DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY THROUGH INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract. This paper examines how inclusive physical education can support the development of physical literacy among school students. Physical literacy encompasses the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding needed to engage in physical activity throughout life. The discussion focuses on differentiated tasks, meaningful choice, cooperative learning, accessible equipment and assessment that recognises individual progress. Two methodological tables outline practical adaptations and indicators for observing development. A teaching sequence is proposed to connect students' initial needs with appropriate challenges, feedback and subsequent adjustments. The paper presents a conceptual and methodological discussion rather than findings from an original intervention. It argues that inclusive physical education should provide meaningful opportunities for every student to learn, participate and develop greater independence in movement.

Introduction. Physical education provides an organised setting in which students can learn movement skills, explore different activities and develop an understanding of active living. However, attendance alone does not ensure that every student receives meaningful learning opportunities. Differences in movement experience, confidence, communication, physical capabilities and access to resources can influence participation.UNESCO's approach to quality physical education emphasises inclusion, varied learning experiences and the development of physical, social and emotional skills [1]. Its global report also identifies inequalities in access and provision, showing why participation must be considered alongside the quality of students' experiences [2]. Physical literacy offers a framework for connecting movement learning with students' willingness and ability to remain active. In this paper, it is understood through interrelated dimensions of physical competence,

motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding. Inclusive teaching addresses the conditions under which students with different starting points can develop these dimensions.The purpose of this paper is to examine pedagogical approaches to developing physical literacy through inclusive physical education and to propose practical guidance for lesson planning and assessment.Methodological approach. The paper draws on international guidance and published research on physical education, motivation and teaching practices. The tables and teaching sequence are methodological proposals for adaptation and evaluation in school settings. No original experimental results are reported.

Physical literacy as a connected learning process. Physical competence includes the ability to perform and adapt movement skills in different situations. In school lessons, this may involve maintaining balance, coordinating movements, controlling an object or selecting an appropriate action during a game. Competence should therefore be considered beyond performance in a single standardised task.Motivation concerns students' reasons for participating and their willingness to continue learning. Confidence reflects their belief that they can attempt a task, manage difficulties and improve. Knowledge and understanding help students explain the purpose of an activity, recognise relevant rules and make appropriate choices.These dimensions can be addressed within the same lesson. For example, a throwing activity may involve controlling the movement, selecting a suitable distance, explaining a safety rule and reflecting on progress. Such planning connects practical performance with understanding and personal engagement.Physical literacy should not be reduced to one fitness score. A student may achieve a strong test result while avoiding unfamiliar activities. Another may have limited initial performance but demonstrate growing confidence, persistence and independence. Both situations require interpretation of the student's broader learning experience.

Inclusive planning and differentiated instruction. Inclusive planning begins by identifying barriers within the task and learning environment. A difficulty may arise from unclear instructions, unsuitable equipment, excessive waiting, inaccessible space or a challenge that does not match the student's current skills. Adjusting these conditions can create additional opportunities for participation.Differentiation involves maintaining a shared learning objective while varying the means of achieving it. During a balance lesson, students might work on a floor line, a wider pathway or a more demanding sequence. The common objective is controlled movement, while the task conditions reflect different learning needs.Adaptations should remain flexible. Students should be able to move between options as their skills and confidence develop. Permanent ability groups may restrict opportunities if they become fixed expectations about what particular students can achieve.

Table 1.

Proposed inclusive adaptations for physical literacy development

Teaching focus	Possible barrier	Inclusive adaptation	Intended learning opportunity

Object control	Difficulty catching a small or fast-moving ball	Use larger or softer balls, shorter distances and predictable throws	Practise successful receiving and sending actions
Balance and coordination	A narrow pathway exceeds current control	Provide pathways of different widths and allow appropriate support	Develop stability through manageable challenges
Participation in games	Complex rules or frequent elimination restrict involvement	Simplify rules, use smaller teams and provide prompt re-entry	Increase opportunities to make decisions and practise skills
Understanding instructions	Long verbal explanations are difficult to follow	Combine short instructions with demonstrations and visual cues	Understand the task and begin with greater independence
Confidence and choice	Fear of failure discourages attempts	Offer task options with a shared objective and opportunities to rehearse	Attempt unfamiliar movements with appropriate support
Cooperative learning	A few students dominate group activity	Use small groups, clear roles and regular role changes	Contribute to shared tasks and support classmates

The adaptations in Table 1 are planning options rather than a fixed programme. Their suitability depends on the learning objective, available resources and individual requirements. Teachers should check whether an adaptation improves meaningful participation and preserves an appropriate challenge.

Motivation, confidence and meaningful choice. Research reviews in physical education associate autonomy-supportive teaching with favourable motivational experiences. Relevant practices include acknowledging students' perspectives, explaining the purpose of tasks and providing meaningful choices within a structured lesson [3; 4]. These findings support attention to how activities are introduced and experienced, although motivation during lessons should not be treated as proof of sustained activity outside school. Choice is most useful when students understand the available options. Asking them to select a throwing distance, for example, can be accompanied by a simple criterion: choose a distance that allows controlled performance while still requiring attention and effort. Confidence can be supported

through achievable intermediate goals. A student who hesitates to join a ball game may first practise receiving a predictable pass with a partner. The next task can introduce movement or a simple decision before participation in a more complex game.Feedback should describe an observable improvement and identify a manageable next step. Statements such as "you maintained your balance when changing direction" provide clearer information than general praise. Students can then connect their actions with the outcome and decide what to practise next.

Cooperative learning and social participation. Cooperative tasks can create opportunities for students to practise communication, shared decision-making and mutual support. However, assigning students to a group does not automatically ensure equitable participation. The task must provide a meaningful contribution for each member.Teachers can organise paired practice, shared movement challenges and small-group games with rotating responsibilities. In paired work, one student may perform while the other observes a single movement feature. Roles should change frequently so that observation supports learning without substantially reducing movement practice.Group success can be defined through shared improvement, completion of a movement sequence or effective inclusion of all participants. Competitive activities may also be used when the rules, grouping and feedback preserve learning opportunities for students with different capabilities.

Assessment of individual development. Assessment should provide information that helps teachers adjust instruction and helps students understand their learning. For physical literacy, observation of movement performance should be combined with evidence of understanding, confidence, motivation and independence. The following framework proposes indicators for classroom use. It is not a validated measurement instrument and should not be used to produce a universal physical literacy score.

Table 2.

Proposed indicators for formative assessment of physical literacy

Dimension	Observable indicator	Possible evidence	Use in subsequent teaching
Physical competence	Performs a practised movement with increasing control	Brief checklist across comparable tasks	Adjust task complexity or provide targeted practice
Confidence	Attempts a suitable unfamiliar task or requests specific support	Teacher observation and student reflection	Identify conditions that make participation more manageable
Motivation	Engages with practice and expresses reasons for participation	Short discussion and observations across lessons	Review task relevance, variety and available choices

Knowledge and understanding	Explains the purpose of an activity or a relevant safety rule	Questions, demonstrations and task explanations	Clarify misconceptions and connect knowledge with action
Cooperation	Shares opportunities, fulfils a role and supports others	Observation during paired and group tasks	Adjust group organisation and responsibilities
Independence	Selects an appropriate option and uses feedback	Record of task choices and subsequent attempts	Gradually reduce support where appropriate

Evidence should be collected across several lessons and interpreted in context. Limited participation on one occasion may reflect uncertainty, fatigue, communication difficulties or unfamiliarity with the activity. It should not immediately be interpreted as low motivation or limited capability. Student reflection adds another perspective. Questions such as “What became easier?”, “Which option helped you learn?” and “What would you like to practise next?” can reveal information that is not visible through performance alone.

A practical teaching sequence. A lesson sequence can begin with a short assessment of students’ movement experience and perceived difficulties. The teacher then establishes a shared learning objective and prepares several task options that address it.During practice, students select or are guided towards an appropriate challenge. The teacher observes participation, checks understanding and provides specific feedback. Where a student struggles, the first response is to examine the task conditions and support provided.The lesson can conclude with a brief reflection linking performance to learning. In the following lesson, the teacher revisits the objective, checks whether previous adjustments were useful and introduces further challenges where appropriate.Opportunities beyond the lesson can extend this process through accessible playground activities, movement breaks and voluntary school events. Suggestions for home participation should account for differences in family resources and available space. School learning should not depend on access to paid clubs or personal sports equipment.

Conclusion. Developing physical literacy through inclusive physical education requires attention to both learning content and the conditions of participation. Movement competence, confidence, motivation, knowledge and understanding should be addressed as connected aspects of students’ development.Differentiated tasks, meaningful choice and structured cooperation provide practical ways to respond to different starting points. Their value depends on whether they create appropriate challenges and enable students to participate with increasing understanding and independence.Assessment should recognise individual progress and guide subsequent teaching. Combining observation, discussion and student

reflection can provide a broader picture than performance scores alone. The proposed tables offer a basis for lesson planning, but their usefulness requires evaluation in specific school contexts.Further work should examine how these approaches influence participation over time, including the experiences of students who encounter persistent barriers. This would help refine teaching practices and identify which adaptations support continued engagement across different activities.

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