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PHYSICAL LITERACY – FROM CONCEPT TO ACTION:

The International Physical Literacy Association Guiding Dumfries and Galloway

Nigel Green [afPE Member], **Andy Sprake**, **Chris Topping** and **Jo Kopela**

After attending a physical literacy workshop two years ago, Chris Topping (Director General of Health and Wellbeing in Dumfries and Galloway) was so inspired by the concept that he explored the potential to underpin the work of the Dumfries and Galloway community with physical literacy. At the time, the International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) was developing a Foundation Course and agreed to travel to Scotland to support the development of the 'concept in action'. After much discussion it was agreed that involving policy makers, teachers and parents within a community would help to encourage joined-up thinking and a systems-level approach. This involved three different workshop sessions over a two-day period, concluding with a final review session with representatives from the three sessions.

Physical literacy, as agreed by the IPLA (2014), is "the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life". Scotland has been very proactive with the introduction of the *Active Scotland Outcomes Framework* (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/Sport/Outcomes-Framework>) which complements the focus of physical literacy in relation to encouraging and enabling the inactive to be more active throughout life, developing confidence and competence, and providing opportunities and infrastructures that allow individuals to engage in physical activity, all of which impact on the wellbeing of individuals within a community. Dumfries and Galloway has the lowest proportion of adults meeting the Chief Medical Officers' (CMO) guidelines in Scotland and only 22 per cent of the local school pupils are meeting the recommendation of 60 minutes of physical

activity a day. Chris was keen to explore how Dumfries and Galloway could work with the IPLA and use the concept of physical literacy to underpin the goals of 'activity for life' and develop a more active community.

Kelly Devine, who is Head Teacher of two primary schools (Wigtown and Kirkcowan), was similarly interested in integrating physical literacy into the daily life of her school communities. Discussions between Kelly and Chris generated an aspiration to include as many teachers, support staff and parents as possible in workshop sessions so that they could consider how the concept of physical literacy could underpin a focus on physical activity for all. With a strategic focus, Chris set up the first session in Dumfries, which had representation from all settings within *A More Active Scotland (Physical Activity Implementation Plan)* and invited policy makers from education, schools, universities, wellbeing, environment and planning, sustainable travel, leisure and sport and community safety. This initial session consisted of a three-hour workshop that included a presentation on the concept of physical literacy and time to consider how the concept could underpin future developments within the Dumfries and Galloway community. This session also considered how to support effectively the development of a new physical activity strategy for the region. A two-hour presentation/workshop session was provided later in the day, with teachers from both schools, and a one-hour presentation/workshop session with parents and support staff from the schools was undertaken the following morning. A final two-hour session then considered the responses and suggestions made by all three groups, along with common threads that could provide guidance for future development.

Engaging with a wide range of people over two days also provided an opportunity for research into their understanding of the concept pre- and post-session and allowed the individuals involved to consider how they could develop their own and others' physical literacy in the future. Asking the participants what they understood by the term 'physical literacy' prior to the session resulted in 40 per cent indicating they had no idea, 28 per cent relating the term to physical activity for life, 10 per cent to motivation and competence, 7 per cent to physical play and 5 per cent to each of holistic education, fundamentals of movement, and linking to learning literacy. This does indicate that the term 'physical literacy' is not a commonly used term and also has quite a varied range of interpretations. However, after the sessions, feedback from all groups indicated that participants appreciated the holistic and uniquely personalised characteristics of the concept. Eighty-eight per cent of the participants also expressed their understanding of the importance of developing confidence, competence and motivation and the value of being physically active for life. This was further supported by their appreciation of the necessity to provide opportunities for individuals to develop their physical, affective and cognitive domains within varied environments as part of their life-long journey.

Each session started with a consideration of why people take part in physical activity and why increasing involvement in physical activity would be beneficial for the population as a whole. It then considered how our embodied interaction with the physical predates language and how words we have used, including movement, locomotion and activity, capture performative aspects but do not describe



the holistic nature of physical literacy, which also includes the cognitive and affective aspects (Jurbala, 2015). The session then clarified that we have an innate human capacity for embodied communication with the physical environment and that physical literacy involves productive interaction with the world which creates literacy. Capitalising on our motile potential to develop as an individual is the focus of physical literacy.

A brief review of the philosophy underpinning physical literacy (monism, existentialism and phenomenology) was then undertaken so that the participants had an appreciation of the rigorous philosophical basis of physical literacy. This briefly clarified that monism (holistic) considers our mind and body as being inseparable, interconnected and intertwined, as opposed to the dualist view that mind and body, although connected, are also separate. It was emphasised how existentialism (personalised) suggests that individuals create themselves as they live and interact with their world. Finally it was highlighted that phenomenology (subjective) proposes that individuals perceive the world from their unique perspective based on their previous experience. Practical examples were used to highlight the relevance of these three philosophies to our physical interactions with the world.

The equal importance of the three domains (physical, affective and cognitive) was shared and the emphasis on the importance of experiencing physical activity in varied environments was also discussed.

Participants then reflected on their experiences of physical activity throughout their life, more specifically to significant instances that affected their involvement in physical activity: who or what had influenced them and how. This provoked significant discussion and linked effectively into the participants considering how a timeline could reveal their personal physical literacy journey to date and how each journey was unique with twists and turns according to changing circumstances. The consideration of a timeline also emphasised the importance of reflections being based on ipsative (comparison with themselves) judgements rather than comparisons to others.

Each group was then asked to consider what they would do personally to develop their own physical literacy and what they could do to develop others' physical literacy. The individual comments shared included expressing a desire: to continue with current physical activity; to improve work/life/exercise balance; to engage in more varied activities; to find other activities to enjoy; to appreciate progress made; and to build more physical activity into life generally. When considering their role in developing others' physical literacy, the policy makers were keen to incorporate physical literacy within their policies and practice, both locally and nationally. They indicated a desire to share an understanding and awareness of physical literacy across their communities. Promoting physical activity in the workplace and removing barriers were also considered to be priorities. The

teachers highlighted encouraging pupils to be more responsible and schools providing a wider range of activities for pupils. Maintaining and enhancing extra-curricular provision and removing barriers related to participation, for example transport within rural communities, were also believed to be important by the teachers. Overall, promoting enthusiasm, encouragement, support and opportunity was a shared desire by both teachers and parents. The parents supported many of the points above but also stressed the importance of being a positive role model and engaging in family activities that allowed their children to develop confidence, competence and self-esteem.

Each of the groups was given a different task at the end of the session, with the policy makers being asked to consider the link between physical literacy and the *Active Scotland Outcomes* and how this could be developed and monitored. The teachers were asked to consider how they could improve physical education lessons, extra-curricular activities, play/lunch times, the school working environment, community provision, and travel to and from school. The parents were asked to consider how the concept of physical literacy could be shared more effectively within the school community. Their conclusions are listed here:

- ✓ Physical literacy should be at the core of a community's development and opportunities should be provided to increase understanding of the concept, so as to empower everyone everywhere to engage in physical activity for life.

- ✓ Start small and then positively influence others for growth. By trialling various approaches to the development of physical literacy within a community, it will be possible to build evidence of what is effective in promoting physical activity for life. This approach should be supported by systematic research.
- ✓ We should recognise and value the range of purposeful physical activities, from gardening to sports pursuits, which are encompassed within physical literacy.
- ✓ It is important to recognise and respect each individual's starting point and capability to make progress within the physical, affective and cognitive domains.
- ✓ Barriers may restrict an individual's ability to engage in regular physical activity, so it is essential to look at who, what, why, where and how it is possible to overcome these barriers in relation to both systems and attitudes.
- ✓ Communities should identify and clarify their current provision and facilities and the potential opportunities available and then inform people of the opportunities to be more physically active.
- ✓ The current position of inactivity should be challenged and positive action should co-ordinate the growth of opportunities for the individuals within the community to be active for life.
- ✓ Community champions (role models, leaders, ambassadors) should be encouraged to enlist support from the whole community in creating more opportunities to be physically active.
- ✓ Models of good practice (case studies) should be shared between communities so that others can consider how to make an impact within their own community.
- ✓ Develop a coordinated strategy within a community that is effectively communicated and promoted using a variety of media and settings.
- ✓ Adopt an integrated, holistic and supportive approach that involves education, leisure, health, travel etc.
- ✓ Develop a means of measuring and celebrating success to ensure progress is being made in engaging the community to be more physical active.
- ✓ Promote the recording and celebrating of achievement and progress that individuals and groups will be proud of.

The individuals involved in the sessions agreed that physical literacy is an excellent concept that, when clearly explained, can provide a clear and genuine focus which people are willing to embrace. If sharing the concept is undertaken sensitively and purposefully, this will motivate individuals to enhance their own and others' personal development and growth through regular involvement in physical activity. Actions that embed and integrate the concept of physical literacy into strategy and practice will build consensus and promote wider public health and wellbeing.

The final working group believed that the concept of physical literacy needs to be marketed effectively by making it simple to understand by all whilst maintaining its integrity. They considered it important that co-ordinated efforts by communities will allow the concept to be adopted and this will result in regular physical activity being embraced by all.

The community of Dumfries and Galloway has made a start by embracing the concept and it is interesting to see Wales, New Zealand, Canada, America and, more recently, India are all channelling energy into making physical literacy a focus for physical education and for life. Perhaps it is now time for the government of the English education system to take a serious look at physical literacy and the potential it has to change lives in the future. ■

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