



Thematic Paper

“It’s hard to be everywhere”: Teachers’ perspectives on spatiality, school design and school bullying

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In this qualitative study, we explore teachers’ perspectives on spatiality, school design and school bullying. The study is part of a larger, ongoing ethnographic research project into the relations between school bullying and the institutional context of schooling being conducted in schools in Sweden, focusing on the perspectives of teachers and students from pre-school class up to grade eight. The findings from this particular study are based on participant observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers from pre-school class to grade six (i.e. approx. ages 5-13) at three schools in Sweden. The findings demonstrate that environmental, social and structural elements of school spaces affect both social relations between students and teachers’ ability to prevent school bullying. Taken as a whole, the study highlights the importance of looking beyond the issue of supervision in schools and considering in more detail the ways in which spatiality and school design influence school bullying and preventative work in schools.

Keywords: spatiality, school design, school bullying, bullying prevention, social-ecological

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Introduction

School bullying persists in Sweden, despite a vast amount of research, the passing of legislation against discrimination, harassment and degrading treatment, and the implementation of anti-bullying programmes in schools (Flygare et al., 2011). Meta-analytical reviews of school-based intervention programmes have

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highlighted that programme interventions have varying degrees of success at reducing school bullying. Some meta-analyses have suggested that certain programmes are more successful than others, but that the effects are usually small to moderate and context-dependent (e.g. Gaffney et al., 2019; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Some meta-analyses have argued that school-based interventions are generally effective in reducing school bullying and victimisation, but that certain components within the programmes may be ineffective or counterproductive (e.g. Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

In a meta-analytical review of studies evaluating the effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Ttofi et al. (2009) pointed to the effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes and to the specific effectiveness of certain programme components. One component that was found to lead to a decrease in bullying was improved playground supervision (Ttofi et al., 2009). A national evaluation report for the Swedish National Agency for Education examined anti-bullying efforts in a sample of Swedish schools and found that while some anti-bullying components were effective, some components were ineffective, and yet other components were counter-productive (i.e. associated with more bullying) (Flygare et al., 2011). In line with the review for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, the report found that a system of playground monitors was one of the effective components for preventing school bullying (Flygare et al., 2011).

Highlighting why improved playground supervision may be an effective means of reducing incidents of bullying, researchers have consistently highlighted that incidents of bullying occur most commonly on the playground during breaks (e.g. Craig et al., 2000; Flygare et al., 2011; Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Slee, 1995; Wolke et al., 2001; Woolley, 2019) and that students most commonly report feeling unsafe on the playground during breaks because of the risk of being bullied there (e.g. Astor et al., 2001; Cowie & Oztug, 2008; Vaillancourt et al., 2010). Researchers have also suggested that bullying tends to occur in unstructured spaces (Craig et al., 2000; Leff et al., 2003), unsupervised spaces (Atlas & Pepler, 1998), and undefined spaces (Astor et al., 2001), and at unstructured times such as breaks and lunchtimes (Woolley, 2019). Researchers have thus pointed to particular ‘hot spots’ for bullying within schools, such as playgrounds, lunchrooms, hallways, stairwells, and bathrooms (Andrews & Chen, 2006; Astor et al., 2001; Craig et al., 2000; Cowie & Oztug, 2008; Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Leff et al., 2003; Migliaccio et al., 2017; Vaillancourt et al., 2010).

While improved playground supervision is perceived to be an effective component of anti-bullying programmes, it is not sufficient on its own (Flygare et al., 2011). A number of researchers have highlighted the importance of not only improving supervision of school spaces but also of addressing the ways in which school spaces are designed (e.g. Carney & Merrell, 2001; Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Gordon & Lahelma, 1996; Lambert, 1999; Malone & Tranter, 2003; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). However, there has been little consideration of how spatial aspects of school design influence teachers’ ability to intervene in bullying situations (Andrews & Chen, 2006; Mishna et al., 2005). In this study, we contribute to this lacuna in knowledge by exploring and analysing teachers’ perspectives on how spatiality and school design influence social relations between students and teachers’ ability to prevent school bullying from occurring.

Method

The present findings are based on ethnographic research conducted at three schools in Sweden, which we have named Woodland, Hillside and Clifton. More specifically, the findings stem from participant observations and semi-structured group and individual interviews conducted with six members of two school safety teams (*trygghetsteam*; three teachers in each team), one member of a student health team (*elevhälsoteam*; interviewed individually due to a temporary lack of staff in that team), and 21 teachers from pre-school class to grade six (i.e. approx. ages 5-13). The research is part of an ongoing ethnographic study into the relations between school bullying and the institutional context of schooling being conducted in schools in Sweden, with particular focus on teachers and students from pre-school class up to grade eight. The interviews with the school safety teams and the student health team member were conducted at the start of the fieldwork at each school and served to inform the following 8-10 weeks of participant observations. The participant observations informed the teacher interviews that were conducted towards the end of each 8-10-week visit. The teachers for these interviews were selected based on their experience of working with the school classes within which we conducted our participant observations.

Prior to conducting the research, we submitted an application to the regional ethical review board, from which we received ethical approval. We introduced the overarching aim of the project to the school principals, school staff and school students. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviewing, the schools have been anonymised, and all participants have been provided with pseudonyms. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed with the help of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz et al., 2017). In line with constructivist grounded theory, and in contrast to traditional grounded theory, we considered our data and our findings to be co-constructed and theory laden (Charmaz, 2014). In conducting the study, we engaged in an iterative process, shifting between theoretical assumptions, data gathering and analysis, and strove to remain open-minded as to what we might find (Thornberg, 2012).

A social-ecological perspective on spatiality, school design and school bullying

We draw inspiration from Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1994) ecological systems model in our analysis of spatiality, school design and school bullying. The strength of the ecological systems model is that it incorporates not only the individual level and the social relations between individuals within particular settings (the microsystem), but also opens up for a consideration of the relations between different microsystems (the mesosystem), including those in which the individual is not actively involved (the exosystem), broader societal norms (the macrosystem) and events and transitions that occur through time (the chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1977, p.514) emphasised the importance of the school environment and defined the microsystem as "the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (e.g. home, school, workplace, etc.)." In considering the microsystem, there has as yet been little focus on the complex of relations between those

involved in bullying situations and the environment of the school setting (Horton, 2016). In this study we attend to how the spatiality and design of the school setting influences social relations between students and the ability of teachers to engage in bullying prevention work.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) pointed to a number of factors that “constitute the elements of a setting”, including place, time, physical features, activities, participants, and roles (p. 514), highlighting that schools are more than mere physical settings for social relations. The elements of the school setting can thus be understood in terms of different spatial elements, including *structural* elements such as timetabling, rules, and regulations, *environmental* elements such as noise and student density, and *social* elements such as social interactions (Zumbrunn et al., 2013). As Gordon and Lahelma (1996) have argued, schools can be understood in terms of three intertwined spatial layers: the official layer of the school made up of rules and regulations, the physical layer of the school made up of buildings, playgrounds, and hallways, and the informal layer of the school made up of social hierarchies and interactions. Yet another way of looking at it is to understand the space of schools in terms of mental space (i.e. the idea of the space of the school and what it is for), physical space (i.e. how the school is built, positioned, and so on), and social space (i.e. how the space is used by those who are there) (Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Frelin & Grannäs, 2014; Gordon & Lahelma, 1996; see also Lefebvre, 1991).

In this study, we consider the importance of these spatial elements (i.e. structural, environmental, and social elements) and investigate not only how teachers perceive the spatial aspects of school design to influence social relations between students, but also how they perceive these spatial aspects to influence their ability to prevent school bullying.

Findings

Our findings suggest that the spatial specificities of school design not only influence the occurrence of negative interactions but also restrict the ability of teachers to prevent school bullying. While there is significant overlap between these aspects, we discuss each of them in turn.

Spatiality, school design and the occurrence of negative interactions

In discussing the relations between spatiality, school design and the occurrence of negative interactions, teachers pointed to environmental elements (such as size and diversity), social elements (such as collaboration, competition and conflict), and structural elements (such as lack of teacher presence) of school space.

Environmental elements

A number of the teachers pointed to the importance of school size for the social relations between students. At Clifton School, for example, Henrik, a leisure-time activities teacher (*fritidslärare*)ⁱ, suggested that the small size of the school lent itself to a sense of familiarity that made it less likely for bullying to occur. While Woodland School was also a relatively small school in terms of space, a number of teachers said that the school

was not designed for the large number of students that it currently accommodated. The schoolyard was relatively small, and teachers perceived it to be a crowded space that encouraged conflicts. As Clare, a fifth-grade teacher at the school, put it, “the schoolyard is way too small for this number of students.” Edward, another fifth-grade teacher at the school, proposed that having a larger area would help to reduce the number of conflicts:

It would facilitate and help a great deal when it comes to contact with each other and that they get into fights and maybe offend each other and that, I think, so it’s very worthwhile then.

In a similar way to Edward, other teachers pointed to the crowded and confined spaces of cloakrooms for similar reasons. As Hanna, a second-grade teacher at Woodland School, explained, the lack of space at the cloakrooms “also creates a lot of conflicts because they are on top of each other.”

A number of teachers pointed to a need not only for more space but also for a greater diversity of spaces that appeal to different kinds of students. Amanda, a leisure-time activities teacher at Woodland school, said that the lack of space on the Woodland School playground meant that there are students everywhere and there is thus a lack of places on the playground where students can find peace and quiet when they feel the need:

There is really no place in the schoolyard where you can find a little peace and quiet if you feel you need to move away a bit. Rather, there are kids everywhere when we are outside. [...] And these kids who have a hard time sifting through impressions, without everything sounding equally loud or so, it must be very hard for them, very stressful.

In a similar way, a number of pre-school class teachers at Woodland School suggested that the playground would be better if there were smaller areas where students could play without having to share the space with everyone else. Viktoria, for example, stated that the school could be designed in a different way, as a more diverse space, in order to reflect the diversity of students using it:

So someone who likes to build huts can be there, someone who likes to play football is over there, someone who likes to climb and swing is here, someone who likes this and that, there are different kinds of challenges, not just one type of thing, or two, rather there are different things because everyone is different.

Amanda and Viktoria highlighted that the playground spaces of Woodland School do not reflect the diverse needs of students and suggested that this may contribute to conflicts and lack of student wellbeing.

Lena, a member of the school safety team at Hillside School, also discussed the need for greater diversity of spaces for those students who need somewhere calm, but also illuminated the fine line between secluded spaces and hidden spaces that provide opportunities for unwanted behaviour such as teasing:

It’s a bit like this... some need a quiet place, yeah, but then it’s good if it’s a bit secluded, as opposed to it being a place where someone can tease someone else, it’s a bit double-sided.

In doing so, Lena demonstrated not only a concern about hidden spaces, but also alluded to the ways in which environmental elements of school spaces influence the social elements of those spaces.

Social elements

Illustrating the importance of social elements of school spaces, teachers at Clifton School pointed to the wooded area of their schoolyard as a competitive space where conflicts often occurred. Henrik, for example, suggested that conflicts often broke out in the wooded area because students had to compete for the use of huts and resources such as sticks. Henrik explained that it was more of a problem during school break times than during leisure-time activities when they only had 24 students outside at the same time:

The problem is when everyone gathers at school, because then it's a lot about the fourth to sixth graders having their huts and the pre-school class kids, first graders, second graders and third graders having their huts and it can be the same kind of damn huts, considering they are not always out at the same time. Our first and third graders go out first, but there are so many conflicts there and sticks are taken, so it's a bigger issue during school time. During leisure-time activities, I don't see the woods as a problem at all.

As Henrik noted, the same spaces can be experienced quite differently depending on the student density and the resources available. In contrast, leisure-time activities teachers at Woodland School pointed to a nearby forest as a more collaborative space, where students engaged in helping each other building huts and carrying heavy material, such as branches. Explaining why students from Woodland School behaved more cooperatively at the nearby forest, Birgitta, for example, explained, "it's partly because it's a bigger area, and then, yeah no other kids. So that also affects them." Taken together, Henrik and Birgitta suggested that key factors in determining whether spaces are collaborative or conflictual are the size of the space in relation to the number of students and the availability of sought-after resources.

A large part of the Woodland School playground is taken up by a concrete football court where conflicts often occurred. It is a competitive space that was generally dominated by boys. School safety team members at Woodland School highlighted the way in which competition could lead to conflicts and explained that such conflicts also sometimes spilled onto the playground from physical education classes and from the playground into the schoolhouse. As Marie, a member of the safety team at Woodland School, put it:

And it also follows them out into the breaks, I would say, the same thing. When there's a competition, in football "who's going to win?" and if you're losing, then the tough pushing and comments emerge that continue a bit up the stairs.

In a similar way, Lena pointed to areas of Hillside School where there are rules and "competitive instincts", such as the football court and the centre of the playground where four square (*kingruta*) is played:

It can be in the middle of the schoolyard too. We have had a lot of discussions about four square, for example. They don't play as much four square now, but it will probably start again in the spring. There are a lot of conflicts about rules and so on.

As Lena explained, conflictual spaces are not necessarily hidden spaces, but can also be competitive spaces in full view of teachers.

Structural elements

Reflecting previous research about school bullying and unsupervised spaces, teachers suggested that the majority of conflicts occurred while teachers were not in close proximity. Susanne, a member of the student health team at Clifton School, for example, pointed to those areas of the school where there is a lack of teachers, such as stairwells, cloakrooms, corridors, and outside during breaks:

Kids are pretty smart like that. In the classroom, there may be things said and so on, but it's not in the same way. Rather, when it happens, it's often when there are not so many adults there. So, the stairwell, cloakroom, corridor and outside during the break.

Likewise, Clare suggested that the majority of conflicts at Woodland School either occurred during breaks or while students were in motion, moving from one place to another, and while teachers were not in close proximity:

It's usually during breaks, somewhere outside during the breaks, in the corridors on the way up or down to the classroom, that is when they are moving somewhere usually, when they meet other students or when teachers aren't right next to them, when they're not sitting at their desk or something. So, that's when things usually happen, I would say.

At all three schools, teachers identified the changing rooms as a particular area of concern, due to the lack of teacher presence and the vulnerability of undressing in front of peers. As Anja, a member of the safety team at Hillside School, explained:

We have often had to put in staff, if we can, in the changing rooms because it is a place where we have noticed in surveys that a lot happens. And you are a bit exposed when you undress and shower and so on, and clothes can be commented on and, yeah.

Anja highlighted not only the lack of teacher presence in the changing rooms, but also alluded to not having enough staff to supervise those spaces that are known as problem areas. In doing so, she pointed to the ways in which social elements of school spaces are influenced by environmental and structural elements and how teachers may be restricted in their bullying prevention work.

Spatiality, school design and bullying prevention

In discussing issues of spatiality, school design and bullying prevention, teachers pointed out that social elements like bullying are influenced by both environmental elements (such as size and architectural design) and structural elements (such as staffing and scheduling) of school spaces.

Environmental elements

When discussing their work dealing with social elements such as bullying, teachers once again raised the issue of school size. Pia, who taught fourth, fifth and sixth graders at Clifton School, argued that the small number of students at the school made it easier to address social issues, while the small number of teachers also facilitated communication about those issues among teachers. Ingrid, a member of Woodland School's safety team also stated that the small size of the school made teachers' jobs easier, not only because of familiarity

but also because it was harder for students to do things without them seeing. As she put it, “It’s more difficult to be anonymous, and harder to hide, and harder to fiddle with things behind the backs of adults in a smaller place.” However, Ingrid’s suggestion that the small size of the playground makes it easier to supervise is in contrast to the perspectives of other teachers at the school, such as Clare and Edward, who pointed to a problem of overcrowding.

Teachers suggested that the design of the school also influenced their ability to see what was occurring on the playground. Anja, for example, said that the ability of teachers to supervise the playground at Hillside School was negatively impacted by the design of the school and the presence of buildings that restricted their views of particular spaces. Likewise, at Clifton School, the layout of the school playground meant that they always needed at least four teachers on the playground at any one time. As Anita, who taught first, second and third graders, explained:

[T]hat’s why we have so many playground monitors outside, and we have one person who is responsible for one area. And at the same time, there are circulating people who can move around, so if a kid has fallen over and they need to go inside and wash the wound, the circulating person can replace that person instead. So, that’s why we have at least three people outside, one for each area.

Despite having four teachers on the playground at any given time, the design of the school playground meant that a teacher may be on their own to deal with incidents, depending on where the circulating monitor was at the time.

Marie, at Woodland School, suggested that there is so much going on, in more or less subtle ways and in more or less hidden spaces, that it is impossible for teachers to see everything:

Because we don’t see everything, it is completely impossible to see exactly what is happening in the stairwell all the way up and every day. The glances, what they say and point out and other stuff ... I’ve never seen anything that has been going on for a long time, that’s more stuff you hear from others.

As Marie explained, this has implications for bullying prevention, as it is impossible to see everything that goes on, and raises issues about what teachers are observing and not observing.

As a means of dealing with the difficulties of supervising large areas of the playground, a number of teachers talked about the use of organised break activities. Sofia, a member of the safety team at Woodland School, explained that leisure-time activities teachers organised activities during the morning break, and that it had improved behaviour on the playground: “The latest thing we have developed is that they also plan a break activity that the kids can participate in. It has become better; it was not so good before.” However, Sofia also pointed out that teachers were sometimes alone supervising the playground because of the need to have teachers in other areas at the same time, and that being alone on the playground may not only mean that a teacher is left to deal with situations that arise on their own, but also that the preventative work that playground monitoring is supposed to contribute may be overshadowed by efforts to sort out conflicts that have occurred. As Sofia noted, it may also serve to undermine the school’s antibullying work and attempts to get students to tell teachers when something occurs:

We always say to the students that they should go to an adult. So, it is a big failure when they feel that they cannot do that, and it also shows up in various evaluations that we have, “that there was no adult ... they didn’t listen”, maybe sometimes or something. But if help was missing then and the students felt it, then we have failed.

This has important implications for student willingness to tell about bullying and also highlights the importance of not merely increasing the amount of supervision but also training teachers and other staff how to identify and deal with bullying situations when they occur. Teachers’ comments about not being able to be everywhere and not being able to see everything illustrate not only the influence of environmental elements such as size and architectural design but also structural elements such as staffing and scheduling.

Structural elements

A number of the teachers pointed to the lack of staff in relation to the number of students at the schools. As Lena argued, the increasing number of students increases demands on teachers:

[I]t’s always a question of resources, I think. As we say, larger classes, more students to keep track of, more students to be synchronised into the whole that you want as an adult, even though they may not fit together as a whole.

In attempting to deal with the large numbers of students, schools utilised scheduling in various ways. Pia, for example, explained that they had staggered break times at Clifton School so as to reduce the number of students in corridors and had no morning breaks except on Mondays, when they had their weekly staff meeting. Pia also explained that they made students queue and walk together so that they would not be alone in problem areas, such as stairwells and corridors:

So, these are the places that we have identified, so we try to keep them here, to walk in a line, because they should not be in those spaces by themselves very much. But then it’s hard to clone yourself and be everywhere.

Teachers also pointed to the implications that large numbers of students had on scheduling and the difficulties of scheduling so that as many playground monitors as possible could be out on the playground at the same time. As Anja explained:

And then the principal turns and twists every little bit of the schedule to find as many playground monitors as possible. In the morning, before school starts, there are quite a few monitors from leisure-time activities. But then there are fewer during the day, actually.

As Anja noted, scheduling may be easier at certain times of the day, when extra leisure-time activities teachers are available to help. Teachers also pointed out that scheduling is dependent on the staff available and that their ability to supervise particular areas is limited by the sickness of staff. Pia suggested that teacher absence could cause the entire playground monitoring system to collapse, meaning that they would then have to try to cope as best they could:

When we are fully staffed, then it’s almost 100% in addition to everything that you are in all these places all the time. When someone gets sick, it’s simply no longer possible, then you have to compromise a bit because the primary situations have to be saved.

Teachers also pointed out that scheduling is dependent on the staff available in terms of their other activities and lunch needs. This was noted by Lena, who said that “everyone has their own assignments and maybe needs a bite to eat, for example, so it’s sometimes difficult to make it work.” Indeed, while teachers may recognise a need for more staff to supervise the different areas of the school, teachers also have other responsibilities and also need to have time for their own breaks. Hanna, for example, said that while she was aware that her presence on the Woodland School playground during breaks would help reduce the number of incidents, spending her breaks on the playground would mean she would not be able to have a break herself.

Highlighting the difficulties of scheduling, a number of teachers pointed to areas that required more staff presence, such as the canteen and the changing rooms, while also noting the need to have teachers out on the playground. Teachers at Woodland School, for example, stated that the changing rooms were spaces that were often overlooked, despite them being areas that were regularly mentioned as unsafe spaces in student well-being surveys. As Ingrid elaborated:

It is somehow forgotten all the time. When the schedule was to be set for this year, we reminded them that we not only need playground monitors out there, but also staff in the changing rooms. [...] But it wasn’t done and there are still students in or outside the changing room without anyone there, even though it is such a vulnerable place.

A number of teachers also suggested that the need to have staff outside meant that students could not be inside during the breaks, due to the lack of staff available to cover both the inside and outside spaces of the school. Karin, a leisure-time activities teacher at Woodland School, said, “It has to do with resources. If we are only two or three, we can’t split up.” Indeed, as Amanda pointed out in the same interview:

But if we had always been four, then it would have been possible to split the group so that two teachers are outside, and two teachers are inside, so not all the kids needed to be out at the same time.

Amanda alluded to the diverse needs of students, some of whom may not wish to be out on the playground during lunchtime. Lena stated that while students are not allowed to be inside at Hillside School during the breaks, some students still go inside, which means that the playground monitors are not aware of what they are doing:

Then we have many students who choose to go inside during breaks, even though they are not allowed to, and there we don’t know, we who are playground monitors are outside. “So, what’s happening in there?” We don’t always know either, unfortunately.

Teachers at all three schools talked about how they discussed particular cases and particular areas that needed extra attention and tried to position themselves accordingly, but also expressed that it is hard to be everywhere. Lena, for example, pointed to the difficulty of being everywhere and suggested that teachers at Hillside School tried to circulate the school playground, but that students are well aware of when teachers are approaching: “We try to circulate, but of course the kids are aware of when an adult is coming or not, so to speak.” For this reason, Pia, who had worked at a number of schools during her career, was happy that the playground at Clifton School was only accessible via the main door at the back of the school and could not be accessed directly from the numerous classrooms:

Thankfully it's not a school where the classrooms open out [onto the playground], because it is completely impossible to be a playground monitor at such a school. I've been there myself and it's pure nonsense, I mean, it doesn't work, because as soon as you walk around the corner, things happen behind you ... and then I'm here and watching but others have long ago checked that "Now she is here", so, yeah.

As Pia illustrated, school design may have a major impact on teachers' ability to see what is going on, and may even make a mockery of teachers' attempts to address issues such as bullying, which tend to occur in ways and in areas that make it difficult for teachers to prevent.

Discussion

In this study, we have considered teachers' perspectives on how environmental, social and structural elements of school spaces (such as size, diversity, interactional norms and visibility) affect social relations between students and how environmental and structural elements of school spaces (such as size, architectural design, staffing and scheduling) affect teachers' ability to deal with social elements such as bullying. In discussing spatiality, school design and the occurrence of negative interactions, teachers pointed to how the physical space of the school is not merely a setting for social interactions, but is also implicated in shaping those interactions (Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Frelin & Grannäs, 2014; Gordon & Lahelma, 1996). They thus suggested that the environmental elements of school spaces, such as whether they are crowded, diverse, or hidden, influence the social elements of school spaces, in terms of whether they are collaborative, competitive, or conflictual spaces (Zumbrunn et al., 2013).

While some research has pointed to more bullying occurring in schools with large class sizes, other research has found more bullying in schools with fewer students (Wolke et al., 2001). Our findings indicate that what is more important is the relation between school size and student numbers in terms of student density or "carrying capacity" (Malone & Tranter, 2003, p.120). Our findings also suggest the importance of adequate resources, as well as a need for diverse spaces to reflect the diversity of students (Lambert, 1999; Malone & Tranter, 2003; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014), including the availability of indoor and outdoor spaces (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Indeed, our findings point to the potential for conflict on overcrowded (Astor et al., 2001; Malone & Tranter, 2003) and non-spatially diverse playgrounds (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Lambert, 1999; Malone & Tranter, 2003; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). As noted elsewhere, competitive spaces such as concrete football courts are not suitable for all students and prioritise competitive forms of activity over other more collaborative forms, which may be less conducive to bullying behaviour (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). Teachers' reflections on the need for more diversity of spaces illustrate how notions of the official school space (i.e. the mental space) influence the design of the physical school space, which in turn influences the interactions that occur within the informal social school space (Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Frelin & Grannäs, 2014; Gordon & Lahelma, 1996).

In discussing spatiality, school design and bullying prevention, teachers pointed to the ways in which environmental elements of school spaces, such as the playground's carrying capacity and how the playground

areas are located, influence structural elements such as break times and the scheduling of playground monitors. They also illuminated how both environmental and structural elements impact their ability to deal with social elements such as bullying (Zumbrunn et al., 2013). In doing so, teachers highlighted that improved supervision in and of itself is not sufficient for countering bullying (Flygare et al., 2011) and may not be the most effective measure for preventing less overt forms of bullying (Astor et al., 2010; Craig & Pepler, 1998; Craig et al., 2000; Perkins et al., 2014). This illustrates the importance of not merely increasing the amount of supervision but also training teachers and other school staff how to identify and deal with bullying situations when they occur (Andrews & Chen, 2006; Lambert, 1999). It also points to a need for more consideration of the structural elements of schooling, including the planning of break times (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Lambert, 1999).

While the findings in this study are based on participant observations and teacher interviews conducted at only three schools in Sweden, and are thus limited in their generalisability, they nonetheless raise critical questions about the focus of bullying prevention work. Indeed, taken together, our findings suggest that rather than focusing on the surveillance and policing of behaviour in schools, it is necessary to address the issue of school design and take seriously the environmental aspects of the ecological system and address its constituent elements (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This requires more consideration of how physical space becomes social space (Gordon & Lahelma, 1996). Rather than focusing solely on structural and social elements, then, it is also necessary to focus on environmental elements and how these different spatial elements interact (Zumbrunn et al., 2013). This calls for further research into the role that spatiality and school design plays in the occurrence of negative interactions and the ability of teachers to engage in bullying prevention work. As the teachers in this study have illustrated, it is hard to be everywhere and attempting to do so seems unlikely to address the spatial roots of the issue in any case.

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Endnotes

¹ Like Henrik, these teachers commonly not only work with leisure-time activities but also as teacher assistants in regular lessons.

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