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Capturing the moment: Understanding embodied interactions in early primary physical education

Background: Several studies demonstrate the benefits of understanding explicit and tacit embodied interactions in physical education (PE). However, there is little research that explores the embodied interactions that occur in early primary PE classes (years 1 and 2), where children (are socialized to) embody various body values, attitudes and stigma. We adopted a micro-sociological approach to examine the embodied interactions of a group of early primary school children. The study provides new insight into how primary age children embody the world around them in their PE interactions and the impact this embodiment has on them and on their peers. *Purpose:* Using a micro-sociological approach, the aim of this study was to examine the embodied interactions of a group of year 1 and 2 children (ages 6-8) in PE classes. *Participants and settings:* The study was conducted at a public primary school in Australia over a six-month period. The lessons were filmed by the lead author, yielding a total of 12 hours and 21 minutes of footage. Observer XT, a systematic observation program, was utilized to aid in the coding, management and analysis of observational data, allowing for the creation of multiple coding schemes. *Findings:* The findings highlighted two distinct themes. First, competition, which involved the constant comparison of performance between the children. Second, skill mastery, which involved the children engaging in acts that displayed their advanced understanding of how to perform certain skills. While the emphasis on competition and skill mastery has been echoed across PE literature, this study showed how those with the most cultural resources (sport experience and physical capital) were able to embody these goals to produce high levels of emotional energy during Interactional Rituals. The findings also indicated the pedagogical implications of these micro-moments. The implementation of an approach characterized by a lack of differentiation and minimal teacher intervention created an environment ripe for embodied engagement in competition and skill mastery. *Implications:* The micro-sociological approach provided a unique insight into how primary age children are embodying the world around them in their PE interactions and the impact this embodiment is having on themselves and their peers. **This approach also provides insight into the pedagogical implications of this embodiment, and highlights the need for more creative and/or student-centered pedagogies in primary PE.**

Keywords: video analysis; early physical education; embodiment; competition; skill mastery; micro-sociology.

Introduction

It is widely agreed that primary physical education (PE) plays an important role in providing building blocks for engaging in lifelong physical activity (Griggs & Petrie, 2016; Talbot, 2009). Despite this agreed-upon importance of primary PE, it is an area that is under-researched (Griggs, 2007; lisahunter, 2006), with the majority of literature in the field focusing on the secondary years (Jess, McEvilly, & Carse, 2017; Kirk, 2005; Tsangaridou, 2012). Research that has focused on the primary years has predominantly examined challenges and problems with the delivery of primary PE: the proliferation of external providers (Dyson et al. 2016; Petrie, Penney & Fellows, 2014; Powell, 2015; Whipp, Hutton, Grove & Jaskon, 2011; Williams, Hay & Macdonald, 2011), the barriers for generalist teachers to deliver quality PE¹ (Griggs, 2007; Hariss, Cale & Musson, 2012; Light & Georgakis, 2005; Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Whipp et al. 2011); and the heavy domination of a sport and games approach in pedagogy (Griggs, 2007; Jess et al. 2017; Ward, 2012; Ward & Quennerstedt, 2016).

In addition, efforts to address the problems with the delivery of primary PE have largely considered the perspective of the teacher (Gordon et al. 2016; Jones & Green, 2017; Powell et al. 2018). This body of research highlights the need to improve PE teacher education (Gordon et al. 2016; Ní Chroínín, Fletcher & O'Sullivan, 2018; Ward, 2012) in order to deliver higher quality curriculum (Gordon et al. 2016; Jess, Carse & Keay, 2016; Dinan Thompson, 2018).

¹These barriers include inadequate training; low levels of knowledge and experience; an inability to correct technique; and low self-confidence (Griggs, 2007; Light & Georgakis, 2005; Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Whipp et al. 2011).

The few studies that focus on children's perspectives of primary PE provide insightful perspectives (Dyson, 2001; Gray et al. 2018; Jachyra, 2016; Parker et al. 2017; Portman, 1995; Powell et al. 2018; Wainright et al. 2018). These studies primarily utilized observations and interviews and highlighted the importance of the primary years of PE, arguing for the importance of positive early experiences to long-term engagement (Gray et al. 2018; Jachyra, 2016; Parker et al. 2017; Portman, 1995) and the consequences of negative experiences (Jachyra, 2016; Portman, 1995). However, few studies have provided an in-depth examination of what is happening between the children during PE class time and their embodied interactions within these moments.

These embodied interactions are particularly pronounced in the early years of PE (years 1 and 2), where children bring different levels of sport and movement experience to class (Evans, 2004; Ward, 2012). For many children, PE is the first time that they engage with their body through structured movement, which is particularly important because PE places a strong emphasis on bodily presentation, display (Paechter, 2003), and performance (Azzarito & Sterling, 2010). During these in-class performances, children embody various body values, attitudes and stigma (Azzarito & Sterling, 2010), and engage in embodied interactions in explicit and tacit ways. In these interactions, those with most sport experience may embody certain dispositions, such as aggression (Gardner & Janelle, 2002) and a 'win at all costs' attitude (Doty, 2006), that can affect their peers in adverse ways. This is particularly important because the 'one-sizes-fits-all' and/or minimal interventionist pedagogies that are delivered in many primary PE classes may mean that teachers either miss these embodied moments or do not recognize them as problematic. An in-depth focus on childrens' embodiment in early PE classes will allow for an account of how children impact each other's experiences in class in tacit and explicit ways, particularly within the pedagogies administered. To

examine the embodied interactions of a group of early primary age children, a micro-sociological approach is particularly well suited.

Micro-sociology as a way to examine embodied interactions in PE

Micro-sociology places an emphasis on the ‘smallscale, the here-and-now of face-to-face interaction, as the scene of action and the site of social actors (Collins, 2004, p. 3). The use of a micro-lens places a focus on interactions and behaviours in groups to reveal the structure and procedure of social life as it unfolds in human interactions (Spaaij & Schaillee, 2020). Micro-sociology has a long lineage of influence in the social sciences. In the last two decades there has been a renewed interest in the approach (Spaaij & Schaillee, 2020), however, this renewed interest has yet to make it to the field of PE. While there have been some examinations of micro-level interactions, mainly between students (Barker & Quennerstedt, 2017; Brock, Rovegno, & Oliver, 2009; Ward & Quennerstedt, 2016) and between teachers and students (Patterson & Van Der Mars, 2008; Ward & Quennerstedt, 2016), there is a dearth of literature in PE that examines students’ embodied interactions through a micro-lens.

While there are a variety of micro-sociological theories, the most applicable approach for this purpose is Randall Collins’ (2004) Interactional Ritual (IR) theory. Collins’ work is highly suitable for application because of its emphasis on the body and engagement in embodied actions (Collins, 2004). PE is full of these moments, where the children are charged up by their proximity to other human bodies and subsequently engage and interact in ways that are below the level of consciousness. This is particularly pronounced in the primary PE class, where there is a focus on skill development and the children are often left to practice on their own, with minimal teacher intervention (Morgan et al. 2013). Thus, the use of Collins’ theory allows for a closer examination of how bodies engage in embodied actions and reactions during

primary PE. His theory looks closely at the patterns and motivations of micro-social interactions.

According to Collins, an IR consists of all types of interactions between two or more individuals; anything from a conversation during breakfast to a basketball game (Wellman et al., 2014). An individual moves through potentially hundreds of these interaction rituals over the course of a day. Important to the IRs, is that each member brings distinct cultural resources in the form of ‘symbolic possessions that are subject to the constraints of the market’ (Collins, 2004, p. 390). In this case, the cultural resources are the combination of sport experience and physical capital that the individual acquired in previous IRs.

Then, as they move through these interactions there is a chaining effect, whereby the outcome of one IR directly affects the next. Integral to these rituals is a sense of bodily co-presence. This requires a bodily assembly of people (Wellman et al., 2014) who will affect each other by their bodily co-presence. This co-presence, coupled with a mutual focus of attention (e.g., on a game), facilitates a momentary shared reality and emotional experience which leads to the production of emotional energy (EE) in the members of the ritual (Collins, 2004). High levels of emotional energy can lead to high levels of enthusiasm, confidence, initiative and pride, while low levels of emotional energy can lead to depression, shame (Collins, 2004), fatigue, lack of interest, and a lack of willingness to initiate action (Summers-Effler, 2004a). Importantly, Summers-Effler (2004a), argues that in situations where all avenues to build EE are closed off, we are often forced to engage in defensive strategizing to minimize loss. According to Collins (2004), humans are EE seekers who try to acquire as much energy as they can from a ritual before moving on to the next, where are they likely to pick rituals with the greatest potential for EE return.

As a site defined by constant bodily co-presence between participants, PE is ripe for a micro-sociological examination using Collins' IR theory. Adopting a micro-analytical approach provides the ability to determine the specific microsocial dynamics and conditions under which certain embodied actions and outcomes occur (Spaaij & Schaillée, 2020). It thus has the potential to yield new insight into how primary age children are embodying the world around them in their PE interactions and the impact this embodiment has on them and on their peers. Importantly, the use of Collins' micro-lens will also allow for an examination of the role that primary PE pedagogy plays as an ingredient in these moments of embodied action. Thus, it will provide the opportunity to examine what primary PE educators are offering and how this affects how the children engage in activities.

As noted, while there has been advocacy for understanding embodied interactions in PE classes, there is little research that aims to explore the embodied interactions that are occurring in early PE classes. This paper addresses this research gap through examining the embodied interactions of a group of year 1 and 2 children (ages 6-8) in PE classes through the use of a micro-sociological lens. This paper offers an opportunity to critically reflect on the embodied interactions in early PE classes in order to explore their pedagogical implications. In the following section, we provide an overview of how the video analysis methodology was implemented. In the second half of the article, we focus on and critically examine two of the themes that emerged: competition and the performance of skill mastery. We conclude by discussing the effect that the embodied actions of certain children may be having on their peers and highlight the need for primary PE teachers (both specialists and generalists) to understand the conditions under which these actions occur.

Methods

The data reported in this paper were collected as part of a multi-method ethnographic study that examined how year 1 and 2 children embody and develop their physical subjectivities on the playground and in PE classes. The larger study utilised four ethnographic methods to examine this process: participant observation, map drawing, photo-elicitation and video analysis. In this paper, we focus specifically on the embodied interactions of a group of year 1 and 2 children in PE classes and the findings from the video analysis. A number of other studies in PE have utilized video technology to study interaction (see, for example, Barker & Quennerstedt, 2017; Brock et al. 2009; Darnis & LaFront, 2015). The use of video analysis in this study allowed for the multimodal (verbal and non-verbal communication) analysis of the situated interactions (Erickson, 2011) that occurred during PE activities. Importantly, it provided a level of analytical examination that is not readily available to educators. It allowed for a multimodal recording of critical incidents during PE classes, which could be examined in-depth at a later date. Video analysis proved to be a highly promising method that allowed for a micro-examination and provided an insight that was not possible through observation alone.

Context and participants

In Australia, PE is a compulsory subject governed at the National level through the Australian Curriculum but maintained and implemented by the individual states (Dinan Thompson, 2018). Primary PE is not commonly delivered by PE specialists, instead the generalist teacher is more commonly responsible for PE teaching (Dinan Thompson, 2018). The study was conducted at a public primary school (Prep to year 6) in Melbourne over a six-month period in 2017. To maintain the anonymity of the school we use the pseudonym Castle Rock Primary (CRP). The school had approximately 110

year 1 and 2 children, divided into five separate composite classes, containing a mix of children from each grade. The children in these classes ranged in age from six to eight years old. CRP was unique, in that a full-time specialist was employed to teach PE to all the grades at the school. The PE teacher taught each year 1 and 2 class once a week, for approximately one hour. Similar to many other schools, CRP also relied on the use of external providers (EPs) from a sport organization (Powell, 2015; Williams, Hay & Macdonald, 2011). In this instance, three weeks worth of lessons (a number of which were filmed) for the year 1 and 2 classes were outsourced to two EPs from the Australian Football² League (AFL). Both EPs had a high level of expertise in Australian Football and spent their time at the school teaching football skills to the children.

At CRP, the content covered in early primary PE classes was governed by the Australian curriculum and focused on the fundamental movement skills, which are said to ‘provide the foundation for competent and confident participation in a range of physical activities’ (VCAA, 2016, p. 8). However, similar to other studies (Jones & Green, 2017; Ward & Griggs, 2018) pedagogy at CRP focused on a narrow set of movement skills, primarily the sport-focused object control skills of throwing, catching, bouncing, kicking and striking. This content was delivered through small-sided games and individual practice, in stations. The children were separated into four stations and left to their own devices to learn and practice these skills.

Typically, each activity session began with a brief set of instructions before the children were assigned to one of the four stations. After five to ten minutes in each station, the teacher or instructor blew the whistle and the groups moved to the next activity. The activity stations were relatively consistent each week and included

²Australian football is an invasion sport played between two teams of eighteen players on an oval field. Points are scored by kicking the ball between a series of 4 goal posts. It is pretty much exclusively played in Australia.

activities such as piggy in the middle, skipping and lever catch. Similarly to the PE teacher, the AFL EPs prioritized stations. As a result, a significant emphasis was placed on interaction between the children in the classes delivered by both the teacher and the AFL EPs. All children who participated in the filming provided assent and were covered by the informed consent of their parents. Ethical approval for this study was received from the Ethics Committee of the first author's university. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper for the two classes examined (Red and White) and all of the students.

Data collection sources

We filmed the PE lessons at CRP, producing a data set of 107 videos. A representative sample of 25 videos was used for analysis, comprising approximately five videos for each class. **This sample of videos was selected based on the intention to include a range of activities and an equal number of videos for each class.** The videos for each class covered four distinct activities: piggy in the middle, lever catch, skipping and football kicking. For each lesson, the participating children were randomly allocated to two distinct filming groups. In each class only a select group of children were filmed (those who opted in and had parental consent for filming).

The lessons were filmed by the lead author of this paper using two Sanyo cameras. To determine the most effective way to film the interactions during PE activities, a number of pilot sessions were conducted. For each group, in each class, the two cameras were set up and moved to follow the children as they moved to each station. Similar to Barker and Quennerstedt (2017), the lead author found that once the activities started, the children did not appear to be particularly conscious of the camera presence. Therefore, this appeared to be an effective method to capture the types of interactions that typically occurred during these classes in a relatively naturalistic way.

For analytical purposes, we used The Observer XT 12.5, a software package designed by Noldus Information Technology for the collection, management, analysis, and presentation of observational data. This software was used to allocate observed behaviours (verbal and non-verbal) into pre-defined categories (Snell, 2011). This ensured a high level of coding reliability and provided the ability to select and justify the critical nature of certain interactional episodes (Snell, 2011).

Data Analysis

After watching the videos at normal speed, and then in slow-motion multiple times, a coding scheme was created that focused on identifiable bodily movements and paralinguistic markers apparent in the interactions between children. The videos were then coded frame by frame to account for all of these movements and markers for each individual child. Coding this individual-based data allowed for subsequent analysis of how one action was followed by, or led to, often subtle and immediate reactions from other participants. This analysis was principally conducted by the lead author, but the co-authors reviewed and discussed the interpretations of the analysis with the lead author. This layer of review helped to guide the analysis phase and eventually led to the identification and consolidation of a number of distinct themes. In the following section, we present a micro-analysis of three moments that were a representative sample of the themes that were common across the video analysis of the 25 videos: competition and skill mastery. Those themes were evident in all of the videos examined, so this subset reflects the larger themes found across the data. For the presentation of findings, a collage of pictures captured in slow-motion was chosen to visualize the interactions between the children.

Findings

Two distinct themes typified the embodied interactions of this group of year 1 and 2 children in PE classes: competition and skill mastery. The first theme, competition, involved the constant comparison of performance between the children. With minimal intervention from the PE teacher, this competition was constantly reinforced by the children themselves. The second theme, skill mastery, involved the children engaging in acts that displayed their advanced understanding of how to perform certain skills. These moments were characterized by the performance of skills that required strength and a level of expertise that went beyond the typical capabilities of children of that age.

Competition

Competition is a significant element of the dominant, traditional model of PE (Kirk, 2010; Paechter, 2003). This may be because of the dominance of competitive sport within popular culture (Paechter, 2003), particularly within Australia. This focus on competition is not evident within the curriculum, which prioritizes communication, problem-solving and cooperation (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2016). Neither was competition emphasized significantly by the PE teacher during classes. However, with minimal intervention of the PE teacher, there was a strong emphasis on competition among the children themselves. The focus on competition was typically embodied most significantly by those students with the most cultural resources (a combination of extracurricular sport experience and physical capital) and then spread to the other students as they affected each other with their bodily co-presence. As a result, a range of IRs occurred across PE classes, where competition was a key ingredient that shaped the production of differing levels of EE in the members of the ritual (Collins, 2004). We present two rituals below.

Ritual 1: Carrie avoids competition

This moment unfolds three minutes into a station activity, during a Red class. The activity has four participants: Willy, Carrie, Bart and Thompson. The children brought very different levels of physical experience into this ritual. Willy had the highest level of sport experience, because he participated in a number of extracurricular sports including soccer, Auskick (AFL) and Milo cricket. Bart also had extensive sport experience, playing on a local soccer team and spending all of his time on the playground engaging in sport. Thompson did not engage in sport outside of school but regularly engaged in sport activities on the playground with Bart and Thompson. Conversely, Carrie did not participate in any organized physical activities outside of school and did not engage in any physical activity on the playground. For Carrie, PE was her first exposure to sport and structured physical activity. The activity, piggy in the middle, typically consists of two, or more, children throwing the ball between themselves, while a third (the piggy) stands in between and tries to intercept and catch the ball. During the first three minutes, Carrie and Thompson alternatively spent most of their time as piggy. Willy had not spent any time as piggy and has been the main enforcer of the rules.

The moment started with Bart throwing the ball to Carrie. The ball rolled past Carrie and she missed it, which led to it rolling out of the game space. Thompson had been watching the movement of the ball and started moving as soon Carrie missed it. Carrie started later but was in front of him to get the ball. Thompson covered the distance to the ball quickly and got in front of Carrie. He used his body to block Carrie from getting the ball. He got in between Carrie and the ball and bent down to grab it. As soon as Thompson got in front of her, she gave up rather than going for the ball. She stopped and bounced on the spot and then backpedaled away from the ball. Thompson's

victory was short-lived. Willy immediately walked over to him, pointed at him and shouted, 'No!!' Thompson had broken the rules by going outside of the gamespace. Willy grabbed the ball out of Thompson's hands and pointed back to the middle (see Figure 1). Thompson walked back to the middle with his head down.

(Insert Figure 1 here)

This is a significant moment of competition between the children. The rules specify that a piggy is not allowed to leave the game space. Thompson sees the ball roll past Carrie and instead of stopping and thinking about the rules or that his run may knock Carrie over, he moves unconsciously to get the ball. He had similar opportunities earlier, against the boys, but did not go for them. Carrie also makes an unconscious decision, in her avoidance of competing with Thompson for the ball. She followed the ball outside of the game space and was in active pursuit, until she senses Thompson to her left. She immediately gives up, but because she was in active pursuit she jumps up and down on the spot and plays off her loss of the ball by engaging in a defensive posture.

The ultimate 'winner' in this ritual is Willy. The experience and physical capital that he brought into this ritual meant he was uniquely positioned to govern the rules, which he did in an aggressive, dominating way when he shout at Thompson and grabbed the ball. He left this ritualized moment overflowing in EE, with a strong sense of confidence, enthusiasm and initiative as decribed by Collins (2004). Thompson did not have the same level of sport experience as Willy but had developed enough physical capital to know how to use his body to gain a competitive advantage. He used his size to cover the space to the ball quickly and put himself between Carrie and the ball to block her off. So, although he lost some EE for violating the rules, this did not outweigh the positive energy that he got from beating Carrie. For Bart, although his involvement is

limited, he is still able to produce EE because he was experienced enough to be able to kick it past Thompson, and know that he is **protected** by the 'game space' rule.

Conversely, Carrie left this ritual with much lower levels of EE. During this competition, she realized that Thompson will knock her over if she continues, which would likely lead to a significant loss in EE, so she engages in a defensive strategy, which according to Summer-Effler (2004a) is done to to minimize the loss of EE.

However, her inability to engage in this competition meant she did not gain any EE. So, for Carrie her lack of sport experience meant she was unable to capitalize on the EE produced from competing.

Ritual 2: Bob kicks Jackie's ball away

This moment occurred during a lesson for class White. In this group, the children had different levels of sport experience. Bob had the highest level of experience. He had played soccer at a local club for the last two years. Paul and Stan did not have the same level of experience as Bob, but both had participated in Auskick for a year and regularly played football on the playground during recess and lunch. Amy did not participate in any sport or physical activity and Jackie engaged in gymnastics every week. However, unlike the boys, Jackie's gymnastics experience did not directly translate to this lever and ball catch activity.

The children were participating in an activity that allowed them to practice catching. Each child had a ball and a lever and was supposed to quietly practice catching a tennis ball. The child placed the ball on end of the lever, stepped on the other end and tried to catch it while it launches into the **air**. This activity typically turned into a competition between the children. The competition was based on stepping on the lever as hard as you can, so that the ball travels behind you, and then turning around and running to catch the ball. The further the ball went, therefore the more challenging the

catch, the better. There is no clear winner in this activity, but success is typically met by approval and praise from the other children.

During the ritual, the competition was started by Bob. As soon as Bob started, Paul and Stan followed his lead and began engaging as well. During this initial competition, Jackie and Amy practiced a few catches and talked near their levers. Bob continued to engage in this competition and eventually he shot the ball up and had to hustle to catch it. He caught the ball and ran back in with his arms out, imitating an airplane. Jackie and Amy witnessed the catch and praised him by cheering and applauding. Eventually, Jackie and Amy joined in. In her attempts, Jackie put a lot of effort into stepping onto the lever but was unable to get to the ball to catch it. During these attempts, Bob started to interfere with her ball. On **one** attempt, Jackie turned to catch the ball, but Bob stepped in and kicked it away before Jackie could get to it.

Jackie stopped and accepted this action, and then went to fetch her ball. As she did, Bob stepped in again and kicked her ball away, meaning she had to go and fetch her ball across the gym. Meanwhile, Amy launched her own ball and turned to chase it. Bob stepped out to kick Amy's ball but Amy was able to grab it in time. She just **missed getting** kicked by Bob. Bob also kicked away Stan and Paul's ball later on but this did not deter them competing (see Figure 2). Jackie and Amy eventually gave up on engaging in this competition and spent the last few minutes off screen talking. Clearly, Bob's interference was enough to dissuade them both from engaging in this competition. Bob continued to compete with Stan and Paul for the remainder of the lesson.

(Insert Figure 2 here)

The outcome of this ritual involved a division in the distribution of EE. As shown, Bob directly impacted the ability of the other four participants to engage in the

competition. So, as the individual with the most sport experience, and therefore the player that embodied the sense of competition to the highest degree, he left this ritual with the highest level of EE. As a result of Bob's interference, Stan and Paul did not produce the same level of EE as Bob. However, based on their previous experience, they knew that these acts are part of the sport environment and so were not deterred. They continued to engage and left this ritual with EE and, according to Collins' (2004) perspective, feelings of enthusiasm and confidence. This enthusiasm and confidence was observed in the body movements that they displayed in the subsequent sections of the lesson. Conversely, Amy and Jackie lost EE by engaging in this ritual. They came into this activity with lower levels of relevant experience and so were unable to engage in the competition at the same level as the boys. As a result, Bob's interference had a bigger impact on Jackie and Amy because they were trying to learn the skill. So, their loss of EE led them to eventually disengage.

Skill Mastery

Although recent decades have seen the introduction of number of creative and student-centered pedagogies in PE and sport pedagogy (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Knijnik, Spaaij & Jeanes, 2019; Luguetti, Kirk & Oliver, 2019), there is still a significant emphasis on skill development in the early years. Even the national curriculum highlights that before children can engage in games and sports, they should first learn and master the fundamental movement skills (VCAA, 2016). As discussed, at CRP there was a particular focus on the practice of object control skills such as catching, kicking and throwing in stations and with a minimal intervention from the PE teacher. The problem with this was that many children have already been exposed to these skills through extracurricular sport participation, while those who have not were new to these skills. This difference in levels of experience, and therefore differing levels

of ability, had an impact on the rituals that occurred. Those with the most experience, embodied this experience in the way they engaged with their peers during rituals. As a result, a range of IRs occurred across PE classes, where skill mastery was one of the key ingredients that played a role in the production of differing levels of EE in the members of the ritual (Collins, 2004). We present an example below.

Ritual 3: Learning how to kick

This ritual occurred during a skill practice session for class Red. The children were learning and practicing kicking a football, under the guidance of the two AFL instructors. For this skill practice, the participating students were working with partners to practice kicking a football. **The children had self-divided into four partnerships,** which reflected **very different levels of kicking experience.** Willy and Bart had extensive experience kicking a football, while on the other end of the spectrum, Mary and Carrie had never kicked a football before. The children were provided a brief demonstration of how to kick and then instructed to find a space to practice.

From the start, Mary and Carrie struggled to kick the ball. They both missed the ball on kick attempts several times. On one occasion, Mary missed the ball four times and eventually walked over and handed the ball to Carrie. Mary quickly became discouraged by her failure to master the skill. Renny and Lana fared better, because both had some practice with kicking before. They were able to kick the ball to each other on several occasions, but still missed the ball at other times. Roger and Thompson were both able to kick the ball, but Thompson clearly had more experience than Roger. As they begin to attempt bigger kicks, Roger missed the ball as much as he connected with it. As highlighted, Willy and Bart were very experienced at kicking the football. They were able to kick to each other with relative ease. Eventually, their focus shifted from kicking with accuracy to each other, to kicking as far as they can. Willy and Bart

praised **each other** after each kick. With each successive kick Willy moved further back. Eventually, he was kicking to Bart from outside the PE space, on the jungle gym area. Roger and Thompson also engaged in this display of skill mastery, although they were not as successful as Bart and Willy.

Meanwhile, the girls tried to learn and master the basic element of the kick. The boys' engagement in this act of skill mastery impacted the girls in several ways. Firstly, as they boys spread out further for their kicks, they took up more and more of the game space, thereby, reducing the amount of space the girls could practice in. Secondly, the focus on strength over accuracy meant that the kicks were not on always target. Consequently, on several occasions, the balls flew through the girl's space and they had to duck their heads to avoid getting hit (see Figure 3). Finally, the shift away from accuracy meant the boys spent more time chasing the ball, rather than catching it. On several occasions, this meant that the boys ran straight through the girl's practice space. Unsurprisingly, this had an impact on the levels of EE that the children left this ritual with.

(Insert Figure 3 here)

There was a clear separation between the group, with the boys more successful during this ritual. Once again, Willy left this group overflowing with EE. As the most experienced participant, he was able to display his skill mastery at a level that was beyond the other participants. Although Bart did not have the same level of skill as Willy, he was still able to produce high levels of EE by working with Willy. For Thompson and Roger, their lower level of experience meant that they were not able to produce the same level of EE, but by engaging in this skill mastery they still left the ritual with high levels of EE. The girls were not able to produce the same levels of EE as the boys. The girls had to try and learn, and master, the skill in an environment where

they were constantly impacted by how the boys embodied their focus on skill mastery. For Renny and Lana, having some experience in kicking meant that they were able to kick the ball successfully on a number of occasions, but were just as likely to miss the ball. Renny and Lana left this ritual with low levels of EE and a lack of confidence in their kicking skills. Carrie and Mary struggled to make any progress on the kicking skill. Both had little to no experience. As a result, they rarely connected with the ball, often missing it completely or just letting it roll along the ground. Consequently, Mary and Carrie left this activity with low levels of EE and a lack of emotional connection to this type of ritual.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to to examine the embodied interactions of a group of early primary children. The micro-sociological approach provided a distinctive insight into how primary age children are embodying the world around them in their PE interactions and the impact this embodiment is having on themselves and their peers. In this section, we discuss: (a) a new lens to the same old story of competition and skill mastery; (b) pedagogical implications for primary PE; and (c) directions for future research.

A new lens to the same old story of competition and skill mastery

The two themes that we highlighted in this study (competition and skill mastery) are not new revelations within the field of PE. Multiple authors have pointed to the significance of both competition (Beni et al. 2017; Hay & lishaunter, 2006; Walseth et al. 2018) and skill mastery (Kirk, 2010; Ward & Griggs, 2018) on impacting children's PE experiences. The findings presented in this paper echo those of other studies in that competition was a dominant focus within the PE context (Hay & lisahunter, 2006) and that there were instances of negative feedback between peers during moments of

competition (Walseth et al., 2018). Similarly, the findings align with previous studies that highlight the ‘sportification’ of primary PE (Ward & Griggs, 2018), which justifies the focus on a narrow set of sport-based movement skills (Knijnik, Spaaij, & Jeanes, 2019). Additionally, the findings highlight how the focus on skill mastery often means activities are carried out in a way that alienates and excludes, particularly for children with lower levels of both skill and tactical ability (Hastie & Casey, 2014). While the findings from this paper echo the same old story described in previous studies, the insight that is provided is uniquely micro, by highlighting the role that EE may play in providing a unique way of seeing, and making sense of, the same old story.

The micro-interactions explored in this paper suggest that the desire to seek EE was a driving force behind these rituals (Collins, 2004). Even for those who were subordinated in the rituals, they were affected by the bodily co-presence, and became caught up in this desire for EE. The micro-moments where some children engaged in comparative competition meant they unconsciously performed in aggressively competitive ways to achieve victory over an opponent (Paechter, 2003). Additionally, the micro-moments during which some students engaged in displays of skill mastery meant they were adversely affecting the ability of the other children to learn. In this primary PE context, those with the most cultural resources (for example, Willy and Bob) engaged in acts of competition or skill mastery as an efficient way to produce EE within these rituals. Through their engagement in extracurricular sport, these students have gained important experience and developed physical capital within their own bodies (Shilling, 2003). Those with the most cultural resources, particularly within an environment where a narrow set of physical experiences were valued, were uniquely positioned to be successful. They were able to embody the focus on competition and

skill mastery that they had learned through their junior sport experience to produce higher levels of EE.

Other students who did not have this same level of cultural resources, or whose experiences were not valued in those moments (e.g., Jackie's gymnastics skills) were unable to engage in the same way and were often negatively impacted by the embodied actions of their more experienced peers. This meant they produced much lower levels of EE. For those students with the most experience, the high levels of EE that they produced in these rituals likely led to high levels of enthusiasm, confidence, initiative and pride (Collins, 2004), and a strong emotional connection with these types of rituals. Conversely, the low levels of EE that others produced may lead to depression, shame (Collins, 2004), fatigue, lack of interest or a lack of willingness to initiate action (Summers-Effler, 2004a); e.g., Mary giving up the ball after numerous failed attempts and Jackie and Amy disengaging from the activity. **Importantly, these findings show that there was a clear gendered element to these rituals. For the boys, their previous sport experiences were closely aligned to the team sports that are valued within the PE space (Hickey, 2008), while the experiences of the girls were not valued in the same way. This meant that the boys were much more likely to be successful during rituals and produce higher levels of EE, while the girls were more likely to produce lower levels of EE. This echoes other studies that argue that multi-activity, sport-based forms of PE is more closely aligned with the stereotypical interests of boys (Kirk, 2006, Hickey, 2008).** Ultimately, the outcomes of these rituals are likely to not only impact how students engage with future rituals but also the types of rituals that they will choose to engage in during their own time.

Pedagogical implications for primary PE: stations like 'roll out the ball'

As discussed, the pedagogical content of most primary PE classes focuses on children learning the sport-focused fundamental movement skills through small sided games, and individual/partner practice (Ward, 2012; Ward & Griggs, 2018). The PE teacher and the EPs in this study adhered to this approach. They utilized a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach (Powell, 2015) with very little adaptation to their activities to meet the differing levels of student ability. This was particularly problematic because of the differing levels of experience that the children brought to class (Evans, 2004; Ward, 2012). Instead, all of the students were guided by a singular demonstration and then provided equipment to go and practice, in stations or with a partner. Effectively, this pedagogical approach consisted of ‘rolling out the ball’ and hoping for the best.

This ‘roll out the ball’ approach often meant that the children were left to engage in these rituals without the direct presence of a teacher (Morgan et al. 2013). In these PE classes, both the teachers and the EPs tended not to intervene, preferring to let the children learn from each other in the station activities. This was obviously particularly problematic for those students who had lower levels of experience and ability, because the brief demonstration of a new skill was all they had to work off (e.g., Mary and Carrie). Part of the reason for this lack of intervention may be due to the belief held by teachers that primary PE is effectively implemented if the children are ‘busy, happy and good’ (Ward & Griggs, 2018, p. 407).

Regardless, the implementation of the ‘roll out the ball’ approach created an environment ripe for the embodied actions that occurred in these classes, overemphasising competition and skill mastery. It meant that those children with the most valued physical activity experience were able to embody this experience to guide the rituals that occurred. This meant that distribution of EE in these rituals was stratified in the favour of these members. Ultimately, this type of pedagogy mean that these

moments went largely unnoticed or were not recognized for the significance that they held. We suggest that creative and/or student-centered pedagogies (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Knijnik, Spaaij & Jeanes, 2019; Luguetti, Kirk & Oliver, 2019) in primary PE classes PE would create a space for a more equitable distribution of EE in these rituals. Student-centered pedagogies challenge the power relations by listening and pedagogically responding to the needs and interests of a diverse student population in localized contexts (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Kirk & Oliver, 2016). For example, these pedagogies invite students to co-create the PE curriculum with teachers, putting student voice as central in teachers' pedagogical decisions. Similarly, in creative pedagogies children 'learn how to create their unique body movements and to respond to the movements of others while in dialogic sports situations' (Knijnik, Spaaij & Jeanes, 2019, p. 49). For example, pedagogies such as Game Sense where sport can be taught through a constructivist perspective in which the intellectual dimensions of games are highlighted. These forms of student-driven practice should involve intentionally seeking input from all students (Kirk & Oliver, 2016) to account for their different types and levels of physical experience in developing the curriculum. This still means that there will be hierarchies, but by acknowledging the different experiences of all children this will likely mean that these hierarchies will be continually changing over a range of activities.

Directions for future research

A limitation of this study was that it was conducted primarily at one school. This micro-sociological approach could be utilized to examine the embodied interactions of children at other schools, in different contexts (e.g., public/private education, urban/regional areas), in order to produce comparative data. While the pedagogies used in these classes were not unique to this setting, they are by no means reflective of all

primary PE practice. Therefore, it would be beneficial to use a similar methodology to examine different types of pedagogies. The use of different pedagogies, particularly a student-centred approach, is likely to lead to the production of a very different learning environment. In these environments, there are likely to be very different types of IRs and different ways in which EE is distributed. Examining these spaces in future research would enhance scientific and practical understanding of the embodied interactions of children in early primary PE.

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