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Heterotopias in Physical Education: Towards a Queer Pedagogy?

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Abstract

This article sets out to outline how prevailing gender structures can be challenged in physical education (PE) by exploring queer potentials in an event that took place during a dancing lesson in an upper secondary physical education class. The event and its features were documented through video recording and post-lesson interviews with the teacher and some of the students. It is argued that the event can be seen as a *heterotopia*, according to Michel Foucault a ‘counter-site’ enabling the resistance to authority, where the production of normalcy was challenged. Further, even though the event happened spontaneously, the authors suggest that it can show a way towards a queer pedagogy for PE through teaching paradoxically; it indicates a preferred ethos of the lesson and the use of conceptual tools by teachers and students that make them able to intervene in the production of normalcy.

Keywords: heteronormativity, teaching paradoxically, gender, sexuality, education

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to outline how prevailing gender structures can be challenged in physical education (PE) by exploring queer potentials in an event that takes place during a dancing lesson in an upper secondary physical education class. Recent research indicates that PE teachers make few attempts to challenge prevailing gender structures (see e.g. Fagrell et al., 2012; Larsson et al., 2009; Webb and Macdonald 2007; Wright 1996), and that students' attempts to challenge gender stereotypes might even be dismissed by the teacher (Berg and Lahelma 2010). In our case, the attempts of some students to challenge gender stereotypes and heteronormativity were embraced by the teacher, who was in turn willing to change his pedagogical approach to teaching PE in what could be seen as a queer fashion. In our view, exploring the case and its conditions of possibility (Foucault 1980, p. 77) might point in the direction of a queer pedagogy, which is "a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of 'normalcy' in school subjects" (Bryson and de Castel 1993).

Issues of gender in PE

According to Atkinson (2010), "[s]ocial boundary crossing is a hallmark of late modern, neo-liberal life" (p. 1249). However, recent literature on the school subject of PE suggests that this subject has not yet reached late modernity, as Atkinson proposes. Indeed, PE is not renowned at all for its social boundary crossing. Elsewhere, one of us noted that "[r]esearch on physical education indicates that the subject is marked by rather stable structures as far as gender relations are concerned" (Larsson, Fagrell and Redelius 2009). Likewise, after reviewing the extensive literature on gender in PE, Brown (2005) points out that this body of research "consistently demonstrates a trend of continuity rather than change in gender relations with

regard to discourse, practice, teaching, pedagogy and teacher education (see for example, Hargreaves 1986; Vertinsky 1992; Flintoff 1993; Wright 1998; Penney 2002; Williams and Bedward 2001)” (p. 3). Recent studies by Hills (2012) and van Amsterdam et al. (2012) also reveal that in PE, gender segregation – whether in a gender segregated class or a co-education class – is maintained and legitimised through a discourse of naturalness, i.e. the genders are by nature different.

What, then, are the ‘stable structures’ concerning gender relations in PE about? In general, this school subject is seen to convey traditional masculine and feminine values, where a certain version of dominant – ‘sporty’ and heterosexual – masculinity occupies a hegemonic position (Penney 2002; Smith 2007; Dempster 2009; Sykes 2011a). In the Swedish context in which this study takes place (see Larsson and Redelius 2008; Quennerstedt et al. 2008), this has been described as more boys being positive about the subject than girls and that, in general, boys more than girls feel that they are physically active in class and can influence the content and the pedagogy. Not surprisingly, this also leads to more boys than girls acquiring a high grade in the subject. It also means that a range of physical activities generally considered to convey masculine values, i.e. to embody space, force and competence (Connell 1983), are privileged. In consequence, it is logical that games dominate the lesson content of PE (Kirk 2012; Larsson and Redelius 2008; Parker and Curtner-Smith 2012; Quennerstedt et al. 2008).

It is not easy to explain why PE is trapped in these stable structures. With specific regard to gender structures, one explanation might be that the patterns are regarded as ‘natural’ by both teachers and students. This ‘naturalness’ is linked to a strong relationship between, on the one hand, what is considered to be a more or less given content in the subject, i.e. games and fitness training focusing on strength and endurance, and, on the other hand, that boys represent the stronger sex while girls represent the weaker one. Such a relationship is also intertwined with heteronormativity. What girls and boys do in the gym can then be interpreted

as a sign of a cultural demand to be normal, i.e. straight (Larsson et al. 2011a, 69). More broadly speaking, the cultural demand to be normal might also be related to the ways many Swedish PE teachers seem to value orderliness, cohesiveness and harmonious cooperation among the students (Öhman and Quennerstedt 2008). All in all, the incentives for PE students to cross borders relative to social norms are few; especially as unlike competitive sport, PE only pays limited attention to actually developing students' capabilities (Nyberg and Larsson 2012).

In Sweden, the destabilising of restrictive and potentially offensive gender structures first became an explicit task for teachers in conjunction with the introduction of a new national curriculum in 1994. Here, it was stated that schools have “a responsibility to counteract traditional gender roles and should therefore provide students with the opportunity of developing their own abilities and their interests irrespective of their sexual identity” (SNAE 1994, p. 4). The same ambition is stated also in the new national curriculum that came into effect in 2011.

Internationally, quite a lot of the research by and discussions between scholars has been devoted to the issue of counteracting gender structures (see e.g. del Castillo et al., 2012; Davis 2003; Dowling 2006; Parker and Curtner-Smith 2012). The critical issue is often framed in terms of how to include girls and young women in PE. This is the case in Flintoff's (2008) study about attempts to challenge gender in English PE. Flintoff states that “[t]he research shows very little evidence of equity issues forming any significant part of the coordinators' (particular agents, working alongside the teachers with the task of facilitating girls' participation in PE; our note) deliberations or everyday practice” (p. 407). In response to this void, a number of researchers have called for a ‘gender-sensitive’ approach to the teaching of PE (Diller and Houston 1996; McCaughy 2006; Vertinsky 1992), gender-sensitive here designating a particular attention among teachers towards how they might counteract unequal

conditions in the gym through carefully selecting lesson activities and organising classes. Further, other attempts to fashion pedagogical practices in PE that are sensitive to gender issues have been reported. Sykes (2011a) calls for educators to work toward ‘ethical encounters’ with queer bodies, and Martino and Becket (2004) focus on the importance of “teachers threshold knowledges, as an enabling grid of intelligibility for elaborating a more complex and nuanced analysis of the gendered dimension of pedagogical practices in PE” (p. 248).

As stated above, the purpose of the article is to outline how prevailing gender structures can be challenged in PE by exploring the queer potential in an event that took place during a dancing lesson in an upper secondary PE class. We view this event as a heterotopia; a PE counter-site. First of all, the dancing lesson might in itself be viewed as a counter-site, since dancing is often incidental in Swedish PE although it is actually decreed by the national curriculum. Arguably, it also helped to bring about the sequence of events that will be analysed below. When analysing these events the following questions were asked: How was the counter-site constituted? Would it have something to say in relation to the attempts to outline a queer pedagogy for PE? What teacher – and student – knowledges might be beneficial to develop, if the studied situation is taken to point to a pedagogical strategy? In what follows we deepen our theoretical framework and theorise further on heteronormativity, heteropia and queer pedagogy, or what American educationalist Kevin Kumashiro refers to as ‘teaching paradoxically’ (Kumashiro 2004). It should be noted that teaching paradoxically is not synonymous to a queer pedagogy. We believe, however, that it might give hints about how to teach in a queer fashion. We then move on to explore our case in detail. Using a variety of information sources, we attempt to trace the event’s conditions of possibility (cp. Foucault 1980, p. 77) to determine what and how it might contribute to a queer pedagogy.

Heteronormativity and heterotopias: a queer case for physical education?

In the last decade a number of studies on heteronormativity in school PE have been produced (cf. Berg and Lahelma 2010; Clarke 2006; Hunter 2004; Larsson et al. 2009 and 2011a; Smith 2007). Sykes (2011a) explore, in a comprehensive study, how students are marginalised in a variety of ways because they do not conform to heteronormativity. According to Røthing (2008), the term heteronormativity:

... may function as a *description* of how heterosexuality in different ways appears to be normative, normalised and desirable, and how heterosexuality is continuously taken for granted in western societies in general, and within public institutions such as schools, in particular [...] Heteronormativity may also refer to the *processes* that produce these understandings and images of heterosexuality. (p. 255)

However, the yoke of heteronormativity can sometimes be cast aside in what Foucault terms heterotopias. In his short, but highly significant text, “Of Other Spaces”, Foucault (1986) starts off with discussing how the world is saturated with places and spaces with a more or less given meaning, and where people are ascribed certain identities. In every society, however, sites occur where this ‘givenness’ is challenged. In contrast to *utopias*, which are imaginary places beyond the real world, *heterotopias* exist in the real world as counter-sites, where given meanings and identities are challenged. A *heterotopia* can be seen as a space where people use the opportunity to struggle with norms that constitute a certain practice. More succinctly, and like Akşit (2011), we view heterotopias “as real/material places that affirm difference and enable resistance to authority” (p. 300). In this way, we believe that the concept of heterotopia can be usefully contextualised within a queer pedagogy with a view to intervening in the production of ‘normalcy’ in school subjects (Bryson and de Castel 1993; cf.

also Tamboukou 2004) – because the production of normalcy seems to be commonplace in PE.

Challenges that tend to fizzle out

In a number of previous articles (Larsson et al. 2009; Larsson, Fagrell and Redelius 2011a; Larsson, Redelius and Fagrell 2011b) one of the authors has maintained that heteronorms contribute to the reproduction of stable gender structures by locking students' bodies and actions into supposedly heterosexual identities. In an ongoing research project that will be described later on in the article, several situations occurred where dominating gender discourses were clearly evident to the researchers but not challenged by the teacher. For instance, the following sequence took place during a fitness training session to music in an upper secondary class:

Teacher: How did that feel? (after finishing the exercise) ... Honestly.

Boy 1: Feminine.

T: Feminine? (surprised)

B1: Well ... actually ... it's a woman's thing from the beginning. You can't argue with that.

T: There are many ... if you say ... if we're going into that discussion, David, what is feminine and masculine?

B1: But no, it just feels feminine. [...]

T: Could you then say that this form of exercise is ... do you feel ...

B1: Yes ... I feel ... You, like, asked me.

Boy 2: Are you against feminism?

T: Jimmy! (rebuking) ... But if you see ... you've never been to a session ... I asked you ... you've never been to any session ... have you?

B1: No, but I've watched.

T: And generally in [a training institute], for instance in a session there, there are mainly girls, so in that sense you have a ... that more women are practising. But if I look at your effort as a whole ... and see what moves you learned ...

Here, one of the students draws the teacher's attention to an issue related to gender, i.e. that the student experiences fitness training to music (or at least a certain form of fitness training) as feminine. To the teacher, this appears to be an unexpected turn, and he does not seem to know how to deal with it. Hence, the possibility to challenge the experienced relationship between certain ways of moving and certain perceptions about gender fizzles out.

We would argue that this clamping of bodies and actions to heteronorms is partly due to PE teachers' propensity to 'adapt' the teaching by gender. Larsson et al. (2009), for example, show that teachers occasionally use a benevolent but rather restraining strategy of girls not being expected to manage physical tasks to the same extent as boys. Adapting the teaching by gender is a strategy that can be linked to ideas about girls' and boys' behaviour in the gym being explained by the properties they carry into class. A teacher interviewed in a previous study said that:

I personally think that some things are genetic. I have a girl and a boy at home and consciously try to counteract that, but then you sometimes get a stick in the head, that my daughter actually *likes* these girly things, even though we [he and his wife; our note] are rather active. [...] And I mean, am I going to change her, and make a boy out of her,

and make a girl out of my boy, if you see what I mean? It doesn't have to be counteracted at all costs. (Larsson et al. 2012; authors' translation)

If behaviour is mainly explained genetically, as this teacher illustrates, and if the behaviour resonates with the dominating norms, trying to counteract gender structures in education seems pointless to teachers. This perspective fits in with attempts to 'adapt' the activities by gender. Larsson et al. (2009) also describe how teachers 'adapt' physical activities in ways that reinforce heteronorms, such as dividing girls and boys when the activities require strength, endurance or body contact (as in a number of games), and/or reducing the expectations and demands for girls in comparison with boys in order to better 'suit' the two genders.

The above quotation also illustrates a common ambition among teachers to want to 'change *them*' (i.e. the girls and the boys), rather than changing the practice. Few teachers seem to spontaneously reflect on which norms are conveyed by certain physical activities or how certain content reflects the experiences and tastes of the students. Hence, few teachers critically reflect on how the teaching, its content and pedagogy express norms that the students have to deal with and that affect people of different gender and sexual orientations in different ways. This is the strategy that we are looking for in this article.

Can physical education be taught paradoxically?

A strategy that matches our ideas about heterotopias, and which might be linked to the endeavour to outline a queer pedagogy for PE, is proposed by the American educationalist, Kevin Kumashiro. Kumashiro (2004) holds that teachers should *teach paradoxically* in order to be in a position to challenge dominating social norms. The theme teaching paradoxically evolved after struggling with gender norms in conjunction with students. Originally,

Kumashiro's idea was to encourage the students to express their views of different sexual orientations. To his great disappointment, this strategy often led to some students expressing themselves in a homophobic way:

Paradoxically, the open discussion was both too open and not open enough. That is, it was too open by allowing students to express heterosexism/homophobia and silence the LGBTQ people in the room, but it was also not open enough for those students who ended up expressing their homophobia in masked, politically correct ways. I ended that semester confused about how best to structure a discussion about LGBTQ issues. Can students challenge their own heterosexism/homophobia (and biphobia/transphobia) if they never really articulate it? Can students speak from the margins if the margins are the very topics of debate? (Kumashiro 2004, p. 113)

After a while, Kumashiro came to the conclusion that it was not possible for him, as a teacher, to 'change *them*' (the students). On the contrary, the focus should be on *changing the teaching*, or as Kumashiro (2004) suggests: "one barrier to anti-oppressive teaching is the very notion that good teaching happens only when students respond in ways that we *want* them to respond" (p. 113). With this follows a need to pay close attention to how specific content and pedagogy relate to dominating norms and to how students can resist these norms. Kumashiro (2004 p. 113) calls for a teaching that is not restricted to teaching the students mechanical skills (i.e. reading, calculating – or moving). Rather, to teach paradoxically includes teaching the students about the cultural dimensions of a particular practice, and about how all practices have normative implications that must be discovered in order to be challenged. Such a pedagogical approach would in PE include questions like: How does this way of moving challenge stereotypes? How does it reinforce it? What does it leave unchallenged? What does it raise critical questions about? Whom does it leave invisible? Whom does it call on to contest their own privileges?

In order to show what these questions could mean within a PE context, we now turn to our case: a folk dancing lesson in a Swedish eighth grade class. Although the case we turn to happens spontaneously, and the teacher captures the situation, it nevertheless inspires us to outline a strategy of teaching paradoxically. Bringing the concept of heterotopia in relation to the concept of teaching paradoxically is to be seen as an attempt to analyse and draw pedagogical conclusions from what happens in a particular heterotopia.

The case: methodological approach

The case is derived from data gathered for a large research project involving researchers from four PE departments in Sweden called “Physical education – a subject for learning?” This project began in 2011 with the overall purpose of investigating knowledge, teaching and processes of learning in secondary school PE. The data collected in the project consist of video recordings from thirty PE lessons in eight secondary schools in four different Swedish cities. The lessons typically ranged between forty and eighty minutes, and were video recorded using two cameras: one stationary camera and one hand-held camera. With the stationary camera we attempted to capture the whole gym and the collective actions of students and teachers, including the artefacts used. The hand-held camera was used to capture important details, such as instructions, relations, communications and movements (cf. Macphail et al., 2008; Öhman and Quennerstedt 2012; Rønholt 2002).

The video films were subsequently analysed in order to identify what we call ‘didactic moments’. Didactic moments are events that are close to what Rønholt (2002) describes as ‘didactic irritations’. These are moments in the explored lessons that engender “pedagogical reflections and discussions, which in turn could lead to alternative thinking and understanding about teaching and learning” (p. 26/27). Based on the selected didactic moments, we

conducted interviews with teachers and three students from each class. The interviews had a dual purpose. The first was to gather information about general aspects about PE and related experiences from outside school. The second was to show the selected video sequences to the teachers and students and ask them to comment on what was happening and whether the events on display related to previous events taking place during or outside the PE lesson in question (for a more comprehensive description of our method, see Quennerstedt et al. in review).

The methodology used in the project is closely linked to sociocultural theories of learning. We accordingly view processes of teaching and learning, “as an ongoing relation between teachers, students and the cultural and institutional prerequisites of the learning situation” (Quennerstedt et al. in review, p. 5). Practice, together with the direction of learning, is then constituted in the intersection between the different participants’ embodied dispositions and the logic of the practice. Coupled with our methodological approach, this means that the video recordings serve to display practice, including the logic of practice, while the interviews provide clues to the particular experiences that teachers and students bring to practice, and specifically to the identified didactical moments.

The case that we draw on here comes from a mixed gender PE class with a male PE teacher who teaches *schottische*, a traditional folk dance that is often taught in Swedish schools. Like any folk or ballroom dancing, *schottische* is traditionally performed in mixed gender couples with slightly different steps and turns for men and women. As stated above, dance is fairly uncommon in Swedish PE, and to the extent it occurs it is viewed primarily as a physical activity (rather than as a cultural practice) and taught in a technical fashion. According to Gard (2006; 2008), such an approach fails to take advantage of the aesthetic, often designated to be the ‘feminine’, dimension of dancing. Other researchers have explored alternative approaches to the technical one (e.g. Richardson and Oslin 2003; Keyworth 2001).

In our case, the dance is taught over a period of two lessons. Early in the second lesson, a situation occurred that we argue can be seen as a heterotopia in the sense that Foucault describes it; a place that affirms difference and enables resistance to authority (Foucault 1986; see also Akşit 2011). Even though the situation evolves spontaneously, and not as the result of a deliberate pedagogy, it helps us to outline a strategy of teaching paradoxically. The PE teacher and four female students make up the heterotopia. Other students are also in the gym, but are only indirectly involved in the situation, although they do experience the pedagogical changes that are engendered by the heterotopia.

“Why must girls and boys dance together?”

The lessons take place in a large gym. In the first schottische lesson the teacher clearly states the purpose of the content element by saying that “you will all learn to dance schottische. We’ll have at least three lessons to practice this particular dance and I’m sure that you will all get the gist of it.” He motivates the selection of content with reference to the Swedish national curriculum, where it is stated that the students shall be able to dance traditional as well as modern dances.

The teacher is very enthusiastic and encourages the students to get into the right rhythm by walking across the gym in time to the music. The teacher demonstrates the different steps in short sequences, so that the students can learn the various dance steps before doing the dance as a whole. The teacher tries to explain the different steps for boys and those for girls. When he hesitates, two of the girls try to correct him. He continuously instructs the boys by talking about the boys’ steps, and the girls while talking about the girls’ steps. When giving instructions, the teacher also makes use of a metaphor, because he wants the students to be

more distinct and definite in their moves. “Try to be like a robot,” he says, demonstrating with his own body.

Slowly but surely the first lesson progresses, and by the end of the lesson the students seem to have learned to move in a way that might be regarded as schottische. Some students are already familiar with the dance, while for others this is the first time they have encountered it. This lesson more or less engenders the practice of PE illustrated at the beginning of the article, i.e. a practice that potentially reinforces rather than counteracts gender norms and hetero norms (see e.g. Clarke 2006; Larsson et al. 2009; Sykes 2011a).

However, at the beginning of the second lesson, when the teacher gathers the students together, some of the girls are sitting on the floor. He tells them about the content of the lesson and that they are to continue practicing schottische. The girls talk about what it feels like to dance with the boys. They are not happy about this and one of them says to the teacher that it is ‘disgusting’. The teacher dismisses the remark by saying: “Yes ... that might be the case, but you’ll do it anyway.” Then one of the girls turns to the teacher and asks:

Girl 1 (Anna): Please, can you answer me and explain why girls and boys have to dance together?

Teacher (Henry): Why must girls and boys dance together? Because we normally do that ... dance boys and girls.

Girl 2: But, I’ll never dance schottische again in my whole life.

Girl 3: Neither will I – it’s ridiculous. Why don’t we dance Zumba instead?

Teacher: Zumba? We did that last year.

Girl 3: But why can’t we do it again?

Teacher: Maybe when we have aerobics later on, next term.

Girl 1: Henry (calling to the teacher), I'll never ever dance schottische.

Teacher: You can never know that.

Girl 2 (ironically): Oh my God! Oh yes, I'll start taking schottische lessons later in life, sure!

Teacher: You never know. You might marry or become great friends with a 'Dalmas' (a person who lives in Dalecarlia, a county in Sweden where traditional folk dances have a long tradition and are still practised; our note).

Girl 2: That'll never happen because I don't like Dalmases. They are ugly.

Teacher: One must be prepared for life. I just can't put you in a little box (indicating with his hands). Everything is possible.

Girl 1: But Henry, you haven't answered my question – dancing girls and boys.

Girl 3 (turns to girl 1): Anna is spot-on actually.

So far the discussion between the students and the teacher is similar to other discussions that take place between students and teachers in PE classes. Students often ask questions like “Why are we supposed to do ...?” Teachers sometimes answer politely, like Henry, and sometimes respond by saying “because we have to”, “because I say so”, or “because the national curriculum says so!” In this respect, the above discussion is not unusual, at least in a Swedish PE context. What is particularly noteworthy is what happens next. Anna (girl 1) makes a radical statement that is unusual, but not extraordinary. The other girls participating in the discussion follow Anna's example. What is exceptional, and both theoretically and pedagogically interesting, is teacher Henry's eventual response to Anna's and the other girls' questions:

Girl 1: Perhaps I'm a lesbian?

Girl 2: I'm also a lesbian.

Girl 3 and girl 4: Me too.

Girl 2: Then you want to dance with a girl.

Teacher: Okay ... (hesitantly).

Girl 1: Are you with us? Do you understand?

Teacher: Yes, I do understand. (still slightly hesitant)

Girl 2: I think Anna has a good point here.

Teacher: Yes ... one doesn't have to dance boy and girl. That's right. It's my heterosexual norm that haunts me here.

Girl 1: Exactly!

Girl 2: Yes it is!

Teacher (turns to Anna): Good on you, I'll give you an A for that.

Girl 3: I also think in that way.

Teacher (turns to girl 3): You'll also get an A because you have reminded me of my heterosexual normativity and lifted the discussion to a societal level. One can actually be lesbian and want to dance with another girl.

Girl 1 and girl 2: Yes, that's right. Exactly!

The teacher now turns to the class as a whole and indicates that it is time to start the activity.

He announces that: "the aim of the lesson is schottische, you've done it before. We will see

whether you've forgotten it or whether it's still there." What happens next is that the teacher changes the lesson plan. He counts the students as one, two, one, two, etc. and asks all those numbered one to stand in the inner circle and those numbered two to take their places in the outer circle. In this way, it is not the student's gender that constitutes the dancing couples, but random numbering. This arrangement means that some of the students randomly dance girl and girl, boy and boy or boy and girl. The teacher then tells the students that the inner circle will dance the 'boy's steps' taught in the previous lesson, and the outer circle the 'girl's steps'.

Interestingly, the teacher now starts to change his vocabulary by referring to the students in the dancing couples as partners rather than girls and boys. Also, the particular steps that the students learned in the previous lesson, as boys and girls, no longer function in this setting. As a result, the schottische dancing lesson ends up in chaos. In simple terms, the new arrangement means that many of the students can no longer dance schottische functionally. The aim of learning schottische in a simple and technical way, following the cultural norms that dancing schottische conventionally embody, has to give way to a slightly different purpose. In our view, this 'new' purpose can be formulated as learning schottische in a manner that also facilitates the discovery of certain cultural norms that characterise the practice, but which are susceptible to change.

After analysing this situation in depth, we believe that it can be theorised in terms of a *heterotopia*: a space during the lesson where some students grab the opportunity to struggle with the norms that constitute the practice and the teacher's pedagogy (Foucault 1986). In terms of pedagogy, it is related to the pedagogical opportunities that are offered by that space. Situations like these are rare in the material that we gathered. As this case – albeit occurring spontaneously and not as the consequence of a deliberate pedagogy – pointed to the possibility of teaching paradoxically (Kumashiro 2004), we began to ask ourselves about the

conditions of possibility (Foucault 1980) under which the situation might occur and whether the case provided useful clues.

The event and its features

A further analysis consisted of an exploration of our case in relation to what research has to say about PE lessons in general. How might our case differ from other lessons? We then delved deeper into the interviews with the teacher and the students and what they had to say about the case. In particular, we wondered what kind of previous experiences might be of significance for how the lesson played out.

With reference to our case, schottische dancing is initially taught in a traditional way, with couples consisting of a girl and a boy doing the women's and the men's steps and turns. The teacher demonstrates the steps in stages, emphasising 'the steps and the turns', and how to hold each other. A correct way of dancing schottische seems to underpin the teaching. As a result of the discussion between the teacher and the girls in the second lesson, the teacher tries to randomly gender-neutralise the dancing couples, i.e. dancing girl-girl, boy-boy or boy-girl, with girls sometimes dancing the 'boy's turns' and boys dancing the 'girl's turns'. As the students had only learned 'girl turns' and 'boy turns' in the first lesson, the second lesson became chaotic because the boys and the girls ended up dancing the turns of the 'opposite gender' that they were not familiar with. The unusual thing about this case is not the students' questioning of what is going on and what will happen in class, but rather the constructive spirit in which the discussion between the girls and the teacher unfolds. Unusual is also the teacher's endeavour to change the way he arranges the continued schottische practice, and that he persistently continues with trying to teach the students dancing schottische despite the interrupted practice.

In relation to this course of events, some general features of PE lessons need to be taken into account when contemplating the conditions for challenging cultural norms. Drawing from a national evaluation of Swedish PE, Quennerstedt et al. (2008) state that:

Discussion and reflection are not often included in Swedish PE, for example, and developing a critical ability is not anything that either teachers or pupils regard as being an important aspect of PE. Opportunities for discussion and reflection also seem to be limited in that the main focus is on a high level of physical activity during lessons. This can be interpreted as that the subject content is taken for granted and that it doesn't need to be discussed or reflected upon. (p. 13)

Hence, teachers and students are chiefly oriented towards the physical activity itself. Talking and discussing are regarded as distractions. This may be why teachers occasionally dismiss students' questions, and particularly their attempts to ask critical questions about practice. The tendency to dismiss or ignore what students move to the fore might also be due to the assumption that PE is regarded as being a socially cohesive medium (Kirk 2012), e.g. that games do, as a state of nature, develop the students' interpersonal skills. Students beginning to ask questions might then be seen as malicious questioning or a sign of unwillingness. As our case indicates, one feature of PE teaching that might facilitate the challenging of cultural norms is to reflect on what is happening in the gym, and how the different activities that constitute the lesson content are played out, which cultural norms they convey and how these norms can be addressed critically and constructively.

If teachers are to understand the resistance that some students display, then it seems important for them to know something about the cultural norms that the selected content conveys. Lots of research has shown that different sports and other physical activities that are part of the PE curriculum convey different cultural norms. For instance, Larsson et al. (2011a) show that

boys and girls relate differently to games and dancing partly because playing games and dancing embody different gender norms (see also Brown 2005; Penney 2002).

The PE teacher in our case was obviously familiar with the concept of heteronormativity, but he was not well-prepared for teaching paradoxically. Thus, although this lesson is not an example of how to teach paradoxically systematically, we believe it can be discussed in terms of a systematic strategy for teaching paradoxically. We will return to this in the conclusion. However, first we will explore some of the previous experiences that the teacher and the students drew on in the event in question.

The teacher's and students' previous experiences

We would argue that an exploration of the previous experiences of the teacher and the students is important in order to understand why the situation played out the way it did. In the interview with Henry (the teacher), he admits that he learned a lot from the particular situation:

My view of dancing was just like that [dancing boy-girl; our note]. But then, when I thought about it ... it didn't have to be that way ... As they say, you could be a lesbian, then you might not want to dance with boys [...] The important thing is that you learn to dance, that you can move together with a partner, that you can find some kind of symbiosis, that you know how to do it, to dance. So it was ... yes, it was cool ... to listen to them and: yes, they're right.

He also emphasises that a teacher should not dominate a lesson, but give the students enough space to solve a problem themselves. The important thing, Henry maintains, is that the task is manageable. Like Henry, we believe that giving students enough room to manoeuvre allows

them to challenge constraining cultural norms. However, as Kumashiro (2004) has pointed out, this kind of questioning can just as easily become sexist and homophobic.

What is also important in this particular case is that Henry is acquainted with the concept of *heteronormativity*. After a period of reflection, Henry realises that the girls' way of reasoning points to his heteronormative way of teaching *schottische*, i.e. his given understanding of girls and boys as heterosexuals and that certain activities, such as dancing *schottische*, should follow this pattern. In the interview, Henry tells us that he also teaches the class in Biology and that the concept of heteronormativity has been discussed in this context. After exploring what Henry has learned from his discussion with the girls, the interviewer asks Henry to reflect on what the students might have learned.

Researcher: Might they have learned something about heteronorms too?

Teacher (Henry): Exactly ...

R: We don't know that for sure, but that's another matter ...

T: Yes, we had it as a theme ... in Biology. That's why it came up here. (Okay) We talked about heteronorms dominating ... so that's what I think ...

R: So what they really do, is that they ... bring what they've learned in biology into the physical education class?

T: Yes.

Thus, in this case, it was not only the teacher who knew about heteronorms but also the students, or at least those (girls) taking part in the discussion. They were knowledgeable enough to say 'exactly' and 'yes that's right' when Henry responded to their statement about heteronormativity. Importantly, they knew how to use the concept heteronormativity

constructively in a discussion in order to make the teacher pay attention to what they wanted to challenge.

What about the previous experiences of the students? Two of the girls who were involved in the discussion were interviewed. The interviews were mainly concerned with learning, which both girls assumed to be about learning to dance. However, the interviewer prompted one of the girls to consider whether she had learned anything from *the discussion* with the teacher:

Girl 1 (Anna): You probably learn to ... not to hold conversations ... but to take part in discussions ... That's a goal I set up at my personal development dialogue (an institutionalized meeting, held once every semester, where a student, parents and class teacher or 'mentor' review the student's situation in school). ... and then you improve a little bit ... you learn to start discussions.

Interviewer: Yes, you definitively did that.

G1: Yes, because Henry (the teacher) always says that we should ask 'why'. I asked why we were supposed to dance like that [boy and girl; our comment] and then he said "because it's the most common way." But if someone wants to, they should be able to dance girl and girl as well.

Encouraging the students to ask questions about the teaching and setting this up as a target during a personal development dialogue seems to encourage Anna to initiate a discussion about the cultural norms that permeate what they are doing: dancing schottische in a particular way. Arguably, Anna is also knowledgeable about heteronormativity; if not the concept, then at least the phenomenon. In our view, these insights into the previous experiences of the teacher and the students tell us a lot about how the situation unfolded as it did, and why. Hence, we also believe that it helps to outline a paradoxical teaching.

Conclusions

In the article we have discussed how prevailing gender structures could be challenged in PE by exploring the queer potential in an event that took place during a dancing lesson. As we see it, the event, to the extent that it can be regarded as a *heterotopia* (Foucault 1986), contributes to the discussion about how to teach paradoxically (Kumashiro 2004). We suggest that our analysis draws attention to the following conditions, all of which need to be considered when attempting to teach paradoxically:

First, create situations in which the heteronorms are obvious enough for the students to act upon, for instance through verbal interruption. Generally speaking, this means creating an open atmosphere where students feel comfortable to ask critical questions about the cultural practice that they are expected to immerse themselves in. This does not mean trying to ‘protect’ the students from heteronorms or traditional gender patterns, but rather making these susceptible to questioning. Teachers do not have to avoid gender stereotypes and heteronorms. On the contrary, there are good reasons why teachers should indicate how gender stereotypes and heteronorms are constituted, and how they are ‘played out’ in practice in order to know how students can act upon them. Importantly, as Kumashiro (2004) argues, facilitating potential queer situations is not enough because they might end up in acts of sexism and homophobia. It is therefore imperative to link this condition to the other conditions listed below.

Second, teachers should be equipped with specific tools for creating potentially queer situations, which includes constructively managing the students’ interruptions (cf. Martino and Becket 2004). This could involve learning about the concept of heteronormativity and how it can be used constructively to both understand and change social practice. Arguably,

this strategy would need to be tailored to particular school subjects, because cultural norms are always played out in particular ways in particular settings.

Third, in the same way as condition two, students should be equipped with the means to challenge cultural norms. For both students and teachers, this could involve learning about the concept heteronormativity and the different ways in which heteronorms are played out in PE. It is also important to empower students in different ways to interrupt practice by, for instance, creating space for discussions and directing attention towards the cultural norms of the practice in question.

The attentive reader may have noticed that what is stated in the above paragraphs is not limited to the context of PE. We believe that insights from the PE lessons discussed above can have important implications for other classes both in PE and in other school subjects. All three conditions presented can easily be transformed to fit any school subject, for example, that both teachers and students should be equipped with tools that help them to challenge the cultural norms both in society and within that particular subject (cf. Sykes 2011b). Put more generally, we believe that Kumashiro is pointing in a direction where any particular subject can be approached as a cultural practice, including a set of cultural norms that engender, and privilege, certain behaviours and identities while marginalising others, and not merely in terms of being technical or instrumental knowledge. When putting this strategy into practice, it must, however, proceed from the specific features of the particular school subject.

As we see it, teaching paradoxically can be regarded as a particular strategy that might fit into the more overarching endeavour of a queer pedagogy: “*the deliberate production of queer relations [...] of subjectivities as deviant performance*” (Bryson and de Castel 1993, p. 298; original emphasis). Using the case of schottische as an example, paradoxical teaching in PE is not about teaching schottische in ‘the best way’. Rather, it is about examining whether

learning the schottische folk dance in the context of a PE lesson has normative implications (cf. Kumashiro 2004). Teachers might, for example, be encouraged to ask questions like: Does dancing schottise reinforce stereotypes? If so, how might these be challenged? In relation to the new strategy that Henry subsequently adopted, one may conclude that there arises an opportunity to break the habit of dancing boy-girl that can lead to the discovery of how cultural norms are constituted and reflections on how they can be challenged and changed.

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