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Abstract [en]

In 1983, Judith Placek published 'Conceptions of success in teaching: Busy, happy and good?' In this much cited book chapter, she argued that PE teachers and pre-service teachers had little concern for student learning, and often conceptualized successful teaching quite differently than researchers. For the four PE teachers and 29 PE majors, success was visible in PE when students were 'busy, happy and good' (Placek, 1983, p. 54). Over the last 40 years, Placek's arguments have been picked up extensively in PE research and 'busy, happy and good' has often been used as catchphrase to critique a particular approach to PE that emphasises student participation, enjoyment, and discipline. In other words, 'busy, happy and good' has, in many ways, evolved into a slur to 'put down' teaching practices that de-emphasize privileged forms of student learning (mainly skill acquisition).

Our intent is not to criticize Placek's work nor dismiss the notion that a PE practice that exclusively focuses on enjoyment, participation and discipline is problematic. Instead, we aim to add nuance to the use of 'busy, happy and good' in PE research and practice by connecting the concept to broader issues in education and pedagogy. To do so, we argue that 'success in teaching' is not a neutral term. Instead, they are always - as Armour et al. (2017) contend - political, educational, and embedded in societal aspirations. In a sense, it all depends on what students, and indeed teachers, are busy, happy, and good doing.

In revisiting Placek's argument we consider how the concept 'busy, happy and good' has been used in PE research over time. Here, our overview reveals that it is described in different ways in research in relation to PE (e.g., an orientation, an objective, a syndrome, a mentality, a model, an agenda). For this paper, we have identified four major uses of the concept with no major shifts regarding its use over time. First, 'busy, happy and good' is used as a general statement indicating that teachers' main concern in PE is that their students are busy, and/or happy, and/or good - and not always all three together. Second, 'busy, happy and good' is used to support results regarding a focus in PE on activity, enjoyment or discipline. Third, 'busy, happy and good' is used as an argument that current PE is not much about learning. Finally, the catchphrase is used as a challenge to contemporary PE to move beyond 'busy, happy and good' towards more focus on student learning. There are of course exceptions, but these are rare (e.g. Griffin 1985; O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou 1992).

It is obvious that Placek's work, particularly this catchphrase, struck a chord in 1983. 'Busy, happy and good' has accordingly shaped practices and is both produced by and produces ideas about teachers, teaching and success in PE. It is, however, rare for such two small studies to realize such an immense impact, particularly since Placek herself argued the small sample size impeded generalization (see Siedentop, 1989). Concurrently, the notion of 'busy, happy and good' has sometimes been used as the only supporting reference for some quite general and broad sweeping statements about teachers, teaching and what happens in PE practice.

From this overview we will discuss the ways 'busy, happy and good' often focuses on the how of teaching PE and argue that many problems arise when it also becomes the why or the what of teaching. Any theory or claim regarding success in teaching becomes empty without a direction and a content. We will follow this up by discussing 'busy, happy and good' in relation to different purposes (why) and different content (what), and argue that a 'busy, happy and good' PE could be quite productive in relation to certain purposes and certain content (i.e. success = educative).

As a conclusion we use different theoretical ideas to revitalize and reclaim the notion of 'busy, happy, and good' as something that is not necessarily bad and can be used in more productive ways than to bash teachers and their practices. Instead, we use the apparent communicative capital of 'busy, happy, and good' to say something about teaching PE in an affirmative way and thus transform what 'busy, happy, and good' can be or be understood as. We accordingly ask: Success in relation to what? What if 'busy, happy and good' were a good thing? Should we even

aim for students to be busier, happier, and 'good(er)'? But again, it all depends on what they are busy, happy and good doing.

References

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