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ABSTRACT

“Learning nothing” in Physical Education and Health (PEH)? – a nine year follow-up study

The school subject Physical education and health (PEH) has during the last decades been under debate in several countries. Reports claim that students learn sport but not health. Literature also points to a gap between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Changes in society show new scenarios around health, wellbeing and illness among young people, and a growing uneven distribution of access to physical activity and knowledge in health. This leads to questions about students' learning experiences from school PEH.

The aim of the presentation is to, with the help of a nine year follow-up study, describe and analyze students' attitudes to participation and learning in PEH over the school years.

Method

The study was based on a population from randomly selected schools in Sweden, with students born 1991, 1988 and 1985. The year of the baseline study was 2001. Follow-up studies were made three, six and nine years later. The collecting of data was made by a self developed and adopted questionnaire with closed and open answers. The presentation will focus on the follow up study of the students born 1991, made six and nine years after the base line study. In 2010, 75% of the original population (1290) answered a revised, almost identical questionnaire. Frequency of data was analysed with descriptive statistics and cross tabulations. Chi-square was used for examining group differences * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Values > 0.05 were considered as statistically non-significant (n.s.)

The results show a significant difference in participation pattern between male and female students, where 18% of the female students in relation to 8% of the male students, never or very seldom participated in PEH in their older ages. From 15 to 18 years of age, one third of those who experience that they learned “nothing” remained in this category. Leaving school, 21% of the students at the age of 18 thought that they knew well how to train and be physically active by their own. 2 out of 10 regarded themselves as not having this knowledge. Over one third of the students were uncertain of the relationships between health, life style and environment. The students' general attitudes towards PEH in upper secondary school, as described in the open answers, have been categorised in two main themes: a request to get the opportunity to become more engaged in school physical activity, and a claim for a restructuring of how PEH is organised and taught.

Conclusions

One conclusion from the study is the need for defined and understandable learning tasks with learning outcomes possible to be shared and assessed by both teachers and students. Possible pedagogical models will be discussed with the departure point from the concept health literacy and curriculum theory.

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