

‘Blurred lines’: The duty of physical education to establish a unified rationale

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Abstract

The recent review of the national curriculum, which places Physical Education as a compulsory subject at key stages 1–4, indicates a government commitment to the subject. However, given the contested history of Physical Education’s priorities and practices, such commitment should, perhaps, be handled with care. The main strength of Physical Education lies in its ability to develop the child holistically, through a focus on the promotion of physical literacy, but more recently the emphasis has been on its ability to support academic achievement. This suggests a dualistic view of Physical Education, whereby the mind and body are separate and physicality is viewed as a subservient function to cognition. It is argued, however, that these aspects cannot be separated, as it is the holistic development rooted in monism that enables the individual to flourish both physically and intellectually. In January 2011, the Department for Education launched a review of the national curriculum, with a ‘greater emphasis on competition’. This totally ignores the notion that competition does not suit everyone and may be catastrophic for some pupils’ self-esteem, having implications for physical activity levels. This paper concludes that a number of aspects require further consideration if the true value of Physical Education is to be realised. The pedagogical implications of a curriculum underpinned by physical literacy must be debated and a consolidated approach agreed.

Keywords

Physical education, physical literacy, national curriculum, pedagogy, holistic approach

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‘I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I know.’ (Old Chinese proverb)

Introduction

The role and nature of Physical Education (PE) in schools has long been a contested area (Smith and Parr, 2007) and debates about establishing a definitive purpose for PE are still ongoing (Alderson and Crutchley, 1990; Bailey and Kirk, 2009; Kirk, 1992, 2013; Whitehead, 2010a). Therefore, now more than ever, it could be argued that engaging in such debates is a professional responsibility for teachers as well as those concerned with academic study, particularly if such debates are to reach meaningful and tangible conclusions. Physical educationalists have often justified the educational worth of PE through its contribution to other aspects of education (Green, 2008). It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that PE has endured a history of marginalisation.

Evidentially, however, PE is pertinent to the current educational agenda. The recent review of the national curriculum, for all maintained schools in England, places PE as a compulsory subject alongside English, Maths and Science throughout all four key stages (Department for Education, 2013a). This heightened status might signal a long-awaited sense of security for the subject within the curriculum, security which has long been in question (Houlihan, 1991). This might provide a timely opportunity to re-visit the overarching purpose of PE and present a justification for a curriculum grounded in physical literacy, which focuses on the holistic development of the individual (Whitehead, 2010a).

The perceived importance of PE within the curriculum is clearly susceptible to political expediency and, as a result, the longevity of this perceived ‘security’ should perhaps be taken only at face value. The fact that *current* education policy looks favourably towards PE, however, might offer a window of opportunity for PE-advocates to strengthen the subject’s place and purpose. Identifying a clear rationale for PE would coincide with its current political support and curricular security. Conceivably, this might strengthen the political impetus surrounding PE and reinforce the justification of the subject within the curriculum. The future of compulsory PE may ultimately hinge on the ability, or inability, to establish a unified consensus as to its purpose. As such, this issue now seems to be of paramount importance.

While there remains a need for the profession to identify and articulate a clear vision and purpose for PE (Whitehead, 2000), it has been argued that all within the PE profession have a responsibility to ‘address and debate what the futures should be and to ensure that policy and curriculum developments then reflect the visions established, and facilitate their realisation’ (Penney and Chandler, 2000: 85). Such responsibilities provide the rationale for this paper, to propose a future rationale for PE in an effort to consolidate its curriculum value and promote its educational worth.

Debates and considerations in physical education

PE has been characterised as a ‘political football that can be kicked back and forth at the whims of government’ (Johnrose and Maher, 2010: 15). For instance, traditionally, the priority for PE according to the Conservative party is to emphasise competition with a focus on ‘elitism’, whereas the Labour party view PE as a vehicle to address wider concerns of social inclusion, health and economic regeneration (King, 2009: 148). Perhaps the divergent priorities assigned to PE over time are partly responsible for the *blurred consensus* about the overarching purpose of the subject. Given the historical debates about its purpose and value, it is perhaps unsurprising that PE has been

exploited for every beneficial outcome it can hope to achieve (Houlihan, 1991). Incidentally, the myriad aims now offered for PE might, in themselves, contribute to the philosophical incoherence surrounding the role of the subject (Capel, 1997).

Throughout the 20th century, PE was afforded little more than a Cinderella status (McNamee, 2005) and was urged to 'redefine itself as an academic subject' (Reid, 1997: 6). This process instigated a significant rise in examinable PE, which suggests an implicit acceptance, on the part of PE, that academia holds superiority within the curriculum (Green, 2008). This might be construed from a sociological perspective as 'curricular-hegemony' (Sprake and Palmer, 2012: 75). That is, through hegemonic control, PE has been persuaded to accept that the transfer of academic knowledge is a common-sense arrangement, not only in the wider educational landscape but also in the context of *physical* education. This might reveal how, in its current state, PE has been unable to justify itself as a standalone subject with a focus on movement. The educational worth of PE, according to Whitehead (2013a), should be celebrated in its *own right* as opposed to justifying its place in the curriculum through its contribution to wider educational outcomes. Dispelling the infiltration of academia into PE, Whitehead (2013a: 35) also argues that the subject needs 'no further justification' since it 'develops the embodied potential of the learner'. It seems that, for now at least, PE has surrendered itself to a subservient curricular existence. The tension-balance between the *academic* and *physical* development of young people has served only to create more confusion about the role of the subject. The incessant debates about the role of PE, the ongoing pedagogical developments, the discussions about PE's curriculum security and the 'political tug-of-war' surrounding the subject (Sprake and Palmer, 2012: 74) may, in fact, provide a timely platform from which to establish a 'new' rationale for PE, one that has always existed but has never been made explicit.

Kirk (2010: 121) anticipates three possible futures for PE: 'more of the same, radical reform or extinction'. If the subject merely produces *more of the same*, it is likely to arouse the same timeworn debates. It might seem prudent, therefore, to envisage this scenario guiding PE to its own eventual *extinction*. A more recently proposed justification for PE has been the development of Physical Literacy, described as having the 'motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take part in physical activity throughout the lifecourse' (Whitehead, 2013d). Physical literacy is a fundamental human capability which creates a 'sound platform' for lifelong adherence to physical activity and provides an 'ideal springboard for those who have exceptional potential with respect to this capability' (Whitehead, 2010b: 163). Put another way, physical literacy as an outcome of PE can provide children and young people of *all* abilities and dispositions with the foundations on which to build a lifelong commitment to, and enjoyment of, physical activity. If the aim of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) is to promote lifelong physical activity then a curriculum based upon the holistic development of the individual must underpin the role and nature of the subject; physical literacy may well be the 'light at the end of the tunnel' (Sprake and Palmer, 2012: 75). Herein might be the *radical reform* awaiting PE and it is therefore important to provide a synopsis of physical literacy, explore its origins as a concept and reveal its ambitions as an existent practice.

Physical literacy: the light at the end of the tunnel?

The overarching purpose of education is to promote the holistic development of children and young people and should not be confined to 'narrow concerns of the cognitive alone' (McGettrick, 2005: 35). It is argued that the development of physical literacy should underpin the work of all

teachers working with pupils between the ages 11 to 18 (Whitehead, 2010b) and that, in a PE context, there should be a ‘focus on movement rather than the activity itself’ (Burgess, 2013: 12). Characterised as the ‘development of a disposition’, as opposed to the realisation of an end product (Whitehead, 2010b: 163), the underlying remit of physical literacy is to empower people of all abilities, and ages, to incorporate physical activity into their lives. A relatively new concept in the world of PE, physical literacy adopts a ‘monist approach to human nature’ and is founded upon two philosophical perspectives: existentialism and phenomenology (Whitehead, 2013b: 37). In order to fully appreciate the relationship between physical literacy and these schools of thought, further clarification about each may be useful.

Existentialism and phenomenology

The term existentialism derives from the word *existence* and recognises that each individual has a relationship with the world (Webster, 2002). Central to existentialism is the belief that individuals are created via ongoing interactions and dialogue with the world that surrounds them (Whitehead, 2010b). For existentialists, the insights and perceptions created by such interactions are what create individual beings (Whitehead, 2010b). Phenomenology is widely recognised as one of the major philosophical movements in the 20th century (Glendinning, 2008). Described as a compatible partner to PE (Connolly, 1995), phenomenology is ultimately concerned with individuals’ perceptions as experienced in the first-person (Smith, 2006). Phenomenologists seek to explain that the *world view* of one individual will be uniquely different to that of another, based on their respective and prior experiences (Whitehead, 2010b). Because the identities of individuals are each influenced by such interactions and perceptions, it becomes clear that the views of existentialism and phenomenology can overlap and align (Whitehead, 2010b).

The plethora of factors which can affect pupils’ experiences of PE, for instance, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, religion, disability or sexuality (Penney, 2002), stretch beyond the remit of this paper. Clearly, however, pupils are all positioned differently to participate in PE and, as a result, their experiences will invariably differ and, in some cases, contrast. Uniquely individual, therefore, each and every pupil entering the ‘classroom’ is on their own physical literacy journey. If this journey were considered at both political and practical levels, then perhaps the rationale and nature of PE would move away from the homogenous, dualist approach currently at-play and move towards a monist approach which considers the holistic and personalised development of all individuals.

Monism versus dualism

Monism can be described as a philosophical perspective which views the body and mind as one indivisible entity (Whitehead, 2010b). The abstract reasoning behind monism is that ‘the whole is prior to its parts’ (Schaffer, 2010: 31). Essentially, the body is neither divorced from, nor subservient to, the mind. Such a fundamentally holistic view about human embodiment would seemingly bode well for PE, not least for its educational legitimacy and curriculum status. However, attempts to define PE are often flawed by a ‘misguided reliance upon a dualistic view of human beings’ (Reid, 1996: 7). Dualism is based on the belief that humans not only comprise two ‘separate’ parts (the body *and* the mind) but that the body is subservient to the mind, in that, prolonging the existence of cognition is the central purpose of the body (Whitehead, 2010b). Based

on their fundamental differences, therefore, monism and dualism are entangled in a philosophical conflict.

Central to the educational remit of PE is the notion of movement and, as a result, it seems logical for PE professionals, such as Whitehead, to strongly advocate monist belief. At no point, however, does monism dismiss the importance of intellect but, unlike dualism, it views the mind and body as one. Perhaps the illustrious phrase of Descartes could be modified in order to describe the fundamental principles of monism: I think *and do* therefore I am. Indeed, it is 'only against the backdrop of embodied experience' that propositional knowledge becomes useful (Gill, 2000: 100). The educational priorities in the UK, however, appear to favour a dualistic approach. For instance, despite a brief acknowledgment of the *broader aspects* of education, the current framework for school inspections (Ofsted, 2013) outlines that the overall achievement of pupils is measured on their academic attainment. The terms 'physical education' or 'PE' are not referred to throughout this document and, as a result, Ofsted's recognition of the wider aspects of education appears more like tokenism.

As outlined, the 'academicisation' of PE has been hurled into ascendancy in recent years (Green, 2005) in an apparent effort to assert its educational worth (Sprake and Palmer, 2012). This might expose a philosophical hierarchy that operates within education, since the educational value of PE can, apparently, be 'guaranteed' only through its all-new academic contribution. It would seem, therefore, that PE has been manipulated by a dualist ideology. Compelled to exploit its own intellectual offerings, PE has repositioned itself in a manner which seems to support the notion of *mind before body*; thus surrendering to the principles of dualism. The embodied dimension of human beings, according to Whitehead (2013b), must not be viewed as subservient to their intellect. Despite such fierce resistance to the mind-body distinction, however, dualism seems securely fastened to the ideological high-ground which governs education. Of course, it would be irrational if *physical* education were to omit its *academic* potential, since the holistic development of the individual encompasses both of these aspects. As outlined, monism does not perceive the body as superior to the mind, rather, that they are of equal importance. However, the hegemonic-dualism which currently informs PE appears to disregard the subject's true potential (Sprake and Palmer, 2012) and it is this dualist ideology which appears to have PE backed into a corner.

The rigid philosophical perspective of dualism is unable to accommodate the holistic account of human embodiment. It could be argued that this view is incompatible with the overarching aims of PE. Monism, on the other hand, acknowledges that the mind and body are of equal and inseparable value which, ostensibly, would appeal to the variable nature of PE. For instance, whilst PE comprises both *physical* and *academic* content, it is likely that at different times one will make room for the other. Differing educational settings in PE, such as the playing fields or the classroom, require, out of necessity, consideration of whether the learning priorities *at-that-time* are physical, intellectual or both. This highlights the educational flexibility of PE which, in turn, gives rise to the appropriateness of monism, a philosophical approach which allows for the divergent and flexible learning environments now inherent to the PE experience. Such flexibility, it seems, would be captured and celebrated through a monist approach, whereas the uncompromising views of dualism seem inadequately rigid. Notwithstanding the difficulties that researchers face when disseminating their findings to inform future PE policies (Evans and Davies, 2002), curriculum developers might take into account the currently dualistic and lopsided approach towards educational objectives, and consider the benefits of creating a new state of educational-equilibrium that portrays the body and mind as having equal significance. Such a view would see monism as the leading philosophy which informs the curriculum.

The holistic approach to academic achievement

Intellectual development in PE must not be overlooked as this supports the holistic nature of monism. However, interweaving the term ‘academic achievement’ and ‘*physical* education’ could be misleading and so it is necessary to insert a caveat: firstly, the points made in this section are not to suggest that PE should become more academic in nature, quite the contrary; and secondly, the following points do not support the view that the educational legitimacy of PE exists only in relation to the benefit of other subjects. PE can, and should, justify itself on the basis of its own educational outcomes. Conversely, the notion that PE has a causal affiliation with academic achievement (Sallis et al., 1999; Trudeau and Shephard, 2008) should neither be overlooked nor viewed as counterproductive to the stature of PE.

The demand for academic success in schools is by no means a new concept, but the contribution that PE can make to this process appears to have been ignored at the chalk face. The introduction of school league tables, for example, has placed increasing pressure on schools to prioritise *academic* subjects (Naidoo and Wills, 2000). In response to such pressures, a new orthodoxy emerged for PE which can be evidenced in the considerable rise in examinable PE (Green, 2008). The ‘academicisation’ of PE is irrefutable. The dualist approach to PE, however, has been met with fierce resistance by many PE teachers who remain anchored in the opinion that PE examinations are a ‘constraint rather than . . . an ideological commitment’ (Green, 2000: 121). Ultimately, many PE teachers resent the fact that *physical* education has become imbued with *academic* objectives. Incidentally, there is no evidence to suggest that increasing pupils’ PE time, at the expense of academic subjects, will have a detrimental impact upon their academic attainment (Trudeau and Shephard, 2008). Ironically, the academic results that schools are compelled to achieve ‘might be realised, not by marginalising, but by emphasising the importance of PE within the curriculum’ (Sprake and Palmer, 2012: 75). If PE were to be allocated more time within the curriculum, whether to support academic attainment or not, then the ostensible benefits to the pupil would be twofold; increased time to participate in beneficial physical pursuits whilst at the same time supporting their intellectual development. This calls into action the holistic essence of physical literacy.

Integral to the educational process is the notion of assessment (Smith, 2007), which has become an increasingly prominent feature within the context of PE (Hay, 2006; Hay and Penney, 2013). The incentives to bring about assessed PE have been criticised, however, for overlooking the ‘educational interests of the pupils’ (Capel and Piotrowski, 2000: 104). Within the PE community, there are questions as to whether the motives behind assessment are in fact ‘counter to the nature, purpose and potential of the subject itself’ (Hay and Penney, 2013: 1). Rimmer (2013: 103) argues that pupils’ success in PE should be understood in terms of their ‘experience of achievement’ and measured by interpreting what is ‘written on the faces of our learners’, rather than by elaborate tick boxes and moderation processes. This concept may be difficult to envisage, however, given the culture of accountability in education.

Whitehead (2010b) suggests that individuals should be judged only in relation to their own prior performances, rather than being compared with others or predetermined success criteria. On the surface, the draft programme of study for PE appears to align with this view by outlining a vision for pupils to ‘compare their performances with previous ones to achieve their personal best’ (Frapwell and Wilkinson, 2013: 9). In addition, Douglas (2013) notes that children from the age of seven will now be expected to compare personal bests; whether this comparison will occur between *each other* or purely with *themselves*, however, is not considered. Irrespective of the

intentions of this assessment structure, it is perhaps an indiscreet assumption, on the part of curriculum developers, that peer-comparisons will *not* take place. Unless it were controlled pedagogically, which in itself seems unlikely, the idea that pupils will make comparisons between, and judgements about, each other's performances seems inevitable. Furthermore, as children get older, their self-perceptions of physical competence become increasingly informed and influenced by their peers (Stroot, 2002). Therefore, the current government's *competitive vision* for PE has seemingly overlooked how the intricate social exchanges, which are commonplace in PE, might be enhancing the self-esteem of some pupils whilst dismantling the self-esteem of others. Needless to say, however, that appropriate assessment strategies form a vital component of PE practice.

In order to support the development of physical literacy in PE, practitioners should use ipsative assessment and promote the notion of charting progress rather than meeting pre-set benchmarks (Whitehead, 2013d). Adopting this approach will encourage and motivate pupils to measure their performances against their own previous ones, and will also embed the notion that each pupil is on their own unique physical literacy journey. This approach will enable teachers to facilitate an environment whereby the holistic development of children and young people could truly flourish.

Promoting lifelong physical activity

Schools have been identified as important organisations for the promotion of physical activity (Taymoori and Lubans, 2007). Unsurprisingly, promoting lifelong physical activity is widely accepted as a central aim of PE (Fairclough et al., 2002), an aim which should be explicitly visible in the nature of the subject (Sallis and McKenzie, 1991). Indeed, the causalities between PE and lifelong physical activity are also widely recognised (Corbin, 2002; Evans and Davies, 2010; Trudeau and Shephard, 2008). The NCPE claims that PE 'develops pupils' competence and confidence to take part in a range of physical activities that become a central part of their lives' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007: 189). Despite such widespread beliefs, however, there remains little evidence to substantiate such claims (Green, 2012). In fact, Sellers and Palmer (2008: 197) acutely dismiss much of the 2007 NCPE document as 'nothing more than a set of unsubstantiated dogmatic claims' based on wishful thinking and naïve idealism. Studies that support the taken-for-granted relationship between PE and participation in physical activity are, according to Green (2012: 4), firmly rooted in a 'language of contingency'; that is, the *potential* of PE to *encourage* or *influence* lifelong participation, rather than basing claims on empirical evidence. It should of course be acknowledged, however, that PE can only 'lead the horse to water' (Clark and Sprake, 2011: 3). The myriad factors that influence participation, or non-participation, in physical activity (Allender et al., 2006) would not only reduce likelihood of PE being heralded for its exclusive, or even predominant, role in sustaining lifelong physical activity (Sprake and Palmer, 2012) but would plausibly distort the measurability of its overall contribution.

Slandering the contribution of PE, however, might serve only to encourage perceptions of PE as a futile component of the curriculum, when what the subject would truly benefit from are practical recommendations and for clarification of its aims. Perhaps unsurprisingly, individuals' early experiences of sport and physical activity have severe implications to their subsequent involvement (Trimble et al., 2010) and research suggests that only a minority of adults continue to participate in activities they experienced in PE (Kirk, 2005). This implies that PE in schools is currently failing to achieve its aims. From a phenomenological perspective, it could be suggested that, for such adults, the prospect of engaging in physical activity might incite un-favoured recollections of, or retrospective anxieties about, their experiences of PE. Therefore, the *manner*

in which PE is facilitated can impact heavily on pupils' enthusiasm to engage in lifelong physical activity (Fairclough et al., 2002). As Whitehead (2010b: 24) explains, '...situations will be imbued with previous connotations and their perception will be coloured by these connotations'. It is the duty of physical educators to generate, harness and nurture pupils' physical competence in order to build positive experiences and predispositions towards lifelong physical activity.

Herein is an illustration of existentialist belief; the interactions between the individual and his/her world, in this case the relationship between pupils and PE, contribute to the moulding of that individual (Whitehead, 2010b). Similarly, Whitehead (2010b: 174) argues that practitioners, thus PE teachers, need to be 'sensitive, responsive and flexible' in order to develop the 'physically literate' individual. As such, the way in which pupils receive and experience PE might be the cornerstone on which their future participation is decided. PE appears to be the intersection at which young people *opt-in* or *opt-out* of physical activity, which magnifies the responsibility of the PE teacher and highlights the social implications of the subject. Teachers display broad and varied philosophies about the role and nature of PE (Capel, 2000), however, which have likely and profound implications to pupils' future dispositions towards physical activity. Such varied philosophies are perhaps a side-effect of the wide-ranging aims for PE, *fuelling the fire* for the philosophical incoherence of the subject. This perhaps highlights further the need for a consolidated approach to PE, with a focus on the development of physical literacy in order to equip children and young people with the capabilities and confidence to pursue physically active lives.

The political priorities for physical education

The landscape of education has undergone a radical paradigm shift in recent years as a result of political preference. The overarching political priorities for PE bring their own set of implications for pupils' dispositions towards physical activity throughout their lifetime. In January 2011, the Department for Education launched a review of the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2011), the impact of which will be manifest in PE through a 'greater emphasis on competition' (Frapwell and Wilkinson, 2013: 8). This appears to reflect the Conservative government's longstanding desire for *competitive PE*, as outlined in the policy document *Sport: Raising the Game* (Department of National Heritage, 1995). What the government has seemingly overlooked is that competition does not suit everyone. Whitehead (2010b: 181) outlines that the breadth and balance of structured activity settings are crucial for the development of physical literacy and offers the following '*Movement Forms*' as a method of categorisation: adventure form; aesthetic and expressive form; athletic form; competitive form; fitness and health form; and interactional/relational form. Clearly, competition can play an important role in the development of physical literacy, but by placing a 'greater emphasis on competition' within the PE curriculum, the current political priorities may lead to the marginalisation of other, equally important, contexts for physical activity.

Biglin (2013) emphasises that, through competitive PE, some pupils can 'inflate their self-esteem whilst glorifying in the ability to do well and beat others' whereas others can only hope to 'avoid being humiliated'. Incidentally, it is perhaps interesting to note that there is no mention of 'inclusion' or 'all abilities' in the draft NCPE programme of study. This poses a potential, even likely, problem for the future of PE, in that, the one-size-fits-all approach to the subject's delivery might be catastrophic for some pupils' self-esteem which, incidentally, has noteworthy implications to physical activity levels (Coalter, 2007). This would appear to go against the grain of physical literacy, as encouraging lifelong physical activity is fundamental to its aims (Whitehead,

2010b). On the journey to becoming ‘physically literate’ the promotion of individual competence and pupils’ self-esteem are paramount (Fox, 2010). Burgess (2013: 12) states that this can only be achieved through positive experiences and accuses PE of losing sight of the *process* by pre-occupying itself with the *product*.

Pedagogical considerations for physical literacy

The newly formed International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) suggests that the physical literacy ‘movement’ is gaining momentum and is becoming an increasingly recognised and valued concept. It could be argued, therefore, that the PE-community has a responsibility to pay close attention to such developments; the promotion of physical literacy as a capability might, and perhaps should, become the new rationale for PE. It should be acknowledged, however, that the term ‘physical literacy’, originally proposed by Margaret Whitehead in 1993, has since been interpreted by various organisations in a number of different ways, with a predominant focus on the practical element: physical competency. The multiple interpretations of physical literacy might have inadvertently ‘muddled the waters’ with regards to the concept. In fact, physical literacy itself has been described as a contested area and one that is not consistently applied (Macdonald and Enright, 2013). However, if the true meaning and intentions of physical literacy can be recaptured and disseminated then perhaps a more unified and holistic approach to the aims of PE might be realised.

Incidentally, the removal of ‘PE-levels’ in the new national curriculum might well assist physical literacy in becoming the new rationale for PE. That is, physical literacy encourages the assessment, or charting the progress, of all aspects of PE such as motivation, confidence, self-esteem and knowledge. Embracing this approach would foster a culture of pedagogical awareness within the PE profession, whereby teachers are mindful of ways to ensure pupils’ development in all of these areas. How it manifests at the chalk-face would vary from school to school, even between classes and pupils, but the philosophic approach remains the same. That is, teachers are acutely aware that all pupils are on their own physical literacy journey.

Mobilising such a paradigm shift will, of course, require careful and strategic planning and implementation; this is an area for further research and development. In the meantime, it is important to highlight that physical literacy is neither an *alternative* to PE nor is it a *pedagogical model* in itself (Whitehead, 2011). Rather, it should be embraced as the value and the outcome of PE (Whitehead, 2013c). Burgess (2013) aptly remarks that high quality PE and physical literacy are theoretically the same thing. So what does this mean for the pedagogy of physical literacy? Whitehead and Almond (2013: 27) advise that teachers should consider several learner experiences on their journey towards physical literacy: experiences that are rewarding and enjoyable; which promote self-worth and self-confidence; that enable pupils to progress and succeed; empower pupils to make choices about physical activity; enable pupils to understand the value of physical activity for lifelong health benefits; and experiences which encourage pupils to engage in physical activity for themselves. Through these guidelines, teachers should be able to facilitate a ‘... pedagogy of engagement’ (Whitehead and Almond, 2013: 27).

Whitehead and Almond (2013) have clearly attempted to clarify the pedagogical possibilities for physical literacy and in so doing they have seemingly tried to bridge the gap between theorising about physical literacy and applying it to PE. Despite their efforts, however, there remains an air of confusion about its practical application. Bassett et al. (2013) give rise to the pedagogical challenges that have stifled attempts to embed physical literacy into PE.

Admittedly, any attempts to lay out the possible pedagogies for physical literacy may be inherently challenging due to the complex origins of the concept itself. Nevertheless, the guidelines set out by Whitehead and Almond (2013) might be susceptible to criticism in that they appear more like abstract signposts, even convoluted ideas, as opposed to practical advice for PE teachers. Whilst it is inconceivable that the essence of physical literacy could be *put in a box* or *packed up and sold* to schools as a pedagogical toolkit, it is perhaps an issue that warrants further discussion. If physical literacy has any hope of taking-the-reigns of PE, particularly in an educational climate handcuffed to dualist preconceptions and a culture of accountability, then developing a framework for application seems critical. As such, it appears that the gap between theory and practice remains an issue for further discussion; a gap that needs to be well and truly filled if physical literacy is to have a lasting impact upon the role and nature of PE.

Conclusion

Like a devil on its shoulder, the entire spectrum of the national curriculum seems to be informed by dualism. This dominant philosophy is having a potentially catastrophic impact upon the nature of PE; that is, PE *should* be experienced holistically but is currently being overshadowed by a national thirst for academic attainment. This is not to say that the academic components of PE should be abolished, rather, that it need not eclipse the subject's fundamentally physical nature. PE has been characterised as a 'political football' (Johnrose and Maher, 2010: 15) and a philosophical depiction might interpret PE as the subject of dualist puppetry. Increased pressure for the subject to become more academic (Reid, 1997) combined with the subsequent rise in examinable PE (Green, 2008) illustrates how PE has fought to assert its educational legitimacy in an effort to safeguard its curriculum position. Following this 'survival attempt', however, the philosophical incoherence, as if it were now an appendage to PE, appears only to have intensified. Surrendering to this hegemonic-dualism has profoundly impacted upon the nature of PE as it appears to have been manipulated into the acceptance of intellectual superiority. Conversely, Whitehead (2013a) argues that PE should be celebrated in its *own right*. Of course, a unique strength of PE lies with its ability to support the academic ability of pupils, both in its own forte and in the wider curriculum, but under no circumstances should this capability be used as justification for the subject itself. The key message here is that PE has sold itself short, having too readily sacrificed its unique potential to contribute to the holistic development of children, young people and, indeed, beyond.

Establishing a unified consensus about the role and nature of PE remains an issue of deliberation. Physical literacy might offer a 'new' rationale for PE, one which would enable PE to fight its own corner on holistic and educational grounds, rather than conceding to a subservient curricular existence informed by dualism. The latter might serve only to dismantle the *physical* nature of the subject. Further clarification might be needed for the profession to establish definitive pedagogical practices for physical literacy as well as clearer guidelines of how to embed it within PE (Bassett et al., 2013). Nevertheless, physical literacy could go a long way towards redeeming the philosophical confusion surrounding PE and, more importantly, provide an ideal stepping stone from which children and young people can continue their physical literacy journey towards adulthood and throughout the lifetime. The future of PE may ultimately lie in the hands of physical literacy, a future which would see the *educationally physical* placed back at the heart of *physical education*.

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