

Aim:

The potential benefits of physical education are universal for all children. However, facilitating such benefits in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) requires careful planning, as children with ASD are typically said to have a range of decreased physical attributes including cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, balance, coordination and general motor skills (Pan et al., 2010). Whilst previous studies have identified the implications for supporting pupils with ASD within mainstream physical education (Groft-Jones and Block, 2006; Zhang and Griffin, 2007) and teachers' beliefs concerning teaching pupils with disabilities (Sato et al., 2007), specific focus on ASD and physical education is scarce (Massion, 2006). This paper focuses on an area that, to the best of our knowledge, has rarely been addressed in the literature: consulting pupils with ASD directly about their views of physical education. We report on a small-scale case study at one school in eastern England, exploring physical education through the eyes of children with ASDs.

Findings:

Four main themes emerged from the collective stories and personal insights:

Physical education changing rooms ...

"people get other peoples' stuff and they start throwing it around like bags, shoes, ties, start whipping people with their ties and shirts, the jumper and anything they can find out of the bags they start throwing around." (Danny)

Physical education corridors ...

"everything is going on around me, and the noise, the noise makes me lose focus of the lesson." (Danny)

Physical education teacher's office ...

"I can come there and tell one of them what's going on in the....what's going wrong in the changing rooms." (Danny)

Physical education activities ...

"in a big game with lots of people then I get a bit nervous that I will um well disappoint people." (Josie)

Method:

- ◆ The researchers worked with a purposely selected group of pupils (n=5), aged 11-16, to explore whether the juxtaposition of images to narrative could enhance our understanding of how pupils with ASD view physical education.
- ◆ Robert, Joe, Josie, Danny and Alex (pseudonyms) took part, all with an ASD statement of Special Educational Need.
- ◆ Photo-elicitation was adopted as the research tool to accord authority to the voices of the pupils, empowering them to share their feelings towards the subject by capturing significant aspects of physical education.
- ◆ Each pupil took their photos using an iPad and engaged in a one-to-one interview with their physical education teacher during their usual 50 minute physical education lesson.
- ◆ The photographs provided prompts for greater exploration during unstructured interviews.
- ◆ The interviews were transcribed and the content analysed manually for themes drawing upon aspects of Johnson et al.'s (2004) four dialogic moments.

Findings:

- ◆ Bourdieu's conceptual tools of field and capital informed interpretation of the findings, highlighting the emotive and powerful feelings of pupils towards physical education, developed through their relationship towards particular spaces.
- ◆ Findings highlight the significance of these spaces in defining the embodiment of physical education dispositions for pupils with ASD. This interaction developed forms of social, cultural and physical capital.
- ◆ The teacher's office was regarded positively as were activities that provided opportunities for engagement with peers.
- ◆ Opportunities to be heroic, such as scoring a goal for their team or being an official were important factors as were some team sports.
- ◆ All pupils took more than one photo of the changing areas, and identified the changing room as an area of physical education that provokes negative emotions and viewed with trepidation.
- ◆ All pupils except Alex discussed different team sports as aspects of physical education they enjoyed, they are small sided and conditioned.
- ◆ The data highlighted how pupil's embodied dispositions interacted with these spaces to create forms of symbolic capital, illustrated by the pupils as worries and fears towards physical education.



Physical education activities

"It gets crowded and louder" (Joe)



Physical education corridor

"I like basketball because I like shooting" (Danny)



Physical education changing rooms

"It doesn't feel like there is room to breathe in there sometimes" (Joe)

"always someone there that you can talk to" (Josie)



Physical education teacher's office

Key References:

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Conclusion:

Both positive and negative interactions within the spaces of physical education develop forms of social and symbolic capital shaping the physical education experiences for pupils with ASD. It is crucial that teachers plan for inclusion through informed awareness of the barriers pupils may face, which extend to actual and conceptual fields beyond the formal space of 'lesson delivery. An informed awareness of these barriers, initiated through more 'two-way conversations' (Fitzgerald, 2012, p458) should be fostered if we really want to forward change and stimulate the thinking of those involved in the delivery of physical education (Fitzgerald, 2012). Through such actions, teachers may be better informed in providing strategies to facilitate communication and social interaction whilst allowing all pupils to engage positively with physical education.