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Different versions of assessment *for* learning in the subject of physical education

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ABSTRACT

Background: Assessment *for* learning (AfL) is now marketed across the Western world as a key to an improved goal attainment in most school subjects. The concept has also attracted increased interest in the international research field of physical education (PE) in recent years. According to (Chan, K., P. J. Hay, and R. Tinning. 2011. "Understanding the Pedagogic Discourse of Assessment in Physical Education." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* 2 (1): 3–18) assessment both influences the teaching and learning process and defines its product, which is referred to as the 'backwash effect'. Contrasting versions of AfL will therefore have different consequences, regarding the constitution of teacher and student subjectivities as well as characteristics of the subject content. These consequences can be understood in terms of didactics, which in a European research tradition focuses on the relationship between teacher, student and subject content (Hudson, B., and M. A. Meyer, eds. 2011. *Beyond Fragmentation: Didactics, Learning and Teaching in Europe*. Opladen and Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers).

Purpose and research question: The purpose of the study is to identify teacher and student subjectivities as well as subject content, constituted through different versions of AfL in school PE. The identification of the different versions of AfL and the relations established through each of them is facilitated by the research question: 'What is performed and produced in the formative assessment practice of PE?' The findings are then discussed on the basis of the question: 'Assessment for *what* learning?'

Methods: In order to answer the research question, a mixed method of lesson observations and semi-structured interviews was used (cf. Patton, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc). Thirteen PE lessons were observed at two different upper secondary schools, involving four classes attaining both vocational and pre-university programmes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 of the students and their two male PE teachers. The empirical material consisted of field notes and transcriptions of the interviews, with an emphasis on the latter. In the first step of the analysis the material was categorised by means of the five key strategies of AfL (William, D. 2011. "What is Assessment for Learning?" *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 37: 3–14. Elsevier), in order to identify different ways of realising the concept in the subject of PE. The second step was a combination of a performativity (Ball, S. J. 2003. "The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity." *Journal of*

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Education Policy 18 (2): 215–228) and a didactic (Hudson, B. 2002. “Holding Complexity and Searching for Meaning: Teaching as Reflective Practice.” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 34 (1): 43–57) analysis, which clarified the relations established under different circumstances in the formative assessment practice.

Findings: The findings highlight five versions of AfL in PE, named after their most prominent features or functions, AfL as: (i) Empowerment, (ii) Physical Activation, (iii) Constructive Alignment, (iv) Grade Generation, (v) Negotiation. ‘Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them’ (Davies, B., and R. Harré. 2001. “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves.” In *Discourse Theory and Practice*, edited by M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S. J. Yates. London: Sage, 263). Accordingly, different teacher and student subjectivities as well as characteristics of the subject content are constituted in each of these fabrications.

Conclusions: The so-called ‘backwash effect’ (Torrance, H. 2012. “Formative Assessment at the Crossroads: Conformative, Deformative and Transformative Assessment.” *Oxford Review of Education* 38 (3): 323–342. London: Routledge) implies that the contrasting versions of AfL promote different kinds of learning, such as: (i) increased autonomy, (ii) participation in a community of practice, (iii) acquisition of prescribed abilities, (iv) criteria compliance, (v) group development. However, the big idea of AfL is to adapt the teaching to the students and not the students to the standards.

Introduction

Assessment *for* learning (AfL) is now marketed across the Western world as a key to an improved goal attainment in most school subjects (see for example Wiliam and Leahy 2015). The concept has also attracted increased interest in the international research field of physical education (PE) in recent years (Borghouts, Slingerland, and Haerens 2016; Leirhaug and MacPhail 2015; López-Pastor et al. 2013; MacPhail and Halbert 2010; Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave 2013). However, the focus in this article is on how AfL is realised in the subject of PE and health, also referred to as PE, in Sweden. Inspired by López-Pastor et al. (2013), a wide definition of AfL is applied in the current study that embraces different forms of integrated assessment, such as formative assessment, authentic assessment, peer-assessment and self-assessment. It is important to note that these alternative forms of assessment are indeed themselves terms with varied meanings and conceptualisations. Nevertheless, the wide interpretation of AfL corresponds with a common definition of the pedagogical approach:

Assessment for learning is *any* assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is *to serve the purpose of promoting pupils’ learning*. (Black et al. 2002, in the prefix, emphasis added)

According to Chan, Hay, and Tinning (2011) assessment influences the teaching and learning process and defines its product, often referred to as the ‘backwash effect’. Different versions of AfL will therefore have different consequences for the constitution of teacher and student subjectivities and the characteristics of the subject content. These consequences can be understood in terms of didactics, which in a European research tradition focuses on the triadic relation between teacher, student and subject content. This relationship is often illustrated by means of the didactic triangle (Hudson and Meyer 2011).

The purpose of the study is to identify teacher and student subjectivities as well as subject content, constituted through different versions of AfL in school PE. The identification of the different versions of AfL and the relations established through each of them is facilitated by the research question: ‘What is performed and produced in the formative assessment practice of PE?’ The findings are then discussed on the basis of the question: ‘Assessment for *what* learning?’

A common point of view is that AfL is grounded in a constructivist perspective on learning (see for instance Hay 2006). However, Black and Wiliam (2009) regard the concept as more of a pragmatic pedagogical approach, based on ‘what works’ in the teaching practice, which is why AfL can be categorised as a ‘self-regulated learning model’. Black and Wiliam (2009) suggest that AfL should be integrated into the teaching and learning process in order to adapt the teaching to the needs of the students. This can be achieved by using different AfL techniques to enhance student learning through peer- and self-assessment. However, summative assessment techniques can also have formative functions, as long as the procedures are accompanied by feedback (Taras 2005). What really matters, according to Wiliam (2011), is the *function* of the assessment, not what it is called. Different functions of assessment have recently been presented and discussed in *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* (PESP) by Borghouts, Slingerland, and Haerens (2016). Whereas they refer to the common notion of formative and summative functions, the current study considers the assessment function as an empirical question. What matters is what the assessment produces, not its prescribed function. In this article the product of AfL may thus include both intended and unintended consequences (cf. Hay and Penney 2013) as well as different outcomes of the ‘backwash effect’ (cf. Chan, Hay, and Tinning 2011).

AfL is based on five key strategies: (1) clarifying and sharing learning intentions with the students, (2) engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning, (3) providing feedback that moves the learner forward, (4) activating students as learning resources for one another and (5) activating students as owners of their own learning (Wiliam 2011). These strategies are ‘tight but loose’, which means that they are indisputable, even though teachers are free to invent their own ways of realising them. This flexibility enables different interpretations and applications of AfL. The three basic questions posed by AfL – *Where is the learner going? Where is the learner right now? How does the learner get there?* (Wiliam 2011) – require that teachers and students cooperate in the teaching and learning practice in the quest for goal attainment. This interactive process can take various forms. Thus, ‘the difficulty of putting research into practice’ (Wiliam, Lee, Harrison and Black, 2004, 51) serves as a point of departure in this research project. As Broadfoot (2002, 288) clarifies: ‘we cannot assume that assessment – or indeed any other educational practice – will work in the way intended’.

Previous research

The assessment mission of PE is widely regarded as problematic. Penney et al. (2009) argue that assessment is either product-oriented and emphasises health effects, or de-contextualised and focuses on isolated physical skills. A common problem in Sweden is that PE teachers tend to take students’ behaviour and attitudes – such as attendance and willingness to exert themselves – more into account than their abilities and learning in the subject. Svennberg, Meckbach, and Redelius (2014) have explored PE teachers’ ‘gut feelings’ and highlighted some of the implications of a lack of transparency in the assessment practice. Annerstedt and Larsson (2010) define the same gut feelings as PE teachers’ internalised criteria that do not always correspond to the stipulated knowledge requirements. Redelius and Hay (2012) show that many students who are asked about what is assessed in PE also focus on attitudinal, dispositional and behavioural characteristics, rather than learning outcomes. AfL appears to be a viable solution to these accountability problems. There is some consensus on the potential benefits of the pedagogical approach (see for example Hay and Penney 2013; Leirhaug and Annerstedt 2015; Leirhaug and MacPhail 2015; MacPhail and Halbert 2010; Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave 2013; Penney et al. 2009). However, even though many PE teachers in the Western world have started to use AfL, there is still a lack of critical engagement in its possible consequences (Leirhaug and MacPhail 2015; Leirhaug, MacPhail, and Annerstedt 2016). Thus, an improved assessment literacy amongst practitioners is crucial. This concept embraces *comprehension, application, interpretation and critical engagement with assessment* (DinanThompson and Penney 2015; Hay and Penney 2013; Leirhaug, MacPhail, and Annerstedt 2016). According to Hay and Penney (2013, 81) assessment literacy ‘refers to capacities of teachers and students to engage with and utilise assessment practices and outcomes in a way that optimises learning possibilities’.

There are many ways of tackling the ambiguous task of assessment, such as being accountable for equivalent grades and the promotion of students' learning at the same time. In a previous article Björn Tolgfors and Marie Öhman (2016) studied the possible implications of AfL in PE from a governmentality perspective. The analysis in that study shows that the pedagogical approach takes different forms in different types of governance, in a tension field between freedom and control. In the current article, the intention is to investigate the formative assessment practice of PE further in order to reveal what is performed and produced in terms of triadic relations between the teacher, student and subject content.

Theory

The combination of a performativity and a didactic perspective is used to achieve the purpose of the study. The performativity perspective focuses on what is performed and produced in the formative assessment practice of PE, whereas the didactic perspective focuses on the triadic relations established through different versions of AfL.

The performativity perspective

When viewing formative assessment practice from a *performativity perspective*, the focus is on how current educational policy, the curriculum and other aspects at a macro level determine teachers' and students' possible action spectra. Moreover, the research interest is how policy takes shape in the interactions between teachers and students at a micro level: 'Performativity works from the outside in and from the inside out' (Ball 2000, 4). Thus, a fundamental methodological stance in this study is that different teacher and student subjectivities and characteristics of the subject content are constituted in the cultural pattern of the PE practice. Previously in PESP, Larsson, Fagrell, and Redelius (2009, 7) define performativity as: '[...] a term designating that discursive practices perform objects, acts, desire, identities and self-knowledge – a certain kind of knowledge about, and an attitude towards, oneself and the world'.

Furthermore, Alexander, Anderson, and Gallegos (2005, 2) explain that the performativity perspective can be used as a critical reflexive lens in studies of different educational aspects. With reference to Lyotard, they define the concept of performativity as: 'Maximizing efficiency by controlling outcomes and creating a culture of accountability'. However, Ball et al. (2012, 92) emphasise the possibility to act in different ways on the predominant governance: 'Compliance is the key – acceptance or rejection the only options.' This means that the accountability regime can either be obeyed or resisted. Although Beach and Dovemark (2009) associate performativity with accountability, they also identify two other important discourses for how teachers act in their teaching practices. The first includes the promotion of *creativity* in terms of individual initiatives, imagination and problem-solving. The second emphasises *personal learning* in terms of taking the needs and interests of individual students into consideration.

The different expectations of policymakers, inspecting authorities and other people with an interest in education could lead to various adaptations of the formative assessment practice at a micro level:

It is not the possible certainty of always being seen that is the issue, as in the panopticon, it is the uncertainty and instability of being judged in different ways, by different means, through different agents; the 'bringing-off' of performances - the changing demands, expectations and indicators that make us continually accountable and constantly recorded. (Ball 2000, 2)

In relation to assessment, this means that *different versions of AfL* will be shaped in the teaching practice through 'micro-political negotiations' (Webb 2006), depending on how teachers and students act on each other's actions (cf. Foucault 1982/1994). For instance Charteris (2016) highlights dialogic feedback in divergent AfL as an example of 'intelligent accountability' in 'the spirit of AfL'. Moreover, Torrance (2012) introduces the notion of *transformative assessment* as opposed to

conformative assessment, which may even be *deformative* for some students. Among other things, *transformative* assessment acknowledges the contingency of the assessment criteria and the potential of student influence in the assessment practice. According to Torrance (2015) the neo-liberal governance of the individual through AfL may also be challenged. From a sociocultural point of view, he raises the question: ‘What might assessment involve if it focused on the development and identification of collective understanding, collaboratively produced through educational experiences?’ (Torrance 2015, 12). These examples of critical research on AfL show that performativity does not have to imply an accountability regime. What is performed and produced in the formative assessment practice is an empirical question.

From performativity to didactics

The regular actions of the participants in the formative assessment practice constitute a cultural pattern, metaphorically seen as a *fabrication* (Evans et al. 2008). In the analysis of the empirical material different fabrications are named after their most prominent features, which correspond with the *functions* of AfL under different circumstances. The fabrications are productive: ‘The technologies of reform produce new kinds of teacher subjects’ (Ball 2003, 217). Accordingly, the teacher subject, constituted within each fabrication of AfL, sets specific prerequisites for students’ actions in the assessment practice. Hence, different student subjects are also discursively constituted: ‘Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them’ (Davies and Harré 2001, 263).

As stated earlier, Hudson and Meyer (2011) explain that research in the European didactic tradition often focuses on the triadic relation between teacher, student and subject content. This relation can be presented in the shape of a didactic triangle, where the mutual influence between its three corners is highlighted (Hudson 2002; Hudson and Meyer 2011; Öhman 2014). In the current study, the triadic relation is seen as an example of how a human and material relation can be established in the formative assessment practice. In the Swedish didactic tradition, ‘education is seen as a process in which the *learning, socialisation and constitution of subjects* takes place simultaneously’ (Öhman 2014, 40, my translation). This didactic perspective has also been applied to studies of learning movement cultures in PE practice by Quennerstedt and Larsson (2015). In a similar way, the current study is conducted at the micro level and focuses on cultural patterns in the formative assessment practice of PE. Leaning on Wetherell (1998), different pieces of the cultural pattern – fabrications of AfL – are cut out and compared: ‘Analysis works by carving out a piece of the argumentative social fabric for closer examination’ (Wetherell 1998, 403).

To sum up, ‘assessment not only influences the teaching and learning process, it also defines an education product’ (Chan, Hay, and Tinning 2011, 5). The performativity perspective is used to analyse what is performed and produced in the formative assessment practice of PE. The cultural patterns are metaphorically described as *fabrications of AfL*, named after their *functions*. Certain teacher and student subjectivities and characteristics of the subject content are constituted within each fabrication. Thus, *the didactic triangle* is used for ‘holding complexity’ in the findings of the study (Hudson 2002).

Method

In order to answer the research question, a mixed method of lesson observations and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers was used (cf. Patton 2002). Four classes and two PE teachers at two different upper secondary schools were purposefully selected by ‘intensity sampling’, which implies ‘information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely, for example, good students/poor students; above average/below average’ (Patton 2002, 243). More specifically, one of the schools mainly offered vocational training courses whereas the other one was a private school with programmes for students aiming for higher education at the university.

The field studies were planned together with the PE teachers, who let me know when certain learning activities involving assessment and feedback would take place in their respective courses. Thus, the lesson observations gave me access to the cultural pattern of the formative assessment practice of PE. Thirteen PE lessons, both outdoors and in the gym, were observed between May 2015 and November 2016. Students aged 17–18 with quite different ambitions in life as well as in the subject of PE were included in the study. This sample made it likely that different points of view of assessment would appear. During the observations some students were selected ‘ad hoc’ for interviews, based on their different performances in the teaching practice. Hence, 17 of the students were asked ‘laddered questions’ (Price, 2002, see below for further explanation) about their experiences of the integrated assessment process in the subject of PE. Their two male PE teachers were also interviewed in the same manner.

Drawing on Price (2002), the first level of the *laddered questions* focused on *action*. This involved questions about *how* the five key strategies of AfL were realised in practice. The second level of questions focused on *knowledge* about the integrated assessment process. The third level focused on *emotions, values* and *opinions* in relation to AfL in PE. The order of the laddered questions was not completely fixed. An interview guide was used to remind me, the researcher, of the areas of interest. All the participants gave their informed consent to taking part in the study in advance and were repeatedly asked if they were still willing to answer questions during the field study. An ethical precaution was to ensure confidentiality as far as this was possible. Altogether the empirical material consisted of 30 pages of handwritten field notes and 110 pages of computer-typed transcriptions.

The first step of the analysis was conducted by reformulating the five key strategies of AfL into questions posed to the material. In this article, only a few examples of these findings serve as illustrations of how AfL was realised in the different versions presented. The second step of the analysis was conducted at a higher level of abstraction and implied a metaphorical interpretation of the cultural patterns found in the formative assessment practice. Different *fabrications* (cf. Ball 2000, 2003; Evans et al. 2008; Wetherell 1998) of AfL were named after their most prominent features or *functions*. For instance, some of the participants’ descriptions of AfL formed a cultural pattern characterised by the students’ individual choice, creativity and personal responsibility (AfL as empowerment). A contrasting cultural pattern was characterised by standardisation, conformity and teacher control (AfL as grade generation).

Certain teacher and student subjectivities and characteristics of the subject content are constituted in each fabrication, which motivates the use of the didactic triangle (see Figure 1, below). The three subject positions are clarified in each corner (Hudson 2002; Öhman 2014). The reason for putting ‘AfL as ...’ at the centre of the triangle is to highlight that it is the triadic relations constituted by different versions of AfL that are in focus:

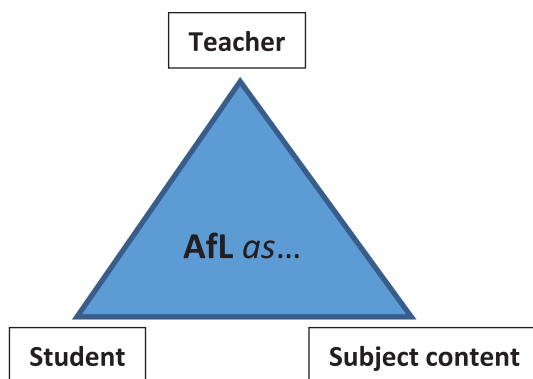


Figure 1. The didactic triangle (Hudson 2002, p. 49; cf. Öhman 2014, p. 37).

Table 1. The major findings of the study.

Versions of AfL	Teacher	Student	Subject content
AfL as empowerment	A coach	A self-regulating and creative subject	Individualised
AfL as physical activation	A fitness trainer/a games organiser	An active participant	Entertaining
AfL as constructive alignment	A deliverer	A customer	Quality assured
AfL as grade generation	An administrator	A grade hunter	Standardised
AfL as negotiation	A moderator	A negotiator	Negotiable

Findings

The findings highlight five contrasting versions of AfL in the subject of PE, through which different teacher and student subjectivities and characteristics of the subject content are constituted. These are listed in Table 1 and then explained separately, with examples.

AfL as empowerment

AfL as *empowerment* constitutes the teacher as a *coach* for the individual student who is free to choose and take responsibility for his or her own training, lifestyle and health. The *self-regulating* student has plenty of opportunities to influence the *individualised* subject content, given that the open goals can be reached in various ways. Problem-based exercises also require students' *creative* engagement. A broad spectrum of physical experiences from students' leisure time are included in the assessment practice, by means of training logs, film clips and other presentations of what they like to do outside school and what they learn from it. One boy explains:

The teacher gave us the responsibility to write a training log and plan our own training. He asked us what we should do to reach a certain goal. (Boy 1, attending a vocational programme)

This procedure sanctions an *authentic* assessment that is relevant for each student, which means that the students' own preferences are considered in the assessment practice. A similar approach is evident in other learning activities too, such as in the individual outdoor education exercise reported on below:

If I'm their guide, they just follow me like a herd of sheep. It's more effective if they choose what to do and take responsibility for that themselves. (PE teacher 1)

The teacher organises specific coaching sessions during the course in which students' training habits and choices of outdoor experiences and other lifestyle issues are discussed (which is an example of how key strategy number three, feedback, is realised):

I sit down with them in groups of four or five. Then they get a chance to talk about their goals in life and in the PE course and how they are supposed to reach them. The discussions are followed up by another coaching session later on in the course. (PE teacher 1)

The motive for this pedagogical choice can be summarised as an ambition to encourage an active lifestyle and the development of a lasting interest in physical training. In line with the fifth key strategy of AfL, students' own engagement in the learning process is seen as essential for the production of healthy citizens. The learning promoted by this version of AfL corresponds with increased autonomy in favour of life-long learning (Figure 2): However, all students do not find the opportunity to choose and take responsibility for their own training and health very positive. Their resistance combined with the teacher's low expectations could lead to the appearance of another version of AfL, identifiable in the cultural pattern of the assessment practice.

AfL as physical activation

AfL as *physical activation* constitutes the teacher as a *fitness trainer* or a *games organiser*, whose feedback focuses on students' active participation, effort and collaboration. This is not necessarily

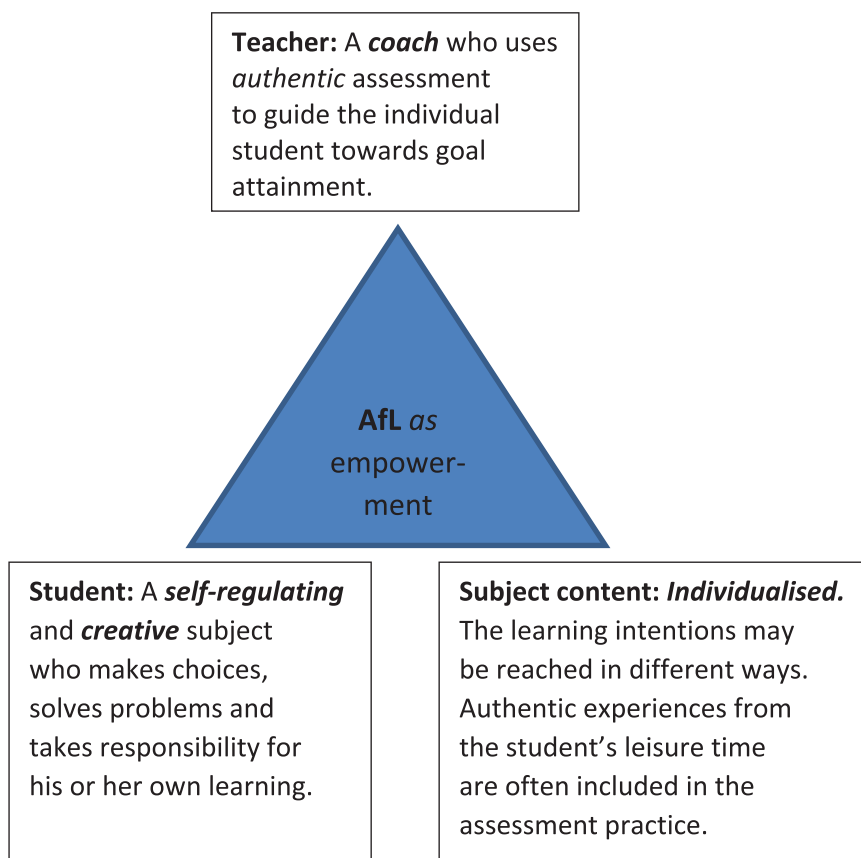


Figure 2. The triadic relation established when Afl has the function of empowerment.

because the teacher thinks it is a good way of realising Afl, but because the interaction in the assessment practice produces such actions. A teacher explains the situation:

I'm afraid that my feedback will do more harm than good for some students, who may come to think of themselves as failures. (PE teacher 1)

This consideration indicates that the teacher tries to avoid what Torrance (2012) calls *deformative* assessment. The students, on the other hand, interpret the situation as the teacher not expecting very much from them:

Isn't it the teacher's responsibility to give us feedback? (Girl 1, attending a vocational programme)

If you ask him how you're doing, you won't get any good answers. He just says, you're doing 'ok'. (Girl 2, attending a vocational programme)

After a lesson led by two students, the group was asked to give the leaders 'two stars and a wish', which is a typical Afl technique. Judging by the comments made, the students did not have the learning intentions in the syllabus in mind when providing their feedback. Instead, they commented on what was enjoyable and what had made their classmates join in. The 'wish' was that the leaders had planned more games so that there was more variation. The two students who had led the lesson were asked which goals they had had in mind when planning the learning activities. One of them answered:

None, because we were not told that we were supposed to, by the teacher. (Girl 3, attending a vocational programme)

When learning intentions are ignored this way, the dominant discourse tends to control what is included in the practice. When no other goals are proclaimed, certain norms come into play that highlight values such as the joy of movement, cooperation, physical exertion and variety. In this fabrication of AfL, the student is constituted as an *active participant*. What characterises the subject content is that it is supposed to be *entertaining*. Many of the games chosen as learning activities have no obvious anchorage in the syllabus. Instead, the learning promoted by this version of AfL corresponds with normalisation in line with the 'physical activity discourse' cherished by the teacher and classmates with the 'right attitude' (Figure 3): The norms stressing active participation and joy of movement are relevant in a subject such as PE. However, the intended learning outcomes in the syllabus focus on 'knowledge' rather than 'action'. That is also the case in the third version of AfL.

AfL as constructive alignment

AfL as *constructive alignment* constitutes the teacher as a *deliverer* of the subject content stated in the syllabus. When AfL techniques are used to bridge the gap between teaching and learning the student becomes a *customer* at the other end of the delivery chain. The learning intentions are clarified for everyone through the three AfL questions: Where is the learner going? Where is the learner right now? What is the next step? (cf. Wiliam 2011). Thus, accountability is reproduced along the delivery chain from educational policymakers via teachers to students by means of AfL. Teachers with systematic routines tend to divide the course into certain themes, which are focused on for a number of weeks at a time. The goals and knowledge requirements for each of these themes are announced in

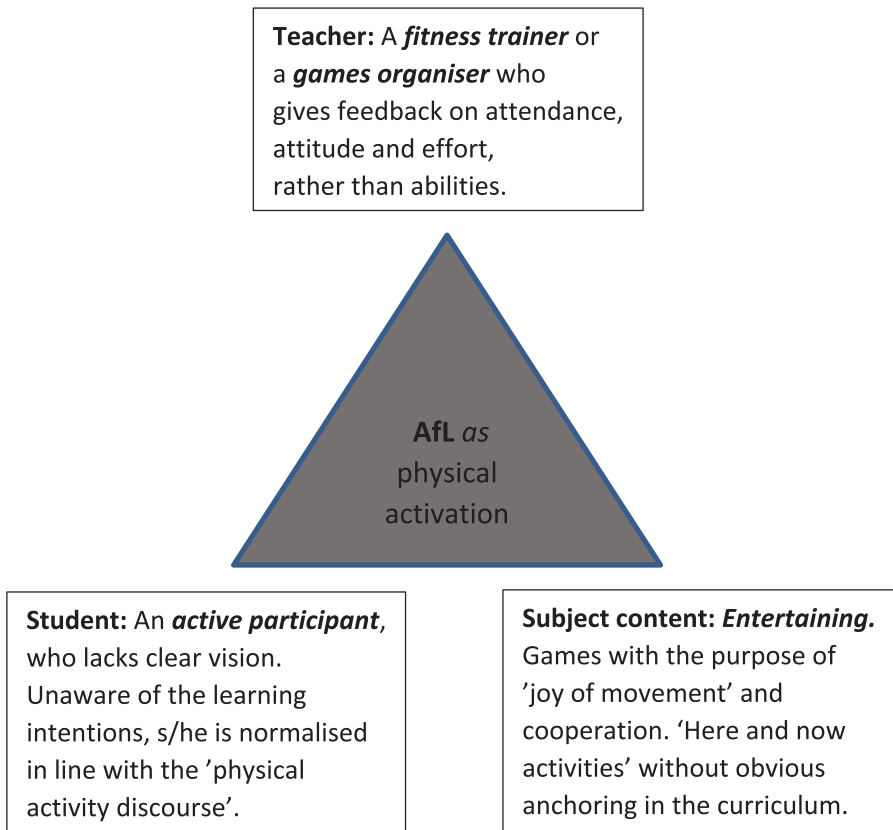


Figure 3. The triadic relation established when AfL has the function of physical activation.

advance. A progression is planned by the teacher in order to elicit evidence of learning, which corresponds with key strategy number two of AfL:

I think that the progression from basic to more advanced learning tasks is crucial, so that the students get a chance to show their abilities. (PE teacher 2)

The students' monitored abilities provide the teacher with information that can be used in the integrated assessment process. Feedback is provided via a learning platform. The duration of a certain theme gives (at least some) time for the students to act on the feed-forward (cf. Hattie and Timperley 2007) provided by the teacher. In addition, rubrics are often used to facilitate self- and peer-assessment. These give students an opportunity to be active subjects in the formative assessment practice. A student gives his view on the feedback integrated in the course:

There are no cons, actually. There are only pros, if you get feedback at an early stage. Then you have time to develop, change things and learn. It would be worthless if you only got feedback at the end of the course. (Boy 2, attending a pre-university programme)

The ambition to work in accordance with the syllabus reinforces a constructive alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Thus, the subject content becomes *quality assured*. The learning promoted by this version of AfL corresponds to goal attainment (Figure 4): There is a slight difference between this goal orientated version of AfL and the next one, which takes its departure from the stipulated assessment criteria rather than the learning intentions.

AfL as grade generation

AfL as *grade generation* constitutes the teacher as an *administrator* of a computerised assessment practice. The subject content is *standardised*, administrated through *conformative* assessment (cf. Torrance 2012) based on the predefined knowledge requirements. A teacher expresses his feelings about this:

The students want feedback all the time. I'd say that 90% of them are grade hunters rather than knowledge hunters. (PE teacher 2)

The teacher regards many of the students as *grade hunters*. The fact that all students are expected to reach the goals in the same prescribed way means that their action spectrum is limited with regard to creativity and other involvement in the assessment process. What is in focus in the assessment practice is already stated in the rubrics attached to the learning tasks. The written word has a higher status than the spoken word or learning in action, which is obvious in the following statement from one of the PE teachers:

I am confident enough to decide whether a student has passed or not (i.e. grade E), judging by their oral reflections and physical abilities. But for the higher grades, I need written evidence of learning. (PE teacher 2)

Apparently, AfL has a strong relationship with summative assessment when the students' written exercises are sent back and forth several times via a learning platform until they meet the set standards for specific knowledge areas. The following conversation gives a picture of the routine:

Last time when we submitted an exercise we had an assessment. Then we got a chance to complement if we were not satisfied. (Girl 4, attending a pre-university programme)

So individual tasks are graded? (Researcher)

Exactly, at least the written ones. (Girl 4, attending a pre-university programme)

The grades are basically motivated on the grounds of how well students are able to reflect on certain aspects of PE in writing. Thus, their writing proficiency is seen as more legitimate evidence of learning than their oral reflections and embodied abilities. The learning that is promoted by this version of AfL corresponds to the following criteria compliance (Figure 5):

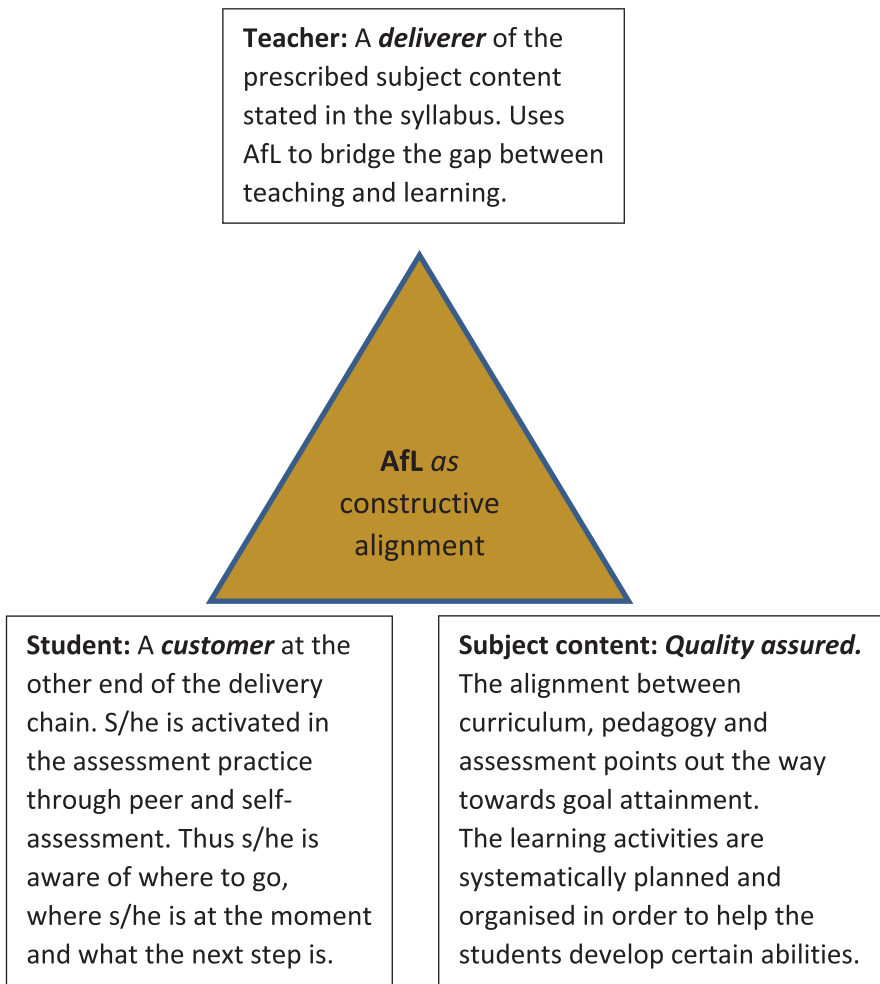


Figure 4. The triadic relation established when AfL has the function of constructive alignment.

However, not all students are motivated by grades. Some may forget to submit their written assignments, which could lead to the final version of AfL.

AfL as negotiation

AfL as *negotiation* denotes a reflexive assessment practice. The teacher is responsive to the actions of the students, which means that quiet resistance, such as refusing to submit exercises in writing, could influence the cause of events. In this cultural pattern the teacher is open for alternative assessment techniques:

I don't want to become a slave to the rubric. (PE teacher 2)

The students are activated as each other's resources when physical activities are followed by group reflection, in line with key strategy number four of AfL:

It's an arena where we are supposed to come up with something together. (PE teacher 2)

The teacher's aspiration is to build relations. At the same time, he is convinced that the democratic stance is a precondition for students' insights that they are responsible for their own learning, which equals key strategy five of AfL:

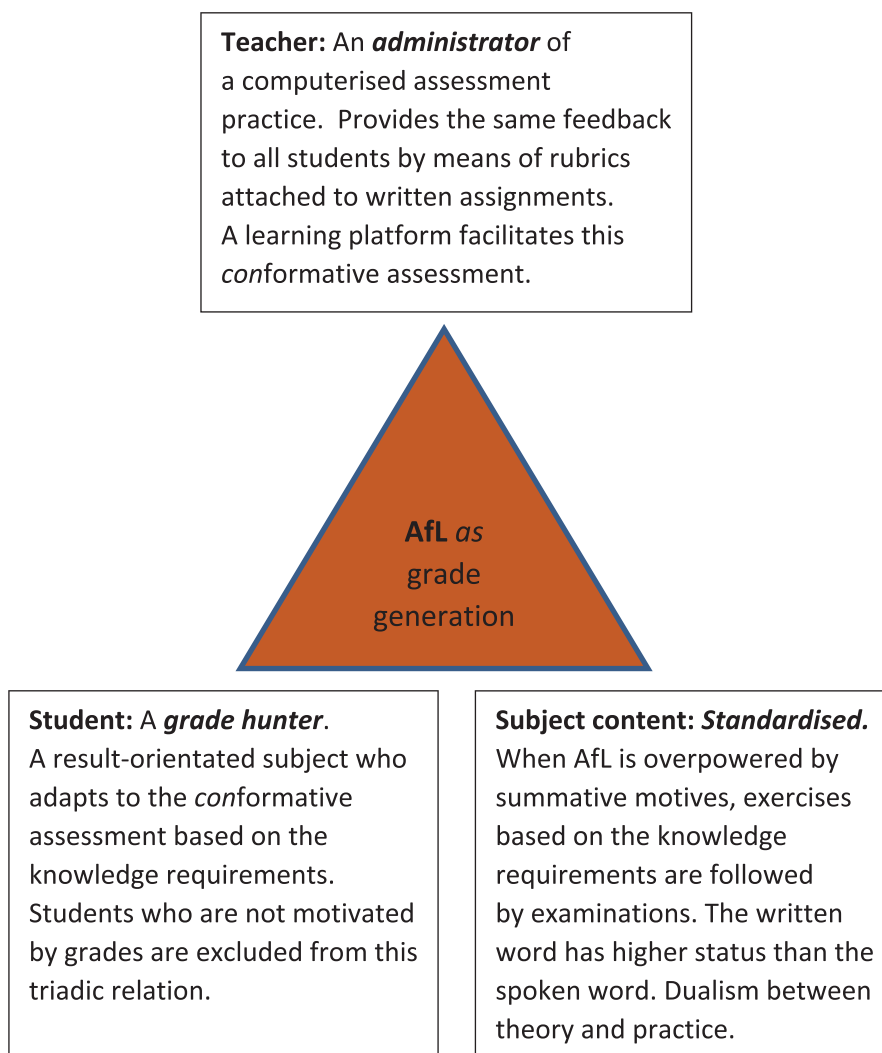


Figure 5. The triadic relation established when AfL has the function of grade generation.

When I ask questions such as how did it go?, what do you think?, what can you do to improve?, it is often obvious that they know the answers themselves about what to do to make progress in a certain learning activity. (PE teacher 2)

In this fabrication of AfL, the collective is of great importance for the individual student's learning. Sometimes evaluation exercises are used to elicit which norms are common amongst the students for different health issues. Embodied knowledge is monitored when classmates are able to take a stand. The spoken word and learning in action are thus seen as essential aspects of learning, even though neither provides detailed individual evidence of 'who knows what'. In this cultural pattern the teacher is constituted as a *moderator*, the student as a *negotiator* and the subject content as *negotiable*. The learning promoted by this version of AfL corresponds to group development and deliberation in the sense of student participation (Figure 6):

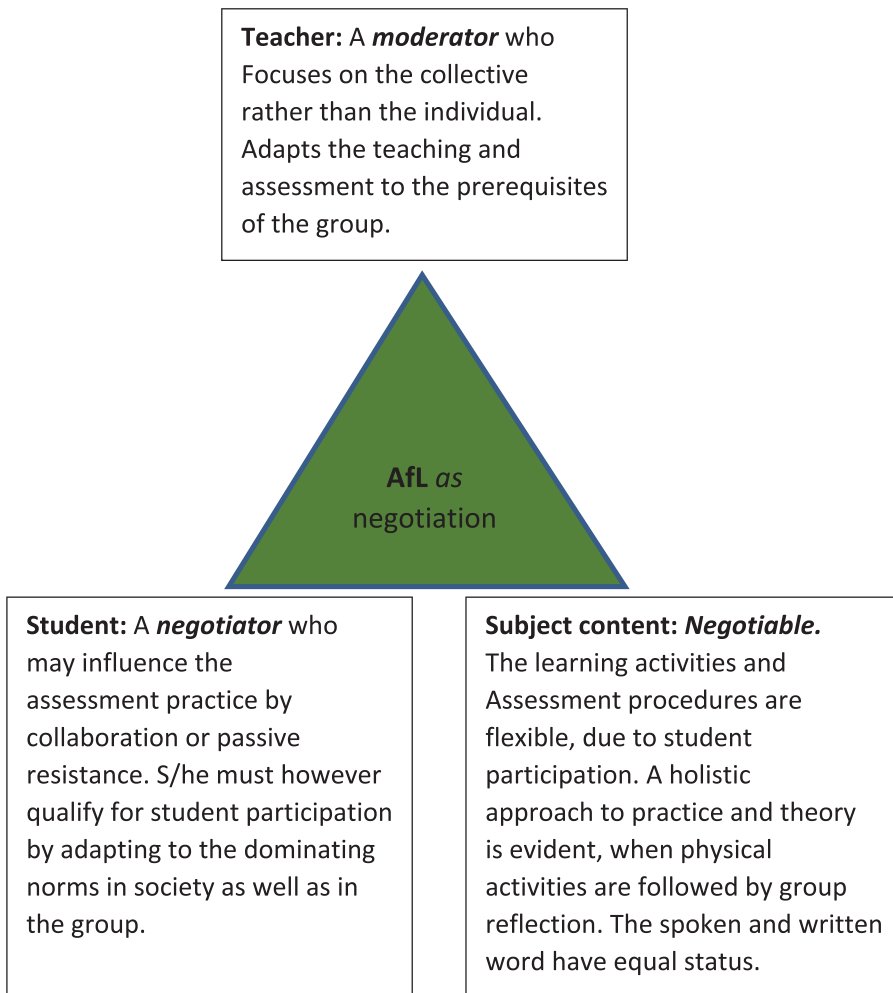


Figure 6. The triadic relation established when AfL has the function of negotiation.

Discussion

The ambiguous assessment mission, including assessment *for* and *of* learning, is a challenge for today's PE teachers. The findings of this study are that practitioners can interpret the 'tight but loose' key strategies of AfL in diverse ways. Evidently, different teacher and student subjectivities and characteristics of the subject content are produced in the formative assessment practice of PE depending on how AfL is realised. The notion of AfL as *empowerment*, *constructive alignment* and *negotiation* must be considered as well established in the research field of AfL in PE (Hay and Penney 2013). However, the two remaining versions could be challenged. The fact that the learning intentions are ignored in AfL as *physical activation* means that the first key strategy is forgotten, whereas AfL as *grade generation* may even seem to be a contradiction. Nevertheless, these versions are common in the assessment practice of PE and comparable to what Jönsson (2016) calls 'pseudo-formative assessment'. Considering the saying: 'you get what you assess; you don't get what you don't assess' (Torrance 2012, 325), the question is what we (would like to) *get* from the formative assessment practice of PE?

Assessment for what learning?

One aspect of ‘assessment literacy’ is a critical engagement in the possible consequences of assessment (Dinan Thompson and Penney 2015; Hay and Penney 2013; Leirhaug, MacPhail, and Annerstedt 2016). By posing the question ‘assessment for *what* learning’, this article may serve as a basis for such critical reflections. The findings suggest that AfL promotes the following different kinds of learning depending on how the pedagogical approach is realised: (i) increased autonomy, (ii) normalisation in line with the dominating ‘physical activity discourse’, (iii) goal attainment, (iv) criteria compliance, (v) group development and liberation in terms of student participation. These different kinds of learning are not necessarily exclusive. However, the study shows that a certain perspective on learning may take precedence over others due to the specific circumstances defined by AfL.

When AfL has the function of *empowerment*, the individual student faces the creative challenge of finding his or her own route towards the open goals. The fifth key strategy of AfL stresses that the student is supposed to be the owner of his or her learning (Wiliam 2011). There are plenty of opportunities to choose and take responsibility for training methods as well as lifestyle and health issues in PE practice. The teacher’s coaching is not just restricted to the PE lessons. Instead, students’ leisure time activities are included in the formative assessment practice of PE by means of ‘rich tasks’ (cf. MacPhail and Halbert 2010), in order to facilitate an authentic assessment. This denotes a life-wide perspective on learning (Hay and Penney 2013). The feed-forward provided by the teacher aims further into the future than the end of the course. One of the teachers explains that a student’s goals in life, not only in PE, are discussed in the coaching sessions, which can be understood as the promotion of life-long learning (Hay and Penney 2013). Altogether, this version of AfL supports an *increased autonomy*, in line with the ‘spirit of AfL’ (Charteris 2016).

In contrast, AfL as *physical activation* implies *normalisation* in accordance with the dominating norms of the ‘physical activity discourse’. Without necessarily being anchored in the syllabus, peer-assessment between classmates and feedback from the teacher can enhance behaviour that is worth striving for in the gym. Thus, students can become carriers of norms embracing ‘joy of movement’, ‘effort’ and ‘cooperation’. Although these aspects may be of great importance in a PE setting, they are of minor relevance in relation to the knowledge requirements stated in the syllabus (Annerstedt and Larsson 2010; Svennberg, Meckbach, and Redelius 2014). Those who do not participate in the activities have little chance of learning, since written assignments or other theoretical exercises are uncommon when the intended learning outcomes are neglected. By stressing participation in games and other popular activities in the teaching practice, the focus is on ‘doing’ rather than ‘learning’.

On the other hand, AfL as *constructive alignment* acts as a bridge between teaching and learning. Under these circumstances, the idea of AfL can be compared to what Ball et al. (2012) call ‘deliverology’. Accountability is systematically reproduced from one link in the delivery chain to the other, from educational policymakers at a macro level, via the school management, to the teacher and the students at a micro level. AfL is utilised in order to secure the delivery, by making sure that everybody shares the learning intentions and the responsibility for their acquisition. When the teacher is constituted as a deliverer and the student as a customer, the learning is characterised by *goal attainment*. This is the kind of quality assurance that today’s educational policymakers want. An improved alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is also advocated by scholars in the field of PE and sport pedagogy (such as Borghouts, Slingerland, and Haerens 2016; Redelius and Hay 2012).

When AfL is ‘overpowered’ by summative motives, the concept is given the function of *grade generation*. This version of the pedagogical approach stresses accountability interests with an emphasis on measurability and comparability. Written assignments are regarded as highly relevant and valid, because they facilitate individual assessment in favour of equity and fairness. Similarly, Chan, Hay, and Tinning (2011) have pointed out writing proficiency as essential in the accountability game of PE. Examinations and rubrics are often used to evaluate students’ abilities in relation to the knowledge requirements. Standardised feedback is based on the next level in the rubric. When the students’ achievements correspond to the standards, the learning can be defined as *criteria compliance*.

(Torrance 2007). A consequence of this version of AfL is an overload of paperwork, which is also the case for the PE teachers in Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave's (2013) study.

AfL as *negotiation* means that the students are seen as each other's learning resources, in accordance with the fourth key strategy of AfL. This version can be compared to Charteris's (2016) notion of dialogic feedback as divergent AfL. Physical activities are followed by group reflection, thus suggesting that embodied learning and the spoken word are equal in status to the written word. Torrance (2015) suggests that collective responsibility should be utilised more in the assessment practice. The teacher's engagement in the collective shows that AfL may have the purpose of promoting *group development* and *deliberation* in the sense of *student participation*, which in the long run can be seen as a contribution to the fostering of democratic citizens.

The conclusion of this study is that today's PE teachers have to find an appropriate balance between the different versions of AfL. These are all part of a bigger cultural pattern and there is no single solution for all situations. This is why a reflexive assessment practice is crucial. From a sociocultural perspective on learning, the potential of the collective must be utilised in an era of test-driven accountability and individual responsibility. In this spirit, one of the PE teachers says: 'It's an arena where we are supposed to come up with something together'. Moreover, embodied learning and oral reflections should be regarded as equally important and valid forms of knowledge as written evidence of learning. If not, there is a risk of a counterproductive dualism between theory/practice in the subject of PE.

As stated earlier, 'Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them' (Davies and Harré 2001, 263). Consequently, it is important to reflect on what kind of students we want to foster in PE. Do we want autonomous life-long learners, active participants here and now, students dependent on their teachers to map out the way to goal attainment, grade hunters, or young citizens who excel in teamwork? Another issue is what kind of PE teachers are required for this. Do we want lifestyle coaches, fitness trainers/games organisers, systematic planners/deliverers, administrators of computerised assessment practices or moderators in communities of learning?

The main idea of AfL is to adapt the teaching to the students, and not the students to the standards. That is why the focus should be more on progression than achievement in the formative assessment practice of PE.

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