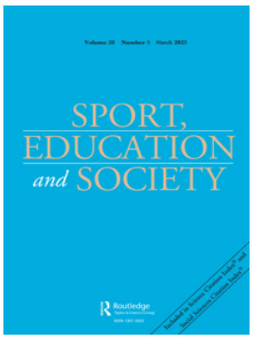

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Making the familiar strange: a narrative about Spanish children's experiences of physical (in)activity to reconsider the ability of physical education to produce healthy citizens

Gustavo González-Calvo [a], Alfonso García-Monge[a], Göran Gerdin [b] and Richard Pringle [c]

[a]Departamento de Didáctica de la Expresión Musical, Plástica y Corporal, Universidad de Valladolid, Palencia, Spain; [b]Department of Sport Science, Linnaeus University, Vaxjo, Sweden; [c]Department of Sport, Health and Physical Education, Monash University, Clayton, Australia

ABSTRACT

There is now a wealth of research on obesity both from biomedical and socially critical perspectives. However, less research has focused on the lived experiences of young children and particularly those who are perceived as 'sedentary'. This paper critically examines the issue of obesity as related to children's experiences of physical (in)activity, via a focus on the circulation of socio-cultural and economic discourses in the context of Spain. We report on data obtained from interviews with 13 children identified as 'sedentary'. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis and based on the analysis a collective story was constructed to represent and give voice to the children's experiences. The collective story sketches a day in the life of 'Diego' to indirectly reveal the limitations associated with assuming that sport and school physical education (PE) are pragmatic 'answers' to the presumed issue of childhood obesity. In our analysis we draw on Foucauldian notions of bio-power and governmentality to highlight how neoliberal and capitalist logics shape and constrain children's experiences and opportunities. By presenting a narrative that delves into the various domains of these children's lives, their families, friends, peers and lifestyles, we argue there is still a need to reformulate and rethink how we understand childhood wellbeing and the role of PE. We conclude by suggesting that the conflation of PE with sport and health can subtly undermine some children's views of self.

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Introduction

We live immersed in a neoliberal era and society. Most of our information, classifications and perceptions of life are marked with the seal of commodity and mass consumption; things get produced quickly and with limited consideration of social responsibilities. This neoliberal system does not escape the educational sphere, which is increasingly impregnated with neoliberal dyes that guide, condition and determine its aim and purpose (Evans, 2014; Varea et al., 2019). Indeed, school Physical Education (PE) is no stranger to neoliberal ways of thinking and operating.

As a compulsory school subject in most countries in the world, PE curricula often have a holistic aim aspiring to both personal and social well-being. With specific aims of helping children to develop

CONTACT Göran Gerdin goran.gerdin@lnu.se Department of Sport Science, Linnaeus University, Vaxjo, Sweden

an understanding of themselves, accepting their own body realities and those of others, providing them with resources that help them enjoy their bodies throughout their lives, and with knowledge and ability to become 'critical consumers and knowledgeable managers of their own physically active lifestyles' (Laker, 2003). However, PE practices and debates have often centred around the so-called 'obesity discourse' (Tinning et al., 2016) which has led, in recent decades, to a focus on fighting the 'growing epidemic of sofa children' (British Heart Foundation, 2000) and viewing PE teachers as 'obesity warriors' (Burrows, 2016).

Many studies have drawn on biomedical explanations to provide 'solutions' that offer ways of resolving this childhood obesity problem (e.g. Boles et al., 2014; Evans & Rich, 2011; Folkvord et al., 2016). Others have adopted a salutogenic perspective of health which has inspired studies of health promotion initiatives in schools and young peopleś engagement in community sport (McCuaig & Quennerstedt, 2018) and pedagogical approaches that move beyond a deficit perspective of youth, school PE and its teachers (Light & Harvey, 2017; Thorburn & Horrell, 2014). A wealth of research has also critiqued the very existence of this obesity 'crisis' and have pointed at the neoliberal and corporate interests it serves (e.g. Burrows, 2017; Burrows & Wright, 2007; Gard & Wright, 2005; Powell & Gard, 2015; Pringle & Powell, 2016; Pringle & Pringle, 2012; Wright, 2009). Powell and Gard (2015), for instance, demonstrate how marketing campaigns by major corporations position children as responsible for their own health and conflate (ill)health with body weight/shape. They further argue that these corporations (re)shape the very ideas of health and notions of what constitutes a 'healthy life'.

Processes of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) instil in people the sense that they are responsible for their own health and that it is a moral virtue to look after their health. This individualising and self-disciplining process allegedly contributes to the greater good of the broader population (Foucault, 1991). In a similar way, the 'obesity epidemic' discourse functions as a form of bio-power with an underpinning but utopian desire to produce fat free bodies, productive citizens and reductions in health care costs. This discourse has not only influenced PE practices (i.e. the prevalence of fitness testing and focus on accumulating physical activity), but also how identities and bodies are constructed as either healthy or obesity-prone (Gard & Wright, 2005; Gerdin & Larsson, 2018; Gerdin & Pringle, 2017). As critical scholars working across the fields of sport, coaching, health and PE, we remain committed to problematising how discourses of obesity both shape practices and identities across these fields. We are in particular interested in elucidating and providing a further challenge to the ongoing production of social inequities in and through sport, coaching, health and PE in which obesity discourses play a significant role.

The aim of this paper is to explore Spanish children's knowledge and experiences of schooling, PE and physical (in)activity in relation to understanding how their bodies and subjectivities are governed via the working of neoliberalism. We accordingly aim to identify and analyse the socio-cultural and economic discourses that surround these children's daily lives in Spain. The paper is guided by the following research questions: *(i) What experiences of physical (in)activity do Spanish children have? and (ii) What socio-cultural and economic discourses have shaped these children's experiences?*

Childhood obesity, socio-cultural and economic discourses in school PE

In recent times, health, education and physical activity are areas where large corporations (banks, food companies, pharmaceuticals, advertising companies, among others) have realised that they have profits to gain or lose and the related importance of targeting schools and youth (Fernández-Balboa, 2017). This situation produces forces of change from within the educational profession and from outside (Johns, 2005; Tinning, 2017). As in many other Western countries, in Spain, educational processes have been shaped by medical discourses – often seen as the most important and prestigious of them all – and by political discourses. This has meant that many political parties regardless of their underpinning ideology promote the importance of increasing school PE hours as a strategy to attract voters. This issue is a space in which the social, economic, political,

personal and professional come together and come into conflict (Greener et al., 2010; Rayner et al., 2010; Wells, 2012), allowing us to reflect on our society and the role of PE in it.

But, despite all the enormous efforts that are being made in most Western countries to avoid what some consider as the greatest health problem of the twenty-first century (Folkvord et al., 2016), the concerns about obesity, if not the rates of obesity, have not improved: which suggests that attempts to use PE as a tool to fight obesity has not been successful. Popkin and Hawkes (2016) argue that this is because the underpinning reasons go beyond individual behaviour (e.g. economic interests, commercial agreements, production subsidies, urban designs) and PE can, therefore, only play a very limited role (Caballero et al., 2003).

On the other hand, as Wright (2009) explains, we should instead ask ourselves whether the obesity crisis is a real or manufactured issue, and whether the great amount of resources - intellectual and economic - that have been deployed to fight against it can be justified, particularly when the aspects that could put the economic dimensions of the phenomenon (i.e. marketing of processed products, sweetened drinks and saturated fats) at risk are not dealt with and the solutions end up opening new lines of trade (e.g. dietetic, aesthetic or fitness industries). This also highlights how it is difficult to separate interests related to health and interests related to commerce in biomedical discourse (Rayner et al., 2010). In the field of physical activity and exercise, this trend is reflected in the emergence of thousands of gymnasiums and sports clubs, the rise of dietetic and health food products, new physical activity patterns and medical guidelines that regulate what PE in schools should look like (e.g. Evans, 2003; Evans & Rich, 2011; Tremblay et al., 2011; Varea et al., 2019).

To date, little attention has been paid within the Spanish context to the structures within this sociocultural context that support health, comparing it with the importance placed on determining risk factors, normally associated with diet and physical exercise in children and young people. In an attempt to better understand the way in which we perceive and know the world, others and ourselves (Bochner, 2014), our paper draws on a narrative methodology with the purpose of generating a dialogue between children, young people, families, teachers and those responsible for educational policies and curricula. In this way, we intend to encourage critical thinking on these issues and interrupt prevailing discourses on physical (in)activity and obesity, to make the familiar strange (Pringle, 2009).

Methodology

Research participants and procedure

The data informing this paper was part of a larger study on physical activity and lifestyle habits conducted at a primary school in a medium-sized Spanish city. All of the participating school's students (n = 423; age 6–12) and their respective families (n = 274), four school teachers and five monitors of extracurricular sports activities participated in the study. Informed consent was provided by the parent(s) for their own and their children's participation in the study. All names referred to in this paper are pseudonyms to ensure the participants' anonymity.

In a first phrase, for the initial assessment of physical activity and lifestyle habits, both students and families completed a series of on-line questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items, organised around the following themes: (a) physical activity habits; (b) habits and knowledge about healthy and balanced diets; and (c) barriers to leading a more physically active and healthy lifestyle. The data reported on this paper, was collected as part of a second phase, in which a total of 13 students categorised as sedentary or at 'risk' of sedentarism - children who exercise only once or twice a week- (7 girls and 6 boys) in the third and fourth year of primary school in Spain (age 8–9 years), as well as their parents, participated in semi-structured interviews. For this phase, purposeful sampling was also used for the selection of the participants (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011), selecting those whose work and family flexibility would allow them to be available for in-depth interviews.

The parents were interviewed separately and were not present during the children's interviews, in order to contrast their information and allowing them to speak their minds (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). All participants were asked the same questions, with respect to the following topics: (a) life habits such as school and work schedules, leisure time activities; (b) how much physical activity and exercise they do each week, both regulated (e.g. participation in sports clubs) and non-regulated (e.g. outings to the park, to the mountains, walking); (c) food habits and what knowledge they have about healthy and balanced diets; (c) what they consider to be the main obstacles to leading a more physically active and healthy life.

All interviews were undertaken within schools, at times chosen by the participants. The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 min and to enhance the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and facilitate data analysis, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were sent to those taking part who, in the final instance, decided if they wanted the content of their interview to form a part of the research or not, and whether they wanted to provide further clarification on something they had said. In this paper, we only report on the data obtained from interviewing the children.

Data analysis and creative non-fiction

All the data collected was analyzed using thematic content analysis (Libarkin & Kurdziel, 2002) and constant comparison (Denzin, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic content analysis focuses on searching for patterns in the text. Descriptive and pattern coding were used to analyze both within-case and cross-case patterns. First, the interview transcripts were read several times to get a sense of the meaning of the interviews as a whole (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). From the categories that emerged after the thematic and content analysis of the semi-structured interviews, those that were considered most relevant to the research questions were chosen to construct the narrative presented below.

For instance, in questions about the daily activities and physical activity, the thematic and content analysis led to the categories of 'socio-economic' and 'social class' factors which in turn resulted in narrative themes of 'school holiday activities', 'dining at hamburger joint as a reward', 'takeaway dinners' and the 'hiring of a personal trainer'. Questions about sport participation and school PE led to categories of 'sport facilities' and 'obesity discourse in politics' that in the narrative involved 'lack of access to sport facilities' and the 'political proposal to add more hours to PE'. The criteria for including data categories also followed Sparkes and Smith's (2014) guidelines for judging the quality and relevance of qualitative research by asking the following questions: Does this work make a significant contribution to our understanding of what school PE is and what it should be? Is there anything to learn from our story; does it invite dialogue as a space for debate and negotiation? Does it open up the possibility of other less utilitarian and more pedagogical approaches to school PE?

After the analysis of the data, and in order to fully represent the complexity of the topic of our investigation, we opted for a presentation of the results via creative nonfiction (see Smith & Sparkes, 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Creative nonfiction represents data from research evidence in a story form. The narrative representation is therefore based on systematically collected data. Given this data was derived from interviews with 13 children, we opted to represent their 'combined' understandings and experiences via what Richardson (1997) calls a 'collective story'. Richardson (1997) promoted the notion of a collective story as a means of giving voice to groups of people that have been silenced or whose storeys have been undervalued. In our case, the voice of children had been marginalised in contrast to the voice of science in discussions concerning the 'obesity epidemic'. We therefore wanted to give voice to children's experiences and understandings of PE and obesity concerns. Richardson's sociological task was to examine the **'**private storeys of members of these groups in relation to broader social forces, to discern the workings of power that act formidably against them, and then to represent their storeys as a collective, unified, chronological narrative' (Pringle, 2008, p. 221). The collective story was constructed around the categories identified in our

analysis of data and represented as the description of a 'typical' day in the life of a child growing up in Spain.

Results

Our intention with presenting this collective story (Richardson, 1997) is to represent and give voice to children's experiences as linked to the complex issues of physical (in)activity and (un)healthy lifestyles: voices and experiences in our view that are crucial in understanding and furthering actions on the impact of obesity, socio-cultural and economic discourses on schooling and PE practices.

Today is Diego's first day of school after the lengthy summer holidays. The truth is that, although he is a bit blasé about school, he usually wants to come back. The summer break was too long and days started to blur and boredom set in. On the best days of his break, Diego would go to the swimming pool with his friends and, on exceptional days, to the shopping centre with his family, with a hamburger dinner included.

Diego wakes up a little nervous, wanting to see his friends and know who his new teachers will be. As always, time is against him and he has a few biscuits for breakfast before putting a tetra-brick of prefabricated juice in his backpack for lunch. His family live near the school, about a ten-minute walk away, and the school encourages pupils to walk or cycle to school. However, his parents work, so he always gets dropped off by car. After saying goodbye to his parents with a quick kiss, he runs to the line to hug his classmates. Diego is happy to see them again. They start chatting about their holidays, what they have done and the places they have visited if they were lucky enough to leave town. Some have a lot more to tell than others. The school bell rings and they line up to go to class.

Once in class, and with excitement, they take out their new books and stationery. Diego knows that he has to take good care of them, that they cost a lot of money and that they have to last the whole year. Because they've been so expensive, he knows his parents will probably cut back on some spending in the coming months. He momentarily thinks he can forget about getting Barcelona's new football outfit! At least he has his team's sneakers that his uncle brought him from one of his trips. He knows that they are a forgery but, after all, an almost perfect forgery. And if any of his team-mates decide to attack him by accusing him of wearing a fake shoe, he will deny it as many times as necessary.

Between the language and mathematics classes, the tutor suggests stretching. She tells them about some exercises that will be good for their back. Diego knows that physical exercise is meant to be good for him, but he doesn't have a back problem but he does the exercises anyhow as best he can.

Again, the bell rings, now to warn of yard time. Diego and his classmates leave quickly, finish their snacks as soon as possible - juices, biscuits and buns; it seems that convenience food is common amongst his friends - and raffle to see who gets to be the goalkeeper. He feels lucky that he is not put in goal; he knows that the real stars, are others: those who score goals, not those who prevent them from being scored.

Back in line, sweating, two team-mates tell the rest that they are going to join a local football team. They are good footballers and very excited: they'll train, they explain, Monday and Wednesday, playing a game on the weekend. Diego has asked his mother and father, on countless occasions, to sign him up for a football team; he doesn't know if he's talented enough, but he would be very excited to train in a club. He thinks all the exercise would be good for him and he dreams of being a good player. Yet his Mum and Dad have explained that they are too busy, and that it is too costly, and that it is not possible for them to take him to the training sessions and also the weekend game. Yet they do also promise that one day they will take him to the football stadium to watch his favourite team play. He hopes this dream comes true and he thinks about being able to tell his friends that he actually saw Barcelona play live at the stadium.

Classes are over, that annoying bell again! Just like last year, he will eat in the school cafeteria, together with many of his classmates. But his best friend at school, Sofia, is no longer with his lunch group; he remembers that last year, she had to stop going to the cafeteria because the doctors said she had a health problem that the school meals could aggravate. He doesn't know what the problem

is, yet he wonders, 'so what we eat here is bad'? He then feels sad about Sofia who is perceived by the others as overweight and he worries whether she is still made fun of.

Eating at school is more boring than eating at home; when he eats with his family, at least he has his television and his tablet on hand to entertain. First there is bean stew. The caretaker, who dishes up the food, invites him to try the stew, but after a spoonful he leaves it. He thinks he'll eat something when he gets home. Yet the chef has also put chicken nuggets back on the second serving, and he devours them right away. The chef remembers that when the caterer in charge of the menu offered chopped chicken, half of the dishes remained untouched. She wants to make sure that the students eat well so they have the energy for the afternoon classes, hence she picks food she knows the children will eat.

After lunch there is one more class before PE. Diego likes PE classes, but he's not sure if he's attracted to the idea of 'sweat more'. He feels a little bad as he can see some of the other students performing the exercises with ease. He tries to avoid working too hard during the exercise drills as he wants to save his energy in case they have a game. The teacher always tells the students that the exercise will make them healthy and that it is good for the heart and will stop them from being fat. The teacher informs that being fat will lead to heart attacks. Diego then looks around to see if his friend Sophia is doing the exercises. Others look at Sofia also. She looks down as if concentrating on her movements. Diego feels bad as he knows that his friend doesn't have a good time in class. She is not the same as in previous years, she is not the same as the one who enjoyed the subject so much. But he is pleased that she is doing PE as often she forgets to bring her uniform and gets in trouble. As Diego's friend is listening to the words of their teacher, she keeps her eyes firmly looking down at the floor.

Diego is in luck as the teacher says they have time for a game of football. Most, but not all, of the children celebrate and clap. The teacher randomly divides the class into two teams and then hands out coloured bibs to differentiate the teams. He then tells them to quickly sort out their positions. The boy – who said he was going to be joining a weekend football team – organises the positions. He looks at Diego and tells him to go goalie. His teammates run into position but Diego is a bit disappointed and walks slowly back to the goal. He was put in goal last week also. He wanted the opportunity to try and score a goal, not save them. As he walks into position, with his head down, he thinks it is probably a good thing that he isn't joining a real football team.

When his father has finished working, he goes to pick Diego up at school and takes him home, where he will spend the rest of the afternoon alone. Well, not alone. Fortunately, he has his television and video games to keep him company. The first thing he does when he gets home is to eat some cookies.

Diego's mother arrives from the shop where she works shortly before dinner, her legs slightly swollen after several hours of standing. The father arrives a little later after a day of delivering packages with his car, with his lower back in pain. They greet each other and comment on their respective ailments. The father recommends the mother to do a little exercise and she remembers that when she went to the fitness classes at the municipal sports centre she ended up with the most painful knees. They joke about hiring a personal trainer like his boss has, someone to guide them on how to exercise according to their needs. Diego wishes they had the money to hire a personal trainer! He then tells the father to do some exercises that his tutor has taught him in class. The father smiles and caresses his head: 'thanks son, now I'm a little tired, but tomorrow I'll try it'.

They all sit down for the family dinner. It's the only time they have to be together. They decide to heat up frozen pizzas, it only takes twenty minutes in the oven and it's one of their favourite dinners. As they dine, they listen to the television news. Although they don't usually pay much attention, they remain silent when they hear the word 'PE'. Apparently, different political forces are considering increasing the hours of this subject in schools. Pictures of overweight children eating hamburgers fill the screen as experts warn of the health dangers of inactivity.

Diego believes that teachers are responsible people and won't do anything that could put children at risk. He also believes - even though his parents often tell him not to pay attention to everything on television - that what is shown on TV is what really happens. So, if the television reporters are saying that children need to be more active and they should play more sport then it must be for a good reason. A strange thought pops into Diego's head and he blurts out a question, 'if you aren't very

good at sport, does that mean you won't be healthy? His mum looks puzzled but doesn't answer. Diego adds more information, 'cos, you won't get picked for the team or you'll get stuck in goal?' Yet no one answers and the conversation changes as the weather reporter tells them it is going to be a hot and sticky night.

Diego brushes his teeth and, after kissing his parents goodnight, goes to bed. He spends a few minutes flipping through a book. 'You have to read more' is something that adults always say to him. But he thinks he has the right to say that reading is boring. He closes his eyes and dreams of the day his parents will take him to watch his favourite football team play.

Discussion

There is a prevailing assumption that obesity is a lifestyle disease (Burrows, 2017; Gard & Wright, 2005; Powell & Gard, 2015; Pringle & Powell, 2016), linked predominantly to sedentary behaviour, poor nutrition and an 'obesogenic' environment (Powell & Gard, 2015). Due to these reasons, corporate and public health interventions tend to focus on attitudinal and behavioural change in families which often frames the obesity problem as one related to parental success or failure - knowing and acting in ways that will halt the rise of childhood obesity (Burrows, 2017).

In this sense, we recognise that Diego's 'slice of life' narrative presented above may not seem particularly striking, perhaps even mundane, yet we hope that readers from various countries can resonate with some of the daily realities of his story. Indeed, we hope that the mundaneness of the story is a factor that might eventually trouble readers, as it is through making the familiar strange that we can start to problematise what we take for granted. The aspect we wish to make strange is not the realities of family life but that despite several decades of socially-critical research on issues of obesity in PE (e.g. Gard & Pluim, 2014; Gard & Wright, 2005) some teachers of the PE profession – and something that is also reproduced in their pupils' understandings - still widely believe and propagate their own health narrative, which assumes: 'if we can encourage children into sport and exercise, we will help produce a 'thin' healthy adult population'. We stress that this a narrative that has not been lived into fruition and there is little evidence to support its veracity. What is strange is not that children like Diego will possibly remain sedentary for life, but that some physical educators have not realised the failings of their own 'health/obesity/activity/sport' narrative.

Moreover, as a collective story constructed from in-depth interviews from 13 students classified as sedentary or at assumed risk of sedentarism, we hope to show the complex array of forces that shape daily life and the respective health understandings from Diego: who, as a school pupil, is the target of select health, activity and obesity messages. These 'health' messages are often promoted within school and PE contexts to pupils with the expectation that the pupil's assumed unhealthy lifestyle choices will then be 'corrected'. Children are thus also increasingly becoming implicated in the governance of healthy family lifestyles (Burrows, 2017). Although Diego is well aware of the various health messages and he desires to do what is required to be healthy, the narrative illustrates an array of socio-cultural and economic factors – outside of his control – that correspondingly shape his daily lifestyle and developing sense of self. These factors include, as examples, his (in)ability in sport, his parent's limited disposable income, his very structured day, his lack of control over his diet and transportation, the accessibility of digital technologies and the joys of consumer culture and fast food. Diego accordingly understands the various reductive health messages that are propagated within his school but is unable to live these into existence within his current sociocultural and economic context. We also hoped that the collective story illustrates that Diego is beginning to realise that his lifestyle and his family's lifestyle does not follow the recommended health/activity guidelines. Although this awareness is not a major source of tension as yet, evidence suggests that this will become an insidious source of tension in later life, as 'guilt' concerning one's body shape, diet and exercise levels afflict many adults (see Harman & Burrows, 2019).

More pointedly, the story reveals Diego's desire to play football, a desire that can be seen as a product of the socio-cultural discourses (Foucault, 1984; Gerdin, 2017) of growing up, as a boy, in

Spain. Although somewhat subtle, the story revealed that Diego believes that playing football is a solution to some of the health 'problems' that he is confronted with: he conflates sport with PE and with healthy exercise. This is an important message in our research findings, as our interview data revealed that children learn through PE that playing sport is healthy, yet many of them do not participate in sport. Our interviewees suggested, indirectly, that they learn through PE that they are not healthy as they do not play sport. We hope it is evident in our collective story that Diego believes he would be 'healthier' if he played football. Yet he is not particularly good at football and his family's busy lifestyle and low-income result in his inability to play. In this respect, we hope that readers might begin to see how the conflation of PE with sport and health can subtly undermine some children's views of self. This is the *mundane reality* that is lived into existence for many children.

The biopolitical (Foucault, 1984) intent to govern Diego's body, we speculate, will likely fail in the long run unless significant economic structural changes are implemented. Indeed, epidemiological studies have long explained socioeconomic inequalities in health by making 'reference to the observation that poor health and psychological characteristics cluster in low socioeconomic status (SES) groups' (Lynch et al., 1997, p. 809). Despite the very clear and dated public health understanding that 'efforts to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in health must recognise that economic policy is public health policy' (Lynch et al., 1997, p. 809) health messages still attempt to target individuals, such as Diego, with apparent minimal understanding of the complexity of factors that shape burgeoning lifestyles.

Our collective story, correspondingly, aims to reveal the futility of repeatedly targeting PE pupils without reflecting on the complexity and constraints of their socio-cultural and economic context. The risk of targeting school students as health problems is not simply that the intended governing of bodies is not achieved but, (i), that the underpinning issues of neoliberalism and consumer culture are left unchecked, (ii), the 'targets' of repeat health messages can gain a sense of guilt given their 'failed' body projects (see González-Calvo et al., 2019) and, (iii), the public contention that PE can fight the obesity epidemic but is met with ongoing failure could encourage an eventual disrespect for the subject. It is against this backdrop of concern that we now draw from the implications of the collective story to discuss more broadly issues surrounding schooling, PE, neoliberalism and the governing of bodies.

In recent years, Spain has seen an increase in public policies and expenditure on infrastructure; aimed at promoting physical exercise and healthy lifestyles. Current policy for instance makes clear its position on the field of sport and physical exercise – 'sport equals health' (e.g. Gard & Pluim, 2014; Kirk, 2020; McCuaig & Quennerstedt, 2018) – but the reality is that, for many families today, a simple swimming pool voucher is still a luxury that they cannot afford. Nor do many of these families work-life balance allow them much time for leisure and family time; as a result, many children and young people are not able to attend fitness centres or other recreational facilities, as their parents' work commitments and hours do not allow for this (Maroñas et al., 2018). It is easy to see, as evidenced by the narrative above, how forms of family leisure time in Spanish cities are closely associated with shopping centres (Escudero, 2008), where rewards and celebrations are often associated with 'fast food'. In addition, although the offer of physical activities for children and young people has been growing in recent times – there are also more and more programmes for sports, music, arts, and acting on offer – but again they imply a certain economic and family time investment that not everyone has. Haste and speed, wanting to do everything fast, are two constants in western urban environments; families have to struggle with isolation, performance and self-realisation through work (Han, 2015), trying to be as efficient as possible and saving time - which inevitably implies spending less time with/on the family. Indeed, these can be seen as the effects of biopower and governmentality (Foucault, 1991) shaped by discourses of neoliberalism and capitalism. Since neoliberalism insidiously imposes itself, often without a critical self-awareness, market forces produce docile consumers and citizens (Evans, 2014).

We share with Bauman (2007) the belief that education in general, and PE in particular, should not focus exclusively on technical knowledge, but on forming citizens who recover dialogue and

their democratic rights, since a citizen who ignores the political and social circumstances in which he or she lives will be unable to control their future and, therefore, his or her own path. The view of PÉs contribution to health – only as a form of medicine that reduces cardiovascular diseases and obesity - does not allow a concern for social justice issues (welfare, rights and dignity, among others) (McCuaig et al., 2019). In this way, allowing ourselves to be carried away by a curriculum dictated by biomedical discourse implies giving in to the passivity and comfort of absorbing what medical science considers 'good' and 'appropriate', without even reflecting on it. The docile PE teacher as an 'obesity warrior' (Burrows, 2016) can thus be seen as a product of these governing processes based on the workings of bio-power and governmentality (Foucault, 1984; 1991).

Our paper further reflects how the conflation of physical exercise and body, the idea that bodies have to be in motion, strongly contributes to the illusion that exercise and its bodies are seemingly innocent and natural (Olive, 2018), somewhat separate from politics, culture and economy. However, the current discourses around PE and the body are not exempt from mercantilist ideologies and interests. For this reason, as educators, we must see to it that students complete compulsory schooling not only with a profound critical understanding of their individual health needs, but also of the way in which those needs have been constructed, manipulated and perhaps obfuscated by the interests of the health/food/entertainment industries and the workings of nationalism. But PE, reduced to the discourse of 'fighting obesity', does not lead to an interest in students' bodily knowledge, understanding, and competence, but rather to be concerned only with body shape, height, and weight. As physical educators, we need to be able to look beyond these narrow ideals. In this vein, we argue that PE practices should reaffirm its focus on developing all students sense of bodily control, self-esteem and belief in their own physical abilities, and promote the idea that being healthy is as much a state of mind as is certainly not limited to being a certain body size.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we hope that the collective story presented in this paper provides a subtle but troubling critique of biomedical and health science explanations of the 'obesity problem' while highlighting how socio-cultural and economic discourses, underpinned by neoliberalism and consumerism, produce the socio-cultural backdrop that shapes the understandings and mundane lived realities of 'childhood obesity'. This paper has drawn attention to the complexity surrounding the socio-cultural, political, educational and medical discourses that shape our understanding and children's and their families' experiences of physically (in)active and (un)healthy lifestyles. Rather than simply reducing the issue of childhood obesity to a weight problem and its panacea of being more physical active and eating 'proper food' to lose weight, we aimed to give voice to the ones who are usually voiceless and have less agency and power to make their rights be listened to: that is, the children. We want to stress the need to learn to listen more carefully to their voices and complex storeys of life, particularly in those aspects closely related to their education, welfare and quality of life. Their voices and their familýs voices may be key in the rethinking of our understanding of the alleged 'problem' of childhood obesity and sedentary lifestyles which can ultimately help inform the future design of policies and interventions to promote more equitable physical activity and health outcomes for all children and young people.

Finally, we hope that the collective story revealed how Diego's conflation of PE/sport/health within the confines of his structured day did not result in increased physical activity rates but insidiously produced an 'unhealthy' notion of self. Indeed, we recognise that the conflation of PE with sport and 'good' health is an issue that deserves more critical attention: as this conflation has ability to shape some students' narratives of self – those who perceive they have little ability with sport – as unhealthy and, correspondingly, as morally questionable.

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ORCID

Gustavo González-Calvo http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4637-0168
Göran Gerdin http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2922-1993
Richard Pringle http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1487-8987

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