



The importance of others

Specific groups and individuals have particular roles to play in terms of the promotion of physical literacy, and thus the promotion of holistic health and wellbeing. These include, amongst others:

- Parents and carers of young children
- Teachers and coaches
- Carers of the elderly
- Medical and para-medical professionals
- Academic institutions
- Central and Local Government/ Policy Makers

At each stage throughout the life course, engagement in physical activity in varied environments is significant to the experiences of each individual. As such each agency who has a responsibility for the promotion of physical activity can play a key role in providing successful outcomes. Promoting healthy attitudes, dispositions and behaviours that promote lifelong engagement in physical activity will only happen through a multi-agency approach where there is consistent and accurate guidance and messaging. As such colleagues in education, health, care, leisure, transport among others all need to work together to create a coordinated approach to physical activity and health promotion and physical literacy offers the medium to create such collaboration.

Physical literacy key messages

The International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) believe that there are fundamental principles regarding supporting work with individuals, whatever the context, endowment or age of the participants. First of all physical activity should be valued in its own right and it is ultimately the responsibility of each individual to choose physical activity for life. Motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding should be fostered in all physical activity experiences through the promotion of holistic embodied health. Everyone should be welcomed and appreciated as individuals on a unique physical literacy journey and that their progress on this journey should be celebrated.

If we create the appropriate conditions for each individual then we should see the following attributes emerge. These are:

1. Wanting to take part in physical activity
2. Having confidence when taking part in different physical activities
3. Moving efficiently and effectively in different physical activities
4. Having an awareness of movement needs and possibilities in different physical activities
5. Working independently and with others in different physical activities
6. Knowing how to improve performance in different physical activities
7. Knowing how physical activity can improve well-being
8. Having the self-confidence to plan and effect a physically active lifestyle.

In order to facilitate the above it is important that all individuals regardless of their life stage, current health status or endowment are given the opportunity to continue to make progress on their physical literacy journey. Parents and carers of young children, Teachers, Coaches, Carers of the elderly, Medical and para-medical professionals, Academic institutions, Central and Local Government/Policy Makers are crucial to achieving this aim.

In summary, if we can support individuals by encouraging them to embrace physical activity then we would be contributing to the health and wellbeing of the global community. Embracing the concept of physical literacy provides practitioners and personnel from the associated agencies with a clear focus for the promotion of human flourishing, health and wellbeing.

The IPLA work with a range of professionals who have an interest in promoting and nurturing lifelong engagement in physical activity. The Association would be pleased to hear from individuals and organisations who would be interested in learning more about the concept and also becoming advocates of physical literacy within their sector. If you are interested please contact the IPLA (www.physical-literacy.org.uk/contact) for more information.



An Introduction to Physical Literacy

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Choosing physical activity for life

References

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Physical literacy is defined as ‘the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life’ (IPLA, 2017).



The notion of ‘literacy’ within the concept of ‘physical literacy’ arises from the importance of our embodied interaction with the world. It is accepted that we have a range of capabilities such as musical, literary, mathematical etc., which can be developed.

We also have an embodied potential and it is important that policies and mechanisms which are influential in providing opportunities to promote physical activity are coordinated, so that individuals can maintain physical literacy throughout their life. Physical literacy differs from most other literacies in its concern for the affective dimension i.e. motivation and confidence and its focus on lifelong valuing and personal responsibility.

However, it shares reference to the application of skills and knowledge and understanding with most other literacies. Through maximizing movement opportunities during the early years, expanding experience in varied environments throughout formal schooling and providing opportunities throughout life to engage in physical activity, everyone has the potential to make progress on their physical literacy journey.

Origins of Physical Literacy

The term physical literacy has been used for over one hundred years to describe notions such as physical education to enhance the quality of life, physical health and movement vocabulary to name just a few.

The early references were generally from a dualistic point of view where the body and mind were seen as separate entities. The concept of physical literacy has developed significantly over the last twenty years as a result of new research into movement science, embodiment and neuroscience.

As a result physical literacy has moved away from a dualistic point of view and instead now adopts a monist perspective. Monism is the notion that our mind and body are inseparable, interconnected and intertwined, not discrete elements, as dualists would argue.

Physical literacy, informed by monism, leads practitioners to consider the holistic development of individuals engaging in physical activity. This can significantly impact on the intrinsic value of lifelong participation in physical activity and the role this plays in enhancing the quality of each individual’s life.

Physical literacy has only been seriously considered as a result of the extensive development of the concept by Margaret Whitehead

and others since 1993. Current thinking suggests that the concept of physical literacy is based on the importance of individuals interacting with and creating themselves, within their surroundings, relative to their capabilities and perceptions, as they interact with physical environments. This approach is supported by philosophers from existentialist and phenomenological schools of thought.

Existentialism argues that every individual will create themselves as a result of the experiences that they have had interacting with the world. This interaction is, principally, that which takes place in participation in Movement Forms. It is through working within and responding to different situations that individuals will ‘craft’ their uniqueness and develop their potential to thrive.

Existentialism can be used to justify why it is so important that individuals have positive experiences of physical activity in order to realise their full embodied potential. Existentialism is also important in justifying why individuals should experience a wide variety of physical environments in

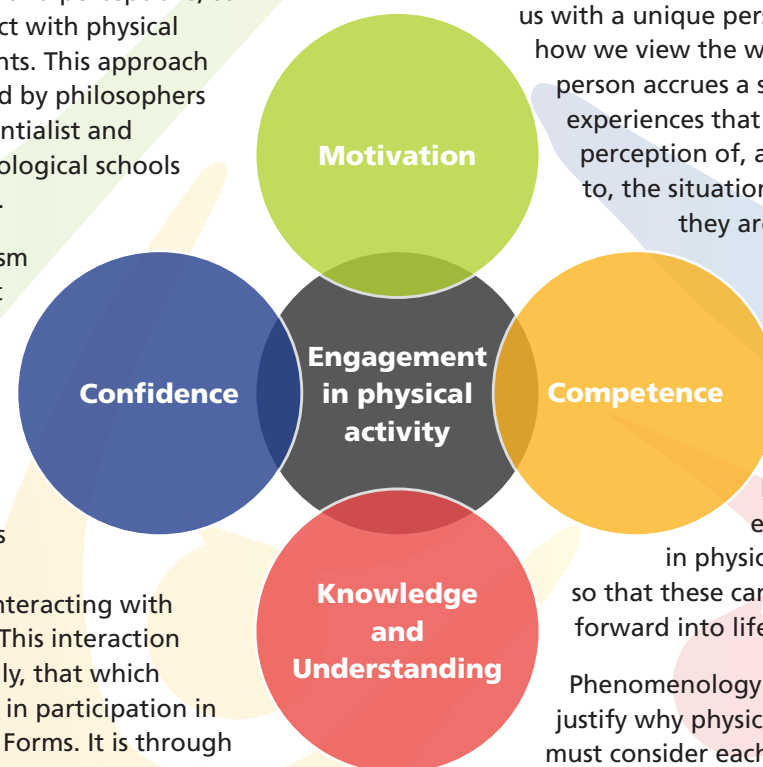
order to maximise their potential to be physically active throughout life.

Phenomenology builds on from existentialism in that it also argues that we are all a product of our experiences and as such this provides us with a unique perspective on how we view the world. Each person accrues a specific set of experiences that colour their perception of, and responses to, the situations in which they are involved.

It is therefore very important that individuals have positive experiences in physical activity so that these can be carried forward into life.

Phenomenology helps to justify why physical literacy must consider each individual as unique and therefore interventions to support individuals engaging in physical activity should consider previous experiences and be inclusive.

Comparison with others is not relevant as each individual brings a unique set of previous experiences to an activity setting. The imprint of these earlier experiences will affect how participants view the challenges set in the future.



The interest in physical literacy has gained considerable momentum in recent years due to the global decline in physical activity levels and the rise of sedentary and inactive lifestyles. Physical activity participation globally continues to decline at an alarming rate; as such alternative methods of engaging the population in lifelong participation in physical activity are being considered with the aim to slow and then reverse this trend and in doing so improve holistic health and wellbeing.

Physical literacy is a concept that challenges the way in which individuals engage in and understand physical activity. The concept is considered to be a novel approach to the promotion of physical activity due to its holistic nature that is rooted within the philosophical ideologies of monism, existentialism and phenomenology.

IPLA Mission

Enable everyone everywhere to understand and embrace physical activity as an integral part of life by nurturing committed participants in a culture that values and promotes physical literacy.