PHYSICAL EDUCATION & HEALTH (PEH) – CHALLENGING GENDER THROUGH EMBODIED LEARNING AND MANAGEMENT

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After the election 2006 the Swedish government decided to support equity within Swedish schools for a period of four years. The National Agency of Education (SNAE) was commissioned to handle this investment. The fact that PEH was the only subject in the Swedish compulsory school where boys had higher grades than girls drew the attention of SNAE to PEH.

The aim of the study was to examine the management of lesson content in PEH in relation to students’ conditions for participation, attitudes and learning.

A non participation observation method was used, collecting data through record written text in a free form, giving attention to activities, attitudes, interaction, and management. The analysis of data focused on gender(ed) pattern, awareness of gender and embodied physicalties emerging from the observations. As theoretical frame work gender theory was used. The purposeful sample was based on grading statistics from SNAE. Six schools were chosen: two with an equal number of girls and boys acquiring the highest grade in PEH, two with a large portion of either boys or girls acquiring the highest grade, and two with a lot of students not passing. Seven classes were followed 4-6 lessons (in total 32 lessons) during a spring semester.

Traditional gender patterns were observed when the form and communication of activities were well known for students and based on the logic of sport. Other patterns were also observed, emerging when the content of lessons was represented by a problem solving learning task or individual physical training. Then, the on fore hand embodied gender pattern was dissolved and new patterns had to be negotiated. More than half of the lessons were managed by one or two students as a part of student assignment for reaching a higher grade. This had consequences for the social practice in terms of communication, engagement and the reproduction of gender. Traditional gender patterns were stronger and harder to challenge in less privileged schools and in schools with a performance oriented pedagogy. The observed teacher strategy to focus on the individual student seems not to be enough to challenge gender patterns within PEH.