

Friluftsliv within Physical Education – a text analysis of Swedish curriculum documents

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Introduction

In this paper I will focus on how Swedish teachers in Physical Education (PE) formulate their local syllabi regarding the teaching in outdoor recreation. More specifically I will analyse the relation between the aims in the national Swedish PE curriculum regarding outdoor recreation and its formulation in local PE syllabi in compulsory schools in Sweden. The reasons for the study are based on the fact that outdoor recreation is assigned great value in the PE curriculum (Skolverket 2000a) and in the Swedish Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) (Backman 2008), but the actual teaching in both compulsory and upper secondary school in Sweden is limited (Al-Abdi 1984; Backman 2004; Skolverket 2005). Therefore, the local PE syllabi can contribute with significant information of how PE teachers think of their teaching generally and, in this paper, their teaching in outdoor recreation specifically.

There have been several attempts to find a suitable translation for the Scandinavian concept friluftsliv. Outdoor recreation, outdoor education and outdoor life are some of the concepts used but of which none has been claimed to be an exact translation (Faarlund 1994; Sandell 1991). Therefore more and more researchers have recently used the concept of friluftsliv even in English texts referring to its specific relation to the Scandinavian tradition, culture, and landscape (see e.g. Backman 2008; Breivik 1989; Henderson & Vikander 2007; Sandell 2001). Based on this research, I will use the Scandinavian concept in this article. During the last two decades there has been an official definition of friluftsliv in Sweden.

Friluftsliv means living and physical activity in open air with the purpose of environmental changes and obtaining experiences of nature – without demands of achievement or competition (Friluftsguppen 1999, p. 9)

To analyse and discuss the relation between the formulation of friluftsliv in the Swedish national PE curriculum and in the local PE syllabi, I have taken a starting

point with the research of Basil Bernstein (1971) and his theories regarding reproduction and change in school. Foremost, I have taken note of how Bernstein uses the *collection* code and the *integrated* code as well as the concept *classification* as analytical tools to decide the structure of the levels which he means constitute the relation between the curriculum and the actual teaching. By codes he is referring to the principles which decides and expresses meaning. A curriculum within the collection code is characterised by its content standing in a close relationship to each other with distinct boundaries separating the content. Towards the collection code Bernstein holds the integrated code which is characterised by the boundaries separating subjects being more blurred and the content standing in an open relationship to each other (1971 p. 51-54). By classification Bernstein refers to "the degree of boundary maintenance between contents" (1971. p. 49). These theories have then been expressed in an extensive Swedish research tradition regarding curriculum theory with Ulf P. Lundgren (1983) as one of its main representatives.

In the latest Swedish national evaluation of PE, friluftsliv is a very limited part of the teaching content. The majority of the pupils also express their lack of knowledge in friluftsliv (Skolverket 2005, p. 24-25 and p. 156). Since the removal of the earlier regulated days especially assigned to friluftsliv in the curriculum reform of 1994, the teaching in friluftsliv in Swedish schools seems to have decreased. Instead it appears that the teaching of friluftsliv contains more activities of a sports character (Backman 2004). In earlier studies I have tried to find an explanation for this condition by exploring friluftsliv at Swedish PETE (Backman 2007). In the Swedish PE teachers' labour journal, friluftsliv is constantly debated but not so much from the stand point of seeking explanations to the lack of teaching. Instead the debate revolves around methodical and didactical issues regarding the realisation of friluftsliv teaching in schools (Nylander 2006; Wadman 2005).

From an international perspective there have been several studies of curriculum issues in PE (see e.g. Kirk & MacDonald 2001; Penney 2006; Underwood 1983) and there is also an intensive discussion on outdoor issues in school (see e.g. Bunting 2006; Cooper 2000; Davies 1992). However, there is a lack of empirical studies with focus on outdoor recreation and outdoor education within PE in school (see e.g. Zink & Burrows 2008). In the light of this, my intention is to illuminate what the

transformation of friluftsliv from the national Swedish PE curriculum to local PE syllabi can say about its position within PE and also about the possibilities for PE to contribute to a movement towards an integrated schoolcode.

Method

The syllabus is the only document where the Swedish teachers are obliged to formulate their interpretations from the national curriculum. These documents can therefore be seen as an informative source as to how teachers think about their teaching regarding aims, content and criteria for assessment. The PE syllabi in this study have been collected within the extensive Swedish research program *School-Sports-Health* (SSH) (Engström 2008).

Among the 47 compulsory schools attending the SSH-project in 2007, 31 syllabi documents was collected from the PE teachers. Since the collected PE syllabi were written in Swedish I have translated the quotations presented in this paper. The analysis has resulted in a presentation of two arenas: *the arena of formulation* which is constituted by an historical retrospect of how friluftsliv is mentioned in the national Swedish PE curriculum and the general Swedish curriculum from 1955; and the *arena of transformation* in which the analysis of the collected syllabi is presented.

The arena of formulation

A specific phenomenon in the Swedish school is the so called 'friluftsliv-days', days that have been specifically assigned to friluftsliv for the pupils and the personnel of the schools. In this analysis of text documents I will therefore try to separate formulations regarding the friluftsliv-days and friluftsliv within PE although, in practice, these two arenas probably often share a common ground.

Friluftsliv on the friluftsliv-days

In the curriculum from 1955 it is stressed that "friluftsliv-days and time for play" should correspond to at least one and a half hour a week or from 10 to 12 full days per year. The aim and content with the friluftsliv-days are further developed in a proposal for the curriculum of 1957 (Skolberedningen 1957). The curriculums for the compulsory school of 1962 and 1969 are to a great extent similar regarding the friluftsliv-days. One of the characteristics is the regulations of specified content in

terms of activities and the emphasis on the possibilities to integrate teaching in different school subjects (Skolöverstyrelsen 1969; Kungliga Skolöverstyrelsen 1962).

Despite the fact that the mentioning of specified activities can be seen as an expression of a strong classification and a collective code, it is also possible to see signs of integrating intentions through the encouragement of the crossing of subject boundaries. It should be stressed that in the curriculum, the friluftsliv-days have never been expressed as a part of the subject PE even though this might have been the case at many schools. In the curriculum for the compulsory school from 1980, a loosening of the classification can be discerned, in terms of that the activities are no longer specified (Skolöverstyrelsen 1980). In the current curriculum reform of 1994, the regulation of friluftsliv-days was erased and today it is up to the local school to give resources for this matter (Svenning 2001).

In the Swedish curriculum, the regulated days devoted to friluftsliv has decreased dramatically during the last 50 years. However, it should be emphasised that there are not many schools that do not spend any time on friluftsliv-days (Backman 2004). The content of the friluftsliv-days in the curriculum have been developed from a relatively high degree of classification into having been successively loosened up.

Friluftsliv within PE

The Swedish PE curriculum from 1955 until today have developed from expressing specific details regarding teaching content into a less specified declaration. In the PE curriculum from 1962 and 1969, the concept friluftsliv does not occur at all. Instead, several outdoor activities such as crosscountry-skiing, skating, orienteering and swimming are mentioned. It was also stressed that the PE teacher was expected to use both the friluftsliv-days and the ordinary PE lessons in order to make the teaching in time-demanding outdoor activities possible (Kungliga Skolöverstyrelsen 1962; Skolöverstyrelsen 1969).

In the organisation of the PE curriculum from 1980 "Friluftsliv and orienteering" is mentioned as a unit and as one of the main elements of PE, leaving the impression that there is no distinct boundary separating these activities (Skolöverstyrelsen

1980). In the PE curriculum from 1994 (revised in year 2000), the following is mentioned about the structure and character of the subject:

The subject is linked to the well-established cultural traditions existing in Sweden concerning the enjoyment of nature. Through outdoor activities and experiencing, pupils gain awareness, knowledge and experiences which can stimulate a continuing interest in outdoor life, nature and environmental issues. The subject also helps to stimulate involvement in the importance of protecting and safeguarding nature and the environment. (Skolverket, 2000b).

In addition to swimming, orienteering, ergonomics, dance and emergence situations connected with water, friluftsliv is one of the few elements expressed as an "aim-to-attain" in Swedish PE. After the course is finished the pupil are expected to be able to:

...have a basic knowledge of outdoor life as well as a familiarity of the principles of the Right of common access. (year 5) (Skolverket, 2000c)

...be able to plan and carry out a field trip in nature during different seasons of the year.(year 9) (Skolverket, 2000d)

'The right of common access', a non-legislated tradition with its history back in the beginning of the 20th century, can be described as a confidence given to the Swedes, allowing them to take part of and do trips in their land and countryside without many detailed restrictions (Sandell 2001). The current PE curriculum is characterised by the idea of decentralisation, where PE teachers are given the responsibility to interpret the aims and concepts in the curriculum. This has resulted in increased possibilities for collaboration between subjects (Karlefors 2002) as well as a decrease in the realised teaching of friluftsliv (Backman 2004). There is reason to believe that the PE teachers' interpretation of the concept friluftsliv (Backman 2005) is a decisive issue for the transformation of friluftsliv-teaching into local PE syllabi. The analysis in terms of degree of classification in this study can perhaps say

something about the position of friluftsliv-teaching within the Swedish school and its contribution to a movement towards an integrated school code.

The arena of transformation

There is a significant variation in the logic of structure among the different syllabi. From a first rough analysis, three different categories appear: the aims with PE, the content of PE and the criteria for assessment in PE, and each of the analysed syllabi usually consist of one of these three categories. Some of the syllabi are very short and poor in their formulations, a few to the extent that it is difficult to assess which category to refer to. Other syllabi are similar to the formulations in the national PE curriculum. In some cases, this similarity is more of an identical copy, a feature also found in other Swedish studies of PE teachers' work with curriculum issues (see e.g. Larsson 2004).

Activities or learning?

A common logic appearing in the analysis is to divide PE into different activities. This logic has also been identified in other studies of Swedish PE and has resulted in a discussion around the educational consequences of the domination of an activity-discourse and the lack of a learning-discourse (Larsson 2004; Annerstedt 1991). In some of the analysed syllabi, friluftsliv (or nature-related topics) was not mentioned by word, despite its prominent position in the national PE curriculum (Skolverket 2000b).

The elements included in PE at the x-school is: play and ballgames; dance and movement to music; track and field; fitness training; orienteering; gymnastics; swimming; skating; theory e.g. physiology, ergonomics, CPR.

(School nr.

15)

One explanation to the absence of friluftsliv in the example above is perhaps that since friluftsliv is not one single activity it is difficult to fit into the domination activity-discourse within PE. This gives reasons to discuss, on one hand, what is possible to mention as friluftsliv in a context of PE (see e.g. Friluftsguppen 1999; Svenning 2001; Backman 2005), and on the other, what is the position of friluftsliv within

Swedish PE and what might be the educational consequences of this position. There were some attempts to divide the subject after other kinds of logic than after the mentioned activity-discourse.

- Historical perspectives regarding the history and traditions of sport.
- Environmental perspectives are central to PE issues regarding nature, friluftsliv and lifestyle.
- International perspectives in terms of games, dances and sports from different countries.
- Ethical perspectives in terms of rules, friendship and respect.

(School nr.
13)

Raising issues regarding learning can cause confusion within the dominating activity-discourse in Swedish PE. In lack of another rhetoric, learning in PE often becomes learning in an activity which is traditionally measured by the physical and technical ability to perform the activity. The learning-dimension in friluftsliv appears to be hard for PE teachers to relate to. In the following categories we shall see different ways of addressing friluftsliv within Swedish PE.

Friluftsliv=orienteering?

A common phenomenon found in eight of the analysed PE syllabi is that, apart from the national PE curriculum, friluftsliv and orienteering are not separated but mentioned as a unit. The consequence of this condition is that friluftsliv is not defined in terms of learning, content or criteria for assessment but instead focus is put on orienteering, a condition also stressed by Harris (1999) in his study of outdoor education in England. Below are an example of the criteria for grading in the element mentioned "Orienteering and friluftsliv".

Pass

With a certain amount of guidance and with help from a map be able to locate yourself in forest and land. Take part in practical and theoretical exercises in orienteering.

Pass with Distinction	Show an understanding for the map and be able to adjust the choice of direction after the terrain. Be able to orienteer without hinder in partly unknown terrain.
Pass with Special Distinction	Show a good understanding for the principles of the map and orienteering. Be able to orienteer safely in unknown terrain.

(School nr.

3)

This illuminates the difficulties of formulating friluftsliv in terms of learning and criteria for assessment in a PE-context. It appears that the Swedish teaching in friluftsliv has a relatively low degree of classification as it is possible to be substituted with other teaching content. Judging by PE teachers' detailed conceptual frame orienteering seems to have a relatively high degree of classification.

'The right of common access' and 'clothes after weather'

Far from all the participating schools in the study have tried to define content in the friluftsliv-teaching. However, when this occurs, formulations often include 'The right of common access' and to have the ability to choose appropriate clothes. In the example below the content and aim regarding friluftsliv is expressed.

Aim: The pupil should have knowledge of; The right of common access, clothing for different seasons, the use of friluftsliv-material, technique and equipment for spending the night in nature, some games in nature, something of survival-technique.

(School nr. 5)

In the Swedish PE context, 'The right of common access', can be seen as an example of a local and contextual expression which, according to Brooks (2002), is lacking in the outdoor teaching. The main impression from the analysis of the of the local PE syllabi is the significant variation of the PE teachers' interpretation of friluftsliv. This observation connects to the conclusion from Lindensjö and Lundgren

on how one of the consequences of decentralisation could be a discrepancy of teaching (2000). So, what is the problem with PE teachers making their own interpretations of friluftsliv in relation to their local context? Isn't this what professionalism is about? When occasionally formulated in terms of learning, friluftsliv becomes (roughly speaking) orienteering, 'The right of common access' and the ability to choose suitable clothes for being outdoors. Formulations regarding nature meetings, environmental perspectives and a sustainable development are (almost) never mentioned in the studied PE syllabi. The occurring (and non-occurring) themes in the analysis indicate a further need for an intensified discussion around what friluftsliv can be about, the purpose of teaching it and its didactical possibilities. Using Bernstein's theoretical concepts, I will now make some concluding remarks from the study.

Conclusions

I hold for it to be difficult to claim that the entire subject of PE in Sweden is characterised by a collective school code with a high degree of classification. The lack of a developed language regarding friluftsliv in a PE context, and its interchangeability towards other PE content, indicates a low degree of classification and blurred boundaries within the content of PE. From a perspective of legitimacy, this condition is problematic in the sense that Swedish PE teachers can choose to ignore obligatory aims regarding friluftsliv in the national PE curriculum, without this being noticed. A high degree of classification would vouch for the self-evident position of a subject or an element within a subject and can not easily be disregarded. For PE in Sweden, it seems as though there is a concealed curriculum working alongside the manifest one. The elements emphasised in the national PE curriculum (dance, friluftsliv, orienteering, ergonomics and emergence situations connected with water) has a low degree of classification but when popular sports activities, and their inherent logic from the Swedish sports movement, are allowed to dominate this contributes to a high degree of classification for PE in the public awareness. However, if PE in Sweden were to have a high degree of classification 'for real', the teachers would regard the formulations in the curriculum as more of an obligation to fulfil than what now seems to be the case.

According to Bernstein, the collective school code is preservative for our way of thinking about learning and he claims this to be a matter of power and control. He asks for more of integration of school subjects and a weakening of the boundaries separating them in order to increase our creativity.

I suggest that the movement away from collection to integrated codes symbolizes that there is a crisis in society's basic classifications and frames, and therefore a crisis in its structures of power and principles of control. The movement from this point of view represents an attempt to declassify and so alter power structures and principles of control; in so doing to unfreeze the structuring of knowledge and to change the boundaries of consciousness. (Bernstein 1971, p. 67)

Using nature and the outdoors for teaching involves possibilities for innovative and creative thinking around how to integrate areas of knowledge. A teaching in friluftsliv corresponding to the formulations in the national curriculum could have influence on a movement towards an integrated school code and could help loosen the surveillance over territorial subject boundaries. However, this would involve that teaching in friluftsliv can not be interpreted to be any teaching practice in PE, which now appears to be the case in Swedish compulsory school. It appears as though the movement towards an integrated school code presupposes the collaboration between subjects whose positions are already well-established and whose classification is relatively strong in relation to other subjects or elements within subjects. As long as friluftsliv have such a peripheral position in Swedish PE there will be no possibilities for it to contribute to move towards an integrated school code.

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