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Competition in Physical Education: Avoid, Ask, Adapt or Accept?

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ABSTRACT
Competition is an essential part of youth sport. But should it also be part of the curriculum in physical education? Or are competitive activities incompatible with the educational context? While some researchers have argued that physical education should embrace the sporting logic of competition, others have criticized the negative experiences it can create for some students in school. In this article, we draw on insights from the philosophy of sport as well as educational philosophy, with the aim of questioning and critically examining the integration of competitive activities in physical education. We present and discuss four normative arguments (AVOID, ASK, ADAPT, and ACCEPT) that can each in their own way inform and guide future talks on the topic.

KEYWORDS
Philosophy of physical education; philosophy of sport; sport pedagogy; sport ethics; contest

When conducted in clubs or associations, competitive activities can be meaningful and provide good experiences for young people. Competitive sport may even contribute to moral education (Aggerholm, 2017; Arnold, 1997; McFee, 2004). But should competitive activities be part of the curriculum in physical education in schools? Can they contribute to meaningful and educational experiences for students? Or are they incompatible with the educational context? The literature on competitive activities in physical education contains various answers to these questions. Drewe (2000, p. 79) argued that "Physical education must take seriously the teaching of sport as the competitive activity it is meant to be if physical education is to fulfill its role as an educative activity." The background for this claim was an earlier analysis of competition and the role it should play in physical education (Drewe, 1998). More specifically, Drewe (1998) argued that competition is too often reduced to simply a matter of winning and losing. This represents a one-sided and limited conception of competition, because it does not take into account the original meaning of *com*-petition, which is to "strive together." In Drewe's positive account, competition in physical education should be practiced as striving together, because this kind of activity is intrinsically good. She (2000) goes on to claim that physical education should include teaching sport, that physical education teachers should view themselves more as coaches, and that competition is indispensable to the acquisition of practical knowledge.

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Research into the experiences of competition in physical education paints a less positive picture. Empirical studies have highlighted certain negative and excluding tendencies in physical education, and there are indications of a discontent among some students, which appears to be related to competitive activities in physical education. In a Scandinavian context, research findings have suggested that physical education is dominated by activities and values from competitive sports, and that some students consequently dislike physical education and experience that physical activity is not for them (Nyberg & Larsson, 2012; Redelius, Fagrell, & Larsson, 2009; Säfvenbom, Haugen, & Bulie, 2014; Von Seelen, 2012). Ennis (1996) has described how a study of American students reported negative experiences with sport-based physical education. She also described examples of students who do not enter games by their own choice, or refuse to become involved in competition. Flintoff (2008) studied a School Sport Partnership Programme in England and found that the dominance of competitive sport activities in the physical education curriculum served to advance inequity and exclusion of girls: "The current inequitable sport structures operated, then, to restrict and constrain the ways in which the coordinators promoted and developed opportunities for girls and young women" (p. 400). Bernstein, Phillips, and Silverman (2011) investigated students' attitudes and perceptions toward competitive activities in physical education. In this qualitative study, the authors found that skill level determined the students' participation in competitive activities in physical education classes, and that competitive activities affected the experience and attitude of lower skilled students in a negative manner. These findings are in line with Evans' (2009) argument, that the wide spread use of competitive team games serve to exclude rather than include certain students.

Bernstein, Herman, and Lysniak (2013) investigated pre-service teachers' (PST) beliefs about competitive activities in physical education. They came to the conclusion that the PSTs found it challenging to plan to teach students with different ability levels. The study also reported that there was a disconnection between the PSTs' beliefs about the positive value of competitive activities and their education (PETE) to plan and implement such activities. In a similar vein, Harvey and O'Donovan (2013) studied an undergraduate practical unity for PSTs which aimed to engage students in reflections on their own beliefs about competitive activities in physical education. Although many of the students held traditional beliefs about competition, they also found individual differences among the PSTs. For instance, competition was thought to contribute to meaning and authenticity. However, while they believed that competitive activities were inherently meaningful, they were at the same time critical of the competitive culture of elite sports. This is in line with arguments presented by Stolz (2014). He points out that taking part in sports through physical education has been justified in terms of the moral qualities that sport is said to have, such as character development, physical courage, and loyalty. However, Stolz argues that sport also has undesirable qualities like meanness of spirit, violence, and a "winning is everything" attitude. Stolz is also critical of the close relationship that physical education often has to elite sport. The idea of physical education as a site for talent development in sport is in his view educationally unsound due to the negative experiences competitive activities may provide some students.

Contrary to Drewe's (2000) views about physical education teachers needing to adopt the positive attitude toward competition usually held by coaches, the research we have reviewed from both physical education and physical education teacher education (PETE)

indicates that it is difficult for teachers and students to see competition as something other than a matter of winning and losing. Indeed, Singleton (2003) argues that the idea of competition as striving together is "utopian" (p. 198). Furthermore, the research indicates that it is particularly difficult to provide meaningful experiences with competitive activities when there is a variety in interest and ability levels among students in physical education.

Against this background, and while acknowledging the constructive role that competitive activities can play in human life, we believe that there are reasons for questioning and critically examining their role in the context of physical education. To do this, we first outline understandings of competition from the philosophy of sport that have been discussed in relation to physical education. We then describe some central contextual differences between organized youth sport and physical education, which we relate to central sport ethical principles regarding the premises for good competition in both an experiential and moral sense. On this basis, and informed also by insights from the philosophy of education, we present and discuss what we see as four key arguments concerning competition in physical education: the AVOID-, ASK-, ADAPT- and ACCEPT-arguments. The aim of our analysis is to contribute to the philosophy of physical education by advancing and discussing possible roles that competitive activities could and should play in physical education curriculum. Rather than seeking to settle the discussion, we wish to encourage and open up for further discussion about the position and practice of competition in physical education.

Philosophy of sport on competition in physical education

Authors have drawn on philosophy of sport to argue for the value of competition in physical education. Morgan (2006) argued for the relevance of philosophy of sport for ethical inquiry to educational practice. Drawing on key positions in sport ethics, he stated that competition in physical education can be morally defensible and that there are "morally valuable lessons to be learned by exposing people to the heat of competition" (Morgan, 2006, p. 105). From this he went on to predict that "the research that feeds the philosophy of physical education will come largely from the philosophy of sport rather than the philosophy of education literature" (p. 106). With reference to Morgan's chapter, Kirk (2006) argued that sporting activities are inherently pleasurable and intrinsically satisfying, so "sport should be retained as an important part of the educational rationale for physical education" (p. 255). Furthermore, he concluded: "School physical education is well placed to take up this challenge of sustaining sport as a moral practice" (p. 263). More recently Harvey, Kirk, and O'Donovan (2014) have, as part of their review study of the Sport Education model (Siedentop, Hastie, & Van Der Mars, 2011) as a medium for ethical practice in both youth sport and physical education contexts, argued that children can learn about moral aspects, such as fair play and respect, through competitive activities in school. In the following we want to critically examine these arguments for the constructive role of competition in physical education. To do so, we first provide a brief review of the key sport philosophical understandings of competition that the authors discuss in relation to physical education.

A classic and influential account of competition in the philosophy of sport is Kretchmar's (1975) clarification of two essential and attractive counterpoints in sport: *test* and *contest*. Tests are related to being able or not to meeting the achievement criterion

when facing difficulties and challenges, for example climbing a mountain or performing a somersault. Contests, on the other hand, involve testing togetherness, where achievements are compared between two or more persons who try collectively to pass a test by "doing the same kind of thing in an attempt to show difference in the direction of superiority" (Kretchmar, 1975, p. 28). This clarification of contests is useful, and we will use it as basic analytical definition of competitive activities.

From these initial clarifications, Kretchmar (1975) concluded that both testing and contesting are captivating; both have their own "sweet tension" of uncertainty about the outcome. The uncertainty of tests relates to the question "Can I do it or not?" while the uncertainty of contest relates to the question "Am I superior or inferior?" Since contests require both kinds of tension, Kretchmar argued that competitive projects can be more attractive than testing activities. More recently, Kretchmar and Elcombe (2007) have elaborated on this view to argue that the experience of contests is more attractive and provide a richer resource for meaning than the experience of tests. Contests provide a richer foundation for the development and display of excellences, and therefore they offer superior possibilities for human flourishing as compared with tests. Against critical concerns related to the comparative purpose of competition, they highlight how competition can promote complexity, dynamism, community, fairness, and cooperation (Kretchmar & Elcombe, 2007, p. 187). They conclude that: "Contests invariably offer more complexity and dynamism than tests do, and they place greater demands on cooperation than are found in base-level testing environments" (p. 188).

This positive account of competition is also dominant in sport ethics. Hyland (1978, 1985) has, for example, described how proper athletic competition involves a mode of friendship and, thus, an element of cooperation because a good contest fundamentally depends on the presence of the other contesters. Simon (2010) has also emphasized the cooperative side of competitive sports, and has been influential in his description of competition as a "mutual quest for excellence." In addition to this, Simon has argued that competitive sport has internal moral values such as concern for excellence, discipline, dedication, and respect for rules.[1]

These arguments from sport philosophers have informed ways of justifying and legitimizing competition in physical education. While far from exhaustive, this brief review of a few dominant positions can illustrate how the role of sport philosophy has primarily been used to underpin how competitive sports can be defensible from an experiential and moral stance, which has supported arguments for the inclusion of competitive activities in physical education.

Reconsidering competition in physical education

Considering the apparent problems in contemporary physical education described earlier, the existing contribution of the philosophy of sport (and sport ethics) to the philosophy of physical education appears rather one-sided and somewhat underwhelming. In particular, the application of sport philosophy seems to neglect reflections about the different contextual conditions of youth sport communities and physical education. Therefore, in order to prepare our suggestion for four arguments concerning competition in physical education, this section explicates three central contextual differences between organized youth sport and physical education, and discusses these in relation to two principles for good competition. Adding these elements to the analytical mix can, we believe, contribute

with new perspectives that can inform critical reflections and discussions on competition in physical education.

Contextual differences

The relation between organized youth sport and physical education is of course very different across nations.[2] Yet, the areas of youth sport and physical education are obviously related and activities in the two fields share some *substantial similarities*. Thus, it can be argued that it is natural that physical education includes competitive activities to a larger degree than other school subjects. There appears, however, to be a problem related to simply transferring activities and/or the sporting logic of competition from organized youth sport into physical education because there are significant *contextual differences*. Youth sport is conducted in clubs and associations, and practice is officiated by coaches or trainers, whereas physical education is conducted in schools, and practice is officiated by teachers. For our present purpose, it is relevant to outline three general and essential differences that apply to the two areas in most, if not all, countries.[3]

First, participation in sport is voluntary, while participation in physical education is obligatory. There are of course exceptions where participants in organized sport are pushed by ambitious parents and where students in physical education get to choose the activities they participate in. Physical education can also be an elective subject, but it is nevertheless part of mandatory education.

Second, participants in organized youth sport compete with others at roughly the same skill level, while participants in physical education have different skill levels. Although, surely there are differences in skill levels within and between teams in youth sport, we submit that these differences are usually far less significant than between students in a school class. In organized youth sport there are various means, both formal and informal, related to regulation and classification, which contribute to form relatively homogeneous groups when it comes to level of performance. In school, classes are usually of heterogeneous skill levels because they are formed on the basis of age rather than criteria related to performance.

Third, in sport a central aim is to enable and allow participants to excel over others, while a central aim of physical education is to enable everyone to excel. In sporting contests comparison is made between competitors. Here it is the difference in skilled performance that should determine the outcome of contests, and although there can be mutual benefits from competition, winning excludes others from winning.[4] In schools, assessment is mostly criterion-based (it is the degree to which the individual has attained the competency aim that determines her grade), it involves a much broader range of human capabilities than skilled performance, and because assessment is related to criteria or norms, rather than comparison between students, the success of one should not exclude others from excelling.

Principled clarification of competition

These contextual differences between youth sport and physical education provide very different conditions for competitive activities. To analyze this, it is relevant to include key sport philosophical principles that describe central premises for good competition. They will provide a

principled background for the four arguments in the next section and they have, to our knowledge, not previously been considered in discussions of competition in physical education.

First, Russell (2004) has proposed a *consent principle*. He also calls this the external principle, as it regulates and sets conditions for entry into, and exit from, competitive games. This implies that morally defensible competition requires that participation is undertaken voluntarily by the contesters. Indeed, as Russell puts it, "competitive games can be undertaken only with the consent of the participants. Without such consent, a game is not really taking place" (p. 147).

Second, Loland (2010) has proposed a *fair opportunity principle*, which is inspired by John Rawls' theory of justice and can be seen as an operationalization of Fraleigh's (1984) *equality of opportunity to perform principle*. Loland describes the principle to imply that: "we should eliminate or compensate for essential inequalities between persons that cannot be controlled or influenced by individuals in any significant way and for which individuals cannot be deemed responsible" (p. 118). Competition should test relevant skills to evaluate competitors according to inequality in performance. For this to be fair it is important that competitors are equal at the outset of competition to secure appropriate competitive balance.

Consent and fair opportunity in physical education?

Including these principles in discussions on competitive activities in the context of physical education can, for a start, contribute to raising new and critical questions. Can the principles be met in the area of physical education? Or are competitive activities, in principle, incompatible with physical education in school?

The consent principle relates to the first contextual difference described above. In most cases it is met in organized sport, where children and young people have (or at least should have) chosen themselves to take part in competition. Compulsory participation in competitive sports and activities is arguably at odds with the consent principle, and most sport philosophers would agree that voluntary engagement is a prerequisite for good experiences within competition. But can the consent principle be met in schools, if competitive sports and activities are part of the curriculum, and participation in physical education is compulsory? Unless students are allowed to choose between subjects and activities the answer to this will, for many students, be no.

It could be argued here, however, that this is a general problem for any obligatory school subject. Although subjects like mathematics, science, or English are indeed obligatory, our point here is that competition is a part of activities and the subject matter of physical education in ways it is not in other subjects. Physical education involves bodily interaction and is different to, say, mathematics in purpose, objects of learning, and forms of knowledge (Nyberg & Larsson, 2012). Therefore, in light of the consent principle, competition as part of obligatory physical education can be problematic. The consent principle may explain why it can be hard for physical education teachers to organize meaningful competitions, and also why physical education can be experienced as alienating for many children who do not like to compete. Perhaps competition in physical education is an arena where lack of involvement is more visible than in other school subjects, because the students (as the sport philosophers argue) depend on each other for competitive activities to be meaningful. Here students who hide or in other ways refuse to

become involved in the activity directly affect the experience and learning possibilities of everyone else in the class or group.

The other principle, which concerns fair opportunity, is mostly met in organized sport outside of the school, where there are well developed ways of regulating competitions (e.g. ranking in leagues and teams) and classifying athletes (e.g. based on body mass, age, disability, or gender). But can this principle be met when it comes to competition in physical education, where classes are heterogeneous groups of children with very different levels of skill and/or experience in sports, and where mostly the only classification is age, and in some cases gender?

If students in a class are not equal at the outset of competition, they are not like testers, which Kretchmar (1975, pp. 28–29) described as a premise for experiencing the captivating sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome in contests. In fact, without equally skilled participants, the activity would not really be a contest, since the beginner and advanced would not be part of the same "testing family" (Kretchmar, 1975, p. 28). Regarding the formation of testing families, Kretchmar described how it "is grounded in the ability to see that someone else can encounter the same test as oneself" (p. 28). He furthermore clarified how the level of skill, albeit often implicit, is a central part of identifying other members of a testing community: "the beginner and advanced golfers do not see themselves as members of the same testing family" (p. 28). From this follows that the refined experience related to Kretchmar and Elcombe's (2007) account of contest can be difficult to establish in physical education. For the more experienced (higher skilled) students, inequality at the outset would imply a less refined experience, because such contests would involve no interesting challenge or tension. Also, such contests can easily degenerate into a venue for asserting oneself over less capable others, which would be morally problematic. For less experienced (lower skilled) students, competitive sports and activities in schools can easily result in bad experiences as they are at risk of suffering defeats without standing a chance. In such cases, the possibility of suffering morally edifying defeats in competitions is not available for all in physical education. As a consequence, it may lead to lower skilled students being excluded from (or through) competitions. Hence, from this perspective competitive sports and activities in physical education can arguably collide with the idea of inclusion in the educational system.

This brief discussion can illustrate how it can be hard to meet the sport philosophical principles of good and fair competition in physical education. This can contribute to understanding why it can in principle be problematic to integrate competitive activities in the curriculum of physical education in schools. On this basis, it is tempting to conclude that competition is incompatible with physical education. The principles in themselves, however, do not prescribe which role competition ought to play in physical education. This is a normative question that requires pedagogical considerations. This is what the remaining part of the article seeks to provide.

Four normative arguments concerning competition in physical education

This section presents four normative arguments, which can guide pedagogical approaches to the apparent difficulties related to competitive activities in physical education. The arguments draw on the sport philosophical reflections above, and in addition to this we include reflections from the philosophy of education that can sustain the pedagogical considerations. On this basis, each argument presents a normative suggestion for how the

relation between competition and physical education ought to be. We seek to present them in a neutral fashion, as valid arguments for and against competition in physical education, so the order of them does not implicate a hierarchy of relevance. Also, even though the four arguments can highlight contrasting positions and approaches, they are not all mutually exclusive. Some might even be interdependent and, of course, the possibilities for pursuing these solutions depend highly on the particular context (national curriculum, etc.) and the group of students (age, experience, motivation, etc.).

The AVOID-argument: Competition should not be part of physical education

One argument could be that competition in physical education should be avoided altogether. Taking the context of physical education and the fair opportunity principle into consideration the argument would be that, contrary to Drewe's (2000) claims and Kretchmar and Elcombe (2007) positive account, contests do not provide a richer resource of meaning than tests for students. On the contrary, contests can in this context deprive activities of the meaningful experiences related to other forms of movement, for example noncompetitive and cooperative games, or the sweet tensions that tests can provide.

This AVOID-argument would be in alignment with Kohn's (1992, 2006) arguments against contests, not least in education. Interdependent competition, he argues, involves a mutually exclusive goal attainment, which renders such activities antithetical to moral development. He analyzed competition to lead, on an individual level, to ills such as obsessional and narrow thinking, conformity, selfishness, hostility, lower self-esteem and creativity, and on a social level to ills such as prejudice, hostility, aggression, cheating, violence, as well as a loss of community and sociability. Since these are not traits or values we wish to develop in students, interdependent competitive activities should not be part of the curriculum. This would eliminate various individual and team sports (e.g. tennis and soccer), where Kohn (1992, p. 93) argues that "well-meaning exhortations to be less competitive seem naive at best."

An educational aim related to the AVOID-argument could be that physical education in school should not just consist of activities similar to the ones students experience in their everyday life, for example in competitive youth sport. Drawing on the works of Gadamer (2004) and Ziehe (1999) it could be argued that activities in school should provide experiences that are subjectively and significantly different from everyday life. Physical education should for this reason contribute to broaden the students' horizon by providing experiences with unusual and contrasting forms of activities from a variety of different physical cultures.

The ASK-argument: Students should be allowed to choose for themselves

Another pedagogical approach to competition in physical education could be to ask the students if they want to engage in competitive activities and sports. This ASK-argument would allow them to choose which activities to participate in, as well as their level of challenge. It can be highlighted as a way of allowing students a more active role in their learning and education, possibly stimulating engagement and sense of ownership. It would relate to the consent principle, and stressing volition would be in accordance with most sport philosophical accounts of good and ethical engagement in competitions.

Starting from the students' interests and wishes would be in line with the basic ideas of progressive education. Dewey (1997) was a key proponent of this position and he stressed its "emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process" (p. 67). Even if physical education is compulsory there should in a democratic educational system be room for both individual and collective choices. Students should contribute to decide the focus of activities and which parts of physical culture in which they want to engage. It would, importantly, require an openness from teachers for students to choose *not* to participate in competitive activities.

The ADAPT-argument: Competition should be regulated and modified

A third argument could be that competitive activities in physical education should be adapted to make the students experience fair opportunities and good contests. This argument would be a more moderate position regarding competition than the AVOID-argument. It would recognize that competition can be good and that it can contribute with shared goods and benefits for students in physical education. This ADAPT-argument also implies that the apparent problems described earlier are related to either misconception of competition, lack of regulation, or the sort of competitive activities used in physical education. Hence, adapting the attitudes toward competition, regulating the way contests are structured (e.g. through classification or differentiation), and/or modifying the activities to create more equal opportunities, would enable students to have positive and edifying experiences with competition in physical education.

In general, the rationale of the ADAPT-argument could be, that since competition is such a big part of western capitalist societies, children should learn to compete well and in moderate forms. If we remove competitive bodily interaction from physical education, then children are not educated in performing fair and/or respectfully in competition with others. This form of argument has for example been proposed by Shields and Bredemeier (2010, p. 66) as they argue that "given the prevalence of contesting in society, schools have a responsibility to nurture the perspectives, values, and attitudes essential to true competition."

The ACCEPT-argument: Students can learn from negative experiences with competition

Finally, a fourth argument could be that we should accept that some students dislike competition and have negative experiences with it in physical education. This ACCEPT-argument implies acknowledging that competitive activities are not for everyone. Some students are just not fond of competing, but since school is to prepare young people for participation in physical culture, and since competitive sport is part of our physical culture, it is important that students get experiences with this. But whereas the ADAPT-argument would seek to give students a positive experience with competitive activities,[5] the ACCEPT-argument would imply that the role of physical education is to make it possible for everyone to learn *if* they enjoy competition *or* not. Hence, it implies a more value neutral approach where it is acceptable for students to have negative experiences and dislike competition.

This idea can also find support in the philosophy of education literature. For example, Dewey argued that negative experiences can be educational if students get to reflect on their experience. Put differently, a negative experience can be educative rather than mis-

educative if it leads to growth. In relation to competition in physical education, the educative objective related to the ACCEPT-argument would not be to provide good experiences, but to enable students to make informed and reflective decisions about their involvement in, or avoidance of, competitive activities in their lives.

Discussion of the arguments

The four arguments represent a spectrum between AVOID and ACCEPT, with ADAPT and ASK as two more moderate positions. Our hope is that these arguments can help discuss normative questions about whether and/or how competition ought to be a part of physical education. In the following, we briefly discuss some implications and challenges related to the arguments, as well as some possible relations between them.

An implication of the AVOID-argument would be that teachers focus on a variety of other physical cultures and dimensions of movement, for example, play, bodily experience, practicing, social interaction, or physical exercise. Another implication, which would also be related to the ASK-argument, could be to let students choose between various testing arenas, to form "testing families" without comparing achievements, where students work collaboratively with others. A pedagogical focus on promoting testing arenas would be a way of acknowledging the value of what Kretchmar (2006) has called "just-right challenges" or "just-right problems" in physical education, as an alternative to "easy streets." He argues that "if we want to invite our students to turn and patiently grow a new playground, that playground almost invariably has to challenge them in some way" (p. 352). In light of this, a way to maintain appropriate challenges and difficulties as part of physical education, even if the sweet tension related to contesting is not available, could be to promote testing arenas with a pedagogical focus on practicing (Aggerholm, Standal, Barker, & Larsson, 2017; Barker, Aggerholm, Standal, & Larsson, 2017). A pedagogical challenge in this respect would be to design and present just-right challenges that involve criteria that are not quantifiable and directly comparable. Most students will compare if they get the chance, but a constructive way to avoid this could be inspired by the kind of challenges that make up lifestyle sports such as parkour and skateboarding. Here tricks and moves can provide meaningful challenges that can be inspired by others, but need not be compared with others (Aggerholm & Højbjerre Larsen, 2017).

This way of avoiding comparative contests can also form part of the ADAPT-argument. Shields and Bredemeier (2010, 2011) have argued that Kohn's conception of competition is, in fact, an account of what they call "decompetition," which they describe to be "contesting that has devolved or decomposed into *striving against*" (2010, p. 64). True competition, on the other hand, is a form of contesting that involves partnership and *striving with* (cf. the argument of Drewe, 1998 mentioned in the introduction). From that perspective, competition has a place in physical education. More specifically, it would be aligned with the ADAPT-argument in the sense that it involves working on and affecting change in the social climate and individual attitudes. Shields and Bredemeier's different way of approaching and thinking about competition involves, among other aspects, seeing opponents as partners and enablers rather than enemies, focusing on process rather than outcome, and aiming for learning, mastery, and personal best rather than domination, conquest, and superiority. It is in line with Hyland (1978); 1985) and Simon's (2010) accounts of competition described earlier and the ADAPT-argument could in relation to

this concern pedagogical work on the social climate in classes. Along the same line, Loland (2006) has described the importance of pedagogical competency and the establishing of the socio-psychological and motivational climate if moral development is to occur in physical education. Part of this could be to emphasize and reward other aspects of participation than winning, and for example focus on mastery, self-knowledge, personal development, and collaboration instead of performance and achievement.

However, the approach to competition involved in this part of the ADAPT-argument could be seen as conflicting with formal requirements for contests. It could, for example, be argued that such adaptations do not solve the hard problem related to meeting the principle of fair opportunity. If contesters are not equal at the outset it would merely result in pseudo-competition with no balanced opposition and no sweet tension, where participants can for the same reason not really attempt to win. As Fraleigh (1984, pp. 35–50) has argued, trying to win is the end of good contests in sport. If participants do not adopt the end of striving to win as their personal intended end, the contesting activity ceases to exist. Thus, enacted in this way the implication of the ADAPT-argument would be very similar to the AVOID-argument.

Based on the ADAPT-argument, teachers could also adapt the competitive activities through forms of regulation and differentiation, such as *classification* of students in order to level the playing field and make competitions fair. Even if physical education does not rest upon the same meritocratic scheme as youth sport, there is sometimes room for regulating contests and classifying participants in order to secure equal opportunities. In the literature, this is discussed as graded competition (Hastie, Ward, & Brock, 2017; Siedentop et al., 2011). However, such classification that involves selection based on skill level implies a hierarchical ranking that arguably infuses a sportive logic into the school, which can be seen as problematic in relation to the educational aims in schools concerning inclusion and embracing diversity.

Another part of the ADAPT-argument could imply that teachers should *modify* the activities to make them fair for participants. An implication for physical education would be that teachers modify the classic competitive games (e.g. football, handball, tennis, or volleyball), which are well known for many students with experience from organized youth sport and which, for the same reason, results in unequal playgrounds and unbalanced competition. An approach that combines this with the ASK argument could be so-called student-designed games (Casey & Hastie, 2011; Casey, Hastie, & Jump, 2016). The idea here is that students go through a process of designing their own games, which according to the authors, may make the games more age appropriate and more innovative than traditional physical education games. On the positive side, these ways of modifying classic games could enable students to experience the sweet tension of good contests, but at the same time it could be argued that this would fail to prepare young people for participation in a large part of contemporary physical culture (cf. the aims related to the ACCEPT-argument). Also, by changing the structure of competitive activities in order to give everyone, regardless of their skill level, a fair chance to win would be at odds with the idea of competitions in sport where it is precisely the difference in skilled performance that should determine the outcome of the contest. Indeed, it could be argued that if activities are undertaken with the aim of winning, it would have to be either a traditional sporting competition or it would not be competition at all.

In relation to the ACCEPT-argument, we want to stress that accepting negative experiences should not imply a *laissez faire* attitude from teachers. On the contrary, instead of, or in addition to, simply providing activities of a competitive nature, the teacher should provide the students with ample time to reflect critically on their experiences with competition. This is in line with Dewey´s pragmatic educational philosophy and also recent development of critical movement literacy (Standal, 2015). This also means that an educational process that leads students to the conclusion that "competition is not for me" would have to be followed by teaching based on the ASK-argument: it would make little sense to continue to provide students with activities and experiences that they have taken a reflected stance against.

Regarding the ASK-argument, the scope of the students' choices of course depends on the specific context and available resources, and it may range from choosing between different kinds of activities in a lesson, to engaging students in curriculum development. In any case, it would require teachers to listen and respond to the students' voices, which is well aligned with approaches related to cooperative learning (Casey, Goodyear, & Dyson, 2015; Dyson & Casey, 2012; Dyson, Colby, & Barratt, 2016) and participatory methods (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012b, 2010, 2012a) in physical education. By including student-centered and inquiry-based pedagogy it could also relate to critical pedagogy and activist approaches (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Oliver & Kirk, 2014, 2017). Thus understood, the ASK-argument can have a critical and transformative potential, for example if physical educators use inquiry-based pedagogy to negotiate and possibly transform understandings of embodiment, social relations, and/or inequality in various forms of practice, not least competitive activities. The ASK-argument therefore has the potential to facilitate the engagement and inclusion of vulnerable or insecure students in physical education.

Oliver and Kirk (2014) stress that a student-centered approach does not mean doing everything the students want to do. We believe the same should be the case for pedagogical work related to the ASK-argument, and one could furthermore argue that the ACCEPT-argument is a pre-condition for the ASK-argument, because in order to make an informed choice, students must already have experiences with competition. Even if students usually bring with them experiences of competition from sports and other competitive settings outside of school, simply ASKing them about whether they want to participate in competition in physical education or not, risks that students base their choices on tacit, erroneous, or at least not well grounded, assumptions.

Finally, a caveat of the ACCEPT-argument would be ascertaining if competitive activities are all students meet in physical education. To avoid this and to make the ACCEPT-argument reasonable, it should form part of models-based practice in physical education (see e.g. Casey, 2014, 2017; Dyson, Kulinna, & Metzler, 2016; Kirk, 2013). This implies that teaching includes a variety of pedagogical aims and methods, and that students meet a variety of movement activities and physical cultures, not just competitive ones.

Concluding remarks

This article has sought to raise questions concerning competition in physical education and suggested ways that discussions and arguments can be informed by insights from philosophy of sport and educational philosophy. We have argued that existing

contributions from the philosophy of sport tend to overlook both existing and potential problems related to competition in a school context. By considering key contextual differences between organized youth sport and physical education in relation to sport philosophical principles regarding consent and fair opportunity, we have sought to reconsider the conditions for competition in physical education, which can add a more critical dimension to the existing contributions.

This, we believe, can open for more nuanced discussions concerning competition in physical education. To inform and guide such discussions we have proposed and discussed four key arguments concerning competition in physical education: the AVOID-, ASK-, ADAPT-, and ACCEPT-arguments. These drew in various ways on educational philosophy to provide normative content to the discussion. They can provide different answers to the question of whether competition ought to form part of physical education, and if/how competitive sports and activities can have educational value in a school context.

The aim of our analysis and discussion in this article has been to contribute to the philosophy of physical education, and we have sought to illustrate why it can be of value, if future research that will feed this field comes from both philosophy of sport and philosophy of education. In addition, our analysis can at the same time show how philosophy of sport could benefit from considerations regarding competition in physical education. It might, for example, inspire sport philosophers to include more contextual reflections when evaluating the moral status of competitive activities.

It is our hope that the clarifications and arguments in this article can be of value on various levels and contribute to future research, pedagogical practice, and policy making. Rather than seeking to settle the discussion, we have aimed to encourage and open up for further discussion about the position and practice of competition in physical education. Depending on, for example, the specific context, the particular activities, available resources, as well as the educational aims and values, we believe that it can be valid and reasonable to argue that we should AVOID competitive activities in physical education, that teachers should ASK students if they want to engage in competition with others or not, that we should ADAPT competitive activities to secure fair opportunities for all, and/or that we should ACCEPT that some have negative experiences with competition because this can be educational if students get to reflect on their experience. Being reflective about these ways of arguing can, we hope, contribute to fruitful and constructive discussions about competition in physical education.

Notes

1. These positive accounts of the moral status of competitive sport are dominant, but they are, to be sure, not uncontested in the philosophy of sport. Kohn's (1992) radical critique of the mutually exclusive goal attainment in interdependent competition, which is described in relation to the AVOID-argument below, has had some influence. A similar view is, for example, expressed by Møller (2010), as he states that "sport is not a moral business" (p. 21). He argues that competitive sport is rather a "cultivation of the will to win taken to the threshold of evil" (p. 24).
2. For example, in the UK and United States they appear to be more intertwined than in Scandinavian countries. Also, while the sporting logic of competition in organized youth sport is relatively universal, physical education as a school subject is more contextual and dependent upon the curricula of different school systems. It is beyond the scope of the

present analysis to engage with particular national contexts and the wide differences between the curricula of physical education.

3 These three contextual differences are inspired by, but do not entirely coincide with, the analysis of Martelaer and Theeboom (2006).

4 We rely here on Kretchmar's (2012) argument that the zero-sum aspect is a central and valuable part of competition in sport, and that neglecting, downplaying, or removing this aim and quality can easily underplay the poignant drama of sport. Importantly, this aim of excelling over others in sporting contests, and the related zero-sum qualities, does not imply that competitions cannot be friendly and/or morally defensible in organized youth sport.

5 This kind of argument can, for example, be found in the Sport Education model (Siedentop et al., 2011), which aims to make students enthusiastic sportspersons.

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