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Physical Literacy as a Journey

Rhys Jones, K. and Green, N.

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5 PHYSICAL LITERACY AS A JOURNEY

Karen Rhys Jones https//orcid.org/0000-0001-6358-2616
Nigel Green http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9395-3921

This chapter will consider why it is beneficial to view individuals on a fluid, ongoing and non-linear physical literacy (PL) journey; how a holistic lens, offered by the underpinning philosophies of PL legitimises the significance of the journey metaphor, and how the concept of an individual's physical literacy can impact an individual and be impacted upon at each stage. Consideration will also be given to how valuing and engaging in physical activity evolves; how it is influenced and impacted upon by factors such as our culture, commitments, environment, experiences and opportunities, as well as by those with whom we interact, including parents, family, peers and practitioners.

Whitehead (2013) proposed that PL should be understood as a personal and ongoing journey, unique to each individual. Building on this idea, Wainwright *et al*. (2016) emphasised the holistic nature of PL, noting that it is a lifelong process influenced by various contexts. Similarly, Taplin (2019) described how the metaphor of a journey encourages reflection on an individual's embodied engagement with physical activity across their lifespan.

Although PL encompasses a broader and more holistic scope than physical education alone, physical education remains a key avenue through which individuals can progress on their PL journey (Giblin *et al*., 2014). For this reason, it is crucial that physical education is delivered in a holistic manner (Sprake and Walker, 2015). Schaerz and Balderson (2020, p. 2) identified frequent, sustained, and diverse physical activity as the "cornerstone of the participants' PL journey." Given the limited time educators have with learners, practitioners and teachers play a critical role in positively shaping and supporting each student's PL journey. Therefore, it is essential that those delivering physical education in schools are equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to effectively nurture physical literacy development.

This chapter will reflect on life stories of individuals, where their stories will be viewed at different stages of their life, from both personal and, where appropriate, professional perspectives. It will consider how individuals at different stages of their lives have been

influenced along their PL journey. This will highlight how positive and negative experiences and opportunities, relative to significant others and events throughout life, can impact on our choice and the chance to engage in physical activity. Individuals' opportunities and early experiences influence their PL journey. And some may face challenges that are forced upon them which are difficult to overcome. Being injured or having commitments that do not allow them to take part in physical activity impacts on their engagement throughout life. Finally, this chapter will consider how, by creating appropriate physical activity environments and experiences, individuals can develop appropriate attributes that encourage lifelong engagement in physical activity.

Stages of a PL journey

Whitehead and Murdoch (2006) identify 6 stages through which most individuals pass during their life course: infancy, childhood; adolescence*;* early adulthood; adulthood; and older age. These stages evolved to pre-school years; foundation/early and primary school years; secondary school years; early adulthood years; older adult years and adult years (Whitehead, 2013b). Whilst terminology and categories around phases and stages of life alter, there remains a chronology through which most individuals pass from cradle to grave.

Using the concept of PL to view a continuous journey enables exploration of an individual's relationship with physical activity as it changes and evolves throughout life. An understanding of PL may explain the reason people choose to engage in or disengage from physical activity. Each journey, throughout the life course, has challenging twists and turns, which impact upon levels of physical activity (Rudd *et al.,* 2020). Appreciation and consideration should be given that we are all on our own personal journey. How we value and engage in physical activity throughout our life is influenced by our eco-system and life incidences. These, along with many other influences and influencers impact upon holistic individuality. This makes an understanding of PL relevant to every individual, no matter who they are or where they are along their journey.

Each journey is a unique, personalised and subjective experience linked to factors including genetics, environmental factors and opportunities (Taplin, 2011). As we enter the world, we have an innate need to engage physically with our environment. Our early experiences, which may be supported by parents, carer givers and early practitioners allows each one of us to

explore our physicality. As we learn to crawl and walk, we develop our confidence and physical competence. If we continue to engage physically in our environment, and have appropriate opportunities, we can develop our knowledge and understanding about how and why we should be physically active and this, in turn, can motivate us to continue to engage. Our disposition to be physically active throughout life, therefore, is influenced by our experiences and there is an opportunity to promote healthy lifestyles whilst nurturing positive engagement and active futures along a lifelong journey (Hughes, 2019).

If we value and enjoy physical activities, they become a regular part of our lives. We may be content maintaining our physical activity engagement at this stage or we may choose to take on other challenges in different or more challenging environments. But it is our choice, and it is influenced by the quality of our previous experiences. Our individualised journeys throughout our lifetime are fluid and dynamic with the possibility of multiple twists and turns as we navigate our way, dealing with opportunities and challenges. A PL journey can be viewed similarly, and reflection on the many and varied situations and considerations over a sustained period of time allow us to view a journey through a PL lens.

Early life, infancy and early childhood: building the foundations

A PL journey begins at birth; whilst it is important to recognise that developments and influences occur prenatally and neonatally, for the purpose of this chapter we will consider the early lives of newborns, toddlers and early childhood as being an important foundational age and the start of a PL journey preschool. Compared to other stages / phases in the life course, children in these early and formative years will experience the greatest and most rapid progress. They develop their physical competence and build up their movement vocabulary. The learning and development of physical skills and development of physical competence and acquisition of basic motor skills can be particularly effective at this time. As new-born babies this relates to survival but then becomes an exploration and interaction as they begin to make sense of their world through movement and building confidence. Early experiences through play and physical activity are crucial; positive encounters with movement will lay the foundations for an active life. The excitement and limitless nature of learning through movement can be seen in the confidence and motivation of ‘I can’ and the energy and enthusiasm of ‘Can I?’

Parents, care givers, groups with informal practitioners and educators play an essential role at this stage in encouraging an active start. Introducing and providing opportunities for children to develop a repertoire of movement, build up their movement vocabulary and develop physical skills and techniques through structured and unstructured play. Whilst growth and development are often sequential, they are not related simply to chronological age, and developing and refining physical skills should always be done in a holistic way. It is imperative that all those involved in contributing to and supporting early movement are aware of the holistic developments and that provision is offered in a supportive and challenging environment.

Childhood and primary school years: building upon foundations

The journey into childhood does not follow a linear path. Each child progresses at their own pace and will be increasingly influenced by genetic predispositions, environmental factors, and personal interests. Children with physical or mental disabilities may also have different challenges to navigate. Some children may develop their confidence, motivation, competence, knowledge and understanding quickly, while others may need more time and encouragement. Importantly, the focus during this stage should be on enjoyment and exploration rather than performance, laying a groundwork of positive associations with physical activity. Teachers play a crucial role in the development of PL (Stoddart and Humbert, 2021) and this stage is an important trajectory for learners for promoting physical activity, decreasing sedentary behaviour and enriching health and wellbeing. Now is an opportunity for further development and refinement of their movement vocabulary within a range of environments.

Within the primary education workforce there are fewer physical education specialist teachers. Time constraints increasingly impact preparation in Initial Teacher Education and continue to be sparse in this curriculum area (Harris *et al*., 2012). In school, physical education sessions are delivered by generalist classroom teachers with an increasing outsourcing of physical education to external individuals, companies and coaches being reported (Smith, 2015). Whilst the latter groups may hold expertise and subject knowledge, they will be limited in offering a holistic approach, especially if associated with specific skills, activities or sports. We should recognise that generalist classroom teachers are usually with their class most of the time and so should be in a position to know and understand each child from a holistic viewpoint. This should enable them to provide more relevant, tailored learning experiences which address the physical, affective, cognitive and social development needs of each child.

Findings from research undertaken with preservice teachers (Rhys Jones, 2025) highlighted the significance of understanding the holistic nature and underpinning theoretical philosophy of PL. It also highlighted a concurrence of both practitioner and learner journeys, with a significance of how reflection, awareness and understanding their own PL journey impacts upon their approach to contribute to their learners' PL journey.

Ideally, this phase should be offering a broad range of activities and learning experiences whilst avoiding early specialism in a particular sport or activity. The development of a movement vocabulary should be framed within holistic approaches, where physical education is given designated and protected time, and practice is informed by physical literacy; systematically addressing the development of the affective, physical and cognitive domains.

Adolescence and secondary school years: dealing with complexities

Teachers continue to play a crucial role during this stage, as for individuals entering adolescence, their PL journey becomes more complex. This stage is marked by significant physical, emotional, and social changes (Uktamovna, 2025) which can influence an individual's relationship with physical activity, both during these adolescent years, but also, more significantly, in the subsequent years. It is essential that individuals receive support to help them successfully navigate this transformative stage which becomes another foundational stage. Adolescents may become increasingly more self-conscious about their abilities and bodies. Heightened self-consciousness can hinder their motivation to engage in physical pursuits which can impact on their engagement in physical activities during and throughout adolescence (Sabiston *et al*., 2022).

School and community programmes play a critical role during this stage by providing diverse opportunities for adolescents to explore and engage in various sports and activities. When cost and accessibility of opportunities beyond school settings may impact on engagement, the educational offer can become the only chance that young people get to take part in sports and physical activity. It is imperative that the educational offer captures interest and enjoyment as well as equipping young people with the skills, knowledge, understanding, motivation and confidence for the future. Offering a variety of options ensures that young people find activities that resonate with their interests and abilities, with the intention of encouraging lifelong

engagement. At this stage, the concept of choice becomes essential; adolescents who feel empowered to select activities that align with their preferences are more likely to sustain active lifestyles. The concept of choice is further challenged when recreational choices are increasingly becoming technological, resulting in increasing habits of sedentary behaviour.

To deal with the complexities of this age phase a PL informed approach will ensure that practice is always considered holistically and facilitated in a way to capture as many different and individual needs and interests as possible. Motivation and confidence are key and recognising the importance of everything teachers and practitioners say, do and organise will increase the likelihood of positive engagement. Variety comes from using models based approaches, pedagogies for learning and the spectrum of teaching styles, which will provide a range of learning environments that enable a range of sports and activities to be experienced in different ways, which in turn allows learners to develop confidence, competence, knowledge and understanding to then take responsibility for engaging in physical activity throughout their lives.

Adulthood: transition and adaptation

Transition into adulthood heralds real independence and the presence or absence of non-compulsory drivers. For the first time in their lives, many individuals will not have to engage in physical activity as part of expected curriculum requirements; in the majority of educational systems physical education is part of the curriculum and therefore compulsory up until the age of sixteen. At this stage, choices will be of an individuals' own volition, and these may be challenged by other recreational or wellbeing options being made which are not related to physical activity. A*s* individuals transition into workplaces and further education, choices will be made and internal drivers will influence and impact upon engagement.

In adulthood, the journey of physical literacy shifts towards adaptation. The demands of work, family, and other responsibilities often compete for time and attention, making it more challenging to prioritise physical activity. Adults may also face barriers such as physical limitations or lack of access to facilities. Nonetheless, maintaining physical activity engagement is crucial for physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life.

Adults often revisit and rediscover physical activities they enjoyed earlier in life or explore new ones, if they have the confidence to do so. For example, someone who enjoyed team sports as a teenager may transition to individual pursuits like running, yoga, or hiking. Having had positive experiences in the early part of life, an individual is more likely to have the confidence and competence in movement to adapt and engage in different activities to fit changing circumstances and abilities as well as transition and modify their physical activity engagement in later life.

Skills and challenges in new or different activities will appear less daunting if individuals believe they will be able to be successful, thus highlighting the connection and importance of previous experiences. If individuals have been equipped through their schooling, they will have broader choice and be less dependent on reliability factors including competence or social aspects. The biggest challenge can be the daunting prospect of attending something new. They will feel more confident to do so if they feel equipped with competence and knowledge to participate.

Later Life: Sustaining Movement and Physical Activity

Many populations continue to extend life expectancy and physical activity remains vital for individuals to navigate healthy aging. In later life older adults should be encouraged to engage in a physically active lifestyle due to its positive impact on mental health and well-being (Wilde, 2014) and maintenance of cognitive function (Engeroff, 2018), Regular physical activity supports mobility, balance, and independence, all crucial for maintaining quality of life and contributing to improved emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Langhammer, 2018).

Moderate physical activities such as walking, swimming, and tai chi help older adults preserve their physical competence. Trips and falls are a leading cause of injury in this population (Baylor, et al.,2023) so exercises contributing to stronger bones and improved stability are beneficial. The journey at this stage emphasises sustainability, focusing on gentle, enjoyable movement that enhances overall well-being. In later life adults may continue, revisit or rediscover physical activities and opportunities, if undertaken within a social context this will foster social connections and may mitigate loneliness.

Grant's (2008) study highlighted that challenges for older people wanting to engage in a physically active lifestyle, which are perceived by many as necessary for good health, moves beyond the functionality of their physical bodies. By 'objectifying and quantifying physical activity' p.818 there is a danger of losing sight of their long lived experiences and rich life histories. In later life the significance of the holistic nature and underpinning theoretical philosophy of physical literacy continues to apply.

Physical literacy journey

Sport Wales' (2014) PL journey poster offers a helpful tool for discussion and opportunity for sense making of the concept, as well as providing an illustration of how precarious each stage might be. The poster represents a fictitious individual who is identified by age points along her life's journey. It illustrates her relationship with physical activity throughout the life course.

<Insert Fig. 5.1 near here>

Figure 5.1: Physical Literacy Journey (Sport Wales)

Opportunities are offered to explore how incidences and individuals might influence a PL journey and affect any ongoing relationship with physical activity. It enables recognition that a PL journey might be straightforward or turbulent depending upon if, and how, opportunities have been experienced. Whilst the life course includes encouragement to be active into later life, the poster also incorporates important messaging around the significance of the early years when positive engagement in meaningful physical activity brings a longer-term range of health benefits (Jones *et al.,* 2020).

A reflection on a life journey highlights how important opportunities, facilities and culture are for impacting an individual's journey; it also presents challenges for practitioners of how they will feature in others' PL journeys and responsibility held in each influencing position. Using the PL journey poster as a discussion tool highlights the importance of individuals' experiences as a contributing factor to engagement in physical activity. As both positive and negative experiences may be reflected upon, it enables consideration of the quality of experiences and who might have influenced them. Whilst a PL journey is individual, the contributions others make is significant (Durden-Myers *et al.,* 2023).

It is imperative for anyone involved in contributing to others' physical activity to consider and improve the experience of the practical offer for their participants as engagement in tasks and the environment will impact upon, and be impacted by, their affective, physical, and cognitive domains. Using the journey activity is an effective way of operationalising the concept, which can subsequently be applied to all practice in all contexts. A further example could be how the journey activity can spark life history reflections, examples of which are covered later in this chapter.

Influencing a physical literacy journey

Our unique experiences and environmental influences mean that everyone's PL journey is different. A life history is an account that is edited by the researcher, who may adopt an interpretive phenomenological approach in unpacking the life story. Goodson (2016, p. 31) highlighted that depicting 'lived experiences into a life story is one interpretive layer, but the move to life history adds a second layer and further interpretation.' PL life histories enable us to reflect on an individual's PL journey and allows us to consider the nature of an individual's lived experience holistically integrating and taking account of physical, affective, cognitive, and social capacities. These will determine whether fulfilling movement and physical activity will be enabled and supported and is relative to an individual's situation and context (Green, *et al*. 2018).

Life history one – Roly

Roly was brought up in a major city and would play in the back yard with his brothers and sisters in his early years. They would sometimes take him to the local park, where he could play on the swings and slides. At a young age, he was allowed to play in the streets with children from the same neighbourhood, as there was not a lot of traffic back then. They would climb the lampposts and play simple games such as hop-scotch and 'Finger, Thumb, Dumb' (a game where one team leapt onto the backs of another, who were leant against a wall, to see if they collapsed or they could hold them up). Roly and other young children were left to play freely in the streets, use their imagination, and be active, and they enjoyed their freedom.

This freedom to explore and play in a local environment with other children, allowed the development of knowledge and understanding of simple games, physical competences in a

range of games, and social qualities to play with others. This was in an environment that encouraged and allowed children to play.

Roly used to walk to school, as his parents were out at work and the school was close by. He would play outside with other children during the morning and afternoon break times, as well as at lunch times, so they had lots of time to be active at school. Roly would play simple playground games such as chase, British bulldog, skipping, and leapfrog. He had some physical training (PT) sessions at school which were run by the local army sergeant in the school yard (outside) and would involve a lot of fitness type exercises which he did not always enjoy. On occasions they had some PE in the school hall which the classroom teacher led and involved them in activities such as dancing and simple gymnastics. Very occasionally, they were taken to the local swimming baths, although there was limited instruction, and the water was often cold, which put him off swimming for a while! Once a year, Roly and some of his fellow pupils took part in an inter-school games competition, which included athletics (high jump) and sack races. One day they were doing PE in the hall and were running on the spot. Roly was not lifting his legs up high enough, so the PE teacher (Army Instructor) slashed him with a cane across the back of his legs. This put him off PE for a while.

Active travel was a must in those days, and it was expected that children would walk or cycle to school. Although PE was very much based on military drill, which could have a negative impact on enjoyment and involved little learning, other experiences would contribute to competence development and self-awareness about what activities were enjoyable.

When he got older, Roly had a pair of roller skates as a Christmas present and used these to go skating at the local skating rink with friends. At the age of fifteen Roly left school and started working 48 hours a week, so had limited time for any sport or physical activity. Roly was given a bicycle at the age of thirteen and brought a second-hand bike when he was sixteen. Most people used bicycles to travel to work and on one occasion, he joined friends and cycled 120km to the coast and back, for a holiday. He was very proud of this achievement, and it encouraged him to join a cycling group who used to meet on a Sunday morning and cycle as a group to different towns. At sixteen he decided to learn to dance (to help him meet the girls) and went to modern dance lessons, learning the quick step, fox trot and waltz. Learning to dance at an early age helped him when he was older as he returned to ballroom dancing in his 70s.

Work impacted at an early age back then; however, active travel led to engagement in lifelong activities. Cultural activities of the time included dancing, and these early positive experiences allowed for a lifetime of engagement.

Roly was called up for National Service in the Army at the age of nineteen. They had to do a lot of physical exercise in the army, such as cross-country running as well as square bashing on the parade ground. He was posted to Jerusalem where he had more opportunities to take part in a wide range of sports, including basketball, snooker, water polo and athletics (shot put, discus and hammer) and he also joined a team in the running events, usually running in the 400 yards. Roly really enjoyed the competition these sports provided, against other teams or individuals.

Provision of a wide range of experiences with the Army, provided a wealth of learning about different sports. It also allowed for the development of competence and confidence in a range of activities as well as embracing the social benefits of engagement in physical activity. These experiences all provided a sound base for future engagement in varied physical activities.

When Roly came out of the Army, he brought a new bike and joined the local Road and Path Cycling Club and used to go out on a Sunday in a group of thirty or more people. He took part in time trials over 25 and 100 miles and went on cycling holidays. Roly really enjoyed the freedom cycling provided, to travel to work, find new places and take part in competitions, as well as the friendship of the group. This emphasises the importance of learning physical activities in physical education that can have lifelong and life wide applicability, as well as the importance of social interactions.

Working in a local factory, Roly had the opportunity to play football in the works team, which he enjoyed. He was then introduced to a new game, rugby, by his future brother-in-law, and he started playing rugby every Saturday at the local rugby club. He enjoyed the training, twice a week, and he particularly enjoyed the social camaraderie at the club. He became captain of one of the teams and played from the age of 24 until he was 48. Roly thought that the friendships established at the club were important in his long-playing career.

With confidence developed in the Army in a range of sports, it was easier to transition into new sports. Once again, the social aspect of team games often provides a motivation to keep engaged in physical activity throughout life.

On meeting his wife-to-be, he was introduced to the sport of badminton and used to play this in his lunchtime in his new job as a lecturer at a local Technical College, where they had a gym. He would play most lunchtimes with his lecturer friends. His enjoyment of badminton encouraged him to join a local tennis club where he played for a few years. Roly continued to play badminton until he was seventy, as the local team he was involved in included everyone, regardless of age or ability. When he retired, Roly continued to swim once a week, and took up short mat bowls, which is an indoor bowling game. He also started playing snooker and in his late 80's as this meant he could meet up with his lifelong friends. He also took up table tennis again as this was an activity he could play quite well and again, he had a group of friends who enjoyed a weekly table tennis session. Into his late 80s, Roly stayed active, looking after his own house and extensive garden. He played bowls twice a week, table tennis once a week and played the guitar and sang in a guitar group. Roly also went ballroom dancing once a week with his partner and friends.

Valuing physical activity engagement and being able to draw from a range of experiences, knowledge and understanding, are clear drivers to motivating individuals to be active throughout their lives. When linked with competition or cooperation, along with social collaboration, the desire to be physically active is often stronger.

Roly introduced his three children to a wide range of sporting activities, such as swimming, tennis, badminton, table tennis, football, and rugby. He always encouraged his children to be active and gave them opportunities to walk in the local hills as well as play for local teams and even go skiing. Roly believed that his interests in physical activities were often prompted by people around him who were interested in particular activities and encouraged him to get involved, or situations he came to be in (such as the Army) where he had the opportunity to try different activities. Roly believed that being involved in sport and physical activities gave him confidence, and opportunities to lead others and be part of teams. He thrived on competition and enjoyed the camaraderie that these activities provided. He enjoyed a range of activities

throughout his life and as he got into old age, he modified his involvement according to his physical capabilities, to make the most of his physical attributes for as long as he could.

Many teachers of PE and coaches providing physical activity experiences will recognise the importance of providing opportunities for young people to be involved in a variety of activities so that they have the potential to be hooked into at least one, which may be the stimulus required for a lifetime engagement.

Life history two - Rosie

Rosie was brought up in the countryside. As a family with dogs, walks were a daily occurrence, she transitioned from observing her environment from a pram to exploring it as a toddler, especially at weekends when her parents were not working. A paddling pool in the garden always brought great excitement, and she would splash and jump and pour water into different containers. This prepared her well for undertaking a water babies' course at the local leisure centre. A visit to local parks with grandparents was a regular occurrence, although they were nervous of allowing her to run around completely freely in this space, she played on the swings, slides and roundabouts. She always liked to attempt some of the 'older children's' trim trail activities and felt great satisfaction as she learned to master some of these.

Physical activity, in terms of walking, was part of the family's life. As she learned to walk, this became part of an adventure with places to explore, fields to run across, puddles to jump in, banks to roll down; all these opportunities developing her physical competence in a range of environments. With access to water activities, she developed her water confidence and enjoyed learning songs and activities alongside other babies and carers. She was learning the parameters of her space and how to master new skills. Grandparents' caution reflected their own experiences, they felt real responsibility, as well as nurturing their connection and relationship with their granddaughter they were determined to enable her to flourish.

Her primary school had a strong physical activity ethos with a range of curricular and extracurricular activities on offer. She enjoyed dance and traditional team sports and experienced success in the school's sports day, which was very competitive. Year on year progress and enjoyment in her PE lessons was dependent on which teacher she was with. The Parents Teachers Association fundraised to pay for playground markings which complemented

some marked out courts. There was a large field on which to play. Out of school, Rosie attended swimming lessons and often engaged in events and activities put on by the local authority sports development team in school holidays, many of which were free. She particularly enjoyed attending a SeaDoo scooter class in the holidays.

The ethos of a school's physical education, physical activity and school sport offer often comes from the head teacher and senior leadership team, and this will be influenced by their own physical literacy journey. Teachers who are or have been 'sporty' may want to pass on their skills or passion to their pupils. However, in their enthusiasm, they might not recognise that not all children share their passion or have the confidence to try. Others, who may not have had positive experiences may avoid teaching the subject or allow their own experiences or perceived lack of competence to colour those of their pupils. In Rosie's experience, the outside space which was developed and created enabled a range of activities to be undertaken offering choice to learners. The physical competence gained by attending swimming lessons opened up further opportunities to develop new competencies and she was learning how to transfer this knowledge and understanding into new activities.

As Rosie transitioned into high school, she recognised that the opportunities she had gained in Primary school stood her in good stead in high school and she felt confident in her ability and application to progress further. Swimming had featured extensively in primary school, and she had taken part in interschool galas, but this no longer featured in the curriculum. She soon became involved in netball and athletics teams but was disappointed that other activities which she had enjoyed considerably in primary school, particularly creative activities such as dance and gymnastics, were not available to pursue. Out of school, she attended a 'learn to row' session and that sparked an interest which would continue for many years. Although she did not enjoy all elements of training, especially seeing 5km scores up on the wall, she thoroughly enjoyed being in a pair or quad out on the water.

By the time many pupils reach high school, some formative experiences are evident. If primary schools do not value physical and sporting activities and schedule sufficient and dedicated time for them, the transition into high school can present a large and challenging gap. Limited and narrow curriculum offers in high schools may further ostracise children and young people from continuing and finding something they enjoy. Experiencing success impacts upon confidence

and motivation so a hierarchy of times and scores which rarely alters position and is listed week on week offers nothing to strive for. However, if ranking is determined by improvement and progress, everyone has something to work towards and success to be gained. The social aspect of physical activity cannot be underestimated; for many, making progress and experiencing success alongside others is part of the enjoyment.

By the time Rosie left compulsory education, her positive habits were well established, and she continued to row and play netball. The latter continued through university and when she started working. She landed awkwardly in a netball match and her injury took her out of sport for a while; she found this difficult and frustrating. On recovery she joined a local gym and decided to train for a triathlon; this was followed by signing up for a marathon. Whilst she has no desire to do another one, she is proud of her achievement, and running continues to feature as part of her wellbeing. She has since joined a local running club and has started to sign up to spin classes in the gym.

Having exposure to a range of physical competences in a range of environments enables transferability and progression. Confidence and motivation results in a willingness to try new pursuits with inspiration and aspiration. Barriers and challenges can be overcome if individuals feel they are equipped to undertake alternative activities.

Rory and Rosie's journeys highlight key considerations for a PL journey as a unique and non-linear lifelong journey. Each person's journey is shaped by their personal experiences, opportunities, and influences. PL involves physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth and development. Foundational influences come from early experiences framed by family, caregivers and teachers, and engagement is further shaped by social and environmental factors including peers, culture, access to facilities. Life events such as injuries, transitions and responsibilities can both disrupt or encourage participation.

Final considerations

PL is not just about skills, but a lifelong, evolving relationship with movement, shaped by experiences, support systems, and environments. A holistic, individualised approach is key to fostering sustained engagement in physical activity across all life stages. PL is not a destination

that has a definitive end which can be achieved or accomplished but instead is considered as an ongoing journey that can always be developed further (Durden-Myers *et al*., 2018; Green *et al*., 2018). PL is a dynamic and personal process, marked by continuous growth and adaptation. It evolves as individuals encounter new challenges, opportunities, and life stages. At each phase the importance of holistic consideration and physical literacy informed practice should be considered. Recognising PL as a journey highlights the importance of fostering a positive relationship with movement at every age, celebrating progress, and embracing the joy of being active. At each phase / stage there will be intrinsic and extrinsic determinants impacting upon and influencing individuals' perceptions. Whether through play, structured sports, or everyday activities, the journey of PL is one of empowerment, enrichment, and lifelong engagement with movement.

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