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Joy, fear and resignation: investigating emotions in physical education using a symbolic interactionist approach

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ABSTRACT

Emotional dimensions of physical education have garnered attention from scholars in the last two decades. Many scholars claim that emotions significantly affect learning and that positive emotions such as joy and pleasure are necessary for continued participation in movement activities beyond the classroom. Much of the existing literature, however, is based on the idea that emotions comprise internal mental states that are retrospectively oriented. In the current paper, we work with alternative principles that can create new understandings of the affective dimensions of PE and specifically, movement learning. We draw on symbolic interactionist principles, framing emotions as multimodal communicative resources that are performed in social contexts. From this perspective, we demonstrate how emotions: (1) can be investigated as part of the production of broader sequences of pedagogical action and (2) relate to issues of knowledge, identity and authority. We present observational material generated with PE teacher education students as they develop movement capability. We focus on three interactional episodes in which fear, joy and resignation are performed by students interacting with either peers or an observing researcher. In each case, we demonstrate how emotions: affiliate or dis-affiliate the actor with the movement knowledge in focus, index an institutionally recognizable identity and influence the subsequent actions of the participants in the interactional sequence. The key thesis developed in the paper is that as symbolic resources, emotions have important consequences for actors within movement learning environments. The paper is concluded with reflections on the implications of the approach for practitioners along with a consideration of questions in need of further scientific attention.

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Introduction

Emotions have garnered attention from physical education (PE) scholars in the last two decades (Booth, 2009; Light, 2003). The shame of public showering (Frydendal & Thing, 2019), the thrill of learning new motor skills (Rintala, 2009), or the frustration of being picked last for a team (Gerdin & Larsson, 2017) have all, for example, been investigated by scholars interested in emotional dimensions of physical education. General principles underpinning this rather disparate body of literature are that: (1) emotions comprise internal states; (2) emotions significantly affect learning and are thus an important aspect of pedagogy for teachers to consider; and, (3) positive emotions such as joy and
pleasure are necessary for continued participation beyond the classroom (Klemola, Heikinaro-Johansson, & O’Sullivan, 2013; Lentillon-Kaestner & Patelli, 2016). This first principle, in particular, commits researchers and practitioners to a limited range of methodological and pedagogical approaches and while it brings certain features of educational situations into focus, it obscures others.

In the current paper, we put forward an alternative approach to emotions with a view to generating new insights into PE pedagogies. Specifically, we draw on symbolic interactionist principles (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014), framing emotions as communicative resources that are performed in social contexts. From this perspective, we investigate emotions as part of the production of pedagogical action and examine how emotion becomes implicated in issues of knowledge, identity and authority in a physical education teacher education context. In the next section, we consider literature dealing with emotions in physical education in general. We then set out a methodological approach for investigating emotions based on symbolic interactionist theory. After an extensive methodological exposition, we provide three analytic illustrations. We conclude with a discussion of the pedagogical aspects to which such an approach can draw attention along with how the approach might be of value to physical education teachers and researchers interested in questions of emotion and learning.

**Emotions in physical education**

Emotional aspects of participation in physical education have been examined with different theoretical perspectives and with different purposes in mind (Lodewyk & Muir, 2017; Pringle, 2010). In this section, we identify recurring themes that run across this literature and highlight several distinctions separating analytic approaches. We conclude with a short commentary on how this paper will contribute to existing understandings of emotions in physical education.

As a starting point, it is useful to consider the ways in which ‘emotion’ has been conceptualized in PE scholarship. Despite the use of both psychological and sociological perspectives, much of the existing research is characterized by what Wilce (2009) refers to as experiential or phenomenological conceptions of emotions. That is, emotions are regarded as feelings that one experiences or similarly, as states that one can be in (Fitzpatrick, 2018; Simonton, Garn, & Solmon, 2017). Terms such as nervousness, boredom and annoyance are used as descriptors for subjective states (Lodewyk & Muir, 2017) and the analytic frameworks employed correspond quite closely to everyday descriptions of emotions. In much of this work, scholars have reproduced participant-generated accounts of internal states or self-reported measures as empirical representations of emotions (Alves, MacPhail, Queirós, & Batista, 2018; Lentillon-Kaestner & Patelli, 2016). Some of this scholarship is cognitively oriented, locating emotions firmly in the minds of individuals (see, for example, Simonton & Garn, 2018). Other researchers have described emotions as embodied phenomena that are not only thought but also felt within individuals’ bodies (e.g. Pope, 2005).

Common across the research on emotions in PE is an assumption that emotions are related to learning in important ways (Maivorsdotter, Lundvall, & Quennerstedt, 2014; Simonton & Garn, 2018; Wrench & Garrett, 2015) and that in line with broader educational literature (Denzin, 1984; Hargreaves, 1998; Radford & Roth, 2011), education is an emotionally saturated activity. With respect to the nature of the relationship, ‘positive’ emotions such as pleasure and excitement are generally associated with promoting or facilitating learning (Light, 2003; Spray, Biddle, & Fox, 1999) while ‘negative’ emotions such as worry or shame are connected with disengagement and the disruption of learning (Frydendal & Thing, 2019). On this issue, Pope (2005) notes all emotions regardless of ‘variety’ can be seen as irrational and therefore educationally deleterious if learning is understood as a purely rational process. He points out, for instance, that fear or joy can be seen to ‘agitate in the human psyche at any time’ (p. 273, emphasis added). Nonetheless, in the PE-related scholarship reviewed here it is primarily negative emotions that are presented as disruptive.

The expressed significance of emotions to learning is consistent with a number of scholars’ advocacy of teachers’ development of emotional understanding/intelligence (Lee, 2017; McCaughtry & Rovegno, 2003). Researchers have examined for example, how pre-service teachers make use of
emotional training during their teaching practicum (Klemola et al., 2013) and how the emotional experiences of pre-service teachers contribute to the construction of teachers’ professional identities (Alves et al., 2018). A recurring argument has been that teachers need to develop empathetic strategies if they are to respond to their students in appropriate ways (see also, Wrench & Garrett, 2015). Taking a more critical approach and focusing on teacher educators, Dowling (2008) has proposed that the ways in which tertiary educators come to understand and deal with social issues are tied to identities and are strongly emotional. Dowling (2008) concludes her work suggesting that emotions represent ‘a powerful mechanism for sustaining practices of ... discrimination’ (p. 262) and that emotions deserve more attention if education is to contribute to social justice outcomes.

Dowling’s (2008) research is one of several investigations that places emotions within a sociological framework. Specifically, she uses Hargreaves (2000) notion of ‘emotional geographies’ to examine how negative affect is related to gender relations in physical education teacher education. Also considering the place of gender within physical education but drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Gerdin and Larsson (2017) suggest that boys in single-sex PE lessons derive considerable pleasure from succeeding in gendered games of normality. Using figural sociology, Frydendal and Thing (2019) consider shame in relation to public showering, suggesting that emotions are ‘developed through society and related to the norms, values and power relations’ (p. 7).

In contrast to sociological approaches, researchers who have employed psychological frameworks have been inclined to investigate connections between personal experiences, lesson content and immediate learning environments, often with a focus on motivation. Simonton and Garn (2018) for example, explored the relation of emotions to students’ achievement motivation. Lodewyk and Muir (2017) examined negative emotional experiences of female students such as state and social physique anxiety during games and fitness activities in physical education.

It is worth noting that emotions, in general, and pleasure, in particular, have occupied a delicate position in debates concerning the educative value of physical education. Building on a significant body of humanist research (for example, Burrows, 2005; Martens, 1996), Pringle (2010) has suggested that pleasure in movement continues to be downplayed in official curriculum documents because it is at odds with current instrumentalist and rationalist discourses of education. For Pringle (2010), physical educators struggle to openly acknowledge the pleasurable aspects of movement for fear of being labeled un-academic, an argument also picked up by Booth (2009). Fitzpatrick (2018) too, has noted the incongruity between the emotional aspects of physical education and current educational values. Taking a critical standpoint, she argues that rediscovering the emotional/poetic aspects of physical education is crucial if physical educators are to reclaim the school subject from a neoliberalist agenda that positions it merely as a means for achieving public health goals.

In short, researchers have utilized the idea of emotions in analyses of a number of aspects of physical education. Most have used emotions in an experiential or phenomenological sense to refer to internal states that individuals enter into during physical education. Some broad differences between approaches can be discerned, mainly related to whether sociological or psychological perspectives are adopted. Most scholars agree, however, that emotions are connected with educational experiences in important ways. In the next section, we introduce an alternative approach to the study of emotions. The approach is consistent with the ideas described above in that it assigns emotions an important place in pedagogy and by implication, encourages teachers to acknowledge emotional aspects of teaching and learning. The approach varies, however, in that it is based on the idea that rather than something that we experience internally, emotions are something that we do.

**Theoretical framework: general interactionist principles relating to emotion**

From an interactionist perspective, emotions constitute communicative practices that people engage in to position themselves vis-à-vis other people or proposed courses of action (Goodwin, 2007). Practices are made up of multi-semiotic resources and people can use vocabulary, intonation, gesture and body posture in various ways to perform emotions such as anger or indignation (Goodwin, Cekaite, &
Generally, emotions can vary in two respects. They can vary in terms of valence – they can either be ‘for’ an object (positive or affiliative emotions) or ‘against’ it (negative or disaffiliative emotions). Second, emotions can vary in terms of intensity – they can display high or low involvement of the actor. In line with an interactionist approach to conduct, emotions are seen as consequential in that: (i) they influence subsequent actions and (ii) they become meaningful in light of their consequences. A loud sigh in the middle of a lecture, for example, might lead to laughter, a pause and/or a comment from the lecturer. The meaning of the sigh, however, needs to be ‘worked out’ in the subsequent actions. Indeed, a key aspect of the analytic task is to examine the consequences emotions have in sequences of action.

Importantly, the approach does not rule out the idea that people experience sensations or feelings while they are interacting. It does, however, provide a different ontological starting point from which we can circumvent the empirical task of attempting to capture what is happening ‘inside people’s heads’. In short, it enables us to consider emotion as part of an interactional rather than a mental reality (Koole, 2015).

Concerning cultural dimensions of emotions, various positions have been proposed within interactionist scholarship. Goffman (1981) suggested that every interactive episode must be examined in its own right since social structures such as gender, social class and age may not necessarily be reflected in, or relevant to, participants’ interactions. Garfinkel (1967) cautioned against treating social context in deterministic ways. His concern was that such treatment framed participants as ‘cultural dopes’ (Garfinkel, 1967) who could do nothing but obey societal norms and conventions. Some recent research has granted structure more influence. Koole (2015) for example, proposes that ‘emotion displays arise as thoroughly subjected to the normative organization of social interaction’ (p. 5). Wilce (2009) concurs. He claims that ideologies ‘appear materially in the embodied, the vocal, the experiential’ (p. 116) and suggests that people cannot escape the social and institutional positions that they occupy. While we appreciate the cultural embeddedness of interaction, we leave agentic room open for people to employ resources in the novel or unexpected ways, a decision based on previous research observations (see Larsson, Quennerstedt, & Öhman, 2014). In this respect, we agree with Nguyen and Janssens (2019) who suggest that context is both the project and product of the participants’ actions.

Finally, emotions have important consequences for processes of identification. Goodwin (2007) notes that as members take up stances, they constitute themselves as particular kinds of social and moral actors. Cekaite (2012) works on a similar premise, suggesting that affective stances are ‘mobilized as resources in the indexing of institutional identities’ (p. 641). In a vivid example, Cekaite (2012) describes how a young girl develops and consolidates a ‘problematic pupil identity’ through day-to-day interactions with her schoolteachers over the course of a school year. Highlighting a more fluid aspect of identification, Tainio and Laine (2015) examine how mathematics teachers deal with potentially face-threatening situations in which students give incorrect answers in front of the rest of the class. The authors propose that the ways emotions are negotiated in public can have long-term consequences for how students see mathematics education, a claim that we believe has considerable relevance for physical educators given that (1) student performance in physical education is often visible for peers (Fisette, 2011) and (2) a number of people report negative experiences in physical education classes (Beltrán-Carrillo, Devís-Devís, Peiró-Velert, & Brown, 2012).

Theoretical concepts: epistemic, deontic and emotional orders

Several interactionist scholars have proposed that emotions should be examined in relation to knowledge and authority (Heritage, 2011; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014). In this endeavor, we use the analytic concept of orders (Heritage, 2011; Nguyen & Janssens, 2019) to develop our illustrations below. The *epistemic* order concerns who knows what in a given situation (Heritage, 2011). Participants have rights and obligations to know relative to their co-participants (see Barker, Quennerstedt, & Annerstedt, 2015, in context of physical education). Actions pertaining to this order will reflect, support
or challenge an actor’s rights and obligations. When a teacher explains to a group of students where
the triceps attach to the skeleton, her action occurs within the epistemic order. She positions herself
as a knower while simultaneously positioning the students as not-yet-knowers. The deontic order con-
cerns participants’ entitlements to impose actions on their co-participants. A teacher may ask a class
to shower after a lesson. Of course, whether the students shower or not is another matter and it is not
a teacher’s right in most schools to force students to shower. As suggested above, the emotional
order concerns personal signs of affiliation or disaffiliation that participants are allowed or expected
to express to their co-participants. A student who lets out a groan on hearing that the class is doing
soccer can be seen to be acting within the emotional order. Whether the groan is acceptable or not
depends on the class and school context – the point, however, is that the action indexes the student’s
stance.

Importantly, participants orient to different orders as they negotiate social interactions (Stevanovic
& Peräkylä, 2014). Participants move between orders as they position themselves as knowledgeable/less knowledgeable, influence their surroundings, and align themselves with issues relevant to the
interactional sequence. Most of the time, participants treat one order as more salient than the
other two but movement between orders is common. Second, there is a complex interface
between the orders. Being told that one is wrong when one thinks one is acting with epistemic auth-
ority is likely to result in interactional trouble in terms of disalignment and disaffiliation (Nguyen &
Janssens, 2019). In other words, actions that occur within orders are rarely isolated and will often
result in actions in other orders.

Data production procedures

The material used to develop the analytic illustrations in the paper comes from a larger project in
which movement learning was investigated in different physical educational contexts in Sweden
(three grade nine PE classes, one physical education teacher education (PETE) group, and one
coach education group, approximately 110 learners in total). The investigation was action-oriented
(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) in that the researchers: created pedagogical modules; collaborated
with teachers and university educators to develop the modules in line with the needs of their respect-
itive groups; and assisted with the implementation of the modules. Assistance with implementation
involved helping the educators with practical activities such as setting up and packing away equip-
ment and fielding questions from students. It also involved working with the educators to modify the
module content in response to what was happening with their groups. The modules were based on
an idea of embodied exploration, essentially an approach that aims to treat the minds and bodies of
learners as one and foregrounds learners’ appreciation of different ways of moving (see Barker, Ber-
gentoft, & Nyberg, 2017). The activities of the learners in the teacher education group are described in
further detail below. More information on an embodied exploration approach to movement edu-
cation can be found in Barker, Nyberg and Larsson (in press).

With each group, we produced both experiential (interview and reflective-writing) and spatial
(video and field notes) data. Due to the theoretical framing of this paper, and specifically the
attempt to understand emotions as actions that people do, only video data are referred to here.
Video data were produced by two researchers circulating in the learning environments with chest-
mounted GoPro video cameras. The researchers filmed individuals and groups of individuals, remain-
ing with individuals/groups for approximately five minutes at a time. The researchers entered the ses-
sions as ‘interested physical educators’, a role that involved asking the PETE students questions about
their learning and responding when the students had comments or posed questions.

The three extracts used in the illustrations below have been selected from the data generated
with the teacher education group. The class contained 24 students who were in the middle of a
five-year teacher education program, which provided preparation for teaching at the upper sec-
ondary level (pupils aged 16–18). At the time of the investigation, the group contained 18 stu-
dents who had selected physical education as their main teaching subject and six students
who had selected physical education as their complementary subject. The students explored unicycle riding in five sessions where each session lasted for approximately two hours. The module was run over five consecutive days. During the sessions, the students were working in groups of three with two unicycles per group. Gymnastics vaults and fixed hinged booms had been set up for students to either maneuver along or take off from. The group’s lecturer maintained responsibility for the sessions, beginning and finishing the sessions with organizational instructions, and offering assistance and comments concerning, for example, progress and challenges. In line with an embodied exploration approach, neither the teacher’s nor the researchers’ actions were designed to instruct the students how to unicycle in a specific way. Rather, their actions aimed to bring students to greater embodied understandings of their own and others’ ways of moving. Typical questions asked were: What happens if you… (lean forward, for example), What is Jane doing differently to John? What would you need to do in order to… (ride backwards, hop on the unicycle, for example). Despite requests from the lecturer and the researchers to experiment with ways to help one another, many of the students practiced alongside each other providing relatively little help to their colleagues.

As a practical process, analysis began in an unstructured manner with the three researchers discussing the kinds of emotions that had been observed during the five days of unicycling. In these discussions, joy/pleasure, fear/apprehension, and resignation/sadness were recurring themes and were discussed as emotions that appeared to have a significant bearing on the students’ development of unicycling capability (other emotions identified included boredom and anger/frustration). After scanning the field notes for entries related to emotions, the first author examined the video material, looking specifically for examples of students expressing joy, fear and resignation. In each case, two examples were selected as typical expressions of the emotion (see Results below). In the interests of analytic depth, one example of each of the emotions was then chosen for transcription and presentation based on the quality of the video and audio material (see Appendix for transcription notation). Transcription and presentation follow traditional procedures used in interactionist research (see, for example, Goodwin, 2007; Tainio & Laine, 2015). Consideration of the illustrations is informed by the interactionist framework and the concept of ‘orders’ (Heritage, 2011; Nguyen & Janssens, 2019) outlined above. At each stage of analysis, the researchers made a number of decisions, regarding amongst others, the actions that constitute joy, fear and resignation. In this respect, analysis was thoroughly interpretive (Denzin, 1984).

Ethical approval was granted by the regional research ethical review committee. The research was conducted in accordance with the Swedish Research Council’s ethical guidelines. Participants were informed about the project, its purpose, and how collected material would be used. Informed, active consent was obtained from the participants. Participants had the possibility to cease participation in the project at any time. The use of video cameras raised issues of confidentiality, possibilities for anonymity and privacy for all participants. The video-filmed material has only been used for research purposes and is stored in a manner that prevents unauthorized use. Anonymity was not possible or desirable in the analysis of the data. Instead, we have aimed for anonymity in the presentation/publication of the research results. This involves using fictitious names for students and excluding information that could be used to identify participants.

Results

The three following illustrations represent recurring emotions observed during the unicycling sessions: joy, fear and resignation. These emotions have been chosen because of their significance to the ongoing pedagogical action of the students, and in this sense, they are theoretically interesting. The specific illustrations have been chosen as typical examples, or ‘emblematic cases’ (see Gobo, 2004, p. 419), of the emotions being enacted. In each illustration, we combine empirical material with analysis of how the emotions are performed and how the epistemic, deontic and emotional orders interface with one another. Hence we refer to the illustrations as analytic.
Analytic illustration 1: joy

This illustration focuses on Ygritte during the third session. The recording starts with a loud scream. Ygritte has dismounted her unicycle after cycling approximately six meters from the vault at which she started. In an intense celebratory display, she jumps up and down, screams and waves her arms in the air (see Figure 1). She orients her actions to the other two members of her group who are still at the vault but a number of other students in the gym respond by looking at her. She picks up her unicycle and runs back to her group. Her performance brings one of the researchers (Gunn) to her. As Gunn approaches, Ygritte looks at her with a big smile and raises her arm as in a triumphant gesture (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Initial display of joy marking success.

Figure 2. Secondary display of triumph marking success.
1 Gunn: Vad var det som gjorde att du lyckades med den nu?
   *What did you succeed with now?*
2 Y: Att cykla (Ygritte sighs and smiles serenely).
   *Unicycling*
3 G: Aa, men varför?
   *Yes, but why?*
4 Y: Jag tror
   *I think..*
5 G: Vad gjorde du för att kunna det?
   *What did you do in order to be able to do it?*
6 Y: (changing facial expression from happy to thoughtful and positioning herself as if she is about to show something) Jag har blivit tillsagd av minst tre personer idag att jag lutar mig framåt på fel sätt och nu har jag nog fattat vad dom menar med att jag ska luta mig framåt..
   *I've been told by at least three people today that I lean forward the wrong way and now I've understood what they mean with 'I need to lean forward'..
7 G: OK, och vad innebär det?
   *OK, and what does it mean?*
8 Y: Ehh
   *Umm*
9 G: Så
   *So*
10 Y: Jag hade tidigare
   *Earlier, I..
11 G: Hade fel sätt att luta dig framåt?
   *Had the wrong way to lean forward?*
12 Y: Fel sätt att luta sig är som att göra knäboj.. och skjuta ut rumpan (demonstrates movement and points to her backside)
   *Wrong way to lean forward is like doing a squat … and sticking out the backside*
13 G: Åå
   *Mm*
14 Y: rakt ut
   *Straight out*
15 G: Åå
   *Mm*
16 Y: Men så har jag böjt ut hela tiden. Nu är tanken att låsa kroppen och luta kroppen framåt
   *But like this I was bent the whole time. Now the thought is to lock the body and lean the body forward.*
17 G: Så hela cykeln kommer framåt
   *So the whole bike comes forward*
18 Y: För att när man gör knäböjsform så blir det nästan så här ändå (åå) för man kommer här med rumpan (hand gesture) men ryggen är ju rak (demonstrating the angle when bending the hip as is happening when doing a squat) nu är tänken att få DEN (showing by leaning the bike forward) framåt för att kompensera … rättning rätt så
   *Because when you bend the knee, it gets almost like this (shows how the unicycle tilts backwards) (Mm) because you get like this with the backside (hand gesture in diagonal direction from the seat – see Figure 3) but the back is straight forward to compensate for the correction.*
19 G: Så det är hela du som ska luta framåt
   *So it's the whole you that should lean forward (Figure 4)*
The interaction helps to constitute the institutional context – Gunn and Ygritte are doing interviewing. It is a pedagogical kind of interviewing where Gunn is asking questions in a teacher-like way (Tainio & Laine, 2015) and is providing Ygritte with opportunities to describe the preceding sequence of events as an example of learning or coming to know. Ygritte remains emotionally oriented at first and in line two, she continues to display joy as positive affiliation with the task at hand. Gunn persists in the epistemic order though (line three); she wants Ygritte to articulate what she knows, not how she feels. Ygritte eventually adjusts to the epistemic order and aligns with Gunn. Ygritte develops a short account of her transition from someone who did not know to someone who does know. This works as a response until Gunn asks Ygritte to elaborate (line seven). With Gunn’s help, Ygritte adds details to the account she began in line six. In this elaboration, Ygritte switches from describing her personal development to a more general, ‘expert description’ of how to unicycle (line 18). This change in epistemic status initiated by the performance of joy indicates the beginning of a change in identity – Ygritte is becoming someone with the authority to talk about how to unicycle.
Analytic illustration 2: fear

Ebba is working in a group with Johanna and Vincent. Currently, Ebba is sitting on her unicycle and has her right arm firmly on the fixed boom. Johanna, who broke her wrist on the first day of unicycling, is standing within talking distance of Ebba (see Figure 5). Vincent joins the two mid-way through the sequence. Rachel is working in a different group on the neighboring boom but her proximity enables her to interact with Ebba’s group.

1 Ebba: Det är som vanligt. Jag har ingen balans (skrattar).
   *It’s like always. I’ve got no balance* (laughs).
2 Johanna: (inaudible) Det är bara att börja om på nytt.
   *It’s just with starting something new.*
   Johanna does some small dance moves to a song that she hums to herself. Ebba begins to pull herself along the boom while seated on the unicycle.
3 Rachel (calls out from the next boom): Fast det känns ju mera balanserat nu än vad det gjorde för tre dagar sedan, när man skulle gå upp på.
   *It feels more balanced now than it did three days ago, when you try to get up.*
4 (Ebba turns to Rachel) De första gångerna, ja!
   *The first times yeah.*
   Ebba continues to pull herself along the boom.
5 E: Oh (tyst)
6 R: Jag vet inte om … (ohörbart)
   *I don’t know if …* (inaudible)
   Ebba laughs.
7 E: Träningsvärk i armarna istället.
   *Muscle pain in the arms instead.*
8 Viktor (joins them): Ja, eller hur.
   *Yeah, really.*
   Ebba has completed the length of the boom. She turns 180 degrees while sitting on the unicycle and holding on to the boom.
9 Viktor (goes towards Ebba): Vill du ha stöd? (Figure 6)
   *Do you want support?*
   Ebba answers but is facing away from the camera.

Figure 5. Relative positioning of Ebba and Johanna.
Ebba invites a response from Johanna with laughter at the end of line one (see Shaw, Hepburn, and Potter (2012) for discussion of laughter). Ebba is communicating fear through posture more than anything else. Like several students practicing close by, she grips her support tightly, keeping the boom close to her body and moving slowly. As a stance in relation to unicycling, her performance of fear has a negative valence. At its simplest, Ebba is expressing a counter-position to what she is attempting to do. This has important consequences for identification, and it is difficult to see how she can reconcile not wishing to practice unicycling with becoming a unicyclist. At the same time, her continued attempts to familiarize herself with unicycling constitute her as a willing learner, an identity that is valued in educational contexts (Cekaite, 2012). The display is interesting in its immediate context however, for the kinds of action it elicits from her peers. Rachel is engaged in the same activity and calls out that it is easier today. Johanna, who is standing nearby, moves closer. Vincent also asks her if she wants support. In other words, Ebba's communicative practices result in bringing co-participants nearer to her while she continues traversing back and forth across the boom. Our impression is that the others are unlikely to suggest that she leave the boom, which is necessary if she is going to ride the unicycle without support.

**Analytic illustration 3: resignation**

The final sequence takes place in the fifth and final lesson. There is half an hour to go. Some students are practicing. Some are working quietly in their logbooks. Vincent is walking slowly along the side of the gym with his hands behind his back. Dean notices Vincent and approaches him with a question (Figure 7).
1 Dean: You’ve had enough?
2 Vincent: Yes.
3 D: Yep. You’ve had enough unicycling for.. one week?
4 V: For one LIFE (hahaha)
5 D. (hahaha) For one life, yeah?
6 V: Oh, I don’t know …
7 Sara (student passing tries to get Vincent’s attention): Vincent..
8 D: (to Sara): Hol, I’m talking to him. I’m talking.
9 V: Mmm, I’m stuck. Jag kommer inte förbi den här sista tröskeln att komma iväg och tordas cykla. Jag kommer några meter sen i tisdags. Jag känner mig nöjd ändå.. och jag skrev i min logbook så att.. man tänka, man kan ta sig upp, man kan cykla med stöd, man kan cykla ett par meter så där..
   I can’t get past this last barrier and ride the cycle comfortably. I came a few meters last Tuesday. Still, I feel satisfied.. and I wrote that in my logbook.. you can get up, you can cycle with support, you can cycle a few meters alright..  
10 D: Yeah.. But, but it sounds like you’re in the same spot that I’m in
11 V: Åå..  
12 D: And I’m thinking I need to go more than this (åå - mm) because I can go a few, and it’s very inconsistent. Sometimes I do five or six meters really nicely and then BANG on the ground.
13 V: Yeah
14 D: Yeah
15 V: I’m on the same level. (1.0)
16 D: But I’m not happy to be there (no) but you say that you are happy to be there?
17 V: Yeah, ah, I talked about that with Sara earlier today, um (yeah) and she said that she is very.. hon är väldigt resultatorienterad (she is really result oriented) (yeah) She really wants to … go further (yeah) And I’m like, likgiltig (indifferent), I don’t care (yeah) I don’t care so much.
18 D: Is that with most things or is that with this (hand motion indicating unicycling)
19 V: Eehh most things I think umm när jag.. i idrottsklass så är det klassiskt, alla är resultatorienterade och vill vinna så.. jag har aldrig riktigt varit den personen
   When I.. in PE classes it’s like classic, all those who are result oriented and want to win, mm, I have never been that kind of person
20 D: Yeah
21 V: jag ser det som en rolig grej, (yeah) och vissa ser det som en.. till exempel [names other student in the class] det är riktig prestige för honom (yeah) att fara, det … det var mer en rolig aktivitet så (steps back and waits for response)
I see it as a fun thing (yeah) and some see it as a.. for example [names other student], it is really a prestige thing for him (yeah) to ride that … that was more a fun activity so

22 D: (2.0 – D. scribbles some notes) Ah, can you, can you write that?
23 V: Yeah, of course
24 D: If you haven’t already

Vincent is neither writing in his log book nor practicing unicycling. Dean approaches him, making Vincent’s possible disaffiliation with the task interactionally relevant. Vincent’s comment that he is ‘stuck’ however, is not an epistemic claim or a request for help. It is the start of deontically oriented speech act in which he responds to Dean’s foregrounding of the emotional order with ‘I feel satisfied’ and stresses that ‘I wrote that in my logbook’. This second feature, in particular, suggests that Vincent’s move is designed to put a line under his participation in unicycling and counter future deontic claims along the line of ‘he should continue to practice’.

Dean, however, persists. Vincent provides minimal acknowledgement receipts until Dean compares himself and Vincent and directly questions Vincent’s claim that he is happy (line 16). Vincent responds by providing a reiterated account, one that has been thought through and can be corroborated if necessary, directly concerning his stance regarding unicycling: He is indifferent because that is the kind of person he is. Disaffiliation is again closely connected with identification and the identity management taking place suggests that his position as a particular kind of social actor – a willing and able learner – is at stake. He is not like some other students who he describes with extreme case formulations (e.g. ‘really result oriented’), which suggests increased emotional involvement (Nguyen & Janssens, 2019). In keeping with the emotional order, Vincent is not attempting to explain why he does not know how to unicycle, he is explaining why he does not care for unicycling. The return to past tense at the end of line 21 though is deontic – Vincent is finished with unicycling.

There is consensus in line 22 with Dean accepting that Vincent will not attempt to unicycle again and requesting that Vincent do something else (write in his log book).

**Discussion**

Understanding emotions as communicative practices allows us to look at educational situations in new ways. We want to draw attention to three features of the illustrations above that have specific relevance to physical educators and physical education scholars.

First, the illustrations contribute to the body of literature exploring the complex ways that emotions connect with identities in physical education contexts (Alves et al., 2018; Dowling, 2008). Ebba and Vincent both provide examples of disaffiliation but in quite dissimilar ways. Through the performance of fear, Ebba is involved in the production of an engaged and persistent student identity. By withdrawing, Vincent manages a disengaged and possibly resistant student identity. Two observations are worth making here. First, both identities can be seen as institutional/structural in that they are recognizable in educational contexts (Cekaite, 2012; Jones & Myhill, 2004). In contrast to other physical education scholarship focusing on how emotions are related to broad social structures and power (see for example, Gerdin & Larsson, 2017; Frydendal & Thing, 2019), the analytic approach adopted in this investigation allows us to ‘zoom in’ (Barker et al., 2015) to examine how individuals use semiotic resources at a micro-social level to produce these identities. Further, in both Ebba’s and Vincent’s illustrations, neither student develops an epistemic status as a knower. Disaffiliation is closely connected to not coming to know unicycling. At first glance, this is perhaps unsurprising. Much of the existing literature examining emotions in PE indicates that negative emotions hinder or prevent learning from taking place (Light, 2003; Spray et al., 1999). Ebba’s illustration is interesting, however, because she is in the process of creating an acceptable institutional identity while not learning. Unlike Vincent, whose actions result in a deontic attempt from one of the researchers to change the course of the pedagogical sequence, Ebba’s stance results in aligned
responses in the emotional order. In Nguyen and Janssens’s (2019) terms, her actions present no ‘interactional trouble’ at all (p. 1). This analytic illustration suggests that a closer inspection of disaffiliative emotions in PE, especially ones that do not cause ‘trouble’, is necessary from a pedagogical perspective.

Second and related, the three analytic illustrations raise important issues regarding the learning object to which the students are relating. There is an important difference between Ygritte on the one hand and Ebba and Vincent on the other. Ygritte displays affiliation for unicycling after having cycled six meters. She affiliates with an experience of riding a unicycle with a degree of fluency. Despite Vincent’s claim that he has had enough of unicycling, neither he nor Ebba has ridden a unicycle without support for more than a meter or two. Their emotions are directed at different aspects of the process of learning to unicycle: in Vincent’s case, balancing on the seat and pedaling one or two rotations before dismounting and beginning the process again. In Ebba’s case, holding on to support and avoiding the possibility of falling. This observation has pedagogical significance. First, it reinforces the idea that if students are to develop affiliations with new ways of knowing, teachers should maintain a focus on knowledge and learning, as opposed to simply keeping active and participating (see Rintala’s [2009] emphasis on the thrill of learning a new skill, see also Gerdin and Larsson [2017]). Second, it suggests that at least part of the teacher’s difficult task is to help students enact affiliative emotions with ‘what is not yet knowledge’. A number of scholars have noted the importance of affiliative emotions such as pleasure in physical education (e.g. Booth, 2009; Pringle, 2010). We would suggest nonetheless, that careful consideration of (i) other positive-valence emotions such as anticipation and relief and (ii) the points at which affiliative emotions are enacted, are important. If students do not affiliate with making mistakes, ‘getting stuck’, and the more mundane aspects of learning new activities, for example, it is unlikely they will develop an affinity for successfully knowing something and fulfilling an institutionally valued role. Here, we agree with Fitzpatrick (2018), at least to an extent, when she claims that ignoring the emotional aspects of PE is likely to be counter-productive if learning is a primary objective. We say ‘to an extent’ because while emotional aspects of pedagogy might be downplayed in instrumentalist, rationalist policy (see also Pope, 2005), as Koole (2015) suggests, emotion seems to be an ‘omnirelevant phenomenon’ in social interaction (p. 12). From this perspective, it would be impossible for practitioners to completely ignore emotions. In line with other physical education scholars (Lee, 2017; McCaughtry & Rovegno, 2003), we would advocate increasingly sensitive and considered performances of emotions in pedagogical situations as opposed to simply greater acknowledgement.

Finally, the analytic illustrations presented allow us to consider how emotion works as a situated accomplishment. In all three cases, the actors involved in the sequences provide opportunities and acknowledgement of ways of acting. They are dialogically involved in the production of the action. Gunn, for example, is engaged in Ygritte’s production of joy. Ebba performs fear but at the same time, is surrounded by people who co-produce the emotion. This co-productive aspect of social situations has led some researchers to refer to ‘emotional contagion’ (Tainio & Laine, 2015, p. 84), essentially the process by which emotions ‘spread’ from person to person. In this investigation, the groups of students performing fear tended to cluster together. While the spatial organization could be related to organizational and epistemic factors (i.e. the students worked close to the boom for support and stayed near each other because they were at the same level), the orientation to the emotional also became an agreed-upon aspect of the students’ interactions. This perhaps provides some indication of why Dean approached Vincent when Vincent displayed resignation – i.e. as an attempt to stop resignation from ‘spreading’ within the class.

**Conclusion**

We have put forward a symbolic interactionist approach to emotions with a view to creating new understandings of affective dimensions of PE. Drawing on data generated with pre-service physical
education teachers, we presented three analytic illustrations. The key points raised from these illustrations concern the relationship between emotions as communicative resources and: (i) identities; (ii) objects of learning and (iii) other actors in the social context. We want to finish with a brief elaboration of the pedagogical implications raised in the previous section along with reflection on areas of potential interest concerning emotion in PE.

In the context of Ebba’s fearful performance of unicycling practice, we have suggested that further reflection on disaffiliative emotions in PE is worthwhile. While pleasurable aspects of PE have garnered considerable attention, our impression from this investigation is that the performance of disaffiliative emotions such as fear in physical education might be more common, more institutionally accepted, and more detrimental to learning, than expected. In our view, examinations of emotions such as fear and resignation from a symbolic interactionist perspective but also from other theoretical perspectives will shed light on pedagogically significant aspects of classroom practices.

We have also proposed more broadly that in order for different institutional identities to be adopted, students need to be able to alter the way that they interact. Traditional phenomenological and experiential views place emotions either in the head or body of a specific actor (Wilce, 2009). From a phenomenological perspective, the actor in question is singularly responsible for changing the state that they are in. Understanding emotions as situated accomplishments, in contrast, places both emotions and the capacity for changing emotions in the interactional world. Other actors have possibilities for influencing how emotions are done. Although this view decreases the individual actor’s responsibility for change, it provides a conceptual opening for thinking about how other actors contribute to the performance of emotions. In educational contexts, rather than attempting to ‘get inside’ people’s heads in an empathetic manner, we can consider how teachers and students can respond to others’ actions in intentionally consequential ways.

The illustrations provided in this paper focused on learners. Further research might fruitfully examine educators’ interactions, including how and when they do emotions, and how they contribute to the production of learners’ emotions. At the same time, we would propose that considerations of student-student interactions such as the one provided have a great deal to tell us about the construction of learner identities, the process of learning and physical education practices more generally, especially in educational environments in which indirect teaching methods are prevalent (Barker et al., 2015). The notion of epistemic, deontic and emotional orders, along with accompanying naturalistic methodological approaches, can be usefully applied to a range of typical physical education situations in which students are working with one another. Such application has the capacity to provide new perspectives on how emotions relate to long-standing educational issues such as conceptions of ability, inclusion and participation.

Notes

1. In keeping with communicative practices developed between the students and Dean, the conversation takes place in English and Swedish.
2. Translation is difficult here, especially in relation to ‘man’ (English ‘one’ or ‘you’). Vincent seems to be saying ‘I can do these things but would you really call this being able to unicycle?’
3. Some physical education scholars have speculated that girls may be more compliant than boys (Sarkin, McKenzie, & Sallis, 1997). Others have suggested that the relation between gender and compliance/resistance is more complex, depending on the activity and the individual amongst other factors (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Wright, 1996). Our point is that the ‘compliant girl’ and the ‘resistant boy’ positions are recognizable. This is not to say that boys cannot be compliant or that girls cannot be resistant.

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References


Appendix. Transcription conventions

(·) micropause, i.e. shorter than (0.5)
(2) pauses in seconds
‘YES’ capitalization. Relatively high amplitude
() inaudible word
(()), comments of the transcriber
? rising terminal intonation
· falling terminal intonation