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RESEARCH ARTICLE



'I play on a club team': examining the development of the physically active habitus in early primary education

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ABSTRACT

The drop off in physical activity (PA) for children has led to an increased focus on their PA engagement, due to the poor health outcomes often linked to this decline. Subsequently, stakeholders, across a variety of fields, have problematised and intervened in activity settings to address this decline. Many of these studies acknowledge high levels of activity in the primary years and tend to prioritise their efforts on the adolescent years. An important limitation in these studies is that they greatly overlook how a decline might also be related to children's physical engagement in early childhood. To gain more insight on the role that early PA engagement may play in long-term PA participation, this paper examines early physical engagement through a focus on year one/ two students across three PA spaces – the home, the physical education (PE) class and the playground. Data was collected through a range of ethnographic and child-centred methods and examined using a Bourdieusian lens. This analysis shows that engagement in PA starts as a confluence between the physically active habitus, sport-focused PE and the sportised playground, which produces different patterns of engagement. This paper offers an in-depth examination of this process across the three spaces and identifies how these outcomes become habitualised over the course of primary school, which may play a role in affecting long-term participation. The paper concludes with a call for a more democratised approach to early primary PE, along with accompanying changes to the playground.

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Introduction

There has been an increasing focus on the under-achievement of children to engage in sufficient PA (Hollis et al., 2016; Kemp et al., 2022), with daily moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) often used as the primary measure to determine PA levels (Kemp et al., 2022; Powell et al., 2019). According to health guidelines, children need to reach approximately 60 minutes per day with MVPA defined primarily based on intensity, to be deemed sufficiently active (see AIHW, 2020). Much of this daily activity is meant to occur within the school, with the playground and PE space operating as key sites, as exemplified in the following field narrative field note:

It is a typical lunch time. The bell rings and the year one/ twos sprint out on to the playground. They run to the jungle gym, the soccer field, the football goals, the down ball courts, and the sandpit. They immediately start to engage in tag games, imaginary games, gymnastics moves, shelter building, down ball, soccer and footy.

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Meanwhile, the year five/six students slowly walk on to the playground. A group of boys head to the football goals, some go to the basketball court. Other students find shady spots on the playground to sit down and talk, while some decide to walk around the playground and talk with their friends. Over the course of lunch, most of the year one/two students maintain a high level of PA, showing clear signs - red faces, hands on heads, and continual trips to the water fountain. For the year five/six students, the groups that were walking have now found a place to sit down and talk. Only the football group is still playing, some of them showing signs of exhaustion but for most, no clear signs. Finally, the lunch bell rings. Many of the year one/two students stop playing and exhaustedly walk over to get a last drink of water before class, wiping off the sweat as they go. Other groups keep playing and are told to stop and head to class, which they do after sticking their heads under the water fountain. Conversely, most of the year five/six students slowly get up from their spots and walk back to class in groups, trying to get one last meaningful talk in, before they return to the classroom. The football game ends with a 'last point wins kick' before the group grabs a drink and heads back to class. (Field note, playground, lunchtime)

The fieldnote, representative of six months spent at a primary school, highlights the ways that children in different years engaged in PA; imaginary games and tag, monkey bars, walking, sitting and sport-based contests. Whilst this description is part of the mundane, day to day, of children's lunchtime, it also resonates with the recurring concern voiced by educators, health practitioners and parents about a decrease in PA levels. The fieldnote above relates to the general trends in MVPA achievement, namely that by the age of 10 (year five/six) only 15% of Australian children meet the standard (AIHW, 2020). As reflected above, incidental PA is said to decrease as children move through the primary system. More accurately though, MVPA is distributed with greater disparity as children age, and this can be seen reflected in the very high levels of PA in some of those who are playing competitive sport compared to the greater numbers adopting more sedentary lunchtime behaviours.

Whether we agree with the ways in which the PA of children is measured and problematised (Evans et al., 2008; Gard, 2010; Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2015), or indeed with the various types of interventions that have been attempted to increase this activity (Hollis et al., 2016; McCaughy & Tischler, 2010), there is little doubt that something happens between the ages of 5 and 13 that corresponds to a drop in the average amount of PA at school. However, few studies have focused on the primary years, with most literature addressing this drop off focused instead on the adolescent years (see Devís-Devís et al., 2015; Gatouillat et al., 2020; Kemp et al., 2022). Accordingly, intervention efforts tend to target this age group, with limited consideration for factors that may carry over from early childhood. We seek to understand the factors in the early primary years that may contribute to lower PA levels in later years. Of interest in this paper is the relationship between physical education (curriculum and practice), sport participation (outside of school), the design of non-classroom spaces (playgrounds), and incidental, habitual, PA levels of primary school students (play). Utilising a Bourdieusian framework, we examine the ways that these four factors operate to enable some students, and restrict others, in developing or maintaining a physically active habitus (PAH). The focus of the investigation is on year one/two (5–8 years-old) students because it is at this point that all students are exposed to the concept of 'organised' PA, namely PE. We are interested in understanding the ways that previous organised sport experience prior to attending primary school may or may not prove advantageous in building a PAH. Further, we engage with students and the way they occupy and use playground space, to consider the ways that PE and sport contribute to the privileging of activity spaces to certain students in the school.

The school, through the implementation of curriculum, plays a central role in efforts to establish behaviours that result in MVPA, by providing an initial opportunity to positively influence PA levels (Dinan Thompson, 2018) and by contributing to the development of lifelong PA habits (Ward & Griggs, 2018). In fact, a significant proportion of this engagement of 60 minutes of MVPA is expected to occur within the school (Powell, 2018), particularly during PE (Powell et al., 2019). Beyond PE, the playground is designed to provide a sense of freedom and autonomy so that children can learn through play, encourages active play through various forms of movement, and is also operationalised as a key space to achieve up to 50% of daily PA goals (Hyndman, 2017). As the opening

reflection showed, these efforts are successful for many students when they start primary school, with most of them active in a variety of ways in the playground, however these PA behaviours change and decline over time. Is this decline a process of aging or are there other contributing factors that shape the PA choices children make? Understanding this process requires examining the different levels of PA experience that children bring to school, how this experience is valued within the school and then how it influences their actions within these spaces.

The physically active habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, field and capital have received substantial interest in the literature on PE and sport (see Jachyra, 2016; Stuij, 2015). Habitus is a particularly useful concept to make sense of children's levels of PA in the primary school setting. Habitus can be understood as one's embodied social history as shaped by the context of the relative social field/s. In other words, the way we speak, what we eat, how we eat, how we walk, etc, is shaped through the individual's interactions (agency) with the social field (structure) to the point where action seems natural, effortless, and most often occurs without the need for conscious intervention (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Key in this process, is capital which is both the process and product in any given field and is like 'trumps in the game of cards' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119), in that their possession gives you advantage in the game. According to Bourdieu, there are three types of capital: economic, social and cultural capital, but equally important for this work is a sub-species known as physical capital, which refers to the idea that bodies possess physical capital, which can be used within specific social fields to accumulate other forms of capital (Koca et al., 2009)

If we apply Bourdieu's framework to PA, as something that is structured through social interaction, as something that is made through repetition of movements, incidentally, on a day-to-day basis, then we introduce the concept of the physically active habitus (PAH). The PAH that is valued has multiple components that are developed in conjunction with each other. The idealised PAH is simultaneously physiological (endurance, aerobic capacity), cognitive (motor skills, coordination, game sense), social (teamwork, following rules), and emotional (pushing oneself, managing pain). Significantly a PAH is expressed through the body in a way that responds to other agents in the field automatically and with predictability. Dukic et al. (2017, p. 104) describe something similar in the 'football habitus', namely being 'able to play, to pass, to conceptualise the game'. The football habitus has its origins in daily prioritising of football, both formal and informal, from a young age. The football habitus describes a social history that is recognised by others in the field as having value, primarily by being included in the team. In the same way, a PAH is recognised as having capital. The fact that educators and health practitioners have tried to quantify (MVPA) and measure it, is an indication that it is something to be desired but think also of all the micro-interactions where PAH receives/is recognised as having symbolic capital. Being selected and competing for the school in sporting events, being called upon to demonstrate for the class and receiving regular praise for your efforts, being picked first or second in playground teams at lunchtime, not to mention the overlap into community sports and being on competitive teams. The symbolic capital afforded to the PAH is reinforced further by the spatial organisation of the school (sport specific spaces) and the broader cultural value of the activities one does, as expressed through the media and professional sport settings.

Most children enter the education with a diversity of PAH, however over time the desired PAH becomes narrowed and shaped by curriculum and assessment, physical space at the school, and the broader cultural context. If one's PAH aligns closely with these social forces, then continuing the embodied trajectory toward an even stronger PAH, is relatively straight forward. However, if parts of one's PAH are incongruous with one, or all, of these forces, then the likelihood of attaining the desired PAH becomes less likely. Hence one student benefits from incidental daily activity that corresponds with their dispositions of taste (games of a particular sport) at any opportunity (before school, recess, lunchtime), whilst another student finds fewer opportunities to express their PAH and

becomes less active daily. The cumulative physiological effect on these two students will almost certainly be markedly different, namely one becomes very fit, and the other doesn't.

In the remainder of the paper, we explore the development of the PAH across these spaces. We begin with a focus on the use of four methods (observations, video analysis, photo voice and map drawing), connected to six months of ethnographic fieldwork by the primary author at Castle Rock Primary School (CRPS). The research aims are then revisited to discuss the interactions between PE and the ways that students embody these experiences differently in class and in their broader engagement with the school especially during non-class time (lunchtime and recess). We consider how children's earliest PE interactions can work to inadvertently validate some students' PAH whilst negating others, and in doing so create conditions where sportised forms of PA are privileged through the provision of physical space at the school that reinforces the PAH of a minority of students. Rather than being problematised, the reinforcement of this PAH is naturalised, especially down gendered lines. We conclude by discussing the possibilities of altering PE practice to draw on and recognise the multiple PAH of all students coupled with a reimagining and redistribution of the playground space, in order to facilitate higher levels of incidental MVPA in the daily experiences of all children. To understand more about the development of the PAH and the data collection techniques that were used to develop insights into this process, we turn to the methodology.

Methods

The study is based on a six-month ethnography conducted at a public primary school (Prep to year 6) in Melbourne in 2017. The ethnography focused on PE classes and playground activity (recess, lunch, etc) allowed for an examination of students embodied history across various PA fields. CRPS was predominantly middle class and had a diverse cultural makeup, covering 31 different languages and dialects. The school had 112 year one/two students (ages 5–8 years) divided into five composite classes containing a mix of students across grades. Approximately 60 students participated in the study (except for the photo elicitation) and pseudonyms are used throughout. The study utilised a variety of ethnographic and child-centred methods: photo-elicitation, observational field notes, video analysis and map drawing to develop a nuanced understanding of children's PA engagement. This paper presents the findings from a theory focused analysis of the disparate data sets. The study received ethics approval from the authors' university and the Victorian Government Department of Education. The children were involved through their own informed assent and legal consent from their parents.

Data collection sources

The study incorporated a range of ethnographic and child-centred methodologies and whilst a full account of the procedure of each method is not possible within the space of this article (see Smee et al., 2021; Van der Smee & Williams, *forthcoming*) we seek to highlight the most important details for each data collection source. The first set of data was collected through photo elicitation, which allows a researcher to insert a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). Parents were asked to opt into this phase and were tasked with taking photos of their children engaging in PA outside of school, then, using the photos as cues, the children (N = 25) explained these physical activities, what they enjoyed, how often they did them and with whom. Fieldnotes were completed by the lead author as part of the daily activities of being at the school. Being involved in PE classes and yard duty at recess and lunch provided access to the student engagement with the curriculum and especially the activities occurring in the playground. Being on yard duty allowed casual conversations with students about the games they were playing, who was included/excluded, the level of intensity of these games and the division of playground space. In each of the five PE classes, several PE lessons were recorded. These recordings provided the opportunity to examine the moment-to-moment actions of the participating children in PE. Finally, all the students in Year one/two were

asked to draw their own distinct maps of the school and playground, identifying who they played with and in which spaces. For the smaller group of participating students, the lead author followed up with individual/group interviews to allow these students to explain their maps in relation to who they played with, where they played and as such how they conceptualised the playground as an activity space. The use of these techniques led to the formation of four distinct data sets.

Data analysis

An inductive thematic analysis approach was utilised to individually analyse the disparate data sets (map interviews, photo elicitations and observation notes) and build codes and themes from a 'bottom-up' approach (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). These themes, covered in-depth in previous work (see Smee et al., 2021), allowed for a deeper understanding of the diversity of the children's PAH. To analyse the video footage, the systematic observation programme Observer XT was used to code the observed behaviours. The data sets were then integrated utilising the video data as the primary source, underpinned by the work of Bourdieu. The other sources were then re-analysed to trace the children's PA engagement in and between multiple fields. The data sets were combined to develop a nuanced portrayal of the year one/two students' relationship between their PAH and PA (see Author, forthcoming). Here we present several reflective examples of the data collected from each method to show the development of the PAH across these fields.

Findings

The Bourdieu-inspired concept of PAH provides a framework to understand children's under-achievement related to recommended levels of MVPA. In this section, we present the findings from the four sources to examine the development of children's PAH across a variety of social fields and discuss how this operates to enable some students and restrict others. We begin by focusing on the photo elicitation to examine the types of PAH that children bring to school.

Photo elicitation: the PAH at home

All the year one/two students interviewed talked about the various activities they were involved in at home and demonstrated that they all possessed some form of PAH. These students all indicated engagement in forms of PA on a regular basis that were both enjoyable and that they were good at. For example:

Thompson: On that one, I'm scooting on my scooter.

Author 1: How often do you ride your scooter?

Thompson: Pretty much a lot in the weekend. I actually ride to the park and it's just really fun.

(Thompson, photo elicitation)

Author 1: So how often do you think you skip at home?

Natasha: Maybe every day.

Author 1: Every day, so you love it that much?

Natasha: Yes

(Natasha, photo-elicitation interview)

Author 1: But did you just start playing footy this year or last year?

Tim: Last year.

Author 1: Where do you play?

Tim: I play on a club team.

(Tim, photo elicitation)

The children's activities generally fell into three categories: formal team sports (with some form of modified competition) such as cricket, Australian football, basketball and soccer; formalised individual and expressive activities and sports including martial arts, swimming, gymnastics and circus; and, finally, informal physical activities and sports such as bike riding, roller blading, tree climbing, skipping, family walks, playing at the park and a range of sport based and/or imaginative games. The home environment contained a wide variety of PA opportunities that the children engaged in. The photo elicitation indicated that students in year one/two entered the education system with a pre-existing and developing PAH, which aligns with previous research on the wide range of physical experience that children bring to school (Evans, 2004; Smee et al., 2021)

Observations: PAH on the playground

As the opening reflection illustrates, the year one/two students engaged in a range of activities. Time on the playground during recess and lunch was a highlight of their day, and they typically launched out of their classrooms to engage in activities. They engaged in a diverse set of playground behaviours/activities, as the following notes highlight:

The students are playing a new version of tiggy (tag) called 'Horror Tiggy'. They pick a killer from a horror movie who must chase everyone else and try and tag them. The game starts with 6 students, but by the end of lunch 20 students are playing.

(Field note, lunch)

A group of girls are playing on the gymnastics bars. They are trying to show off all their favourite moves - summersaults etc. They start daring each other to do complex moves. They aren't all able to do them, but they have a lot of fun trying.

(Field note, lunch)

Danai and Uma decided to kick a football back and forth at the goals. They each had several turns kicking. Eventually, a couple of boys joined the game and began to get aggressive with the two girls. The boys eventually took over and wouldn't let the girls play anymore. The girls left to play with skipping ropes.

(Field note, lunch)

The students played soccer, football, cricket, gymnastics, played on the jungle gym and the monkey bars, created endless new versions of tiggy (tag), raced each other, built forts and sandcastles, and engaged in an infinite range of imaginary games. Some of the children played the same games during each break, with the same friends, often continuing a sport or game from a previous session. Others regularly played different games, with the same friendship group or joined with other friendships groups. They typically only played with their peers, and rarely seemed eager to return to class. As the final field notes shows, there was separation along gender lines on the playground, but this will be elaborated on later.

Importantly, not all the children were active for the entire playground period, in fact, many of them would engage in less-active activities, often guided by the less active pursuits that defined their PAH. For the majority though, they engaged in physical activities that kept them physically active for their entire break. These students showed some of the tell-tale signs of PA engagement – heavy breathing, red faces, hand on heads, sweat and severe thirst. Although not all of them participated in the same types of activities that they did at home, many of them did engage in similar activities. The diversity of PAH was embodied through the diversity of activities that children engaged in which kept most of them active for significant periods of time on the playground. If

we consider this PAH as contributing to the desired daily 60 minutes of MVPA, then recess (20 mins) and lunchtime (40 mins) play for these students goes a long way to achieving this goal. This development and demonstration of PAH was also possible within the PE space.

Video recording: PAH in PE

PE was another social and physical field that provided the opportunity for the children to demonstrate and further develop their PAH. Early PE is often perceived as a period of 'pre-sport', where children are expected to learn the skills for later sport participation (Ward & Griggs, 2018). CRPS had a full-time specialist PE teacher, who taught all the grades (Year one/two had one hour of PE per week). Mr King followed the Australian Curriculum by focusing on the development of the fundamental movement skills, delivered primarily through small-sided games and individual practice, conducted through activity stations. The emphasis on sport in PE at CRPS was translated into a focus on several sporting focused object-controlled skills, such as throwing, catching, bouncing, kicking and striking. These skills were taught and developed through several activities, such as piggy in the middle and ball and lever catch, in a way that emphasised competition and skill mastery (Smee et al., 2021). As a result, those students who had developed their PAH through engaging in similar sporting activities were able to embody these dispositions at level that their peers were unable to replicate. They had developed many of the key physiological, cognitive, social and emotional characteristics of the idealised PAH. The following images are screenshots of video recordings of PE and are indicative of the ways differing PAH interact with the curriculum.

The images above show a game of piggy in the middle that had six participants: Aaron, Rick, Adele, Shooki, Nat and Danny. This moment shows that Aaron and Rick are clearly able to succeed within this activity, often at the expense of their peers. For students such as these two, the ability to succeed within these moments, and broader PE, is a result of possessing a well-developed PAH that aligns with the field. Both students participated in basketball outside of school, which meant they brought a high level of physical capital to this activity, as well as the dispositions highlighted above. This was also reflected in their abilities, as the photos highlight. The photos show Rick executing a textbook block attempt: he has timed his jump perfectly, jumping off the ground with both feet and extending his hand at the peak off his jump to block Adele's throw attempt (see Figure 1). This makes it incredibly difficult for some of the other students to throw effectively. Meanwhile, Aaron displays his superior shooting skills: adopting the perfect flexion of his wrists and releasing the



Figure 1. Rick performs a block.

ball at the height of his jump to release it high and arcing over Rick's head, as the piggy (see [Figure 2](#)). This technique makes it nearly impossible for Rick, or the other students, to intercept. For Aaron and Rick, these are automatic behaviours because they demonstrate their 'embodied history' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) developed through engagement in similar activities. By displaying these skills and embodying several sporting dispositions, Rick and Aaron were able to be successful in a way that many of their peers could not, executing the skills with ease to avoid interceptions and spending far less time in the middle.

In contrast, the other students were unable to compete in the same way and were often intimidated by the actions of these two. As the videos highlighted, they often had to try and throw with both Ric and Aaron towering over them and crowding their space, with active hands. This made it incredibly difficult to competently throw the ball to the other players. Importantly, Ric and Aaron particularly focused on the students with the lowest competence (see [Figure 3](#)). In this instance, they tower over the much shorter and less experienced Shooki, cutting off any ability for her to throw the ball. This type of situation led to an easy intercept and relegation to Piggy. Once in the Piggy position, they struggled to compete and move with the same ability as Ric and Aaron, particularly when these two 'experts' threw the ball over their heads, making it difficult to develop the skills needed to succeed in the game or within the broader field. Put simply, Ric and Aaron dominate this activity. Their PAH is not only about previously developed physical ability. They also demonstrate very high levels of competitiveness, well above that of their peers, and this further enhances their domination and subsequent positive feelings of competence (or being good at something).

These findings were not unique to this situation and are echoed in the works of others (see [Stuij, 2015](#)). The make-up of the field of PE (curriculum), and the emphasis on sport-based movements, privileged the PAH of certain children over others. These children possessed many of the skills and dispositions necessary for success within this field, allowing them to acquire and accrue capital (Bourdieu, 1993) that was not as easily accessible for their peers. For these students, their PAH 'encountered a social world of which it is a product', (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) and as a result were able to succeed with less effort. The other children, whose PAH did not align with the make-up of the field, don't get to demonstrate or embody their PAH in the same way, impacting their ability to succeed. In other words, their PAH is not recognised as possessing value through the interactions in the field and therefore they gain little or no capital. As a result, the field of PE provides a privileged environment for certain types of children to continue to develop their PAH, often at the expense of the peers. Despite all children bringing a PAH into PE, it



Figure 2. Aaron expertly throws the ball.



Figure 3. Shooki struggles to throw the ball.

becomes a site where differential PAHs start to develop, determined by the alignment of their pre-PE PAH with PE activities. This then plays a role in how children use the playground space and the types of activities that they choose to engage in.

Playground maps: the privileging of certain PAH

CRPS was a relatively small school with the grounds taking up half a block. Of that space, the school buildings, an assembly area and a staff car park took up approximately 50% of the area. The rest of space was devoted to the playground. CRPS's playground was like other traditional playgrounds in that most of the space was devoted to spaces for sports and organised games (Thomson, 2007). The oval was the single largest element of the playground, counting for over half of the playground space – containing facilities for football (footy), soccer and cricket. Other sporting spaces, such as a basketball and Down ball courts took up 20% of the space. In comparison, other areas such as the jungle gym and monkey bars were much smaller, counting for less than 10% of the playground space. The rest of the playground space (lunch tables and sitting areas) existed between these spaces and children were provided a significant amount of freedom to play where and how they wanted. There were typically three teachers on playground duty, assigned to different spaces, but they mainly operated as monitors to address any potential behavioural or safety issues (Thomson, 2007). The maps show how the children see and use the playground providing an insight into how they exist in the space, as shown through Figures 4–7.

The playground observations provided insight into the type of activities that the children engage in on the playground, but the maps provided important context on how the students view the space. It particularly highlighted how the students use and own different spaces on the playground. The playground is known to be a highly segregated space, often divided by age (Pawlowski et al., 2018) and gender (Clark & Paechter, 2007; Thomson, 2007), but these maps highlighted the student perspective on how they perceive the playground space and how the embodiment of their PAH influences them to spend time in certain spaces. The figures show two very different types of maps, which were a reflective sample of the other student maps. The playground was quite a large area, consisting of several spaces, and the maps show how the students value certain spaces through their use of scale. The first two maps position the oval centrally, with the space taking up the whole map, emphasising how important it is to them. The other maps similarly



Figure 4. Carl's playground map.

emphasised singular spaces (such as the jungle gym, monkey bars or sandpit) using scale, with their maps explicitly focusing on the spaces they regularly occupied.

What can we learn from the children through their maps and follow-up interviews? Importantly, they see themselves existing in different spaces in ways that are closely linked to the development of their PAH. They select spaces that align with their PAH and this reflects their performances and experiences in PE. The sporting spaces, which dominate the playground, are afforded symbolic capital. Those who bring a PAH into PE that is valued, are then able to play in the sporting spaces and, as their maps show, successfully occupy them. They picked these spaces because they aligned with their PAH, further developed through PE, providing more opportunity to develop this PAH further through similar sporting activities. The other students whose PAH was not valued in the same way, saw themselves existing in different spaces. They engaged in different type of activities, that did not align with the valued activities in PE, but which did often align with the activities that they valued at home.

The key difference in the valuing of spaces comes down to how students prioritised and occupied certain areas in the playground. As the opening observation highlighted, the oval was largely populated by the year five/six students playing sport. The year one/two students with a reasonably well-developed PAH, recognise the importance of this area through their maps, even if they only exist on the periphery of the oval during recess and lunch. They discuss the older students' games and their



Figure 5. Tim's playground map.

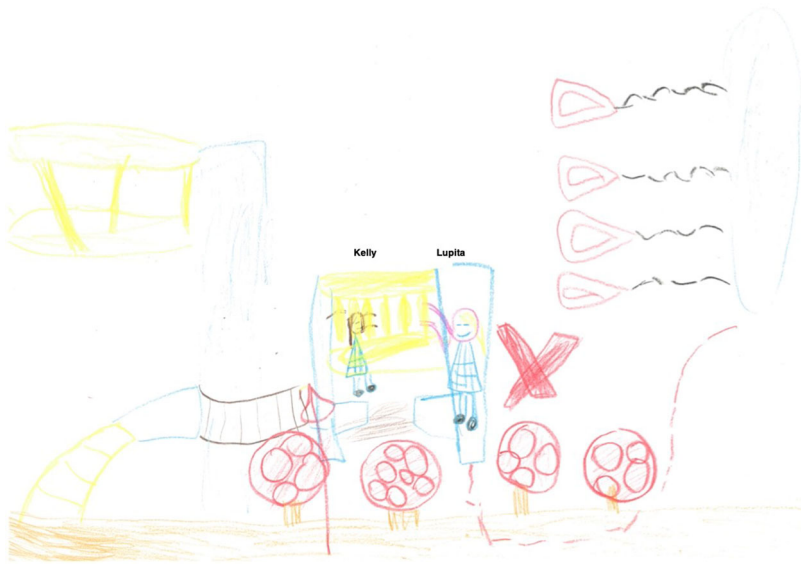


Figure 6. Lupita's playground map.



Figure 7. Renny's playground map.

desire to be part of them at some stage. The older students have continued along a trajectory that the younger students are currently on, now able to engage in these sporting activities with ease, grace, and a range of physiological adaptations. Their dominance of the oval is unquestioned. For the younger children, within this field, they can see that their Sport PAH is 'immediately endowed with meaning and interest' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, p. 128). For these children, this is their future in the playground. They occupy and play similar sports in the areas of the oval that are left over,

knowing that at a certain point they will graduate to five/six status. For the other students, they have multiple spaces in which to engage in activities that align with their own PAH, but these areas are much smaller and overpopulated by students trying to engage in a range of different activities. Importantly, in comparison to the oval, there is very little opportunity for future play here, as these students will eventually age out of these spaces. The year one/two students do not see the older students engaging in activities that align with their own PAH. Instead, they see them engaging in more sedentary activities at the fringes of the oval. As these year one/two students progress through school, and experience less play options, they are more likely to follow this same trajectory. This is the beginning of the pronounced differences in PA during recess and lunch seen between students in the later years of primary school. Such differentiation corresponds to the individual PAH students possess and whether it aligns with sportised PE. As most of the playground is designed for sport activities, those with sport-based PAH are afforded the space and opportunity to develop this habitus (skills, fitness, competition) daily at the expense of other students whose spatial options are condensed and whose entry into sport spaces becomes incongruous with their embodied physical histories.

Discussion

The reflective observation that started this article provided a narrative insight into the daily incidental play and PA that occurs at CRPS. More importantly, it echoed the physical drop off rate that has been widely reported as children progress into adolescence (AIHW, 2020; Kemp et al., 2022). Most year one/two children were active in a variety of ways, displaying the tell-tale signs of MVPA while on the playground. Comparatively, a much smaller group of year five/six students were displaying these same signs, with proportionally more choosing to engage in more sedentary activities. A variety of studies have tried to understand how this happens (Devís-Devís et al., 2015; Gatouillat et al., 2020; Kemp et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2018). We believe that the theoretical lens provided by PAH offers a complementary insight into how this drop off in PA may be developing within the primary school.

The findings from this study showed that the children brought a diversity of PAH to school. They majority engaged in a wide range of activities, both formal and informal, and brought a PAH developed through these experiences. They continued to embody their PAH and engage in a variety of activities on the playground, many, but not all, influenced by the activities that they engage in at home. This starts to change in the PE space, which is a key field for the development of PAH, a PA field where students must engage on a weekly basis. The narrow sporting approach emphasised in primary PE (Dinan Thompson, 2018; Ward & Griggs, 2018) starts to privilege certain PAH over others. In this case, even though there was no engagement in formal sport, there was still an emphasis on sport through sportised activities, that provided capital to those children who possessed a PAH developed through similar sporting activities. These children had already made progress towards developing an idealised PAH which they embodied to display physiological, cognitive, social and emotional traits their peers did not possess in the same combination. The pictures of Rick and Aaron show them displaying more advanced aerobic capacity, motor skills, coordination, game sense, teamwork and the ability to push themselves. They were able to embody their PAH to engage in these activities, like a 'fish in water', rarely feeling the weight of the water (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Their peers might be able to embody and display some but not all of these skills, particularly in the same combinations. This privileging of certain types of activities and the capital associated with an idealised PAH, develop advantages, which the other children do not necessarily get because they don't have the opportunity to embody their PAH in the same way. The fact that the divide typically occurred along gendered lines was also apparent, and made sense since PE tends to align with the interests and experiences of boys (Jachyra, 2016; Ward & Griggs, 2018). This was also echoed here, as the students that possessed a more idealised PAH tended to be boys. This divide between the children, particularly with physical skills, is seen as

natural, rather than a product of the embodied history of the students as they are valued through a narrow lens in the PE space.

This divide between the PAH of the children becomes further naturalised on the playground. In fact, the playground is perhaps the main space where certain PAH are privileged and allowed to develop towards an even stronger PAH. These students were given more space to engage and embody their PAH, and often chose who could play in the spaces with them. As the maps showed, the other children chose to exist in other spaces, but these spaces were much smaller and somewhat limiting in the options for PA, especially as more children tried to engage in their activities in these smaller spaces. Although the development of PAH is progressed in PE, this division between the PAH of the children becomes habituated through the repetition of incidental movements that occur on the playground daily. It provides some children the ability to further develop their idealised PAH, which then feeds back into PE, providing further advantages. The other children find fewer opportunities to express their PAH, and so over time are likely to become less active. Thus, if these trajectories continue, we see a decline in PA (AIHW, 2020; Devís-Devís et al., 2015; Gatouillat et al., 2020; Kemp et al., 2022; Powell et al., 2019), so that by the time children are in year five/six many are much less active on the playground. Not only do PA options on the playground decline as students get older (Hyndman, 2017), but these children who do not possess the idealised PAH, including the key physiological, cognitive, social and emotional adaptations, are less likely to succeed and last in these games for the entirety of a playground session. Hence, why we see the divide, in the reflective observation, between most of the year one/twos who are active and embodying their PAH, and the relative few who are still engaging in PA on the playground by the later years.

Conclusion

This article has provided insight into the development of PAH in primary school. The study showed how most children enter formal schooling with a diversity of PAH, but the desired PAH becomes narrowed and shaped by a variety of social forces within the school over time. These social forces, through the valuing of certain activities and ways of being in the fields of PE and the playground, privilege certain PAH over others. If a student's PAH closely aligns with what is valued in these fields, they are likely to be able to easily continue along this trajectory towards building an even stronger PAH. However, when most of the elements of a student's PAH do not align with the valued capital of the field, they will be less likely to progress in the same way towards this desired PAH. As a result, students can become less active, as reflected in the divide in PA engagement by age on the playground. Importantly, the legitimatising of certain types of PAH and activities, particularly within PE (Jachyra, 2016; Ward & Griggs, 2018), plays a role in de-legitimising other types of PAH and activities. That is not to say, that these children are not still active outside of school, many are (O'Connor & Penney, 2021), but they miss the opportunities to develop in the same ways as their privileged peers, missing a variety of crucial opportunities. The cumulative effect of these different trajectories clearly leads to very different physiological development for the different types of children. This aligns with other research which has highlighted the PA differences between children (Hollis et al., 2016; Kemp et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2018), but also shows that part of what is missing in our understanding, is perhaps that the difference in physiological development that we have highlighted means that not all children can engage in MVPA in the same way in the adolescent years. Those children who can engage in this type of activity have likely developed physiological adaptations through the process outlined here, making PA engagement easier. Meanwhile, for the other children, who have become less active over time, engaging in this level and intensity of PA in the adolescent years is likely to be much more challenging. That is not to say that the development of PAH within the school is the only factor that must be considered¹ but its development clearly highlights the need to examine how engagement in the early years may play a role in the drop off later on.

How do we address this problem? Firstly, we must acknowledge that the habitus is ‘durable but not eternal’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p?). Even though we argue that the PAH development process sets the children on embodied trajectories that will lead to the development of certain types of PAH, this does not mean they are stuck on their trajectories and cannot change their PAH. However, if we want to address the declining levels of PA as children age, then we must address the development of PAH in the early years. One solution, often proposed to address high levels of inactivity in PE (Martins et al., 2018), is to increase the amount of time students engage in MVPA during PE lessons (Hollis et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2019). For example, while emphasising fitness or conducting boot camps may seem appealing because they appear to put all the children on equal footing, they do not recognise and value the PAH of all students. This form of PE would just become regulated PA. Another solution that has been proposed is to intervene in PE classes to help those students with less experience to ‘catch-up’. While this approach has been seen to be effective in some educational contexts (see Paille, 2013), in this case, this type of intervention is just likely to provide more symbolic capital to the more experienced students, and place further emphasis on the same activities and those with a desired PAH. This solution is unlikely to lead to any significant change.

Instead, we need to alter the field. We argue for a more democratic approach that aligns with calls made by Oliver and Kirk (2016) and Powell and Fitzpatrick (2015) to develop PE in ways that enhance the interests and meet the needs of all students. This approach should explicitly acknowledge the diversity of PAH that children bring to early primary PE. The teacher can then work with the children to develop the curriculum to incorporate their voices and take their different PAH into account in planning. This must be accompanied by changes to primary playgrounds to recognise and support a wider range of PA and play opportunities. This will allow all children to continue to embody and develop their PAH daily along a wider variety of trajectories. This way, we will be able to make a positive change to the social forces that impact the development of PAH within primary education and allow more children to develop their diversified PAH.

Note

1. See Kemp et al., 2022 for a nuanced analysis of the other factors such as gender, identity, lifestyles changes.

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