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Understanding pupils' hiding techniques in physical education

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Previous research shows that some pupils find physical education (PE) demanding and difficult. Some pupils use strategies to avoid participation in PE when it is demanding and difficult. The present study aims to illuminate and describe strategies used by pupils to avoid negative self-perception in difficult situations and activities in PE classes. This behavior, called hiding techniques, arises out of the need to protect self-perception and save academic or social face in the PE subject. Interviews and focus groups have been used with six PE teachers in Norwegian primary and lower secondary school to illuminate hiding techniques. Ten former pupils have also been interviewed about their experience of PE classes in primary/lower secondary school and upper secondary school for the same purpose. The results show that hiding techniques are experienced and practised in many different ways, and that there is a wide range of causes behind hiding techniques. Pupils' hiding techniques are categorized into main types, and the causes underlying the hiding techniques are summarized. This study provides insight into educational challenges that need to be highlighted to help all pupils in school, not just those who complete the PE subject without any real problems, to realize an important aim of the subject and to experience the joy of movement and lasting physical activity. It also highlights hiding techniques that are sophisticated, clever and deliberate actions pupils use to take control over the social setting in PE through the covert act of resistance rather than passively allowing the oppressive social setting to overpower them.

Keywords: *Physical education; Participation; Hiding techniques; Self-protection; Self-presentation; Interview; Focus group*

Introduction

Previous research shows that some pupils experience physical education (PE) in school as difficult and problematic, for example, Cardinal, Yan, and Cardinal (2013), Enright and O'Sullivan (2010), Fenczyn and Szmigiel (2006), Fisette (2011), Kalogiannis (2006), Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughtry (2009), Tischler and McCaughtry (2011), and von Seelen (2012). A study of 2000 pupils in Norway shows that 12% of the pupils do not like PE, while 32% find PE good but do not like how the subject is taught in Norwegian schools (Säfvenbom, Haugen, & Bulie, 2014). Almost half of these pupils thus appear to be uncomfortable with how the PE subject is taught in school. It has been stated in a study of research in this field that having to show an unfit body lacking confidence and competence in core skills or

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appearing overly masculine are barriers to participating in PE (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006). Motivation, social status and peer support also influence pupils' views on PE and participation (Morrison & Nash, 2012). If pupils lack the motivation to work hard or do well in PE, they will not participate to their full ability or will not participate at all (Brooks & Magnusson, 2006). Pupils with social physique anxiety may also prefer to stay out of PE and avoid the risk of being observed by others (Morrison & Nash, 2012). Pupils who possess complex and often destructive relationships with their body experience PE classes as one site within school where the body is explicitly used and displayed, and they might prefer to avoid this situation.

Pupils who find PE problematic and difficult may use methods to hide what they feel in PE classes, so-called *hiding techniques*. Pupils who use hiding techniques position themselves as if they were on stage and playing a role because they want to maintain a particular self-value (Crossley, 1996). These pupils do not want to lose face in PE, whether in terms of the subject or socially, and neither to teachers nor to co-pupils, because losing face undermines their self-perception (Ntoumanis, Taylor, & Standage, 2010; Ommundsen, 2001; Ommundsen, 2004). In some situations, some pupils do not have to say a word to express the deep insecurities they feel, as their bodies visibly communicate their angst (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). They are liable to manipulate situations in PE classes to counteract pressure on their self-perception, for example, by blaming how they are not prepared for physical activity (sick or injured; Ommundsen, 2004). They use 'a strategic manipulation of a situation in such a way that an individual can claim that obstacles to her or his performance account for a potential failure' (Ommundsen, 2004, p. 183). Excuse notes are used by some pupils as an 'opting out' strategy (Lamb, 2014). These pupils may find it difficult to see themselves in a positive light in PE and may find themselves outside of much of the social interaction in the classes. This may also impede their learning processes in the subject.

It has been suggested that the research in this field needs to develop a more sophisticated understanding of pupils' avoidance strategies in PE instead of viewing the pupils as lazy, unmotivated or low skilled. The pupils' behavior might rather be construed as deliberate actions that permit the pupils to avoid involving themselves in situations where they will likely experience a defeat or lose face. This interpretation of pupils' behavior paints the pupils as clever, active agents taking control over the social setting in PE classes rather than passively allowing the oppressive social setting to overpower them (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

The aim of this study is to expand on previous research and to illuminate hiding techniques from both teachers' and pupils' points of view in a concrete and practical way. What techniques do teachers have experience of from their teaching practice and pupils from their own schooling and what are the reasons behind the use of hiding techniques? The research question for this study is as follows: Which experiences do six teachers in the PE subject and 10 former pupils in PE in Norwegian school have of hiding techniques in PE, and what do they think are the causes behind hiding techniques?

The first section of this study briefly examines earlier research in the field and theory on self-perception and self-presentation, which form the basis for hiding techniques. The methods used to collect data from the six teachers and 10 former pupils are explained and discussed briefly. Then the findings of this study are presented, categorizing hiding techniques into different main types, and summarizing the causes underlying hiding techniques based on the narratives from the teachers and former pupils. Finally, the findings are discussed in light of earlier research while using a didactic perspective.

Previous research

Previous research has utilized self-handicapping (Ntoumanis et al., 2010; Ommundsen, 2001; Ommundsen, 2004) and defensive pessimism in PE (Ntoumanis et al., 2010), which are similar to hiding techniques. Self-handicapping involves drawing attention to a possible impediment to performance, so that it can be blamed if failure should occur in PE. By using:

self-handicapping in which failure can be blamed on a number of factors, such as having been up late the night before the test or that they were disturbed by fellow pupils before taking the test, pupils may manage to save face in PE. (Ommundsen, 2004, p. 183)

Self-handicapping can be divided into behavioral and self-reported forms. Behavioral self-handicaps are genuine obstacles that have been willfully created by a pupil to restrict his or her performance. Self-reported handicaps refer to verbalized excuses for poor performance that are declared before or during performance (Ntoumanis et al., 2010). Defensive pessimism involves evaluating possible worst-case scenarios prior to a performance and setting low expectations. Self-handicapping and defensive pessimism allow pupils the opportunity to control the impact of possible poor performances in PE and to minimize the perception of poor achievements and low sense of mastering. In the short term, pupils may be able to maintain their self-perception through self-handicapping and defensive pessimism. In the long term, the effect will be, however, poorer self-regulation, and self-handicapping and defensive pessimism will become counterparts to involvement in the subject, constructive learning and goal achievement in PE (Ntoumanis et al., 2010; Ommundsen, 2004).

Some pupils use hiding techniques individually, while others cooperate with co-pupils. Pupils' hiding techniques are to some extent described (although not called hiding techniques) through examples in the research literature (Carlson, 1995; Fisette, 2011; Kalogiannis, 2006; Lamb, 2014; Ntoumanis et al., 2010; Ommundsen, 2001; Ommundsen, 2004; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011; von Seelen, 2012). One technique identifies pupils as becoming wallflowers, taking part in the lessons, but only to the minimum (Lamb, 2014). A second technique is to become skilled bystanders (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011), for example, when pupils get into groups in PE, they are on the court but not doing anything. The pupils move around and make it seem like they are participating. Some pupils also pretend to be busy

even if not doing anything in PE classes (Lamb, 2014). Some pupils pretend to tie shoes, take longer than necessary to retrieve equipment, stop participating when the teachers are not watching, position themselves on the margin and allow others to dominate during games (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Other pupils cooperate with co-pupils in difficult situations in PE classes, for example, showing the other pupils and the teacher in the class that they are having fun when they actually dislike PE. These pupils want to give the impression of having fun, not that they dislike PE (Fisette, 2011).

von Seelen (2012) claims that particular situations in PE strain the self-perception for some pupils, such as in game activities involving competition and body contact with opponents. Strain may also occur in exercises where (poor) skills are revealed, for instance, when performance is measured or timed. The teacher's manner of teaching and instructing may also cause pressure. Pupils who are uncertain about what is to happen during classes because the instructions are imprecise and difficult to understand will be less able to crack the instruction code and get started with the activity, while other pupils, who may be more used to sports, will often understand the instructions more easily (von Seelen, 2012).

Other scholars have examined the teacher's influence on participation and pointed out the importance of teachers relating to and having compassion for students. Teachers may contribute to student disengagement instead of engagement if they do not understand the underlying reasons for student disengagement. They must read the pupils' emotional connection to activities in PE classes (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011) and should have a self-critical lens to understand better the underlying reasons for student disengagement (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

The pupils' self-presentation in PE is regulated through social interaction and communication with others in PE classes and may be both maintained and undermined in the social interaction (Morrison & Nash, 2012). Self-presentational processes are those where pupils monitor and control how others view them in PE, and self-presentation plays a major role in determining how pupils will participate in the subject. The self-presentation varies from one situation to the next, and the pupils play roles and act differently depending on the situation they are in, who they are with and what they wish to achieve, or possibly avoid (Fisette, 2011). A distinct factor of self-presentation is often related to pupils' social physique anxiety, which is a special form of social anxiety that emanates from the potential for or presence of evaluation of a pupil's physique by others in PE classes (Morrison & Nash, 2012). Self-presentation is also impacted by what pupils think others see and think about them (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Self-presentation is also gendered, which has been examined by several scholars (for example, Caudwell, 2014; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Fasting, Chroni, & Knorre, 2014; Fisette, 2011; Hauge & Haavind, 2011; Hills & Croston, 2014; Oliver, Hamzeh & McCaughtry, 2009; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). One aspect of this research is that perceived gender barriers influence the participation of both girls (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010) and boys (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011) and that, for example, hegemonic views of what a

boy should do and *be* in PE regulate boys' behavior in PE classes (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

Another important factor is that PE pupils tend to put high value on those areas of the subject where they assess their performance highly and depreciate the fields where they assess themselves as less competent (Kalogiannis, 2006). This means that it may be difficult for pupils to devalue fields that they perceive as important in PE. It may not be easy, for example, to devalue the importance of sports performances because they have importance in connection with assessment and setting grades. Thus, pupils may do much to avoid defeats in some contexts when it comes to subject or social performance in PE. When pupils show the other pupils and the teacher in the class that they are having fun in PE classes, for example, they externally express their enjoyment of PE, but in reality, they are falsely expressing what they think of PE and who they actually are in PE classes (Fisette, 2011). They do this because they do not want to show the others that they dislike PE, particularly those who are not included in the nearest social group, including the teacher.

Methodology

To illuminate hiding techniques, we have interviewed and had meetings in focus groups with six teachers teaching PE in Norwegian primary and lower secondary schools, and interviewed 10 former pupils. The interviews and the teacher focus groups illuminate hiding techniques seen from their perspective and inform about causes behind the hiding techniques. The interviews with the former pupils illuminate hiding techniques from their point of view and their experience from earlier schooling.

Sample, sample selection procedure and data collection

Three PE teachers were initially selected to participate in the individual interviews. They had between 5 and 20 years of experience in teaching PE, and they taught in different schools. They also had experience in teaching various age groups (years 1–7 in primary/lower secondary school and 8–10 in secondary school). Each of these teachers then recommended a colleague who satisfied the same requirements. We invited these three teachers to participate in the research project, and they accepted after a short while. The teachers were selected as suitable for this study because of their teaching experience, and three female and three male teachers participated in the project. Three of these teachers had a year or more training in PE (as part of their teacher education), while the other three had shorter education backgrounds. The interview guide for the teachers consisted of four main questions as follows: (1) Did the teachers have experience of pupils who attempted to hide what they felt during classes by using special techniques (hiding techniques), and could they give examples of situations where these techniques occur and how they are acted out in class? (2) Could they illuminate hiding techniques that are particularly due to pupils doing what they are asked without actually wishing to do so, or stage positioning? (3) Could

they talk about other techniques they were aware of from their practice? (4) What did they believe are the causes for using hiding techniques?

The teachers have fictitious names in this study. Betty and Dan taught in a medium-sized school (years 1–7), Emma in a large school (years 1–7), Susan in a large secondary school (years 8–10), while Peter and Tom taught in a small school (years 1–10). Betty and Dan knew each other previously, as did Emma and Susan and Peter and Tom.

Each teacher then participated in a focus group (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Fern, 2001; MacNaghten & Myers, 2004) with his/her colleague and a moderator. The focus groups were generally reflective dialogs about hiding techniques (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001), which means that at times questions were asked to initiate conversation and discussion about hiding techniques, but apart from this, all the participants freely discussed the statements made by the other participants and gave their points of view on the topics that were raised. A brief 'agenda' based on the individual interviews was prepared prior to each focus group. This agenda comprised key words, quotes and opinions from the earlier interviews, so that the content of the discussions varied to some extent from one focus group to the next.

The size of the focus groups was less than the recommended number for focus groups in general (from 6 to 10 persons; Chrzanowska, 2002). For a number of reasons, it was deemed acceptable to carry out focus groups with only two teachers and a moderator in each group. One reason was that the discussion could take place without using much time to get to know each other before the discussion could start.

The interviews with the former pupils were retrospective: Eight of the former pupils were students in a folk high school¹ at the time of the interview, while two were students in a university college. The former pupils looked back at PE in primary/lower secondary school and upper secondary school and training. PE is a core subject in these school types. For most of the students in folk high school, the PE subject in upper secondary school had been finished just one year ago, while the students in the university college had finished PE three to five years earlier. The former pupils were asked to speak openhearted about PE; somewhat they could since they were not pupils in PE in primary/lower and upper secondary school anymore.

A folk high school environment was considered to be suitable for recruiting informants to this study. Hiding techniques could also be observed in this environment, according to a representative from this school. This representative, who was a PE teacher in the school, was contacted and informed about this study, and we explained what we meant when we talked about hiding techniques. This enabled us to recruit informants who had firsthand experience of hiding techniques from the folk high school and possibly also from primary/lower secondary school and upper secondary school. The representative contacted prospective informants and gave them an information leaflet about this study.

Students who did not display the same tendencies to apply hiding techniques were also given the opportunity to participate, which might also yield useful secondary data. Two of the informants had PE every day at school, while six informants did not have PE. The informants who did not have PE participated from time to time in

voluntary sport activities at the school. Seven of the former pupils had personal experiences of hiding techniques from primary/lower and upper secondary school, while the eighth had seen situations where other pupils had used hiding techniques. The first informant, Alex, liked PE in school a little bit but gradually became more negative, particularly toward the end of lower secondary school and through upper secondary school. (The students informed us about how much they liked PE in the interviews.) The second informant, Irene, both liked and disliked PE, depending on the teaching. The third, Nora, did not like the PE subject, particularly in lower secondary school and upper secondary school. Nor did the fourth informant, Catherine, like PE very much. The fifth, Lars, liked it to a relatively high degree and took part in sports outside school. Informants number six (Martin) and seven (Robert) had negative views of PE, and this may be said also to apply largely to the eighth informant, Lisa.

The two final informants were recruited from a teacher education university college. We used the same procedure here: a representative of the institution (PE teacher) and an information leaflet. A college environment was also deemed to be suitable for recruiting interviewees because the same tendencies toward hiding techniques in PE were observable in this environment. The two interviewees had PE in their teacher education program. The ninth informant, Mary, had no positive relationship to PE in primary/lower secondary school and upper secondary school, while Frank, the tenth informant, liked PE quite well. Mary had personal experiences of hiding techniques in school, while Frank had seen situations where other pupils had used hiding techniques. Both types of data form the basis for this study, in addition to data from the teachers. The former pupils have also been assigned fictitious names in this study.

The interview guide used for the interviews with the former pupils was prepared according to didactic concepts and categories found in the theory of planning and implementation of teaching created by the Norwegian researchers Bjorndal and Lieberg (1978). This theory uses the concepts goals, subject content, learning activities, assessment, pupil and teacher backgrounds and physical material and organizational circumstances to describe key didactic aspects of teaching. This formed the point of departure for five main questions on hiding techniques in the interview with the former pupils in connection with the content of the teaching in PE, ways of working with the subject, pupil assessment, social environment in PE classes and teacher factors. The interview also included questions about causes behind hiding techniques. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes and was conducted in a neutral meeting room at the folk high school and the college. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

The interviews with the teachers took 60–90 minutes, while the focus groups took 90–120 minutes. Other themes were also raised in the teacher and pupil interviews; hiding techniques were one of the main themes. The first-mentioned author of this study conducted the individual interviews with the teachers, served as the moderator in the focus groups and conducted the interviews with two of the former pupils. The

second and third authors carried out four interviews each with folk high school students.

Processing, analysis and interpretation

The data material was processed and meaning condensed by excerpting quotes and brief sections from the interview transcriptions and putting them together within the same analysis units, which were based on the main themes of the interview guides (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Loughran, Mitchell, & Mitchell, 2003). The statements and opinions uttered by the teachers and former pupils were assessed as to whether they were dominated by the social context they had emerged in (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2005). This was particularly relevant for the focus groups (Halkier, 2010). Could we trust the teachers' statements on pupils' behavior, for example, or were they dominated by the social context they had emerged in? To assess this, we asked the teachers in the focus groups how they knew what they told us in the interview and focus group about the pupils. They all answered that their statements and interpretations were based on observations of the pupils in classroom activities in other subjects as well, and that they interpreted the pupils' actions in PE within the total social environment in school. This helped them to understand better the pupils' behavior in PE. They all taught in several subjects in school, and their knowledge about the pupils was thus broader than from only PE. In addition, we sent transcriptions of the interviews and focus groups to the teachers, asking them to give feedback if they found statements or opinions they would like to correct, add or remove. We also asked them to consider and comment on whether anything stated in the course of the interviews and focus groups impeded their discussion or prevented them from saying what they wanted to say, or whether they felt there was something unsaid in each interview and in the focus groups. This was done at the conclusion of each interview and focus group. No teachers felt the need to make such corrections, add comments or provide new input, not at the conclusion of each interview, not in the focus groups and not after they had reviewed the interview transcripts.

Nor did any of the former pupils offer any correction of their interviews after they had reviewed their transcripts.

The data analysis process in other respects complied with other principles for qualitative interpretation of opinion and meaning of interviews (individual data and group data; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), which in brief means that opinions and statements in the interviews were identified according to the main questions of the study, condensed, coded and categorized within analysis units which are based on the interview guides, and thereafter reconstructed within a broader theoretical framework. In the present case, this concerned a reconstruction within the theory of self-perception, self-presentation and hiding techniques in PE.

The analysis and interpretation also followed hermeneutic principles (Kvale, 1983). This means that the interpretation process leads to increasingly deeper understanding of data in the interviews and focus groups and to understandings that are without contradictions and logical flaws. In this connection, interpretations were

discussed by the researcher group, and critical questions were asked about the various interpretations. The interpretations were to some extent processed and modified after these discussions.

Findings

Data from the various informants are referred to and used to varying extents. Some secondhand experiences of hiding techniques among former pupils are used, but in general, only firsthand experiences are mentioned. Findings that state something about causes behind hiding techniques are illuminated in connection with the different narratives told by the teachers and the former pupils about forms of hiding techniques.

Clowning, fooling around and kidding

The informants told us of a technique that may be called clowning, fooling around and kidding. One of the teachers, Betty, described this technique as follows:

I can think of some examples when it comes to leapfrogging, when there is someone who doesn't dare to or can't do it. Then they'll cavort weirdly, really make some odd hops instead, to camouflage that they're unable to do it. And then everybody will laugh (pupils).

Pupils who use this hiding technique may be the ones who find it scary to leapfrog in gymnastics, or who find that some exercises are too difficult, Betty stated. Therefore, they attempt to camouflage this when they find it difficult by acting in a comical manner while the others are watching. Pupil clowning and fooling around are seen as attempts to play down and shift away from the problems at hand. Susan, another teacher, had experienced that some pupils find such situations to be very difficult and reveal acting out behavior: 'Some pupils may actually act out very much when the exercises become too difficult. Then they'll fool around and play the clown'. Susan had experienced that in some cases it also appears that such behavior comes about because it may be easier for pupils to deal with teacher reprimands due to poor behavior than to deal with attention being given to their inability to manage exercises in PE.

In the interviews with the pupils, similar examples also emerged, but the pupils used other terms. One of the former pupils, Alex, stated that pupils would often start kidding around when situations became difficult in PE. He particularly recalled a situation when dancing was taught in lower secondary school:

First we had to practise the steps and moves, and afterwards we had to perform the dance for the rest of the class. I already knew I wouldn't be able to do this [...]. I tried to be funny and deliberately make it look funny, so the others understood that I was doing it deliberately. And then everybody laughed.

The other pupils, particularly the boys in the sample, had the same experience and told us that the boys would 'clown around, grinning and shouting. They were unable

to dance, and did not want to learn because it was embarrassing', Robert, among others, told us.

Tough, rough, noisy and violent

Another hiding technique is to be tough, rough, noisy and violent in PE classes. The teachers described several examples of this, especially among the boys. Emma for example stated:

there are perhaps some boys who want to be tougher than they really are. They may often become loud and abrasive in football, if we're playing.

These boys act a physically tough role and make sure that they are noticed when the opportunity arises to show how tough and strong they are. But they are not really tough or strong because they are trying to hide that they lack skills. Because the activity demands strength, or demands motor skills and technique, they cover their lack of skill by being tough and brutal. The absence of any sense of team play is also covered in the same way.

Susan also told us a similar story. She had experienced that some pupils would apply very strong means in situations that were perceived as uncertain and difficult, i.e. that pupils hit others as a way of dealing with a difficult situation. These could be pupils who act out so strongly that they 'will actually hit the person next to them. But they don't know how to play the game', she stated.

Lars and Martin, two of the former pupils, confirmed the teachers' statement and related that many boys in lower secondary school would 'act tough' physically because they found it difficult to compete in PE.

Pretending and preparing excuses

The teachers also talked about pupils who blame injury or pain for having difficulty with challenging situations in PE classes. This is similar to results from previous studies (Lamb, 2014; Ntoumanis et al., 2010; Ommundsen, 2004) and will be briefly referred to here. Tom told us about pupils with poor stamina who attempt to hide this by feigning an injury and saying that they are unable to run due to 'painful knees'. These pupils cannot complete PE classes: 'They say they have a stomach ache and have to sit down', Peter, another teacher, told us. Some pupils also bring a note from their parents. However, it is easy in many cases to see through these excuses and see how pupils try to avoid PE for false reasons by feigning injury or pain because their behavior is completely different during recess, Betty told us: 'Then they go full tilt', she observed.

Robert, one of the pupils, told us examples of this kind of hiding techniques. At times, he wanted to participate in activities he enjoyed, such as the warming up activities, but then he would have to invent a special reason afterward to avoid the activities he detested. He would usually pretend that he had injured himself while warming up:

When we went from warming up to other activities, I would pretend to be injured. When the teacher checked his watch, I knew we would soon be changing the activity (from the warming up activity). Then I would pretend to fall, twist my ankle or trip on a bench.

Robert also stated that he quite often would cooperate with a co-pupil in such situations:

When we were told that we were going to play football in physical education class, a friend and I had an agreement that we would crash into each other towards the end of the warming up period so we would be 'injured'.

He also told us the following, which showed that he had a broad repertoire of techniques:

A technique I used often was to join during the last five minutes of the physical education class. Then I would say that the injury was okay, and that I would like to join the activity. When the teacher would look at his watch, I knew there were five minutes left in the class. Then the teacher would think that I really wanted to participate in the physical education class. It was only a technique to fool the teacher. I would say 'Oh no, so little time left?' and pretend that I was unhappy when I went to the showers after class.

'There was no injury, I just wanted to avoid physical education class', he stated. He also related that he needed to 'appear sick and injured all day' when he had used an excuse note from home, which he did sometimes, as the PE teacher also taught them other subjects.

Avoiding involvement, acting 'suitably passively' and seeking blind zones

Another hiding technique is to avoid too much involvement in PE classes. This is also similar to results from other studies (Lamb, 2014; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). The informants told us about many examples of this technique where pupils become wallflowers (Lamb, 2014) and skilled bystanders (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). In team handball, the strategy of Cathrine, one of the former pupils, was to act 'suitably passively' in the game. She found a place on the wing along the edge of the field of play, thus avoiding involvement in the game. She took part in the game/class, but only to the minimum. She was afraid of being criticized by the others on her team if she lost the ball or made a mistake. If the ball was passed to her, she did not want to have it. She would quickly pass the ball to a player on her team: 'Then it wouldn't be me who screwed up', she said.

Cathrine also told us about a technique that concerned seeking the blind zones of co-pupils and teachers in PE classes:

It was no fun when we were tested in something I wasn't very good at, such as agility, where I would get poor results. I didn't really feel very cool in situations like that. Then I would try to wait until as few as possible were watching [...]. If there were many of us doing the test, I tried as well as I could to get lost or disappear in the crowd. The teacher didn't always remember who he had tested.

She tried to avoid attention by seeking the blind zones of both co-pupils and teachers and felt that it was embarrassing to do the tests in front of co-pupils, particularly the agile boys. Irene, a former pupil, described a similar strategy she used when playing football. The teacher had instructed the class in how to move to get out of the so-called passing shadow when playing football. Irene tried the opposite, i.e. to move into the passing shadow, which is the area where the person with the ball could not see her, and to avoid making eye contact with the person with the ball. She thus tried to do the opposite of what the teacher had told her. She would also need to do this discreetly, so she would not be discovered. When asked why she did this, she responded:

It was because of the stupid reactions that would come if I didn't perform adequately in the eyes of others, for example if I lost the ball. There was this incredible focus on winning.

Cathrine also experienced a similar technique in gymnastics. Here we call this technique reverse queue jumping. She stated:

I felt I managed the basic exercises well, but when it came to doing summersaults I pulled out. I didn't dare to try. I would rather not roll when I wasn't comfortable with it. So then I tried to sneak as far back in the line as possible [...]. I tried to be friendly and allow the more agile people to pass me.

If she succeeded in doing this, she might avoid taking part in this gymnastic exercise at all in the course of the class.

Other techniques

Irene told us about a special hiding technique she used when playing dodgeball. She did not like dodgeball and made sure she would be among the first to be hit by the ball. She did this for a special reason:

My strategy was to be hit as early as possible. My tactic was to stand close to the dividing line, so I would be an easy prey for the opponents. Then I would be caught, and stand watching in the free field for long periods, because so many pupils wanted to be thrown free and return to the playing field.

She also stated:

I didn't like being hit by the ball. When I got over to the other end of the floor, nobody threw a ball at me.

She also added:

Nobody asked how I was doing during the class, because I would pretend I was doing fine.

Mary, also a former pupil, stated that she exploited situations where co-pupils were injured in PE. When she would like to get out of the activity that was going on, if the opportunity arose, she would offer to provide first aid and care if another pupil was injured:

A girl fell down and hurt herself [...]. I wanted to help her, and then I wouldn't have to go back to playing softball, if I made this situation last.

This strategy often worked, and she would use it to fool the teacher—and the other pupils—to avoid the activities.

Lisa, who managed quite well in PE, told us that one of her co-pupils in lower secondary school was a boy who was not quite on the level of the others in football. This boy would participate in the activity, not because he thought it was fun or because he wanted to learn football but simply to avoid being bullied:

One of the boys was laughed at because he was not very good at football. He was sort of bullied [...]. He didn't like football, but he joined because he [...] didn't want comments from the other boys.

Discussion

The findings from the present study support insights that have emerged in earlier research on how pupils choose a special type of behavior in PE when exercises and situations are perceived as difficult and demanding. Some pupils pretend that they have injuries or pain to avoid PE (Lamb, 2014; Ntoumanis, et al., 2010; Ommundsen, 2004) or make up other excuses. Another technique is to perform what is requested and appear to participate but without putting much effort into the activity (Lamb, 2014; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Some pupils also state that they cooperate on using hiding techniques systematically (Fisette, 2011). In addition, findings in this study illuminate hiding techniques in the following way: Pupils clown and kid around, covering up how exercises are too difficult or socially demanding by fooling around or kidding while the other pupils watch in class. Some pupils act tough, rough, noisy and violent in class for the same reason. Pupils also utilize sophisticated techniques, for example, being injured easily when playing dodgeball, seeking the passing shadow in football, practising reverse queue jumping or seeking blind zones of co-pupils and teachers when they have physical tests. Moreover, they use advanced 'feinting techniques' with teachers when they are afraid of being found out, while they also attempt to please their teacher (such as suddenly reentering the activity during the final five minutes of the class after being injured the rest of the class).

The findings also support insight from previous research on causes behind hiding techniques (Lamb, 2014; Ntoumanis, et al., 2010; Ommundsen, 2001, 2004; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Pupils who use hiding techniques create obstacles to success in order to maintain self-worth and a positive sense of self, and hiding techniques may be seen as a coping strategy designed to protect self-esteem in PE and used when the self-schemas on oneself are threatened (Ommundsen, 2001). According to the interviews, the causes behind hiding techniques are the following: Pupils are afraid to make fools of themselves and fear social defeat. They wish to avoid performance pressure and the sense that they are unable to master activities and situations in class. They are afraid of activities and exercises that demand

courage. They wish to avoid pain connected with participating in particular activities in PE, such as being hit by a ball in ball games. They also wish to avoid physical effort, which may be felt to be uncomfortable in PE classes and which may reveal their poor physical condition. Pupils also fear being pestered or bullied. Hiding techniques may also be used because pupils wish to conceal that they have poor motivation are constrained or that they feel the classes are boring or not interesting, which is not beneficial bearing in mind that the teacher will assess their performance and effort in class.

Additionally, the narratives from the former pupils in particular show that hiding techniques may be deliberate, sophisticated and sometimes rehearsed well. Robert and Cathrine, for example, had a broad repertoire of hiding techniques they used to manipulate situations in PE classes. Our interpretation of such actions paints pupils as active agents trying to take control over the social setting in PE classes, rather than passively allowing the oppressive social setting to overpower them (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). It is possible to interpret hiding techniques as oppression, and that pupils who use hiding techniques have little efficacy against difficult situations in PE classes. However, if we use an active-critical lens, hiding techniques may be seen as forms of resistance. This means that hiding techniques are seen from the pupils' point of view as clever and sometimes sophisticated actions for avoiding embarrassment and humiliation in PE.

Another perspective within this approach is that pupils are not only skilled at planning and performing hiding techniques, they know how to play on what they believe the teachers know about them in PE situations. Some pupils know how to play a game in the PE lessons. The pupils often choose their hiding techniques according to how the teacher operates in class, so that they can act strategically and adjust their hiding techniques in the classes. This is a game between the pupils and the teachers where neither side knows what the outcome will be nor has research tried to illuminate this to any large degree. If the pupils are afraid that the teachers are about to figure out what is going on, they can adjust their hiding techniques very quickly and thus stop the teacher from catching on. Some pupils are good at varying their techniques, which makes it harder for the teachers to interpret their behavior, and this can leave the teacher quite confused or unsure about their actions. Thus, teaching involves interpretations of pupils' behavior. This also puts the teacher's role in a new light. Teachers must help to establish good communication with the pupils to solve the basic problems that lead them to use hiding techniques. PE teachers must interpret pupils who use hiding techniques as acting assertively and having good 'hiding' skills. This might provide clues that will help in developing ways of teaching that inspire enthusiastic participation rather than lead pupils to retreat in PE (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011).

If hiding techniques in PE occur often, it is not beneficial for pupil learning in the subject. Studies of and knowledge on hiding techniques in PE give insight into educational challenges that must be taken seriously if the intentions in the PE curriculum to provide joy of movement and physical activity in a lasting perspective are to be realized for all pupils. All pupils should experience physical activity in a

positive manner and gain positive experiences of learning about movement and varied physical activity forms in PE. Ommundsen (2004) argues that the PE teaching should be more oriented toward tasks in learning movement and less toward performance to consider pupils who use hiding techniques. Ntoumanis et al. (2010) claim that PE-teachers should aim to reduce the pupils' fear of failure by providing multiple opportunities for success, and use strategies to enhance pupils' self-perceptions. Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) advocate teaching PE by emphasizing learning, cooperation, tactical skill development and compassion while reducing competition and elite performance. We argue, based on some former pupils' narratives in this study, that hiding techniques can be seen from the pupils' point of view as clever and sometimes sophisticated actions for avoiding embarrassment and humiliation, which will help in developing ways of teaching that inspire enthusiastic participation rather than lead pupils to retreat in PE.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated and described hiding techniques from the points of view of teachers and pupils. More research and in-depth studies of this field are required to give deeper insight into pupils' hiding techniques, not least when it comes to the underlying causes. For some pupils, the reasons behind hiding techniques may be deeply seated, not least in the social field, for example, because they are afraid of being bullied in the PE classes. There is reason to assume that for some pupils relatively serious social problems will be tied to demanding social class environments in PE that are the causes behind the use of hiding techniques. Unfortunately, research on PE gives too little insight into this. Future research should illuminate these causes in more detail and bring to light important knowledge. Using an active-critical lens highlights hiding techniques that are sophisticated, clever and deliberate actions pupils use to take control over the social setting in PE through the covert act of resistance rather than passively allowing the oppressive social setting to overpower them.

Research in this field will contribute to an educational discussion and development that will prevent the use of hiding techniques. Our study shows that pupils might use hiding techniques in sophisticated ways, and the causes behind hiding techniques are many-faceted. The fear of making a fool of oneself, being unable to perform adequately, experiencing social shortcomings or bullying should be counteracted in PE. Poor physical condition and a sense of being poorly trained should not preclude participation, effort and progress for the pupils. Research that examines and illuminates pupils' experiences and perceptions thus discussing constructive educational strategies and methods to combat hiding techniques will contribute to realizing the subject's intentions for all pupils, and not only for the pupils who participate in PE without any real problems—and without the use of hiding techniques.

Note

1. Folk high schools are the institutions that provide one-year education for young adults, normally after upper secondary school. They are a common alternative in Nordic countries and are different from lower and upper secondary schools and higher education. The schools are boarding schools. The students are usually 19- to 20-years-old. The education generally do not grant academic degrees. Folk high schools have a large variety of subjects, such as sport, PE, dance and outdoor activities.

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