

4 Motivation and the significance of physical literacy for every individual

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Introduction

This is the first of three chapters that will look in more detail at the attributes of physical literacy. This chapter will discuss the importance of motivation and the assertion that physical literacy enhances the quality of life. Consideration will then be given to the proposal that physical literacy is of significance and value to every individual and is achievable by all, whatever their age, embodied endowment and the culture within which they live.

The initial attribute (A and Aa) of physical literacy set out in Chapter 2 states that:

Physical literacy can be described as a disposition characterised by the motivation to capitalise on innate movement potential to make a significant contribution to the quality of life. All human beings exhibit this potential. However, its specific expression will depend upon individuals' endowment in respect of all capabilities, significantly their movement potential, and will be particular to the culture in which they live.

Motivation and physical literacy

Motivation is understood to be a drive, a willingness and eagerness to take a particular action. At the heart of physical literacy is a desire to be active, to persist with an activity, to improve physical competence and to try new activities. Physically literate individuals will exhibit a 'joy of movement', and will celebrate, through movement, their ability to capitalise on their embodied capability. They will be confident in their physical abilities knowing that success is likely. A physically literate individual will enjoy a challenge, will be prepared to take time, expend effort and fund involvement in physical activity. Motivation is essential if there is to be the necessary application and concentration to thrive in the movement context, maintaining ability and making progress possible. A physically literate individual will have a positive attitude towards participation in physical activity and will take steps to be

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involved in this activity on a weekly or perhaps daily basis. Without this spur to action there will be little chance that physical literacy will be acquired or maintained.

It is suggested that the reason why many people seldom take part in physical activity is because of their lack of motivation. The term physical activity is used here to include such activities as walking and gardening, as well as all forms of sport, dance and other recognised pursuits such as skiing, pilates and bowling. It could be the case that earlier experiences, usually during schooling, have helped these individuals to develop their physical competence, but this experience has not resulted in their desire or interest in continuing with activity. This situation begs the question: Why do these people lack motivation?

It could be the case that aspects of their previous experience have been negative and this deters them from continuing to take part. Past experiences may not have been rewarding, with individuals experiencing little success. In the worst case scenarios they may have been subjected to humiliation, criticism and ridicule from significant others such as parents, teachers and peers. Individuals' confidence may have been damaged. Indeed, the thought of participating in physical activity may engender fear on the part of these non-participants. Establishing and sustaining physical literacy is highly dependent on experiences which individuals have encountered in respect of their involvement in physical activity. Chapter 7 considers the importance of nurturing self-respect if activity is to be maintained, while Chapter 14 looks at key pedagogical issues in the promotion of physical literacy. In brief, situations in which motivation is more likely to be promoted are those where appreciation is shown for effort and improvement, and thus self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced. In these situations there is a celebration of each individual's abilities and mutual respect is shown between all those involved. Motivation essentially arises from the confidence and self-esteem acquired through experience; that is, experience which has been perceived as successful and has been recognised as such.

Motivation to be involved in all forms of embodied activity is innate in the young child, being the expression of operative intentionality to engage with the world. A discussion of movement and the young child can be found in Chapter 9. There seems to be a drive, a need, an insatiable curiosity to explore and interact with every aspect of the environment. This is the purest example of being-in-the world and living through or creating the self, through interaction with the world. The young child seems to be in a constant state of dissonance, urgently needing to find equilibrium. This is an early form of intrinsic motivation and is characteristically played out predominantly in movement. The ideal scenario is one in which the child's natural motivation to explore and experiment with ways of interacting with the environment is never lost. The individual continues to enjoy physical activity for its own sake, reaping the wide range of benefits this brings to the enrichment of life.

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It is sad that this intrinsic motivation can be lost on account of less than positive experiences that young people encounter. Intrinsic motivation can be described as a drive to take action for the benefit of the experience itself and not as a means to other ends. In situations where motivation has been lost, measures have to be taken to encourage these younger or older people to re-engage in physical activity and experience the positive outcomes of participation. Examples of individuals returning to being physically active can be found in Chapters 8 and 10. Forms of extrinsic motivation may be needed to initiate a return to being active. Typically this motivation takes the form of approval and praise from another person or some form of reward such as a treat for a young person or the possibility of losing weight for an adult. The goal with these individuals would be to offer opportunities for success, to nurture interest, and to re-ignite a drive to capitalise on physical potential. Where this is successful there can be a return to intrinsic motivation, with individuals becoming self-motivated and no longer reliant on others to spur them into action. In other words, individuals acquire a positive disposition to participate in physical activity and thus become physically literate.

Physical literacy as enhancing quality of life

It is proposed that being physically literate can make a significant contribution to the quality of life. As has been outlined in Chapter 3, our nature as beings-in-the-world who create themselves from interaction with the environment, means that all aspects of our being that afford this contact are highly significant. The wider, richer and more acute our perception of, and interplay with, our surroundings the more we will come to know the world and realise our potential. The only way individuals can achieve their full potential, open up the many avenues of development and live a fulfilled life is to actively engage with the environment. As the embodied dimension is implicated in much of this interaction there is no doubt that this human capability has the potential to play a central role in enhancing the quality of life. The role of this dimension in perception and response was outlined in Chapter 3. However, what was perhaps not stressed was the way in which this mode of interaction permeates nearly everything we do in life. Indeed, our embodied capability is so integral to life that it is all but impossible to conceive of an unembodied existence. It might be true to say that without our motile embodied capability there would be no existence. Supporting this perspective, Merleau-Ponty (1962: 166) describes existence as ‘perpetual incarnation’, and Sartre (1957: 476) writes, ‘for human reality, to be is to act’.

This situation reveals the fundamental importance of our embodied dimension and hence physical literacy in life as we know it. There are at least two ways in which our embodied capability makes a significant contribution to life. Both of these ways develop from our nature as a single indivisible entity, in which experiences are all-pervading, affecting, informing and

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changing us as people. The broader contribution in relation to the realisation of a fuller life will be looked at first, followed by a consideration of some more specific contributions to our flourishing, being in respect of the development of other human characteristics such as cognition and language.

Physical literacy, as the expression of a fundamental capability, is one vehicle through which individuals can realise and develop their characteristic human nature. A number of writers talk about our becoming more human as we exercise any of our potential capabilities. There is a sense in which these experiences are self-affirming, intrinsically satisfying and rewarding. Each capability is of value in its own right and will enable the individual to blossom in a particular way. However, each will also contribute to the well-being of the whole person. For example, exercising our powers to sing, appreciate art masterpieces or grapple with mathematical formulae has its own positive feedback to our personal fulfilment and sense of self. Each of these activities will make us who we are and build our self-confidence. Physical literacy is no exception.

Capitalising on embodied potential can undoubtedly contribute to the sense of self. The self-respect and self-confidence acquired through the deployment of embodied potential can be profoundly fulfilling. Using this human capability brings to the fore an essential and fundamental aspect of our being. Through exercise and challenge of the powers of the embodied dimension, individuals celebrate a unique aspect of humanness. More than this we celebrate the roots of our being, the wellspring of many of the other capabilities. Effective deployment of the embodied capability is a holistic and rewarding experience. While achievement will be relative to the person in question, the experience of growing competence will be of a similar nature. This could be realised in carrying out a simple skill for the first time, learning to use a novel gadget, taking part in a new sport or mastering a highly complex move in gymnastics or diving. There is undoubtedly potential for intrinsic satisfaction in the deployment of this human capability. This can be a self-affirming experience of ourselves as embodied beings; a satisfying and profound experience of improving physical competence, of growing independence and of self-realisation.

In addition to this intrinsically valuable and satisfying experience of involvement in physical activity available to all, which is often overlooked, there are, of course, a number of what might be called additional benefits of deploying the embodied dimension. There are a range of well-documented health benefits such as preventing obesity, building up resistance to certain forms of cancer and maintaining joint flexibility. In addition, there may be the invigoration brought about by exercise in the fresh air, with the beneficial physiological effects of stimulating the cardiovascular system, not least through the secretion of body chemicals such as endorphins that both relax and energise the state of being. There may be the refreshing experience of simply having the freedom to move after hours of seated work; the pleasure

brought about by calling on a different human capability. There may also be

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a sense of belonging in a group activity setting, with the enjoyment of sharing a common interest with others, and the positive experience of being valued and respected by other people. Physical activity can also have beneficial effects to allay stress and contribute therapeutically to the recovery from a range of health and well-being problems.

Beyond the self-affirming and additional benefits that arise from deploying, developing and sustaining physical competence there is growing support for the way in which capitalising on the potential of the embodied dimension can contribute to other human capabilities such as cognition, language, reasoning and the expression of emotions. This position, championed by Merleau-Ponty and now endorsed by a range of current philosophers and scientists, is founded on the monist belief in the indivisibility or interdependence of the 'mind' and the 'body'. Lakoff and Johnson explain (1999: 3) that 'The mind is inherently embodied'. Burkitt (1999) elaborates on this and writes:

[W]hat we call 'mind' only exists because we have bodies that give us the potential to be active and animate within the world, exploring, touching, seeing, hearing, wondering, explaining; and we can only become persons and selves because we are located bodily at a particular place in space and time, in relation to other people and things around us.

(Burkitt 1999: 12)

This view turns on its head the notion that our 'mental' faculties are separate from, independent of and somehow far superior to our embodied capacities. Sheets-Johnstone (1992: 43) also challenges this view squarely by asserting that 'A human intelligence bereft of a body would be an intellectual cripple'. There is no doubt of the significant role that the intellect plays in the way individuals live their lives, and no one can argue with this, but what is so striking is the way that, repeatedly, writers refer back to our embodiment as the wellspring of the intellect.

While there is no doubt that the contribution of our embodied capacities is of significance throughout life, or as Polanyi explains, as detailed in Gill (2000), is the 'ongoing axis' of thought and knowing, our embodied interaction with our surroundings in the early days, months and years of life are particularly critical, and much has been written about the way in which our embodied dimension is involved in how a child develops.

For example, Clark (1997) suggests that cognitive development cannot be understood in isolation from children's intimate relationships with the world via their embodied dimension. Similarly, Sheets-Johnstone (2002) describes infants as 'apprenticed' to their embodied dimension. From birth, the child is actively perceiving and responding, becoming familiar with such features as heat and cold, texture, near and far, weight and spatial relationships of 'on top of' and 'underneath', to name but a few areas of basic knowledge.

The lack of speech in the first eighteen months or so of life should not be taken to mean that no learning is taking place. A great deal of learning is

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occurring, in respect of developing physical competence, in relation to making sense of the world around, and in the early formulation of concepts that are the foundation of cognition. Many writers concur that there is no sense that our embodied capacities are secondary to any of our other capabilities; rather, the opposite is the case. In fact scientists are now beginning to show that it is through the embodied dimension that many of the other capabilities are able to develop. The nurturing of physical competence ensures that a framework that is essential to many aspects of development is in place. For example, it is suggested that it is from the foundation of coming to understand the world through embodied interaction that the young child begins to attribute meaning via language. The meaning referred to goes beyond the often first achievement of 'naming' people and things. Children develop the ability to appreciate, and thus name, characteristics such as weight, size and shape. They can identify spatial relationships such as under and over, near and far, as well as aspects of time – now, soon, later, tomorrow. All these linguistic concepts arise from the embodied experience of the environment.

Burkitt (1999) argues that perception and embodied action form the basis of meaning. Meaning is, therefore, not created as a result of applying the rules of cognition or the rules of grammatical correctness but arises through our embodied interaction with the world. Other writers support this view, explaining that propositional knowledge only becomes comprehensible in the context of embodied experience, and that the concepts individuals develop should not be viewed as the sole purview of a disembodied innate faculty of mind. There is no such thing as a disembodied mind. What individuals know, what is 'in our mind' is as a direct result of our embodied interaction with the world.¹

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) develop this line of thought further and show how a grasp of basic concepts forms the ground for rationality and reasoning. Typical of their assertions is that 'Reason is not disembodied . . . but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience' (1999: 4). For example, they attribute a clear embodied basis to the 'weighing' of one idea against another and of the 'balancing' of one potential outcome against another. Concepts such as these are experienced initially pre-reflectively via embodied interaction with the world; however, these interactions provide the fundamental understanding of difference and differential outcomes. Sheets-Johnstone (2002: 104) reiterates this view in asserting that 'rationality is first and foremost a bodily logos'. She explains that the basis of rationality is 'sense-making' and that the acquisition of this capability depends wholly on the nature of the embodiment.

As well as the embodied dimension being critical in the development of areas of cognition such as concept formulation, language and reasoning, a

number of writers see a clear role for this human dimension in respect of emotion. In looking very briefly at this view, two issues will be mentioned, namely the importance of the emotions and the involvement of the embodied

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dimension in the experience and presentation of emotions. In respect to the importance of the emotions there seems no doubt that they are a fundamental aspect of human life. There is a great deal written about this aspect of our human nature. For example, authors such as McMurray and Dunlop refer to emotions as of central importance in human life – indeed, as the core or essence of life as we know it. In fact McMurray (1935, quoted in Dunlop 1984) asserts that the intellect arises from our emotional life: ‘is rooted in it, draws its nourishment and sustenance from it’. The emotions are not simply one element of life but are an integral and essential part of being human.

Considering the involvement of the embodied dimension in emotion it is essential to move away from a position that sees emotions as a discrete aspect of human functioning. In fact there is no such thing as a ‘disembodied emotion’. It is not the case that what individuals perceive, or perhaps better, what individuals see and hear, of another’s behaviour is merely the ‘outward display’ of an ‘inner state’ or emotion. Best (1974) supports this and explains that the emotion is in the movement itself. Our embodied dimension is not a passive vehicle for expressing an emotion. Movement or actions are the very material of emotion. Movement does not reveal an emotion; it is part and parcel of the emotion. Burkitt (1999: 116) expresses the view that ‘the physical component of an emotion is vital to our experience of it’, and goes on to argue that embodied involvement in the experience of emotion is not the outcome of a mental state but an integral part of the emotion itself. He further explains that emotions arise from our interaction with others and our response to situations in which we find ourselves. Emotions have an essential relational element and are part of the human communication system. As such they are important to sensitive interaction with others. In perceiving others we need to be alert to and empathetic with the emotion being expressed. While there are basic emotions which all human beings share, the specific expression of emotion is regulated by the accepted practices in a social class or culture. As Burkitt explains (1999: 124): ‘emotional feeling is at one and the same moment, produced and regulated’. Our embodied dimension is integral to the expression of emotion and is also involved in the control of the emotion, ensuring that this is culturally appropriate and socially acceptable.²

In the light of the views that the embodied dimension is an essential component in emotional experience and expression, as well as playing a part in the regulation of emotion and in communicating with others, it could be argued that a sensitive awareness of the embodied dimension is valuable to this aspect of human life. Physically literate individuals endowed with

versatility, confidence and competence with respect to their embodied dimension would seem to be in a better position to experience, express and appreciate different emotions, and also to monitor and control emotions to conform with cultural expectations. This issue will be returned to in Chapter 6. This section of the chapter has looked at the way in which

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developing our embodied capability can enhance other aspects of our human nature. Gallagher (2005: 247) sums up this position:

[N]othing about human experience remains untouched by human embodiment: from the basic perceptual and emotional processes that are already at work in infancy, to a sophisticated interaction with other people; from the acquisition and creative use of language, to higher cognitive faculties.

Physical literacy as achievable by all

This area of discussion relates to the element in the definition of physical literacy that claims it is a universal concept (see also Whitehead 2007d). It is proposed that all human beings have the potential to realise this capability, notwithstanding the fact that its expression will be particular to the potentials with which the individual is endowed and the culture within which they live. There are, therefore, two main areas to consider. The first relates to an individual's embodied potential and the second to cultural context.

Our embodied dimension is a significant and indeed essential human asset. As embodied beings, we all, in a sense, 'live through' our embodied dimension. Embodied interaction with our surroundings is the ground of our development, including knowledge of the world, self-awareness and self-confidence. This view was one of the key insights of existentialists and phenomenologists with their description of the human condition as essentially embodied in-the-world. On these grounds it is argued strongly that physical literacy is applicable to all, whatever the nature of their embodied endowment. Everyone can accrue great benefit from being physically literate, that is from developing their embodied interaction with the world.

The issue concerning whether the capability of physical literacy is attainable by all or is achievable only by the 'physically gifted' has attracted considerable debate. It is argued in this text that physical literacy is within the scope of every individual, whatever their embodied potential, but that the expression of this human capability will differ in respect of the individual's embodied endowment. It is regrettable that this is seen as an area for debate, somehow discounting the potential of many people and discouraging them from developing this aspect of their humanness. That this point needs to be brought to the fore would seem to shed some light on the way embodied abilities are viewed in Western culture. There appears to be

an all too readily adopted attitude in Western culture of self-deprecation in respect of the way individuals regard their embodied capability. Many people dismiss suggestions that they have any potential in this area. They purposefully avoid any involvement in physical activity, asserting that they have no ability and 'it is not for them'. It may be the case that the media are partly to blame for the development of this unfortunate attitude. Television

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and the press focus on high-level performance and international competition, they champion sports stars, show and describe amazing physical feats and give time and space to the development of extreme sports. The relentless exposure to high-level performance in Western media, with its hidden message that this is the only manifestation of embodied ability worthy of attention, results in many people judging themselves to be 'physically incompetent'. As the level of performance 'on show' is out of their reach, many seem to conclude that physical activity is 'not for them'. They say 'I am no good at sport'. They are not motivated to take part in any physical activity and are lacking in confidence, anticipating failure, embarrassment and loss of self-esteem. The deployment of their capability in respect of their embodied dimension is not perceived as a potential source of achievement, of satisfaction or of a feeling of well-being. This is very sad and should not be the case.

Indeed this is not the case – almost without exception all have the potential to achieve physical literacy and benefit from its expression. Apart from the very severely physically disabled, all individuals possess the building blocks of physical literacy. As such these competences are available for us all to use and develop, beyond the essential embodied involvement with the world that is integral to life in general. Opportunities for capitalising on our embodied capability through some form of structured physical activity are many and various – both in the nature of the activity and the degree of the challenge. It must surely be the case that each one of us can find a context or contexts within which we can experience satisfaction and reward in expressing and developing physical literacy. Each individual will be on their own personal physical literacy journey. All can make progress, and each will display physical literacy in the context of their endowment. The important element is that individuals are making progress on their own personal journey. The benefits of physical literacy are available to everyone.

Physical literacy, disability and the older adult population

In the context of the claim that physical literacy is a universal concept the question it is often raised as to how applicable or achievable this capability is to those who have what might be broadly described as, 'a disability'. The problem arises, in part, from the aforementioned preoccupation with high-level skilful performance as being the principal goal in participation in physical activity. The value and indeed relevance of physical activity for

physical activity. The value and indeed relevance of physical activity for those with a disability is often doubted, with perhaps only the physical fitness or therapeutic aspects being felt to be worthwhile. However, parents, carers and teachers of these individuals need to appreciate that any development in physical competence is valuable and comparisons with those who have no disability are out of place.

Reference to attitudes to learning to read may be useful here. Interestingly there are what is known as 'reading ages'. Whatever 'reading age' is attained

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the individual is said to be able to read. The ability to read, even at a very basic level, is recognised as an achievement and valued in respect of the opportunities this affords to the individual. The more competent individuals are at reading the more potential there is for them to widen their horizons and enrich their lives. In the same way when individuals take even a small step on their physical literacy journey, this is valuable and should be celebrated. All individuals should be encouraged to make progress, thus widening their horizons and enriching their life options. The focus on achievement for those with a disability is not relative to others, but is expressed in the charting of progress on the personal physical literacy journey of each person.

Individuals with a disability may be at the start of their journey in becoming physically literate and they may be travelling very slowly; however, their progress will be as significant as the refinement of a higher order embodied capacity for those who have already travelled some way. I would argue strongly that any progress in respect of physical literacy, from whatever starting point, will have a profound impact on the individual concerned. This applies equally to the challenge of climbing stairs, managing a knife and fork or catching a ball for a disabled youngster, to the achievement of the necessary coordination to drive a car, to keeping a rally going in tennis, or to scaling a particularly challenging cliff face for those who have no difficulties. Each individual has the potential to be physically literate but the expression of this capacity will be as unique to the individual as their particular personality. Movement work with those with a disability will be discussed further in Chapter 11; however, there is no doubt that every individual can benefit enormously from developing their physical literacy. Growth in coordination or a small step in coming to grips with a physical task can be tremendously rewarding for those with difficulties, giving them added self-esteem, self-confidence and ultimately greater independence.

Another closely related issue concerns the value of physical literacy and its attainment in the case of the older adult population. There is a commonly held view that when an individual reaches old age physical activities are irrelevant – these activities are for the 'young and fit'. However, this is profoundly untrue, as will be exemplified in Chapter 10. There is growing evidence that nurturing movement competence throughout the later stages of the lifecourse adds hugely to the quality of life of older people. It is not so much developing an individual's embodied potential, as with younger people,

but rather to do with maintaining physical activity options and thus enhancing the confidence, independence and self-respect of these members of society.

As with any human potential, there is a positive experience associated with exercising a capability, and indeed with any progress, however small the step. What is being advocated here is the nurturing of a positive attitude towards one's embodied potential and to the realisation that physical activity is innately rewarding and self-affirming. The motivation, confidence and competence to take part in physical activity is within the grasp of us all. What are most worrying are situations where individuals go out of their way

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to avoid all physical activity, be this house cleaning, walking, throwing or kicking a ball or swimming. Once there is the preparedness to take part in physical activity, to give time and expend effort, then physical literacy can be a personal asset and play a part in enriching life.

Physical literacy and culture

A second area of debate in respect of the universality of the concept of physical literacy relates to the relevance and significance of the capability to the socio-cultural context in which an individual lives. There are, perhaps, three issues to consider. One relates to the fact that all individuals share the same embodied structure and functioning, irrespective of the culture of which they are a part, and another concerns the physical demands that the lifestyle within a culture may make on our embodied dimension. The final issue relates to attitudes to the embodied dimension that are prevalent in a particular culture.

With respect to the first issue it would be argued that, as human beings, whenever and wherever life is lived, the embodied capability is a significant aspect of being human. Existentialists and phenomenologists would not think twice about the validity of this proposition. Two fundamental aspects of our human situation that were discussed in the previous section are pertinent here. First, that human life is lived, necessarily, from an embodied standpoint, with all knowledge of the world and all development of the individual deriving from embodied interaction with our environment. Second, the significant role played by our embodied dimension in the development of other aspects of human functioning such as cognition, the formation of concepts and reason. Gibbs (2006: 41) endorses this by writing 'perception, cognition and language are thoroughly embodied.' This position is supported by contemporary writers such as Sheets-Johnstone (1994) and Nussbaum (2000). The former, while accepting the influence of culture on our movement patterns and behaviour, is always quick to remind us of our roots as embodied animate beings, who share a common parentage through evolution. While Nussbaum identifies a number of 'Central Human Functional Capabilities' that pertain to every individual irrespective of their cultural context, she argues (2000: 73) that all these capabilities need to be

nurtured if individuals are to achieve what Marx called being 'truly human'. Among her named capabilities she cites a range of aspects related to our embodied nature. There is considerable support for the view that deploying our embodied capability is fundamental to life as a human being, whenever and wherever life is lived. On these grounds the concept of physical literacy can be seen as universally relevant.

The second issue relates to the expression of physical literacy in the context of the different physical demands that a culture may make on the human embodied dimension. This can be looked at on two levels. At a fundamental level it is proposed that being similarly embodied, the range of movement

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patterns and movement capacities outlined in Chapters 5 and 15 are common to all human beings. While it may be observed that the range of movement components identified has a 'Western cultural' flavour, the reader is challenged to rewrite these for the hunter-gatherer, the crofter and the nomadic Inuits. It is doubtful that many would be deleted, although the use and expression of some may vary. The basic components of physical competence will therefore be the same in any culture. That having been said, on a contingent level, different cultures will make different demands on our physical literacy and provide different opportunities for challenging this human capability. For example, in Western culture in everyday life individuals are seldom expected to walk far, carry heavy loads or get involved in physically taxing tasks such as digging. While there are still some areas or work, such as those in the building trades that require heavy manual labour, the nature of most of the tasks that are necessary today require more intricate coordination, more precision and less use of large muscle groups.³ For example, individuals need to be able to drive a car and operate a computer. It would be interesting to look at the particular demands on the embodied dimension of those living in medieval times and those currently living in the third world. It would seem to be the case that all human beings will call upon their fundamental movement competences, but certain of these will be drawn on more often and become more highly developed to reflect the demands of a specific lifestyle.

There will also be differences in the structured physical activities that are available. Every culture has its specific forms of physical activity, be they dance genres, types of swimming or competitive sports. These activities will, in a sense, be part of the fabric of a society and may feature in education in order to initiate the young into accepted forms of cultural activity. In Western culture one might cite competitive team games and athletics, while in some Eastern cultures initiation in education might be into martial arts and forms of dance. While the fundamentals of physical literacy will be essentially the same for all, the way they are deployed will vary according to the parent culture.

Burkitt (1999) would concur with this and argues that while the embodied dimension and therefore, in our terms, physical literacy, plays a key role in

dimension and therefore, in our terms, physical literacy, plays a key role in the life of all human beings, the specific role of the embodiment differs markedly depending on the culture within which individuals live. He writes (1999: 25):

However, as far as human beings are concerned, it is not just the interaction between organism and environment that defines our being, for these 'movements' of life are also interrelated with, and affected by, our history as social and cultural groups.

Included here are not only the more functional aspects of deploying our embodied dimension but also the demands made by operating effectively in

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the context of established social practices, including the particular form of interpersonal relationships that are seen to be acceptable in a culture.

The final aspect to be considered follows from the suggestion above, and concerns the specific way in which the embodied dimension is viewed by a particular culture. Gibbs (2006) discusses this issue and observes, interestingly, that human beings inhabit 'physical environments imbued with culture' (2006: 36) and that our embodied dimension itself incorporates 'cultural meanings and memories' (2006: 37). He goes on to discuss how many of our embodied experiences are rooted in the social-cultural context in which individuals live. There is a sense that our embodied dimension has particular 'meaning' that incorporates established cultural attitudes. He concludes by saying: 'Rather than being a biological given, embodiment is a category of social analysis, often revealing complex dimensions of interactions' with other humans and the environment. A great deal has been written about attitudes to the embodied dimension both throughout the history of man and in different cultures. This is a fascinating area with implications to the expression of physical literacy, but is beyond the scope of this book.⁴ Cultural issues are referred to again in Chapter 12.

It is essential here, however, to signpost the implications for physical literacy of the way our embodied dimension is viewed in what Shilling (2003) refers to as high modernity in developed Western cultures. As is ably described by Shilling (2003) and Grogan (2008) in their texts on the sociology of the body, there is a worrying trend for people not only to perceive themselves predominantly in terms of their embodiment-as-object, but also to judge themselves based on the attitudes of others to this aspect of their personhood. Society, through its members, exerts huge pressure on people in respect of the 'ideal body' – how they should look and present themselves. The media play a significant part in this process. The power of the media is picked up again in Chapter 8. A very unfortunate outcome of this is that individuals forget there is more to themselves than their embodiment-as-object. Self-esteem is damaged when they perceive they do not match up to the ideal model and in some cases they feel alienated from their embodiment-as-object.

Girls and women are most at risk here (see also Whitehead 2007b, 2007c). It is suggested that Western society should be far more accepting of variations in the size and shape of the embodied dimension and should work to develop positive attitudes in respect of the physical competence of the many rather than the few. Involvement in physical activity, where sensitively handled, can enhance attitudes to individuals' embodiment and hence to their self-respect, self-confidence and quality of life.

This chapter has looked in more detail at the importance of motivation in the maintenance of physical literacy and the issue of universal applicability of the concept. It has been argued that physical literacy is achievable by all, including those with a disability and the older adult population. Each individual is on their own personal physical literacy journey. With respect to physical literacy in different cultures, it has been argued that as human

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beings we all share this capability; however, its specific expression will always be influenced by the particular demands and opportunities evident within a society, and by the cultural significance of this dimension of ourselves. The next chapter looks at physical competence and the attribute of physical literacy related to effective interaction with a wide range of physical environments.

Recommended reading

- Burkitt, I. (1999) *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity*. Sage, London.
- Clark, A. (1997) *Being There: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again*. MIT Press, London, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and Epilogue.
- Gibbs, R.G. Jr. (2006) *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Ch. 2.
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. Perseus Books Group, Basic Books, New York, Chs 1, 3, 4 and 5.
- Whitehead, M.E. (2007a) Physical literacy and its importance to every individual. Paper given at the National Disability Association of Ireland, Dublin, January.

