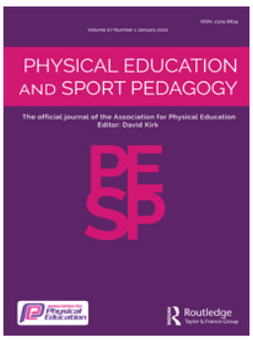

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Fit for the job? How corporeal expectations shape physical education teachers' understandings of content, pedagogy, and the purposes of physical education

D. Barker [a], M. Quennerstedt [a], A. Johansson[b] and P. Korp [c]

[a]School of Health Sciences, Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden; [b]Division of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden; [c]Department of Food and Nutrition, and Sport Sciences, Gothenburg University, Gothenburg, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Background: People often expect physical education teachers to look fit and athletic, to do lots of physical activity, and to eat well. While ample research exists on physical education teachers' bodies, relatively few scholars have investigated how physical educators relate corporeal expectations to broader ideas about subject content, pedagogy, and the purposes of the school subject.

Aim: The specific aim of the paper is to identify the assumptions about content, pedagogy, and educational purposes that teachers make when they talk about a perceived need for physical educators to look fit and athletic.

Method: To frame our work theoretically, we draw from a Swedish didaktik of physical education tradition and employ Bakhtin's concept of *speech genres*, and Wertsch's concept of *privileging*. Our empirical material consists of transcripts generated from 6 focus group and 6 individual interviews (24 teachers in total, average age of 40 years, average teaching experience 11 years).

Findings: Data suggest that when teachers use an 'athletic-looking teacher as healthy role model' speech genre, they tend to privilege: (1) a particular version of health as subject content that involves not being too overweight and maintaining physical functionality in sports. This content is based on biomedical conceptions of health which foreground exercise, eating and weight, and a pathogenic reduction of risk; (2) particular pedagogies in PE that put the teacher at the centre of the pedagogical situation, and; (3) a certain educational purpose in PE, which is to educate citizens for healthy lives through participation in sport. With respect to this purpose, increasing body weight enters the genre as a potential obstacle for educational success.

Discussion: The findings raise questions concerning appropriate curricular content and its relation to teacher identities. They suggest that learning possibilities may be missed when certain content, pedagogies, and outcomes are privileged. The findings also indicate how wider voices are implicated in the speech genre.

Conclusion: The paper is concluded with reflections on the possibility for change regarding expectations of physical education teachers' bodies and pedagogies.

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CONTACT D. Barker dean.barker@oru.se School of Health Sciences, Örebro University, Fakultetsgatan 1, SE701-82 Örebro, Sweden

Introduction

People have long expected physical education (PE) teachers to look fit and athletic, to do lots of physical activity, and to eat well (Macdonald and Kirk 1996). For their part, physical educators often accept these expectations uncritically (González-Calvo, Varea, and Martínez-Álvarez 2019; Yager et al. 2020). Many PE teachers claim that a fit, athletic-looking body is connected with pedagogical authority; without one, they do not see themselves as trustworthy (Parkinson and Burrows 2020). Maintaining appearances, however, can become difficult for teachers when they age, become injured, or gain weight (Webb and Quennerstedt 2010; Fisette 2015). Indeed, while aging and sustaining injury can be deemed acceptable by some teachers, gaining weight appears to be essentially problematic (Heidorn 2013).

While a significant amount of research exists on PE teachers' bodies, relatively few scholars have investigated how corporeal expectations relate to broader ideas about subject content, pedagogy, and purposes of physical education more generally (González-Calvo, Hortigüela-Alcalá, and Fernández-Balboa 2020). Knowing how expectations of teachers' bodies relate to pedagogical practice is necessary for understanding both physical education teachers' corporeality and the teaching and learning taking place in the name of the school subject. This paper takes its point of departure in the corporeal expectations that are placed on teachers – and that teachers place on themselves. The paper makes a detailed examination of the assumptions PE teachers make to support the need for fit and athletic-looking bodies. Through interviews with teachers in Sweden, our specific aim is to identify the assumptions about content, pedagogy, and educational purposes that teachers make when they talk about a perceived need for physical educators to look fit and athletic. By laying these assumptions open to scrutiny, we want to encourage physical educators and researchers to reconsider what it means to be a role model in physical education.

Teachers as 'healthy' role models

Scholars have paid substantial attention to physical education teachers' bodies (e.g. Webb, Quennerstedt, and Öhman 2008; Wrench and Garrett 2015). Much of this scholarship focuses on the attention that teachers pay to their own bodies, especially regarding how they meet or do not meet common expectations of the profession (Parkinson and Burrows 2020; Sirna, Tinning, and Rossi 2010). A key proposition that runs through this work is that bodies work pedagogically. In one sense, teachers' actions are expected to set exemplary standards for pupils to meet. Students should see teachers' bodies in action and attempt to imitate those actions (Barker et al. 2020). In another sense, anticipated pedagogical outcomes are related to teachers' appearances. A fit, athletic-looking body is assumed to be proof of a healthy life and evidence of the teacher's knowledge of how to live well (González-Calvo, Hortigüela-Alcalá, and Fernández-Balboa 2020). For PE teachers, a distinction between actions and appearances is rarely made; both are considered essential elements of modelling health (Heidorn 2013).

While teachers' actions and appearances are often elided, a significant distinction can be made between scholars who advocate for the pedagogical value of teachers' bodies and scholars who critique it. In the former group, researchers have questioned whether overweight teachers can effectively communicate health concepts to pupils (Melville and Maddalozzo 1988) and examined factors that lead teachers to see themselves as effective models of healthy behaviours (Drummond, McGuire, and Bennett 2002). This work supports claims that teachers' bodies matter and that athletic-looking bodies are better than non-athletic looking ones when it comes to teaching health in PE (Hunt et al. 2017). Heidorn (2013, 6) endorses this view, when he states that 'participating in regular physical activity at a level sufficient to promote health-related physical fitness is an important behaviour for professionals in all fields of physical activity at all levels'.

In the second corpus of work, researchers have acknowledged expectations on teachers but considered the potentially negative consequences of the pedagogical body claim. In their concern with

risks, the position taken by researchers in this second corpus of research is closer to our own. Webb and Quennerstedt (2010) for instance, suggested that a perceived need to look fit and athletic causes problems for teachers as they age and gain weight. González-Calvo, Hortigüela-Alcalá, and Fernández-Balboa's (2020) more recent work echoes these findings. The authors note that increasing anxiety is certainly not limited to physical education and results from a constant barrage of messages concerning the need to be 'fit, slim, athletic, young and healthy' (293). They further suggest that PE teachers 'undergo considerable stress as they try to fit within prevalent bodily ideals' and that these ideals are ultimately 'destructive' for teachers (González-Calvo, Hortigüela-Alcalá, and Fernández-Balboa 2020, 300).

Critical investigations of PE teachers' bodies have not only been conducted with in-service teachers. A number of studies have focused on pre-service teachers, with many identifying a similar pressure to conform to body ideals (Sirna, Tinning, and Rossi 2010; Wrench and Garrett 2015). Varea and Underwood (2016) for example, proposed that the Australian pre-service teachers in their investigation 'showed little acceptance towards fat in their own bodies' (475) and came to see overweight bodies as 'indecent' (472) and 'abnormal' (474). Varea (2018) further suggested that pre-service teachers were so strongly influenced by healthist discourse that conveying a socially critical perspective of bodies to their pupils became all but impossible. For these pre-service teachers, non-appearance related conceptions of health became unthinkable (see also González-Calvo, Varea, and Martínez-Álvarez 2019). Yager et al. (2020) highlighted the considerable influence of an athletic body ideal in teacher education. They identified gender differences noting, for example, that male pre-service teachers were more likely to claim that PE teachers should look athletic than female pre-service teachers. They also pointed out that non-physical education pre-service teachers tended to claim that physical educators should model appropriate health behaviours (see also Wrench and Garrett 2015). Further, Blackshear (2020) raised questions about the use of fitness testing, including the measurement of body mass index (BMI), to assess the fitness levels of PETE students. Taken together, research with pre-service teachers suggests that certain corporeal ideals continue to shape PE teachers' professional identities, often with adverse effects.

Several studies specifically examine how pupils are influenced by their teachers' appearances. Drummond, McGuire, and Bennett (2002) claimed that just over three quarters of the pupils they surveyed saw their health educators as important models of exercise habits. Nonetheless, many of those pupils also indicated that it was the content that the teachers presented in class rather than their bodies that made them role models. Melville and Maddalozzo's (1988) experimental investigation involved pupils watching one of two instructional films, one where a physical educator presented exercise concepts, and an identical film in which the same physical educator wore a suit which made him appear overweight.[1] The pupils rated the 'overweight' teacher less favourably in terms of likability, expertise, and appropriateness as a role model. While the authors concluded that teacher educators might need to 'take a serious interest in the fitness levels of their physical education majors' (352), it is worth keeping in mind that the investigation was based on one male teacher (i.e. results may have been different with a female teacher or other male teachers) and that pupils are likely to respond differently to an unknown adult seen in a one-off film compared to a teacher with whom they work over an entire school year. Neither this investigation nor other investigations of pupils' perceptions of their teachers entertained the possibility that (1) athletic-looking bodies could be regarded by some pupils as unachievable or intimidating and consequently be unhelpful in promoting desirable attitudes and behaviours in PE, or (2) pupils might have different conceptions of ideal bodies compared to teachers or researchers.

Despite a raft of investigations on bodies and role modelling in PE, few studies have examined potential connections between corporeal expectations and pedagogy directly. Cliff and Wright (2010) describe how a teacher and her all-girl class continued to focus on weight management strategies despite the teacher evidently recognizing that her students were familiar with dieting and were at greater risk of developing eating disorders than becoming overweight. Wrench and Garrett (2015) provide another example in which they investigated how the embodied physicality of pre-

service PE teachers affected emerging pedagogies. They noted for instance, that the pre-service teachers in their investigation were inclined to value competition and hierarchies of ability, prefer practical, hands-on activities, and promote a healthist discourse in their teaching.

In summary, teachers' bodies have been a recurring theme in physical education scholarship. Many scholars have underscored the pedagogical significance of teachers' bodies while some critically oriented scholars have pointed to the detrimental consequences that corporeal expectations can have for teachers. Building primarily on this second corpus of literature, we want to take a closer look at the assumptions that PE teachers make about content, pedagogy, and educational purposes when they talk about a perceived need for physical educators to look fit and athletic. To do this, we interview PE teachers in Sweden and are analytically drawing on a Swedish didaktik of physical education tradition along with sociocultural theoretical work.

Theoretical framework

To explore the assumptions that teachers make when they express expectations on physical educators' bodies, this investigation is grounded in the concept of didaktik. Framing the study in a Swedish didaktik of physical education tradition involves a focus on issues such as, 'what and how teachers teach, what and how students learn and why this content or teaching is taught or learned. Questions such as who is teaching, who is learning, when and with whom are also relevant in this context' (Quennerstedt and Larsson 2015, 567).

From this perspective, pedagogy within PE involves a range of different choices. Expectations on teachers potentially affect choices concerning the content of teaching, the pedagogies that are used but also the educational purpose of teaching PE. As Quennerstedt (2019a) has argued, teaching is understood as a political and moral act that should be explored in terms of judgement and its educational consequences. From this perspective, teaching is:

> … a continuous act of doing professional judgements about the why(s), how(s) and what(s) of education. This together implies that teaching is about making judgements about what is educationally desirable i.e. the purposes of education in terms of what to bring to the educational process. (619)

In the paper the didaktik framework thus helps us to formulate our problem, analyse our data, and support the claims we can make in our discussion. An expectation on teachers to have fit, athletic-looking bodies in order to teach PE accordingly involves not only a claim about pedagogical authority or trustworthiness but is also a political and moral act of judgement. It involves decisions about what to bring to the educational situation in terms of their teaching bodies.

As a way of analytically handling assertions about education more specifically, we draw on Bakhtin's notion of *speech genres* and Wertsch's (1993) notion of *privileging*. Combining these concepts provide a fruitful strategy for thinking about the characteristics and potential consequences of language and will help us to explore the content, pedagogies, and educational purposes that are related to corporeal expectations in the second part of the paper. In Bakhtin's (1986, 1999) terms, the production of any utterance entails the invocation of a speech genre. For Bakhtin (1986), a speech genre is a semantically bounded, relatively stable unit of communication that is used in particular situations. He proposed that genres 'correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and, consequently, also to particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances' (Bakhtin 1986, 87). A speech genre can thus be understood as language-use-in-context involving patterns in social action as well as in speech. In our investigation, the idea that PE teachers need particular kinds of bodies in order to be healthy role models can thus be understood as a speech genre about teaching PE and as a consequence is logically related to claims about subject content, pedagogies, and purposes.

There are several points worth emphasizing here. First, Bakhtin (1986) stressed that a speech genre is circumscribed not simply by a concern for a certain theme but also by the way in which the theme comes to be expressed. People can for example, approach the task of greeting one another

in different ways and the style of greeting will depend on the situation (Bakhtin 1999). For Bakhtin (1986), genre is not solely dependent on context but is determined by multiple factors that include semantic considerations and the personal composition of the situation. Second and related, utterances are always linked to other aspects of ongoing communication. Bakhtin (1986) develops this idea, suggesting that 'utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another' (91). In this sense, genres are woven into larger fabrics of discourse. A theoretical approach based on Bakhtin's idea of speech genres involves a concern with voice and how utterances are embedded within, and constitutive of, discourse. Third, if speech is invoked rather than created by speakers, a crucial question is, 'Who is doing the talking?'. Wertsch (1993) points out that for Bakhtin, people always speak with two or more voices: their own and that (or those) of their culture. From a Bakhtinian perspective, people become socialized within particular sociocultural settings to the point that they *ventriloquate* through speech genres appropriate for that setting. Individuals can be creative and can generally be considered responsible for what they say (Wertsch 1993).

The selection of certain speech genres over others is a necessary aspect of meaning making. In this respect, power is always present in communication. Wertsch (1993) uses the term privileging to describe the process by which individuals deem certain issues, topics, and questions reasonable and fruitful while ignoring or avoiding others. Privileging occurs in everyday situations without much forethought as people discuss topics in ways that they have learned to be appropriate (Almqvist and Östman 2006). In formal education contexts, creating meaning involves privileging certain speech genres such as those related to official science over others (Wertsch 1993, 128–129, see also Andersson, Garrison, and Östman 2018). We can 'see' power at work as individuals make choices about which content to cover and encourage certain ways of talking about topics (see Cliff and Wright 2010, discussed earlier). In our investigation, we use the notion of privileging to explore the content, pedagogies, and educational purposes that are foregrounded as a consequence of an 'athletic-looking teacher as healthy role model' speech genre. The idea that teachers may or may not have to look fit and athletic to be healthy role models is understood as a political and moral act of judgement involving what to bring to the educational situation.

Methods

The context in which the investigation took place is Swedish PE. In contrast to many other countries, it has been suggested that Swedish PE is not so much about sport techniques, competition, learning sports or fitness (Quennerstedt and Öhman 2008). Sport is not considered the most important issue in PE among teachers, and fitness testing to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles is uncommon. Instead, Swedish PE focuses on trying out different activities in non-competitive environments, joy of movement, being physically active and social relations (Larsson and Karlefors 2015; Larsson and Quennerstedt 2016). Since the last curriculum reform in 2011, there has also been a strong focus on assessment and grades which has put other aspects such as movement complexity in the foreground (Janemalm, Barker, and Quennerstedt 2020; Svennberg 2017).

Participants

The participants in the project were 24 qualified PE teachers who at the time of data collection were working in the profession (11 women and 13 men). Participants varied in age (average age was 40 years) and professional experience (20 of the participants had been teaching PE for more than 3 years, 14 of those 20 teachers had been teaching for more than 10 years. Average teaching experience was 11 years). All except one of the teachers worked in urban or suburban regions in Sweden. Given that teacher subjectivities have been shown to influence pedagogical approaches (Sykes and McPhail 2008), our goal was to select a variety of participants with respect

to gender, age, and years of experience. Different recruitment strategies were used. Initially, invitation letters were sent to 22 schools. Eight schools responded, from which four teachers agreed to participate. PE teachers known to the research team were then contacted and asked to (1) take part in the project, and (2) invite colleagues to participate in the project. This combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Gobo 2004) resulted in the participation of a further 20 teachers. While variation in gender, age, and experience was to an extent achieved through our sampling strategy, it is worth noting that snowball sampling tends to result in homogeneity as participants recruit like-minded participants (Sparkes and Smith 2014). Claims of representativeness for this sample are thus naturalistic and the value of the findings lies in their capacity to resonate with readers rather than their capacity to statistically correspond to other populations or contexts (Smith 2018).

Data collection

Data production occurred through focus group and individual interviews held at either the participants' schools or at the campus of the university coordinating the project. Two focus group interviews with five participants, four focus group interviews with two participants and six individual interviews were conducted. Interview format was determined by practical factors – focus groups were the researchers' preferred format but finding times that suited multiple participants was not always possible. In total, 12 interviews were conducted with 24 participants. One interview was conducted by the third author; 11 were conducted by the fourth author. All 12 interviews were conducted in Swedish. Interview questions were based on issues emerging from existing PE scholarship concerning body weight and body form and were used to explore views and assumptions on bodies, health, and weight in the teaching of the school subject. Interview questions included: 'How important is role modelling in physical education and health?', 'Do you think that you have expectations on you as a physical education teacher?', 'Can one be overweight and still be a role model in physical education?'. In line with a semi-structured approach (Amis 2005), all participants were provided with similar questions. Interviews lasted for between 30 and 82 minutes (average 59 minutes).

Analytic procedures

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the transcripts involved three phases, each of which was guided by an analytic question or questions. The first phase focused on the question: how is the speech genre of the 'athletic-looking teacher as healthy role model' built up in terms of how utterances are embedded within, and constitutive of, concrete situations? This phase involved the first author reading the transcripts multiple times, copying all extracts relating to role modelling into a Word document, marking and categorizing significant extracts in the new document, and writing reflections in the margins of the transcripts. The process of reading, marking, and notating was reliant on recognition: specifically, the first author's ability to recognize the teachers' statements as semantically bounded, relatively stable units of communication (Bakhtin 1999). The second phase of analysis was guided by the didaktik framework as well as the concept of privileging using the questions: (i) what subject content is privileged in the speech genre, (ii) what ways to teach are privileged in the speech genre, and (iii) what educational purposes are privileged in the speech genre? In this phase, the first and second authors worked collaboratively to identify how the teachers judge certain issues, topics, and questions as reasonable and productive in steering the communication in a certain direction with regards to being a role model. Here we followed Goodyear, Kerner, and Quennerstedt's (2019) deliberative strategy as a procedure in the analysis to form collective agreement where the different researchers are given possibility to 'make judgements in relation to different alternatives, views and arguments' (217) which in turn helps to 'mak[e] the themes something "in common"' (216). The final analytic phase was guided by the

question: what are the potential consequences of the privileging of certain content, pedagogies, and purposes within the speech genre of the 'athletic-looking teacher as healthy role model'? All four authors continued the deliberative strategy, attempting to connect the theoretical framework, the data generated in the investigation, and the background literature introduced at the start of this paper.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 624-18), safeguarding the requirements of institutional ethics. Concerning procedural ethics, we realize that by asking questions about sensitive topics such as body image, body size, and desirable bodies, we unwillingly affected the participants. We also recognize that our interview questions might have encouraged specific responses and affected how the participants positioned themselves during the interviews. There was at times a certain reluctance to express thoughts about body size and weight, which could be interpreted as a fear of not expressing oneself 'correctly'. The sensitive nature of the topic discussed was however, explicitly addressed in the interviews, in most cases resulting in what we felt was open and honest responses and discussions. Participants' anonymity in the publication of findings has been managed through the use of pseudonyms.

Findings – the athletic teacher as healthy role model

All teachers in this investigation used the 'athletic-looking teacher as healthy role model' speech genre (from now referred to as the 'role modelling speech genre') in their utterances. Using the genre involved making assertions about: (1) PE teachers' need to display health to their pupils, and (2) how expectations related to health from outside the profession strongly shaped teachers' ways of acting. This genre consisted of comparisons between PE and other school subjects ('Just like maths teachers need to be able to solve maths equations, PE teachers need to be able to perform physical skills'), comparisons with health professionals ('You wouldn't trust doctors or nurses if they were smoking cigarettes, why would you trust a PE teacher who does not exercise?'), and more general claims of authenticity ('The pupils wouldn't listen to me if they saw me eating unhealthy food during the break'). Indeed, 'credibility' was a key term in this speech genre, which teachers repeatedly employed when describing the need to model health.

> Can you be … can you live unhealthily? Yes, you can. But you won't have any credibility. Can you be … can a teacher be an alcoholic? Yes, but you'll lose credibility. If I as a physical education teacher stand out the front and smoke, it doesn't really matter what I say about health because the pupils will say 'but you smoke'. If I make sexist comments, not to the point that I would be fired but if I said things that were borderline, can I talk about norms? No, I can't. I wouldn't have credibility. And just the same, I would say that a teacher in physical education and health who is overweight would have a problem with credibility. (Erik – nine years' teaching experience)

> Johan (10 years' experience): I have to be able to do certain things in order to be credible as a teacher, I think. That's how I see things.

> Linus (20 years' experience): We can't get away from that.

However, not all participants maintained that physical educators should be seen as health role models. One claimed that that the 'clean living' label applied to the profession is a misplaced stereotype and that privately, many physical educators engage in unhealthy practices. Nonetheless, they all described a responsibility to exhibit healthy versions of themselves to the outside world. Understood within the didaktik framework, the teachers privileged particular ways of understanding the content, form, and purpose of PE.

A particular version of health as subject content in PE

Within the speech genre, the privileging of a particular version of health as a subject content was evident. Health as content frequently concerned watching what one eats and maintaining a functional body weight.

> Karin: I try to persuade them not to eat sweets. We have a sugar ban at this school. Today they get cream donuts. We are a little, a little 'well, we think like this … mm [sceptical sound]'.
> Interviewer: I saw some cream donuts over there.
> Karin: Yeah, exactly. And it would have been okay if you had them in the dining room, but they were going to be handed out during class time and then we had to choose which occasion we wanted them. And I felt that, 'No. School time [is] lesson time, it shouldn't be used for eating'. Because I don't think you should be rewarded with sweets, because that's the kind of thing that we're trying to counteract a little here – that you can take a fruit or something whenever you want. Because we don't stop lessons or break the schedule just to eat fruit or nutritious things, but on the other hand we do it for sweets? Then I think that we may be sending the wrong signals. We try to talk about, as generally as possible, one should eat according to the 'food circle' and eat breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. (Karin – three years' experience)

While nutrition emerged relatively frequently as an important content knowledge, the point of having this knowledge was not connected simply to weight. A functional weight for PE teachers was typically defined as a weight fit for purpose. The purpose was almost always participation in sport and in this respect, sport as subject content was woven tightly into explanations of health role modelling. Teachers on several occasions commented that carrying extra weight was only a problem if it meant that they could no longer take part in common PE activities such as ball games, gymnastics, or fitness activities.

> This is also about function … body control and function … as long as we can use our body and show … I mean in a functional way. And you can take part and do it … if it doesn't prevent us from doing what we are going to do … On the other hand, if we just stumbled round and couldn't keep up with the pupils, or just stood on the stairs and panted, then we would lose credibility. (Magnus – 17 years' experience)

In the main, the privileging of a particular subject content that consists of different sports and participation in these sports defines a healthy weight. Some teachers added that being overweight only becomes problematic 'in more extreme cases', such as when a person develops diabetes or heart problems. And crucially, no respondent said explicitly that PE teachers needed to have a particular physique. Instead, varying levels of scepticism were directed towards the idea of overweight PE teachers being able to do a good job.

The privileging of a particular version of health as subject content achieved through the role modelling speech genre comes into sharper focus when considering other ways of conceiving health (cf. Quennerstedt 2019b). For example, social or psychological dimensions of health were not raised in discussions of what it means to be a healthy role model – the teachers did not describe social relations or how spending time with family were important behaviours to model, for instance. Even exercise featured relatively infrequently in the teachers' commentaries. When it did, it was related to fitness and sport functionality. In short, the role modelling genre posits health as not being too overweight so that one can maintain physical functionality in sports. In these ways, the genre privileges health content based on sport participation, nutrition and weight, and implicitly a pathogenic reduction of risk.

Particular pedagogies in PE

In the role modelling speech genre, two versions of how to teach subject content were privileged. The first was the idea that teaching health could be reduced to showing pupils how to live a healthy life.

> I try to live as I teach … but I love sweets on Saturdays [laughs] […] I try to think about balance and tell them about myself and be quite transparent. [I tell them] that it is difficult to keep eating, exercising, recovering, but that you always have to strive for it. Because then you have that health aspect. I'm probably like everyone else, quite average, even though I don't like that word. (Ida – 15 years' experience)

Ida's explanation reflects a normative pedagogy where teachers exhibited specific behaviours that they considered constitutive of healthy, moderate lives. This type of health pedagogy is not particularly surprising: physical educators have a long history of showing and telling people how to be healthy (Kirk 2020). It is worth noting though that it is within this perspective on teaching that the idea of credibility assumes its logic – because teachers employ a procedural pedagogy with the promise of particular outcomes for certain behaviours, their own bodies are laid open to scrutiny.

The second version of how to teach PE was similar but concerned teachers' motor capability. Here, demonstrating sports skills was a crucial element of teaching in physical education. Again, scepticism concerning overweight teachers' ability to model such skills was common.

> A few years ago, I was quite big, I weighed maybe 25 kilos more than I do today. And I was in pretty bad … And somewhere along the way, I felt that this is not credible. I couldn't do certain things properly either, so I … Maybe not based on weight but it affected my activity and my mobility. So I would probably say that you can … You have to be able to do certain things as a physical education teacher, at least at a certain age, I think. I'm like 35. I need to be able to do certain things to be credible as a teacher, I think. (Jakob – 10 years' experience)

> At my university, I had a teacher. He was old … 50 [laughs]. At the time, he was a little … okay actually a lot overweight … so we watched him the first time and 'wow', he showed us a heap of exercises. He did everything possible on the rings, bars and everything. So everyone was like … 'huh?'. And the guys who were young and strong, they weren't as strong as he was. Okay, he was a bit … he didn't have the perfect body. But still he was strong and he had shown fantastic body control. He was a great role model. If you're overweight, but still show that you're in good condition or strong or can demonstrate a lot of exercises … it's okay, I think it works. But if it's like, I'm going to come … pretty fat, do five sit ups and like [exhales] 'Keep going, I can't do anymore'. That's a really bad role model. (Mia – 11 years' experience)

Leaving aside overweight teachers' ability to demonstrate sports skills for a moment, the speech genre privileges a demonstration-explanation-practice (see Tinning 2010) style of teaching as an appropriate pedagogical approach. It is a 'follow-me' pedagogy that centres the teacher in the pedagogical situation and pupils are only responsible for imitation. Researchers in PE have long problematized teacher-centred styles of teaching (Kirk 2010). The point we wish to emphasize however, is that again the role modelling genre invites evaluation of the teacher. While we do not know how overweight Mia's university teacher may have been, her comparison of the teacher's capabilities with those of her colleagues and her final assessment of the educator's pedagogy as one that 'works' illustrate the entanglement of pedagogy, bodies, and authority.

Certain educational purposes in PE

In line with the privileging of subject content and pedagogies, a certain educational purpose emerged in relation to their teaching practice. In talking about a perceived need for physical educators to look fit and athletic, the comprehensive purpose for PE identified in our analysis was to educate citizens to lead healthy lives through participation in sport. As suggested, a healthy life primarily involves physical functionality in relation to participation in certain activities. The importance of sport becomes even clearer since the speech genre excludes role modelling in relation to outdoor education, dance, swimming, play or theoretical knowledge, all of which are central parts of the national curriculum that guides these teachers' practices.

Body weight occupies a place in the genre as a potential obstacle to participation. It is possible to approach health with extra body weight and a non-athletic looking body, but it is not possible to achieve health as participation in sport entirely:

> Well, I think it can be an advantage if you can be … a role model that shows that all bodies work. Then I would probably feel that there is a limit to … Getting extremely overweight and … It is maybe difficult to believe if, if you stand and talk about 'this is how it should be' and then you show that you don't live like that at all. (Elin – 16 years' experience)

Being a little overweight is thus reasonable and acceptable, and weight becomes problematic mainly when it prevents participation in certain activities. In this sense, the genre is tightly connected to the goal of improving sporting abilities, despite the school subject having a wide variety of official aims (Barker, Bergentoft, and Nyberg 2017).

Discussion

The findings reveal that when teachers talk about a perceived need to have fit, athletic-looking bodies for the sake of credibility, the purpose of physical education becomes helping citizens to lead healthy lives through participation in sport. This purpose is woven together with normative discourses of how to live healthy lives (Quennerstedt 2019b); traditional demonstration-explanation-practice teaching practices (Tinning 2010), and; a subject content related to (i) functional participation in sport and, (ii) health as functional body weight. Using our didaktik framework and building on the critical scholarship presented in our background, we want to select three important and potentially problematic issues that emerge within the findings and consider these in more detail. These issues are first, the relation between the role modelling genre and subject content; second, the pedagogical possibilities that are missed through the privileging of these aspects, and; third, the particular 'voices' (Wertsch 1993) that are ventriloquated (Bakhtin 1986) in the speech genre.

The teachers' responses suggest that the connection between the role modelling genre and PE subject content is more complex than has been presented in some of the existing literature (Heidorn 2013; Hunt et al. 2017). The pedagogical value teachers assign to their bodies is not implicated in *any* PE subject content. As noted, teachers in this investigation do not expect to have a specific body type to model proficiency in outdoor education or swimming, for example.[2] This finding has at least two related implications. It suggests that a nuanced understanding is necessary when scholars and practitioners consider expectations of the profession (Heidorn 2013; Melville and Maddalozzo 1988). Physical educators should reflect on the tacit assumptions that are made about health and the educational purpose of PE when they are expected to – or expect themselves to – have certain kinds of bodies. Scholars especially should acknowledge the varying levels of curriculum emphasis that are placed on the biophysical, psychological, and cultural dimensions of health in different national contexts (Pühse et al. 2011). Our findings suggest that PE teachers are likely to encounter expectations concerning appearances – and suffer negative consequences (see González-Calvo, Varea, and Martínez-Álvarez 2019; Webb and Quennerstedt 2010) – in contexts where narrow views of health are prominent.

Of course, the privileging of a pathogenic view of health, normative pedagogies, and an educational purpose of educating citizens for healthy lives through participation in sport neglects other content, pedagogies, and purposes for PE. This privileging directs attention away from alternative notions of health (cf. Parkinson and Burrows 2020) and provides some explanation for why pathogenic views of health remain dominant within PE (Quennerstedt 2019b). Further, a normative, teacher-centred pedagogy ignores a range of student-centred pedagogies that have been proposed as part of a constructivist turn in physical education over the last three decades (Rovegno and Dolly 2006). The privileging of a specific purpose conceals the possibility of citizens being educated to live healthy lives through participation in activities other than sport. In this last respect, the speech genre works to foreground traditional sport as *the* central interest in physical education (Kirk 2010). Our claim is not that these traditions are the result of a role modelling speech genre. The genre is not monolithic in the sense that it shapes all else within PE. It is however, woven into the discursive fabric, the expectations, values, and norms (Sirna, Tinning, and Rossi

2010) of the school subject. In this way, it works to reinforce other taken-for-granted ways of understanding and doing PE.

The speech genre also privileges an all-round, practical ability in sports (Barker et al. 2020) and the teachers were principally invested in wide sporting competence. Neither increased professional experience nor age appeared to furnish teachers with different ways of describing competence, role modelling, and teachers' body weight. Indeed, the centrality of all-round sports ability to teachers' descriptions of role modelling strongly connects PE teacher identities to size, age, and ability discourses (Fisette 2015) and specifically the notion that teaching competence deteriorates with increasing weight (Heidorn 2013; Melville and Maddalozzo 1988). This is problematic because overweight and aging teachers are positioned as deficient by default. As in other investigations (Fisette 2015; Yager et al. 2020), the question of gender emerges as highly relevant, especially since sporting competence is often valued to a greater degree in traditional male arenas and since gender affects how bodies are experienced (Johansson 2017). When gender is considered – and we are aware that we have left this issue largely untouched in this paper – more questions emerge. How, for example, do female teachers' conceptions of an 'appropriate' weight for teachers differ to those of male teachers? And how do all teachers understand their capacity to role model when it comes to pupils that do not share the same gender? Intersectional perspectives have been used to consider the influence of various social structures on PE teachers' practices (Flintoff, Fitzgerald, and Scraton 2008). We would propose that further scholarship that takes account of teachers' size, age, and motoric capability in combination with norms that have received more attention in PE scholarship such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality, would prove generative.

Lastly, from a Bahktinian perspective, it is worth considering 'who is doing the talking?' in this speech genre. Due to the use of snowball sampling and focus groups, a degree of convergence in the participants' speech genres and the issues privileged could be expected. Nonetheless, the close proximity of the Swedish teachers' comments to their Spanish (González-Calvo, Hortigüela-Alcalá, and Fernández-Balboa 2020), English (Parkinson and Burrows 2020), and Australian pre-service (Varea 2018; Varea and Underwood 2016) counterparts' commentaries, suggests that teachers ventriloquate a speech genre with broad relevance. Irrespective of national context in the studies, PE teachers appear to undergo a process of socialization whereby they learn to use a genre related to bodies and role modelling. According to Bakhtin (1999), mastery of specific speech genres is necessary for gaining membership within communities. The teachers in our investigation, like the teachers in earlier investigations, had few problems demonstrating this membership.

Research focusing on pre-service physical education teachers (González-Calvo, Varea, and Martínez-Álvarez 2019; Wrench and Garrett 2015) suggests that socialization is underway even before individuals enter professional training. In this sense, the role modelling speech genre probably belongs to a common sense that school pupils learn during schooling. This contention is supported by Yager et al.'s (2020) observation that non-physical education pre-service teachers often claim that PE teachers need athletic-looking bodies, as well as early studies on pupils' perceptions of PE teachers (Melville and Maddalozzo 1988). The common-sense notion that teachers should 'practice what they preach' appeared in many of the teachers' comments. As our findings also show though, this common logic only works if 'what teachers preach' is (grossly) simplified. To counter narrow corporeal expectations, PE teachers thus need to continue to make explicit the differentiated and often multifaceted nature of the content, pedagogy, and purposes with which they are working. Further, they need to critically scrutinize their positions as role models of health in terms of the politics and morals that these positions entail as they decide what to bring to the educational situation.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to identify the assumptions about content, pedagogy, and educational purpose that teachers make when they talk about a perceived need for physical educators to look

fit and athletic. By using a Swedish didaktik framework along with sociocultural concepts, we identified specific ways in which a speech genre privileges certain understandings of PE teachers' relations to pedagogical practices. We contended that the 'athletic-looking teacher as healthy role model' speech genre is intimately tied to traditional understandings of subject content, pedagogies, and an educational purpose of PE that have sport and a pathogenic conception of health at their core. We want to finish with one final reflection concerning the implications of our findings and the possibilities for change, Wertsch (1993) proposes that patterns of privileging are difficult to alter because users of speech genres generally do not see that they are taking certain assumptions for granted, nor do they recognize that these assumptions generally affect how they understand themselves. Although this proposition makes educational transformation sound challenging, Wertsch (1993) provides one small but useful suggestion for bringing about change. He notes that 'it is only when one is confronted with a comparative example that one becomes aware of an imaginable alternative' (Wertsch 1993, 126). In the case of the role modelling speech genre, the kind of 'imaginable alternatives' necessary for change appeared to be just out of grasp for PE teachers. The participants in this research could almost conceive of teachers who were both overweight *and* effective role models of health. For us this suggests that change is taking place, even if somewhat slowly. We would propose that if PE teachers can continue to imagine the content of PE as something more than sport, the pedagogies of PE as something more than teacher-centred demonstrations, and the educational purpose of PE as something greater than preparing pupils for lifelong participant in sport, expectations on PE teachers – and PE teachers' expectations of themselves – will continue to transform.

Notes

1. A similar design has been used to study the relation between pupils' perceptions of teachers' age and teacher effectiveness (Pennington, Curtner-Smith, and Wind 2019).
2. These activities feature considerably in the curriculum that guides the participants' professional practice (Skolverket 2011). Swedish teachers are still generally responsible for teaching outdoor education (friluftsliv) and swimming and outsourcing is still relatively rare.

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ORCID

D. Barker http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4162-9844
M. Quennerstedt http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8748-8843
P. Korp http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7258-9967

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