

## PEDAGOGY

# Competitive Situations in Physical Education: Is It Useful in Students' Everyday Lives?

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### Abstract

*Dealing with competitive situations is part of our everyday lives. Learning to participate constructively in competitive situations may, therefore, be important for citizens in a society. Although physical education may help in such an endeavor, competitive activities inspired by sports competition may not be the best solution. This article seeks to contribute to the discussion of competitive activities in PE. The aim of this study was to investigate how and why competitive activities in PE are presented and to explore students' experiences and actions in competitive situations within these competitive activities. The aim was to answer the following questions: How are competitive activities facilitated in PE? What are the teacher's intentions of facilitating competitive activities in certain ways? What are the students' experiences and actions in competitive situations within competitive activities? The creation of such knowledge through different cases creates the opportunity to discuss whether the competitive activities presented in this study were useful in students' everyday lives. The participants comprised 25 students (13-15 years old) and their teacher from one secondary school in Norway. The methods included a triangulation of 1. Students' written narratives were conducted after each of*

*the eight PE lessons. 2. Observations and video recordings of eight PE lessons (600 minutes). 3. Interviews of 13 students and their PE teacher. The data was inductively analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that PE activities adapted elements from sports competitions in different ways. For instance, the aim of winning was adapted into PE but not the opportunity to practice over time towards the competition. The aim of winning triumphed an educational outcome. The teacher intended to use the competitive aspect of winning to produce engagement and high physical exertion and to create positive experiences for the students. Due to students' different physical skills and, therefore, different opportunities to win, the teacher adapted competitive activities to make physical skills less relevant or the students' performance less visible. The students' experiences and actions showed that they were still aware of their performance in relation to other students and that replacing the importance of physical skills on performance with chance concerning success in the activity caused frustration, leading students to act out the frustration in the activity. The frustration resulted from a lack of possibility to improve one's performance. In addition, the findings indicated the difficulty of seeing whether students had positive experiences of an activity only by observation. The article discussed the opportunity to disconnect competition from sports from competitive situations in PE. Instead, competitive situations in PE could be connected to the relevance of students' everyday lives. As such, it was discussed the opportunity to start with an educational outcome such as helping students to handle competitive situations in their lives or learning about trustworthy actions relevant to the students' general growth in their lives. The article also discussed the difficulty and importance of evaluating whether the learning outcome and the competitive situations are moving students in an educative direction.*

## **Introduction**

Competition is part of our everyday lives. We compete to get into schools, get jobs, get a spouse, in sports, etc. Although we compete in our everyday lives, sports are particularly covered in the media, where sports and the media work together to increase earnings and popularity (Jeanrenaud & Kèsenne, 2006). As such, one may understand that physical education (PE) in Norway may be influenced by sports, especially by competition or 'looks-like-competition' from sports (Larsson & Karlefors, 2015; Ward & Quennerstedt, 2016;

Aasland et al., 2020; Aggerholm et al., 2018; Erdvik, 2020). However, PE competitions provide negative and positive student experiences (Hovdal et al., 2021a). Aggerholm et al. (2018) compared competition in PE with competition in sports and pointed out: 1. Students may not consent to competition in PE, as they do in sports. 2. In sports, one regulates competitions to achieve fair opportunities, whereas PE students are more heterogeneous in relation to skills and/or experiences in sports. These authors follow up by introducing four key arguments concerning competition in PE. The implications concerning teachers' actions in PE will be mentioned here: 1. We should AVOID competitive activities in physical education. 2. We should ASK students if they want to engage in competitive activities with others. 3. We should ADAPT competitive activities to secure fair opportunities for all. 4. We should ACCEPT negative experiences in competitive activities if the students get to reflect on their experiences. The possible consequences of teachers choosing one of these actions are the focus of this article. As one may see, the ASK and ACCEPT arguments indicate that teachers organize and implement competition similarly to sports. In contrast, the AVOID argument does not provide the opportunity to educate students on handling sports competitions in their everyday lives (Dewey, 2015). As such, the ADAPT argument may be more useful in PE. However, adapting competition into PE from sports may result in unexpected consequences concerning students' experiences and actions and is not necessarily educative and useful for the students in their everyday lives. One needs to consider what Dewey (2015) called educative experiences to become educative for the students. In short, by interpreting the work of Dewey (2015), we can see that humans live in a series of situations where humans and the environment reciprocally influence each other in a holistic way. Through the mutual influence of humans and the environment, an experience occurs. The subjective experience by humans may be reflected upon or not reflected upon. From these series of situations, there is a continuity in experience from one situation to the next. The world expands or contracts when humans go from one situation to the next. If the world expands, one may talk about growth. At this point, we need to include learning. Through these experiences in a series of situations, humans learn consciously or unconsciously a certain kind of behavior, and

this behavior strengthens over time and becomes a habit. Habits may form through blind desires or intellectual control. Forming habits out of intellectual control includes that students reflect upon possible consequences of one's actions related to a certain end-in-view. The term end-in-view 'keeps our attention on the ends of the task at hand and reminds us that ends are always provisional and changing throughout the course of educational experiences' (Hildreth, 2011, p. 34). Further, for experiences to become educative, one needs to discriminate growth. A continuous experience of lying and stealing through situations may lead to growth in the case of becoming better at such actions, but growth in such a direction would hinder growth in general. It will contract the world to humans. It will impede the kind of persons one may interact with and the quality of the interactions due to mistrust. As such, educative experiences should result in a general growth of experiences and effective dealing with future situations (Dewey, 2015).

A recent study showed that competitive situations within activities in PE may be used to educate students (Hovdal et al., 2021a). In such a way, the students' goals may still include winning in the competitive activities, influenced by the media presenting mostly winners and losers from sports. Still, the teacher, through the design of the activities, directs the students' attention to the learning within the activities and learning how to compete constructively in society. The term learning, in this sense, may be connected to educative experiences (Dewey, 2015). Learning may be considered as changing one's predisposition to act in further situations (Quennerstedt et al., 2011), and the student's predisposition to act in further competitive situations should result in general growth of experiences and by dealing effectively in future situations (Dewey, 2015). Further, it is the teacher's role as an educator to decide whether the student's predisposition to act in further situations is educative, and it is the teacher's role to facilitate competitive activities in a way that leads to educative experiences for the students (Dewey, 2015). In other words, the teacher shall educate the students and make the subject meaningful in the students' everyday lives (Beni et al., 2017; Dewey, 2015; ; Fletcher & Chr  n  n, 2022; Hovdal et al., 2021a). For instance, the teacher helps students explore and reflect on their experiences in competitive situations in PE to provide a deeper understanding of

themselves in society and competitive situations. Further, the teachers are helping to broaden the students' repertoire to acting in the world, leading to general growth. This way of looking at PE competition differs from the ADAPT argument proposed by Aggerholm et al. (2018). The ADAPT argument includes the rationale that 'since competition is such a big part of Western capitalist societies, children should learn to compete well and in moderate forms' (Aggerholm et al., 2018, p. 12). Although these perspectives seem similar at first glance, Aggerholm et al. (2018) argue that emphasizing an aspect of participation other than winning (for instance, personal development) may conflict with formal requirements for contests, such as the principle of fair opportunity, which may result in pseudo-competition with no balanced opposition and no real attempt to win. In contrast, Hovdal et al. (2021a) do not seem to be interested in the requirements for competition per se, or competition in general for that matter. They are more interested in educating students on how to constructively deal with competitive situations in their everyday lives. For instance, Hovdal et al. (2021a) argued that in a series of competitive situations, it may be rational for students to give up or reduce their effort in situations they think they would lose to save energy if the aim is to win as much as possible. In contrast, it may not be rational in the long-term concerning the students' mindsets when facing obstacles later in life. Although not every obstacle may be relevant for students to overcome, learning important strategies and setting individual goals may lead students to persist and deal effectively when facing obstacles worthwhile to overcome. By creating a habit of investigating how to overcome obstacles and to persist in such endeavors, it may lead to further general growth for students. Creating habits of giving up or reducing effort when facing obstacles may hamper or be negative for a general growth (Dewey, 2015). As such, one may understand their alternative use of the term *competitive situations* instead of *competition* in PE. Changing the vocabulary (in a limited sense) in this way makes it difficult to merge these two articles meaningfully. The reason is that while Aggerholm et al. (2018) use the term *competition* in a traditional and *correct* way, Hovdal et al. (2021a) disconnect *competition* from sports and show another way of looking at situations where people compete in PE. The alternative way of looking at competitive situations in PE was

based on the use of handling competitive situations in peoples' everyday lives—not just in sports like competitions.

One may look at the above-mentioned differences as semantic or a philosophical discussion. Still, the point here is similar to (but not the same as) when Rorty (1989) shows us another way of looking at the world. Instead of participating in philosophical discussions concerning what is true knowledge from a positivist, phenomenology, or constructionism perspective, Rorty seems to argue that such philosophical perspectives, with their tools to investigate the world, are different vocabularies that help us to do different things in the world. None of the vocabulary with their tools is better for describing the world as it is, but they influence how we conduct our investigations. As such, the tools one chooses must be based on what one wants to achieve (Rorty, 1989). In the case of competition as a tool in PE, the question would not become whether the tool is useful but to what end-in-view the tool should serve. As such, one may take a starting point in what happens in everyday real-life competitions in PE instead of taking a starting point in the existing ways of looking at competition in PE. In this way, one can show other ways of looking at competition in PE. A way that considers the usefulness of competition in PE in students' everyday lives (being educative). Therefore, it may be useful to investigate such situations in terms of the use by Hovdal et al. (2021a) of competitive situations and see how such situations may be relevant to the students' everyday lives. The present article will, therefore, follow up on the research by Hovdal et al. (2021a).

Hovdal et al. (2021a) investigated two different competitive activities in PE, showing one activity where the teacher focused on social comparison and winning and another activity where the teacher focused on learning and improvement. The focus on social comparison led to a high effort if the students did not know whether they would win, a reduced effort if they knew they would win, or giving up if they knew they would lose. The focus on learning and improvement led to high student effort because the students would see whether they improved and if their training had worked (Hovdal et al., 2021a). While one cannot generalize from these findings, they indicated the possible consequences of different ways of facilitating competitive activities in PE. Further, Hovdal et al. (2021a) focused

on competitive activities in general by separating the focus on winning and the focus on learning. They did not differentiate further between different ways of facilitating competitive activities. The present study identified different competitive activities in one class from a wider research project and described competitive situations within the activity. Further, students were interviewed about these situations to analyze the possible consequences of these competitive situations. While Hovdal et al. (2021a) emphasized that students had both positive and negative experiences of competitions, they argued that it was not just about the activity but also about how it was facilitated. As such, the present study aimed to identify different kinds of competitive activities, investigate the students' actions and mainly negative experiences of competitive situations within these activities, and explore whether such situations were educative for the students. Doing such research in a meaningful sense would, therefore, need a detailed description of the competitive situations and to include both the teacher's and students' perspectives in the activities. The questions sought to be answered were:

- How are competitive activities facilitated in PE?
- What are the teacher's intentions of facilitating competitive activities in certain ways?
- What are the students' experiences and actions in competitive situations within competitive activities?

The aim of this study was, therefore, to investigate how and why competitive activities in PE were presented and to explore students' experiences and actions from these competitive activities. The creation of such knowledge allows the opportunity to discuss whether the competitive activities presented in this study were useful in students' everyday lives.

## **Method**

The present study formed part of a larger research project investigating experiences and learning in PE. The project included written narratives and observations combined with video recordings and interviews. The study took a starting point in actual situations in PE, as proposed by Dewey (1938): "Any problem of scientific inquiry that does not grow out of actual (or "practical") social conditions is facti-

tious; it is arbitrarily set by the inquirer instead of being objectively produced and controlled” (p. 499). Data relevant to competitive activities were extracted and came from the narratives, observations, video recordings, and interviews. The data were further analyzed and triangulated. The triangulation of the methods (Abdalla et al., 2018) was based on philosophical pragmatism and pragmatist methodology (Allmark & Machaczek, 2018; Feilzer, 2010; Morgan, 2007; Rorty, 1982). In philosophical pragmatism, one is interested in investigating human needs and addressing those needs (Rorty, 1982). In the present study, the investigation of human needs came because of the students’ experiences (mentioned in narratives conducted after each PE lesson) of competitive activities and the observations of the students’ actions in such activities. To investigate students’ thinking in specific situations, students were interviewed about video clips of competitive PE situations, similar to stimulated recall interviews (Aarskog et al., 2019; Dempsey, 2010). The students were chosen to be interviewed based on their actions from observations and their experiences mentioned in the narratives concerning the competitive activities.

## **Participants**

The data creation period started at the beginning of the students’ ninth grade and was completed at the end of their ninth grade. The participants came from one secondary class in the south of Norway. There were 25 students (13 girls and 12 boys), and their male PE teacher, who was also the main teacher for the class, participated in the study.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The students, teacher, and school principal were informed about the study verbally and in writing, and the students’ guardians were notified in writing. The teacher, students, and the students’ guardians gave their written consent to the present study. The study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD-58504)

## **Data Creation**

The data consisted of observation and video recordings of eight PE lessons (600 minutes), written narratives conducted at the end of each PE lesson (25 students), and interviews of 13 students and

their teacher. The students' narratives included their most positive and negative experiences from (all, not just competitive) situations in the finished PE lesson, what happened in the situations, and why they found the mentioned situations negative or positive. Different competitive situations were extracted in the observation and video recording part of the study. In the interviews of the students, the students were interviewed about these competitive situations based on video clips of the situations (e.g., their experiences, actions, and what they had learned), and the interview of the teacher concerning the intentions of choosing activities and further context of the situations. The interest in investigating different competitive activities arose from the students' narratives, where some competitive activities were experienced as frustrating or boring, in addition to the student's observed behavior in such activities. Although these students' experiences of such competitive activities were of particular interest, other students in these activities were also interviewed to shed light on some complexity of the situations.

## **Data Analysis**

To take a starting point in the social condition of competitive situations in PE, the narratives, the transcription of the video clips, and the interviews were inductively thematically analyzed using the six basic steps by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Familiarizing with the data included reading observation notes and students' narratives and watching video recordings to identify competitive situations. Competitive situations were coded (initial codes), and themes were searched for (finding similarities of competitive situations). These themes were reviewed, and new more appropriate names of the themes were selected (Table 1). The last step, producing the report, was not conducted in this analysis phase. The transcription of the interviews with the students (and teacher) was analyzed in similar ways but within different kinds of competitive situations. These overall analyses were used in the production of the report. Due to relevance and having space to add some complexity of competitive situations, only two competitive activities will be presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows the results of the analyses in these two activities. Due to the complexity and amount of data produced in the study, the students' actions will only be presented in the results section.

## **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

An important strength of the study was the investigation of the students' real-world setting of PE lessons, and the triangulation between the narratives, observations and video recordings, and the interviews in the study. However, one important limitation was that the study could not investigate the students' learning. The study only investigated students' actions in particular situations, and the students' expressed learning from the situations. To explore students' learning, one must observe a change in students' thoughts and/or actions in further situations (Dewey, 2015; Hovdal et al., 2021b).

## **Results**

This study aimed to investigate how and why competitive activities in PE are presented and to explore students' experiences and actions in competitive situations within these competitive activities. Based on the triangulation of the students' written narratives, the students' and teacher's interviews, observations, and video recordings, the results will be presented under two headlines: 1. Adapting competition in PE to produce engagement and reduce students' negative experiences due to visibility. 2. Adapting competition in PE to produce positive experiences and reduce the importance of physical skills on performance. The aim of the study will be answered through these two headlines. For instance, describing how the competitive activities were facilitated, the teacher's intentions for adapting competitive aspects from sports into competitive activities in PE, and students' experiences and actions in competitive situations. The first presented competitive activity will mainly focus on what happened before the activity started, what the activity was, and the students' narratives and interviews afterward. The second presented activity will mainly focus on the activity itself and one student's actions, experiences, and learning in and from the activity.

### **Adapting Competition in PE to Produce Engagement and to Reduce Students' Negative Experiences Due to Visibility**

Under this headline, the focus will be on the pursuit racing activity and will start by describing the teacher's intention for the activity. The teacher's intention was to produce engagement among

**Table 1***Creation of Sub-themes and Main Themes from the Data Creation Stages*

Data from each data creation stage	Sub themes	Main themes
<p><b>Observation/video recordings/field notes:</b> Pursuit racing. Students are divided into teams and run laps. If a team is caught up by another team, they are out of the contest (see result section)</p> <p><b>Written narratives:</b> I did not like the pursuit race thing, that thing where we ran after each other and tried to catch each other. Because it is boring to be the person that is caught, and the whole team becomes disappointed. You feel really bad, even though it was not me who got caught today</p> <p><b>Interview students:</b> It is like I wrote [in the narrative after the PE lesson], even if it is a team competition when one is running... the goal is to catch up with each other, and one feels bad when it is oneself that is disappointing the whole team... that is not fun (Cassandra)</p> <p><b>Written narratives:</b> I liked it when we were running in a square and exchanged who was running. I like to run</p> <p><b>Interview students:</b> I get a highly competitive instinct on that activity. It is a lot of movement in a short time. It is really intervals, I feel</p> <p><b>Interview teacher:</b> It creates a lot of engagement. When the activity is organized as it is, I experience that it is less visual who is slower than the rest, kind of. But, of course, you cannot hide that, the slowest student in class is still the slowest. It is not like that, however. It has worked surprisingly well. I think it has been a good activity</p>	<p>Losing leads to elimination</p> <p>Negative experience of competitive activity</p> <p>Positive experience of competitive activity</p> <p>Creating engagement</p> <p>Reduce the negative impact</p>	<p>Adapting competition in PE to produce engagement and to reduce students' negative experiences due to visibility</p>
<p><b>Observation/video recordings/field notes:</b> Rock, scissors, paper. Students are divided into two teams. One student on each team jumps with their legs together from one ring on the floor to the next. When the student from each team meets an opposing student, they perform rock, scissors, paper, and the loser must go back to his/her team and the winner continues (see result section)</p> <p><b>Written narratives:</b> When we were jumping in those rings. I thought it was boring since we only jumped into some rings and performed rock, scissors, paper</p> <p><b>Interview students:</b> I would prefer not to have rock, scissors, paper. Because it was not fun. But I am still participating in the game</p> <p><b>Written narratives:</b> Jumping in the rings. It was fun and something new</p> <p><b>Interview students:</b> Nobody commented, and I managed to do it</p> <p><b>Interview teacher:</b> [It is a] game, competition, fun. Just a fun activity. You have a 50% chance of winning, everyone can win, regardless of who you are. The weakest may win against the strongest. It is 50/50. As such, it is not always the physical part that decides [who wins]</p>	<p>Losing does not lead to elimination</p> <p>Negative experience of competitive activity</p> <p>Positive experience of competitive activity</p> <p>Having fun</p> <p>Arbitrary winners</p>	<p>Adapting competition in PE to produce positive experiences and to reduce the importance of physical skills on performance</p>

the students through competition, thereby influencing students to produce high physical exertion in the running activity. The teacher was aware of the possible negative impact of competition on some of the students' experiences. He, therefore, wanted to reduce the possibility of these negative experiences by facilitating the competitive

activity in a way that made it less visual who was the fastest or slowest runner. The researcher noted during the observation that every student performed high physical exertion during the activity. This observation contrasted with other competitive activities in the PE lessons where students might reduce physical exertion or give up during competitive activities. The students and the teacher called this activity 'pursuit racing.'

### **Pursuit Racing**

The activity consists of four teams (3-4 students on each team) starting at each of the four cones arranged as a quadratic field with approximately 20 meters between each cone. One student from each team starts to run and tries to tap the students from the other teams to eliminate these students and their teams from the contest. After one lap, the students exchange with another student on their team. The competition is finished when there is only one team remaining.

The PE lesson started with the students arranged at the grandstand while the teacher told them about the day's activities and other information. One of the students raised his hand to ask whether they could have the pursuit racing in the current lesson. Another student replied, "Yes," and the teacher responded with, "It is great fun," and got the immediate response from the previous student, "Yes, it is." The teacher responded with, "So we might include this activity after a while." Later in the PE lesson, the pursuit racing activity was included. The students were divided into teams of three or four students, and a student mentioned that they needed one more boy on their team, where the teacher responded, "No, you don't need that," and then explained how and where to make an exchange on the teams. The activity was finished before only one team remained, making no clear winners in the activity.

From the observer's perspective (researcher), the pursuit of racing provided both high physical exertion (the running in the activity) and enjoyment of the activity (students initiated the activity and the positive response before the activity). However, from the students' narratives written at the end of each PE lesson, several students mentioned pursuit racing as the activity they liked the least in the PE lesson. In the interviews, two students said:

It is like I wrote [in the narrative after the PE lesson], even if it is a team competition when one is running... the goal is to catch up with each other, and one feels bad when it is oneself that is disappointing the whole team... that is not fun. (Cassandra)

That activity, in particular, is something I do not like that much. Because one is on a team, but if you cannot do it, or if someone catches up with you, then it is your fault. I think it is very stupid because it gets noticed if it happens again and again. No, I. Even though I am not always the reason that we get eliminated, it is kind of, no, I don't know. (Silje)

These two students had negative experiences with the competition because of their possible contribution to the team's elimination from the activity. Regarding learning, Cassandra answered that she "practiced running, of course, and how to make exchanges fast. I don't think I learned anything else."

### **Adapting Competition in PE to Produce Positive Experiences and to Reduce the Importance of Physical Skills on Performance**

These competitive activities were identified through the arbitrary results of the students' actions on their success in the activity. There was no point in practicing the activity, as it would not improve the students' performance. In the interview, the teacher said the "jumping followed by rock, scissors, paper" was used for "play, competition, fun, just a fun activity."

#### **Jumping, Followed by Rock, Scissors, Paper**

The students are grouped into two teams. The activity consists of 10 rings in a half circle, where each team is placed in front of each side of the beginning half circle. The first student of each team jumps with legs together in the rings until they meet their opponent (student on the other team). The students then do rock, scissors, paper, and the winner is allowed to continue jumping to the following rings, while the loser must leave the ring and go back in the line for her/his team. If a student reaches the last ring, their team receives one point.

From the observer's perspective on the activity and the student's body language (e.g., smiling, throwing arms in the air), students could enjoy themselves and get frustrated. A few minutes into the activity, some students might take a longer time to leave the ring after losing the rock, scissors, paper match, pushing their opponents out of the way, and cheating in rock, scissors, paper (which resulted in the teacher demanding a replay). In other words, some students got a bit frustrated with the activity. An example of a student who got frustrated and was later interviewed about the activity will be presented below.

Joachim started the activity on his team and lost his first round of rock, scissors, and paper. The situation lasted eight seconds, and he had to wait 1 minute and 23 seconds until his next turn. Joachim lost his four first rounds. In his fifth round, he lost again and threw out his arms downwards, seemingly frustrated (3 minutes and 53 seconds into the activity). In his sixth round, Joachim landed in the same ring as his opponent and pushed his opponent, to which the teacher responded, "Joachim, calm down." Joachim wins this and the next round, seemingly a bit frustrated and irritated because he pushes his opponents before they can leave the ring. The last opponent Joachim needed to win against to score a point for his team chose not to start her round and let Joachim score a point. Joachim is the only one who cheers. Joachim lost his first match in the next round and pushed the student, who almost fell to the ground. This student claps Joachim's back and goes back to his team. The competitive activity lasted 8 minutes, and Joachim's team won.

Although some students expressed positive experiences of the rock, scissors, and paper activity in their narrative and interview, Joachim said he liked this activity the least in the PE lesson because it was boring. During the video clip of these situations, Joachim said, "I lost all the time," and when he scored a point, he laughed and said, "I cheered, finally I succeeded." He also said in the interview that he got frustrated when he could not win. When asked what he did not like about the activity, he said, "It is luck, it is luck. But it [the activity] was well made. I guess other [students] liked the activity." Joachim said that he learned that he had to try harder in the competition. When asked how, he answered: "You can't do that [try harder] in rock, scissors, paper, it is just the same thing... It is easier

in, for example football, to try harder. Because you can run and work harder.” As such, the activity did not bore the student in the sense of reduced activation of the nervous system; rather, it seemed to heighten the activation of the nervous system by producing frustration for the student. As such, the term “boring” seemed to express negative experiences of/in the activity.

The competitive activity with “jumping followed by rock, scissors, paper” provided arbitrary success and positive experiences (from narratives) but also frustration and cheating. The activity could become frustrating because it did not help to “try harder.”

## Discussion

ADAPTING competition from sports to physical education may not necessarily provide the educational end-in-view we want for the students. The schools in Norway shall provide a foundation for students to understand themselves, others, and the world and make good choices in life (Udir, 2019b). In contrast, one aim of sports is to win (Aggerholm et al., 2018). Based on the presented competitive activities in the result section, the teacher was more concerned about winning to motivate students instead of helping students understand themselves, others, and the world and make good choices in life. However, the teacher considered The Norwegian PE curriculum, which states that “PE is a central subject to stimulate a lifelong enjoyment of movement and a physically active lifestyle based on one’s own capabilities” (Udir, 2019a, p. 2a). The teacher seemed to use competition and the aim of winning to motivate students, and, at the same time, adapting the competitive activities in a way, to create enjoyment and positive experiences and reducing negative experiences for the students. Thus, combining part of the PE curriculum and part of the competition aims to include the best of two worlds. However, the teacher’s good intentions may work on paper but still provide negative experiences for several students. With respect to these activities being relevant to the students’ everyday lives, facing obstacles or losing in activities in PE and not being able to do anything about it, may create habits of accepting or not trying to do anything about failure. In other words, it might influence the students towards a fixed mindset or a habit of giving up when facing obstacles (Dewey, 2015; Dweck, 2019). Although there is no certainty here, the teacher’s role as an educator is, according to Dewey (2015), to

“be on the alert to see what attitudes and habitual tendencies are being created. In this direction he must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental” (p. 39).

As such, facilitating situations where practice or effort is of no use may be detrimental to students’ continued growth (unless there are some explicit educational reasons for doing it). Perhaps it is better to disconnect competition from sports entirely from competitive situations in PE due to the difficulty of bringing the best of two worlds and being useful in students’ everyday lives. The following discussion concerns the AVOID, ASK, ACCEPT, and ADAPT arguments presented by Aggerholm et al. (2018) and whether there are other ways of looking at competitive activities in PE disconnected from sports. Thereafter, the discussion includes what kind of aim and vocabulary we need in PE to disconnect competitive activities in PE from sports. The shift of vocabulary is exemplified by discussing the concept of trust.

### **AVOID, ASK, ACCEPT, ADAPT, or...**

At first glance, it is better to practice competition in PE as one does in sports instead of trying to provide both the aim of winning and reducing the negative effects in terms of experiences. Although presenting competition in PE as one does in sports may provide negative experiences for several students, it would at least be useful to increase one’s effort and to practice producing better performance. Hence, the ACCEPT argument by Aggerholm et al. (2018) may be the most beneficial in PE. However, accepting negative experiences does not open up further growth for the students if they avoid competitive situations in their everyday lives because they find out that competition is not something for them. As such, one could AVOID competition altogether in PE. However, avoiding competition in PE is not educative for students if competitive situations exist in the world. It does not provide a foundation for students to understand themselves, others, and the world and make good choices in life (Udir, 2019b). As mentioned in the introduction, we need to compete in several areas in our everyday lives. The AVOID argument would, therefore, not be very educative for the students. In a similar way, the ASK argument would not be very educative for the students because they could just say no and AVOID competitive activities. As

such, none of the arguments—AVOID, ASK, ACCEPT, or ADAPT if adapted as in this study—would be educational for the students. Instead, we need to do something else. By reading the article of Hovdal et al. (2021a) and including the work by Dewey (2015), one may be inspired to find alternative ways of using competitive activities in PE, so it becomes educative and relevant to students' everyday lives.

### **Choosing Learning Outcomes in Competitive Activities**

Redelius et al. (2015) indicated the importance of expressing the learning outcome to the students so that students perceive PE as a subject for learning. In the running pursuit activity, it was one student who suggested the activity. One may problematize whether it is only the loudest students or the students who are confident enough to suggest activities that should decide what happens in the PE lessons (Aarskog et al., 2022; Brock et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the teacher letting some students decide the activity makes it difficult to have a clear learning outcome in front of the activity. It may further be difficult for teachers to evaluate whether their teaching is working (Hattie, 2012) since there is no educational aim to evaluate the students' actions and reflections. Further, evaluating PE lessons may be difficult because, as seen in the present study, both the teacher and researcher misinterpreted the running pursuit activity, thinking the students found the activity more enjoyable than the students did. Such findings indicate the need to include students' expressed experiences in addition to students' behavior in activities. For instance, teachers may get information from more students than in this study through variations of the think-pair-share strategy (Cooper et al., 2021; Fernandez-Rio et al., 2017).

### **Learning About Trust Through Competitive Situations**

One of the end-in-view of competitive situations in PE may be to learn how to face obstacles in competitive situations that are useful in students' everyday lives (Hovdal et al., 2021a). Another end-in-view in competitive situations in PE may be to act constructively that are also useful in students' everyday lives. As such, the concept of trust may be useful —while avoiding the concept of fair play in sports (Fretland et al., 2020; Simon, 2018).

Validated trust may, for instance, help us to get better relationships, live better lives, and fulfill our goals in life (de Fine Licht & Brülde, 2021). Introducing the concept of trust in PE may, therefore, help students to act and reflect upon trustworthy actions by themselves and others. Thus, providing a foundation for students to understand oneself, others, and the world, and to make good choices in life (Udir, 2019b). Trust has been philosophically discussed elsewhere (Nickel, 2017). The importance of trust in present article includes trustworthy actions which may be achieved through continuous situations over time (e.g., Dewey, 2015). Through continuous situations, trust may be stronger, weaker, or lead to mistrust through the following narrative: “Watch what I do as I watch what you do as part of what we are doing to achieve common goals in shared futures” (Weigert, 2011, p. 326). Such a way of looking at trust may be useful in competitive situations in PE. For instance, the educational aim of competitive activities in PE may be learning to handle competitive situations in the students’ everyday lives. However, when students are acting out their frustration or cheat in activities, then an educational aim of learning about trust may be put in the foreground.

As we saw in the present study’s rock, scissor, and paper activity, students could cheat and violate the rules. The consequences of such actions seemed to be a longer period of waiting due to retaking on rock, scissors, and paper and that a student chose not to start her round due to the aggressive behavior. In other words, cheating and violating the rules ruined the activity for other students. The teacher, therefore, corrected the students’ behavior in accordance with the expected behavior of the activity. However, such actions do not educate the students about the possible long-term consequences. As such, the question at stake is not how to get students to follow the rules in a compliant way, but to see what attitudes are being created and whether these attitudes are conducive to continued growth (Dewey, 2015). The teacher could use the situations with cheating and violating the rules to help students learn about trust. For instance, how one should act in competitive situations and how to react when other people are cheating or misbehaving in competitive situations. Further, one may reflect on whether one should trust people who cheat in competitive or other stressful situations and the possible consequences of being known as a person who cheats and

whom other people cannot trust. If a person is known for cheating, it may deprive the person of interacting and broaden one's experiences with people who avoid persons who are considered unreliable (Dewey, 2015; Hovdal, 2022). Opposite, trustworthy students should avoid untrustworthy students due to the possibility of reduced quality of relationships and lives and the less possibility of fulfilling goals in life (de Fine Licht & Brülde, 2021). Students should avoid going in a direction that may hamper general growth (Dewey, 2015). Helping students to see the bigger picture concerning possible long-term consequences of being considered trustworthy or untrustworthy, may help direct students' actions in a trustworthy direction (Dewey, 2015; Fujita, 2008). To help students become trustworthy through competitive situations in PE, the teacher could facilitate a discussion concerning the consequences of being considered trustworthy or untrustworthy and what kind of actions might be considered trustworthy. For instance: 1. If someone cheats in stressful situations such as competitive situations in PE, can one trust the same student not to cheat in other areas when facing stressful situations? 2. If I cheat, would others believe that I will do what I say if I am in a stressful situation? 3. What may be the short- and long-term consequences of being considered a person who cheats? 4. What kind of actions in competitive situations are suitable to be considered trustworthy? 5. How would it influence my life, being around people I can or cannot trust?

## **Conclusion**

We compete in our everyday lives, and physical education may be helpful to do so in an educative way. The results showed that PE activities adapted elements from sports competitions in different ways. For instance, the aim of winning was adapted into PE but not the opportunity to practice over time towards the competition. The aim of winning triumphed an educational outcome. The teacher intended to use the competitive aspect of winning to produce engagement and high physical exertion and create positive student experiences. Due to students' different physical skills and, therefore, different opportunities to win, the teacher adapted competitive activities in a way that made physical skills less relevant or the performance less visible. The students' experiences and actions showed that students were still aware of their performance in relation to other students, and

that replacing the importance of physical skills on performance with chance concerning success in the activity caused frustration, which led students to act out the frustration in the activity. The frustration resulted from a lack of possibility to improve one's performance. In addition, the findings indicated the difficulty of seeing whether students had positive experiences of an activity only by observation. It was suggested that competition adapted from sports be disconnected from competitive situations in PE. Instead, teachers may focus on how competitive situations in PE may be useful in students' everyday lives. It was discussed that teachers preferably select the competitive activities because a clear learning outcome should lead them, and teachers need to include ways of getting students' experiences of the activities in addition to observation when evaluating whether their teaching is working. One learning outcome or end-in-view in competitive situations may be to learn how to face obstacles in competitive situations, which are useful in students' everyday lives. Another end-in-view may be to help students learn about trustworthy actions in competitive and stressful situations. Thus, helping students to understand themselves, others, and the world and to make good choices in life (Udir, 2019b).

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