

Chapter 3

What is physical literacy and how does it impact on physical education?

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Introduction

Physical literacy is a relatively new concept in the world of physical education. The concept is founded on philosophical principles and provides a clear rationale for the importance of the subject. The concept identifies a unique value for physical activity as well as clarifying how physical education can make a significant contribution to the education of young people.

This chapter is concerned with considering whether and how the concept of physical literacy can play a part in articulating, with conviction and clarity, the significance and value of nurturing our embodied capability, and at the same time, in line with suggestions made in Chapter 2, provide the means by which the profession no longer needs to rely on extrinsic factors to justify the subject area in the curriculum. Work in the movement field is of value in its own right and has both a unique contribution to make to education as well as potential, in and of itself, to make a broader contribution to the development of young people.

The chapter opens with a short background to the concept of physical literacy. The concept is based on a monist approach to human nature and two philosophical schools of thought – existentialism and phenomenology. Each of these is explained briefly. The overarching value of fostering our embodied capability is drawn out from these views and this provides the springboard for the definition of the concept of physical literacy to be presented.

Building from this explanation, the value of physical literacy as a human capability that can enhance and enrich the quality of life is briefly outlined. The relationship between physical literacy and physical education is then explained and the way that the concept can support the value of physical education is presented. The responsibilities of the physical education teacher in promoting physical literacy are then outlined. Finally the implications for the teaching of physical education, where the goal of nurturing physical literacy has been adopted as the fundamental goal of the subject, are presented.

Readers should examine the arguments in detail, ideally carrying out further reading as suggested, and then consider both the claimed value of physical literacy and the assertion that it can contribute to supporting physical education within the school. Finally readers should interrogate the pedagogical recommendations concerning the implications for teaching physical education.

Philosophical foundations

Physical literacy is a concept developed from a commitment to a monist approach to the nature of human being and a philosophical study of existentialism and phenomenology.¹

A monist or holist approach to our nature is in opposition to the dualist position that sees us as comprised of two distinct and separable parts – the ‘body’ and the ‘mind’, with the ‘body’ being relegated to secondary status in relation to the ‘mind’ or the intellect. From a holistic perspective we are one indivisible whole, with every experience we have and every action we take being influenced by, and influencing, all aspects of our personhood. We are each comprised of a variety of capabilities,² all of which function in concert with each other – reciprocally interacting, influencing and enriching each other.

The philosophy of dualism dates back to the work of Descartes (1972 in Leder, 1990) who claimed that the intellect is indisputably our dominant feature on account of the fact that the only thing about which he could be certain was that he was thinking. He argued that he could doubt the reality of all other functions that he could perform. Hence, he concluded, we are at root cognitive beings. This attitude to our nature has become so embedded in western thought that it is taken for granted, notwithstanding challenges from philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists such as Leder (1990), Strawson (in Gill 2000), Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Gibbs (2006). For example Leder (1990: 153–4) describes this situation well in writing that we are trapped inside a picture, a dualist picture of ourselves. He goes on to say that this has limited our self-development and self-realisation. Similarly Strawson (1964, in Gill 2000: 18) asserts that the person is logically prior to any description of the dimensions, such as cognitive, affective and physical, from which the individual is comprised. In other words he asserts that as humans we are manifest in the world as composite beings, fostering the capabilities that arise from developing our different areas of potential or dimensions to live our lives to the full. Any consideration of these constituent ‘dimensions’ of our nature must start from the notion of a whole person. No aspect of human nature exists as a discrete function prior to the existence of a person. It is similar to saying that, for example, a vase is comprised of clay, colour, texture, shape and weight and then trying to conceive how each of these constituents is merged to make the vase. You have to start with the vase and then identify its characteristics.

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The philosophies of existentialists and phenomenologists are grounded in this monist concept of our human nature and build their theories from this perspective. The other key aspect of these philosophies, from the standpoint of physical education, is that they both see great significance in the fact that we are embodied and judge that our embodied nature plays an all-pervading and fundamental role in the development of life as we know it. The concept of physical literacy grew from the respect shown by monists, existentialists and phenomenologists for our 'body'. Significantly these thinkers arrived at these views from their wider philosophical deliberations, in no way concerned to support work in physical education.

The belief on which existentialism is founded is that existence precedes essence. Put simply this means that humans create their individual being through interaction with the world they inhabit. Every interaction provides new perceptions, new experiences, new knowledge about the world. As we interact with the world we are ourselves enriched and changed. We not only come to know more about the world, but at the same time realise more of our potential and our capabilities. We can interact with the world in a variety of ways. Each mode of interacting with the world carries the potential to contribute to the full realisation of human being and so it follows that all modes that offer this interaction should be nurtured. The human embodied dimension is one such mode and is therefore worthy of serious study, attention and development. Far from being a minor player in existence, our embodied nature is implicated in all we do.

For example many writers are now convinced that the development of cognitive concepts depends on embodied interaction with the world. Burkitt (1999: 12) writes that meaning is created through our embodied interaction with the world and also says:

What we call mind only exists because we are embodied and this gives us the potential to be active and animate within the world ... we can only become persons and selves because we are located bodily at a particular place and time in relation to other people and things around us.

Leder (1990: 114 and 126) writes that 'the lived body is mentalised through and through, all of its organs participating in a uniquely human intelligence' and refers to the 'lived body as the seat of vitality, action and thought'.

Phenomenology adds further support for the significance of the embodied dimension, championing 'the embodiment-as-lived' perspective of this dimension. These philosophers assert that we perceive the world from the perspective of how we have interacted with it on previous occasions. The meaning it has for us is based on experience. We make sense of the world by assimilating what is perceived so that it builds from our prior knowledge, in a way 'seeing' the world in a particular way. We accommodate this new information about the world by adapting aspects of existing knowledge and understanding. Each

of us has a slightly different world and each of us is changed by what we experience. The richer the understanding and appreciation of the world, accrued through interaction with the environment, the more sensitively perceptive the individual becomes, the more the individual learns about the world and at the same time learns about him/herself.

Given the key role that the embodied dimension plays in interacting with the world and the monist views of the human as a whole being, further support is provided in respect of the importance of our embodiment. It is the case that an element of the meaning of most of our surroundings springs from our embodied relationship with features in our environment. Unfortunately this meaning is seldom realised or articulated. Polanyi (1966) describes this as tacit meaning or knowledge: meaning that is inherent in our dealings with things. Tacit knowledge is seldom articulated, partly because it is founded on experiences in childhood prior to the development of language, partly because it is acquired throughout life in our embodied interaction with the world – an interaction much of which takes place at pre-conscious levels – and partly because the experience is, by nature, subjective. Tacit knowledge is taken for granted. For example, we know how to ride a bicycle but would have great difficulty to put this into words. Similarly we may know how to use a paper clip, climb stairs, perform a forward roll or throw a javelin, but it is almost impossible to explain how we do these things. Nevertheless knowledge of this nature is constantly called on as we live our lives and, as suggested above, is the foundation of cognitive development and the acquisition of propositional knowledge.³ Merleau-Ponty, referred to in Leder (1990: 7), suggests that abstract cognition itself may subliminate but never escapes its inherence in a perceiving, acting body.

Monism, existentialism and phenomenology give unequivocal support for the significance of the embodied dimension in human life as we know it. As such it is not appropriate to 'write off' our embodied dimension as a subordinate servant to our intellect. *We are as we are* on account of our embodied nature and we interact with the world essentially from an embodied perspective. The world is for us a world viewed by an embodied being.

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Philosophical considerations, physical literacy and physical education

How do the above views relate to the work of physical educationalists? Unequivocally these views demonstrate the importance of the subject area. There are no grounds for the profession to see itself as nurturing a subsidiary or inferior aspect of our learners. The learners' embodied dimension is as worthy of development as any other human dimension. Education, as a vehicle by which potential is developed in order to live a full and rewarding life, should address all aspects of our human nature. Individuals should be aware of the

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potential of their various dimensions and be motivated and confident to foster the capability each dimension affords, deploying it as appropriate throughout life. This includes our embodied dimension and its resultant capability and is pertinent to all learners, whatever their physical endowment. From this standpoint physical educationists have a clear, underpinning justification for their work as making a significant contribution to education.

Our role is to nurture learners' motivation and confidence in capitalising on their embodied dimension in realising their embodied capability. It is suggested that promoting positive attitudes to physical activity in the interests of establishing exercise as a lifelong habit should be our ultimate goal. This positive disposition to activity has been described as being physically literate. Physical literacy is a disposition all can achieve, it has far-reaching benefits for the young and the old, for those with particular needs as well as the able-bodied.

The definition of physical literacy can be set out briefly as follows:

As appropriate to each individual's endowment, physical literacy can be described as a disposition acquired by individuals encompassing the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that establishes purposeful physical pursuits as an integral element of their lifestyle.

(Whitehead, 2010a: 11)

In more detail the attributes evident in a physically literate individual can be described as follows:

- A Physical literacy can be described as a disposition characterised by the motivation and confidence to capitalise on innate movement/physical potential to make a significant contribution to the quality of life and a commitment to maintaining purposeful physical pursuits⁴ throughout the lifecourse.
All humans exhibit this potential, however its specific expression will depend on individuals' endowment in relation to all capabilities, significantly their movement potential, and will be particular to the culture in which they live.
- B Individuals who are physically literate will move with poise, economy and confidence in a wide variety of physically challenging situations.
- C Physically literate individuals will be perceptive in 'reading' all aspects of the physical environment, anticipating movement needs or possibilities and responding appropriately to these, with intelligence and imagination.
- D Individuals will have a well-established sense of self as embodied in the world. This, together with an articulate interaction with the environment, will engender positive self-esteem and self-confidence.

- E Sensitivity to and awareness of embodied capability will lead to fluent self-expression through non-verbal communication and to perceptive and empathetic interaction with others.
- F In addition physically literate individuals will have the ability to identify and articulate the essential qualities that influence the effectiveness of their own movement performance, and have an understanding of the principles of embodied health, with respect to basic aspects such as exercise, sleep and nutrition

(Whitehead 2010a: 12)

These attributes need to be understood from the background of the monist nature of the individual and the way in which developing physical literacy has an impact on the wider development of other capabilities such as cognition and social interaction.⁵

It is important at this stage to make it clear that the concept of physical literacy offers no threat to physical education. Physical education is an element of the school curriculum, while physical literacy is a goal to be reached. Physical literacy provides a clear focus for our work in physical education. In addition its sound philosophical roots open up the opportunity of providing a clear articulation of the value of movement work in school and a justification for the inclusion of physical education in the curriculum.

Questions are often asked about the relationship between being physically educated and being physically literate. It is suggested that there has never been real consensus about what is meant by being physically educated and this is not surprising given that other subjects do not use this type of terminology. For example, the notions of being geographically educated and historically educated are not used. Efforts to define being physically educated have usually resulted in a list of physical skill achievements realised by an individual by the end of schooling.

There are a number of problems with any effort to describe an individual as being physically educated. Of particular note is that, with such a wide variety of physical endowments, it is all but impossible to have a single benchmark against which to judge attainment in respect of every pupil. The second problem is that the notion of being physically educated gives the impression that there is an end state which cannot be built on in the future.

There is considerable advantage in referring to individuals being physically literate as this implies that they are making progress, as appropriate to their individual endowment, across all or most of the attributes of physical literacy. The notion acknowledges that they are on a lifelong journey and that progress is always possible. Critically, being physically literate encompasses the expectation that this progress is very likely to occur. It is interesting to note that other areas of the curriculum have adopted a 'literacy' approach, for example music – music literacy – and politics – political literacy.

While there have been various references to physical literacy in the context of discussing the nature and aims of physical education, such as in the Declaration

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from the National Summit on Physical Education (Talbot, 2007), Hardman (2011) uses the concept of physical literacy to define being physically educated in writing:

Physically educated persons might be described as being physically literate, having acquired culturally normative skills enabling engagement in a variety of physical activities, which can help to maintain healthy well-being throughout the full life-span; they participate regularly in physical activity because it is enjoyable; they understand the value physical activity and its contribution to a healthy lifestyle.

While this is a useful way to relate the two concepts it is not wholly satisfactory in that it does not make clear that all can be physically literate, in a form appropriate to each individual's physical endowment, nor does it highlight the key aspects of physical literacy of being motivated and confident in respect of taking part in purposeful physical pursuits.

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The value of physical literacy

There is not space here to go into great detail of the value of physical literacy (see Whitehead 2010b). However two approaches can be suggested, either of which can be a starting point from which values can be identified.

First, taking a broad view from the perspective of the philosophical positions that have been covered, the value of making progress in becoming ever more physically literate enables each individual to:

- foster the development of the embodied dimension and thus benefit from realising a human capability;
- capitalise on an aspect of human potential – thus becoming more fully human;
- engage in a wide range of interactions with the world, including interacting with others, thus having experiences through which to gain personal knowledge and understanding as well as a richer appreciation of the world.

Second, the value of physical literacy can be expressed from a more practical standpoint, that is, its potential in making a significant contribution to human flourishing in its widest interpretation.

On account of our holistic nature, making progress in respect of all the attributes of physical literacy will promote:

- the development of physical competence;
- confident participation in a wide variety of purposeful physical pursuits;
- effective interaction in a wide variety of situations and environments;
- the development of self-confidence and self-esteem;

- sensitive interaction with others;
- knowledge and understanding of the importance of physical activity in maintaining health;
- the commitment to participate in a range of purposeful physical pursuits;
- the ability to reflect realistically on personal strengths and to select appropriate purposeful physical pursuits in which to take part;
- an appreciation of the value of purposeful physical pursuits in their potential to enhance the quality of life.

Physical literacy has the potential to enhance life in many respects. Some of the outcomes of being physically literate relate closely to our specific embodied potential, however others relate to broader human functioning and thus can be significant to human flourishing and to individuals enjoying a rich quality of life.

Physical literacy and physical education teaching

While the nurturing of physical literacy needs to be addressed throughout the lifecourse, with a variety of significant others being involved from the early years through to later life, it is suggested that physical education teachers have both a unique opportunity and a clear responsibility to nurture this capability (see Whitehead with Murdoch, 2006). It is certainly the case that physical education in school is the only place where every young person is assured of having experiences in purposeful physical pursuits and therefore it represents perhaps the one and only opportunity for every young person to develop their motivation, confidence and competence in respect of their participation in these activities. This unique opportunity puts the onus on physical education teachers to use this time to effect to promote physical literacy. The expertise that the teacher brings to this area of the school curriculum is substantial and significant. School physical education may be the only time when all young people work with those who are best prepared to enable every pupil to thrive in the physical activity context. It is argued that, as highly qualified professionals, physical education teachers have a responsibility to support all learners in their physical literacy journeys and to launch them on the road of a lifelong habit of participation in purposeful physical pursuits.

Implications of promoting physical literacy for physical education teachers

Where teachers set themselves the goal to promote physical literacy what are the implications for teaching?

The implication for teaching can be seen to cover four areas: knowledge of the nature of physical literacy, the development of a productive relationship with learners, the employment of appropriate teaching approaches and the selection of apposite lesson material.

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Knowledge of the nature of physical literacy

It is suggested that a prerequisite for taking up the challenge is a sound understanding of the nature of physical literacy and its philosophical foundations (see Whitehead, 2010a). Teachers need both to understand and support the concept of physical literacy and to appreciate the range of attributes of which it is comprised. They need to take a monist approach in their appreciation of the human condition and to acknowledge, as argued in Chapter 2, that, on account of our monist nature, promoting physical literacy can have far-reaching effects on the whole person.

Relationship with learners

The promotion of physical literacy is founded on the acceptance of each individual as an holistic being with unique potential. Each individual should be viewed as a whole, a unique person with particular characteristics and potential. Each individual should be respected and acknowledged as of value. Each is worthy of support, attention and guidance. Each is on a personal physical literacy journey and progress should be judged from this perspective. Comparison with others is less valid than an evaluation of individual learning, hence the use of ipsative assessment, where judgements are made in relation to the individual's previous attainment, is recommended. There is no reference to benchmarks or comparison with others. This respect for each young person should be reflected in all interaction between pupil and teacher and this compassionate understanding and acceptance should extend to the ways learners relate to each other. The teacher's example is paramount. Learners should be encouraged to show empathy and appreciation of the efforts of their peers as displayed by the teacher.

Physical education requires learners to display, very publicly, an aspect of their personhood and to expose more of their physicality than is normally the case, outside the physical education setting. The embodied dimension is an integral and highly significant aspect of the nature of young people and they can feel exposed, embarrassed or ashamed of this aspect of themselves. Any criticism of the embodied dimension can be read as a criticism of themselves – for both boys and girls. Great care needs to be taken to show that each is accepted as they are and to build appropriately from this starting point. Presentation of self is highly significant to young people at the secondary stage and this needs to be borne in mind when deciding on the dress for physical activity. Sensitivity should be shown to all and of course to those from certain cultures/faiths that have strict dress codes. In the context of respect for persons, listening to the learners' voices demonstrates the teacher's real interest in the experiences of young people. Acting, as appropriate, on their views is a clear indication that the learners are seen as having a contribution to make to decisions relating to the learning/teaching in lessons. As far as possible teachers should know their learners, and, being sensitive to their family circumstances, encourage ways the learners can participate in purposeful physical activity beyond the school.

How teaching is conducted

The overall nature and atmosphere of lessons have been described above and the way teaching needs to be conducted follows closely on these recommendations.

It is argued that all learners should be confident that physical education is a context in which they can make progress and succeed, in respect of their own physical literacy journey. All learners should leave the lesson with a 'can do' attitude to physical activity, a feeling of satisfaction in their work in the lesson and a positive attitude to the next lesson. This can be engendered by the teacher being encouraging and supportive. Effort and progress need to be acknowledged as much as achievement. This enthusiastic appreciation of learners' work does not mean that the teacher has low expectations and is easily satisfied. On the contrary the teacher should set realistic goals and demand application from all. Praise should be earned. Learners themselves are very much aware of how hard they are working and rewarding casual efforts can be seen as something of a joke (see Whitehead, 2011).

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Assessment for learning should be adopted at all times including recognition of effort, as appropriate, as well as an identification of the next goal and advice on how this goal can be achieved. Feedback should display appreciation, understanding and empathy. Criticism should be avoided where possible, with reprimands focusing on the deed not the person, stressing behaviour that should be adopted rather than the inappropriate behaviour. With the embodied dimension being such a key aspects of personhood, negative comment on learners' abilities or progress can lower self-perception, self-confidence and self-esteem. Nurturing of this triumvirate is absolutely critical to the promotion of physical literacy, having at its heart confidence and motivation.

As indicated above, the experience of success is essential in nurturing individuals' physical literacy. This points towards effecting differentiation through task, outcome or teaching approach, in some or most episodes of the lesson. The concept of mastery learning where the goal for each pupil is to reach a particular goal, rather than to reach a pre-specified class-wide standard, would seem to be the most likely to offer success.

A particularly challenging aspect of differentiation is management of ability grouping with its inherent overt recognition of differences in pupil potential. The success of an ability grouping approach, where some learners can feel identified as less able, will depend on lesson experiences in which a 'respect for persons' climate pervades between the learner and the teacher and between the learners. Learners should accept that it is in their interests to work on particular tasks. In fact learners themselves know how they compare with others. However this should not prevent all participants feeling that they can improve and that sometimes this means working on different tasks. All mixed ability grouping and teaching is challenging and needs to be carefully presented and managed.

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With the goal of involvement in purposeful physical pursuits becoming a lifetime habit, learners should be given increasing opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. They should be supported in being realistic in their self-assessment and in the acknowledgement of strengths and areas that need to be developed. They need to be able to self-assess and be intrinsically motivated to work to make progress. When learners complete compulsory education they should be able to make informed decisions about the physical activity regimes they adopt. This points to the need to use strategies that involve independent learning in physical education, with the reliance on the teacher being decreased.

The recording of progress throughout schooling with respect to physical literacy is a challenging area and one that is currently the subject of study and research. While charting personal progress with respect to movement competence will be of central importance, all attributes of physical literacy should be monitored. Any record should document a personal journey rather than the success or otherwise of reaching pre-specified targets. It is suggested that learners should be involved in this exercise, both because affective elements of physical literacy such as motivation and self-esteem will involve gathering the views of learners, and because realistic self-assessment and setting own goals is an important element of being physically literate.

While a highly controversial suggestion, it is worth considering if, given the marked variation in physical development at certain stages of schooling, age-related physical education is the best way to teach the subject. For example in adolescent boys chronological age is not always a good indicator of limb development or muscular strength. Timetabling two year groups together and subgrouping according to height, size and strength might be an approach to explore.

Content of teaching

Once again this topic needs to be considered from the perspective of each learner being on a personal journey, through which the promotion of motivation and self-confidence are paramount. However this should be balanced against providing a broad and balanced experience of Movement Forms (see also Chapter 4) and the need to prepare learners to make choices from the wealth of opportunities available in the context of purposeful physical pursuits within and beyond school.

In the early years and through the first stages of schooling up to the age of 11 years a broad and balanced experience of movement competence needs to be effected. As detailed in Chapters 9 and 15 of Whitehead (2010a), movement competence should build from the young child's movement vocabulary described as generic movement patterns. Movement patterns are seen as the building blocks of physical competence and the root of all purposeful physical pursuits. An essential aspect of teaching should be the development of generic

movement patterns so that they become refined and then specific to different activity contexts. This sophistication of movement patterns depends on the application of movement capacities such as balance and control. This honing of movement patterns into activity specific forms is a long-term and challenging enterprise. (Movement patterns and movement capacities are explained more fully in Chapter 4.)

It is proposed that the focus of pre-secondary school experience should be on the confident use of generic and refined movement patterns rather than being concerned with specific patterns. Specificity is needed when the adult form of an activity is engaged in and this is seldom appropriate for the majority of younger learners. It is argued that a curriculum that looks widely at movement competences in relation to, for example, functional body management, expressive body management, manipulative learning and learning in the outdoors, is more appropriate than a curriculum comprised of named activities. Working in these broader categories of movement experience, younger participants can learn through discovery and problem-solving and acquire the necessary co-ordination and control to facilitate later more specific and demanding movement patterns.

In the secondary years of schooling difficult decisions have to be taken on how best to enable all to make progress and at the same time open doors to future involvement in purposeful physical pursuits. This calls for a carefully designed curriculum in school that builds on earlier work in developing movement patterns. In the main the focus will be on fostering the development of movement capacities enabling patterns to develop from refined to specific. Learner involvement in examples of adult physical activities and sports should be introduced as the context for specific patterns to be practised and established. As indicated above, the intention in all this work is to ensure that every learner is being appropriately challenged and making progress. Situations to be avoided are:

- those in which previous work is repeated, for example, the learning outcomes of a lesson on throwing in athletics being the same as those covered in an earlier module or year;
- lessons in which the demands of work are unrealistic, for example the expectation of younger secondary phase learners to play a full game of hockey;
- lessons in which insufficient time is given for specific movement patterns to be established, for example a very brief introduction to the tennis serve with no time for practice and individual guidance, or the challenge in dance to use different levels in movement without enough time to improve control and precision in the execution of the movements identified.

All the above should be avoided as they can engender frustration and disillusionment and hinder the development of motivation and/or confidence.

Teachers have a dilemma: how to introduce learners to a new way of learning, enabling learners to have a more active participation after schooling. The current approach to learners is seldom effective. The current approach is that this approach is either too much emphasizing lifelong participation or too much emphasizing lifelong participation. They are given to a series of demands. We have to revisit old work. Little progress is made, and the current approach is not achieving no

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Teachers have a dilemma here. There is a strong desire in curriculum time to introduce learners to as many adult forms of physical activity as possible, thus enabling learners to have a wide experience from which to select in their participation after schooling. While these sentiments are valid, the outcome for most learners is seldom effective. As discussed by Kirk (2010) there is no evidence that this approach is either fostering motivation in physical education or encouraging lifelong participation in purposeful physical pursuits. Short blocks of time are given to a series of activities with learners rarely getting to grips with the movement demands. When this organisation is repeated year after year, learners have to revisit old work before they can begin to move on to new work. Overall little progress is made, with the danger of learners becoming bored, losing motivation and achieving no gain in confidence.

A new approach will be needed if all are to make progress in their individual physical literacy journey. This is not an easy problem to solve. However one approach would be to see curricular and extra-curricular work as a whole. Curriculum time would be spent on fewer activities that involve learners in participating in different Movement Forms such as the athletic form, the competitive form and the aesthetic and expressive form (these are detailed in Chapter 4). An equal amount of time would be given to each Form, with learners experiencing exemplar activities from each Form. Extra-curricular time would be planned as an extension of curricular work to provide opportunities for all to take part. Some learners may wish to widen their experiences of activities, some may favour doing further work in an area of the curriculum they are finding challenging, while others may want to challenge themselves in competitive and/or team situations. Learners themselves would be free to plan this aspect of the physical education curriculum. (This proposal is discussed fully in Chapter 4.)

In deciding on the content of teaching, teachers should also be mindful of the attributes of physical literacy that

individuals will have the ability to identify and articulate the essential qualities that influence the effectiveness of their own movement performance, and have an understanding of the principles of embodied health, with respect to basic aspects such as exercise, sleep and nutrition.

(Whitehead 2010a: 14)

This knowledge and understanding need to permeate the curricular work with records kept by the teachers of the ways in which this has been covered in each year of schooling with each class. As far as possible these records should be readily available to other teachers so that subsequent teaching can both reinforce and build on earlier consideration of these issues.

This section of the chapter has presented a variety of recommendations, some very challenging, for aspects of teaching physical education in school. All arise from a commitment to the philosophy underpinning the concept of physical

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literacy. It is for the reader to consider both if these are feasible and if, together, they represent a route to enable all to make progress, laying the ground for participation in purposeful physical pursuits throughout the lifecourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the philosophical background to the concept of physical literacy by briefly outlining monist, existential and phenomenological positions. These reveal the centrality of our embodied nature in life as we know it and lead to a clear justification for serious attention to be paid to this human dimension throughout life. The concept of physical literacy was then explained, with a concise definition and a list of the attributes likely to be demonstrated by a physically literate individual. Using these definitions as a background, the value of physical literacy was briefly touched on both from a philosophical standpoint and from the perspective of human flourishing.

The relationship between physical literacy and physical education was then explained as were the ways the concept of physical literacy, with its roots in established philosophical thought, can support the value of physical education in the curriculum. This was followed by a consideration of the pedagogical implications of promoting physical literacy.

Underpinning the views expressed in this chapter is the notion that physical literacy is a disposition relevant to all, throughout life. It is argued that lifelong participation should be at the heart of all work by practitioners with participants in school and beyond. Physically literate individuals, drawing on the motivation, confidence, movement competence and knowledge and understanding they have developed, will be more likely to:

- be energised to be active;
- establish involvement in purposeful physical pursuits as a lifespan habit;
- understand the value of physical activity in maintaining health;
- value purposeful physical pursuits as a part of a full and satisfying life;
- reflect on this value and make informed choices relating to the nature of physical pursuits in which to be involved.

Individuals who have developed these propensities will be highly likely to self-manage their involvement in purposeful physical pursuits and take steps to foster their own physical literacy. This can, without doubt, provide opportunities for a richer, fuller life.

Readers are encouraged to consider where they stand in relation to the potential of physical literacy to add legitimacy to physical education and to debate if the pedagogical approaches suggested to achieve this goal for all learners are apposite and feasible.

Q6

Question

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- 2 A capability Examples o defines cap: (2010a: 18 should not as human capability capability a that in ourselves and (2000).
- 3 Proposition ally involvin
- 4 Purposeful and organis itive team g activities in

Questions for consideration

- Q1 It has been suggested that dualist beliefs work against the appreciation of the importance of work in physical education. Reflect on ways in which you have experienced problems on account of a devaluing of the embodied dimension in comparison with other aspects of education. Construct an argument to advocate the importance of physical education using a monist approach to support your position.
- Q2 Critically consider the concept of physical literacy, debating how far it is legitimate to claim that the concept is grounded in the philosophical views presented in this chapter.
- Q3 Differentiate clearly between physical education and physical literacy, critically considering if physical literacy should be the goal of physical education. What grounds would you identify in your support, or otherwise, of the suggestion that there are advantages in using the term physically literate over the concept of being physically educated?
- Q4 This chapter has stressed that key to physical education is the development of the motivation and confidence to promote continued involvement in purposeful physical pursuits throughout life. Discuss how feasible it is for physical education to achieve this aspiration.
- Q5 Discuss whether the pedagogical approaches suggested above are feasible and have the potential to foster physical literacy in all learners.
- Q6 Critically consider what might be the chief barriers to the acceptance of the concept of physical literacy as the fundamental goal of physical education.

Notes

- 1 For further detail see Whitehead (2010a).
- 2 A capability is the outcome of fostering the potential of a human dimension. Examples of dimensions are cognitive, affective and physical. Nussbaum (2000: 5) defines capabilities as 'what people are actually able to do and to be'. As Whitehead (2010a: 18) explains, Nussbaum 'argues that each capability is valuable in itself and should not be seen as a means to other ends. ... While she does not describe them as human rights she asserts that all humans should be at liberty to exercise each capability and express themselves in ways that they choose. She talks of each capability as being an opportunity for functioning in a fully human way and argues that in nurturing the capability each person should be treated as an end in themselves and not a means to the ends of others'. For further detail see Nussbaum (2000).
- 3 Propositional knowledge is that concerned with theories and cognitive concepts, typically involving statements that express notions that can be true or false.
- 4 Purposeful physical pursuits are understood to include the wide range of developed and organised physical activities within a culture such as dance, swimming and competitive team games. Also included here are activities such as walking, gardening and DIY activities in the home.

