

HUMAN PRACTISING

- in Physical Education, Sport and Rehabilitation

SHORT RESUMÉ

This project will investigate the particular movement phenomenon of human practising in physical education (PE), sport and rehabilitation. The ambition is to describe the nature and role of practising in these fields in order to contribute with a) a better understanding of the activities that currently takes place and b) investigate how the phenomenon of practising can inform new perspectives on learning and pedagogical approaches, and renew and improve working methods and practices within them. It is initiated in 2014 through two exploratory workshops (October 2014 in Stockholm and January 2015 in Oslo) that will establish a Nordic research network, and it will be conducted as a Nordic research programme running from 2015-2020.

BACKGROUND

In contemporary research and pedagogical approaches to PE, sport and rehabilitation the phenomenon of human practising appears to be either overlooked or instrumentalised. A rough generalisation of contemporary activity in these fields can illustrate this.

In PE our shared Nordic body-cultural heritage and the original subject matter is mirrored in the Norwegian term *kroppsoving*, the Swedish *kroppsoevning* and the Danish *legemsøvelser*. This is, however marginalised and has to a large extent disappeared. It is replaced by a focus on introducing the students to a range of sporting activities and techniques, with the aim of informing, entertaining and securing a certain amount of physical activity, but with insufficient time for practising (Kretchmar 2006; Kirk 2010). Also, this activity is legitimised through external outcomes, such as improved health, higher energy level and increased cognitive skills that can facilitate learning in other subjects, outcomes that have in fact proven difficult to verify in research (Bailey, et al., 2009).

In sport approaches to performance and development of athletes has to some extent been reduced to instrumental regimes of physical and mental training. Here scientific approaches to sport are to a still larger extent occupied with objectification, quantification, measurement, monitoring, etc. (Aggerholm 2013, 2014 forthcoming; Nesti 2011). Sporting activity and development thereby degenerates to acquisition of objective skills that are added to the toolbox of athletes in a process accompanied by an increasing challenging of athletes to enhance performance towards new records (Loland 2000, 2001, 2009).

Finally, in rehabilitation activities are dominated by a focus on the physical and social body. Informed by physiology and biomechanics interventions are on the one hand directed towards objective and measurable variables of the impaired body, with the aim of assisting towards regaining or maintaining normal functioning through physical exercise and fitness (Beier, Lund & Klinde 2010). On the other hand many social approaches aim to help disabled people through initiatives that remove social barriers to facilitate participation, e.g. by adapting activities, ensuring rights and integration, and confronting discriminating discourses (Smith 2009). These dominating approaches can be very useful and helpful, but at the same time they neglect and are unable to grasp a deeper meaning related to practising to improve one's abilities (Aggerholm & Jespersen 2014 forthcoming).

Against this background the present project will depart from the following research question:

How can we understand contemporary practice in PE, sport and rehabilitation in light of the movement phenomenon of human practising and how can this inform and contribute with new meaning for participants, new conceptions for research and new pedagogical approaches in these areas?

HUMAN PRACTISING

The basic assumption is that the tendencies described above can be traced to the understanding of *vita activa* in western philosophy. Arendt (1958) distinguished between three forms of activity fundamental for the human condition: labor, work and action. These forms correspond rather precisely to a dominant triadic understanding of activity in sport and PE between health, achievement and bodily experience (Bøje & Eichberg 1994). The distinctions can be useful to describe how activity can contribute to nurturing biological functions and fitness of the body, produce new and useful skills and as a contrast to these, be the source of plurality, spontaneity and playfulness. But at the same time they are incapable of grasping an essential aspect of human activity: practising. This is a kind of activity between physical training, skill acquisition and playful experimentation. The fundamental understanding of this movement phenomenon that will guide the research within the present project is primarily informed by Sloterdijk's (2009, 2010) anthropology of practising, Foucault's (2005) philosophical clarification of *askēsis*, and Kretchmar's (1975) philosophical account of 'testing' in sport. This can be clarified by the following condensed description of the most essential aspects.

First of all human practising involves *agency* of the practising subject. It does not, however, take the practising subject into the realm of theory, reasons and concepts in *vita contemplativa*. It merely describes an active and pre-objective engagement and it is expressed in our use of *practising* (present participle) rather than *practise*. Secondly practising also involves *effort* as the practising subject struggles to overcome difficulties, constraints, challenges and obstacles. But practising is not just a matter of overcoming any kind of obstacle. Like any kind of movement it is intentional and has a *background*, which implies that it involves the practising *of* something, for example manoeuvring a wheelchair, climbing a mountain or performing a handstand. Still, in order to be a case of practising and not just a single test of abilities, it must involve *repetition*. It is a process, a sequence of active repetitions of difference (Deleuze, 2011) directed at what the subject is practising towards. Such repetitions can be a venturesome endeavour since it is a kind of movement on the borderline between 'I can' and 'I cannot'. It therefore involves a compelling and attractive *uncertainty*: can I do it? At the same time practising also involves a *vertical tension* between better or worse. The process of practising is always governed by personal, social, cultural and historical values and ideals, which means that it is undertaken to maintain or improve the quality of the activity in relation to this. But the goal (*telos*) of practising does not concern external and measurable results or skills, as in the production of work. It is self-referential in the sense that the aim of practising is related to *self-perfection*, understood as the experience of a qualitatively strengthened comportment; a new and better 'I can', i.e. a more meaningful hold on the world. Finally, even if practising is self-referential it is not a lonely thing and the *apprenticeship* involved with an active engagement and inter-actions in a social context, where tests can be shared (con-tests) and good examples (e.g. role models and masters) can inspire and be imitated, provides an important source of social meaning in all aspects of human practising.

AIMS AND RELEVANCE

The project will build on this understanding of human practising and from this it will invite researchers who share an interest in this movement phenomenon and represent congruent approaches to participate. The ambition is to conduct a coherent and yet interdisciplinary study of practising within the broad palette of activities in PE, sport and rehabilitation. The guiding hypothesis is that a better understanding of human practising can enable researchers and practitioners to reveal, study and work in novel ways with an important and often overlooked aspect of activities within the three fields.

In PE it can help challenging the dichotomy between physical activity for the sake of external ends and playful activity for the sake of joy and fun. Further, it can promote learning, but not from the instrumentalised perspective of pre-defined skills or a certain level of physical activity, but rather from a perspective where practising and learning movements is tantamount to gaining new insights and meaning making. This can inform the area of teacher education (PETE) and sustain new pedagogical approaches for PE teachers to engage students.

In sport it can help reveal a layer of meaning that can make it possible to understand the passionate engagement of athletes, distinct from the instrumental qualities of performance and external motivations for their struggles. This can inform sport pedagogics and inspire new roles for sports coaches and leaders, which can take sporting activity and talent development in direction of more meaningful and sustainable approaches.

In rehabilitation it can inform e.g. physiotherapists and occupational therapists to help encouraging an awareness of the subjective, experiential and contextual aspects of training and recovery.

In this way an awareness of the phenomenon of practising will have relevance for professions related to the three fields and it will contribute to the field of sport research in general by bringing these three fields together under the common phenomenon of human practising. This can make it possible for researchers and practitioners from each field to gain new knowledge and inspiration from each other and develop the respective professions. But the understanding of human practising developed in this project also has the potential to throw new and constructive light on learning, education, pedagogy and leadership in general. Therefore, in the longer run it is an additional ambition for the project to engage in dialogue with other related fields, for example performance arts, music academies, vocational education, etc.

STRUCTURE AND PLAN FOR THE PROJECT

The project will be initiated in 2014 through network activities, case studies and two workshops that will explore the phenomenon of practising in order to provide new territories for future research in Nordic sports science based on our shared body-cultural heritage. The first workshop will be held at The Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences (GIH, Stockholm) on October 2-3, 2014. This will seek to establish a shared understanding of the meaning of human practising and explore how this can throw new light on the activities in PE, sport and rehabilitation. The second workshop will be held at The Norwegian School of Sports Sciences (NIH, Oslo) on January 12-13 2015. This will take a step further to explore how this movement phenomenon can inform new perspectives on learning and pedagogical approaches, and renew and improve working methods and practices within the three fields of practice. In its startup phase in 2014 several

preliminary case studies will be conducted to inform the practical and theoretical foundation of the project. Six of them are established:

1. Case study of alpine skiing in Beitostølen (Norway), investigating the experience of practising for a group of 12 persons with cerebral palsy (aged 14-18). This will run from March to May 2014 and it will use qualitative group interviews. It is conducted by Kenneth Aggerholm in collaboration between Helene Elsass Centre (HEC) and Centre for Adapted Physical Activity Participation Studies at SDU.
2. Case study of sport practising and the experience of recovery from schizophrenia. This will run during 2014 and be based upon treatment reports and qualitative interviews with the person and others in question. The study is conducted by Ejgil Jespersen in collaboration with psychiatrist Piet Draiby and nurse Lisa Bay.
3. Case study of learning processes in PE. This project will start in the fall of 2014. Through participant observations in physical education classes the goal is to describe and analyze practising in relation to the pedagogical practice in PE. This case study is conducted by Øyvind Standal
4. Case study of player development in Sogndal Football. The project will start in the fall 2014. It will use participant observation and qualitative interviews to describe and analyse practising as part of learning processes and knowledge integration in a Norwegian premier league club. This study is conducted by Lars Tore Ronglan and Vegard Fusche Moe.
5. Case study of learning in and through parkour, a contemporary movement phenomenon that challenges the dichotomy between spontaneous, free play and the sportive striving for results. The acrobatic endeavours of traceurs will be investigated as a special way of practising through participant observation and qualitative interviews with practitioners. This study is conducted by Signe Højbjerg Larsen and will start in the fall 2014.
6. Case study of recovery from overtraining. This case study will focus on the ‘practising to return to practice’ in overtrained athletes to explore the dynamic relationships between intentionality, subjective ‘felt sense’ and physiological indices. Gender variations, if any, are of particular interest. Data will be collected through medical assessment, individual interviews, and a focus group interview. Tatiana Ryba, Noora Ronkainen, Tuomas Mäkinen and Harri Selänne will conduct the study in 2014.

It is the ambition to use this work during 2014 to build a solid knowledge base and form a Nordic research network of 15-20 participants. This will be used to inform a comprehensive research proposal aimed at securing Nordic and international research funding for a Nordic research programme running in a 5 year period from 2015 to 2020. It is planned to be conducted as a Nordic Research Collaboration and currently the following institutions are involved: The Norwegian School of Sports Sciences (NIH, Oslo, Norway), The University of Southern Denmark (SDU, Odense, Denmark), Sogn og Fjordane University College (HiSF, Sogndal, Norway), The Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences (GIH, Stockholm, Sweden) and Research Institute for Olympic Sports (KIHU, Jyväskylä, Finland). It is led by Kenneth Aggerholm (Ph.D., currently visiting scholar at Centre for Adapted Physical Activity Participation Studies, SDU) in close collaboration with especially Ejgil Jespersen (associate professor and head of Centre for Adapted Physical Activity Participation Studies, SDU), Øyvind Standal (Ph.D., associate professor of sport

pedagogy, NIH), Vegard Fusche Moe (Ph.D., associate professor and head of program for sport research, HiSF), Lars Tore Ronglan (associate professor and vice rector, NIH) and Håkan Larsson (Professor of physical education and sport pedagogy at the Department of Culture and Learning).

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