and students from socially deprived neighbourhoods (for a review of the literature on youths’ participation and social inclusion in sport and PE, see, Dagkas and Armour, 2012; Green, 2008; Stidder and Hayes, 2015b), the expectation was that there would be a particularly high level of non-participation among students in the secondary PE classes in this specific case school.

Gradually, however, I realized that although a lot of students did not participate in PE, the exclusion processes based on gender and ethnicity, were not correspondingly strong. Thus, although according to existing theory the case was ‘most likely’ to exhibit social exclusion, when working with a very compound group some of the more traditional characteristics of exclusion processes seemed to disappear to a certain extent.

In regard to the second part of the research project, in which the implementation of the new curriculum model was expected to encourage more students to participate in PE, the case is best considered as a critical case; a critical case in the manner that it was ‘least likely’ to exhibit social inclusion (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Based on the rationale of Flyvbjerg (2006), a ‘least likely case’ offers the possibility of a critical examination of the potentials and barriers of students’ participation and non-participation in PE. The argumentation is, that if the curriculum model succeeds in developing students’ inclusion at the research project case school, it probably also will succeed to do so in PE elsewhere.

4.1.2 The Curriculum Change

The curriculum model developed and empirically explored in part 2 of the research project implied two major changes. First, it was intended to change the performance-oriented motivational climate, found to characterize the secondary PE classes studied, to a mastery-oriented motivational climate. Whereas, a performance climate is characterized by an emphasis on winning and comparison with others, a mastery climate is characterized by an emphasis on learning and development of skills, a focus on self-improvement and reward for persistence and effort (Ames 1992). As both the
content and the delivery of the PE curriculum might be critical for fostering students’ on-going participation (Welsman & Armstrong, 2000) in addition to changing the motivational climate, we intended to reflect a distinctly new orientation in the units of lessons; an orientation toward the educational aspects of PE.

To promote a mastery climate in PE, the TARGET approach was applied (Ames, 1992). TARGET is the abbreviation of the words Task, Authority, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation and Time, which describe the main element in the model. As a particular strength, the TARGET approach both takes into account the structural and behavioural characteristics that may be developed through the organization of PE classes and through the behaviour of the teacher. Thus, while lesson plans were designed in line with the structural, content-based TARGET elements - Task, Authority, Grouping and Time - an external teacher was instructed in the two teaching-behaviour elements; Evaluation and Recognition. An outline for the teaching of a PE class based on the TARGET-approach can be found in (Agergaard et al. 2017).

In relation to the content of PE, the main changes to the curriculum were closely related to the social learning theory underlying this thesis. Thus,

- the curriculum was thematically oriented rather than activity-based; that is, the focus in PE was not defined in terms of specific activities or sports, but in terms of themes (‘Motivation and the joy of movement’ and ‘Sport in society’). Moreover, the units extended to periods of 6-8 weeks, which were longer than the usual length of a unit prior to the curriculum change.

- greater emphasis was given to making connection between students’ prior knowledge and new knowledge and experiences. In particular, connections to prior lessons and to prior units of work as well as to learning in other school subjects were articulated by the teacher in the introduction to each lesson and/or in the process of joint evaluation at the end of each lesson.

- in order to recognize the interdependent nature of student learning and to encourage student leadership and responsibility, more time was spent on group work. The greater use of group work also served to encourage a shift away from teaching pre-defined knowledge, skills and understanding towards a
notion of the teacher as a facilitator and the students as creators of learning.

4.2 Methods

As highlighted by Merriam (1998) unlike most other research methodologies a ‘case study does not claim any particular methods for data production or data analysis’ p.28). Following my research questions and my interest in gaining insights into students’ perspectives and sense making, I turned to qualitative methods. In particular I decided to base this thesis on observations of the PE classes, on individual interviews with the PE teachers and on focus group interviews with the students as the main methods. In the following, I discuss my considerations regarding the choice of these methods and argue for why, when and how these methods were employed in the research process.

*Figure 3: Overview of the research and the data production process*
4.2.1 Observations

Doing observations provided me with an important account of the processes whereby students came to take up or be ascribed to positions of participation or non-participation. To understand these processes, I needed to observe the ways in which students interacted with each other and the ways in which they related to each other, the teachers and the practices and values of PE. As such my observations were crucial in understanding the PE context as well as in adding new dimensions to my understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes.

Also, the observations were important in regard to the interviews conducted in the research project. So specific incidents, reactions and behaviours were used as reference points for discussions with students and teachers. Finally, for students who were not able or willing to talk about their experiences and to discuss their position of participation and non-participation in PE, I had to rely on the analysis of observations and on other students’ accounts. In fact, in several circumstances, students’ actions in PE as well as in the interviews came to be as least as significant as their words in order for me to understand their ways of making sense of their own and others positions in PE (cf. article 2).

The observations took place during one calendar year. During the first six months, I observed all PE lessons in the 7th, the 8th and the 9th grades. During these first six months, my observations amounted to a total 42 PE lessons each lasting 90 minutes. In the last six months of the research project, I only observed the 7th grade class and the 9th grade class, which were taught according to the new PE curriculum model. During these last six months, the number of observations amounted to a total of 26 lessons each lasting 100 minutes. Throughout the research project, I typically showed up in the gym or the hallway 10-15 min prior to the PE lesson and left the school 10-20 minutes after the PE lesson had finished. Ethical concerns meant that I chose not to attend the changing facilities.

During my observations, I jotted down notes. Just after the lesson, I used these notes to record in detail what I had observed. The recording of my observations typically took me 2-3 hours. So, they also included my reflections on the research process and commentaries about my hunches, initial interpretations and working hypotheses.
During the data generation process, I gradually became better to reconcile the substance of an activity, an act or a conversation from only a few keywords or a drawing. When I put aside my notebook, I seemed to attract less attention from students; they seemed to talk more freely with each other and to be less concerned with what they did or did not do.

**The Observer**

The stance I assumed while gathering data as an observer developed during the 12 months in which the observations took place. In all phases, the observations were guided by my research questions. However, in the first few weeks I preferred to keep my observations open and un-structured in order to allow my focus to emerge and develop. As argued by LeCompte and Preissle (2003: 200) what to observe depends on ‘the data that begin to emerge as the participant observer interacts in the daily flow of event and activities, and the intuitive reactions and hunches that participant observers experience as all these factors come together’.

It was during these first interactions that I slowly became aware that while some students were, in a traditional sense, excluded from PE others chose to exclude themselves from participation in PE (article 1). Crucial to this insight, was my determination not to ‘perpetuate the very stereotypes’, that I wished ‘to eradicate’ (Hall, 1996: 7). I was not blind to, but tried to look beyond categories of gender, skill level and ethnicity. In particular I focused on the variety in students’ participation and non-participation, on students’ interactions with each other, their bodily expressions and behaviours and their negotiations of norms and rules and on what did not happen (Patton, 1990: 235).

Another aspect that developed during the time of my observations was my relation to the students. Tracing my movement on the continuum of participation and observer, in the first six months of the observations, my role might be described as ‘observer as participant’ in Gold’s (1958) classical spectrum of possible stances. Thus, I took up a rather passive observer-role in which participation was definitely secondary to my role of information gatherer (Merriam, 1998: 101). As such I mostly placed myself outside the activities of the class and only seldom sought to become involved in students’ group work.
My choice to take up this position of observation was partly due to my concerns regarding the establishment of a rapport with students and teachers and the establishment of familiarity with the PE setting (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). With the benefit of hindsight, more influential was perhaps my positivistic research background in sport science education. In traditional models of research, the ideal is to be as objective and detached as possible so as not to contaminate the study (Merriam, 1998: 103). This ideal was reflected in my distress at the thought of my presence affecting the ‘natural setting’ and so the social processes, I wanted to study. Therefore, what seemed most logical to me was to stay as passive as possible and to attract as little attention to myself as possible. Thus, it took me some while to feel at ease with the subjectivity involved in qualitative research as well as to acknowledge how more direct interaction with students’ added value to the observations and indeed, was necessary for me in order to answer the research questions.

Following this insight, in the following six months of the observations, I gradually went from describing my role in terms like ‘neutral’ or ‘non-participating’, to defining my role more in terms of interaction and participation and so taking up a position closer to the ‘participant as observer’ (Gold, 1958). From primarily positioning myself along the walls or at a distance from the activities, in order not to ‘disturb’ the teaching, I now positioned myself much closer to where things happened. I joined in with activities, I moved around the gym and in between students. In students’ group work, I took part in students’ discussions, shared my opinions and gave assistance. However, in order to get closer to students’ ways of making sense, I also critically questioned their behaviours and their ways of participating (or not) in PE.

Throughout the research process I tried to identify, negotiate and balance my character somewhere in between the character of a student, a friend, a teacher and a researcher; that is in a space somewhere between an adult figure of authority and the students themselves (Greene and Hogan, 2005: 11). Although I aimed to approach the perspective of students, I do not think that full participation was either possible or desirable. First; it is difficult as an adult to blend in with children or youth (Højlund and Gulløv, 2015). Second; students might find such an effort intrusive, and third; I found it hard to reconcile certain aspects of this character with my responsibility toward the teachers, who had allowed my entry. Thus, I did not feel comfortable
partaking in students’ activities that were unsanctioned by teachers as for instance students’ non-participation or misbehaviours. At the same time, I did not find it appropriate to be associated with a teacher. In particular, it was necessary that students felt confident that what they told me would not have any consequences for them.

Taking into account all these considerations, I ended up identifying myself and being identified by students as an adult ally. I say ally rather than friend, because as their ally I was involved with the students, but could remain emotionally detached. I was allowed to ask students critical questions, but they were not under pressure to answer me or change their behaviours. Most importantly, however, as their ally students could be sure that I would not ‘rat on them’ (for example to their teachers or parents). For instance, students felt confident to tell me that they had faked an absence authorization, or had not upheld their teachers’ rules and instructions, when I was present, but their PE teachers were not.

Often my informal conversations with students took place in situations in which students had placed themselves outside the activities of the class, that is, on benches or mats along the wall and in the locker room or other rooms nearby the gym. Many of these conversations provided me with useful insights into students’ reactions, behaviours and ways of making sense of PE, however, they often involved a tightrope walk between the interest of students and teachers on the one side and the interests of the thesis on the other. For instance, I found it ethically problematic that some students gradually came to prefer talking with me rather than participating in PE and as such that my presence in PE indirectly could serve as a hindrance to the students’ participation or at least as a facilitator of students’ non-participation.

4.2.2 Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interactions reveal not only shared ways of talking but also shared experiences, and shared ways of making sense of these experiences. The researcher is offered an insight into the commonly held assumptions, concepts and meanings that constitute and inform participants’ talk about their experiences (Wilkinson, 1998a: 335)

Focus groups are increasingly used in research with children as group interviews are
believed to create a safe peer environment (Davies, 2001; Morgan et al. 2002). Moreover, focus groups have been shown to be an effective way to obtain a diverse range of information and perspectives from participants (Morgan, 1997). As opposed to a group interview in which the interviewer asks questions of each group participant, in focus groups, the moderator encourages group members to interact with each other (Wilkinson, 2013). As such the interaction between group members is often described as the ‘hallmark’ of focus group research (Morgan, 1997: 2). Likewise, it is participants’ interactions with each other that distinguish the focus group from an individual interview.

My decision to use focus group interviews rather than individual or group interviews was based on two premises. First, I needed a method that could provide access to students’ own concepts and perceptions of participation and non-participation in PE. Second, in order to develop a social-relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, I needed to comprehend how students’ opinions and beliefs about PE, were advanced, elaborated and negotiated in a social context (Wilkinson, 1998b). That is to reach an understanding of the ‘why’ behind students’ attitudes and behaviours (Massey, 2010: 22).

In relation to the first premise, one appealing aspect of focus groups often pointed to by researchers (see, for example, Wilkinson, 1998c; Wilkinson, 1999), is that focus group are helpful when one attempts to diminish the effects of adult power (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). In particular the use of focus groups tends to augment engagement with students’ own concerns and agendas, and as such may generate new and perhaps unexpected findings (Wilkinson, 1998b: 190). In relation to the latter premise, my interest arises from the fact that focus groups rely on the social dynamics between participants (Morgan, 1997). From my social-relational standpoint, beliefs, ideas and opinions are not generated by individuals in isolation, but rather, are collectively produced in interactions in specific social contexts; a point also raised by Wilkinson (1998b) in relation to researchers working within a social constructionist framework.

The crucial component of interaction is also contained in Morgan’s definition of focus groups as: ‘…a research technique that collects data through group interactions on a topic determined by the researcher’ (1996: 130). As such Morgan (1996) describes the interaction in the group as a specific source of data. As focus groups allow collection
of data both from the individual and from the individual as part of a group (Massey, 2010: 21), this interview approach offers the researcher an opportunity to explore how views are ‘constructed, expressed, defended and (sometimes) modified’ by students during the course of conversations and as such to observe the process of ‘collective sense-making’ (Wilkinson, 1998a: 186). As succinctly expressed by Morgan (1996: 139), the real strength of focus groups is not simply what participants have to say, but providing insights into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations.

In practice, I carried out six focus group interviews by the end of the first part of the observations and six focus group interviews by the end of the second part of the observations. Whereas in the first six interviews, groups consisted of 6-9 students, in the last six interviews, groups consisted of 4-6 students. My decision to use smaller groups in the second round of interviews was based on my desire to find a balance between the breadth and depth of data (Morgan, 1996). Whereas in the first round of interviews my primary interest was in obtaining a wide range of potential responses, in the second round, I aspired to give each participant more time to discuss her/his views and experiences in regard to the curriculum change in which they had become highly involved (Morgan, 1996). In addition, based on my experiences from the first round of interviews, in groups larger than six students, it was difficult to include all students in conversations and discussions, in particular students who were quiet.

Discussion Guide and Moderator Involvement

All interviews took place in a meeting room at the school. In all interviews, I served as both the interviewer and the moderator. In order to provide feedback on my interviewer and moderator role, in the first interviews, my supervisor was also present. Besides this immediate feed-back, my supervisor and I have returned to these interviews on several later occasions in order to discuss general and more specific issues pertaining to students’ behaviours, interactions and attitudes. As such these interviews have played an important part in enhancing the validity of my findings.

At the outset of the focus group, all students were given ‘child-friendly’ information about the purpose of the group discussion, their right to leave the interview whenever they wanted and the procedures for confidentiality (Hennessy and Heary, 2005). In relation to the latter, I requested students not to disclose group discussion to their
classmates and in particular not to identify what any individual student had said. I also told students that these same rules of disclosure applied to me. Then I explained to students the format of the group discussion; that the aim was to understand their experiences and perspectives, and that they should respect others’ comments.

The focus group interviews were structured around a discussion guide. To foster conversation and interactions and to avoid transferring my own preconceived notions of students’ participation and non-participation in PE, I introduced each topic with an open question (Krueger and Casey, 2015). In addition, I generally allowed discussions to flow with the direction of students’ answers.

As students knew one another well, their social relationships with each other significantly influenced their interactions within the context of the interview (Hennessy and Heary, 2005). So they clearly brought with them their peer group reputation and status (Davies, 1982). Likewise, students also brought with them their personal dispositions (Hennessy and Heary, 2005); some being skilful communicators others preferring to keep silent and to let others speak. Therefore, as aptly described by social scientist and professor of children and families studies Malcolm Hill, each focus group interview was ‘a mixture of contextual and personal influences, some assisting rapport and the exchange of ideas, some impeding it’ (Hill, 2005: 73).

In addition to the power dynamics between students, the institutional context of the school also turned out to influence the nature of students’ interactions and to limit discussions in the group. So my efforts to engage students in discussions, was thwarted by their expectations around traditional classroom norms. For instance students typically waited before answering and so, expecting me to manage the discussion. Likewise, students appeared quite reluctant to question or to challenge the voiced utterances and opinions of their classmates.

Being aware of these limitations, in the second round of interviews, I included more informal, interactive and creative activities in the focus groups to engage students in conversations with each other. Besides stimulating discussion, these activities also encouraged the interest and engagement of the socially less powerful and/or verbally less articulate students. Moreover, being aware of students’ collective knowledge, in the second round of interviews, I raised a number of critical questions that related to
specific examples of participation and non-participation noted during my observations.

All focus groups lasted between 60-90 minutes including a pause. Just after each interviews I made records about students’ interactions and the group dynamics noted during the interview. I transcribed the first few interviews myself, however I hired an external transcriber for the remaining interviews. The transcriber was familiar with the terminology of PE and briefed about the transcription guide. In order to correct errors and to fill in my own notes about students’ interaction, I read through all transcripts while listening to the interviews. Moreover, to keep the intimate familiarity with my data, I listened to the interviews several times (Merriam, 1998).

*The Inclusion Diagram*

As noted earlier, inclusion and exclusion are concepts with different connotations that do not necessarily make sense to all students. Therefore, when planning my focus group interviews, I spent some time working out how to couch discussions in a language that was familiar to students and which did not just elicit students’ reactions to my own preconceived notions of participation and non-participation in PE (Merriam, 1998). As such, what I wanted to avoid was to simply reify children by transposing on them my own, adult interpretive framework.

While considering and searching for methods to elicit students’ experiences and ways of participating in PE, I became inspired by studies that had successfully incorporated alternative activities to elicit students’ responses. In particular, visual and kinaesthetic methods have been demonstrated to be useful in research with children through assisting on the reflections of complex issues’ (Horgan, 2017: 253). Furthermore, I became inspired by Grimminger’s use of sociograms as a quantitative measure of students’ sociometric positions in the class (Grimminger, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

This work encouraged me to develop an inclusion diagram that could also encompass my use of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s theoretical framework, and the idea that there are multiple, varied and more or less engaged ways of participating in a community, in relation to PE. The inclusion diagram had four circles that indicated different levels of participation, with the central circle indicating a high degree of involvement in PE and the outer circles indicating more peripheral engagement.
Despite, or possibly because of, the simplicity of the inclusion diagram, the diagram came to serve a significant role in the thesis. The students easily understood the diagram and it triggered several interesting discussions and as such provided for significant insights into students’ perceptions. The significance of the diagram is reflected in the fact that data obtained in discussions initiated by and/or centred on the inclusion diagram feature in all of the three articles included in the thesis.

Methodologically, the diagram served three purposes: First to learn about typical positions of participation and how these positions were categorized and talked about by students, second to inquire into students’ experiences of their own and other students’ participation and non-participation in PE and third, to understand students’ experiences of the curriculum change.

Epistemologically, the justification for including the diagram was multifaceted. First and foremost the diagram made it easier to involve students who found it challenging to express their opinions verbally. This both applied to shy students and to students for whom Danish was not their native language. Thus, avoiding traditional question-answer formats has been shown to foster and support multiple forms of expression and so to support the communicative styles that those children who inhabit different ethnicity, gender and class position may have (Hill, 2005). Moreover, involving students in filling in and completing the diagram and thus, providing an activity that was less structured by the knowledge of the researcher, students became co-creators rather than simply sources of data (Punch, 2002).

4.2.3 Teacher Interviews

In addition to the focus group interviews, I made 5 individual interviews with relevant PE teacher (2 females and 3 males) in part 1. The aim of these interviews was to gain insight into the teachers’ interpretations of processes of inclusion and exclusion and to collect knowledge about the ways the teachers structure the values and practices of PE.

All individual interviews took place approximately three months into the period of observations. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by myself. As only a minor amount of this data material has been analysed and included in my articles (see article 1), I do not further describe this material in this thesis.
4.3 Strategies for Analysis

At all levels of the system what people think they are doing, what they say they are doing, what they appear to other to be doing, and what in fact they are doing may be sources of considerable discrepancy. Any research, which threatens to reveal these discrepancies, threatens to create dissonance both personal and political (MacDonald and Walker, 1977: 186).

In addition to observations and transcripts, my research diary also contained descriptions of the informal conversations I had with students and notes on my thoughts, preliminary (and sometimes, contradictory) analysis and reflections concerning the process of collecting/producing material. These notes all informed how I analysed my data and they provided important material to expand on themes that emerged from the analysis.

In addition, how I approached my data to a large extent also depended on embodied and non-cerebral experiences and knowledge. As aptly described by Okely (1994: 21), an anthropologist doing ethnographic research, this kind of knowledge production ‘is recorded in memory, body and all the senses’. Okely (1994: 21) further suggests that ideas and themes ‘have gestated in dreams and the subconscious in both sleep and in waking hours, away from the field, at the anthropologist’s desk, in libraries and in dialogue with the people on return visits’. This was also how my ideas and themes, consciously and unconsciously, developed throughout the research process and so moved my analyses in certain directions. So, the analysis of the material was an iterative process that evolved through moving back and forth between my observations, my interview transcripts and my thoughts and interpretations previously written down in my research diary. Likewise, in order to make sense of data, I constantly moved back and forth between pre-established theoretical frameworks and the conceptual frame that gradually developed during the analysis process.

The most intense period of analysis took place in two stages; at the end of the first school term when the curriculum change was being developed and I was writing article 1, and at the end of the second school term when I was planning and writing articles 2 and 3. In regard to the first stage, I was mainly inspired by thematic analysis
(Guest et al. 2012; se also Krueger 1994). In the process of synthesizing, summarizing and extending themes (Guest et al. 2012), I made use of Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis programme. However, in order to familiarize myself with the data, I also worked more directly with the transcripts and the notes by for instance colour-coding, ‘cutting and pasting’ units from the transcripts into files representing emerging themes, and by building preliminary models.

In regard to the second stage of analysis, and in particular for preparing article 3, I worked more intensively with analysing the informational and in particular relational intentions of students’ communication in the focus group interviews conducted by the end of the curriculum change (Tammivaara & Enright, 1996: 219). Whereas the informational intentions refer to what students communicate, the relational intentions refer to ‘how the information is understood within the relational context of the interactions’ (Dunn, 2005, quoted in Freeman and Mathison, 2009: 93). As argued by Wilkinson (1998b), although participants’ interaction is definitional to focus groups, the considerable potential for analyses of interactions offered by focus groups is seldom realized. This might be a reflection of the relative lack of detail regarding techniques for analysis and interpretation of focus group material (Massey, 2010).

Therefore, when organizing and systematizing my focus group analysis, I was inspired by Oliver Tom Massey; an associate professor in Child and Family Studies. In his article from 2010, he describes a qualitative data analytic model, which acknowledges the focus group method for its specific capacity ‘to uncover the unique experiential data that determines the complexity of social situations’ (Massey, 2010: 25). Moreover, the model is offered as a means to increase the specificity of the data analysis process and so to make the chain of evidence more transparent to readers (Massey 2010). In his model, Massey distinguishes between three levels of data each offering different kinds of insights regarding individual and group experiences; the articulated, the attributional and the emergent data.

Massey defines articulated data as the data offered by participants in direct response to and addressing the questions and the probes posed by the moderator. However, there are also occasions were questions do not allow for direct requests for information or at least occasions where direct questions are not likely to offer informational responses (Massey, 2010: 24). For instance, had I directly asked
students about experiences of being excluded in PE, probably conversations would have been restrained by their efforts not to expose themselves. Therefore, I obliquely addressed such experiences by couching questions in more general terms and so expecting that ‘the most critical issues, from the perspective of students, would ‘bubble up’ in the conversations’ (Massey, 2010: 24). As such, meaningful interpretations about students’ participation and non-participation in PE were also drawn from listening to how issues of inclusion and exclusion arose during other group discussions.

As such my analysis did also rely on what Massey describes at the second level of analysis; the *attributitional* data, which is described as the data, that emerge from hypothesis testing and from theory driven thematic coding (Massey 2010). Following from the label, when analysing this second level of data, the researcher must attribute the participants’ comments to her/his propositions, as it is from this attribution, that data gains relevance and value (Massey 2010). In regard to article 1 and 3, analysing the focus group interviews, I mostly relied on *articulated* and *attributitional* data. These data expanded my understanding of the way students interpreted and made sense of their experiences in PE, their views on different positions of participation and non-participation in PE and the meaning, relevance and importance they attributed to participating in PE.

Crucially, however, focus group interviews also offer a third level of data; the *emergent data*. This third level of data relates to ‘group meanings, processes, and norms that add new insights and generate new hypotheses and is the unanticipated product of comments and exchanges of group members’ (Massey, 2010: 25). As such the emergent data covers ‘more subtle themes of which participants and researcher may be only partly aware’ (Massey, 2010: 25). In the context of this thesis, these data included the unarticulated social norms underlying students’ behaviours and the dynamics of the group. Likewise, it included data emerging from students’ silences; that is, the attitudes, motivation and perspectives that remained unvoiced by students. As this third level of data proved crucial for understanding students’ reactions to the curriculum change and provided for important insights to the ways students ascribed meaning to PE, it became the main source of data on which, I based article 2.

An important point made by Massey (2010: 26) is that all layers of data may not
provide a ‘consistent single story’. Thus, as highlighted in the quotation opening this chapter, what students ‘think they are doing, what they say they are doing, what they appear to others to be doing, and what in fact they are doing’ (MacDonald and Walker, 1977: 186), are sources of considerable discrepancy. Thus, using different methods enriched the thesis by generating multiple entry points for answering the research questions, however, it also provided me with more ‘messy’ data.

Looking into the process of analysing the material, it took me a while to recognize that the contradictions within and between the students’ voices, as well as the conflicts between what was voiced by students and what I observed, were not just methodological deficits, rather, a methodological strength. When data coincided it offered me reassurance that my stories were consistent (Massey, 2010). However, it was in the process of analysing the data that diverged, that the new and most revealing stories about students’ participation and non-participation appeared.

Likewise, it took me a while to convince myself that the things the children said were not any truer than the truth told by any of the other materials. That it was indeed necessary to take a critical stance toward the children’s voices, to address the multiple layers contained within them and to escape the discourse telling us to believe in and surrender ourselves to the immediate truth told by students. At this stage, it took me some courage to allow the contradictions and inconsistencies contained within my material to enter the public sphere and so to defy the clarity and singularity of what is usually presented to the reader as children’s voices (Spyrou, 2016). However, it was not until then, that I really began to realize the quality and value of my material.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Following the school’s general procedures in regard to obtaining informed consent, prior to the research project all students were given child-friendly information about the thesis and informed that rejecting to participate would not have any consequences for their evaluation. Asked for their consent, all students accepted to participate. In the initiation of the research project, many students repeated questions about the purpose of the thesis and why I was there, however, no students showed or verbally expressed any reservations to the thesis or to me being present in their PE classes. Also, the students’ parents were informed about the research project via the school
intranet. In order to protect the students’ and the teachers’ anonymity, all identifying information have been removed and names replaced by pseudonyms. Moreover, in each article the pseudonyms are changed. Also, the name of the school is not mentioned anywhere.

In addition to considering the ethical principles of informed consent and anonymity, another important consideration lies with the risk of doing any harm to the students (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). In particular, deciding to gather students from different positions of participation in composing the focus group interviews, I was faced with some ethical considerations in relation to the students taking up a marginal or an outsider position in PE.

When selecting students for the interviews I consciously avoided to chose students on the basis of how I perceived them to be positioned in PE. It might be argued, however, that such an approach could lead to those students who have a lower participation in PE feeling exposed when discussing their position in front of students who show more active participation in PE. I also had to take care not to turn too much focus on personal feelings (these were discussed with individual students in informal one-to-one conversations during my observations). Had this been my main interest, focus group interviews would not have been my preferred choice or I would have composed the groups differently. In the focus group interviews carried out, questions were directed towards students’ shared experiences and beliefs in line with the social-relational perspective on students’ participation and non-participation. This approach had the advantage that there is reduced pressure on individuals to respond to every question (Hennesy and Heary, 2005).

Yet, gathering students of various positions in PE, one might worry that students taking up the more central position of participation would silence students taking up more peripheral positions. This worry was further enhanced by the fact that in the case of this thesis, many of the centrally positioned students in PE were also the socially most powerful students in the peer groups. Hence, although intended to enhance the input of students, the interactive nature of the focus groups, might also interfere with the ability for all children to find a voice (Tudge and Hogan, 2005).

That said, from an ethical perspective when analysing data from students of different
positions of participations, it became essential that I did not only take into account students’ voiced responses to articulated questions, but also the interplay between students, the dynamics of the group discussions and students’ unarticulated normative assumptions. In other words, I needed to address the complex, multidimensional and social nature of students’ voices in my analysis (Spyrou, 2011).
CHAPTER 5: Results

The results of the thesis are published in three papers. Paper 1 builds on the data material (observations, focus group interviews and individual teacher interviews) collected in the first part of the research project and has as its main focus inclusion and exclusion processes in PE prior to the curriculum change. Paper 2 and 3 both seek to understand students’ experiences of, reactions to and participation as well as non-participation in PE during the curriculum change. While paper 3 builds on the data material collected in the second part of the research project (observations and focus group interviews), paper 2 builds on observations throughout the whole research period and on the focus group interviews (in particular the inclusion diagram) conducted in the second part of the research project (see figure 4).

Paper 2 and 3 both contribute to answer the second of the two research questions guiding this thesis (How is the curriculum approach reflected in students’ positions of participation and non-participation in PE?). In regard to the first research question (How do inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE?) all three papers contained within this thesis make a contribution. Each having a different focus, the three papers add in different ways to the social-relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE pursued in this thesis. How the three articles each contribute to this understanding is the focus of the next section.

Figure 4: Overview of papers
5.1 Overview of Findings

In article 1 the main focus is on how *the relations between students and between the students and the traditions and values of practices held by the teachers in PE* shape inclusion and exclusion processes. In particular, attention is given to how these relations in some instances *impede* students’ participation in PE. Moreover, it is examined how social communities form around the groups of non-participating students in PE, and how these communities might *tempt* other students to choose not to participate in PE.

In article 2 special attention is given to how *already established peer group relations within and outside PE* also shape inclusion and exclusion processes. Thus, it is examined how the normative expectations negotiated within the peer groups and the pressures toward social conformity have a direct impact on the positions of non-participation intentionally taken up by some students in PE.

Article 3 attempts to interpret *the broad range of communities to which PE connects*, and to which *students relate* when they negotiate, construct and evaluate the meaning of and their (lack of) participation in PE. More specifically, it is analysed how changing the relation between PE, sport and school, shape students’ willingness and possibilities to participate and as such reconfigure inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

By focusing on the relations between the students in PE, the relations between the students and the traditions and values of practices held by the teachers in PE, as well as students’ peer group relations within and outside PE, and students’ relations to the broad range of communities to which PE connects, together the three articles provide a social relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

In the following three sections, I provide a summary of the key findings from each of the individual articles. Following these sections, the chapter is concluded with a discussion of the overall findings relating to the research questions of the thesis.
5.2 Summary of Article 1 (The Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Physical Education: A Social-relational Perspective)

Based on the conceptual tools of social learning originally developed in Lave and Wenger (1991) and further elaborated in Wenger (1998), in article 1 the significance of students’ social relations to inclusion and exclusion processes in PE is examined. Of relevance for inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, Wenger (1998) states that two conditions are critical for members of a community of practice to be considered as legitimate peripheral participants and therefore included in the learning processes within that community; that members are ascribed legitimacy by other members and that members experience the practices within the community as meaningful.

In the article, firstly, I examine the ways in which students gain legitimacy and are deprived of legitimacy in PE and secondly, which conditions matter for students to experience PE as meaningful. Moreover, I embrace these insights in the development of a typology of inclusion and exclusion in which four main forms of participation and non-participation in PE are distinguished.

Article 1 shows that students’ physical skills were neither a guarantee nor a prerequisite for the legitimacy students were ascribed. Rather, students’ social relations were significantly linked to the legitimacy they were ascribed or deprived in PE. As such, high skilled students with the ‘wrong’ social relations were as least as exposed to exclusion as the less skilled students. Likewise, some of the less skilled students avoided being excluded by virtue of their ‘right’ social relations. What article 1 also shows is that students’ experiences of legitimacy in PE are not only a result of how much legitimacy they are ascribed, but also of how much legitimacy they expect to be ascribed. Adding to the social-relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, sufficient legitimacy for students’ experiences of inclusion is thus not absolute but relative; it is based on a subjective experience and therefore cannot be judged solely on the basis of observations but also requires analysis of the meaning students attach to PE.

In addition to the students being excluded on the basis of their lack of legitimacy, apparent from the analyses was that several other students chose not to participate mainly because participation was not meaningful to them. For some of these students,
non-participation was an act of showing their non-identification with sport and physical activity. For other students, non-participation was a reaction toward the lack of access provided to students in regard to the development of the skills and the knowledge necessary for moving toward full participation. Moreover, many of the students did not experience any or only a limited transfer of learning between PE and other spheres of life; an issue also pointed to by others (see, for example, Ennis, 1996; Fernández-Balboa, 1997a, 1997b; Kirk and MacDonald, 1998; Murdoch and Whitehead, 2013; Penney and Chandler, 2000).

Stressing the social-relational dimension of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, article 1 illustrates that the meaningfulness and legitimacy that students believe they could achieve by participating in PE should be seen in relation to the meaningfulness and legitimacy students believe they could achieve by not participating. In particular, some of the students in this thesis were tempted by the possible legitimacy they could gain by uniting the group of non-participating students. Indeed, in some instances the non-participating students developed a kind of social community; a community in which access was conditioned on their non-participation in PE.

5.3 Summary of Article 2 (Listening to Students’ Silences – a Case Study Examining Students’ Participation and Non-participation in Physical Education)

Article 2 sets out to explore the meaning and the purpose of students’ silences, as these appeared in the data material. To this end PE is, I argue, a unique context in which to examine and critically reflect on silence in that to a large extent students express themselves through their bodies. Thus, the bodily dimensions of the subject make it possible to analyse students’ silences in relation to what they express through their physical behaviours and performances.

As the starting point for the analysis of students’ silences, I use the categorization of silences suggested by Lisa Mazzei (2003). With reference to her study on racial identity and awareness among white teachers, Mazzei (2003, 2007) has theorized and written extensively about silence as data. In particular, I devote my attention to students’ intentional silences. Moreover, I point to a sixth type of silence, which is not included in Mazzei’s typology of silence, non-privileged silences, which I identified in the data analysis process.
Closely listening to students’ intentional silences helped to clarify how students’ peer group relations influenced positions of participation or non-participation and in particular, what made some of the students choose to exclude themselves. During the implementation of the new curriculum model, a great resistance was observed among a minor group of the most dominant and socially respected students in the class. Also, this resistance had a significant influence on the position taken up by other students in the PE 7th grade class observed. Thus, although in the observations many of these students appeared physically and cognitively engaged in and preoccupied with the activities of the intervention, they were unquestionably also very aware to take note of how the socially most respected students comprehended the activities and to modify their involvement in accordance. As such it appeared that the fear of being socially sanctioned by the dominant and socially respected students in the class controlled and restrained some students’ participation during the curriculum change. Likewise, those same students appeared highly aware that what they voiced in the context of the focus group interviews, might be consequential for their peer group connections within PE and for their social reputation among peers outside PE. As such, what students expressed through their intentional silences was a need to fit in, to be socially accepted and to be part of the community gathered around the most socially respected students in the class.

As such the normative expectations negotiated within the peer group and the pressures toward social conformity had a direct impact on the positions of non-participation intentionally taken up by some of the socially less respected students in PE. What these insights reflect is that in some instances inclusion and exclusion processes in PE might have more to do with the already established peer group relations between students than with specific circumstances within PE; an insight that might be important for how future studies attempt to approach the problem of students’ non-participation in PE.

Also, other researchers have pointed to the significance of students’ peer group dynamics on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE (Grimminger, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Hills, 2007; O’Donovan, 2003). However, while these researchers find that the most dominant students in the class may limit or hinder the participation of other students, this thesis finds that the socially less respected students in PE may
themselves reject or resist participation in PE in order not to break the established norms, their reputation and acceptance among classmates and/or disturb the social hierarchy of the class.

The latter kind of silences recorded in the focus groups is based on the assertion that students ‘…can report on their motivations and emotions only to the extent that they are aware of them and only in the manner that they have come to interpret them’ (Greene and Hill, 2005: 6). Thus, what students’ non-privileged silences suggested was that a minor group of students were not aware of or had not recognized their non-privileged position as non-participants in PE and moreover, were unable to imagine that things could be different and to voice a desire for change. Although often assigned or taking up a very passive role, these students were never heard to complain or protest about their position in PE neither in the observations nor in the focus-group interviews. Moreover, turning to the curriculum change, many of them, were resistant to the attempts to encourage engagement in PE, and thus they did not seem to either recognize or appreciate the possibilities of change offered to them during the curriculum change. Rather, what seemed to matter more for these students were their social relationships and peer group connections to the more skilled, and often more socially respected students in the class, to show their affiliation with these and thus to keep up a more general sense of belonging.

What students’ non-privileged silences show is that some students might have learned that they are never going to become legitimate participants in PE. However, as this process of exclusion might have taken place over several years of schooling and in a way highly invisible to the student themselves (Sandford and Rich, 2006) it might be difficult to access by only listening to students’ voiced utterances.

In conclusion, article 2 shows that students’ peer group relations are critical facets of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. However, they are facets that might be difficult to access if we do not listen to, hear and attempt to understand students’ silences. As such, developing ‘methodologies of silence’ alongside ‘methodologies of voice’ might be a point of departure for further elucidating the social-relational aspects of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.
5.4 Summary of Article 3 (The Inclusive Potential and Challenges of Replacing a Performance-oriented with a Mastery-oriented Curriculum Model in Physical Education)

Article 3 looks at the replacement of the traditional performance-oriented multi-activity curriculum approach identified in article 1 with a mastery-oriented curriculum approach. The purpose of the article is to examine how this curriculum change shaped students’ willingness and possibilities to participate, and as such came to reconfigure inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

The processes whereby students came to make sense of the landscape of PE and their position in it lie at the core of the analysis. This process concentrate on the broad range of communities to which PE connects, and to which students relate when they negotiate, construct and evaluate the meaning of their participation in PE (or lack thereof).

Evident from the inclusion diagrams filled out by the students who participated in the focus group interviews were students’ highly diverse reactions to the curriculum change. In both of the classes the curriculum change significantly altered the way many students perceived their position in PE. However, whereas in the 9th grade class most students changed their position in the direction of increased participation, in the 7th grade class many students, and in particular many girls changed their position in the direction of increased non-participation. However, as discussed in article 2, there appeared some discrepancies between the observations and the indications on inclusion diagrams from students of the 7th grade class. These discrepancies, however, do not change the overall conclusion that while the curriculum change facilitated many students’ inclusion in PE, it also facilitated other students’ exclusion.

In the process of analysing the reasons why some students responded with increased participation and others with decreased participation, four interrelated themes emerged: 1. A decreased risk of being judged; 2. A changed regime of competence; 3. (Apprenticeship) learning in PE; and 4. The connection between PE, sport and school.

In regard to the first theme, among the students who moved in the direction of increased inclusion; in particular the 9th grade girls, the establishment of a mastery-
oriented motivational climate in connection with the provision of non-traditional team sports reinforced a perception that everybody was starting at the same level and hence, of nobody being better than anyone else. Together with a less competitive atmosphere amongst the physically skilled students, this made many of the 9th grade girls experience a decreased risk of being judged.

In regard to the second theme, the mastery-oriented curriculum programme appeared to change what was recognized as competence in PE. It was apparent from the focus group interviews with students that competence in PE was no longer to be defined only in relation to the practice of doing, but also in relation to the practice of thinking and knowing. Among the 9th grade students, who moved in the direction of increased inclusion, the changed regime of competence appeared to enhance their willingness to participate in PE. In particular, many of the 9th grade girls that used to make themselves invisible or in other ways escape participation in PE engaged more fully in the required coursework and even took up leadership positions, for example, designing and planning the adventure race and discussing, reflecting upon and evaluating the theoretical and practical dimensions of Quidditch. As least as significant, was the greater value other students assigned to these students.

In regard to the third theme, among the students who moved in the direction of increased participation, the emphasis given to (apprenticeship) learning appeared greatly appreciated and probably also did enable many of them to take up a more central position. For instance, the focus on developing students’ physical skills, and the knowledge and understanding necessary for successfully playing a game, might be an important explanation for the observation, that during the curriculum change, more of these students succeeded in playing a more active role in team ball games.

In regard to the fourth theme, in the mastery-oriented curriculum, efforts were made to reify the place of education in PE and hence, to establish a closer connection between PE and school. From understanding the value and meaning of PE in relation to the value and meaning of performance sport and/or recreation, this connection made many of the students, who moved in the direction of increased participation, to understand it in relation to the value and meaning of attending school; that is in relation to learning. As such the mastery-oriented curriculum programme appeared to significantly shape the way many of these students made sense of and drew meaning
from PE. Moreover, it appeared to be significant in the decision by many of the 9th grade girls to relocate themselves in the landscape of PE.

Paradoxically, the themes, that appeared to explain why some students, and in particular the 9th grade girls changed their position of participation into a position of non-participation during the curriculum change, were the exact same themes that appeared to explain why other students, and in particular some of the physically skilled 7th grade girls changed their position of participation into a position of non-participation.

Hence, among these physically skilled 7th grade girls the changed regime of competence appeared to result in an experience of incompetence. In addition, among these students the changed regime of competence appeared to be perceived as a potential threat to their social position in the class. Hence, whereas prior to the curriculum change PE represented a perfect arena for many of these students to display the superiority of their physical skills, the changed regime of competence forced them to find other ways to act out this superiority. Moreover, the physically skilled 7th grade girls seemed to have difficulties entering into relations of apprenticeship learning. In particular they appeared to have reservations about granting the legitimacy necessary for other students to move towards more active participation in PE, and were challenged when faced with reconciling their desire to perform with the intentions of apprenticeship learning. Finally, the attempt to use the mastery-oriented curriculum programme to change the connection between PE, sport and school appeared to make these students distance themselves from PE. First, this might be explained by their indignation toward the reification of school in PE. However, it might also be explained by many of these students’ interests being upheld by the connection of PE to the world of sport and its inherent social hierarchies. Notwithstanding, among the 7th grade students, generally, the teacher remained challenged to effectively mediate the interplay of education discourses with discourses of sport (Penney, 2013: 9)

The highly diverse experiences of and responses to the mastery-oriented curriculum programme seen in particular among the girls, stress the multi-dimensional character of students’ experiences in PE also pointed to by others (see, for example, Azzarito and Solomon, 2005; Kirk, 2002; Penney and Evans, 2002). Hence, in particular the
9th grade girls generally appeared more academically inclined than the 7th grade girls and to have less experience with organized leisure sport. In addition, more girls in the 9th grade than in the 7th grade had an ethnic minority background.

5.5 Discussion of Findings

In this section, I first discuss the methodological strengths and limitations of the study in regard to elucidating the social-relational, multidimensional and dynamic nature of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. In light of the theoretical and methodological approach utilized, I then consider the less significant manifestation of social categories found in this study as compared to other studies.

Further, I consider how the social-relational approach influenced the curriculum model developed to affect inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. Last, I discuss the methodological limitations pertaining to the evaluation of this model.

5.5.1 Demonstrating the Social-relational and Dynamic Nature of Inclusion and Exclusion Processes in PE

The findings in this thesis emphasize the significance of students’ social relations for how inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE, and hence the dynamic nature of such processes. In particular students’ social relations appeared significant for understanding how and why some students’ construct and sustain a position of exclusion in PE. Notably, this pathway toward exclusion has been left rather unexplored in research to date.

In the thesis I made us of a research design that was focused on a specific case in the shape of secondary PE classes in the bounded context of a school that were followed for one year. Moreover, a combination of observations and focus group interviews were utilized. I believe, that this specific research design and combination of methods were highly significant for the unique insights on the social relational, multidimensional and dynamic nature of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, provided in the thesis.

First, a 1-year data collection period is a longer time-span than in most other studies on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. In particular, the long-term perspective was beneficial, if not necessary, for understanding the significance of social relations
with respect to students’ participation as well as non-participation and hence, for making transparent students’ reasons for deliberately taking up a position of non-participation in PE. As least as important, the one year long fieldwork offered the possibility to track changes in students’ participation and non-participation over time, and thus to include an analysis of the temporality of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, and how this might be linked to the social complexity of these processes.

Also, the use of a combination of focus group and observations, I believe contributed to the revelation of the dynamic nature of students’ participation and non-participation in PE. Thus, even if my primary focus was on understanding students’ perspectives, the focus group interviews only provided a partial account. As in many instances students’ actions spoke louder than their voice, indeed, the observational data contributed with insights that would not have appeared otherwise (MacDonald and Walker, 1977). Thus, supplementing the focus group interviews with observational data did not merely duplicate data. In line with Darbyshire et al. (2005: 417) who have highlighted the benefit of the observational approach when working with children, I found that the method ‘offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access through reliance on a single method of data collection’.

From my perspective, another important dimension that illustrated the significance of students’ complex social relations to inclusion and exclusion processes in PE was the decision to gather students from different positions of participation and non-participation in the focus group interviews. Thus, while this composition tended to uphold the power relations between students and as such affected what was shared and not shared by students, I do not find this a methodological deficit. Rather, in this thesis, it became one of several keys to elucidate the social significance of students’ participation and non-participation in PE.

In regard to the methodological limitations of the study, a frequently encountered challenge to relational analysis is that of demarcating boundaries (Emirbayer, 1997). More specifically in regard to this study the challenge proved to be finding justification for the empirical boundaries drawn by the PE classes. As my study did not include observations of the students during break time, in their leisure sport activities or in their classroom teaching, the analyses of the students’ relations to and within these communities only drew on interviews with the students. Hence, although
I believe that significant insights into students’ social hierarchies and relations to wider communities of sport, recreation and exercise were provided in this study, future studies on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE might benefit from extending the empirical boundaries.

5.5.2 The (Lack of) Manifestation of Social Categories

The findings in this thesis, unlike many other studies, do not emphasize the importance of social categories such as gender, ethnicity and ability to shape practice, although the thesis acknowledge these categories can be important.

One reason for the less significant manifestation of social categories found in this thesis might be the theoretical approach used in the study. Important to bear in mind, however, is the fact that the social-relational conceptualization of students’ participation and non-participation developed in part 1, did not emerge from preconceived and pre-existing categories but from data; that is from a process of abduction rather than deduction. The evolving framework developed in article 1 then directed the search for empirical data in part 2 in which the social-relational conceptualization of inclusion and exclusion processes was further expanded.

Another possibility is that the context-dependency of a case study might explain the less significant manifestation of social categories. In contrast to the majority of studies on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, which have been conducted in Australia and the UK, this thesis is located in a Nordic PE context. Most notably, the Nordic context represents a special case in the sense that a large proportion of students participate in sport in their leisure time (in Denmark, 81% of 13–15-year-old adolescents) (Laub & Pilgaard, 2013). Moreover, it was not until August 2014 that any assessment of students became mandatory in PE in Danish secondary schools. Although, we do not know if such differences influence the manifestation of social categories in PE, they suggest the need for comparative studies on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

Also, my biography as an adult, white, female researcher probably influenced the kind of data obtained and as such the knowledge produced in the thesis. In particular, I find that it might have been easier for me to empathize with the students who had an ethnic minority background, had we shared a common cultural biography.
A last possibility, however, might be that when working with a very specific group of students, as was the case in this thesis, the significance of differences in students’ ethnic affiliation, gender and social class to inclusion and exclusion processes disappear. Hence, the line drawn between minority and majority groups becomes more blurred.

5.5.3 Reconfiguring the Inclusion and Exclusion Processes in PE

I agree that social categories such as ethnicity and gender do matter a great deal in PE and that categorical research has had crucial implications in regard to reconfiguring inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. However, I also agree with Emirbayer (1997: 309) that categorical research might risk naturalizing rigid distinctions and as such suppress possibilities for creative transformations.

Thus, I find the social-relational approach taken in this thesis important in regard to reconfiguring the inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. Hence, the curriculum model developed in the thesis did not just seek to ‘repair’ the dominant models of PE but to re-orientate and re-structure the subject (Locke, 1992).

Although, the mastery-oriented curriculum approach showed great potential with respect to promoting experiences of meaningful participation in PE among students previously taking up a marginal position in PE, it also appeared to jeopardize the popularity of PE. As such this thesis supports Redelius and Larsson’s (2010: 700) speculation that to ensure the inclusion of all students, and in particular those students who are to benefit most from instruction in PE, PE teachers need to take far greater risks than they do today of not directly responding to and satisfying the expectations of those students who are engaged in organized sport.

Moreover, by including in the evaluation of the curriculum model those students who previously took up a central position of participation, this study points to some of the tremendous challenges of implementing a curriculum model that provides a meaningful framework for all students’ participation in PE, as each student comes with their own unique interests, histories and ways of ascribing meaning (Ennis, 2013: 115).
5.5.4 Methodological Limitations to the Evaluation of the Curriculum Model

A methodological aspect important to consider in relation to students’ experiences of the curriculum change, initiated in the study, is the case study research design. Hence, as a case study per definition takes place in a ‘real world context’, contrary to laboratory research there are things that you cannot control (Yin, 2014). This leaves open at least two important questions in regard to the evaluation and, hence, future implementation of the curriculum model.

First, simultaneous with initiation of the curriculum change, a new PE policy was introduced by the Danish government; one important implication being the introduction of assessment in secondary PE. As a critical aspect of pedagogical practice, it is widely acknowledged that assessments do have a fundamental bearing upon what knowledge and competences come to be valued (see, for example, Annersted and Larsson, 2010; DinanThompson and Penney, 2015). In the case of this thesis, the students’ awareness that they would at some point be assessed probably did encourage meaningful participation in PE by a few students (perhaps in particular in among the 9th grade students), while it discouraged the participation of others.

Second, to lead the PE sessions and initiate the curriculum change, it was decided to invite an external teacher to run the classes. Although the curriculum change showed promise with regard to the provision of inclusive PE, this decision, unquestionably raises the issue of how PE teachers may or may not respond to and negotiate such a curriculum change within the context of their schools. Repeating Wenger-Trayner’s words ‘we cannot assume teachers will implement our research simply because we have called it ‘evidence-based practice’ (Farnsworth et al., 2016: 158). Supporting this assumption, research examining the impact of attempted innovations has demonstrated that teachers are often resistant to change (see, for example, Larsson et al., 2016; Mordial-Moen and Green, 2014a; Sparkes, 1991a, 1991b) and that various education reforms and new curricula do not seem to have had a significant impact (see, for example, Annerstedt, 2010; Kirk, 2010; Penney, 2006).
Conclusion and Future Perspectives

This article-based PhD thesis provides detailed insights into students’ participation and non-participation in PE. Insights which can be used for the critical evaluation of existing PE curriculum approaches, as well as to the design of future initiatives, not only in the field of PE but also in related physical activity programmes.

By focusing on students’ participation relative to their legitimacy, their negotiation of meaning and the authenticity of their learning, this PhD thesis makes a significant contribution to the existing PE literature on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE as well as to applied PE curriculum research. Moreover, the thesis adds to methodological developments within the field of child voice research in PE by raising awareness of student silence.

More concretely, the thesis addresses two major gaps in the literature; firstly, although research has raised awareness of the complexities of difference and diversity within different groups of students, studies utilizing a social-relational approach as a means to avoid simplistic categorizations of students, are few and far between. Secondly, PE still has a long way to go in order to embrace the insights that research on students’ participation and non-participation has provided. Reflecting this general gap of research, only limited attention has been given to developing and examining curriculum models specifically designed to facilitate and support students’ meaningful participation in PE.

Utilizing a social-relational approach, the thesis offers a rethinking of how inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE. Hence, the social-relational perspective on students’ participation and non-participation developed in the thesis, and in particular the focus on student legitimacy and meaningfulness has at least three strengths: First, the thesis challenges the static binary of inclusion and exclusion processes (MacDonald et al. 2012). Thus, rather than simply differentiating between students who participate and students who do not participate, it focuses on the variety of positions taken up by students in PE under various curriculum models. As such it also acknowledges the dynamic nature of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. Second, the thesis acknowledges that not all students desire to become central participants in PE. More specifically, it provides for valuable insights into the ways in which
students resist participation and/or opt for non-participation as such expands prevailing notions of exclusion as something being done to students. Third, the thesis alerts attention on the way different dimensions combine together to generate or diminish exclusion. More specifically it illustrates the broad range of social contexts of school, sports and physical activity to which students relate when they negotiate and evaluate their participation and non-participation in PE.

Moreover, apparent from the thesis is that listening to student voice (and silence) is imperative if we are to create worthwhile and meaningful PE provisions. At least as important, however, the thesis also demonstrates that recognizing the problem of students’ non-participation is one thing, however, offering alternative curriculum construction that all students find relevant and valuable is another.

The curriculum model suggested in this thesis sought to challenge the narrow focus on performance and specific sports disciplines in PE. More specifically, the selected curriculum model was based on the premise, that a mastery oriented approach to PE emphasizing educational objectives would allow for other identities than only those of sport to be expressed, other values and interests than only those of performance to be acknowledged and other competences than only the physical to be recognized.

Apparent from my research is that this particular curriculum construction has the potential to transform the exclusion processes in PE. Yet, providing empirical evidence of students’ experiences of a curriculum change to an educational framework for learning in PE, this thesis shows that not only does the particular vision of what PE as a subject is essentially about, have implications for who are included but also for how we come to view and define what it means to be included.

At this point my research is highly pertinent to the new PE policy introduced by the Danish government in summer 2014, one and a half years into the thesis (Ministry of Education, 2014); a policy that in theory converges partly with the premises of the curriculum approach suggested in this thesis. First, the new PE policy states that in addition to students’ physical skills, the subject should engage with students’ cultural and relational learning. Second, the learning objectives described in the policy specifically relate to students’ skill development and to students’ knowledge production. Third, it stresses that teaching should be practice-oriented, and complemented by theory. However, as the policy has retained a specific focus on
more or less traditional sport ‘disciplines’, one might worry, that teachers will maintain current didactical and pedagogical approaches inappropriate for meaningful and inclusive PE provisions (Hansen, 2017).

This brings me to the conclusions in regard to the curriculum implementation process. My research shows that, although the content and organization of the curriculum do have the potential to significantly shape inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, initiating a new practice in PE is far from easy. By focusing on students’ experiences and the subjective meaning that those experiences hold, the thesis points to the fact that different students take different things from the ‘same’ experiences. Thus, not all students appreciated the changes initiated by the curriculum alterations. In particular, this was the case for those students who had extensive experience of organized sport and/or those students whose status among peers were upheld by the connection of PE to the world of sport and its inherent social hierarchies.

With the social-relational insights on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE provided in this thesis, I hope that my research will bring about understanding and in turn affect and perhaps improve practice not only in the context of PE but also in related contexts in which the goal is to promote inclusion in physical activity.
References


Davies B (1982) *Life in the classroom and playground: The accounts of primary*


Greene S and Hogan D (2005) Researching children’s experience: Methods and


London: SAGE, pp.61-86.


Penney D (2002a) Equality, equity and inclusion in physical education and school


Von Seelen J and Munk M (2012) Status på Idrætsfaget. Report, University College South Denmark, DK.


Articles
The Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Physical Education: A Social-Relational Perspective

Mette Munk 1,2,* and Sine Agergaard 1

1 Section of Sports Science, Department of Public Health, University of Aarhus, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark; E-Mails: mmj@ph.au.dk (M.M.), sa@ph.au.dk (S.A.)  
2 University College Syddanmark, 6100 Haderslev, Denmark

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 27 October 2014 | In Revised Form: 2 February 2015 | Accepted: 12 March 2015 | Published: 25 June 2015

Abstract

Existing research on inclusion and exclusion processes in physical education (PE) has particularly focused on exclusion from PE as something being done to students and attributed to specific social categories such as (female) gender, (low) physical skills or (minority) ethnic background. This article aims to develop a social-relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes defined as students’ participation or non-participation in PE interpreted as a community of practice. In so doing, the article examines how students’ experiences of participation and non-participation in PE are influenced by complex interactions within the group of students and in negotiations with teachers about the values and practices of PE. The article is based on an embedded single-case study carried out over the course of 6 months through weekly observations of PE classes in a multi-ethnic school, as well as focus group interviews with students and teachers. Using Etienne Wenger’s conceptual tools, we show that a student’s degree of participation in the community of practice of PE-classes is closely related to the legitimacy of the student and the extent to which the student experiences PE as meaningful. Some students were excluded from PE because they did not have the physical skills and social relations necessary to gain legitimacy from other students. Others chose not to participate because PE was not meaningful to them. This latter type of non-participation from students who experienced lacking meaningfulness was evident in PE classes that had little transfer value and limited prospect for students to develop the knowledge, skills or the understanding necessary to move towards full participation in the classes. Thus, the article argues that an understanding of the variety in students’ participation or non-participation is important not only in terms of how we talk about students as passive victims or active agents, but also in terms of future intervention aimed at promoting inclusion processes in PE.

Keywords

inclusion; exclusion; meaningfulness; legitimacy; legitimate peripheral participation; situated learning; physical education; sport

1. Introduction

For many years there have been indications that not all students experience inclusion in physical education (PE), both in Denmark (Munk & Von Seelen, 2012) and internationally (Dagkas & Armour, 2012; Penney, 2002; Stidder & Hayes, 2013). Our understanding of the processes promoting students’ experiences of being in-
cluded and/or excluded in PE remains limited. Two general focus points have prevailed in existing research on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. First of all inclusion and exclusion have primarily been conceptualised as something being done to students (MacDonald, Pang, Knez, Nelson, & McCuaig, 2012). Secondly, a categorical approach to the understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE has been adopted (Penney, 2002). The starting point for the majority of studies has been particular social categories used for the division of students, mostly by gender (with a focus on girls as the problem group); but studies have also referred to skills as the main dividing characteristic (with a focus on the so-called “less skilled” students) or ethnicity (with a focus on ethnic minority students). The categorical approach may be criticised firstly for overlooking important variation within the specific category of students (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002). The use of social categories gives the impression that individuals may be considered homogeneous groups based on common characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or skills (Penney & Evans, 2002). Griffin (1985) has already highlighted this while pointing out that traditional generalisations concerning the behaviour of girls and boys posed the risk of camouflaging other (and more important) differences not necessarily related to gender. The use of social categories induces a grouping and not least a uniforming of individuals that seem counterproductive to obtaining a more nuanced understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE (Penney, 2002). This has been expressed in the criticism of what Penney (2002) calls single-issue research, which is believed to provide a simplified representation of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE (Stidder & Hayes, 2013). The relations between students’ multiple identities (Penney, 2002) are reflected in interactions between students and in negotiations with teachers about the values and practices of PE classes. More knowledge about those interactions could thus contribute to a further understanding of the complexity of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE.

Our aim is to contribute to a social-relational perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. We define inclusion as those processes which promote students’ participation in the learning processes of PE and exclusion as those processes that promote students’ non-participation. The relational perspective leads us to pursue the question of how students’ experiences of participation and non-participation in PE are influenced by the complex interactions within the group of students and within the values and practices of PE.

The article is structured in six parts including this introduction. The following section is a review of how existing research has contributed to our understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. In the third section, we will outline Lave and Wenger’s (1991) social-relational learning theory as the basis for the subsequent identification of how students are being positioned or position themselves on the continuum of participation and non-participation in PE. In the fourth section, we will describe our methodological approach, while the fifth section will be concerned with analysis that shows how students’ participation or non-participation is influenced by their experiences of meaningfulness and legitimacy that develop in relationship to other students and to the values and practices in PE. The sixth section will serve as a concluding discussion, where prospects for future research will also be examined.

2. Previous Research

As already mentioned, we believe that a categorical perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes during PE lessons has prevailed in existing research. In categorical research, individuals are often grouped based on the single aspect that seems most influential in accounting for the main differences between them. These studies have been important in pointing to differences between groups, although not sufficient for accounting for the complexity within them and for identifying possible issues across traditional groups of students.

The vast majority of these studies have focused on the exclusion of girls in PE (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Several studies have shown that gendered practices and values have a negative effect on girls’ participation in PE and that boys’ control of the learning environment negatively affects girls’ experiences and learning (Evans, 1989; Evans, Lopez, Duncan, & Evans, 1985; Griffin, 1984; Scraton, 1993; Oliver, Hamzeh, & McCaughtry, 2009). Furthermore, recent studies have found that girls often find it incompatible to identify themselves as girls and “doers” of PE at the same time and therefore try to avoid participation in PE (Cockburn & Clark, 2002; With-Nielsen & Pfiester, 2011). A similar concern has been raised by O’Donovan (2003), reporting how some girls’ ability to benefit from educational experiences in PE is hampered by anxiety related to being socially accepted by peers.

In addition to gender, recent research, especially in England, has focused on the experiences of ethnic minorities in PE, and particular attention has been paid to the exclusion processes related to Muslim girls’ participation (or rather non-participation) in PE (Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2011; McGee & Hardman, 2012). Although Islam does not in general prohibit girls from participating in physical activity (McGee & Hardman, 2012), some Muslim girls do not participate in PE, since the practices and values of PE are not perceived to be compatible with their cultural traditions and beliefs, e.g. in relation to girls being together with boys for activities like dancing and swimming (Dagkas et al., 2011), in relation to being physically active during Ramadan (McGee & Hardman, 2012), and
in relation to wearing the PE kit (Dagkas & Benn, 2006).

Other studies have devoted some attention to students that by virtue of lacking physical skills are at risk of being excluded from PE. Quantitative studies suggest that these "less-skilled" students are excluded from both participation and learning (Corbin, 2002; van der Mars, 2006). This is supported by qualitative studies, which show that "less skilled" students are criticised and humiliated by their peers, especially during competitive ball games (Carlson, 1995; Grimminger, 2013; Portman, 1995a). Furthermore, some of these studies show how students apply different strategies to avoid such situations. This could be pretending to participate, putting themselves in positions where they avoid interaction with others during ball games or skipping their turn when in a queue (Carlson, 1995; Griffin, 1984, 1985; Portman, 1995a).

While these studies have contributed valuable findings regarding how differences between groups of students are reflected in PE, it is widely accepted today that the categorisation perspective cannot fully capture inclusion and exclusion processes (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002; Penney & Evans, 2002; Stidder & Hayes, 2013). Additionally, particularly within feminist research, an interest seems to have evolved in girls’ multiple identities, rather than membership of a single social category (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). An example of this is discussed by Knez, MacDonald and Abbott (2012) who point out the diversity within the group of Muslim girls attending PE classes in England. They question the misleading assumption that the cultural and religious beliefs that restrict some Muslim girls’ participation in PE are definitive and apply to all within this social category of ethnic minority students. Thereby, they also question the appropriateness of social categorisation. Another example is reported by Hills (2007), who shows how gender, ethnicity and ability interact in girls’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE classes in English secondary schools, and moreover how these experiences are influenced by the girls’ social status and which fellowship group they belong to outside PE classes.

In this article, we will pursue a social-relational perspective on processes of inclusion and exclusion by using the conceptual tools of situated learning originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Others have used this theoretical perspective to describe relations between students in PE and relations between PE and other forms of physical culture (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998; Kirk, 1999; Williams & Bedward, 2002). A recurring argument amongst these authors is that students are alienated from PE in its present form because learning in PE has not kept pace with developments in other areas of the physical culture in which students are involved outside the framework of the school. However, Wenger’s theoretical perspective, and particularly the significance of students’ feelings of alienation or not, have not yet been thoroughly empirically investigated. In particular, inclusion and exclusion processes in PE have not been empirically investigated in a Nordic context. The Nordic context represents a special case in the sense that a large proportion of students participate in sport in their leisure time (in Denmark, 81% of 13–15-year-old adolescents) (Laub & Pilgaard, 2013). Still, it is worth inquiring into (in this case Danish) students’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion processes in PE, since school sport and leisure sport are organisationally and educationally separated, being structured by voluntary coaches and professional teachers, respectively.

3. Theory

In this study the relational understanding of inclusion and exclusion processes is based on the theoretical framework and concepts developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger introduced the idea of situated learning; their work also outlined the concept of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, which was further developed by Wenger in 1998. Originally the concept was developed on the basis of five case studies on learning in apprenticeships. However, Lave and Wenger (1991), as well as others (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998), have suggested that the theory could also be beneficial in analysis of schooling, as well as other specific educational forms. This is consistent with our aim to examine how the theory could be applied to learning in PE classes.

In line with Kirk and MacDonald (1998), we understand a community of practice as “any collectivity or group who together contribute to shared or public practices in particular spheres of life” (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998, p. 380). The group of students and teachers in a PE class would be an example of a community of practice. These students and teachers are at the same time part of other communities of practice such as the school, sports clubs etc. To describe the class as a community of practice allows us to identify the social relationships, practices and values that shape students’ participation or non-participation within this community and to explore the community’s relationships to other overlapping communities of practice such as the broader context of school, leisure exercise and sports in which students also participate.

Legitimate peripheral participation describes engagement in a social practice that entails learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As stressed by Lave and Wenger (1991), the term legitimate peripheral participation does not imply that there is a centre or core of a community of practice. On the contrary peripherality is a way to acknowledge that there are “multiple, varied, more or less engaged and inclusive ways of being located in the field of participation defined by a community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36). With this perspective different levels of participation in PE do not only
derive from members facing structural limitations but also from students having different interests in PE, making diverse contributions to the activities of PE and holding varying viewpoints about PE. This is consistent with our aim of contributing to the development of a social-relational perspective on processes of inclusion and exclusion in PE, as experienced by students and taking the values and practices in PE into account.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), legitimate peripheral participation is a crucial condition for learning. Thus, Wenger (1998) defines four categories of participation; the insiders and the peripherals, both of which are characterised by legitimate peripheral participation; and the marginalised and outsiders, both of which are not characterised by legitimate peripheral participation. We can presume that these four categories could also be identified in the community of practice of a PE class, so the criteria for identifying the four types of participation in our empirical data could be deduced from Wenger’s description of the patterns of participation and non-participation typical for insiders, peripherals, the marginalised and outsiders. Thus, Insiders are the students who fully identify with the practices in PE; they are students who have a strong commitment to PE, who make an effort to achieve a good result and who have the greatest responsibilities. The peripherals also contribute to practices in PE, although they do not perform at the same level as the insiders, nor do they have the same level of responsibilities. Still, the peripherals’ experiences of participation are stronger than their experiences of non-participation. In contrast, the marginalised are identified by their non-participation rather than their participation; their contributions are very limited and it is hard for them to identify with practices in PE. Outsiders are characterised by full non-participation; they do not show up for PE classes or place themselves outside of the activities of the class e.g. on benches or mats along the walls or in rooms nearby the gym.

Of importance for the processes of inclusion and exclusion, Wenger (1998) states that two conditions are critical for members of a community of practice to be considered as legitimate peripheral participants and therefore included in the learning processes within that community. The first is that members are ascribed legitimacy by other members and the second is that members experience the activities within the community as meaningful. The focus in our analysis of students’ participation and non-participation in PE is firstly an identification of ways in which students gain legitimacy and are deprived of legitimacy in PE and secondly which conditions matter for students to experience PE as meaningful.

4. Method and Material

A case study was conducted to examine the complex relationships involved in students’ participation or non-participation in PE. The single case study was chosen because of its potential to cover a complex phenomenon through various methods, along with the options for bringing forward unknown relationships and variables leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 1981).

The case school was selected through purposive sampling “based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 1998, p. 48). The students in the school should represent a variety in gender, ethnicity and physical skills level as we know from earlier research that these are some of the variables that could affect the processes of inclusion and exclusion in PE. Furthermore, the school was selected on the basis of accessibility and geographic proximity. The case school is situated in a medium-sized city in Denmark. A majority of children are from the lower classes and a relatively high percentage of students have ethnic minority background (approximately 40%).

To enrich and validate the findings, multiple types of material were gathered through different research methods. This study is based on observations of PE classes in the 6th–8th grades (pupils aged 11–14) over a period of six months, as well as 6 focus group interviews with selected students from these classes and 5 individual interviews with the PE teachers responsible for the observed classes. The use of observations along with teacher and student interviews also served to triangulate data.

To be more specific, a total of 42 PE lessons, each lasting 90 minutes, were observed over a period of six months. In the 6th grade, 18 lessons were observed, in the 7th grade it was 13 lessons, while 11 lessons were spent with the 8th grade. The smaller number of observations in the 7th and 8th grades were a consequence of the school’s cancellation of lessons caused by holidays, school arrangements etc. All observations were made by the first author as a non-participant. The focus of the observations was the variety in students’ participation and non-participation, and special attention was given to relations between students, between students and teachers and between students and the content of PE. Short notes were taken during the lessons and the observations were further described as soon as possible after the end of the observed lesson. Throughout the six-month period, several “informal conversational interviews” (Patton, 1990) with teachers and students also took place before, during and after the PE classes. At first, the observer initiated the conversations with students, but gradually students approached the first author at their own initiative. The conversations were recorded as notes at the end of each informal conversation (Patton, 1990).

Approximately three months into the period of ob-
servations, the relevant teachers (2 females and 3 males) were interviewed individually. The aim of these interviews was to unfold the teachers’ interpretations of the processes of inclusion and exclusion and to collect knowledge about the ways teachers structure the values and practices of PE. At the end of the interview, teachers were asked to indicate their students’ levels of participation in a diagram, so that the most participatory students were placed closest to the inner circle and the least participatory students were placed furthest to the inner circle (see Figure 1). This was followed by questions inquiring into the teachers’ understandings of participation and non-participation in PE and the positions taken up by different students. The intention was not to have all students placed in the diagram, but to gain knowledge about typical positions of participation and how these positions were categorised and talked about by teachers.

In the last month of the observation, students were selected for focus group interviews. By this time, the observer had become familiar with the students and the students had gained trust in the observer; they initiated conversations, asked questions and seemed happy to share their experiences in PE. Two focus group interviews (each with 6–9 students) were conducted in each of the three PE classes and a total of 46 students were interviewed. On the basis of observations, students from each of the four categories of participation defined by Wenger (1998) were invited. It was intended that students that seemed to contribute considerably and be highly valued in PE, as well as students that seemed to contribute less and be less valued in PE were represented in each interview. Furthermore, students were selected to represent specific characteristics of each class observed in terms of ethnic origin, skill level and gender. As the composition of the focus group is important to facilitate an active and free-flowing discussion during the interview (Morgan, 1996), PE teachers reviewed the composition of each focus group to ensure that it would not interfere with the students’ will to talk freely. The composition of the focus groups tried to balance both the importance of homogeneity (Morgan, 1996) and heterogeneity (Krueger, 1994).

Students were informed about the aim of the interviews and procedures for confidentiality. Three of the 50 students invited did not want to participate in the interview, and one student did not attend school on the day of the interview. The aim of the focus group interviews was to inquire into students’ experiences of their own and other students’ participation and non-participation in PE. Thus, students were asked questions about what could encourage or discourage their participation (and non-participation). Furthermore, at the end of the interviews, each student was given a diagram (see Figure 1), and asked to position him or herself in the diagram, to indicate their level of participation. After having placed themselves, students were given a shared diagram and asked in confidence to position at least three of their classmates in each of the diagram’s circles as to gain further knowledge about typical positions of participation and non-participation and how these positions were categorised and talked about by students.

All interviews were conducted in a quiet room away from the gym to ensure participants felt comfortable. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were conducted by the first author, tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the analysis to follow, all students and teachers mentioned are anonymised and information about individual students and teachers is limited. Data were analysed throughout the research process using the principles of systematic combining (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), which has been described as an iterative process between the case, the empirical world, the framework and the theory or model being developed (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

5. Results and Analysis

In the process of analysing the forms of participation and non-participation identified through observations, interviews and diagrams we developed Figure 2. The model served as the starting point for further analysis of the dynamic interactions between students and the values and practices of PE that were influencing students’ participation and non-participation in PE.
In Figure 2, Wenger’s (1998) four positions of participation are located in relation to the degree of perceived legitimacy and meaningfulness. In the first field of the figure, students’ participation is characterised by both legitimacy and meaningfulness. Here the degree of perceived legitimacy and meaningfulness becomes the determining factor in students’ positioning as an insider or peripheral. In the second and third fields of the figure only one of the two conditions of inclusion is sufficiently met. What becomes crucial for students’ positioning as either peripheral or marginalised participants in the second field of the figure is the degree to which legitimacy is lacking and in the third field of the figure the degree to which meaningfulness is lacking. In the fourth field of the figure, neither of the two conditions is sufficiently met; what becomes crucial for students’ positioning as either a marginal participant or an outsider is the degree to which both legitimacy and meaningfulness is lacking.

In order to show the variations in students’ participation and non-participation in PE, the following analysis is structured on the basis of the four categories of participation in Figure 2. However, in practice the borders between categories are of course more fluid. The empirical examples represent practices and interactions repeatedly observed in the PE classes. Furthermore, the examples are chosen to reflect the values expressed by students and teachers in relation to students’ participation and non-participation in PE.

5.1. Field 1: Participation with Meaningfulness and Legitimacy

In many of our observations, the processes of inclusion and exclusion in PE classes unfolded in the relationships between students who, in the specific activity of PE, could be described as novices (or newcomers by Wenger (1998)) and masters. In these observations it became clear that the participant position of the novices largely depended on the legitimacy they could be ascribed by the masters. While the relationship between the skilled students (here the masters) and the less skilled students (here the novices) has often been described as exclusionary, this relationship could also encourage learning and provide a chance of making PE meaningful to the novice students in PE.

Today the students have been allowed to choose whether to play football or dodgeball. Eight boys and three girls, including Mary, Alice and Michelle, choose to play football. While all the boys play football in their leisure time, Mary, Alice and Michelle do not have any qualifications to the game. The teacher decides that a “girl-score” counts double. To take advantage of this rule, Steven asks Mary and Alice to go to the opponent’s goal and place themselves by each of their posts. For long periods of time, the game takes place around the opposite goal; however, Mary and Alice stay at the posts as they have been told. Alice says that it’s better to let the boys do the job themselves. Mary and Alice rarely receive the ball and when they do, it is by coincidence. The boys do not seem to see the girls. Sometimes the boys intercept the ball on its way to the girls and sometimes they take over the girls’ positions in the field. The same pattern applies to Michelle, who plays as a defend-
er/goalkeeper on the other team. Sometimes the ball randomly comes into Mary, Alice or Michelle’s possession and Alice actually manages to score a goal once. It results in loud praise from the boys. Generally the boys praise Mary, Alice and Michelle the few times they touch the ball. The atmosphere is intense, but nobody is yelling at each other if someone loses the ball or misses an obvious opportunity to score. If this happens the students quickly calm each other down. At some point Alice and Michelle indicate that they are thirsty. Typically, Mary and Alice would go and have a sip of water together. However, in this situation Alice asks Michelle to stay until she comes back, so the team does not need to do without both of them, while they are gone. (Notes from observation, 30 April 2014)

Mary and Michelle both participated in the subsequent focus group interviews. When asked about a good lesson in PE, a lesson that was meaningful to them and in which they learned something, they independently of each other described the lesson in which they played soccer with the boys.

Because of the boys’ technical and tactical skills and experience in football, they participated as the masters on the team. They direct and distribute the play, they take most responsibility and they contribute considerably to the way the game is developing (upper corner field 1, Figure 2). On the contrary, the girls’ lack of experience with and competence in football place them in the position of newcomers. According to Lave & Wenger (1991, p. 110) the tasks of newcomers “tend to be positioned at the ends of branches of work processes rather than in the middle of linked work segments”. In that sense, the participation of Mary, Alice and Michelle is enabled rather than restricted by their tasks being short and simple, the costs of their errors being small and their responsibility for the activity as a whole being little. As newcomers Mary, Alice and Michelle are highly dependent on the boys recognising them as legitimate members of the community of practice. The teams only consist of 5–6 players and so the girls’ contribution to the game becomes significant although limited. The teacher’s decision to double up a girl score further contributes to the legitimacy that the experts of the team acknowledge for Michelle, Mary and Alice because it raises the value of their contribution. Although the contribution of Mary, Michelle and Alice is limited, they themselves also seem to have a feeling that the role they have on the team is meaningful and valuable to the other players. This is, for example, reflected when Mary and Alice choose not to leave the game at the same time when they get thirsty and in the way all three of the girls talk seriously about the tasks they are given in the match. That Michelle, Alice and Mary are able to participate in a legitimately peripheral way (lower corner field 1, Figure 2) entails that they despite being newcomers have access to the mature practice of the experts (Wenger, 1998). So the newcomers’ authentic experience of being participants in a “real” football match together with masters, could in part explain the positive experience of learning expressed by Michelle and Mary in relation to the specific lesson described.

Despite Mary and Michelle’s expressed experience of learning, the situation described seems problematic for several reasons when examined from a gender perspective. First of all, the teacher’s rule “girls’ scores count double” stigmatizes the group of girls as non-competent. The teacher states the rule before the game has even started and so takes for granted that all girls are less competent than boys at playing football. This way of structuring the values and practices in PE, also found in other studies (see e.g., Scraton, 1992; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Hay & MacDonald, 2010), could contribute to a stereotyping of girls’ competence in PE lessons. Furthermore, the teacher does not intervene in the situations in which boys clearly take over the responsibility the girls have been given. As described by Wenger (1998), mutual engagement can be a vehicle for both sharing ownership of meaning and for denying negotiability. If negotiability is denied, like in the case of not recognising the contributions of some members of the community of practice in PE, members develop “an identity of non-participation that progressively marginalises them” (Wenger, 1998, p. 203). Over time Michelle, Alice and Mary therefore risk losing their sense of legitimacy, thereby shifting from the position of peripherals (lower corner field 1, Figure 2) to a position of marginalisation (lower corner field 2, Figure 2). However, this risk is not only related to the relationship between genders but between novices and masters in general. For Mary, Alice and Michelle to experience a continued sense of meaning and legitimacy, they must have an opportunity to not only experience “the masters’ game” but to develop their own communicative, technical and tactical competence as football players and, in this way, obtain greater legitimacy. For this to happen, it seems necessary for the teacher to play a more active role than was the case in this observation and others.

Finally, we have to be aware that although Mary and Michelle expressed an experience of participation in the case described, this could also be a result of Mary’s and Michelle’s desire to be viewed positively by the interviewer and the other students participating in the interview. Grimminger (2014a) has described how less sporty children use different defence strategies and deny non-recognition experiences in order to explain their own role and to maintain personal control. In the next section, we will examine in-depth how and why students are deprived of legitimacy in PE and how this affects students’ participation and non-participation.
5.2. Field 2: Participation without Legitimacy

Although the relation between the novices and the masters, as shown in our first example, could be a vehicle for learning, this relation could also be the reason for some students’ experiences of non-participation. Lave & Wenger (1991) ascribe this duality to the relation of power involved in legitimate peripherality.

As a place in which one moves toward more intensive participation, peripherality is an empowering position. As a place in which one is kept from participating more fully it is a disempowering position. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36)

The empowering position of peripherality is clearly expressed by Andrew, a peripheral student, as scepticism towards the interviewer’s question about the option of separating the less skilled from the more skilled students in PE.

Try to imagine that all the less skilled were in here, then how could we learn? You can learn from the skilled, how they do things. (Andrew, authors’ translation)

In that sense Andrew acknowledges the potential of learning from more adepts practitioners like the masters. However, in other cases the students were very aware of the disempowering position of being kept away from participation. These cases were mainly related to experiences of not being ascribed sufficient legitimacy and are, for example, reflected in the way John describes his experience of being in a marginal position in PE (lower corner field 2, Figure 2).

Usually it is only just the skilled students who play together all the time. And then all the others, that is the ones who are not that skilled, they never get the ball. They never ever get the ball. Well, maybe they get it once, but then they should throw it back to the same people for them to shoot, and it just continues like this. (John, authors’ translation)

Situations of more skilled students being restrictive for the less skilled students’ participation in PE as described by John, were very easily recognised in our observations. So, only seldom were the skilled students aware of ascribing legitimacy to the less skilled students, for example by passing the ball to the less skilled students. Furthermore, in situations where this occurred the less skilled students often rejected the possibility to participate in the game.

The students are playing Danish Dodgeball. Tom, a less skilled student, and Paul, a highly skilled student, stand next to each other. Tom catches the ball. He turns immediately towards Paul and asks him if he wants to shoot the ball. Tom shrugs and says, no, I don’t care. Not until then does Paul shoot the ball. (Notes from observation, 23 April 2014)

Paul’s behaviour was the exception rather than the rule among the skilled students. This is consistent with Hills’ (2007) study, reporting that even though some students, like Paul, made a conscious attempt to include the less skilled students in PE, exclusion seemed to have been the normative practice among the skilled students. In our interviews, the skilled students did reflect on not passing the ball to the peripherals being an unacceptable form of exclusion. However, many of them did not blame the skilled students but rather the less skilled students for this exclusionary relationship.

We give them the ball, but they give it back to us straight away. If I have the ball, they say, “no, you throw, I can’t make it, you throw. (Louise, authors’ translation)

The behaviour of the less-skilled students described above could possibly be explained by earlier experiences of not being ascribed legitimacy or more broadly speaking not being recognised in PE. Grimminger (2014a) has shown that non-recognition experiences, among which could be experiences of non-legitimacy, are negatively associated with both physical self-conception and self-esteem, however, only among sporty children. In our interviews some students, especially the more skilled ones, acknowledged that the behaviour of the less skilled students could be based on a lack of self-esteem developed in PE over the years; they did not, however, seem to acknowledge their own part in this. Rather both the skilled students and the less skilled students explained their non-participation as not trying hard enough. This way of denying their lack of legitimacy in PE has been described by Grimminger (2014) as a strategy of “self-handicapping” and self-protection.

The significance of physical skills for the recognition and participation of students in PE have also been described by others (Carlson, 1995; Griffin, 1984, 1985; Grimminger, 2013; Grimminger 2014b, Hills, 2007; Portman, 1995a, 1995b). Even if physical skills are undoubtedly important for the legitimacy ascribed to students, in our observations and interviews with students it also became clear that students’ physical skills were neither a guarantee nor a prerequisite for the legitimacy ascribed. Legitimacy, as in the following observation, also seemed to be ascribed and deprived through students’ social relationships.

The students play Danish dodgeball. Susan, Michael and Kelly are all on the same team. Kelly and the other girls on the team often play the ball to Susan,
who often ends up shooting the ball. In the position beside Susan stands Michael. He tries hard to get hold of the ball and to make the others pass to him. He waves his hand and shouts “Pass to me! I am really good!” While still not having received the ball, Michael runs in front of Susan to snatch the ball. When Kelly receives the ball, she really has to make an effort to pass Susan the ball over the head of Michael. Kelly manages to pass the ball to Susan, but the pass has taken too much time and all the opponents have moved away. Susan turns angrily towards Michael and asks him not to block the pass. (Notes from observation, 23 April 2014)

It is pivotal for the understanding of this observation that Michael’s skills in Danish dodgeball are not different from Susan’s. What presumably separates Michael from Susan in this observation are the communities of practices of the two outside of PE. Susan is a friend of Kelly and the other girls on the team—Michael is not. Generally, Michael is not popular among the girls in the class; in PE they often turn their back on him or look at him without sympathy. So the relations between the girls and between Michael and the girls hamper Michael’s participation, placing him in a peripheral position (upper corner field 2, Figure 2) and at risk of being marginalised (lower corner field 2, Figure 2) in this specific case. The significance of social relations or popularity among peers has also been reported in studies by Hills (2007), Grimminger (2013) and O’Donovan (2003). Hills (2007) found that girls’ physical skills, as well as girls’ social relationships, were important in shaping their involvement in PE and for the power relations between the included and the excluded students. The relevance of social relations was also confirmed in our interviews when students talked about team selection—a strategy described as a typical way of being ascribed legitimacy or not in PE (Grimminger, 2014b). When asked who they would typically choose when they were forming the teams on their own, students explained that some students chose “the highly skilled” and others chose “their good friends”. While the strategy of choosing best friends was typically described as something done by girls, the strategy of choosing the highly skilled was typically described as something done by boys. In addition to the different preferences of boys and girls also highlighted in Grimminger (2014b), the students we interviewed also described how preferences of team selection differed between skilled and less skilled students.

The skilled ones, they just want to have the best team and the ones, who don’t really bother about the game, they just want to be together with someone they like. (Louise, authors’ translation)

So which students are being ascribed legitimacy and
imagination. Elisabeth is one of the students that sometimes ran the whole 3km and sometimes choose to stroll along with some of her classmates. She tells me that she does not feel like running but that it is important for her to have a good relationship with the teachers. However, that kind of meaningfulness does not seem to be sufficient to maintain Elisabeth in a peripheral (upper corner field 3, Figure 2) rather than marginalised position (lower corner field 3, Figure 2).

Elisabeth clearly expresses that she does not believe the teachers when they tell them that the running program can make students improve their physical fitness.

That is not why. It is just something (the teacher) says. If you only run once a week, it does not make a difference. You also have to run in your leisure time. (Elisabeth, authors’ translation)

So the purpose of these PE activities appears meaningless to Elisabeth. Other students also do not seem to find the purpose of the running sessions relevant either because they already do a lot of physical activity in their leisure time or because they never do any physical activity. Finally, for several students it is the practice of running the three laps rather than the goal of running the three laps that makes PE meaningless. Andrew and Monica are two of the students that find it pointless to run the same lap all over again and in their opinion they only do it to satisfy the teachers. What this signifies is that they are offered only very limited opportunities to develop as runners and thus to move from a marginal to more peripheral or full participation. The prerequisites of moving towards full participation have been described by Kirk & Kinchin (2003):

As a legitimate peripheral participant in any community of practice...a learner's trajectory towards full participation can only be realized through the increasing mastery of the goods—the knowledge, skills and dispositions internal to that practice, whether this be tailoring or midwifery or baseball playing. (Kirk & Kinchin, 2003, p. 230)

In the running classes students were not offered many opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions relevant to running. In fact they were not offered the prospect of any other profits than the possibility of physical activity and improved health. This adds to the concern expressed by Kirk (1994, p. 49) that PE is “being lost in the public health rhetoric”. In our interviews, more students questioned the practice of separating running from other sports. They did not mind running but argued that they liked running better when it was a part of doing sports.

The lack of focus on the development of students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions were not reserved for the running classes but was also very symptomatic for the way ball games were taught. Generally, the focus of the classes was more on what students should do than on what students should learn. This was also expressed by several of the interviewed teachers; for example one said that “for many years PE has been too much fun and too little learning”. In the competitive team game units we observed, very limited time and assistance were offered to students for the development of their skills and knowledge. Rather, most of the time teachers simply let students play the games. In the interviews only one teacher seemed to hold strong goals for the development of students’ physical competence, including their technical skills and tactical awareness. On the contrary, many of the teachers expressed a contradiction between giving the students a good experience and paying attention to the improvement of their physical skills or their development of theoretical knowledge. However, while unintentional on the part of the teachers, this practice seemed to deny students the possibility of moving towards full participation in PE and to promote exclusion rather than inclusion. Furthermore, the limited perspective of learning in PE experienced by students made it difficult for many of them to relate PE to learning as the central meaning of school and to their future possibilities of gaining from PE. In our interviews many students questioned the relevance of their participation in PE for their future lives and careers. When contrasting mathematics with PE students said:

PE is ok, but you see, we cannot really use it for anything. I haven’t learned anything in PE. Mathematics you should use the rest of your life (Laila, authors’ translation)

You can use it [Mathematics]... (Elsa, authors’ translation)

In your future... (Marc, authors’ translation)

To get a job. To get an education (Laila, authors’ translation)

The importance of students believing in the usefulness of learning, has clearly been captured by Alexander (2001), who states that:

It is not enough to say to someone, learn and you will increase your life chances. The learner needs to know that they have the power to apply their learning and to benefit from it. (Alexander, 2001, p. 30)

That students lacking experiences of meaningfulness in PE could be related to the evidently limited transfer of learning experienced by students in some PE-classes has also been noted by others (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998; Penney & Chandler, 2000; Kirk & Kinchin, 2003).
5.4. Field 4: Participation without Meaningfulness and Legitimacy

Characteristic of several of the students we observed was that during the lesson they moved from being in a peripheral position to becoming marginalised (upper corner field 4, Figure 2) or even outsiders (lower corner field 4, Figure 2). Based on their past experiences, other students chose from the beginning of PE classes to be outsiders and did not take part in the joint enterprise of the community of practice (lower corner field 4, Figure 2). The reason for this seemed to be a combination of two circumstances; that students did not experience PE as meaningful and that they were not ascribed the sufficient legitimacy. In contrast to what has been indicated in earlier studies primarily focusing on students who are excluded, the students who chose not to participate in one or more of the observed lessons in PE were not only low skilled students but also higher skilled students, boys as well as girls and ethnic Danish students as well as students of other ethnicities. While a lack of legitimacy, as earlier argued, was mostly related to the physical skills and social relations of students in this study, the experience of PE as meaningless also seemed to be significant across gender, ethnicity and skills level. This points to the importance of also searching for other reasons for students’ participation and non-participation in PE.

Furthermore, through our observations and interviews it became clear to us that the meaningfulness and legitimacy that students believe they could achieve by participating in PE should be seen in relation to the meaningfulness and legitimacy students believe they could achieve by not participating. Some students are tempted by the possible legitimacy they can gain if they choose to be outsiders together. In some of our observations, the outsiders even developed a kind of social community around their non-participation. Access to that community was conditioned on members’ non-participation in PE.

Sometimes you can feel different because the other students participate in PE and you do not. But on the other hand there are also others who do not participate, and so you are just like them. (Evelyn, authors’ translation)

The legitimacy and experience of meaningfulness that students like Evelyn could gain by participating in PE, was not always sufficient to offset the legitimacy and meaningfulness they could gain by being outsiders. Evelyn was not being excluded from PE but she chose to exclude herself from it in order to be included in another community of practice. Wenger points to the ways in which one community of practice is developed not only in relation, but even in opposition to another: “each side is defined by opposition to the other and membership in one community of practice implies marginalisation in another” (Wenger, 1998, p. 168). More specifically, O’Donovan (2003) has pointed to the deleterious effects of a PE culture valuing non-participation rather than participation in PE.

The deliberate choice made by students not to participate in PE seemed to be further reinforced by the dominant culture of the observed classes. Students often talked about participating in PE as a choice rather than a necessity. For example, they explained their choice not to participate or not to attend as “having other things I would rather like to do”, “feeling tired” or “being busy with after-school jobs”. Furthermore, students did not describe any consequences of not participating or failing to attend. The students’ experiences of non-participation or non-attendance being without consequence were largely confirmed by our observations. Lessons seldom built upon previous lessons in any direct manner and teachers did not always notice that some students were missing. Furthermore, students were very aware of how easy it was to be exempted by faking an injury, presenting a counterfeit notice from their parents or pretending to have forgotten their PE clothes on days they did not “feel like” participating. The fact that at the time of our data collection there was not any formal evaluation of students in PE in Denmark only seemed to contribute further to students’ experience of non-participation and non-attendance being inconsequential and to their experience of participation as meaningless. Many students more or less explicitly conceptualised PE as a break from learning rather than a place for learning. The low status of PE among students, however, does not seem to be limited to Denmark (Flintoff & Sracton, 2001).

In addition to the kind of students mentioned above, we also noted another kind of outsiders or marginalised students (Field 4, Figure 2), those for whom non-participation became an active and conscious act of showing who they were not. Wenger (1998) has argued that

We know who we are by what is familiar and by what we can negotiate and make use of, and we know who we are not by what is unfamiliar, unwieldy and out of our purview. This is an important point. We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not. (Wenger, 1998, p. 164)

While one student had a very visible way of showing his non-identification with PE, for most others, mainly less skilled students, non-identification was simply expressed by being indifferent to PE. In the observations, the former did not seem to take any notice of neither being ascribed legitimacy or not. Also, when talking to
students, what happened in PE did not seem to matter to them. Even if this could be an act of self-handicapping, based on our observations and informal talks with students, it seems more likely that both participation and non-participation in PE only contributed very little to the self-identification of these students. Grimminger (2014a) has described this in relation to other communities of practice.

Realizing that you are not a claims processor may contribute in a small way to your sense of self but, unless you are trying to become one, that realization remains inconsequential. (Wenger, 1998, p. 165)

So in the case of these students, not being a sports person only contributed in a small way to their sense of self. This has also been evidenced by Grimminger (2014a), who reported that PE had no self-relevance among less sporty children.

In contrast to the students showing their non-identification with being a physically active person through indifference to PE, another boy had a more visible way of showing his non-identification. In our observation he could be very destructive of the teaching, both by answering back to teachers and through acting in defiance of what was asked of him. He wanted to send a message of “try me and I will show you that you can never make me become a sporty person” to us, as well as to the teachers and other students. In the interviews and our informal conversations with him, he made a big point of both showing what he was not (a person who liked PE) and what he was (a person who liked playing computer games). He told us that he only wanted to participate in PE if he could have “a computer with a lot of games, a refrigerator with candy and coke and a comfortable beanbag”. He contrasted the values and practices of the community of practice of PE with the values and practices of the community of practice of computer gamers, which he wanted to be part of. That the incompatibility of identities can restrict participation in PE is confirmed by studies showing that some girls feel caught between the values of feminism and the values of masculinity in PE (Cockburn & Clark, 2002; With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011; O’Donovan, 2003).

6. Concluding Discussion

This case study aimed to contribute to a social relational-perspective on inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. In order to understand the complexity of students’ participation and non-participation, a case was selected in which there was a highly differentiated composition of students and a variety in gender, skills and ethnicity that, according to earlier studies, was critical for students’ participation and non-participation in PE. On the basis of Etienne Wenger’s conceptual tools, we showed that a student’s degree of participation in PE-classes is closely related to the legitimacy ascribed to them and the meaningfulness of PE, as experienced by the student. While some students were excluded from PE as they did not have the physical skills and social relations necessary to be ascribed legitimacy, others chose not to participate because PE was not meaningful to them.

The present study focused on how students’ experiences of participation and non-participation in PE are influenced by the complex interaction between the students themselves and the values and practices of PE. The findings of the study provide a number of insights into how students are excluded from participating in learning processes in PE and why some students choose not to participate; the latter finding has not gained much attention in earlier research in this field.

In the case of students being excluded from participation, we found that interactions between students were important for how they were ascribed or deprived of legitimacy in PE. Other studies have pointed to team selection proceedings as an opportunity for students to transmit recognition and non-recognition (Hills, 2007; Grimminger, 2014b). As teachers often formed the teams in the classes we observed, there was seldom an opportunity for students to do this in the study. However, we found that legitimacy was often ascribed to and deprived from students during games when teams had already been formed. We found that being passed to or passed over, as well as being or not being assigned a privileged position were typical ways of being ascribing or depriving someone of legitimacy. Hills (2007) has pointed to such practices as important for processes of inclusion and exclusion in PE. In contrast to studies focusing on the exclusion of low skilled students, we found that even if students’ physical skills were important, they were neither a guarantee nor a prerequisite for the legitimacy the students were ascribed. In accordance with recent studies on processes of inclusion and exclusion in PE (Grimminger, 2013; Hills, 2007; Grimminger, 2014b), we found that in addition to students’ physical skills, legitimacy was also ascribed and deprived on the basis of students’ social relations. So a highly skilled student with the “wrong” social relations could risk being excluded from participation, while a less skilled student with the “right” social relations could avoid being excluded from participation.

In addition to students being excluded, we also became aware of several students choosing not to participate. In addition to the possibility of the choice being a defensive strategy (Grimminger, 2014a), we can also point to other possible reasons. First of all, students chose not to participate in PE in situations where the learning practices and/or values of PE are not meaningful to them. In such cases, non-participation could be either a reaction to not wanting to be identified with sport and physical activity; not having access to the de-
velopment of the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary for moving towards full participation; or the experience of learning in PE not having any or only a limited relevance in other communities of practices. Secondly, some students seemed to have reached the conclusion that the potential of achieving legitimacy and meaningfulness was greater if they chose not to participate in PE. In fact, in some of the observed classes a social community was built around not participating. Students’ deliberate choices not to participate seemed further reinforced by their experiences of non-participation not having any consequences and by the notion that PE was more like a break than a school subject. It seems reasonable that this typical notion of PE among students could partly be explained by the fact that grades and exams have not until recently been a practice in PE in Danish schools. While the use of assessment has been criticised in other studies on PE (Hay, 2005), it seems in this study that the lack of grades and exams could actually be contributing to students choosing not to participate in PE.

While this study agrees with others in relation to the importance of inquiring into students’ multiple social categories, there also seem to be some nuances in the way inclusion and exclusion processes were expressed in this study compared to others. First, contrary to findings identified through our literature review, the ethnic minority background of many of the students we observed and interviewed did not seem to be decisive in whether or not they participated, either among girls or among boys. In the interviews, many of the students reacted without understanding our questions about how and whether the variation in students’ ethnicity was influential in their PE-classes. Working with a very compound multi-ethnic group, ethnicity seemed to disappear. Secondly, the way in which sport and motor skills have been described as crucially important for students being deprived of legitimacy in PE did not seem as visible and humiliating in our case as described by, for example, Grimminger (2013) in her study of PE in lower grade and middle grade classes in Germany. Students generally seemed very appreciative of each other and to disapprove of jeers in PE. If students failed, this was normally not met by anger and if someone complained it was him/her rather than the one who had failed who was met by disapproval. The context-dependency of case studies could explain why the results of this study regarding certain aspects differ from those of other studies on inclusion and exclusion in PE. Thus, the location of the case in a Nordic physical education context and the composition of the student body are reflected in the values and practices of PE expressed by students and teachers in this study, in the interactions between students observed in this study, and in the conclusions drawn about students’ experiences of participation and non-participation.

In our findings we have distinguished between those students excluded from participation in PE and those who actively choose not to participate. Based on our findings, we find this distinction important in relation to how we talk about students as passive victims or active agents. Furthermore, we find the distinction relevant to future practices in PE. In our interviews with teachers, they expressed a much greater concern over the challenge of including students choosing not to participate than including students who are excluded from participation; this was also supported by Scraton (1992) and Cockburn and Clarke (2002). While some didactical strategies aimed at ensuring the legitimacy of all students in PE, for example varying the methods of dividing classes into teams (see Grimminger, 2014b) and moderating the rules of competitive team games (see e.g. von Seelen, 2012), have already been suggested, only recently researchers have begun to discuss how to make PE more meaningful to students (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998; Penney & Chandler, 2000; Penney, Clarke, & Kinchin, 2002; Kirk & Kinchin, 2003; Penney, 2003). Reproducing and transforming other communities of practice known by students outside school has been argued to be one way of making PE more meaningful to students, for example by enabling students to transfer learning from PE to opportunities to do sports in their spare time (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998). Some researchers have suggested Sports Education as one curriculum model, building on these principles (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998; Siedentop, 1994). However, others have questioned the nature and extent of transfer achievable for students in this curriculum model and have suggested that connections to communities of practice other than that of sport should be sought (Penney & Chandler, 2000; Penney et al., 2002). Furthermore, we agree with Penney and Chandler (2000) that connections of learning should not only be provided between PE and extra-curricular activities outside school, but also between learning in different units of PE, and between learning in PE and other curriculum areas, seeking to make PE more meaningful to students in school. After our data collection ended, the PE curriculum in Denmark was changed in favour of (among other things) a more thematic approach to PE, which has been suggested as one way of pursuing connectedness and meaningfulness for PE (Penney & Chandler, 2000). However, further studies are needed to develop strategies to enhance students’ experiences of meaningfulness in PE and to empirically explore whether these strategies could include more of the students who choose not to participate in PE.

**Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to thank the PhD Council of Denmark for funding the research undertaken for this article. We thank the students and teachers of the case school for their willingness to participate in the study. Finally we thank the anonymous reviewers of the arti-
acle for their competent and constructive comments and suggestions for the article.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References


Penney, D., Clarke, G., & Kinchin, G. (2002). Developing physical education as a “connective specialism”: Is sport education the answer? *Sport, Education and Society, 7*(1), 55-64.


---

**About the Authors**

**Mette Munk**

Mette Munk is a PhD student in the Department of Public Health at the University of Aarhus in collaboration with the University College Syddanmark. Her earlier research has focused on the qualifications of Danish physical education teachers, the discrepancy between the curriculum and the actual content of physical education in Danish schools, and the introduction of grades and exams in physical education in Denmark. In her current research, she pays particular attention to teaching models aimed at promoting a more inclusive learning environment in physical education.

---

**Dr. Sine Agergaard**

Sine Agergaard is a social anthropologist and an associate professor in the Section of Sports Science at Aarhus University. Her research focus is on sport and migration, with particular attention to inclusion and exclusion processes within professional as well as recreational sports. Sine Agergaard has published a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals and contributed to and edited several books. She is currently the head of a Nordic collaborative research project, and the manager of the International Network for Research in Sports and Migration Issues.
Munk M and Agergaard S (2018). Listening to students’ silences – a study examining students’ participation and non-participation in physical education. Accepted in Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy. Published online 23 Feb 2018.
https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2018.1441393
Listening to students’ silences – a case study examining students’ participation and non-participation in physical education

Mette Munk & Sine Agergaard

To cite this article: Mette Munk & Sine Agergaard (2018): Listening to students’ silences – a case study examining students’ participation and non-participation in physical education, Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, DOI: 10.1080/17408989.2018.1441393

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2018.1441393

Published online: 23 Feb 2018.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 49

View related articles

View Crossmark data
ABSTRACT

Background: For years researchers have been engaged in revealing the impact of the hidden curriculum in physical education (PE) on students’ participation and non-participation. The hidden PE curriculum encompasses the knowledge, the relations, the assumptions, the norms and the beliefs that students unconsciously and unintentionally learn through the process of education. As the hidden curriculum reinforces particular values and attitudes among students in a very subtle and often unnoticed fashion, it limits students’ possibilities for becoming aware of, and thus reporting, how the tacit messages communicated through the hidden curriculum impact on their position of participation and non-participation. Thus, in this article, we argue that examining students’ silences, that is the things students do not voice, is significant for the understanding of the impact of the hidden curriculum on students’ participation and non-participation in PE.

Purposes: In this article, we aim to develop insight into students’ silences in order to elucidate how aspects of the hidden curriculum serve to reinforce some students’ non-participation in PE. Much attention has been devoted to particular values and attitudes unintentionally transmitted by teachers in PE. However, in this article, we examine how the everyday exchanges between the students themselves may also convey a hidden set of meanings, that impact on students’ actual experiences of the PE curriculum, and thus mitigate the intended effects of students’ participation.

Research design: The backdrop for this article is a single-case study carried out in a multi-ethnic and co-educational secondary school in Denmark from January to December 2014. The article draws on material collected through focus group interviews with 7th grade students (including participant-diagrams filled out by students) along with observations of their PE classes. The observations took place once a week throughout the whole calendar year.

Findings: In the article, we point to students’ intentional silences that are highly reflective of the normative expectations negotiated within the peer group. In addition, we show that the pressures toward social conformity have a direct impact on the positions of non-participation intentionally taken up by some of the less socially respected students in PE. These students were highly aware that how they behaved in PE and what they voiced in the interviews might have consequences for their peer group connections within PE and for their social reputation among peers outside of PE. In addition, we add to the current literature on student silence by pointing to a category of non-privileged silences. These silences revealed that a minor group of students were not aware
of or had not recognized their position as non-participants in PE. Moreover, they appeared unable to imagine that things could be different and to voice a desire for change.

**Conclusions:** We argue that our findings reveal critical aspects of students’ non-participation that would be difficult to access if we did not listen to, hear and attempt to understand students’ silences. In order to extend the knowledge base on students’ participation and non-participation in PE, we hope that this article may also encourage other researchers to let students’ silences breathe and speak.

**Introduction**

For years research has highlighted the impact of the hidden curriculum on the reproduction of inequality and reinforcement of exclusion processes in physical education (PE) and education more broadly (see, e.g. Bain 1975; Fernandez-Balbao 1993; Kirk 1992). The concept of the hidden curriculum refers to ‘the tacit messages, the daily regularities, the relations, and the norms and values that lurk undetected, behind, and beyond the content of daily lessons and subject matters’ (Dodds 1985, cited in Fernández-Balboa 1993). As the hidden curriculum encompasses the knowledge, attitudes, norms, values and assumptions unconsciously and unintentionally learned by students through years of education (Kirk 1992), the hidden curriculum is embodied at a deep level (Sandford and Rich 2006). Thus, students are often not aware of and, therefore, cannot negotiate and/or reject the messages sent by the hidden curriculum. Moreover, as the hidden curriculum acts as a ‘subtle and often unnoticed means of reinforcing particular values and attitudes’ among students, it is often neither recognized nor acknowledged by students (Laker 2000, 73). This makes it difficult for students to voice and communicate just how much the attitudes, the beliefs and the body practices reinforced by the hidden curriculum restrict their participation in PE. Thus, the argument can be made that the hidden curriculum serves to silence students who take up a non-privileged position in PE and that aspects of the hidden curriculum might best be documented and assessed through students’ silences.

In PE, hidden curriculum research, has been particularly focused on revealing how assumptions held by teachers transmit stereotypical expectations of girls’ and boys’ behaviours; expectations that reinforce particular values and attitudes among students construct gender differences and thus serve to uphold the culturally constructed and gendered order of sport (see, e.g. Azzarito 2012; Flintoff and Scraton 2006; Gorely, Holroyd, and Kirk 2003; Oliver and Lalik 2004; Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughtry 2009; Rønholt 2002). What this research also shows is that this type of learning might have significant consequences for students’ engagement in PE. Thus, some students learn that they are legitimate participants in PE while others learn they are not (Casey 2017). However, as this learning is not only ‘driven’ by the teachers in PE, the hidden curriculum is embedded in the everyday exchanges that occur between teachers as well as between the students themselves (Casey 2017; Rønholt 2002). Thus, students also support this learning through their own curricula (Casey 2017). For instance, the nature of students’ peer relationships and the values promoted by peer groups, such as cliques, might also convey hidden messages that impact on students’ experiences of the PE curriculum. However, the significance of students’ peer group relations and interactions are aspects of the hidden curriculum, which have not yet attracted much attention in PE research. This suggests that there is still much to learn about the effect of the hidden curriculum from those students who are silenced.

With these considerations in mind, in this article, we examine student silence as an important means of investigating the hidden set of meanings embedded in the everyday exchanges between the students in PE. By identifying issues that typically remain unstated by students, yet have implications for students’ participation and non-participation in PE, we might prevent this hidden
curriculum ‘from remaining a black box of unspoken truths’ (Tekian 2009, 823). Treating silence, not as an absence of empirical material but as an integral part of language that can be studied in its own right (Minh-ha 1988), we agree with Poland and Pederson that ‘what is not said may be as revealing as what is said’ and as such, that ‘what is left out’ may sometimes ‘exceed what is put in’ (1998, 293).

State of the art

Student voice research

A number of researchers have theorized and argued for the significance of including students’ voices in educational research (Batchelor 2006; Cook-Sather 2002, 2006; Robinson and Taylor 2007). Within PE, the publication of Graham (1995) is often referred to as the methodological milestone, marking the important shift to extend the focus of researchers to provide students with a voice. The concepts, practices and meanings associated with the term ‘student voice’ and thus the approaches used to elicit students’ perspectives have proliferated considerably in the last 30 years and as such vary across different studies (Cook-Sather 2014; Hill 2003). However, what student voice proponents generally agree is that student voice work is important as it enables, supports and empowers students to take active and meaningful roles in decisions related to their learning, and thus provides students with the opportunity to critique and reform education (Batchelor 2006; Cook-Sather 2002, 2006; Robinson and Taylor 2007). Moreover, arguments have been made that authorizing student perspectives motivates students to participate constructively in their education (Cook-Sather 2002). With the growth of student voice research responding to and acting upon young people’s voices in PE, increased attention has also been given to students’ silences (Long and Carless 2010). However, as we will argue in the following, only a few empirical studies have been specifically devoted to analyses of students’ silences; that is to the things students do not voice.

Issues of silencing

One major concern within the student voice literature has been the silencing of students; that is the voices we do not listen to, the voices we do not hear and/or the voices we do not acknowledge (Long and Carless 2010). In relation to the first, great efforts have been made to correct the imbalance in the voices that have shaped practice to date. For instance, much attention has been given to the voiced experiences of girls (Flintoff and Scraton 2006) and more recently the voiced experiences of ethnic minorities (Harrison and Belcher 2006). In addition, some attention has been directed to the voices of the physically ‘less skilled’ and disabled students (Fitzgerald 2006). What is distinctive for all of this research on students’ voices is the priority given to the non-compliers and/or the non-participating students in PE (Long and Carless 2010). However, as shown in for instance (O’Donovan 2003), it is crucial that the voices of those students presently taking up the most central position of participation in PE (typically the boys and/or the physically highly skilled students) are not silenced in research examining the development of more inclusive practices in PE.

Another concern raised within the PE literature in relation to the silencing of students is the stories that are not acknowledged by participants themselves and so cannot be shared. Most notable has been the research documenting how the hidden curriculum ‘acts as a highly selective, powerful screen that filters what we pay attention to and what we ignore’ and as such limits students’ ability to become aware of their own ‘victimization’ (how they become victimized or victimize others) and ‘to envision other worlds and possibilities’ (Fernández-Balboa 1993, 231). In terms of what and how messages are communicated, the silences initiated by the hidden curriculum are closely related to the silences initiated by the media and popular culture (see, e.g. Burrows 2010). As the hidden curriculum ‘foregrounds or backgrounds particular discourses and social relationships depending on whether they serve the purposes of the dominant groups’, so does the
media and popular culture (Fernández-Balboa 1993, 231). For example, Burrows (2010, 149) points to the important insight that interview commentaries do not necessarily yield the ‘truth’ in children’s experiences of physical culture. Rather, their talk serves to illuminate the discursive resources children have available to draw on and the ways they position themselves as ‘healthy’ (or not) subjects in relation to these.

This same point might be claimed in relation to the discursive resources available to students in positioning themselves as participants or not in PE, and so is highly relevant to this article’s intention of examining students’ silence as an integral part of student voice. Listening to students’ silences, we might be able to better understand how students give meaning to these discourses and as such go beyond the surface meaning of students’ voices.

**Issues of silence**

Closely related to issues of students being silenced are issues of students being silent. Enright and O’Sullivan (2010) add to this discussion with insightful empirical examples of students’ reluctance to speak and share their minds. Likewise, research has pointed to students’ distinct personalities and students’ social relationships as reasons to why some students do not feel confident and/or able to participate in and contribute to group discussions (Fisette 2008; Lalik and Oliver 2007). Thus, in particular, students who are socially isolated and/or quiet might refrain from voicing their opinions. In efforts to include these voices, which might fail to be represented within more traditional interview methods, alternative approaches for data collection have been suggested (Sparkes 2009) and widely employed in research with students in PE (Fitzgerald and Jobling 2014; MacPhail and Kinchin 2004; Oliver 2013; Oliver and McCaughtry 2010).

An important point made by Long and Carless (2010, 215) in relation to participants unable to share their stories, as well as in relation to participants unwilling to share their stories, is the potential that ‘these stories might have something new to offer, something qualitatively different from stories already told’. To access these stories, one strategy may be to overcome the issues of silences and silencing referred to above. However, finding ways to analyse and better understand students’ silences may also enable us to access these stories.

**Silence as a possibility for learning about students’ non-participation in PE**

What is clear from this review is that students’ silences have been acknowledged and discussed within the PE literature. But, what also becomes evident is an apparent tendency to treat silences as ethical and/or methodological problems to overcome rather than as data alongside students’ voiced utterances. Closely related to this tendency is the observation that in the majority of this research, silence has been studied only implicitly and as a context for analysing and understanding students’ voices.

Within childhood, research scholars have called for more studies to critically reflect on and take account of silence when embracing children’s voices:

Given the overwhelming embrace of children’s voices in childhood research, one might expect that silence would constitute a central feature of voice-based accounts of children’s worlds. However, a search for published work which considers silence as an important feature of voice research in childhood reveals little to none suggesting that childhood scholars have failed to critically examine the more complex and problematic features which constitute voice such as silence. (Spyrou 2016, 8)

Based on our review, the same might be said about PE scholars. This is rather surprising since, we argue, the context of PE appears to offer a unique opportunity to explore and come to fully understand students’ silences. Physical education is notable in that to a large extent and in opposition to the more traditional subjects in school, students express themselves through their bodies. Thus, the
bodily dimensions of the subject make it possible to analyse students’ silences in relation to what they say through their physical behaviours and performances.

Theory

In this article, our conceptualization of silence is based on Lisa Mazzei’s work on and categorization of silences. Mazzei, who is based in the USA, is an associate professor in qualitative research methodology and curriculum theory. With reference to her study on racial identity and awareness among white teachers, Mazzei (2003, 2007) has theorized and written extensively about silence as data. From Mazzei’s perspective, silence is not just an absence of empirical material. Rather, it is ‘a place where the researcher goes to find out more, but unlike speech it is not always as identifiable, tangible, or observable’ (Spyrou 2016, 10). Despite this potential of the silences contained within our data to reveal our subjects’ feelings, still the non-voiced and the silent are often treated as non-data and so ignored and left out of qualitative research (Mazzei 2003, 2007).

As succinctly expressed by Spyrou (2016) because of its apparent nothingness, a major challenge is of course to hear what silence is saying. According to Mazzei (2007), in order to recognize the significance of silence, we need to go beyond what is immediately observable and present in data. This means that silences are to be discovered in the ‘hidden, the covert, the inarticulate: the gaps within/outside the observable’ (Mazzei 2003, 358), and what should be ‘listened’ for are the questions not answered, the sentences, phrases and expressions not finished, that is what is being intentionally or unintentionally left out and repressed (Mazzei 2007). Adding to Mazzei (2007), Lewis (2010) has argued that hearing silence and recognizing that silence is not empty requires the researcher to be reflective about why and how (s)he recognizes, notes, responds to and interprets children’s silences. Furthermore, it requires the researcher to be reflexive towards the situational dynamics in which the interviewer and respondents are jointly involved in knowledge production (Lewis 2010).

When our definition of empirical data is expanded to include the silent, we need to rethink how we take into consideration issues of validity and credibility (Bailey 2008; Spyrou 2016). This also accounts to the common use of quotes in qualitative research to validate the authenticity of children’s voices and perspectives (Spyrou 2016). Hence, not all types of (silent) voices may be quoted. Therefore, to provide insight into students’ silences without compromising the rigour of good qualitative research, we describe as detailed as possible the contexts in which students remained silent and the strategies used by students to omit, ignore and/or resist questions from the interviewer. As our main focus is on students’ silences, their voices are shared only to the extent that they add in illuminating and/or explaining specific types of silences.

In this article, we use the categorization of silences suggested by Mazzei (2003) as a starting point for attending to and analysing the silences contained within our data material. In an effort to discern, articulate and clarify the various voices with which silences speak, Mazzei (2003, 364–366) identified five types of silences: (1) polite silences that happen when people fear to offend someone; (2) privileged silences, when people are reluctant to acknowledge or admit their privilege(s); (3) veiled silences, when people disguise what or who they are; (4) intentional silences, when people choose not to speak because they are not sure what reactions or sanctions it may provoke; and (5) unintelligible silences, which do have a purpose, but are not readily discernable or comprehensible and so remain unintelligible to the researcher.

Although all five types of silences could be identified in our data material, in the analysis section, we devote our attention to students’ intentional silences. As we will also exemplify, yet, different types of silence may sometimes ‘overlap, reflect or refract one another’ (Spyrou 2016, 12) and as such categories may not be clearly bounded. Moreover, as no taxonomy of silence could be exhaustive (Spyrou 2016), we point to a sixth type of silence, which is not included in Mazzei’s typology of silence, however, which we identified in our process of analysing our data material.
Research methodology and methods

Research methodology
The backdrop for this article is a one-year project examining inclusion and exclusion processes in PE. To gain insights into the variety in students’ participation and non-participation, the project was designed as a single-case study. This design has several strengths including the ability to investigate a phenomenon in its natural setting, use a variety of research methods and obtain a rich description and in-depth insight (Merriam 1998). Thus, the case study design enabled us to understand the students as they engaged in practices and interactions within the context of physical education.

The case in focus is a strategically selected secondary school. Just like other Danish public schools, the selected school enrolled students from 6 to 15 years of age that attended the 10 compulsory school years. The focus of this project was the lower secondary school, that is the 7th–9th grades. The secondary school was placed in a socially deprived neighbourhood and had a high percentage (60%) of students with an ethnic minority background. Moreover, as in most other Danish schools, girls and boys were mostly being taught together, rather than in separate groups. As these are all characteristics known from earlier research to negatively influence students’ exclusion from PE (for a review, see Munk and Agergaard 2015), the school is best thought of as an extreme case (Flyvbjerg 2006). That is a case in which the exclusion processes in PE were expected to be unusually strong.

Research design
The research project was organized into two parts: the first taking place from January to June 2014 and the other from August to December 2014. In the first part of the study, the intent was largely interpretative (Merriam 1998). So, the aim of this part of the study was to understand how the inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE.

To listen to and hear students’ voices also means to respond (Cook-Sather 2002; Robinson and Taylor 2007). Therefore, the insights provided by the students on the inclusion and exclusion processes in PE served as the knowledge base on which we developed a new PE curriculum approach aimed to promote students’ participation in a way that also enhanced their experiences of being socially included in the PE context. The new curriculum approach was implemented in the second part of the project in which the intent of the study was largely evaluative (Merriam 1998).

The change of curriculum approach
In the first six months of the study, the PE programme was observed to be based on a multi-activity curriculum, which was seen to emphasise competition and winning in leisurely sporting activities rather than students’ individual progress and development (Agergaard et al. 2017). Furthermore, the purpose of the curriculum change was to offer students more opportunities for differentiated self-improvement and learning. More specifically, it was hypothesized that inclusion of non-participants in PE can be promoted by a mastery-oriented curriculum model.

To promote the curriculum change, the TARGET approach was applied (Ames 1992). TARGET is the abbreviation of Task, Authority, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation and Time, which describe the main element in the model. As a particular strength, the TARGET approach both takes into account the structural and behavioural characteristics that may be developed through the organization of PE classes and through the behaviour of the teacher. Thus, while lesson plans were designed in line with the structural, content-based TARGET elements – Task, Authority, Grouping and Time – an external teacher was instructed in the two teaching–behaviour elements: Evaluation and Recognition.

The external teacher was a female in the late thirties. Most significantly, however, the external teacher differed from the observed internal PE teachers in her teaching approach in PE. Hence,
whereas the internal PE teachers appeared most experienced with applying a performance approach, the external teacher had extensive experience with applying a mastery approach.

In the curriculum change two, units were taught. In the first unit, the theme was ‘Motivation and the joy of movement’. The theme was taught, discussed, reflected upon and understood alongside the planning and testing of an ‘adventure-race’. In the second unit, the theme was ‘Sport in society’. This theme drew from Quidditch, a team ball game known from the Harry Potter series. A detailed outline for the teaching of a PE class based on the TARGET approach and an example of a lesson plan can be found elsewhere (Agergaard et al. 2017).

Data collection

This article draws on data material collected in the 7th grade class participating in the intervention. Twenty-four students were enrolled in the class; 13 of them being girls. The students in the class were ethnically diverse. Thus, eight of the students had a mother and/or a father who was not born in Denmark.

The data material included in this article comprises (a) focus group interviews which included the use of participant-diagrams filled out by students and (b) observations conducted throughout the whole study period from January to December 2014.

Observations

Descriptive field notes were taken in every PE class for the whole of the study period. The PE classes took place once a week. In total, the first author observed 31 PE lessons (18 lessons prior to the curriculum change and 13 lessons in the period of the curriculum change). Observations were focused on students’ patterns of participation and non-participation, their verbal and non-verbal communication, their body language, their interactions with peers, and the ways in which they related to each other, to the teachers and to the practices and values in PE. Thus, the observations were essential for understanding the physical education context in which the inclusion and exclusion processes occurred. Finally, data from the observations informed the activities and discussions at the focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews

In addition to the informal conversations and interactions with all students during the observations, a total of 16 students were interviewed in focus groups (each consisting of 4–6 students). Three focus group interviews were conducted just prior to the curriculum change, while a further three focus group interviews were conducted towards the end of the curriculum change. The intent of these interviews was to develop a sense of students’ perspectives: their feelings, their thoughts, their intentions and the meanings they attached to what goes on in PE. Moreover, as focus groups allow data both from the individual and from the individual as part of a group (Massey 2010), the focus group interviews offered an opportunity to explore how views are ‘constructed, expressed, defended and (sometimes) modified’ by students during the course of conversations and as such to observe the process of collective sense-making (Wilkinson 1998, 186). Closely related to this direct outcome of interaction is the capacity of focus groups to reveal social, and otherwise unarticulated, norms, values and expectations among students (Massey 2010). As succinctly expressed by David L. Morgan, a qualitative social research professor widely recognized for his expertise in focus groups, the real strength of focus groups is not simply providing access to what students have to say but providing insights into the sources of students’ complex behaviours and motivations (1996).

The groups were composed to reflect the diversity of students in the class and, thus, were based on our initial observations and on inputs from the internal PE teachers. First, students were selected so that each group was representative of the class as a whole in terms of gender and ethnicity. Second, to
ensure dialogue and discussion and the sparking of ideas across the range of perspectives pertaining to students, students from diverse positions of participation and non-participation in PE were represented in each interview. Moreover, in the second part of the study, students were selected so that the ones who had shifted position in various ways (in the direction of increased participation, in the direction of decreased participation and in shifting directions respectively) were all represented in each interview. Third, to stimulate discussion between participants, students’ social relations and peer groups dynamics were considered.

The focus group interviews were structured around a discussion guide. To stimulate students’ interactions, the guide was built around a number of informal and creative activities. Moreover, these activities encouraged the interest and engagement of the non-participating and/or verbally less articulating students. To augment engagement with students’ own concerns and agendas, and thus to avoid transferring my own preconceived notions of students’ participation and non-participation in PE, the starter activities and questions tended to be open ended. Likewise, discussions were generally allowed to flow with the direction of students’ answers.

Yet, efforts were made to limit those students who tended to dominate discussions and who tended to sway discussions in particular directions. Likewise, shy and reticent students were encouraged to contribute to discussions by, for instance, catching their eye or direct questioning. Being sensitive to students’ distinct personalities, dispositions and reasons for staying silent, however, ‘silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay’ was also respected (Minh-ha 1988, 74).

These efforts did, however, not change the circumstance that the social dynamics within a focus group interview are always to be ‘a mixture of contextual and personal influences, some assisting rapport and the exchange of ideas, some impeding it’ (Hill 2005: 73). This is exactly what makes listening to silence rather than or, at least, in addition to voice essential.

To capture the complexity of students’ experiences and ways of participating in PE (or not), we developed a diagram consisting of four circles. The four circles were formed to indicate different levels of participation with the central circle indicating a high degree of involvement in PE and the outer circles indicating more peripheral engagement. In the focus group interviews conducted toward the end of the curriculum change, students were asked to consider what they perceived as the defining features of the four levels of participation and to mark their own level of participation prior to the curriculum change, in the first unit of the curriculum change and in the second unit of the curriculum change on an individual diagram.

All interviews were conducted by the first author, tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the analysis to follow, all students and teachers mentioned are anonymous and information about individual students and teachers is limited.

**Analytical strategies**

For this article, we have worked intensively with analysing the informational and in particular relational intentions of students’ communication in the focus group interviews (Tammivaara and Enright 1996, 219). Whereas the informational intentions refer to what students communicate, the relational intentions refer to ‘how the information is understood within the relational context of the interactions’ (Dunn 2005, quoted in Freeman and Mathison 2009, 93).

In particular, we were inspired by associate professor in Child and Family Studies, Oliver Tom Massey. In his article from 2010, Massey describes a qualitative data analysis model that emphasizes thematic analysis and which specifically takes into account the capacity of the focus group method ‘to uncover the unique experiential data that determines the complexity of social situations’ (2010, 25). Thus, the data analysis model explicitly refers to information contained within ‘group meanings, processes, and norms that add new insights and generate new hypotheses and is the unanticipated product of comments and exchanges of group members’ (Massey 2010, 25).
Results

Listening to student voices

Based on the diagrams completed by students, we have developed a schematic overview of the changes in the students’ positioning of themselves as participants in PE (see Figure 1). The figure consists of 16 fields each representing the individual diagram of one student. So, each field contains the indications made by one student on his/her individual diagrams.

According to the diagrams, very few students took up a position of non-participation in PE prior to the curriculum change. Moreover, several students appear to have moved from a position of participation prior to the curriculum change to a position of non-participation in one or both units of the curriculum change. These data are supported by the general opinion voiced by students in the focus group interviews that they would like PE to return to ‘normal’.

However, our observations prior to and during the period of the curriculum change made us consider some of the more complex and problematic features that constitute voice. In particular, it made us eager to go beyond what was immediately voiced by students and to critically attend to the students’ silences.

The non-privileged silences

First of all, based on our observations and contrary to the diagram, Emma and Ethan were not the only students taking up a position of non-participation in PE prior to the curriculum change. Quite a few students were observed not to participate (Munk and Agergaard 2015). Many of these did not have the required physical skills, or at least the physical skills they had were not recognized by other students (Munk and Agergaard 2015). So, they were often found at the periphery of the activities, for instance on the sidelines or behind a post. Likewise, they mostly avoided any contact with the ball and they made sure not to interfere in the game. If unintentionally coming into possession of the ball, they immediately passed it to another player. The higher-skilled students did not appear to pay much attention to these students. They only seldom passed the ball to them or in other ways engaged them in the game. Likewise, the non-participatory students were rarely invited to take part in negotiations about the rules of the games or the composition of the teams.

So why did these students not place themselves in a position of non-participation prior to the curriculum change? And why did they not voice any dissatisfaction with PE prior to the curriculum change, despite the observed lack of involvement?

As pointed out by Mazzei (2003, 364) when explaining privileged silences: ‘If we don’t agree that we experience privilege or are unable to identify this privilege, then we are also unable to speak about this privilege’. The same point might be made in relation to the non-privileged silences. Thus, many of the lower-skilled students seemed to have neither recognized nor acknowledged their position of non-participation and the non-privilege of being physically lower skilled. These students did not make any complaints about their position in PE or refer to any of the above situations when asked about their own or other’s participation in PE, both during observations and in the focus group interviews.

In addition, many of these students placed themselves in the inner circle of the diagram, indicating that they did not perceive themselves as non-participants in PE. It is possible that these students did so to protect themselves – to conceal that they were (lower-skilled) or who they were (non-participants) – and as such are examples of what Mazzei (2003) describes as veiled silences. However, our interview data indicate that these students might actually not have been aware of just how much their non-privilege of being lower-skilled limited their scope for participation prior to the curriculum change. For instance, when talking with students about the diagram, most of them were opposed to skill level having any significance on their own or other’s (non-)participation in PE. Rather, non-participation appeared to be linked with an unwillingness to participate or a lack of interest in doing sport; it was the students’ attitudes rather than their skills. In the case of students referring
to other students’ position in PE, their rejection of skill level having any significance to participation might also be an example of the type of ‘polite silences’ described by Mazzei and as such indicate a fear of offending other students in terms of their low skill level.

Correspondingly, observing these students, they appeared quite satisfied with how things were in PE. They seemed happy just to be with their friends and to be allowed to play on the team. Although often assigned or taking up a very passive role, you never heard them complain or protest. What seemed to matter more for these students were their social relationships with other students, to show their affiliation with these and so keep up a more general sense of belonging. This was particularly noticeable among the female students often found arm-in-arm. The significance of students’ social relationships was also supported by the focus group interviews prior to the curriculum change in particular when students talked about team selection. Hence, students told that, when forming the teams, many girls as well as many lower-skilled students, in general, made use of a strategy of choosing ‘their good friends’ (Munk and Agergaard 2015). Turning to the curriculum change, many of the lower-skilled students, who were apparently satisfied with their current position, appeared resistant to the teachers’ attempts to encourage engagement in PE. Likewise, based on what they disclosed in the focus group interviews about their experiences of the curriculum change, they did not seem to either recognize or appreciate the possibilities of changing their position of participation that were offered to them through the curriculum change. Indeed, the curriculum change did not seem to make the lower-skilled students acknowledge their non-privilege, it just became a veil through which students’ vision of participation became clouded (Mazzei 2003, 357). As such, students remained unable to imagine that things could be different, to envision a more central position of participation in PE and to voice a desire for change.

**The curriculum change**

Turning our attention to the curriculum change, students’ positions of participation and non-participation were often more complex than immediately audible in the focus group interviews.
First of all, our observations suggested that there were certainly more students who enhanced their participation in PE in the two units of the curriculum change than the diagrams suggested. For instance, several students were observed to welcome the changes initiated by the external teacher and to gradually change their position of non-participation into a position of participation. For instance, many of the students previously taking up a marginal or outsider position in PE now appeared physically engaged in the games played and highly occupied in the tasks given by the teacher. Moreover, some of the students now also began to take part in discussion and negotiations with other students. So, why did not all of these students disclose what they liked about the curriculum change and share their experience of increasing participation in PE in our interviews with them?

Secondly, our observations identified a group of students who moved from a position of participation into a position of non-participation. In this regard, in particular, four girls stood out and deserved further attention. Not only did these four girls change their participation in PE in a very visible and bodily expressive manner, based on our observations, they also had a very dominant and respected position within the social hierarchy of the class both within and outside of PE. However, it was not until much later that we came to recognize just how significant these social relations appeared to be for other students’ norms, behaviours, and patterns of participation in PE and their voices, regarding what they shared with us and what they kept silent about.

As mentioned above, the four girls, along with other dominant and socially respected students in the class, showed a striking resistance towards the curriculum change. When introduced to activities, the four girls verbally and/or bodily expressed this resistance; they stared at the ground, looked indifferent or simply refused to participate. Also of note was their desire to turn the planned activities into their own games if the opportunity arose, while keeping their efforts to a minimum if they accepted to take part in anything the teacher planned.

Our study suggests that the rebellion initiated and maintained by these girls also had a significant influence on the positions taken up by the socially less respected and influential students in the PE classes during the period of the curriculum change. So, although in our observations many of these students appeared physically and cognitively engaged in and preoccupied with the activities in PE during the curriculum change, they were unquestionably also very aware to take note of how the most dominant and socially respected students comprehended the activities and to modify their involvement in accordance. Likewise, although a few students were obviously observed to welcome the changes initiated by the external teacher and to gradually ignore the behaviour and expectations of the most dominant and socially respected students, in the focus group interviews, they were tentative when disclosing what they liked about the curriculum change and sharing their experiences of increasing participation in PE.

It seems, therefore, that the fear of being socially sanctioned by the socially most respected students in the class controlled and restrained some students’ participation in PE during the time of the curriculum change. Also, others have found that the peer group dynamics within PE significantly influence students’ participation in PE (Grimminger 2013, 2014; Hills 2007; O’Donovan 2003).

However, while these researchers find that the most dominant students in the class may limit or hinder the participation of other students, in this study, we find that the socially less respected students may themselves reject or resist participation in PE in order not to break the established norms and lose their reputation and acceptance among classmates.

As the fear of being socially sanctioned controlled some students’ participation in PE, so it also seemed to restrain their voices in the interview. In particular, the socially less respected students appeared to be torn between the expectations of the interviewer and the expectations of the most dominant and socially respected students in the class, between sharing their experiences of participation and refraining from praising the curriculum change. In several instances, the former concern seemed outmatched by the latter. Except for a few students’ utterances, most of what was voiced in the interviews with the 7th grade students was dissatisfaction, anger and critique of PE in the period of the curriculum change. This ‘downward spiralling’ of dissatisfaction and in particular how this appeared counterintuitive to the observations made by the first author throughout the period of
the curriculum change left us with a feeling that students withheld something: something that could only be accessed by critically attending to the social dimensions of their voices and to that what was expressed through students’ silences.

**Students’ intentional silences**

According to Mazzei (2003), intentional silences happen when participants intentionally choose not to answer because they fear what their voice might reveal about themselves and what the reactions and judgement of the rest of the group might be. In the context of our study, the negative attitude of the most dominant and socially respected students in the class seemed to make some of the socially less respected students reluctant to share their positive experiences of participation in the period of the curriculum change. For instance, this reluctance became evident in the way some students resisted to elaborate on questions relating to their increased participation. As depicted in Figure 1, Ethan was one of the few students placing himself in a position of non-participation prior to the curriculum change and in a position of participation in both of the two units of the curriculum change. This was also a development noted by the observer. However, when Ethan was asked further questions about his changed position of participation, he did not provide an answer.

**Interviewer:** Why did you move inward Ethan?
**Ethan:** I don’t know?
**Interviewer:** Has PE changed?
**Ethan:** A lot
**Interviewer:** for better or worse?
**Ethan:** Mostly it is worse, so I don’t know why I participate more now
**Interviewer:** Does it have anything to do with something not related to PE then? You have started boxing in your leisure time haven’t you?
**Ethan:** Yes
**Interviewer:** So maybe you are just happier about being physically active now?
**Ethan:** Yeah that might be the case

It is possible that Ethan simply did not know what to answer and that his answers were eventually guided by the rhetorical questioning of the interviewer. Another possibility is that we simply failed to make questions understandable to Ethan. However, Ethan’s reluctance might also have been prompted by a fear of being negatively judged by the other students. A fear of giving a ‘wrong’ answer, that is, an answer breaking the norm negotiated by the most dominant and socially respected students of the class, not to praise the curriculum change or to value the new PE approach above the traditional PE classes. A fear of what an answer might come to mean for his social reputation and position among classmates. To admit that he had enjoyed participating in PE would point to satisfaction with the curriculum change; a curriculum change that had become ‘blacklisted’ by the dominant and socially respected students in the class. In particular, Ethan’s fear becomes apparent in the way he immediately grasps the opportunity, offered by the interviewer, to explain away his increased participation in PE with something that has nothing to do with the curriculum change, but with circumstances outside the school. Following from this, the excerpt might as well be an example of the wavering silences first described by Spyrou (2016) within the field of childhood studies. According to Spyrou (2016), wavering silences are the partial, the uncertain and the undecided silences that waver back and forth from concealment to disclosure.

Another strategy used by the students in the interviews to circumvent the risk of losing their good standing among classmates was to simply confirm the answers of other students. By only stating what others had already voiced, students could make sure not to break the established norms or at least not to be the only one breaking these. Alice, one of the socially accepted girls in the class, explicitly referred to this fear when explaining that not everyone did, for instance, find the teacher ‘that bad’. According to Alice, however, students refrained to voice such opinions, because they did not want to ‘be the only one to make this judgement’ and ‘to be turned against by everyone else in the
Alice, it turned out, was the only student who made this kind of comment, but earlier in the interview, other students also, and in particular the socially less dominant students, had admitted that they gave in to certain pressures when talking about PE and in particular about the PE teacher in their peer groups. This social context of students’ voices also became evident when students were made to know that they had actually liked or appreciated one or more elements of the curriculum change. These students would often go on to mention that they knew of other students sharing this same perspective or having these same feelings. In the same way, the social significance of students’ voices became apparent in the way one statement of satisfaction could prompt a cascade of similar responses.

When looking at the data and interview material, we also became aware of several contradictions within the individual student’s responses. There often seemed to be contradictions between what was voiced by some students at the beginning of an interview and the contemplations made by them later on, when they realized that there might be a fellowship of students bold enough to voice another truth than the truth advocated and propagandized by the highest-ranked students in the class. What was voiced by these students in the beginning of the interview was not necessarily less authentic or true than what was voiced by them later on (Spyrou 2011). Rather what these contradictions reveal are the complexities inherent in children’s voices.

The multidimensional nature of students’ voices

On the surface, what children voiced was dissatisfaction with how the curriculum change had changed their PE classes. However, when the researchers scratched the surface, embracing students’ silences as an important feature of their voices, what they actually, or at least also, expressed was a need to fit in, to be socially accepted and to be part of the community gathered around the most dominant and socially respected students in the class. Crucially, this layer of meaning actually does reveal at least as much about the conditions of participating or not in PE, as does the surface meaning; conditions that might have more to do with the already established social hierarchies between students than with specific circumstances within PE.

In particular in the 7th grade class studied, the PE climate seemed to be greatly influenced by the already established social hierarchies between students, and this meant that the agenda of the curriculum change was simply outmatched by the agenda of the socially most respected students, who strived to uphold their social positioning within and outside PE. To this end, we support the suggestion of Liz Todd (2012, 196) following her evaluation of ways of including young people with disabilities in a secondary school that there might be ‘merits in moving away from seeing the purpose of seeking children’s views solely in terms of neglected perspectives’ and in looking ‘at what children’s views tell us about power structures and the causes of social inclusion and exclusion.’ As this may be told in a more indirect way, however, these merits necessitate that we do acknowledge the complex and multidimensional nature of students’ voices and silences and that we do strive to go beyond their surface meanings in order to understand the multiple narratives contained within them.

How the desire to fit in influences what is not talked about and not told by students, and was also touched upon by Elke Grimminger in her study on how children handle situations of non-recognition (by other students and the teacher) in PE. Thus, Grimminger (2014) found that the less sporty children deny and stay silent about non-recognition experiences in PE even if these are obviously recorded by the videos.

Conclusion

In this article, we set out to explore silence as an integral part of student voice. Analyses of student silence were used as a strategy to elucidate how aspects of the hidden curriculum serve to reinforce students’ non-participation in PE. Whereas much attention in hidden curriculum research has been
devoted to particular values and attitudes unintentionally transmitted by teachers in PE, in this article, we examine how the everyday exchanges between the students themselves might also convey a hidden set of meanings, which impact on students’ actual experiences of the PE curriculum and thus mitigate the intended effects of students’ inclusion. In particular, we show how students’ peer group relations and interactions are highly significant to the position of participation or non-participation taken up by students in PE. What we also show, however, is that the tacit messages and hidden meanings that are conveyed through students’ peer group relations and interactions are not always obvious to the students themselves. Thus, it was mostly through silence that such messages and meanings were ‘voiced’ by students.

In the case of our study, students’ silences were highly interwoven with and reflective of the positions of participation and non-participation taken up by students in PE. First, among the most dominant and socially respected students in the class, the will not to say was intentionally enacted as a way of showing their resistance towards participation in PE. Second, in the context of the interview, pressures toward social conformity were highly significant to students’ will to unsay. Likewise, these pressures were reflected in the position of non-participation intentionally taken up by some of the socially less respected students in PE. So, these students seemed highly aware that how they behaved in PE as well as what they disclosed in the interview could have consequence not only for their peer group connections within PE but also for their social reputation among peers outside PE.

In addition to describing students’ intentional silences in PE, this study adds to existing typologies of silences by pointing to a category of non-privileged silences. Students’ non-privileged silences revealed that some students were not aware of or had not acknowledged their non-privileged position as non-participants in PE and so were unable to imagine that things could be different and to voice a desire for change.

Apparent from our analysis is that these are critical aspects of students’ (non-)participation that are difficult to access if we do not listen to, hear and attempt to understand students’ silences. As such, students’ silences became a possibility for learning (Poland and Pederson 1998) a point of departure for the discovery of new aspects of students’ participation and non-participation in PE. Our hope is that this article may encourage other researchers to let students’ silences breathe and speak.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


Tekian, A. 2009. “Must the Hidden Curriculum Be the 'Black Box' for Unspoken Truth?” *Medical Education* 43 (9): 822–823.


ARTICLE 3

The Inclusive Potential and Challenges of Replacing a Performance-oriented with a Mastery-oriented Curriculum Model in Physical Education

Mette Munk* and Sine Agergaard**

Department of Public Health, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

*Corresponding author. Department of Public Health, Section for Sport Science, Aarhus University, Dalgas Avenue 4.3, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark. Phone: +45 22749825. Email: mmj@ph.au.dk

** Department of Public Health, Section for Sport Science, Aarhus University, Dalgas Avenue 4.3, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark. Phone: +45 87168187. Email: sa@ph.au.dk
The Inclusive Potential and Challenges of Replacing a Performance-oriented with a Mastery-oriented Curriculum Model in Physical Education

The purpose of this article was to examine the inclusive potential and challenges of replacing a performance-oriented with a mastery-oriented curriculum model in physical education (PE). More specifically, we aimed to examine how changing the relations between PE, sport and school, might shape students’ willingness and possibilities to participate in PE. The study is based on a qualitative single-case study. Data collection took place over two consecutive school terms in two strategically selected PE classes and included weekly observations of PE lessons and focus group interviews with students (including filling out inclusion diagrams). On the basis of collected data, units of meaning were established, categorized into themes, and synthesized using Etienne Trayner’s work on landscapes of practice to consider and interpret the broad range of communities to which PE connects and to which students relate when they negotiate, construct and evaluate the meaning of PE.

The mastery-oriented curriculum model was shown to have a great potential with regard to including, in particular, the academically inclined girls and the girls who had no or only limited experience with organised (performance) sport. Thus, for many of these students, PE came to be experienced as a meaningful and legitimate place of learning and as a subject worth participating in. Paradoxically, however, the same changes that made inclusion into PE possible for these students were responsible for other students’ experiences of exclusion, in particular
among academically less inclined girls and among physically skilled girls with great experience in participating in leisure time sport.

Keywords: Competence, Learning, Legitimacy, Meaningful; Participation

Introduction

International research shows a widespread application of the multi-curriculum model in physical education (PE) (see, for example, Ennis, 1999). Furthermore, the predominant use of this model has been argued to have a significant bearing on some students’ exclusion in PE.

First, the activity-based structure of the multi-curriculum model has been argued to reinforce focus on students’ performance and achievement in specific sports (Hardman, 2006). Moreover, this ‘sportization of PE’ (Green, 2008) has been argued to narrow students’ image of how physical activity is supposed to be carried out, to legitimate particular types of knowledge and thus to assign value to particular learners (Evans, 1990; Penney, 2013; Redelius and Larsson, 2010).

Second, the central idea of presenting students with a range of physical activity experiences means that PE has come to be perceived by students as well as teachers as a release from rather than as a part of the academic content of education (see, for example, Cothran and Ennis, 2001; Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Gard et al. 2013; Green, 2000). Thus, the multi-curriculum model appears to undermine the educational intent of PE and to stress a recreational framework for students’ participation (Gard et al. 2013). Moreover, the requirement to introduce many activities during a limited number of PE sessions means that only a short amount of time can be spent on each activity and many students thus struggle to ‘develop the necessary appreciation of the
activity, the specific movement patterns required in each and an understanding of how these patterns are employed in context’ (Murdoch and Whitehead, 2013: 63).

Third, the multi-curriculum model does not appear to provide students with meaningful experiences of how learning in PE relates to different sports contexts, to other school subject, and to experiences beyond schools (Penney and Chandler, 2000). This limits students’ possibilities to transfer knowledge and competences to other spheres of life and therefore, makes PE seem valueless, irrelevant and meaningless to students (see e.g. Ennis, 1999; Fernández-Balboa, 1997a, 1997b; Kirk and MacDonald 1998; Murdoch and Whitehead, 2013; Penney and Chandler, 2000). Moreover, even though there seems to be a rather clear connection between the multi-curriculum model of PE and the practices of sport more broadly, the form in which sport is taught is apparently too abstract for participation to be meaningful and of educational value to most students (Kirk and Kinchin, 2003).

As such, the multi-curriculum model appears to fundamentally limit who can fully access and reap it rewards (Penney, 2013). Thus, it has been argued that ‘doing things differently and doing different things in the name of PE’ is the key to promote inclusion in PE (Penney, 2013: 7). However, finding forms that cannot easily be associated with competitive sports and which may challenge both hierarchies of knowledge and social hierarchies, which prevail inside the subject of PE, may necessitate that alternative methods of instruction as well as an alternative content of teaching are found (Redelius and Larsson, 2010: 698). Moreover, to do so, may require that we replace, rather than attempt to improve or repair, the dominant models of PE (Locke, 1992).

However, arguments in favour of such a replacement, tends to be theoretical rather
than empirical (Siedentop, et al., 1994: 375). More specifically, in recent years curriculum change from a student perspective has been emphasised as a research area in need of development (Penney, 2006).

Therefore, the purpose of this article was to empirically examine the inclusive potential and challenges of a curriculum change where the traditional performance-oriented multi-activity curriculum is replaced by a mastery-oriented curriculum model emphasizing the educational objectives of PE. In particular we aimed to examine a) what kind of learning and participation opportunities that this model provides b) how different students experience and respond to such opportunities.

**An educational framework for participation in PE**

In efforts to make PE more inclusive, more researchers have suggested curriculum approaches emphasising the educational or academic elements of PE rather than continuing multi-activity and performance-oriented approaches to PE (see, for example, Gard et al., 2013; Penney and Chandler, 2000; Tinning et al., 1994).

In 1994, some of the proponents of an educational approach, Tinning et al. argued that ‘the subject needs to be conceptualised as an education process, positioned within education discourses and drawing on educational arguments rather than be appropriated by protagonists for sport, health, or exercise’ (cited in MacDonald and Brooker, 1997: 159). Likewise, in order to make PE more relevant to students, Gard et al. (2013: 111) proposed that PE should simply ‘try harder to be educative – that is, to actually teach something – rather than being satisfied with occupying students or offering them a range of experiences’.

One of the first attempts to emphasise the educative potential of PE is seen in
Arnold’s (1979) conceptual account of meaning in movement, sport and PE. In an attempt to justify the educational value of PE, Arnold (1979) refers to three dimensions of learning movement: 1. learning ‘about’, 2. learning ‘through’ and 3. learning ‘in’ movement. The ‘learning about’ dimension refers to the theoretical body of knowledge about human movement in the shape of sub-disciplines such as anatomy, physiology and sociology. ‘Education through movement’ is perceived in instrumental terms and refers to the educational process of developing extrinsic learning objectives through participation in physical activity. These learning objectives may relate to domains such as physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of movement and are associated with purposes such as becoming more skilled (Brown and Penney, 2017). The ‘learning in’ dimension is concerned with inherent values of movement and as such the knowledge, understanding and skills that students acquire as a direct result of thoughtful participation in physical activity (Brown and Penney, 2013). Importantly, Arnold (1979) emphasises that although conceptually discrete, these dimensions are functionally related. Thus, stressing the inherent inter-dependency and inter-connectedness of the dimensions, Arnold’s (1979) intention was that theory and practice should be integrated rather than separated (Jones and Penney, 2015). Similar attempts to ‘dismantle the gaps of nexus between the traditional binaries of theoretical and practical knowledge’ and hence, the mind-body dualism, are found in Kirk’s (1988) concept of ‘intelligent performance’ (Brown and Penney, 2017).

Turning to the 21st century, one of the most compelling arguments in favour of emphasising the educational elements of PE is reported by Penney and Chandler (2000). Questioning the relevance of PE in its current definition and structure as well as the nature and purpose of physical activity in PE, Penney and Chandler (2000: 71)
argue that PE should be defined in relation to its connectedness to education. In continuation they present a curriculum framework that privileges ‘learning achieved in and via activity contexts, as compared to learning of activities’. In so doing they suggest that the defining feature of PE should be the contribution to learning, rather than the activities through which this contribution ultimately may be achieved. To achieve this, they contend that a thematically oriented rather than activity-based curriculum is needed; thus, lessons should be defined in themes rather than through specific activities or sports. A thematically oriented curriculum may also, they argue, reduce the ‘insulation’ between different activities in PE, and as such promote the connection between units of work. Importantly, according to Penney and Chandler (2000), an educational approach to PE does not preclude the development of skills, knowledge and understanding associated with specific sports, neither does it deny the central importance of the physical aspect of physical education.

However, although compelling theoretical arguments have been provided in favour of a mastery-oriented curriculum model emphasising the educational objectives in PE, such a model has, to the best of our knowledge, not been empirically examined from an inclusion perspective.

**Theoretical framework**

In a previous article, we contended that the inclusion and exclusion processes in PE might be conceptualised through Etienne Wenger’s (1998) theory of learning trajectories and the diverse positions of participation and non-participation in a community of practice to which they lead. Thus, critical to being included as a legitimate peripheral participant, students are to be granted enough legitimacy from other students to be treated as potential members in PE and to experience learning in
PE as meaningful (Munk and Agergaard, 2015). In relation to the latter, one important consideration is the context in which the meaning of PE may be drawn.

To describe the learning environment of specific professions consisting of a number of educational communities and workplace communities, Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015: 13) introduced the concept of a landscape of practice, which was defined as ‘a complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them’. In the context of the current article, we find this concept particularly useful to consider and interpret the broad range of communities to which PE is connected and to which students relate when they negotiate, construct and evaluate the meaning of PE (figure 1). The work by Kirk (1999) underpins our definition of the central communities of practices in the PE landscape. However, whereas Kirk (1999: 69) suggests that PE ‘informs and is informed by’ the overlapping fields of sport, exercise and physical recreation, we extend this understanding, by suggesting that the school itself may support the meaning of PE as an educational subject with defined learning objectives.

Figure 1: Illustration of the landscape of practice of PE in a traditional multi-activity curriculum model. The sizes of the illustrated overlaps between the communities of
practice (circles) within the landscape of PE (square) are dependent upon how the boundaries are negotiated within the community of practice of PE.

Wenger-Trayner et al.’s (2015) concept of a landscape of practice is followed by the acknowledgement that learning is not isolated in a single community of practice but is affected by participants’ multi-membership in other communities of practice within and outside a particular landscape. Furthermore, it is suggested that learning not only takes place within single communities of practice but also at the boundaries between different communities of practice within the landscape. Hence, an important aspect of the theory of Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) concerning landscapes of practices is the potential for unexpected learning and insight at the boundaries between different practices. Equally, significant for such boundary encounters is the potential for misunderstanding and confusion arising from the sometimes competing regimes of competence, values and meanings of the different communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). Hence, as competence is not merely an individual characteristic but something negotiated and recognized as a competence among members in a community of practice, specific communities of practice have specific regimes of competences. As a consequence, ‘we cannot be competent in all the practices in a landscape, but we can still be knowledgeable about them, their relevance to our practice, and thus our location in the broader landscape’ (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015: 19).

To make sense of the landscape and our position in it, we make use of three different modes of identification; engagement, imagination and alignment (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015). Engagement is described as our most immediate relation to a landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015: 20). Through engagement, we obtain direct experience of regimes of competence and if this experience resonates it
may develop into an identity of participation (or elsewhere an identity of non-participation). Imagination is the process of creating images of the world and ourselves. Such images are essential to locate ourselves and interpret our participation in a landscape (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015: 21). Like the mode of engagement, the mode of imagination might work by either connecting us or distancing us. Importantly, the processes of identification through engagement and imagination, respectively, are highly interrelated as engagement in practice provides resources for building a picture of the world, and that picture in turns determines how we identify with practice (Wenger, 1998). Alignment is a process of complying with the norms, values and expectation of a community. However, as alignment is not just a one-way process, it also involves allegiance as for instance fighting a decision that we find unjust, violating a moral code or joining a rebellion (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015: 21). Thus, similar to engagement and imagination, alignment may result in an identity of either participation or non-participation.

In conclusion, defining PE as a landscape of practice provides a framework for analysing how students draw meaning from PE and the process by which students develop an identity of either participation or non-participation. Moreover, the framework enables an analysis of why boundary encounters between communities of practice in the landscape of PE might appear as meaningful assets of learning for some students, while others find such encounters a challenge to their self-image. These are all essential issues, we argue, when evaluating the inclusive potential and challenges of the curriculum model suggested in this article.

**Research design and methods**

This paper presents material from a qualitative single-case study. Material was
collected over one calendar year as the students moved from 6th to 7th grade (students aged 12-14 year) and from 8th to 9th grade (students aged 13-15 years). The aim of the first school term was to understand how the inclusion and exclusion processes play out in PE. This knowledge served as a pre-study for the curriculum change that was developed and implemented in the second school term; the results of which are the basis for this article.

**The curriculum change**

Prior to the curriculum change, a pre-study was conducted providing insights into the existing PE classes (Munk and Agergaard, 2015; Agergaard et al., 2017). Data was collected over one school term lasting approximately five months with weekly observations of all PE classes in 7th through 9th grade along with focus group interviews with students about their understanding of and experiences concerning participation and non-participation in PE. Observations showed that non-participation in PE was a pertinent issue in all grades. Hence, between 15-50 % of the students did not show up for PE, did not engage in the activities despite being on the field, or where left on the sideline. In this six-month period a traditional teacher-directed multi-activity curriculum was used. Observations pointed to little learning-oriented instruction and to only a limited amount of time being spent on enhancing students’ skills in and knowledge of PE. Rather, in many cases the leisurely sporting activities provided followed a performance-oriented approach emphasising competition and winning. From the focus group interviews with students it became clear that to a large extent, PE was perceived as a spare time and break activity to students. Adding to students’ experiences of PE being irrelevant, they found PE to have been following the same routine progression and covering the same sporting activities year after year.
In summary, this PE context presented an ideal case for a curriculum change to allow for more students’ inclusion in PE. Moreover, the pre-study led to a selection of a theoretical framework for the curriculum model, that focused on changing the teaching climate during the PE sessions toward a focus on motivation. However, as both the content and the delivery of the PE curriculum might be critical for fostering students’ on-going participation (Welsman and Armstrong, 2000) in addition to changing the motivational climate, we intended to reflect a distinctly new orientation in the units taught; an orientation toward the educational aspects of PE.

To promote a mastery climate in PE, the TARGET approach was applied (Ames 1992). In particular, lesson plans were designed along the structural, content-based TARGET elements; Task, Authority, Grouping and Time, and an external teacher was instructed in the two teaching behaviour elements; Evaluation and Recognition. A further description of the implementation of TARGET as well as an outline for the teaching of PE based on the TARGET approach can be found in Agergaard et al. (2017) During the period of the intervention, only the external teacher and the first author were present in the PE sessions.

The new curriculum was taught in 12-14 lessons (each lasting 100 min.). In the first unit, the theme was ‘Motivation and the joy of movement’. The theme was taught, discussed, reflected upon and understood alongside the planning and testing of an ‘adventure-race’. In the second unit, the theme was ‘Sport in society’. The theme drew from Quidditch, a team ball game known from the Harry Potter series. In addition to students’ acquisition of the physical skills and tactical knowledge necessary to play the game, it was compared to more traditional team ball games e.g. soccer. Also, students discussed and reflected upon the possibility of organizing
Quidditch as a leisure time activity.

Participants

Two of the classes observed in the pre-study, one 7th grade and one 9th grade were selected for use in the implementation and evaluation of the curriculum change. In the two classes a total of 46 students participated. The composition of students in the two classes was rather different. In the 9th grade, 16 out of 22 students were girls, whereas in the 7th grade, 12 out of 24 students were girls. Secondly, in the 9th grade, approximately 65 % of the students were ethnic minority students, whereas in the 7th grade this was only around 20 %. Finally, whereas many of the students in the 7th grade were engaged in organised sport/sport clubs, many of the students in the 9th grade were not.

Procedures

Data used in this study include five months of weekly observational field notes and a total of six focus group interviews with students.

In total, 26 lessons were observed. The first author typically arrived in the gym or hallway 10-15 minutes prior to the PE lesson and left the school 10-20 minutes after the PE lesson had finished. During the observations, the author looked for visible and audible signs of students’ engagement and non-engagement in PE, and ways in which students related to each other, the teachers and the practices and values of PE.

In addition to the informal conversations and interactions with students during the observations, three focus group interviews were conducted in each class in the last week of the intervention. Focus group interviews have been shown to be an effective way to obtain a diverse range of information and perspectives from participants.
Each focus group consisted of 4-6 students. The first author selected the students to be interviewed representing diversity of e.g. gender, skills, and ethnicity. Moreover, based on the observations, students were selected so that students mainly taking up participating positions in PE and students, mainly taking up non-participating positions in PE, were equally represented in the focus groups.

In the focus group interviews, students were presented with tasks that would trigger reflection on their own and others’ position in the PE context before and during the curriculum change. In one of the tasks, students were asked to mark their level of participation in PE prior to the curriculum change, in the first unit of the mastery-oriented curriculum program and in the second unit of the mastery-oriented curriculum program, on a diagram consisting of four circles representing different levels of participation (see figure 2).

![Inclusion diagram](image)

**Figure 2:** Illustration of the inclusion diagram that was filled out by each of the students that participated in the focus group interviews. Each student marked his/her position of participation in PE prior to the curriculum change (X1), in the first unit of the mastery-oriented curriculum program (X2), and in the second unit of the mastery-oriented curriculum program (X3).

The diagram facilitated a longer discussion among students about the defining
features of the different levels of participation and non-participation. Furthermore, the reasons for the inward and outward movements marked by the students were discussed and reflected upon. Specific examples of participation and non-participation noted by the interviewer during the observation were used to further facilitate this discussion.

As the interview material was collected at the end of the intervention, students’ positioning of themselves in the diagram before as well as during the intervention, were reflections of what had happened. Rather than focusing on the students’ precise participation, the authors set out to understand the students’ experiences of the curriculum change and their reasons for movements between positions in the diagram.

**Data analysis**

In the various forms of data from interviews and observations, units of meaning were established. Further, units of meaning were categorized into themes and linked to theoretical models in line with analytical strategies outlined as thematic analysis (Guest et al. 2012). More specifically, themes were synthesized, summarized and extended using the recent work by Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) on landscapes of practice presented above (Guest et al. 2012).

**Ethics**

General school procedures to obtain informed consent were followed. Prior to the project, all students were given child-friendly information about the project and parents were informed about the project via the school intranet. To protect the students’ and the teachers’ anonymity, all identifying information has been removed
Results

Figure 3 illustrates how students’ positioned themselves in the inclusion diagram. The numbers in the figure 3 show how many students in the 7th grade and the 9th grade, respectively, placed themselves in each of the circles prior to the curriculum change (Prior), in unit 1 of the mastery-oriented curriculum program (Unit 1) and in unit 2 of the mastery-oriented curriculum program (Unit 2). The numbers in parentheses specify how many of the students were girls.

As evident form the inclusion diagram eight 9th grade students perceived themselves as taking up a position of exclusion in PE prior to the curriculum change. In unit 1 of the curriculum change, this number was two and in the unit 2 of the curriculum change, only one student took up a position of exclusion. This appeared representative for how we had observed students changing positions between inclusion and exclusion in the class as a whole.

In the 7th grade, two of the students participating in the focus group interviews perceived themselves as taking up a position of exclusion prior to the curriculum change. In unit 1 of the curriculum change, this number was fourteen and in unit 2 it was seven. Based on our observations in the 7th grade class, more students than indicated in the students’ own diagrams were placed in a marginal or outsider position prior to the curriculum change. Likewise, several students were observed to enhance their participation and engagement in PE during the curriculum change in particular in the second unit (see Munk and Agergaard, 2017).

The discrepancies, however, did not change the overall conclusion that while the
curriculum change facilitated many students’ inclusion in PE, it also facilitated the exclusion of others.

![Diagrams showing levels of participation](image)

Figure 3: The inclusion diagrams filled out by students in the focus group interviews. The circles indicate different levels of participation with the inner circle representing the students who participated the most and the outer circle representing the least participatory students. Based on the defining features of the different levels of participation and non-participation as expressed by students, a border between positions of inclusion and positions of exclusion might be drawn between the two inner and the two outer circles.

When analysing the learning and participation facilitated by the curriculum change and the reasons why some students increased participation and others did not, four interrelated themes emerged: 1. *A decreased risk of being judged*; 2. *A changed regime of competence*; 3. *learning in PE*; 4. *The connection between PE, sport and school*. Within these themes all three modes of identification described by Wenger-Trayner et al. (2105), are represented. Hence, the modes of engagement, imagination...
and alignment all appeared important to how students made sense of the landscape of PE and of their position in this landscape during the time of the curriculum change.

**A decreased risk of being judged**

One important intention of the curriculum change was the facilitation of a mastery-oriented motivational climate in PE. Reflecting this facilitation, in the focus group interviews being an insider in PE was described without reference to the performance of physical skills by most 7th as well as 9th grade students. Rather, ‘doing your best’ and ‘keep on trying’, were the themes emphasized by the students. The change of motivational climate appeared to make students less passionate about winning. Moreover, the decreased passion for winning played a great role in particular to some of the physically low-skilled girls. Hence, they expressed an experience of increased legitimacy from other students in PE during the curriculum change. One of the girls moving from a position of inclusion to a position of exclusion during the curriculum change explained:

> People don’t judge me in the same way as they did before [prior to the curriculum change]. Especially, when we played soccer, people were very tough. People are not that passionate about Qudditch as about for instance soccer (Lucia, 9th grade, author’s translation).

Students’ decreased passion for winning might have been further reinforced by the activities being different from traditional team sports such as for instance soccer and basketball, and as such less easily associated with competitive sports and with performance as an inherent value and measure of success. Moreover, as also reported by Brooker and MacDonald (1999), the non-traditional activities appeared to make
students start at the same level and hence, to reinforce a perception of nobody being better than anyone else:

There’s nobody who is the best. If we look back at other ball games, like soccer, then some are chosen before others. In Quidditch you don’t know who are the best, so everybody is equally involved (Robin, 7th grade, author’s translation).

Boys are better at soccer because it’s something they practice, but nobody practices Quidditch, so we all started at the same level (Lucia, 9th grade, author’s translation).

In summary, the establishment of a mastery-motivational climate in connection with the provision of non-traditional team sports seemed to decrease students’ experiences of being judged and served as an important basis on which students could develop into legitimate peripheral participants in PE.

**A changed regime of competence**

During the curriculum change, an equal amount of time was spent on the learning of activities (for instance Quidditch) and on developing students’ abilities to enact, understand and reflect upon and discuss their relations to the multiplicity of practices across the landscape of PE (for instance in relation to their physical experiences and theoretical understanding of different joys of movement). One of the intentions was to influence what was recognized as competence in PE. A changed regime of competence not only being mandated by the teacher but also recognized among students was evident in the way students described the main differences between the mastery-oriented curriculum program and the PE practice they knew prior to the curriculum change.

I think it’s the difference between the things we did before the summer vacation [prior to the curriculum change] and the things we do now. When we do things
now, there is something we need to think about. (Sophia, 9th grade, author’s translation)

The teacher wants us to think about some things. Before [prior to the curriculum change] they only required us to do something. (Rachel, 7th grade, author’s translation).

Hence, according to the students, being competent in PE went from being defined only in relation the practice of doing to be defined also in relation to the practice of thinking and knowing.

The changed regime of competence also seemed to greatly influence students’ opportunities for and willingness to participate in PE. We observed that many students that used to make themselves invisible or in other ways escape participation in PE engaged more fully in the required coursework in the mastery-oriented curriculum program and even took up leadership positions, for example, when designing and planning the adventure race and discussing, reflecting upon and evaluating the theoretical and practical dimensions of Quidditch.

Moreover, the responsibility taken by these students appeared to be widely recognised among many of their peers. A clear illustration of this is found in an observation made halfway through the unit 1 of the curriculum change. In the following description, particular attention is given to Sarah; a student who placed herself in a position of exclusion prior to the curriculum change. She, however, perceived herself as being in a position of inclusion in both units of the mastery-oriented curriculum program.

The groups are preparing the last details of their adventure races, in which everybody in the class will take part in the following lessons. In one of the groups they discuss what they are to name their race. Sarah comes up with a lot of names that are discussed in the group. While the four girls discuss enthusiastically, the two boys in the group stay more passive. However, suddenly
Adam smiles and shouts ‘Girl Power, what about naming it Girl Power’
(Observation, 9th grade, 15.09.15)

Adam’s utterance clearly was a surprise but also a recognition of the leadership positions taken by the girls in the process of preparing and planning their adventure race. Hence, our results widely support Penney’s (2013: 17) argument that the established knowledge boundaries in PE, or what we here describe as the regime of competence, assign value to particular competences and to particular learners.

However, in this study, the changed regime of competence also appeared to have a downside. Angela, Karen, Debra and Tina were four of the 7th grade students who actively participated in PE prior to the curriculum change, but who refused to engage in PE during the mastery-oriented PE program. These girls were observed to distance themselves from the changed regime of competence negotiated in this program. When introduced to new activities, they looked indifferent. They often turned to each other verbally and bodily expressing that they were not going to participate. In reflections and discussions, they kept staring into the ground and if asked to join, they typically just replied with a ‘yes’, a ‘no’ or ‘I don’t know’.

Angela, Karen, Debra and Tina all participated in youth sport clubs and were greatly recognised for their physical skills among other students in the 7th grade. In PE prior to the curriculum change they often managed not only to decide the content of the PE session, but also to negotiate the practices and the meaning and value of PE. As master practitioners in many of the games being played prior to the curriculum change, Angela, Karen, Debra and Tina were ‘secure in the present regime of competence’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015: 26). However, the changed regime of competence meant that being a competent performer of sport was
not necessarily enough to make students competent students in PE. Thus, to take up a
central position of participation in PE was no longer only related to students’
performance of sport techniques. Therefore, from considering themselves as
competent students in PE, Angela, Karen, Debra and Tina were faced with an
experience of being rendered incompetent by their unfamiliarity with the new regime
of competence (Fenton-O’Creery et al. 2015).

In addition, the way Debra reacted when the teacher applauded other students during
the mastery-oriented curriculum program indicated a fear of losing status as a master
practitioner of PE.

The students are working in small teams. One of the teams is applauded for their
excellent cooperation. Debra asks, insulted and angry: ‘What about our team,
didn’t we cooperate well’? (Observation, 7th grade, 19.09.15)

In this and in other situations, Debra seems to verbally reject the judgments of
competence expressed by the teacher when appraising other teams and students. First
of all, it might have been unfamiliar and uncomfortable for Debra to change from the
role of a master to the role of a novice. Secondly, Debra may perceive the appraisal as
an indirect rejection of her status as being among the (most) competent performers of
sport and as such a potential threat to the legitimacy and respect that she usually
enjoys among peers. This supports Cothran and Ennis’ (1999: 234) argument that
‘educational engagement is not an isolated construct’. Rather, students’ emotional
and personal connections to peers in the classroom and the school are also
fundamental to their engagement in PE (Cothran and Ennis, 1999). Prior to the
curriculum change, PE represented a perfect arena for girls like Debra to display a
superiority of physical skills and to mark a relationship with other physically skilled
girls. However, in the mastery-oriented curriculum program, Debra was forced to find
other ways to act out her superiority and her relationship to peers.

In sum, among some students the changed regime of competence appeared to result in an experience of competence, among others in an experience of incompetence. Moreover, as the changed regime of competence appeared to make some students move into a position of participation, it appeared to make other students move into a position of non-participation.

Learning in PE

In contrast to the PE practice prior to the curriculum change, where most of the time was spent competing in traditional ball games known from communities of sport outside PE, the mastery-oriented curriculum program attempted to provide students with greater possibilities for developing their physical skills, and the knowledge and understanding necessary for successfully playing a game. One important focus of the mastery-oriented curriculum program was to enhance students’ tactical understanding and to provide students with the knowledge necessary for them to make sense of what they observe and hear in PE (such as the verbal communication and slang used between players in ball games).

Moreover, to recognise the potential of apprenticeship learning between students in PE, in the mastery-oriented curriculum most course work was done in groups. It was not the teacher but the students themselves that developed and composed the activities for their adventure races. Likewise, it was the students themselves who defined and analysed the different player positions in Quidditch, who developed the technical and tactical exercises appropriate for the different player positions and who taught this to their peers.
In all of the focus group interviews, students mentioned learning as a significant change to their PE program.

Despite handball being the activity in PE several times, I still cannot play handball, because nobody has taught us how to do it. However, in this unit, I have become able to play Quidditch (Lucia, 9th grade, author’s translation)

Lucia did ice-skating and fitness in her leisure time and had limited experience with team ball games as a leisure sport activity. The focus on learning may have contributed to enable students such as Lucia to take up a more central position of participation. Hence, we observed that more students succeeded in playing a more active role in team ball games.

Equally important, many of the students who engaged in leisure sport, managed to connect learning in the mastery-oriented curriculum program with their leisure sport experiences.

You might transfer it to other games like soccer. Personally, I think I have become more tactical. Usually I just played, but now I actually think about what I am doing. (Adam, 9th grade, author’s translation)

What Adam here acknowledges are the transfer of competences between PE and the communities of institutionalized sport in which he participates.

Regarding the emphasis assigned to apprenticeship learning between students in PE, as also supported by others (see, for example, Azzarito and Ennis, 2003; Smither and Zhu, 2011), we found many students to appreciate being perceived not as passive receivers of learning but as creative creators of their own learning.

I like that we work a lot in groups because then we don’t have the feeling, that the teacher decides everything. We have to do the stuff, so we have to be a part
of it, and to be a part of it we need to decide on some things ourselves. (Lucia, 9th grade, author’s translation).

What Lucia here seems to express is that the emphasis given to interaction and cooperation between students served as a facilitator for her engagement in PE and made learning in PE more relevant to her.

However, our findings also indicate that not all students found it easy to align with the intention of apprenticeship learning. In particular, some of the physically skilled girls in the 7th grade seemed to have difficulties as well as reservations entering into relations of apprenticeship learning rather than competing against classmates. For instance, they were observed to turn activities created and instructed by peers into (throwing) competitions. Moreover, in group-work they were observed to often bark at novices and to generally be unwilling to grant the legitimacy necessary for the other students to move towards more intensive participation in PE. Based on our observations of how these girls attempted to negotiate the meaning of PE, it became clear that they were highly influenced by their participation in the community of sport. In ball games they were found to only accept a strict application of the official rules and to only play the students who they considered able to execute the game. Hence, these girls might have had difficulties reconciling their desire to perform with the intentions of apprenticeship learning negotiated by the mastery-oriented curriculum program. Moreover, to these girls, PE might have lost its ‘resonance’ (Kubiak et al., 2015: 79) with practice outside the immediate setting of PE.

The relation between PE, sport and school

In the mastery-oriented curriculum, efforts were made to reify the place of education in PE and hence, to signal, the connectedness to school. More students found that the
connection established between PE and school increased both the relevance and the significance of their participation.

Chloe: Before [prior to the curriculum change] PE was just like playing. Now it’s become more serious
Sarah: It’s become a subject.
Chloe: Yes, it’s become a subject. It wasn’t before.
Sarah: It was just for fun.
Adam: PE is much more important than I used to think
(Conversation between students, 9th grade, author’s translation)

Hence, whereas prior to the curriculum change the value and meaning of PE was understood by students in relation to the value and meaning of performance sport and/or recreation, more students came to understand it in relation to the value and meaning of attending school and in relation to learning. As such the mastery-oriented curriculum program significantly shaped the way many students made sense of and draw meaning to PE.

Before [prior to the curriculum change] PE did not have any significance to me, it was motion and jumping around, now we also think about theory, tactics and techniques and it’s not just movement. A game isn’t just a game – you need to think about the organisation of the game. There are many things you need to think about in PE now. (Lucia, 9th grade, author’s translation).

Based on students’ engagement in the practice of the mastery-oriented curriculum program and their experiences of the changed regime of competence, many students appeared to build a new picture of the landscape of PE; a landscape no longer only associated with communities of sport and physical recreation, but also with the school as a community of education.

As least as significant to these students' building of a new picture of the landscape of
PE was a clarification of the differences between PE and (organised) performance sport. Hence, the direct line between PE and (organised) performance sport drawn by many students, significantly shaped how some of the girls, and in particular the girls who did not attend any leisure sport clubs, distanced themselves from the practice of PE prior to the curriculum change.

I didn’t know anything about sport, so I had a feeling that I couldn’t contribute to anything in PE. However, now I think I can add something valuable (Sarah, 9th grade, author’s translation).

As indicated by Sarah and other peers, students’ engagement in the mastery-oriented PE program was essential for how they came to re-interpret their participation and to relocate themselves in the landscape. To other students, however, the attempt made in the mastery-oriented curriculum program to change the relation between PE, sport and school, appeared to distance them from PE.

Hence, while emphasizing the connection between PE and school appeared essential for some students’ relocation towards inclusion in PE, it appeared as least as significant to other students' relocation towards a position of exclusion. In particular, this seemed to be the case among a number of the high status 7th grade girls with extensive experience in organised leisure sports. Among the 7th grade students, expressing the greatest indignation toward the mastery-oriented curriculum program, learning in school did not appear particularly valued. Our notion of this was confirmed by talking with other teachers who knew the students involved in the curriculum change and who expressed that among these students identification with the general norms of being a good student was neither valued nor accepted. The strongest indignation towards the reification of school was noted in relation to the introduction of homework in PE. However, reservations towards school were also
apparent in their reluctance to take part and engage in group conversations, discussions and reflections in PE. Hence, it appeared that to many of these students stepping into PE meant crossing the boundary out of school. Among these students, the teacher therefore remained challenged to effectively mediate the interplay of education discourse with the discourse of sport (Penney, 2013: 9) and to effectively communicate across the boundary between the ‘old PE’ and the ‘new PE’; that is, between being a competent performer of sport in PE and being a knowledgeable student in PE.

Discussion

As apparent from our findings the inclusive potential and challenges of the mastery-oriented curriculum showed out very different in the 7th and the 9th grade class. In particular the experiences and reactions of some of the 7th grade girls were very different from the experiences and reactions of most of the 9th grade girls.

First of all, this might be explained by the highly different composition of students in the two classes. In general, the 7th grade students appeared less academically inclined than the 9th grade students and to have more experience with organised sport. In addition, more students in the 9th grade than in the 7th grade had an ethnic minority background. Thus, it is possible that the master-oriented PE curriculum program has the greatest potential regarding the inclusion of ethnic minority girls, girls with no or only limited experience with organised sport and/or girls being academically inclined.

Secondly, previous research has shown that the relation between students and the PE teacher influence students’ attitudes to and participation in PE (see, for example, Subramaniam and Silverman, 2000). Thus, it cannot be precluded that the different responses seen between the 7th and the 9th grade girls, also had to do with their
different relation to the external teacher responsible for the implementation of the

curriculum model.

Conclusion

This study showed students’ diverse experiences of and responses to the learning and
participation opportunities offered by the mastery-oriented curriculum model
emphasizing the educational objectives of PE. The change was greatly appreciated by
most of the students taking up a position of exclusion. Thus, for many of these
students, PE came to be experienced as a meaningful and legitimate place of learning
and as a subject worth participating in. Paradoxically, many of the changes that made
inclusion in PE possible for some students, also seemed to be responsible for other
students’ experiences of exclusion. In particular, this was the case for some of the
academically less inclined students and to some of the physically skilled girls who
had extensive experience with participating in leisure time sport activities.

As such the question still remains on how an educational framework for students’
participation in PE becomes meaningful also to the students to whom PE derives its
meaning from the community of sport. It is possible that among these students the
meaning of an educational framework may develop over time. Still, our findings
suggest that a key issue is to decide on the right size of the overlaps between the
communities of sport, recreation and exercise within the landscape of PE.

By pointing to the dynamic nature of students’ participation and non-participation,
however, the results of this study also remind us to acknowledge inclusion for what it
is - a process; a process in which not all students can obtain equal positions of
participation all of the time; a process in which students move within and between
different positions of participation. However, a process in which all students could be
given the opportunity to experience the meaningfulness of participating in the landscape of PE.

References


