ABSTRACT

Teachers’ documentations of students’ achievements in Swedish PEH – an impossible equation?

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In several Swedish research studies about the school subject physical education and health (PEH), assessment emerges as a difficult task for teachers. Assessment and grading is largely based on observation and teachers’ gut feeling, even though a reliable assessment process requires some form of documentation.

The aim of this study is to examine how teachers in the Swedish primary and secondary schools document the students' knowledge and how this work is perceived in relation to influencing factors. The theoretical framework consists of curriculum theory with a focus on frame factors and the transformation and realization of the subject content.

In the first part of the data collection 144 PE teachers completed a survey about their perceptions of the documentation process. The second part was conducted as semi-structured interviews with ten PE teachers focusing on the teachers’ work with the documentation of students’ knowledge in PEH.

The results show that a large majority of the teachers experience the documentation of students’ knowledge as difficult. The main obstacles are frame factors such as time, schedule and class numbers. The teachers, however, have a broad repertoire of documentation methods that they use. The analysis indicates that the teachers' documentation of the students’ performances is guided by what is possible to document rather than what learning objectives the curriculum stipulate. However, exceptions emerged among some of the interviewed teachers whose teaching clearly differed from the other teachers. These “systematic planners” had already decided in the planning stages of teaching what content should be assessed, how it should be made, and what kind of information that should be collected and documented. For “the systematic planners” the frame factors did not constitute a major obstacle.

The national PE curriculum has undergone significant changes over the last 20 years and the teachers have problems transforming the curriculum into daily practice. The teaching is characterized by a wide variety of content but with few lessons per activity. The collision between the realization of the subject content, and the increased demands for a legally secure assessment practice, is perceived by many teachers as an impossible equation. Having enough time to observe, assess and document all the students’ knowledge of a specific subject content, delivered over two to three lessons, is problematic. However in the perspective of “the systematic planners”, with perhaps six to eight lessons in the same subject matter, this does not seem to be a problem.