

EXPERIENCES OF PE IN FINNISH SCHOOLS AMONG THE WEB AGE GENERATION

Lauritsalo Kirsti¹ & Sääkslahti Arja² & Rasku-Puttonen Helena¹
kirsti.lauritsalo@edu.jyu.fi

¹Department of Teacher Education, ²Department of Sport Sciences,
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

INTRODUCTION

According to the Finnish national core curriculum for basic education (2004) PE aims among other things to build the pupil's self-esteem and a positive physical self-concept through favourable PE experiences and to encourage cooperativeness and positive future sport and health behaviour.

Earlier research has established that PE is predominantly (75%) a popular subject in schools (among others Groves & Laws 2000; Penttinen 2003). At the same time it is undoubtedly a subject that divides pupils' opinions.

However, PE - despite its good intentions - still produces negative feelings. The use of the internet has increased explosively among the young as a way of expressing themselves and the anonymity of the web allows the deepest feelings to surface.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to establish what kind of experiences the web age generation has of PE in schools.

METHODS

The data for this study was collected during week 15 of 2007 via a Google search using the Finnish word 'koululiikunta' [PE in school]. From the first 200 hits all the discussion forums were selected and analysed further. These 9 forums comprised 450 messages which were first divided into 4 groups: positive, negative, both, and other. Later the messages in the 'other' group were discarded because they did not deal with the object of this research. Having done this, 356 messages remained.

In terms of content analysis these 'positive', 'both' and 'negative' messages were grouped into intrinsic and extrinsic factors based on T. Carlson's (1995) alienation-nonalienation model in the physical education setting. These factors are known to have more or less impact on pupils' feelings towards PE and to work well with both positive and negative messages.

RESULTS

Of 356 messages in total 12% were positive, 24% included both feelings and negative messages amounted to 64%. Each of these messages may have included more than one factor mentioned, so the total number of opinions rose to 652.



Table 1. Positive, both and negative opinions divided into intrinsic and extrinsic factors

Factors	positive %	both %	negative %	n	all %
Intrinsic					
Physical ability					
- I'm good/not good	4	9	11	61	9
- I can/can't					
Self-esteem					
- I like/don't like PE	28	24	12	116	18
- shame/showering					
Beliefs about PE					
- should/shouldn't be	18	4	3	34	5
- advice to others					
Other factors					
- out of school experience	3	6	6	36	6
Intrinsic total	53	43	32	247	38
Extrinsic					
Teacher personality					
- I like/don't like	14	29	25	163	25
- teachers' behaviour					
Curriculum					
- wide/narrow scale	12	9	10	64	10
- PE as compulsory					
Assessment					
- grades in report	6	4	6	35	5
- rating/tests					
Class environment					
- supporting/depressing	11	9	19	96	15
- envy, group-dividing					
Facilities and equipment					
- gyms, balls, skis, skates	0	4	7	34	5
Out of school influence					
- family, coaches	3	1	0	5	1
- hobbies					
Other factors					
- different factors	1	1	1	8	1
Extrinsic total	47	57	68	405	62
Total all	n=72	n=221	n=359	652	100

One factor cannot describe all the experiences. Positive opinions were almost equal between intrinsic (53%) and extrinsic (47%) factors. Where the negative opinions were concerned, however, the emphasis was clearly on the extrinsic factors (68%).

In the case of positive opinions the pupils' self esteem was strongly present (28%).

'Yeah, I like PE the most, I'm in the sports class and I have six hours a week of PE. Sure I understand that not everyone likes it... But me, I like it a lot.'

Also the pupils' beliefs regarding PE were often mentioned (18%).

'I don't think compulsory PE lessons should be done away with cos "we" youngsters don't do much exercise, at least some don't...'

In negative opinions the role of the teacher was significant (25%).

'but anyway the teacher is in a pretty important position during PE classes - if the teacher is a real dickhead I don't believe your attitude can be anywhere near positive.'

Also the class environment situations were remarkable (19%).

'So true. In school PE they talk constant bollocks about team spirit and so on, but in reality it's sheer hell, where people are humiliated'

Though there is a great deal of discussion about assessment in PE surprisingly only a few opinions dealt with this (5%).

CONCLUSION

Negative feelings predominated in the discussion forums. The internet provides the opportunity to use very strong and even arrogant language when expressing deep feelings anonymously. Since the main focus was on the extrinsic factors, the interesting question is how much, and what, could be done to make these experiences more positive?

The teacher's interaction skills and a task-oriented motivation climate play very crucial roles when discussing pupils' experiences of PE.

Further research on listening to pupils' opinions is essential for a deeper understanding of these roles.

REFERENCES

- Carlson, T. 1995. We hate gym: student alienation from physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 14, 467-477.
- Groves, S. & Laws, C. 2000. Children's experiences of physical education. *European Journal of Physical Education* 5, 19-27.
- National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004. <http://www.oph.fi/english> [22.11.2007]
- Penttinen, S. 2003 [Starting points for a primary school physical education teacher. The growth environment of adolescence and teacher education as developmental factors of teachership]. University of Jyväskylä. *Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research* 219.

