Diskurser om kropp, hälsa och vikt bland lärare i idrott och hälsa
(Vetenskapsrådet project 2018-2020)

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Background – locating PE teachers within obesity discourse

Fostering inclusion – teachers as carers

Transmission of state guidelines – teachers as policy conduits

The good life – teachers as preachers

War against obesity – teachers as soldiers

Healthism and PE teachers as exemplary bodies

PE teachers
Aim of investigation

- To provide insight into how teachers use discursive resources surrounding obesity to create particular professional identities.
Theoretical framework

• **Discursive contributions**: ‘blocks’ of language that are (1) comprised of a restricted range of terms which are used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion, and (2) recognizable.

• **Identity bids**: attempts to create a certain picture of oneself by linguistic or corporeal means during communication.

(Wetherall & Taylor, 1988; Cohen, 2010)
Method

- **Sample**: 24 practising PE teachers in Sweden
- **Method**: Group and individual interviews (12 in total)
- **Analysis** of interview transcripts – two analytic questions:
  1. What discursive contributions do the teachers use in their conversations?
  2. How do these discursive contributions work as bids on certain identities within the PE community?
Findings - overview

- Adapting activities
- Being sensitive
- Changing focus
- Inspiring activity
- Modelling health
- Challenging norms

- Caring practitioner
- Activity luminary
- Body rationalist
Findings 1: The caring practitioner

- A provision of parallel activities
- An introduction of different levels of difficulty within one activity
- A reduction of competition in the classroom and a decreased emphasis on individual performance
Findings 1: The caring practitioner

- Adapting activities
- Being sensitive
- Changing focus

Caring practitioner

- Stories of events that raised or might have raised pupils’ weight as a salient issue in the classroom.
- Sensitivity to avoid shame or to avoid dieting and eating disorders.
Findings 1: The caring practitioner

- Adapting activities
- Being sensitive
- Changing focus

Caring practitioner

- ‘It does not really matter what size the pupils are as long as they have the right attitude and the “will to learn”’
- ‘All pupils have different strengths and weaknesses’ – ‘everyone will find something that they are good at’.
Findings 2. The activity luminary

- Activating pupils so that they experience the joy of being active and will therefore want to be active in the future.
- ‘Kids are becoming less active.’
Findings 2. The activity luminary

Inspiring activity

Modelling health

Activity luminary

• Having trim, fit-looking bodies is an important part of teaching physical education (believability)
• It’s ok for PE teachers to be overweight if...
Findings 3. The body rationalist

- Young people are exposed to unrealistic and unhealthy ‘messages’ about bodies through media and social media.
- Kids are under a lot of stress.
Discussion

Caring practitioner

• Avoidance of shameful situations but also avoidance of causes of shame.
• Uses student-centred teaching which hierarchizes ability.

Activity luminary

• Assigns own body symbolic value, as proof of the healthist relation between exercise and health and a standard to which others should aspire.

Body rationalist

• A concern for the mental or psychological health of pupils.
• A departure from traditional views of physical educators(?)
Concluding thoughts

• Level of teachers’ reflection does not extend to nature of PE.
• Question of context. There is some overlap between the teachers’ identity bids and the identities identified in the literature. Does context account for differences?