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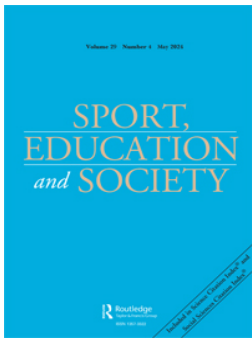
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'There is more room to do it at home': constructing children's physical activity spaces

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ABSTRACT

Public health policy and interventions seek to arrest declining physical activity rates in childhood. Two prominent settings for intervening in childhood physical activity are schools and the home. This paper critically examines how these two spaces are constructed in a way that leads to different physical activity outcomes for children in their early primary years. We draw on child-centred ethnographic fieldwork conducted with a cohort of Year 1/2 (5–8 years) students in a public primary school in Australia over a six-month period, and as well as on Bourdieusean concepts of field, capital, and habitus. The results show that many participants perceived the home to be a much safer environment for physical self-expression compared to physical education and the school playground. The way these spaces are constructed leads to the privileging of certain physical activity habitus (PAH), while some children must manage a divided habitus across these settings, which can increasingly create internal tensions over time. We conclude with a call to utilise theoretically informed approaches to better understand the complex processes occurring across the spaces, and to utilise this insight to develop more nuanced efforts to engage children in physical activity.

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Introduction

Over recent decades, there has been a renewed focus on the physical activity habits of children. This has been epitomised in a recurring concern voiced by educators, health practitioners, government officials and parents, about declining physical activity levels in children (Kemp et al., 2022; Telford, 2017). To address these concerns, a variety of stakeholders have targeted several physical activity spaces in the lives of children, such as schools, sports clubs, community spaces, and the home environment, with the expressed desire of increasing physical activity levels. These efforts typically involve adapting or renewing policies, structures or practices to enhance the conditions for increased physical activity levels. These efforts have had varying levels of success but have often struggled to prove a direct link between program outcomes and increased long-term physical activity (see Lindsey & Bacon, 2016), but the effects on children's physical activity levels have been negligible (Mansfield & Piggin, 2016). Crucially, these efforts often miss how these spaces are socially constructed through interaction, and how this construction may affect physical activity behaviours.

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To understand how space affects physical activity behaviours, it is important to understand how 'spaces are developed, maintained and contested through discourses and practices that are inherently political and ideological' (Mooney, 2022, p. 120). According to Lefebvre (1991), space is socially constructed, shaping 'our understanding of the world and is central in establishing, maintaining, and challenging power relations' (Jeanes et al., 2021, p. 3). Space is socially constructed through the players who enter and engage with, reproduce, and contest the discourses and practices that are inherent within. So, rather than simply a 'container' within which social relations occur, instead space is a 'product of interrelations constituted through interactions' (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Typically, policy interventions that occur in these spaces often focus on surface-level changes instead of addressing the systems, structures, and relationships (Jeanes et al., 2021) that may be affecting physical activity outcomes within and across these spaces.

Efforts to increase PA levels predominantly occur across two main physical activity spaces in the lives of children: the school and the home. Through the implementation of curriculum, the school plays a central role in this effort, by providing an initial opportunity to positively influence levels of physical activity (Dinan Thompson, 2018) and by effect contribute to the development of lifelong physical activity habits (Rainer & Davies, 2013). Within the school, emphasis is placed on two spaces to help achieve this goal: the physical education (PE) class and the playground space. In fact, PE is regularly regarded as the primary vehicle for the promotion of physical activity (Thompson et al., 2005). Accordingly, many stakeholders see PE as playing a significant role in fostering lifelong physical activity engagement (Powell et al., 2019). An outcome that had been widely disputed across physical education literature (Kirk, 2010; Smee et al., 2021). Similarly, the school playground is operationalised as a key space to achieve up to 50% of daily PA goals (Hyndman, 2017). In Australia, a distinct lack of government policy regulating playgrounds (Hyndman, 2017) means schools have a lot of freedom in how they organise their playgrounds and tend to devote most of the space to spaces for sports and organised games (Hyndman & Chancellor, 2015). This overwhelming focus on sporting space on the playground can impact on students' physical activity engagement on the playground (Hyndman, 2017).

Conversely, the home provides a less structured environment for children to engage in a wide range of physical activity opportunities. Similar to Pang (2022), we define the home space as more than just the four walls of the house, but rather a social space that encompasses the family, and can include the back/front yard, the neighbourhood and the local park. According to Pang (2022), the home space provides a 'pedagogical structure for young people to develop and to adopt dispositions related to physicality and physical activity' (p. 156). Within the home, children's engagement in physical activity is influenced by a range of social factors, including culture, socio-economic status, and parental support (Macdonald et al., 2004), which can play a significant role in enabling children to 'test the waters; and develop their own personal meanings of physical activity' (Pang, 2022). Clearly, the home has the potential to lead to more positive physical activity outcomes, because of the freedom that it provides for children to develop their own personal meanings and connections with physical activity and physical activity dispositions.

It has already been established that children enter school with a diversity of physical activity habitus (PAH) (explored below), but this becomes narrowed and shaped by a variety of social forces (such as gender, experience, ability etc.) within the school over time (Van der Smee et al., 2022). The wide range of physical activities that children engage in at home become affected by the social forces of the school space, to the point that some children eventually become less active. So, why are there such different physical activity outcomes between these two spaces? What is the difference between how these two spaces are constructed and maintained? How do we ensure better physical activity outcomes across both spaces? Influenced by leading scholars in the field (see Hunter, 2004; Jeanes et al., 2021; Pang, 2022), this paper seeks to answer these questions by examining how these physical spaces are constructed through everyday micro-level practices and the division that occurs for some children across these spaces.

In the remainder of this paper, we explore the construction of two physical activity spaces (the school and the home) and how they produce different physical activity outcomes. We begin with

a focus on the use of several methods used to collect data in this project. We then start to unpack how these spaces are produced by examining the makeup of each field and the types of habitus and capital which are privileged, and how this effects the micro-practices that occur. We consider what these micro-practices mean for the types of habitus that children develop across these spaces and how this effects physical activity outcomes. We conclude by discussing what this construction means for physical activity outcomes across both spaces, both in the short-term and the potential impact over time. To begin, we offer an examination of the theoretical framework that we use to understand how these spaces are constructed.

Theoretical framework

To understand the construction of these spaces and children's engagement in physical activity in and across these spaces we utilise Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, capital, and field. These conceptual tools are particularly suitable for this exploration because of the emphasis that they place on spaces being (re)produced in the micro-level interactions between the agents who enter. The connection between the three concepts is relational, temporal, and dialectical (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and therefore they must be used together to understand complex social practices. The field holds a key space within Bourdieu's work as the social space where habitus and capital exist. It is a 'network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). Therefore, fields consist of both agents and institutional structures that are governed by sets of connections that dictate the type and degree of independence for each social actor who enters. Importantly, in Bourdieu's use of the conceptual field, he acknowledges that all social places and spaces are fields and play a role in contributing to the broader field of society as a whole (Schirato & Roberts, 2018). Habitus is what individuals bring to and is/are shaped within fields. It is the product of an individual's social experiences in the world, a product of time and history (Bourdieu, 1990), which becomes inscribed in our bodies (Bourdieu, 1993). The dispositions, schemas, forms of knowledge and competencies of the habitus, function below the threshold of individual consciousness and become unconsciously ingrained within an individual through repetitive and consistent exposure to a social field. To examine, the engagement of the habitus in these spaces, we specifically utilise the concept of the physical activity habitus (PAH) (Van der Smee et al., 2022). The PAH is 'something that is structured through social interaction, as something that is made through repetition of movements, incidentally, on a day-to-day basis' (Van der Smee et al., 2022, p. 3). The PAH is 'simultaneously physiological (endurance, aerobic capacity), cognitive (motor skills, coordination, game sense), social (teamwork, following rules), and emotional (pushing oneself, managing pain)' (Van der Smee et al., 2022, p. 3). Significantly a PAH is expressed through the body in a way that responds to other agents in the field automatically and with predictability.

Key to understanding the relationship between fields and habitus, is capital. The ability to enter a field, and potentially be a dominant member in that field, is determined by the level of capital an individual possesses. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three types of capital: economic (accumulation of wealth), cultural (embodied, objectified, or institutionalised resources such as educational qualifications), and social (reputation, relationships, and social networks). Various versions of these types of capital are on offer within each social field. There are also a variety of subspecies of each form of capital, but one of the more prominent subspecies of capital is physical capital. Although Bourdieu placed a significant emphasis on the body, it was Shilling (1991) who extended Bourdieu's idea of bodily capital into physical capital. According to Shilling (2003), the body as a system for the generation of physical capital is a 'possessor of power, status, and distinctive symbolic forms, which is integral to the accumulation of various resources' (p. 127). In the case of the PAH, individuals bring different levels of physical capital to PA spaces, imbued within their habitus, which allow them to acquire and accrue different levels of physical capital through repetition of movements (Van der Smee et al., 2022). Applying the conceptual tools allow us to explore how these fields are

shaped/re-shaped, daily, to produce different physical activity outcomes. To examine how these spaces are constructed and why there are different physical activity outcomes between these two spaces, we turn to the methods of data collection.

Methods

This study is based on a sustained six-month ethnography conducted by the primary author at a Melbourne-based public primary school (Prep to Year 6). The ethnography focused on PE classes and playground activity (recess, lunch, etc.) allowed for an examination of students embodied history across various PA fields. Castle Rock Primary School (CRPS) was predominantly middle class and had a diverse cultural makeup, covering 31 different languages and dialects. The school had 112 enrolled year one/two students (aged six to eight years), divided into five composite classes. 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 drawing¹ to develop a nuanced understanding of children's PA engagement across these spaces. This paper presents the findings from a theory focused analysis of the distinct data sets. This study received ethics approval from both the authors' university and the Victorian Government Department of Education. The children engaged in this project through their own written informed assent and legal consent from their parents.

Data co-creation methods and procedures

A full account of each procedure is not possible within the confines of this article (for a more detailed account see (Van der Smee & Williams, 2023), so, instead, we attempt to highlight the pertinent details for each data co-creation method. The first set of data was collected through observation of the children on the playground (during recess, lunch, etc.) and in their PE classes. These observations were collected through detailed field notes completed by the lead author. 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. Observing on the playground also allowed for 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. The second set of data was co-created through photo elicitation. To implement this method, a group of twenty-five students was selected, five students from each class (thirteen girls and twelve boys in total). This sample was based on time commitment, as the implementation to completion process for each child was approximately a month, and complexity of the method. The parents of the students were asked to opt into this phase and were tasked with taking photos of their children engaging in PA at home, then, using the photos as cues, the children explained these physical activities, what they enjoyed, how often they did them, and with whom. These recordings provided the opportunity to examine the moment-to-moment actions of the participating children in PE. The final data set was captured through video recording of PE lessons. For each of the five classes, several lessons were filmed in their entirety. The use of these methodologies led to the formation of several distinct data sets.

Data analysis

To initially analyse three of these distinct data sets (map interviews, photo elicitations, and observation notes), an inductive analytical approach was used to individually analyse each data set and develop codes and themes from a 'bottom-up' approach (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). These themes, covered in depth elsewhere (See Smee et al., 2021), allowed for an initial examination of the children's physical activity engagement across these spaces. To analyse the recorded video footage, a

systematic observation program (called Observer XT) was used to code the observed behaviours of the children into pre-defined categories (Snell, 2011). The data sets were then integrated utilising the video data as the primary source, to focus on the situated moment of the PE class, and then built out from there to trace the student's physical activity engagement across spaces. This provided a wealth of data on both the physical activity engagement of the children and the micro-practices that (re)produce each physical activity space. For this paper, this data was reanalysed using Bourdieu's conceptual tools to develop a nuanced portrayal of how the physical activity spaces are constructed and the types of PAH that are produced. In the next sections, we present several representative examples to illustrate the role that the micro-practices of the children play in developing these spaces, and in producing an (in)congruous PAH, or what Bourdieu calls 'a divided habitus' (Friedman, 2016), that different children maintained across these spaces.

Findings and discussion

In this section, we present and discuss the findings from the data sources to examine the construction of these spaces and how the school privileges certain types of PAH, while other children's PAH and levels of physical capital were valued at home but not within school. This created a situation where some children possessed a PAH that was congruous across the two spaces, while others possessed a divided PAH, which created a divide between their PAH at home and their PAH at school. We begin by focusing on the school and examining those students who had a congruous PAH.

The school: students with a congruous PAH

As discussed, in the school there are two main spaces that children regularly engage in physical activity: the PE class, and the playground. In most schools in Australia, early primary age children are expected to engage in up to two hours of physical activity weekly in PE (Dinan Thompson, 2018) and engage in physical activity daily on the playground (Hyndman, 2017). At CRPS, like other schools, both spaces placed an emphasis on sport, particularly competitive team sports, despite ongoing efforts to address this in PE at a curricular level.

The introduction of a national curriculum in Australia, presented a more holistic approach (Cliff et al., 2009) to HPE curriculum, designed to help students develop a range of skills across a range of physical activity experiences (Macdonald & Enright, 2013). In primary PE, this translates to a focus on the learning of a diverse set of fundamental movement skills (FMS). Despite this new emphasis, the focus on sport continues to dominate in Primary PE (Jess et al., 2016), with many teachers focusing on the movement skills that most directly relate to the sports that they perceive as important to PE practice (Powell, 2015). Unsurprisingly at CRPS, there was a focus on a narrow set of movement skills, primarily the object control skills of throwing, bouncing, catching and kicking, which were seen as essential learning for sporting engagement (Kirk, 2010; Ward & Griggs, 2018). The children were typically taught through a skill demonstration and then provided with the opportunity to learn and practice the skill at their own pace with their peers, through small-sided activity stations. On the playground, the children were given freedom to engage in the physical activities that they valued and aligned with their PAH (Van der Smee et al., 2022). Most of CRPS's playground was devoted to spaces for sports and organised games. 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. Importantly, the school made these spaces open to everyone, but they were regularly dominated by kids playing sport, pushing everyone else to the edges. Other sporting spaces, such as a basketball and downball courts, took up significant space, while the jungle gym and monkey bars took up a much small area of the playground.

Within this context, all the children brought a pre-existing and developing PAH to the field, however, not everyone's PAH was valued in the same way. The emphasis on sport within the field

privileged those students who had developed their PAH through similar sporting activities at home. Access to these sporting opportunities, were driven by factors such as parental support and prioritising of PA and household income (Macdonald et al., 2004). Gender was also an important factor (Macdonald et al., 2004; Storr et al., 2022), as boys are much more likely to engage in the types of sports that are valued in PE (Hickey, 2008). This meant that the boys with the most well-developed sporting habitus were able to establish a monopoly over the types of capital that was valued in this field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It was the previous sporting experiences of these students that set the rules and the stakes that the other players had to follow to play the game. Through their sporting experiences, these boys had learned how to embody, reify, and express sporting physicalities onto the corporeal (Jachyra, 2016), expressing this experience at the level of a bodily hexis to talk, walk and act in ways that many of the other children did not have the practical knowledge to emulate (Bourdieu, 1990). In embodying their sporting experience, they drove the quest for symbolic capital, which set the stage for the interactions that occurred within the field. They were able to embody the focus on competition and skill mastery that they had learned through junior sport experience (see Smee et al., 2021), displaying dispositions, such as aggression and a 'win at all costs' attitude (Doty, 2006), that many of the other children did not possess.

For these boys, there was a congruence between their PAH and the field of PE. One of these boys, Nelson, had the highest level of physical experience in the class. He engaged in several junior sports, including cricket, soccer, footy, and a variety of informal sports with friends (see Figure 1), This sporting experience automatically provided value to Nelson's PAH, rewarding the levels of physical capital that he had already accumulated and providing further opportunities to acquire and accrue this physical capital. He was able to successfully engage in all the activities within the PE class. For example, in lessons on football kicking he was able to move further and further away from his partner, kicking the ball each time with power and precision (see Figure 2). Importantly, he was able to embody his sporting experience to drive the quest for symbolic capital through emphasising competition (see Smee et al., 2021). He engaged in certain sporting dispositions, such as 'aggression' and a 'win at all costs' attitude (Smee et al., 2021), to acquire and accrue physical capital. He was able to embody his PAH to set the stakes of the game (Bourdieu, 1993). Through his sporting experience,



Figure 1. Nelson playing cricket.



Figure 2. Nelson kicks the ball from further and further back.

he had a strong understanding of how to use his body to gain a competitive advantage and acquire this capital. In this quest to gain this advantage and acquire and accrue capital, he engaged in acts of symbolic violence:

Nelson has the ball and is trying to figure out who to pass to. He decides to kick the ball to Chloe. As soon as he kicks the ball, he realizes that it is going to go straight to Renny (as Piggy), he runs in, knocks her to the ground, and grabs the ball (see [Figure 3](#)). He walks back to his spot with the ball. No one questions him because he is typically the most dominant player. Renny gets up off the ground, sheepishly, and the game continues. (Video, Class 1/2 Red)



Figure 3. Nelson knocks Renny to the ground to get the ball.

These moments of symbolic violence are happening below the level of consciousness and are often imperceptible even to their victims (Bourdieu, 2001). Importantly, moment like this are also part and parcel of the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and the quest for capital, with the other plays not understanding that engaging in these moments of competition are how you succeed within the field. Nelson's engagement in these moments of competition align with his PAH and put him in a privileged position to acquire and accrue more physical capital.

This continued on the playground where Nelson's PAH aligned with the make-up of the field. He was able to embody his PAH to engage in sporting activities in the sporting spaces. Nelson spent most of his time playing sports such as Aussie Rules football and soccer. He was able to embody his experience to succeed in these spaces, as highlighted here:

Over the course of recess, one boy dominated. Nelson was the most skilled and competitive player. While the other boys bickered over the rules and argued if one person had the ball too much, they allowed Nelson to dominate. There was never any discussion about Nelson getting to kick too much or that he should share the ball around. (Field note, recess, playground)

Within these moments, Nelson dominated the game, utilising his experience to display his advanced skills. His well-developed PAH was acknowledged by the other students, who allowed him to dominate without overtly enforcing the rules on him. He was able to set the stakes of the game (Bourdieu, 1993) by focusing on competition. His PAH also allowed him to choose who could play and in what capacity, based on their level of physical capital. Nelson left these moments with a further developed PAH, by acquiring and accruing further physical capital, which provided further privilege in PE classes.

Like Nelson, Paul had a PAH that aligned with the valuing of physical capital in the school. Outside of school, Paul played cricket, football, and basketball (see Figure 4), In fact, he played on multiple basketball teams, playing in and above his age group as he explained:

Cameron: So, you play on the same team as your brother?
 Paul: Yes. And also, another team.
 Cameron: So, you play on two teams?
 Paul: Yes. (Paul, photo-elicitation interview)



Figure 4. Paul playing junior football.

This translated to Paul bringing in a high level of physical capital to PE. Accordingly, he was able to succeed in PE activities to a level that his peers could not match, as highlighted in the following game of piggy in the middle:

Paul, now a piggy, runs up and gets in Adele's face, he spreads his hands and tries to block her throw. She moves the ball around, but he moves with her, trying to block it. He reaches in and tries to knock the ball out. She holds the ball up and he jumps up and smacks the ball in her hands (see [Figure 5](#)). Adele is not able to throw it far, Ric catches her ball and she has to go into the middle. (Video, Class 1/2 Red)

In these moments, Paul is able to embody his PAH to display skill mastery and experience beyond many of his classmates. This allows him to dominate the game and drive the quest for symbolic capital. In engaging in this quest, he also committed acts of symbolic violence, including knocking the ball out of Adele's hand and hitting her multiple times while trying to get the ball. Engaging in these acts, as he embodied the 'win at all costs' (Smee et al., 2021) attitude that defined his sporting experience, contributed to his success in the game. As a result, the emphasis on sport in PE allowed Paul to acquire and accrue more physical capital, allowing for further PAH development.

On the playground, Paul was able to use this PAH to choose where and what he played in the sporting spaces. This typically translated to playing either basketball or football. Like Nelson, Paul's experience meant he was able to dominate in the sporting activities that he engaged in, able to set the stakes of the games (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), choosing which students could join the game, based on their level of physical capital, as shown below:

There were three boys playing on the basketball court (Carl, Jake and Paul), attempting to make wild basketball shots. After 10 mins, two girls tried to join in and play (Molly and Gabriel). One of the girls simply grabbed the ball when it came to her and tried to shoot. The boys gave her a hard time while she tried to shoot and then mocked her further when she missed. The boys continued to treat Molly and Gabriel poorly. Carl kept telling them to hurry up, and Jake rushed at the girls and screamed at them a couple of times, while they were trying to shoot. When Molly got the ball a third time Paul ripped it away from her, so that he could shoot. Eventually, Molly actively started to chase after the ball, even if the boys had it. Paul got sick of this and took the ball and said, 'it is my ball and you can't play anymore'. The girls silently accepted this defeat and gave up. They moved over to play other games (an eyes closed tag game and hopscotch). The boys went back to shooting without them. (Field note, playground, recess)

In these moments, the other students simply do not possess the right PAH and levels of physical capital to play. So, Paul decides that they cannot join in the game, not even giving them the opportunity to learn and develop the skills. In ejecting them from the game, Paul committed a further act of symbolic violence. This domination of sporting spaces allowed Paul to further develop his PAH, by acquiring and accruing more physical capital, often at the expense of his peers.

Ultimately, the emphasis on sport within PE and on the playground, and the focus on acquiring and accruing physical capital through engaging in the game, privileges those students with a PAH developed through sporting experience. The other students do not have this experience but still must recognise the value of the game (Bourdieu, 1990). As a result, the sporting students are provided further opportunities to develop their sporting PAH within the school, often at the expense of the other students, who are not provided similar opportunities for development. The emphasis on sport put these children in a position to govern and establish a monopoly over the type of capital that was valued in the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). There was a clear gendered element to these types of interactions, with the boys more likely to have the sporting experience needed to set the stakes of the game (Hunter, 2004), which makes sense since sport is often seen as the primary domain of boys (Mooney & Hickey, 2012). For these sporting boys, there was a clear alignment between the PAH at home and the PAH at school. It was a congruous PAH, across these various physical activity spaces, developed at home and then provided numerous further opportunities for development within the school. For these students, the alignment of the PAH across these spaces, means that it will likely continue to develop on an upwards trajectory, as they are provided a multitude of opportunities to accrue physical capital within sporting activities.



Figure 5. Paul uses his body to block Adele's throw.

The construction of these physical activity spaces, in a way that emphasises sport, provides this opportunity for those with a congruent PAH.

Home – students with a divided PAH

In contrast to the school environment, the home environment is a different space. The home space does not have the same structures as the school environment. There is no curriculum, no guiding policies, and far less structure. Each child's home environment can be uniquely and drastically different, with factors such as culture, class, and socio-economic status playing a significant influence on physical activity engagement, as discussed earlier. Within this space, the children tended to engage in a much wider range of physical activities, all of them possessing and developing their PAH in several ways (see Van der Smee et al., 2022) For CRPS students, these activities included: a range of formal team sports; individual and expressive activities; and informal physical activities and sports. The conditions for acquiring physical capital were different at home because the make-up of each child's home space was different. It was the children themselves who provided insight into the field of the home, and the unique makeup. The examination of these accounts showed the divide that some of the students experience across these spaces.

For these students, there was a divide between the PAH at home and the PAH at school. One of these students, Jay, brought a PAH, imbued with physical capital from engaging in a range of activities, that was not valued within the sporting spaces. At home, he engaged in several physical activities, including swimming and fishing, but his favourite was skipping, as he explained:

- Cameron: So, what are you doing in that one? (Referring to [Figure 6](#))
 Jay: I'm skipping.
 Cameron: So how often do you skip?
 Jay: Every ... every ... nearly every two days.
 Cameron: And what type of things do you do when you're skipping?
 Jay: Crisscross, I skip backwards. I can skip on one leg. (Jay, photo-elicitation interview)



Figure 6. Jay skips at home.

In this photo elicitation interview, Jay spoke openly about how much he loves to skip, particularly with his sister, and how frequently he liked to do it. For him, skipping was how he developed his PAH and accumulated physical capital. This was in direct contrast to PE, where he often downplayed his skipping ability:

After a few failed attempts, Jay looks to the camera and says, 'I forgot how to skip.' He says, 'this is how skipping is' and pretends to skip incorrectly (see Figure 7). (PE video, Class 1/2 blue)

In PE, skipping was not valued as a skill, because it did not align with the focus on sport. Jay, sub-consciously aware of this, chose not to actively display his skipping ability, as he knew he could



Figure 7. Jay pretends that he cannot skip in PE class.

not acquire much physical capital through this act within this field. Asked to elaborate on this, he tried to explain:

- Cameron: Do you prefer to skip at home or skip in PE?
Jay: Skip at home.
Cameron: Why?
Jay: Because there's more space. (Jay, photo-elicitation interview)

He tried to rationalise the difference between skipping at home and school, by saying that there is more space, but a simple observation of the PE space shows that there is an abundance of space to practise. At home, he was happy to skip but in PE, where he knows skipping was not valued, he did not make the same effort. There is clearly a gendered element to the choice not to skip, as skipping is a highly gendered skill (Boyle et al., 2003) with many of the CRPS children thinking it was mainly for girls. So, here, Jay is reading the gendered social field of PE, and the focus on sports that are seen as the domain of boys (Mooney & Hickey, 2012), and making the choice not to display his skipping prowess. Here he is playing the game, unconsciously aware that engaging in skipping will not allow him to acquire and accrue much capital within the sporting field of PE, so he opts to be incompetent because his reading of the field tells him so. Accordingly, Jay did not have many opportunities to further develop his PAH by acquiring and accruing physical capital in the school. This showed the division between his PAH at home and his PAH within PE. Unsurprisingly, he rarely skipped on the playground or engaged in the activities that were valued within PE. Instead, he talked with his friends and played imaginary games, keeping the home as the space where he felt the most comfortable to skip.

Similarly, other students experienced this division, where the home was a much safer space to express themselves physically in a variety of ways. Another student, Laura, experienced this same sense of division. At home, Laura engaged in several activities, regularly riding her bike and her scooter (see Figure 8). Importantly, she also spoke of playing games of soccer with her family at the park:

- Cameron: So, what type of game did you play that day?
Laura:



Figure 8. Laura rides her bike at home.



Figure 9. Laura playing soccer at home with her family.

We were playing soccer (see [Figure 9](#)). We were playing for fun. Like I was getting the ball into the goals. We weren't keeping score. Just having fun, like we always do. (Laura, photo-elicitation interview)

Unfortunately, this experience did not translate into the PE class. Laura's experience riding her bike and scooter did not provide her much physical capital within PE. Although, she had some experience with playing soccer, her family engaged in these games for fun with no emphasis on competition, keeping score or skill mastery. Accordingly, Laura's PAH was not valued in class, which meant that she often struggled to engage in PE activities. She often found herself the victim of acts of symbolic violence from the sporty students, for example, trying to learn to kick while balls flew at her head and the boys encroached on her space.

Laura also struggled to learn the sporting skills that were focused on in class. For example, in a lesson on football kicking, Laura struggled to learn how to kick the ball effectively. Her experience from soccer gave her some ability to kick a ball, but the football kick was entirely different and so she possessed low levels of physical capital. Laura struggled to make any progress on the kicking skill. As a result, she rarely connected with the ball, often missing it completely (see [Figure 10](#)) or just letting it roll along the ground. Eventually, after numerous failed attempts, Laura gave up on trying and walked the ball over and handed it to her partner, rather than continuing to try and kick it. Accordingly, on the playground, Laura chose to engage in distinctly different activities:

Cameron: And so, you play with Claudia?

Laura: Uh-huh.

Cameron: And what types of games do you and Claudia play?

Laura: Well, we usually make some sandcastles or try to dig for wet sand and dig big holes. (Laura, playground map interview)

Laura chose not to engage in the soccer that she enjoyed at home, perhaps unconsciously aware that the make-up of the field is different and realising that playing on the playground meant playing with the boys and opening herself up to acts of symbolic violence, such as aggressive and competitive acts. So, for Laura the PAH at home was distinctly different to the PAH at school.

These accounts, and the insights of many of the other children, showed that the home was a safe space for many of the children. They were able to develop their PAH and acquire and accrue capital



Figure 10. Laura misses the ball after several attempts.

through a wider range of physical activity opportunities. The activities they engaged in were not valued in PE, and therefore did not afford the children much valued physical capital, but the children still enjoyed these activities for the intrinsic meaning that they provided. This shows that for some children there was a division between the home and school environment. That there was a division between the fields of home and school for some students makes sense. Although each field operated similarly, as ‘a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97), the make-up of each field was distinct. The key difference was the focus on sport, particularly a gendered valuing of the sporting experiences that are seen as the domain of boys (Mooney & Hickey, 2012). This focus on sport (particularly competitive team sport) that defined the fields of the playground and PE, was not always a defining feature of the children’s lives at home. That fundamental difference meant that for many of the children there was a wider range of valued activities that they could engage in at home.

Noticeably, at home, the forms of capital are different and therefore the habitus a child must possess to acquire and accrue this capital is also distinct. In some instances, this meant that the level of physical capital that each child embodied was rewarded in an activity that was not particularly valued at school. In others, these children could play a more significant role in determining the ingredients of these activities, therefore their habitus did not preclude them from acquiring and accruing more capital, nor were they victim to the same types of symbolic violence. As a field, the home still acted as a game space (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), but the stakes were uniquely different. So, as children, such as Laura and Jay continue to engage in these types of activities during their free time, but do not have the same opportunity at school, are they likely to be able to manage this incongruence between their school PAH and their home PAH indefinitely? The more time they spend in school, especially as it continues to place a stronger emphasis on the types of activities that do not align with their PAH at home, the harder it will be to manage this division. For these children, if activities at home drop off, and the school space becomes the only way to continue to develop their PAH, they are much more likely to be less active, and may possibly eventually disengage from PA all together (Van der Smeë et al., 2022), as reflected in the high levels of drop out in the adolescent years (Devís-Devís et al., 2015)

Conclusion: utilising theory to inform policy

The use of Bourdieu's conceptual tools and child-centred methods provided insight into how the home and the school are socially constructed. The make-up of each field is different, prioritising and performing different types of capital. For students with a PAH developed through junior sport, the school recognised this PAH and valued it, providing multiple opportunities within the PE and playground space for these students to acquire and accrue further physical capital, often at the expense of their peers. For these students, their PAH was congruent across both spaces, providing more opportunities for further development. For those students who had developed their PAH through other activities, the school had a narrowing effect on their choices. The home was a space where they felt a greater sense of freedom to engage in the activities that informed their PAH, able to acquire and accrue physical capital because the make-up of the field was uniquely different. Accordingly, at school these students read the field and chose, often at an unconscious level, to engage in entirely different types of activities. This meant that these students possessed a divided PAH, due to the division between the PAH at home and the PAH at school. Over time this incongruity will become harder and harder to manage and may result in one dominant physical way of being.

How can we use this knowledge to inform policy and ensure better physical activity outcomes across both spaces? Utilising theoretical approaches such as Bourdieu's theory of praxis can provide additional insight into the complex social processes that shape these fields and children's PAH development within and across them. This theoretical understanding provides an extra layer of insight into why policies or interventions may (not) elicit the desired outcomes. To implement policies that have a positive impact, we need to use this knowledge to develop PA engagement efforts that incorporate this nuanced understanding.

To achieve this, there are several informed policy decisions that we can make. Firstly, we should continue to develop policies that support all children to engage in the physical activities that they value at home. Pang (2022) argued for the importance of the home as an environment to 'test the waters; and develop their own personal meanings of physical activity' (p. 156). As discussed, engagement in PA can be affected by a myriad of social factors, however, as we have shown all the students in this study engaged in PA options they enjoyed at home. The problems occurred when these PA experiences were not valued outside of the home. So, future PA policy work should seek to reflect and equally value the range of PA options that children engage in at home. Secondly, we must change the nature of the field at the school. In PE, we should broaden the scope of physical activity beyond the sporting focus that continues to dominate primary PE curriculum (Ward & Griggs, 2018). As discussed, the national curriculum in Australia has prioritised this through a focus on a more holistic approach to HPE (Cliff et al., 2009), but the focus on sporting skills has persisted (Powell, 2015). So, instead we should empower and work with teachers to use the national curriculum as a guiding document to develop their own class curriculum to adopt a more democratic approach to PE that provides greater agency and enhances and meets the needs of all students (Lambert et al., 2021; Oliver & Kirk, 2016). This approach should explicitly acknowledge the PAH of all children to embrace a fuller range of PA options, as well as the barriers to engagement. This will provide more opportunities for all children to acquire and accrue physical capital in a safer environment. It will require more nuanced policy development at the national level and within PETE programs to help cultivate this curriculum development knowledge and overcome the numerous barriers that teachers face to delivering primary HPE (Whipp et al., 2012). On the playground, we should develop policy and practices that encourage schools to broaden their focus beyond primarily emphasising sporting spaces and increase the focus on natural environmental features and loose parts for imaginary play (Hyndman, 2017). This is known to have a positive effect on physical activity outcomes (Hyndman, 2017) and may encourage more students to feel comfortable to express themselves physically more freely. By taking these steps we should be able to construct these physical spaces differently and ensure better outcomes across both spaces.

Note

1. We do not utilise any of the maps in this study, but we do still include some of the insights from the map elicitation interviews.

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