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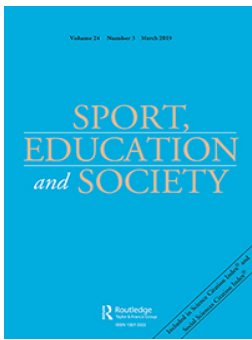
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The fantasmatic logics of physical literacy

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ABSTRACT

The history of physical education has seen the embracing of practices that have promised idealized scenarios and visions of the future. These practices are in many respects ideological and this paper explores the ideological workings in physical education with a particular focus on physical literacy. The purpose is to articulate and discuss a set of discursive logics in research and policy on physical literacy in terms of what is claimed in its name. We draw on the logics of critical explanation framework and use recent research, policy documents and organisational web pages on physical literacy to identify the *social and political logics* that underpin the practice. Specifically employing the concepts beatific and horrific narratives, we explore the *fantasmatic logics* of physical literacy to reveal the shared ideological workings of this collection. Fantasmatic logics is applied to grasp the visions of what will come to pass if physical literacy is, or is not, implemented in sports and physical education. Together, the logics reveal an increasing seduction of physical literacy and its operation as an all-inclusive grand narrative through the hopes and fears that policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders attach to the practice of physical literacy. In contrast to previous ideologies in physical education where the horrific narratives were strong, it is an over-investment in beatific narratives that is at the core of physical literacy. It seems to be enacted in a relation between ideals and measurement, and in policy the narratives with grand promises of physically literate citizens also seem more opportunistic, not seldom ignoring conflict without recognition that the claims made are incommensurable. This erasure of conflict can become problematic if we don't continue the debate around what physical literacy reasonably can be held accountable for. Otherwise the well-intended beatific narratives risks over-investment and as a consequence ideological closure.

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Introduction

Historically, physical education (PE) has embraced practices that promise an idealized scenario in terms of, for example, moral and aesthetic development, the building of national identity, or a healthy and fit population seeking to achieve national health objectives through exercise-oriented programs. These practices are in many respects ideological and this paper seeks to further explore ideological workings in PE, with a particular focus on a recent practice that has attracted attention, namely physical literacy.

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Our interest stems from a curiosity about the wide-spread advocacy and use of physical literacy and its increasing purchase in sport and PE. In this paper, we seek to contribute to scholarship that asks how and why particular ways of doing PE motivate investment while others do not.

To this end, our purpose here is to articulate and discuss a set of discursive logics in research and policy on physical literacy to examine what is claimed in its name. We draw on Glynos and Howarth's logics of critical explanation framework (2007) to explore the case of physical literacy, consider what an approach that interrogates *different* logics might reveal, and discuss what promises the practice of physical literacy can reasonably be held accountable for in PE. We are, therefore, not aiming to criticize the achievements that have been secured in the name of physical literacy through research, policy or practice, and we are not defending an alternative ideological position. Instead, we are interested in contributing a voice to the advocacy in reviews of physical literacy that we are in a 'critical period for intellectualization of the construct' (Cairney et al., 2019b, p. 79).

Ideologies of physical education

The history of PE has seen the embracing of practices that have promised idealized scenarios and visions of the future, albeit with national and contextual variations that nonetheless demonstrate significant similarities (e.g. Gard & Wright, 2005; Kirk, 2010; McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2009; Tinning, 2012). Tinning (2012) maintains that in later years PE as sport, games and exercise, is remarkably similar across cultures, and that the institutionalised practice of PE have been exported universally as a collection of ideas relating to sports (e.g. Kirk, 2010), multi-activity programs (e.g. Siedentop, 1998), health-based exercise (e.g. Green, 1998; Lynch, 2019), and PE as an academic subject with debates over the naming of the discipline (e.g. Lawson, 2007).

As Kirk (2010) and Tinning (2012) both highlight, these ideas are ideological (in a Glynos and Howarth sense) in terms of being 'seductive' practices promising to move towards utopian visions through narratives of ideal futures (so-called beatific narratives), and away from catastrophic scenarios through narratives of disaster or crisis (so-called horrific narratives). This potentially leads to closure of possibilities through an over-investment in narratives of hope and fear (see e.g. Lorusso & Richards, 2018; Stolz, 2014). Horrific narratives of a nation in decay and beatific narratives of a strong nation state often accompanied early advocacy of school PE. A dominant horrific narrative often revolved around threats posed by a mechanisation of society and endeavours to produce, as Kirk (2010) reminds us, 'a population of productive but compliant workers and citizens' (p. 20). PE understood as sport and sport techniques (Kirk, 2010), maintains much of the horrific 'declining youth' narrative. As Tinning and Kirk inform us, this problem should be solved through doing sport, given an 'assumption that the teaching and learning of sport techniques [...] are of such central importance that these activities define the purpose of physical education' (Kirk, 2010, p. 45). The beatific narratives in many countries' PE policy, further promise physical, social, affective, cognitive benefits including character building, cooperation, being a good sport and healthy competition for youth who engage in programs of school PE.

In PE as exercise, a horrific narrative revolves around inactivity and sedentary behaviours, with far-reaching pedagogical consequences (Evans et al., 2008). As Hawkins (2008) argues:

One main driving force behind the current societal interest in health and wellness is the seemingly exponential rise in health care costs, an expense born to one degree or another by the citizenry [...] Because physical activity, or actually the lack thereof, contributes to the health care crisis, our profession often defines its *raison d'être* in such material terms. (p. 347)

According to Hawkins this preoccupation with health and well-being as a seductive notion of PE has been at the cost of meaning and play in movement. Lately, PE as exercise has been further enmeshed within obesity discourses where young people are positioned as at risk (Gard & Wright, 2005; McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2009), and highly vulnerable given their physical inactivity and 'addiction' to computers, social media and high-fat food. More recently, there has been increasing advocacy of PE as a pre-eminent school-based strategy for countering the emerging wellbeing crisis amongst

youth. As Lynch (2019) argues, the ‘question is no longer whether or not physical activity enhances children’s wellbeing, this is axiomatic, rather it is ‘how’ regular quality PE classes can act as a platform for wellbeing in all schools, for all children’ (p. 1).

It is within this rich heritage of discourses, claims and counter claims encompassing PE that the notion, and privileging, of physical literacy has evolved. Indeed, since Margaret Whitehead (2001) reintroduced the concept of physical literacy to the field, it has gained extensive and global interest. The concept is now at the forefront of several PE and sport policies (see Edwards et al., 2018). Moreover, a substantial and expanding body of scholarship addresses the concept, exploring: its different philosophies (Durden-Myers & Whitehead, 2018; Pot et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2018); definitions (Hyndman & Pill, 2018; Shearer et al., 2018; Jurbala, 2015; Cairney et al., 2019a; 2019b; Lundvall, 2015); origins (Cairney et al., 2019a; Young et al., 2019); practices (Corbin, 2016; Robinson et al., 2018); policies (Dudley et al., 2017; Roetert & MacDonald, 2015; Shearer et al., 2018); measurements (Cairney et al., 2019b; Edwards et al., 2018); understandings and misunderstandings (Robinson et al., 2018), including a burgeoning number of special issues on physical literacy (e.g. Dudley et al., 2019; Durden-Myers & Whitehead, 2018). In this paper, we build on the insights of current scholarship through our application of a critical theoretical lens in terms of social, political and fantasmatic logics.

Analytical framework: logics of critical explanation

Theoretically, this paper takes its starting point in the post-structuralist ontology of political discourse theory, which conceptualizes discursive practices as constitutive of society and social relations. Of particular importance is that discursive practices are regarded as interchangeably stable and contingent, suggesting that practices, while mostly operating smoothly and coherently through hegemonic consent, remain subject to being dislocated (i.e. disrupted) in moments of political contestation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Here, we understand political contestation in ontological terms as the ubiquitous *possibility* of us-and-them relations being established around (or in) any given societal matter, including sports and PE (Evans & Davies, 2017; Tinning, 2019). However, as all societal issues are not contested simultaneously, discursive practices involve an interplay between stability and contingency that lends itself to empirical inquiry. In this study we investigate a particular set of such practices, namely research and policy informing the practice of physical literacy.

Our investigation employs the logics of critical explanation framework (LCE) developed by Glynos and Howarth (2007). This framework provides a collection of concrete analytical tools designed to aid scholars in studying the ways discursive practices function. For Glynos and Howarth, ‘logics’ is the framework’s most central concept as it denotes ‘[...] *the rules or grammar of the practice, as well as the conditions which makes the practice both possible and vulnerable*’ (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 136, italics in the original). In this respect, logics is a concept that directs the researcher’s attention towards the internal articulatory workings of a set of practices. Put more plainly, the framework calls for outlining the guiding principles of discourse that make the investigated practices operate, or ‘tick’, the way that they do. Within their framework, Glynos and Howarth (2007) distinguish between three kinds of logics – social, political and fantasmatic – which are each used to highlight different dimensions of a studied set of practices.

First, the *social logics* concept is employed to characterize the discursive coherence of practices. For Glynos and Howarth (2007), every practice relies to some extent on recurring discursive patterns, or ‘*regularity in dispersion*’ (p. 139, italics in the original), that define what counts as intelligible and ‘proper’ knowledge. To function coherently and smoothly, every practice thus contains some elements or statements that are generally accepted and not questioned. In applying the concept of social logics, a researcher’s task is to identify articulatory regularities and sedimented assumptions that constitute a practice’s commonly held truths. In this context, sedimentation refers to the *absence* of political contestation and participants’ acceptance of a practice as self-evident. Put succinctly, using social logics entails a seeking out of a practice’s stability and unity in terms of what is unequivocally taken for granted (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). As such, we apply the concept to outline the

socially shared and sedimented assumptions about physical literacy that afford it a measure of permanence in contemporary research and policy on sports and PE.

In stark contrast to social logics, the concept of *political logics* is designed to account for how practices are dislocated in moments of contestation, and shown to be fundamentally contingent. Contestations involve a discursive simplification whereby the plurality of arguments, interests and identities enmeshed in a practice are arranged into two opposing camps (us-and-them), separated by a clearly defined boundary. On each side of the boundary, arguments, interests and identities are merged as equivalent in the face of their shared negation or opponent. In short, practices increasingly operate according to a political logic when relations of us-and-them are established and/or strengthened through the dominance of equivalence over difference. Conversely, practices move in the direction of being *de-politicized* when differences dominate, i.e. when constellations of us-and-them are weakened as arguments, interests and identities are kept wholly distinct and separate (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Thus, the concept of political logics is applied to analyse instances where a practice (or some element of it) is questioned and fought over by two camps that mobilize in opposition to each other. For the specific purpose of this paper, political logics is subsequently used to determine if and how physical literacy is a contested notion in PE research and policy.

Finally, Glynos and Howarth's (2007) concept of *fantasmatic logics* is utilised to grasp why individuals invest themselves in a given practice. Fantasmatic logics pertain to the ideological grip that practices hold in their discourse. Here, we find it necessary to make an important distinction as the term ideology can have many meanings. For Glynos and Howarth (2007), 'ideology', and consequently the concept of fantasmatic logics, does not refer to a false consciousness on behalf of the subject. Instead, it is understood as an articulatory function that covers up the inherent contingency of practices. Hence, in the present paper ideology is not understood as beliefs that distort the supposedly 'true' state of things, but in the spirit of Glynos and Howarth's (2007) definition, as the primary mechanism through which individuals are rendered complicit in ignoring the possibility of alternative means of enacting their practices (Clarke, 2012; Howarth et al., 2016; Glynos, 2008).

Furthermore, Glynos and Howarth (2007) argue that fantasmatic logics work through beatific or horrific narratives as follows:

[...] fantasy operates so as to conceal or close off the radical contingency of social relations. It does this through a fantasmatic narrative or logic that promises a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome – the beatific dimension of fantasy – or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable, which might be termed the horrific dimension of fantasy. (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 147)

In this sense, the term 'fantasmatic' signifies a particular understanding of ideology grounded in the notion of a decentred subject that, through its participation in discursive practices, is interchangeably promised and denied a mythical fullness, either in terms of an ideal society or an ideal life (Glynos, 2008). Or put in layman's terms for the purpose of this paper, fantasmatic logics pertain to the utopian and dystopian visions of what will occur if physical literacy is or is not, implemented in sports and PE programs. For the present inquiry, this analytical concept is thus applied to capture the many hopes and fears that policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders come to attach to the concept of physical literacy. We accordingly use fantasmatic logics to account for why research and policy continuously engage in promoting physical literacy.

In sum, the present study makes use of the LCE framework to address three research questions, each informed by the analytic purpose of the social, political and fantasmatic logics as outlined above. The questions are:

- (1) What socially shared and sedimented assumptions about physical literacy underpin the concept's permanence in contemporary research and policy?
- (2) How, and in what sense, is physical literacy positioned as a contested concept in research and policy?
- (3) Why, or through which beatific and horrific narratives, do research and policy continuously engage in promoting physical literacy?

By addressing these questions, and particularly the third one, we aspire to lay bare the discursive conditions that grant physical literacy a prominent, yet vulnerable, position in current research and policy.

Given our objective to examine what is claimed in the name of physical literacy, we conducted a close read of a purposive sample of recent reviews, research articles, and digital and hardcopy policy documentation focusing on physical literacy. This involved a cascading process of literature identification, more organic than would be typical of a systematic review that relies more on digital platforms and metrics. Our intention is not to appraise a representation of *all* physical literacy research or policy, but a purposive sample to reveal a dominant constellation of logics *typically evident* in research and policy.

Initial literature searches were conducted during 2019 using the search terms 'physical literacy' and 'physical education' in abstracts of peer-review journals between 2015 and 2019 in the EBSCO and Google Scholar data bases, in order to generate a purposive sample of physical literacy practice that recently attracted attention in/through PE research.¹ We initially included articles that had a primary focus on physical literacy with explicit articulations on what physical literacy is 'promising'.² We further searched for previous articles and frequently cited policy documents. Thus, in addition to the principle of a purposeful sampling, we also followed a 'snowballing procedure'. All included texts were subsequently cross-referenced and reviewed purposively according to the logics framework. Papers or policy statements that simply replicated others' commentary or failed to offer an original perspective, were excluded from the texts used in this article. In total 21 articles were analysed³, from which policy documents were chosen according to their authoritative status through frequent references in the selected research articles (e.g. Corbin, 2016; Jurbala, 2015), review studies of physical literacy (e.g. Edwards et al., 2018; Hyndman & Pill, 2018; Young et al., 2019) and/or previously analysed in studies of definitions of physical literacy (e.g. Shearer et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019). For included policy documents see references.

All texts were analysed using the five analytical steps associated with the LCE framework, as suggested by Howarth and colleagues (2016).

- (1) *Problematization* – framing and demarcating the object of study, in this case, the practice of physical literacy.
- (2) *Retroduction* – conducting an initial 'to-and-fro engagement with empirical data' (p. 100) from the point of view of our theoretical construct.
- (3) *Logics* – applying the concepts of social, political and fantasmatic logics on the selected articles and policy documents to answer our research questions.
- (4) *Articulation* – linking and re-naming the different logics according to the most prolific patterns present in the data, thereby modifying and problematizing our understanding of the plurality of physical literacy.
- (5) *Critique* – using the empirically discerned logics to reveal the contingencies and exclusions implied in physical literacy as well as to discuss its movement towards ideological closure.

In the following section, we present our findings, ensuring that we faithfully demonstrate the collective analytic potential of all three logics within the LCE framework, but dedicating more attention to fantasmatic logics in our quest to understand why particular ways of doing PE motivate investment.

Social logics of physical literacy: holism, movement competency and lifelong healthy living

The social logics of physical literacy (i.e. the permanence, stability, shared assumptions) in research seeks to establish a commonly held certainty about the usefulness of physical literacy in PE and youth sport. Typically, physical literacy encompasses aspects from affective, physical and cognitive

domains (see Young et al., 2019) as illustrated by International Physical Literacy Association’s (IPLA) popular definition that physical literacy is the:

... motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and engage in physical activity for life (IPLA, 2017).

Research reveals a discursive coherence about physical literacy as the development of movement competencies in various contexts leading to lifelong movement; positive affect like self-esteem and motivation to be physically active; and, cognitive knowledge about movement. What appears uncontested, is that physical literacy involves various movement competencies and skills and that increased engagement in physical activity leads to improved health in terms of life-long safe engagement in physical activity (see Cairney et al., 2019a; Corbin, 2016; Dudley, 2018; Dudley et al., 2017; Edwards et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019).

In policy, the discursive coherence of physical literacy practice is even broader in scope than in research. SHAPE America describes physical literacy as the ‘ability, confidence and desire to be physically active for life’ (p. 9), and thus leads to life-long enjoyment of healthful physical activity. A recurrent claim is that physical literacy involves affective, physical, cognitive and behavioural aspects, integrating physical, psychological, cognitive as well as social capabilities. This taken for granted all-embracing and holistic notion of physical literacy is prominently illustrated in the Australian Physical Literacy Framework where a sizeable number of elements – from movement skill performance to the understanding of cultural values – contribute to every individual’s development in four distinct domains of physical literacy.

In policy, the basis for all physical literacy is embodied knowledge and individual competency in a variety of movement skills like running, skipping, climbing, walking, balance, weight transfer, or specific skills like throwing or catching, or competence in activities like dancing, swimming, games or sports allowing people to ‘move on land, water, snow or ice’ (Australia 2, p. 14). As it is taken for granted in policy that physical literacy goes beyond the physical, it becomes intelligible to also include, for example, ‘knowledge of concepts, principles and tactics related to movement and

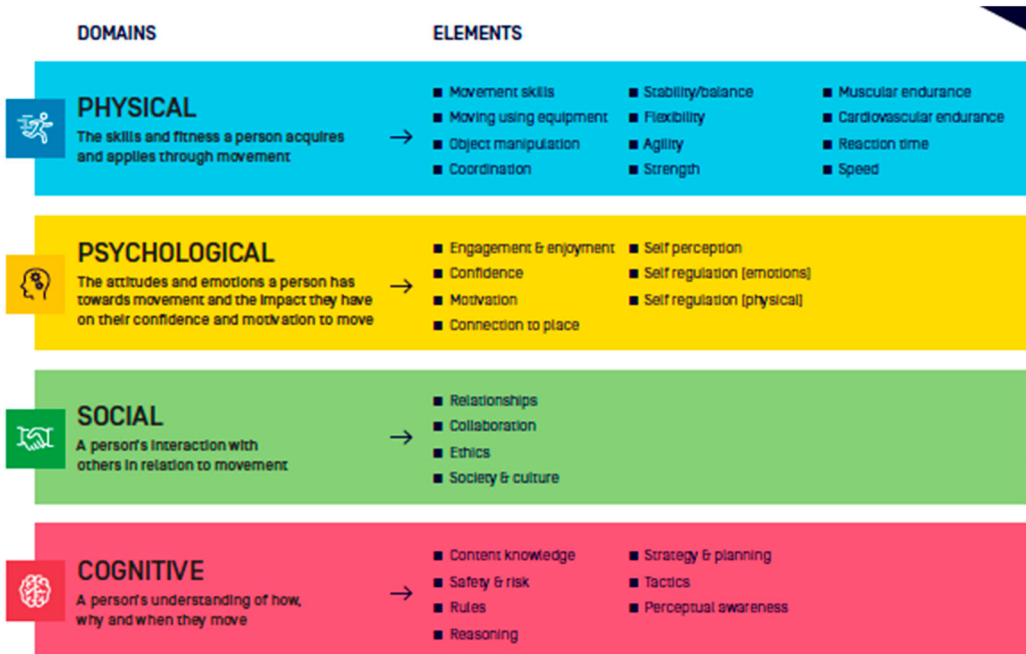


Figure 1. Australian Physical Literacy Framework (p. 8).

performance’, ‘knowledge ... to achieve health-enhancing levels of physical activity and fitness’ and an ability to recognise ‘the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, and challenge’ (USA 2). Such theoretical knowledge can, therefore, incorporate health-related knowledge about physical activity, fitness and nutrition (USA 2; Canada 4), but also knowledge about rules and tactics in competitive sports (Australia 2, USA 2), such as the application of ‘basic offensive and defensive strategies and tactics’ (USA 2, p. 15), or ‘applying the rules of games correctly and appropriately’ (Australia 2, p. 54).

The discursive coherence in policy regarding the anticipated outcome of physical literacy development, exemplified by UNESCO as ‘the development of healthy, able and active citizens’, is invariably presumed. Across the literature, the articulatory regularities and sedimented assumptions constituting commonly held truths about physical literacy are that development of physical literacy leads to increased physical activity throughout life, which inevitably leads to better health. Physical activity is assumed to be a natural desire in human beings and enjoyment of movement, together with competence and understanding, is identified as the critical driver of an individual’s motivation to ‘always want to be physically active’ (Wales 1).

Political logics of physical literacy: meaningful experience versus quantifiable asset

Political logics are about the conflicts and contestations that permeate a practice. As Shearer and colleagues (2018) argue, there are several inconsistencies and conflicts within the physical literacy research community, where competing understandings of the concept are put forward, often with incompatible definitions (see Cairney et al., 2019a, 2019b; Edwards et al., 2018; Hyndman & Pill, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019). In research, physical literacy appears to be arranged in two opposing camps with clear boundaries between what has been called idealist and a pragmatic approaches to physical literacy. According to Cairney and colleagues (2019b), these positions build on existentialism on the one hand and positivism on the other (see also Edwards et al., 2018), but the differing positions have also been described in terms of a philosophically founded vs. a more opportunistic approach (Pot et al., 2018). As a consequence of these two opposing research camps, contestation over defining and determining what to include and/or exclude in practice, as well as when physical illiteracy occurs is evident (e.g. Pot et al., 2018; Shearer et al., 2018). In addition, there are enduring and contentious debates as to whether or not physical literacy can be measured as health-related fitness, movement skills or both (Edwards et al., 2018; Tremblay & Lloyd, 2010), and if physical literacy should be established as the goal of PE or simply replace PE all together (Hyndman & Pill, 2018; Roetert & MacDonald, 2015).

At one end of the debate, physical literacy is embedded in its philosophical foundations (Shearer et al., 2018), valuable in its own right and positioned as holistic, with inseparable dimensions (Durden-Myers & Whitehead, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2018). Physical literacy from this position is viewed as a process that cannot, as such, be measured. In some of this scholarship, there is concern that the concept is becoming lost (Durden-Myers & Whitehead, 2018; Shearer et al., 2018), with Jurbala (2015) arguing that focusing on measurable outcomes diminishes physical literacy to nothing more than physical activity and movement skills. Or to speak with Glynos and Howarth (2007), this camp establishes equivalence between several interests and arguments – intrinsic value, process orientation, anti-assessment – that are joined together in the face of those who try to contest physical literacy as a philosophical project.

In stark contrast, the opposing camp argues that evidence-based practice and accountability is imperative, and physical literacy is often viewed as the outcome of what is done in practice. As a consequence, physical literacy becomes a clearly defined and excluding practice that can and should be assessed and measured, for example through fundamental movement skills, motor development, fitness tests, motivation tests or shuttle runs (Cairney et al., 2019a; Robinson et al., 2018; Tremblay & Lloyd, 2010). According to this position, the connection to health is more explicit, and physical literacy is often positioned as a valuable determinant of health (Cairney et al., 2019a). In opposition to

the previous camp then, this position articulates an alternative equivalential chain of interests that merge together arguments all relating to accountability, outcome orientation, physical skills, and testing.

In policy, however, the contestations of the two opposing camps are not as visible. Instead, there is an acknowledgement that the concept is context dependant, and that physical literacy is misused in some practices (Canada 2). Some definitions are explicit, following the philosophical underpinnings suggested by Whitehead, while others omit aspects of what is regarded as its underlying philosophy (Shearer et al., 2018). There are also inconsistencies regarding age, in terms of both the achievement of physical literacy by a certain age and also the possibility of physical literacy decreasing with age (England 2). Nonetheless, there are almost no moments of explicit contestation within or even between different policy documents. In policy, we can thus witness a movement away from political relations of us-and-them as the difference of interests relating to physical literacy are being articulated as existing separately but amicably side-by-side.

Fantasmatic logics of physical literacy: benevolent mobility or malevolent morbidity

In this section, we focus on the fantasmatic logics of physical literacy and the way in which the concept currently works ideologically through *beatific* and *horrific* narratives.

Horrific narratives

Our analysis reveals a strong horrific narrative in research stressing that we live in a movement suppressed culture (Cairney et al., 2019a) and that there are alarming levels of physical inactivity across the life course (Shearer et al., 2018; Edwards et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is a consistent narrative that school PE does not effectively address this problem. While the pragmatic physical literacy research strand routinely recruits public health crises, morbid obesity levels, sedentary behaviours and chronic health conditions as potentially disastrous scenarios that physical literacy should contribute to solving (Cairney et al., 2019a), the idealist research strand instead argues that this failure to appreciate the philosophical principles of physical literacy only limits its potential.

In policy, the declining rate of physical activity in industrialised societies drives the dystopian scenario. This scenario harnesses the issues of obesity and risks for diseases like cancer, diabetes or heart disease.

Research shows that physically in-active children are more likely to gain unhealthy amounts of weight, miss school, and perform worse academically. They're twice as likely to be obese as adults. They'll earn less at work, have higher health care costs, and take extra sick days. Physical inactivity impairs quality of life, drains economies, and sets in motion a vicious cycle ... (USA 3, p. 2)

As demonstrated, the loss of economic productivity and massive costs to society is also significant (USA 3). Essentially, the health of nations is being compromised (Australia 3) and policy documents call for urgent action by introducing physical literacy programs.

The clock is ticking; we want every child to be happy, healthy and confident, both now and for their future. Unfortunately without the right skills, confidence and motivation to be physically active, the chances of this are far less likely [...] To help our children become physically literate, we all need to act now. Each and everyone [...] of us has a part to play in helping a child discover what they can do, before they give up and turn into couch potatoes. (Wales 1)

An extension of this danger is the 'emerging' threat to sports and a certain lifestyle, exemplified in Australian policy documents that declare: 'Australia's sporting way of life and our health as a nation are under serious threat because of the decline in physical activity' (Australia 3, p. 5).

Beatific narratives

Moving on to beatific narratives, our analysis of research and policy reveals promises typically relating to a perfect life for individuals through better health. However, in some cases and predominantly in policy, the promises are made in relation to an ideal society.

In research, there is a compelling and far reaching beatific narrative. The main promise in relation to *the individual* concerns the development of movement competencies and, as an implicit consequence, life-long, safe engagement in physical activity (Cairney et al., 2019a; Corbin, 2016). In this scenario, fundamental movement skills, movement competence, in addition to increased physical activity levels, should be developed (Corbin, 2016; Robinson et al., 2018) to realise the promise that a physically literate person will move 'with poise, economy and confidence in a wide variety of physically challenging situations' (Jurbala, 2015, p. 369).

Closely related are assurances about health, which at times seek to counter horrific narrative risks, but mostly champion a more holistic health, well-being and improved quality of life (Jurbala, 2015). Research also promises psychological and cognitive benefits through physical literacy, as expressed in Whitehead's definition that physical literacy is the 'motivation, confidence, physical competence, understanding and knowledge to maintain physical activity at an individually appropriate level, throughout life' (Whitehead, 2007, p. 282; see also Whitehead et al., 2018). Other benefits claimed as a consequential future scenario include psychological assets of motivation, increased self-confidence or self-esteem (Dudley et al., 2017; Jurbala, 2015; Whitehead et al., 2018), cognitive benefits related to life-long learning (Cairney et al., 2019a), and a physically literate person's understanding of the principles of embodied health like sleep, exercise and nutrition (Jurbala, 2015). Other, less common, promises made in research are related to social benefits such as integration, improved cultural dialogue and empathetic interaction with others (e.g. Dudley et al., 2017; Jurbala, 2015).

Arguments about the contribution of physical literacy to human flourishing and quality of life move a step further to incorporate the maximising of human potential, nurturing 'numerous individual goods and virtues' (Durdin-Myers et al., 2018, p. 309). By discussing physical literacy in relation to the development of human capabilities, or as a human capability itself (Durdin-Myers et al., 2018; Pot et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2018), the fullness-to-come is related to a fulfilling life, pursuing 'freely and democratically chosen values and goals' (Durdin-Myers et al., 2018, p. 310), and the 'potential of physical literacy to contribute to holistic health, well-being and maximizing human potential' (Durdin-Myers et al., 2018, p. 311).

In relation to an *ideal society*, beatific narratives promising improved population health prevail (e.g. Cairney et al., 2019a; 2019b), with 'numerous downstream positive health outcomes that have eluded modern society' (Cairney et al., 2019a, p. 80). Shearer and colleagues (2018), for example, argue that global acknowledgement of physical literacy can support national policies in undertakings to 'better improve the health, productivity and happiness of citizens' (p. 237). Dudley and colleagues (2017), in a critical discussion of physical literacy policy, further introduce the notion of 'physically literate societies' (p. 449), arguing that:

These physically literate societies must be more than education, recreation, sport, and health agencies offering access to physical activity. Each of these agencies should seek to clearly articulate in their policy statements how each of the four pillars of physical literacy are being addressed. In doing so, they will be well positioned to provide an environment of diverse, rich, and prejudice-free physical activity participation opportunities across the lifespan. (Dudley et al., 2017, p. 449)

In this vein, research promises to overcome inequitable participation by 'freeing individuals from cultural expectations related to the embodiment ...' (Whitehead et al 2018, p. 257), and furthering what Dudley and colleagues (2017) call inter-cultural dialogue.

In policy much of the same beatific narratives can be found, even if the social benefits and human flourishing is toned down considerably as narratives on life-long healthy physical activity are heightened. In relation to *the individual*, policy's foremost promise relates to health, impacting both the improvement

of health here and now, as well as supporting future healthy and fulfilling lives through movement (Australia 2, 3, Canada 4, UNESCO 1, USA 2). In Australia, for example, physical literacy can thus:

... help Australians at every stage of life develop and maintain positive physical activity behaviours and delivers physical, psychological, social and cognitive health and wellbeing benefits. (Australia 2, p. 5)

... and from Canada:

Children who are excelling in their physical literacy journey have the physical competence, knowledge, motivation or daily behaviours that are associated with substantial health benefits. (Canada 4, p. 21)

In some documents individual fitness, maintenance of a healthy body weight and measurement of daily step count or moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) are proffered as aspects of physical literacy (Canada 4, USA 2). In this way, the need for assessment of physical literacy is a strong part of the beatific narrative in policy, that is, through testing protocols where self-perceived MVPA, daily behaviours, shuttle runs, daily step count or knowledge about physical activity guidelines are assessed (Canada 4).

A critical underpinning of the ideological rationale driving health promises is to be found in the distinctive physical, psychological, cognitive, social, emotional, as well as behavioural, aspects of physical literacy. Fittingly, the hopes attached to physical literacy are *first* (and foremost) physical in terms of movement skills like running, throwing, jumping and coordination allowing for an engagement in physical activity and sport. *Second*, they are psychological in terms of increased motivation and confidence to take part in movement, and cognitive in terms of an understanding of the need to engage in activity. Cognitive aspects are also evident in the notion that physical literacy allows individuals to make informed decisions about movement (Australia 3) and that young people 'do better in school' (Canada 4, p. 23) if they are physically literate. *Third*, hopes are attached to emotional dimensions, where physically literate individuals value physical activity, recognize the enjoyment of moving and feel happier (Canada 4). *Fourth*, there are social aspects connected to the promises made to the individual in policy. Physical literacy, it is claimed, can make physical activity and sport equal and accessible for all, or as Sport New Zealand argue, physical literacy generates 'participation in physical activity and sport for life [...] regardless of age, gender, ability, socio-economic group or culture' (New Zealand 3). *Finally*, there are behavioural hopes attached to physical literacy. As with promises in research, responsible personal and social behaviour are promised as a consequence of increased physical literacy, for example that a physically literate person follows rules and directions from teachers, listens respectfully, and accepts corrective feedback (USA 2). Or as the UNESCO policy puts it, the physically literate person: 'will relate well to others, will enjoy discovering new activities and will welcome advice and guidance'.

In relation to an ideal society, a prevailing logic in policy promises a brighter future to come in terms of public health, a stronger nation, social justice and economic growth. While public health promises might dominate, the promises of physical literacy in some policy documents are extended to include rewards in health care, business and industry, civic leadership, education, fitness organizations, national sport organizations, and media and technology (USA 3). Public health benefits like reduced sedentary behaviour and tackling overweight are highlighted, with UNESCO stressing that physical literacy creates 'healthy, able and active citizens'. This beatific promise is, of course, closely related to the horrific narrative of what will happen if physical illiteracy is not overcome, as exemplified in the Aspen Institute document:

The outcomes of a physically illiterate society are a public health concern. PL has the potential to significantly improve to community health by affecting indicators for physical activity and other factors linked to chronic diseases and life expectancy. (USA 3, p. 21)

Aligning with this narrative are hopes for a stronger nation where it is argued that 'societies that move, improve' (USA 3, p. 30) and that physical literacy can ensure a 'healthier Australia for generations to come' (Australia 3).

In a few documents promises regarding social justice and economic growth are proffered. Promises regarding social justice focus on inclusion, equality, appreciation of cultural values, and helping vulnerable populations regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic group or culture. In short, the policy documents imply that structural injustices regarding physical activity participation can be handled through physical literacy (Australia 2, USA 3, New Zealand 3). By contrast, promises regarding economic growth are about the financial profits that are to be gained through physical literacy. In this logic reduction of health care costs due to the health benefits of physical literacy are emphasized, as ‘employees who developed physical literacy and habits of activity as youth will be more active and healthier as adults’ (USA 3, p. 23). However, Aspen Institute’s claim goes even further, arguing that physical literacy holds a promise to businesses: ‘Children are your future, whether as elite athletes or as consumers of your products – everything from merchandise to tickets’ (USA 3, p. 19). Consequently, there is an implicit promise of ‘good consumers’ and reasoning that it is rational to bind physical literacy to issues of consumption and profit.

Discussion: what is promised in the name of physical literacy?

Our objective in this paper has been to intellectualize the use of the concept physical literacy (cf. Cairney et al., 2019b) by applying the critical lens of the LCE framework. To this end, we have sought to articulate a set of discursive logics in research and policy on physical literacy in terms of what is claimed in its name. In sum, our analysis reveals that physical literacy is promising more broadly to achieve:

- Better health, well-being and quality of life for all
- Life-long safe engagement in physical activity
- Movement competencies and confident movement over diverse terrains
- Increased knowledge in and about sport
- Increased motivation for physical activity
- A desire for and enjoyment in movement
- Reduced sedentary behaviours and obesity
- More socially just physical activity participation
- Responsible citizens with improved social skills and self-esteem
- Enhanced public health and a stronger nation
- Increased productivity and economic growth

With this in mind, we find it appropriate to critically ask ourselves and the profession, for which promises can physical literacy actually be held accountable?

Fantasmatic logics of physical literacy in physical education

Together, the social, political, and fantasmatic logics presented above reveal the increasing ideological seduction of physical literacy and its operation as a grand narrative, fuelled by the hopes and fears that policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders have attached to the practice. Policy gives the impression that physical literacy can solve most ails in society (medical, social, economic, cultural), akin to a miracle cure that can be applied to any problem. Similarly, Larson (2007) describes literacy in general as the snake-oil remedy for stakeholders that hope to solve all societal problems by simply encouraging children to read, read, read. In the case of physical literacy, it is instead about encouraging children to move, move, move and all will be well. Our analysis indicates that physical literacy is often presented as something inherently good and, if implemented in PE, will bring numerous benefits to the individual and society. Policy also adopts an all-inclusive remit for children’s development of physical literacy through school PE, embracing aspects of motor development, physical fitness, daily step count, fitness tests,

problem-solving skills, knowledge about food and exercise, or techniques and tactics in sport. In short, physical literacy in PE becomes a smorgasbord of ‘anything goes’, furthering its ideological seductiveness.

Indeed, a major risk of these beatific narratives in policy is that they are so hard to resist. After all, who doesn’t want life-long engagement in physical activity, social justice or better health for all as outcomes of PE? However, if we look closer *within* such a logic, we argue that the ‘causal leap’ between the promises made and the promoted activities in PE is quite a stretch. For example, how do sport techniques like dribbling a ball or knowledge about offensive and defensive game tactics lead to the diversity of promises made in the name of physical literacy? Furthermore, in what sense do daily step counts, torso strength assessment or tests on physical activity guidelines offer valid measurements if the aim is a more socially just physical activity participation?

Applying the LCE framework onto physical literacy research and policy has afforded insight into the ways in which policy clings to a physical literacy beyond its scope, thereby ignoring the ‘contradictions, tensions, and other uncomfortable aspects of social reality’ (Clarke, 2012, p.184) that occur in the chain from what is promised to what is done in school PE. Put succinctly, policies of physical literacy tend to promise far more than evidence, to date, suggest they can reasonably deliver, providing an exemplary case of ideological fantasy. As Clarke (2012) advises, fantasmatic logics are ‘about backgrounding the contingent, fragments, and incomplete nature of social reality in order to view the world as a well-structured, harmonious whole, thus blunting the latter’s political dimension and reducing the likelihood of subjects engaging in resistant political practices’ (p. 179). All of which begs the question of what dimensions of PE might be best served by the fantasmatic logics of physical literacy policy.

Where is the child in the fantasmatic logics of physical literacy?

A noteworthy dimension is how the child is positioned in PE within the narratives of physical literacy. From our perspective, there is a distinct difference between positioning children as ‘lacking’ in relation to a fixed norm of physical literacy, and narratives positioning children as being in a constant process of becoming that involve a multitude of ways to be physically literate. In the first case, the child is not yet literate or at least, not yet literate enough. The child is thus positioned as at-risk and in need of being saved through physical literacy, with the objective of meeting a fixed norm of what it means to be physically literate. This norm indicates, as Larsson and Quennerstedt (2012) have argued, a neutral and thus covertly white masculine physical literacy, as it is one and the same physical literacy that all children should develop. Thus, the child potentially becomes *subjected* to physical literacy in education. In the second instance, childhood is not viewed as something universal and the child is, as Quennerstedt (2019) argues, released from a predefined finished product of being physically literate. Instead, it is a life-long *process* of becoming literate in a multitude of ways.

Some promises also go beyond physical activity and health, by focusing on what kind of person you are supposed to be in order to count as physically literate. These promises are directed towards a physically literate child becoming a *responsible* person with *social skills* and an unequivocal *desire* to be physically active. Incorporating personal responsibility in this way implies that to be physically literate denotes being responsible in relation to certain societal norms, i.e. not being sedentary and at the same time welcoming advice and following teachers’ directions. Equally important is that the child *wants* to be physically active by harbouring a desire and longing for movement. As such, there appears to be an idea of mandated enjoyment built into the fantasmatic logics of physical literacy.

The risk of ideological closure

As stated previously, the predominately beatific narratives regarding the physically literate citizen articulates an extensive range of personal, social, cultural and political benefits shaped by notions

of an ideal society and lifestyle. In light of this analysis, we suggest that research and policy is fuelled by a profound ideological investment in certain fantasmatic logics, restricting the possibility of carrying out alternative practices of physical literacy. The logics consequently sustain certain relations, actions and patterns with a distinct risk of closure and making counter narratives less visible. To quote Glynos (2008) 'the more subjects are invested in fantasies, the more likely they are to read all aspects of their practice in terms of that fantasmatic narrative, and the less likely they are to 'read for difference'' (p. 286). The extensive collection of promises constrains the potential for robust accountability and critical scrutiny. This puts physical literacy in a convincing ideological position, and it is this all-encompassing tendency that makes its practices so ideologically potent and hard to resist.

However, our analysis revealed a relatively healthy agonistic discussion surrounding physical literacy within research that has not been transferred into policy. For example, there is distinct contestation in research regarding physical literacy as a practice that can be quantified and measured. However, this conflict is not at all visible in policy where statements about what is promised in the name of physical literacy, what its philosophical foundations are, and how physical literacy can be measured, are unproblematically amalgamated.

Despite this move towards ideological closure in policy, a contingency in research offers potential for nuanced and critical discussions on what physical literacy could or should be held accountable for in PE. To paraphrase Clarke (2012), within research we see moments of an alternative to fantasizing through a willingness to 'accept difference, antagonism, and contestation as essential constituents of democratic politics' (p. 188). In light of our policy findings, we argue there exists an urgent need for further critical discussions within physical literacy research and policy, reflective of Sage's (quoted in Pringle, Larsson and Gerdin, 2018, p. 3) commitment to criticism that recognizes problems, unwarranted abuses and a need to 'make things better for everyone'. If contestation is ignored or erased, there is a distinct risk of continual closure where unrealistic and unsubstantiated promises within physical literacy policy become 'holy grails' that researchers and policy makers seek merely to defend or take for granted.

Conclusion

Together, the three logics we have articulated in this paper reveal an increasing seduction of physical literacy as an all-inclusive grand narrative. In contrast to previous ideologies in PE where the horrific narratives (for example inactivity and obesity or the failure of the nation) were strong, it is an over-investment in beatific narratives that lies at the core of physical literacy. In policy the narratives on physical literacy with grand promises of physically literate citizens also seem more opportunistic, i.e. to promise widely, but filling physical literacy with whatever works in relation to its own interests, not seldom ignoring conflict evident in research or recognizing that the claims made are incommensurable. This erasure of conflict can become problematic if the profession fails to sustain rich debate about what physical literacy *reasonably* can be held accountable for achieving in PE. Otherwise, the well-intended practices of physical literacy run the risk of simply becoming yet another example of over-investment added to the long line of dystopian and utopian narratives that historically has furnished PE practices with ideological closure.

Notes

1. We are well aware of our collection's privileging of articles and documents published in English, and is therefore in this sense a limited sample of research or policy.
2. We have refrained from using articles not explicitly involving claims about what physical literacy is promising, e.g. interventions, empirical studies on teachers' views, arguments how to best measure physical literacy in PE practice or the use of specific measurements of current status in certain groups (e.g. measured with FMS, Fitnessgram, fitness tests, accelerometers, written tests etc.).

3. Articles ($N=21$) used for the analysis (see reference list): Cairney et al., 2019a; 2019b; Corbin, 2016; Dudley, 2018; Dudley et al., 2017; Dudley et al., 2018; Durden-Myers et al., 2018; Durden-Myers & Whitehead, 2018; Edwards et al., 2018; Hyndman & Pill, 2018; Johnson et al., 2016; Jurbala, 2015; Lundvall, 2015; Pot et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2018; Roetert & MacDonald, 2015; Shearer et al., 2018; Tremblay & Lloyd, 2010; Whitehead 2007; Whitehead et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019.

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