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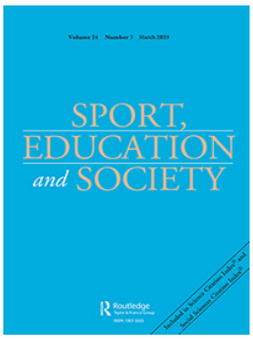

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Arriving in the body – students' experiences of yoga based practices (YBP) in physical education teacher education (PETE)

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ABSTRACT

The interest in yoga, mindfulness or similar yoga-based practices (YBP) has grown exponentially in the western world, also within education, including physical education (PE). Although some studies have been conducted on YBP in PE, yoga has not yet been researched in the framework of physical education teacher education (PETE). Using a regional lifeworld approach, the purpose of this article is to investigate how PETE students experience their participation in a YBP didactics unit when it was included in the PETE programme. What thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations were evoked in the students as they explored YBP and their prospects for teaching it themselves? The project involved 13 students during their fifth year in one of Sweden's PETE programmes. Questionnaires and diaries were used as information sources. Ten of the 13 students were also interviewed. In the phenomenological analysis, the phenomenon of *friction* 'showed itself' to be an essential part of the perceived experiences. Friction was characterised by a tension between *an absence of friction*, which describes experiences of participating in YBP smoothly, and *the presence of friction*, which included experiences of resistance. The students also oscillated between experiences of *I-here and now*, and *Me-my future teaching profession*. At least to some extent, the YBP that was practised during the course changed the students' views of what education in 'human in motion' can be by discovering and breaking their habitual attitudes towards PE. Rather than being discussed in terms of 'benefits', the YBP practice charged the body, the room and the group with a heightened awareness of the present moment that could also be expressed verbally. It is anticipated that this kind of reflexive knowledge will help the student to make careful didactical considerations in their future teaching practices.

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Introduction

Yoga and other 'Eastern movement forms' (Brown, 2013) that articulate connections between spirituality and physicality were introduced into western societies some decades ago (Brown, 2013) and are nowadays even given space in public education (e.g. Hart et al., 2022). Interest in yoga has also increased amongst physical education teachers seeking to include yoga-based practices (YBP) in their teaching (Folleto et al., 2016). Furthermore, scholars in the subject highlight a need for new ways of thinking about the body, health and education, for example through using yoga (Standal, 2017;

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Tinning, 2001). However, introducing new or 'alternative' content into physical education is not always friction-free. According to Standal (2017), this could be because such approaches relate poorly to the logics of sport and natural science that typically form the basis for much of the content in both the subject and subject teacher education (see also, e.g. Larsson et al., 2018; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2016; Tinning, 2009). Moreover, YBP is sometimes associated with religious beliefs, which may conflict with ambitions for public education to be non-denominational (Skolverket, 2022).

In the autumn term of 2019, students enrolled in a physical education teacher education programme in Sweden were offered an introductory unit in teaching YBP, which was in turn part of a larger subject didactic course (30 ECTS) towards the end of the teacher programme. The task of leading the unit was assigned to the first author of this article, a trained eurhythmics and dance teacher who is also trained in the yoga tradition of T.K.V. Desikachar. As previous research has highlighted 'that those involved in teacher education must identify, acknowledge and understand the experiences of those coming into teacher education' (Ralph & MacPhail, 2015, p. 51), we wanted to gain deeper insights into the students' experiences of this new content. Thus, the purpose of the article is to investigate how PETE students experienced their participation in the YBP didactics unit. The research question that has guided the study is: What thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations are evoked in the students as they explore YBP and their prospects of teaching it themselves?

Background

The demand for eastern inspired YBP has grown exponentially in the west, including Sweden. Arguably, this can be seen as a reaction to the incessant acceleration of tempo in all areas of modern life (Rosa & Trejo-Mathys, 2013) as well as a search for movement practices that have 'more to do with opening one's mind more than mastering the body' (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1259). YBP usually involves slow movements and can be related to a rising interest in somatic movement, somaesthetics and other eastern influenced movement practices (Fraleigh, 2015; Shusterman, 2012; Standal & Bratten, 2021). Research on YBP has also emerged. If we limit the focus to the school context, most of this research follows natural scientific logics, where an emphasis on 'evidence' and 'benefits' in relation to the health, mental well-being, cognitive functions and behaviour of school children dominates (Ferreira-Vorkapic et al., 2015; Hart et al., 2022).

As already indicated, YBP is now taking place in Swedish primary and secondary education. However, introducing such activity in Swedish schools has not been without friction. Some people have protested on the grounds that yoga conveys religious beliefs. A decision by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, 2012), however, concluded that yoga may well be practised without compromising the Swedish school law's requirement that education should be non-denominational. Notwithstanding, research shows how yoga can involve feelings of sacredness and purity in secular milieus (Brown, 2013; Nevrin, 2009), which means that questions about faith and religion can occur in connection with YBP.

Regarding PE, in 2001 Tinning argued that the subject needed new and more holistic ways of thinking about the body, health and education and suggested that yoga, Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais method could be useful in this endeavour. However, Tinning (2001) anticipated that alternative ways of working with the body could be somewhat difficult to include in the subject, especially the suggested methods often require silence and stillness. This could conflict with PE's strong focus on physical activity (Ekberg, 2016; Standal, 2017); a trend that is probably related to the view of health as synonymous with (increased) physical activity (Kirk, 2018). The focus on 'health-as-physical activity' is also strong in physical education teacher education programmes (PETE), where natural scientific logics dominate and are in turn linked to behaviouristic thought traditions. This can easily lead to mechanistic ways of relating to the body and movement (Backman & Larsson, 2016; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2016; Tinning, 2009). A Swedish study by Larsson (2009) shows that while PETE students manage to reconcile the relationship between 'health-as-physical activity' within a natural scientific logic with their previous experiences from (competitive) sport, they find it

more challenging to come to terms with 'alternative' movement practices and perspectives from the social sciences and humanities. This raises questions about how PETE students experience teaching in YBP, which also includes alternative perspectives on the body and movement.

YBP can refer to a variety of body/mind practices. In the present study, YBP is based on the yoga tradition of T.K.V. Desikachar (1999), which includes movement, breathing exercises and meditation, adapted to the individual condition (and age) of each participant. YBP, which is often characterised by relatively slow practices, encourages practitioners to listen to their bodies, mind and breath and offers opportunities for alternative ways of being and moving (Standal & Bratten, 2021). Guiding or teaching YBP requires a different way of approaching pedagogy than that commonly used in PE teaching (i.e. with behaviourist overtones) (Wright, 2000). Practising YBP is about working with the body and mind in particular ways and it is done with a directed focus that is coupled to a great awareness of the interplay between body, breath and mind. This directed conscious action is sometimes experienced as a state of flow that can be found in other forms of movement practices, such as non-competitive dancing, running and skiing. It can also occur in music-making, painting or acting. The practice of YBP may offer ways of finding firmness and stability and at the same time easiness and comfortability in postures or movements. This is an ongoing task that requires alertness and presence in an ongoing reflexive approach (Desikachar, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Theory

The study is based on phenomenological theory. Phenomenology is, however, not a uniform and coherent theoretical approach. We draw mainly on *lifeworld* phenomenology as conceptualised by Merleau-Ponty (being-to-the-world, Fr. *etre au mond*), which is in turn inspired by the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger (Bengtsson, 2005; Zahavi, 2019). The lifeworld is the reality that we all take for granted. The lived body is our access to the world and can never be reduced to something that is purely subjective or purely objective. The lived body is always in an interactive relationship with the world and there is a kind of circular relationship between world and subject (Zahavi, 2019). The communicative and interactive encounter is explicitly our access to other people and things in the world. As the lived world is social and historical, and since individuals are bodily subjects, the lifeworlds of others are never completely foreign to us. The way to deeper knowledge of others is through communication and interaction (Bengtsson, 2005). As researchers, we can never put ourselves outside the lifeworld (the natural attitude). Rather, we are an inevitable part of it and the only things we can study are those that 'reveal themselves' to us (Bengtsson, 2005).

Phenomenology can be said to be a philosophy of experience. Bengtsson makes a comparison between three different ways of looking at 'natural' experiences: 'the things themselves'.

> [T]he empiricist experiences this concrete, somewhat uneven tomato as a red colour spot and nothing else and the Kantian experiences an object that is admittedly located in space and time, but which in principle lacks individuality, i.e. you cannot distinguish two tomatoes from each other. The phenomenologist who sticks to the natural experience, on the other hand, experiences precisely this individual red tomato with all the properties and meanings it can have for me who experience it. (Author translation, Bengtsson, 2005, p. 27)

In a PETE context, this perspective can be translated into movement practice, where 'physical activity' seems to designate movements that are generalised, lifted out of context and lacking in individuality, while 'movement' seems to designate individual experience with all the properties and meanings that are attached to moving in particular ways (Larsson, 2016).

The pioneers, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, were not interested in using lifeworld phenomenology in empirical research (Bengtsson, 2013b; Varela et al., 2017). Instead, it is later researchers, such as van Manen (1997), who have developed empirical methods rooted in phenomenology. Discussions are ongoing between researchers as to how phenomenology should or should not be used in empirical research. The central issue of disagreement concerns *reduction* and whether it is necessary or not. Reduction is a Husserlian philosophical method that is used to examine the

essence of a phenomenon and draw out the invariable components. According to Zahavi (2018) and other critics (Bengtsson, 2013b), establishing an all-encompassing valid *essence* of a phenomenon is an impossible task in empirical research. Dahlberg et al. (2008) offer a middle way: the concept of *bridling*, which is related to reduction but not in its full sense, i.e. to not understand too quickly or imprecisely. Bridling means restraining one's 'preunderstanding in the form of personal beliefs, theories and other assumptions that otherwise mislead the understanding of meaning and thus limit the research openness' (Dahlberg et al., 2008, pp. 129–130). To bridle is to not make definite what is indefinite and '[…] actively wait for the phenomenon to display itself within the relationship with the researcher as a hunter of meanings' (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 130). In other words, bridling is pointing forwards. 'While "bracketing" is directed backwards, putting all energy into fighting preunderstanding and keeping it in check "back there", […] "bridling" aims to direct the energy into the open and respectful attitude that allows the phenomenon to present itself' (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 130).

Bengtsson (2013b) suggests a clear transition from philosophical to empirical research based on the concept of lifeworld yet restricted to a *regional* lifeworld ontology (and epistemology). The concept of regional lifeworld highlights that 'people move between several regional worlds in their daily life, for instance from the home in the morning to the working place (academic research included) during the day and to some recreation activity in the evening' (Bengtsson, 2013a, p. 48). The purpose of using the regional lifeworld concept is to delimit the lifeworld ontology to the specific reality to be studied (Bengtsson, 2005; Bredmar, 2013), in this case a course unit of YBP didactics.

Method

Phenomenology is not a theoretically uniform and coherent approach, nor is there consensus regarding the methodological approach (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Bengtsson, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2008). In this study, since we draw on lifeworld phenomenology, we refer mainly to the empirical phenomenological approach outlined by Dahlberg et al. (2008).

The project was carried out with PETE students in their fifth and final year of the PETE programme in one of Sweden's PETE institutions. It was conducted parallel to a course in which the first author was involved as a teacher. Around 70 students were able to choose a specialisation in a subject didactic course. Two such specialisations involved YBP: movement and dance didactics (MD) and didactics of training practices (TP). Six lessons of YBP were offered in the MD course and three lessons in the TP course. Six students participated in the MD group and seven in the TP group. Thus, a total of 13 students were involved in the study.

All the YBP lessons were taught by the first author. The lesson content included basic yoga asana-s (movement exercise), pranayama (breathing exercise), mindfulness-inspired practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) in stillness and in motion, exploring sounds, mantras and yoga in pairs, theory – key concepts in mindfulness, yoga philosophy (Patañjali Yogasutra, 1985), how to create asana-s and how to understand ashtanga yoga linked to core values in the Swedish national curriculum.

Open ended questionnaires, semi structured interviews and written diaries were used to obtain information about the students' experiences. The questionnaires were simple in design and produced specifically for this course. They were answered before and after each session with the aim of capturing the students' immediate and spontaneous experiences. The first questionnaire included questions about how the students would describe their overall relationship to YBP and the kind of knowledge they presumed they would need to be able to teach it in their future profession. The subsequent questionnaires focused specifically on how the students experienced their *body*, *breath* and *mind*. The last questionnaire included a comparison of the students' relationship to yoga before and after the course as a whole and how they thought their prospective pupils might benefit from YBP in school. In line with the phenomenological approach, the questionnaires aimed to 'capture' immediate experiences that could then be picked up in subsequent interviews. At the same time, it is impossible to capture 'pure' experiences. Even though the students were given the opportunity

to fill in questionnaires directly in connection with the lessons, it should be noted that their experiences had inevitably moved from pre-reflective to conscious thoughts. One hundred and thirty-three questionnaires were generated during the course.

The questionnaires were analysed qualitatively and subsequently formed the basis of the interviews. For example, one student wrote 'Present and thought-scattered'. At first glance, the answer may seem contradictory and therefore interesting to explore further: 'Could you elaborate on that answer, what does it mean for you?' Each student was interviewed for approximately ninety minutes, following a phenomenological 'open attitude', i.e. true willingness to listen, see and understand. According to Dahlberg et al. (2008, p. 187), 'a researcher's task is to cultivate a productive dialogue that addresses the phenomenon as deeply and thoroughly as possible'. The interviews were conducted at the PETE institution in small meeting rooms.

Additionally, the students were encouraged to write a diary about their experiences of the course. Four students opted to hand in diaries. According to Dahlberg et al. (2008), keeping a diary helps self-reflection. '[I]n the very act of writing, thoughts are freed, and begin to solidify and become clear' (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 180). The instructions were in the form of suggestions written on the white board:

1. **Experiences** – thoughts, feelings, memories that appear (appropriate or inappropriate) between sessions – write them down!
2. **Associations** – linked to read literature – to didactics/learning/knowledge – your future teaching role. What development opportunities do you see? What difficulties do you see?

After completing the interviews, the first author started the transcription work. All the interviews were written down verbatim with clarifications in brackets, such as gesturing, flipping through papers, sighs, laughing or the like (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Emphasised words were underlined and shorter pauses in the spoken phrases marked with … three dots. It should be noted, though, that the analysis focuses on the content of the conversation, not on the conversation *per se* (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The transcription of the 10 interviews generated 264 pages, while the diaries generated 11 pages.

The transcripts were read several times. Throughout the process of analysing the material we took the interview as a construction from first order to sixth order into consideration (Bengtsson, 2005), as follows: (1) students' un-reflected experiences that are already an understanding of something, (2) reflections on the experienced, that is, the lived experience is transformed into reflected experience, (3) reflections formulated in words, linguistic construction, the language's ability to talk about past experiences, (4) the researcher's understanding of the interviewees' statements, (5) researcher processing, analysing and generating units and (6) the researcher's written results and construction of vignettes (Bengtsson, 2005, p. 43). Relevant parts of the interviews were selected and structured into six main headings, or 'clusters of meaning' (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 244). The main headings were abductively generated, which means that although there were no pre-established headings, they were constructed based on Bengtsson's suggestion (2005) to focus specifically on the students': (1) *spontaneous experiences* (as noted in the questionnaires before/after lessons and recalled during the interviews), (2) *self-understandings* (their reflective understanding of themselves and their world as presented in the interviews and diaries) and (3) *thoughts* (explicitly cognitive descriptions expressed in the interviews and diaries). The three themes constituted the analysis, which engendered meaningful interpretations, or units. The interview excerpt below is an illustration of how the analysis resulted in meaningful interpretations based on the three dimensions:

CAY:

1 It was meditative to …

3 standing up and doing repetitive movements all the time … and so …

1 with force …

1 I think that a certain kind of force was involved … but

3 we stood up straight … which made it

1 feel as though in some way … you could feel its effect

2 in contrast … to bending down …

3 you stretch out … and …

1 I had a feeling of … er … stability … and

1 pride … in the movements …

1 self-confidence …

We then considered each unit (meaningful interpretation), joined together those that were analogous in content and removed repetitions and irrelevant statements. The results are presented in the form of vignettes (van Manen & van Manen, 2021, p. 1080), which include condensed statements and, occasionally, accurately reproduced quotations (cf. Ørbæk, 2021):

> CAY experiences 'standing up and doing repetitive movements all the time' as a meditation and that a certain kind of 'force' is involved when the body is 'upright'. A special effect occurs, in contrast to 'bending down', in the act of 'stretching out'. A feeling of 'stability, pride' and 'self-confidence' in the movements. By releasing the mind-controlled movements, which are automatic, CAY experiences it as a meditation.

Vignette style representations reflect the phenomenological aspiration to not present results in an overly fragmented form, but rather to maintain the experience *as a whole* as much as possible and keeping the thematic domains together. '[I]t is imperative that each part is understood in terms of the whole, but also that the whole is understood in terms of its parts' (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 236). The results section, including the vignettes, is written in the present tense, to bring a sense of the whole and the immediate experiences made in the present.

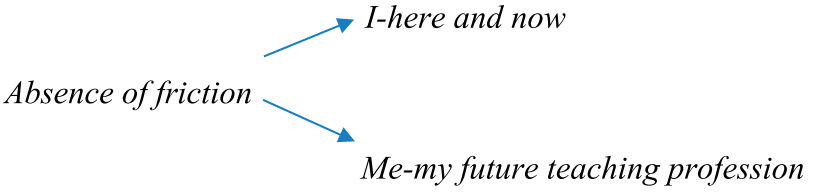
The study was conducted according to ethical standards (SFS, 2003:460). All the partaking students were informed verbally and in writing that participation in the study was voluntary and could be stopped at any time. All the material has been anonymised and will be stored in a secure place with no unauthorised access for a maximum of 10 years to enable reviews. After receiving information about the study, the students were asked to wait until the following day to accept or decline the invitation. All the students decided to participate in the study and confirmed their involvement in writing. Student performances during the YBP lessons were not assessed. Assessment in the course was based on one written and one practical exam, where students were tasked with constructing a thematic series of lessons with a view to their future teaching profession. The first author was not involved in this assessment process.

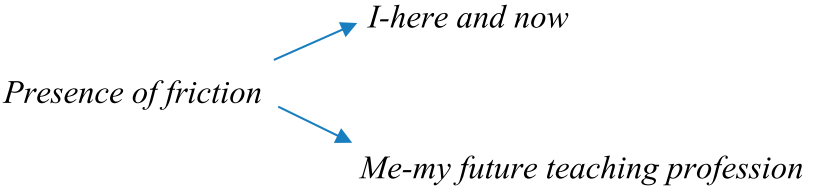
Results

At the beginning of the course, each student enters the dance studio with their own lifeworld into the regional lifeworld of the YBP course. The students make themselves at home on the yoga mats and from now on the dance studio partly transforms into a Yogashala, a Sanskrit word meaning a place for spiritual development. The students fill out the first questionnaire, which shows that strong norms and preconceptions flourish about what yoga is, and what effects yoga should bring when practised, mostly containing topics like 'peacefulness' and 'quietness'.

At the end of the course, the students' experiences of the YBP lessons can be characterised by the phenomenon of *friction* and a tension between *absence of friction*, which describes experiences of participating in YBP easily and smoothly, and *presence of friction,* which includes experiences of resistance and struggle. After reading through the material many times in order to bridle the analysis

process, i.e. to interrogate the data, be open and really 'listen' to it *as a whole*, the phenomenon *friction* 'showes itself' (Bengtsson, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2008) as an essential part of the perceived experiences. Constituents that can further elucidate the phenomenon of friction are that the students' experiences oscillate between two temporal dimensions: *I-here and now*, that is, the quality of the present moment in the YBP practice and *Me-my future teaching profession*, that is, involving associations with the future. From a regional lifeworld approach, the reality is complex and impossible to divide strictly into separate domains (Bengtsson, 2005; Bredmar, 2013). However, the domains show tendencies and, in the section below, these tendencies are combined under the following headings:





Each sub-section follows the same structure: a short introduction, vignettes displaying the students' experiences during the course and an attempt to use the theoretical framework to deepen understanding.

Absence of friction/I-here and now

Several students feel that during the ongoing lessons they have time to listen and process what is happening with their bodies, breath and minds. 'Arriving in the body' (Gill), 'entering into the body' (Henni), noticing 'the blood flowing in the veins' and 'time to reflect on spirituality' (Kendal), are some examples of how the students formulate what they experience.

> GILL emphasises the significance of 'arriving in the body' through YBP, and the importance of being able to feel that she *is* her body, can feel her own foot, her own hand, for example. According to Gill, it means experiencing being in the body, not forgetting any part and noticing 'oh, my breathing is like this and now I feel something in my foot – it calms and creates an awareness of the body'.

> Suddenly, HENNI is not really sure what is happening but experiences his breathing becoming automatic and as though he is entering into his body. Henni feels his pulse, how his heart beats, how his whole upper body contracts with 'just that heartbeat'. The upper body becomes smaller and smaller and the heart just beats and beats. When Henni tells his mother about this experience she asks, 'Were you stressed?' Henni says, 'No, it didn't feel like stress because the heartbeat was calm, a calm rhythm. It was more like feeling what was happening inside.' Henni was also struck by the thought … 'I don't usually think about this, I don't usually feel this, this is generally on … mute'. When asked if it felt uncomfortable, Henni said, 'No, it was mostly just … Oh, what's happening now? An interesting experience.'

> KENDAL notices how the blood moves through the body and especially in the arms when lifting them. Standing still, with eyes closed and just focusing on the body makes it possible for Kendal to clearly feel how the blood flows in his arms. Kendal experiences this feeling as very pleasant and describes satisfaction at having time to reflect on spirituality, 'because I can control my own thoughts'.

These experiences show how an absence of friction can stimulate a feeling of not only *having* a body but also *being* a body. We always carry this body with us and cannot put it away (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). According to Husserl, 'the natural attitude' (Bengtsson, 2013a) means that we do not think about this daily but need to actively focus on experiencing how 'body and mind' are connected, i.e. a 'both-and' instead of 'either-or' (Bengtsson, 2013b). The body's ability to perceive itself shows that it is in a relationship with itself (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The absence of friction allows Gill to experience that she is her body, gives Kendal space to feel the blood flowing through his arms and offers a time for spiritual experiences and enables Henni to suddenly hear his heart beating. Experiences of being able to observe the event from the outside and simultaneously experiencing being inside the body, mean that there is no sharp demarcation between 'outer' and 'inner', subjectivity and objectivity (Bengtsson, 2013a, 2013b). Instead, there is a necessary ambiguity: 'The mind is embodied and the body is animated' (Bengtsson, 2013b, p. 6). Nevrin (2009) discusses how yoga practitioners sometimes develop a 'heightened sensitivity' of sensory experience, in contrast to 'habitual' experience, and how habits can be changed if we learn to use our body capacities differently. As Kendal expresses, this increased awareness can bring spiritual experiences that can also be cared for and cultivated as an educational goal (Brown, 2013).

Absence of friction/me-my future teaching profession

Arguably, as YBP takes place in a subject didactics course within a teacher programme, several students highlight the relationship between yoga and their future teaching profession. Some students pay attention to how the lessons are structured, 'built up piece by piece' (Jaden), or are surprised by new experiences, such as the possibility 'to associate a chair with yoga!' (Bevin). Most reflections concern bodily performance, but also thoughts about spirituality and the urge to be open-minded about this in school settings.

> JADEN appreciates the structure of the YBP lesson series, how it starts with basic exercises and includes something new in each lesson. What is new is also connected to the previous lesson. For example, how 'we started by inhaling and at the same time lifting our arms and then exhaling and lowering our arms. We then got down on our knees went up on all fours and then back again. We continued this in the next lesson and came to the downward facing dog'. Jaden thinks that he will remember building up the exercises bit by bit in the future and in his future teaching role.

> BEVIN emphasises that the YBP course exercises on a chair were excellent and would be 'easy to apply in a school setting'. Sitting on a chair is something that most people can manage and even a wheelchair user can take part. 'I have never associated a chair with yoga!', exclaims Bevin, and continues 'It will be inclusive, even for those who do not consider themselves to be particularly flexible or slender. Everyone can participate.'

> CAY rather tentatively suggests that yoga is linked to religion depending on which culture it derives from – Buddhism for example? Cay wants people to be able talk about all kinds of religion in society and in school. Religion can have an important function, 'as a natural way of seeing and interpreting the world' and Cay would like us to dare to approach religious questions and not be so afraid of that. He is against the 'total censorship' of everything religious [in school] and thinks that an 'open mind' is very important. Cay would like to work with YBP and link it to the subject religious studies. 'Many people are afraid of yoga,' says Cay, because 'they see it as prayer.'

Jaden and Bevin can easily and spontaneously without friction see opportunities to apply certain exercises in a future school setting. Bevin is astonished that a chair can be such an asset in YBP sessions. In terms of tools, the yoga mat and blanket are already included in presumed and 'naturalised' notions of what a YBP session contains, but not a chair. That is something quite new for Bevin. This clarifies how the incorporation of a tool as an extension of the body can give an altered perception of the chair and the body and how the boundary between them can be blurred (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The use of a chair also opens up thoughts about the inclusion of pupils with physical disabilities. Jaden absorbs the planning of gradual progression in lessons, 'vinyasa krama' (Desikachar, 1999). All three students value becoming 'grounded' in the experience and how repetition favours the acquisition of familiarity (Rosa & Trejo-Mathys, 2013). Cay shows how existential thoughts can

surface that are not usually associated with sporting activities or are not given much space in an educational setting (Larsson, 2009). Cay's frictionless approach to religion linked to YBP was filled with curiosity. Research has shown that even novice yoga practitioners can experience a heightened awareness while moving and interpret it as 'being of "spiritual" character' (Brown, 2013; Leledaki & Brown, 2008; Nevrin, 2009). Cay further advocates in-depth investigation rather than fearful avoidance.

Presence of friction/I-here and now

The students sometimes struggle to synchronise their bodily postures, breathing and awareness. This mainly manifests as a clash between expectations and outcome, or an 'ambivalence' towards the practice (Ellis). Likewise, physical, mental and spiritual conflicts sometimes become apparent: 'It has been aching for six years' (Drew), 'Not being friends with the body' and 'I felt nauseated' (Ashley).

> ELLIS' experience of yoga is ambivalent (love/hate). Sometimes nice and rewarding, sometimes very difficult and frustrating and could generate panic and a feeling of wanting to 'break something'. Ellis experiences certain postures as impossible to do or feel comfortable in. Above all it is the breathing that is difficult. Sometimes it flows and the experience is good but sometimes panic arises. In addition, she compares herself with the other participants who seem to breathe much slower, which also creates frustration. Even if the movements are slow and she thinks that 'This should not be a problem', Ellis thinks that she quickly gets out of breath and in that sense end up out of sync.

> ASHLEY gets annoyed when the exercises require more balance and physical coordination. Ashley 'fails', which results in a feeling of 'not being friends with the body'. He quickly tries to direct the focus and the light on staying focused but 'the ego gets in the way and disturbs'. Ashley expresses that every time he starts to feel more connected things get in the way and prevent him from becoming more composed. 'All worldly temptations get in the way and other things emerge instead – some call it the devil who tempts you … "forget going to school today"' [in a seductive voice].

> DREW describes how the shoulder does not like certain positions. It is the rotator cuff that hurts. 'It has been hurting for six years now', Drew shrugs his shoulders. When Drew carries a backpack in the wrong way it hurts and when he sits for too long in certain positions it aches. But Drew wants the challenge rather than adapting the yoga exercises. Drew reasons that some movements may 'be a little uncomfortable'. 'If I'd given up as soon as something hurts I'd be stuck, because there are so many things that have caused pain.'

At times, the presence of friction shows itself as a conflict between the student's expectations of the YBP practice and their experiences of it. The various components – body, breath and mind – are interdependent, and the students become frustrated when things do not flow as expected. Ellis makes comparisons with classmates and chooses to keep up with her peers' slower pace. Adapting the movements does not seem attractive to Ellis or Drew. Observing without judging seems difficult for them. Ashley's disappointment with his own performance gives rise to associations with other failures, temptations and disappointments in a 'chain of references' (Bengtsson, 2005). '[T]he present is not shut up within itself, but transcends itself towards a future and a past' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 421).

All three students display an educational rigour in their approaches that could be linked to performance requirements, according to the common PE logic of performance and competition (Larsson, 2009; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2016). This logic clashes with YBP's focus on acceptance, attentiveness and presence, or, as Atkinson puts it:

> Recognizing one's limitations is not intended to be a humbling or humiliating process for the participant (as is often the case in modernist sport forms and cultures), but rather a vehicle for inspecting why one cares, to begin with, about personal limitations and absences of athletic ability. (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1258)

The presence of friction becomes noticeable for Ashley as he works with mantras. Feelings of inner conflict cause somatic reactions in the form of nausea. However, in this case there is an *acceptance* of his own needs (Desikachar, 1999; Fraleigh, 2015; Shusterman, 2012), which leads to non-participation. That is, Ashley refrains from pushing or cursing, i.e. a YBP approach. Otherwise, each

student struggles with various types of pain in the body, which are clarified on the yoga mat yet could be experienced as being partly alleviated by conscious and focused work.

Presence of friction/me-my future teaching profession

At times the students appear anxious about that yoga might unintentionally be considered a 'religion' and could therefore be interpreted as contrary to the core values expressed in the national curriculum (Kendal, Drew). Some students also worry about the 'danger of focusing inwards' too much (Gill).

> KENDAL does not want to call it yoga when working with it in school. Kendal shares his parents' concern that the pupils might start doing yoga outside school and be drawn into spiritualism … 'when you try to get in touch with other "powers" … and with the dead, I don't think it's such a good idea'. Kendal would prefer to call yoga *flexibility training* or *stress management* and *mental training*. 'I wouldn't use the word yoga precisely because there are people like me. If I had been forced to attend yoga lessons as a youngster at school … I would probably have found it very difficult and felt uncomfortable due to my own personal faith.'

> DREW relates the practice of mantras to religion and thinks that the correct place for religion in school is in the subject of religion, 'where a well-educated person can lead discussions and make various views visible from a scientific perspective'. According to Drew, even though yoga is not a religion, the practice can be interpreted as such. Drew thinks that many parents and young people have opinions about mantras and that some people are put off by the *word* yoga. 'It's about choosing words that aren't so loaded with associations.' Drew suggests *mindfulness and flexibility*. Those words work better 'because they are things that they [the pupils] can relate to and understand in concrete terms.'

> GILL thinks that yoga is very 'inward-focused' and that you as a participant are encouraged to listen to your own body, 'pay attention to all processes – heat, tingling and so on'. This can create problems and Gill claims that sometimes you should not *feel* so much but instead make yoga more concrete 'Come on, let's do the tree, let's do the downward dog' or 'let's turn into meatballs' … that is, you create a little frame around it so that it does not focus on *me* and how *I* feel' i.e. direct the focus outwards. If yoga is to be done 'correctly', Gill thinks that it should be 'outward-focusing' and in that way can help us to get away from our 'little self', so that we can merge with and into the bigger picture, the world out there and understand the importance of the more 'universal energy' and experience togetherness.

The word yoga triggers friction for some students. Both Kendal and Drew are concerned about the name, yoga, which they think can easily be associated with religion. It is worth noting, though, that Drew suggests mindfulness as an alternative term for yoga. Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Varela et al., 2017) although is now mostly portrayed as neutral (e.g. Hölzel et al., 2011) For Drew, the presence of friction becomes palpable when the voice has to be used because he connects mantras to religion and makes him feel uncomfortable. Gill notices the presence of friction when imagining teaching yoga with an inward focusing approach. Gill fears that yoga's inward focus can be misinterpreted and pose problems for the unaccustomed, leading to an unhealthy self-focus. Gill believes that self-reflection should instead lead to understanding oneself in a larger context, or, as Atkinson puts it, '[t]he mat provides a person with a context for using athletics to reveal truths about the self and, potentially, about the human condition' (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1258). Gill maintains that the risky inward focus can be avoided by a change of attitude and the use of a language that more resembled traditional PE language: 'Come on, let's do the downward dog!' Wright (2000) argues that '[A] close analysis of language of the physical education lesson illustrates those assumptions about the body, about physical activity and about bodies that are taken for granted, that is, that are dominant/hegemonic within the traditional practices of the field' (p. 47).

Discussion and conclusion

The regional lifeworld concept has been used to define the studied area: how PETE students experienced a unit in their education in which YBP was introduced and where the teaching of YBP was in focus. What kind of thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations were evoked in the students as they explored YBP and their prospects of teaching YBP themselves? In the phenomenological analysis,

friction showed itself to be an essential part of the students' experiences and could consist of *absence of friction* and *presence of friction*. The students also oscillated between experiences of *I-here and now*, and *Me-my future teaching profession*.

At times, the students 'went with the flow' in a frictionless fashion (absence of friction), while at other times they struggled with feelings of resistance (presence of friction). However, all the students seemed to appreciate the reflexive body/mind approach being offered. The interruption of one's 'natural attitude' entails making the 'habitual' way of being, acting and thinking explicit, especially when it comes to 'traditional' PE, which typically encompasses a focus of intense physical activity with few opportunities for reflection and conversation (Ekberg, 2016; Standal, 2017). The disruption of habit may help students to experience movements (or physical activity) in new ways. Some of the students felt uneasy when existential topics surfaced and were sometimes associated with 'religion'. It therefore seemed important for them to be able to distinguish clearly between religion, spirituality and philosophy. Spirituality as a word does not seem to induce as much insecurity among the students as religion, but if confused with spiritualism it could cause problems.

The students also oscillated between experiences of the quality of the present moment in the YBP practice (I – here and now) and associations with their future profession (Me – my future profession). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), time seems to pass like a river flowing before us, but at the same time we *are* time ourselves; lived time: 'In every focusing movement my body unites present, past and future' (p. 239). The swaying movements in the experience of time and what the students put in the foreground or background are obvious. For some, the experience of a heightened awareness of the present moment is the main goal, to later be developed into their future teaching, while others are quick to point to the possible instant applicability for them as future teachers – or decide that YBP is not a 'fitting' content for PE.

Pedagogical implications

As the YBP practice materialised in a subject didactic course, the students were expected to transform their YBP experience into knowledge for their future teaching careers. They then became profoundly aware of the kind of impact a particular parlance could have when teaching YBP, which also needed to be settled in the body: 'When knowledge has sedimented in the body as a way of seeing, talking, listening, feeling, acting and thinking, knowledge has become a tool for the teacher' (Bengtsson, 2013a, p. 50). YBP, as performed during the course, did to some extent lead to changed views amongst the students of what an education of a 'human in motion' could be by discovering and breaking their habitual attitudes towards PE, as discussed above. Another way of looking at the body than that of the natural sciences (with its focus on 'evidence' and 'benefits'; Ferreira-Vorkapic et al., 2015; Hart et al., 2022), i.e. the interdependent connection between body, breath and mind, helped to clarify the complementary nature of the course unit and its content. Rather than being discussed in terms of 'benefits', the YBP practice charged the body, the room and the group with something different: a heightened awareness that was also allowed to be expressed verbally. This type of reflexive knowledge and competence obtained from the YBP course will hopefully help students to make careful didactical considerations in their future teaching practices, not only in terms of physical activity but also in the use of a variety of teaching methods (Standal, 2017). Teaching YBP could thus be seen as a counter movement, in contrast to the acceleration of society and the dominating logic of competition (Brown, 2013; Larsson, 2009; Rosa & Trejo-Mathys, 2013).

Limitations of the study

The study has some limitations. The students came from similar and relatively homogeneous backgrounds. Even though each student is unique they can still be categorised as white and middle class and as valuing sport, health and well-being in their own lives and their future professions (cf. Larsson et al., 2022; McCullick et al., 2012). In any future research of this kind, a more heterogenous group

would be beneficial. It should be noted that the first author's dual role as teacher and researcher can be seen as an asset that facilitates an understanding of the topic being studied as well as a liability, which increases the risk of blindness to the study's various facets or shortcomings. With such comprehensive empirical material there is a risk during the research process of narrowing the results down too quickly, despite the act of 'bridling' (Dahlberg et al., 2008). This problem was addressed through the second author's role as a critical friend in the analysis, interpretation and construction of vignettes. Activities within the YBP spectrum are diverse concerning values and appropriateness for educational purposes. This is important to bear in mind and could be a reason for future studies. Debates are ongoing, for example, about yoga's connection to religion (Brown, 2019), body ideals (Webb et al., 2020) and white dominance (Cannon, 2016).

Future research

It may be worth following up students who have taken part in an YBP course to investigate whether and how they have included YBP in their teaching and how they experience the content. It could also be fruitful to explore how the students' future pupils experience being taught YBP in PE lessons, which is most often associated with ideas about 'activating' the pupil, 'raising the heartbeat' and 'getting sweaty' (Ekberg, 2016; Standal, 2017). YBP may attract pupils who are otherwise hesitant to participate in PE. In a broader perspective, we suggest looking into the subject content knowledge of PETE, in that PE teachers are expected to offer teaching in 'mental training and stress management' in compulsory school but are hardly prepared for this during their teacher education. If it occurs at all, is it sufficient to build and strengthen confidence in their own abilities?

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