Chapter 2
Physical literacy and sport identity

Based on:
Introduction

Policies aimed at health promotion and disease prevention often deploy sport as a solution for numerous health problems (e.g., European Commission, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012; WHO, 2012). This led to the use of medical paradigms such as ‘dose-response relationship’ (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010, p. 1) and ‘exercise as medicine’ (Sallis, 2009), in which a certain amount of sport or physical activity is presumed to lead to health outcomes. From this medical and political role assigned to sports, sport participation is seen as an important way to be physically active and to meet the guidelines for the recommended amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). This means that in these policies, sport and physical activity are often understood as synonyms and are used interchangeably.

Because of the presumed health benefits, many sport policies aim at increasing sport participation levels. This implies that sport participation is considered behaviour that can be taught, shaped and altered. In most of these policies on health and sport, physical education (PE) and school sport are mentioned as contexts in which these behavioural changes can be stimulated (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; European Commission, 2011; WHO, 2012). It is conceived that by teaching children certain movement and tactical skills, the chances increase that these children will continue to pursue physical activities, including sports, throughout their life, leading to the presumed health benefits. This assumption is exemplified by studies on the positive relationship between training fundamental movement skills and physical activity patterns (e.g., Barnett, Beurden, Morgan, Brooks, & Beard, 2009; Stodden et al., 2008). A concept that is growing in importance worldwide in the promotion of physical activity is physical literacy (Nyberg & Larsson, 2012; Whitehead, 2001). In several countries, physical literacy is used as a philosophy that influences pedagogical models in PE, to form a basis for physical activity throughout the life course and an introduction into sports (Whitehead, 2010).

Based on this paradigm, the school is assigned an important function in shaping the physical activity patterns of children with the aim of healthier lifestyles. The argument that PE can contribute to the health of children seems to be a welcome validation of PE, in the continuing urge to account for results that substantiate the existence of PE as a core subject in the education system (Feingold, 2013). However, reducing the praxis of PE-professionals to making sure that children meet the MVPA guidelines can be considered an imminent threat to
the PE profession as well, because the main objective of PE would then be that children just move for a certain amount of time and intensity. This would limit the importance of the pedagogical, technical and didactic knowledge that PE teachers do need to have within a broader paradigm of sport and physical education.

However, there is also a considerable amount of scholarly work that considers physical activity behaviours to be largely constrained by social and cultural structures of the family (e.g., Evans & Davies, 2010; Green, 2012). This research shows that learning technical and tactical skills does not necessarily lead to long-term sport participation.

The arguments and language that are used for interpreting the importance of PE are not neutral. They are hypothesised to influence the way in which PE is legitimised, the way in which movement, physical activity, sport and health differ from each other and are related to each other. Furthermore, the arguments and language influence the role that the school is considered to play in shaping these behaviours. Therefore, we will critically discuss the concept of physical literacy (PL), as it is often used as a scientific framework to substantiate the role that the school can play in stimulating the pursuit of physical activity, including sports. First, we will explain the concept of PL in detail and we will discuss how it is used in the fields of PE and sports. Next we will argue that this application of PL in the field of sport is influenced by the language that is used in the conceptualization of PL. Third, we will discuss the socio-cultural aspects of sport participation. Finally, in order to bridge the gap between PL and socio-cultural constraints on sport participation we will introduce and explain the concept of sport identity.

The concept of physical literacy

Physical literacy (PL) is defined as “the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the life course” and is used as a pedagogical model for PE in several countries (Whitehead, 2010, p. 5). One of the reasons to develop the concept of PL was the perception that the importance of movement development in children was being neglected, due to the emphasis on ‘cognitive’ capacities, such as literacy and numeracy (Higgs, 2010; Whitehead, 2010).

A main goal of PL is to enable every child to reach his or her potential. The main developer of the concept, Margaret Whitehead, described how movement competences in a wide variety of circumstances may enhance the quality of life
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(Whitehead, 2001, p. 136), contribute to the realisation of our human potential (Whitehead, 2007, p. 286), increase self-confidence, self-esteem, appreciation of the importance of health and fitness and access to high-level participation (Whitehead, 2007, p. 287) and assist in developing “a lifelong habit of taking up options in one or more areas of physical activity” (Whitehead, 2007, p. 295). These physical activities can be a variety of physical pursuits that lead to moderate to vigorous physical activity (Whitehead, 2010). What these pursuits look like may vary from one individual to the other and from one life stage to the other. For instance, young children will be more involved in play and adolescents in sports. Physical pursuits may also be expressed in other lifestyle choices, such as travelling by bicycle instead of the car.

The philosophical basis of PL lies in the existentialist and phenomenological tradition (e.g., Husserl, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In this view, individuals cannot be understood apart from their environment. It is argued that “we create ourselves in interaction with the world” (Whitehead, 2007, p. 285). One of the main reasons to develop the concept of PL is to stress the importance of the embodied interaction for the development of children from a monist perspective, which is in contrast to the traditional dualistic substantiation of PE to train the physical in order to rest or vitalise the mind (Whitehead, 2010). Instead of teaching children a limited number of skills in a set of narrowly defined activities, as is the usual practice in PE, movement capacities should be understood in interaction with the environment in which they are executed (Whitehead, 2010). These interactions are considered crucial for being a human, as we are ‘beings in the world’ (Martínková & Parry, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The interaction with the environment is a central tenet in the phenomenological view. Within phenomenology this is described by the concept of intentionality (Husserl, 1991; Martínková & Parry, 2011). Motor intentionality can be described as “an embodied and concrete way of understanding or being meaningfully directed at ‘things’ in the surroundings.” (Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 267). This means that the meaning of an action cannot be isolated from the context in which that action is performed. This has consequences for understanding motor actions. For instance, cycling to school is a different action from cycling the Tour de France, although the biomechanical aspects may be similar (Standal & Moe, 2011).

According to Whitehead (2001, p. 129) the richer the interactions with the world are, the more individuals have the opportunity to develop their potential. PL provides the framework that describes the range of physical capacities with which human beings are able to interact with their environment and thus capitalise on their potential (Whitehead, 2010). The more extensive the bank of movement
competences is, the better humans are able to interact, respond and anticipate on these environments. These embodied competences can be divided into four aspects or stages: a young child’s movement vocabulary, movement capacities, movement patterns and movement patterns specialised for a specific activity (Whitehead, 2010, p. 45). A young child’s movement vocabulary encompasses movements of a typically developing child, such as rolling, grabbing, walking and clapping. The movement capacities described include, for instance, balance, coordination, control flexibility, power, endurance, running, jumping, climbing, hand-foot-eye coordination and rhythm (Whitehead, 2007, p. 287). These general movement patterns may develop into more refined movement patterns, such as throwing, bowling, catching, batting, dodging and hopping (Whitehead & Murdoch, 2006). Sometimes these “building blocks” (Whitehead, 2010, p. 45) combine into movements aimed at a specific activity, such as sports. It is stressed by Whitehead (2010) that the concept of PL is much more than bodily movements per se: it includes the interaction with the environment, that is, the ability to read and understand the environment and to be able to respond to it in an economical (efficient) and confident way.

Therefore, the embodied dimension of human existence should not be understood as a passive container that houses the mind, but as an “active player in existence” (Whitehead, 2007, p. 286). This is also related to the notion that PL has an influence on how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, consisting of the ‘inanimate’ environment but also of other human beings (Whitehead, 2007, pp. 289-290). The environment is grasped in terms of affordances that offer action possibilities (Gibson, 1979). Therefore, the world is crucial for developing the potential of humans.

The environment, or world, also has an influence on how PL is manifested. Drawing on the work of Burkitt (1999), Whitehead (2007, p. 292) states that “We are all similarly embodied, and rely on this dimension of ourselves for realising a range of human capacities. However the scope of any individual’s physical literacy will be influenced by the culture within which s/he lives and the motile capacities with which the individual is endowed.” There are studies investigating cultural differences in the way physical literacy is manifested (e.g., Adele Kentel & Dobson, 2007).

A relevant question is whether this cultural dependency and philosophical basis of PL is recognised in the application of PL in policy and practice (Whitehead, 2010). Whether this is the case will be discussed in the next section.
Use of PL in policy and practice

As indicated before, sport and physical activity are often considered synonyms in many sport and health policies. However, as will be argued in this paper, sport is a specific (socially and culturally relevant) type of activity. This arguments in this paper are specifically aimed at the use of PL in policies aimed at increasing sport participation and not ‘physical activity’ in general. Attempting to increase the number of children involved in sports is often done by introducing different sports to children and familiarising them with the technical skills and rules of the sports. A model that is used by sport federations worldwide to describe the pathway of young children into a sport is the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model (Balyi, 2004), for instance in the UK (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002), Canada (CS4L, n.d.-a) and the Netherlands (NOC*NSF, 2011). The first three stages of this model (active start, FUNdamentals and learning to train) are summarised as ‘physical literacy’ (Balyi, 2004). Developing PL in the (primary) school context is therefore regarded as an important prerequisite of sport participation, talent detection and eventually the level of elite athletes (CS4L, n.d.-b; DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). Within the LTAD, PL is often understood as a scientific framework for fundamental movement skills (FMS) (e.g., Ford et al., 2011; Higgs, 2010), describing an arsenal of movement skills (e.g., catching, kicking, jumping and throwing) that will lead to more (and a higher level of) sport participation.

For instance, Canadian Sport for Life defines PL as “the mastering of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that permit a child to read their environment and make appropriate decisions, allowing them to move confidently and with control in a wide range of physical activity situations. It supports long-term participation and performance to the best of one’s ability.” (CS4L, n.d.-b). Furthermore, Canadian Sport for Life suggests that physically literate children will develop “more confidence in their bodies and better sport skills – with better chances to become the next Wayne Gretzky or Steve Nash” (CS4L, n.d.-b). This relationship between PL and sport participation is affected by matching fundamental movement skills to sport activities. In this way, it is attempted to gain insight into which sports are suitable for children with certain abilities. The Dutch sport federation NOC*NSF (2011, 2012b) uses the derivative term ‘physical alphabet’. They regard these ‘basic movement skills’ as important for life-long participation in sport and as the basis for talent development programmes. In the UK, the DCMS/strategy unit declares that “the aim should be for young children to develop sport literacy (an ability across a range of skills, with an emphasis on
quality and choice) [...] with the aim of enabling as many people as possible to become lifelong regular participants.” (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002, p. 16).

The question is why these governing bodies use the metaphor of ‘literacy’. It might be that they regard the connotation of literacy to contribute to the status of movement and exercise for children (Higgs, 2010). For instance, Tremblay and Lloyd (2010) suggested that PL might provide an opportunity to renew the focus on PE by using the importance assigned to literacy and numeracy. They argue that in order to assess the effectiveness of PL interventions, a measurement tool to test PL must be provided. In their opinion, a measurement tool is crucial “as a means to elevate the importance of physical education, increase the robustness of physical education assessment, improve monitoring and evaluation of physical education curricula, and provide important surveillance evidence needed to assist with resource allocation by decision-makers.” (Tremblay & Lloyd, 2010, p. 26). What Tremblay and Lloyd’s tool measures are fitness parameters, fundamental movement skills, pedometer data and knowledge about healthy lifestyles (Tremblay & Lloyd, 2010). Drawing on the theoretical framework of PL, the intentionality of an action is crucial for the meaning that a motor action has (Standal & Moe, 2011). However, in none of these measures of the PL test (Tremblay & Lloyd, 2010) it is incorporated why, where, when and with whom these fundamental movement skills or fitness tests are performed. Therefore, it is impossible to conclude anything about PL or sport skills based on this test. For instance, when considered from a phenomenological point of view, it can be questioned what the intentionality of push-ups is. Moreover, a clear Cartesian division of body and mind is illustrated by the definition of PL that Lloyd and Tremblay use, as the physical measurements of the objective body (fitness, FMS and the pedometer data) are considered separately from the cognitive test checking knowledge about healthy lifestyles. This illustrates that the concept of PL appears to be used as a means to augment the status of the ‘physical’ (Higgs, 2010). This is in essence contrary to the phenomenological and non-dualistic conceptualisation of PL as proposed by Whitehead.

In many of these policies, the school context (PE and school sports) is being put forward as an important context for the development of PL. However, as illustrated above, PL is often interpreted as FMS in sport and educational policy and praxis. In other words, it is conceived that sport participation levels can be increased by promoting FMS in the educational setting. In the next section, we will argue that the use of language in the conceptualisation of PL might facilitate this misinterpretation of the concept.
Misunderstanding the philosophical foundation of physical literacy

Although the concept of PL is claimed to depart from a monist point of view, it appears to be implicitly dualistic. The strongest example of this is the use of ‘physical’: ‘physically challenging situation’, ‘physical competence’ or ‘physical activity’ implies that there is something that is ‘non-physical’. Whitehead (2010, p. 6) recognizes this friction, but defends the use of “physical” by arguing that alternatives such as embodied or motile may be unfamiliar and too esoteric for general use. A reference to a physical component can often be found in the definition of sport. This is what Tamboer (1992) called the hidden essentialism. However, it is the question what could then be considered a non-physical activity, or non-physical literacy. For instance, should chess, riding a bike to work or raising a glass of beer be part of the movement repertoire of PL? A frequent response to this issue is to conceptualise sport or exercise as activities involving larger muscle groups (Tamboer, 1992). This is exactly what happens within the concept of PL (Whitehead, 2001, 2010): “[...] it is proposed to define Physical Literacy prescriptively as being a universal concept, that is an end state relating to full human capacities, involving larger muscle groups.” (Whitehead, 2001, p. 131).

It thus appears that within the definition of PL lies an (implicit) dualistic interpretation of ‘physical activities’ that require larger muscle groups. It is hard to detach this definition from sport or vigorous exercise. Although Whitehead (2010) explicitly wants to avoid a characterisation of PL as sport education, it seems inevitable that the field of sport is the dominant context in which PL becomes concrete and meaningful, especially for youngsters.

Physical literacy also implies a (quantitative) notion of ‘richness’ (more is better), which is illustrated by the metaphor of the “bank of movement competences” (Whitehead, 2010, p. 53). The suggestion is that the more movement competences one has, the more fluently one will be able to interact in different circumstances (Lloyd, 2011): “any increase in physical literacy will have a marked effect on quality of life” (Whitehead, 2007, p. 287). In addition, the building block metaphor assumes that movements can be stacked from movement vocabulary to movement capacities, movement patterns and ultimately movement patterns specialised for a specific activity, such as sports (Whitehead, 2010, p. 45).

Drawing on the phenomenological basis of PL, the suggestion that combining specific movement capacities leads to more refined movement patterns is questionable. The execution and meaning of movements are intrinsically dependent on the context in which the movements take place. Using
this concept of intentionality, the breakdown of movement patterns into more specific movement capacities or movement vocabulary is not possible. This means that learning a movement skill can only be used in a sport context in a reflexive way, when that sport context is incorporated in (learning) the motor action. What distinguishes sport actions from everyday actions can be characterised as ‘the sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome’ (Kretchmar, 1975; Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 262). Without that tension, the motor actions are not only experienced differently, they are also learned in a different way (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This has crucial implications for the question how sport participation levels can be stimulated. For instance, a baseball player must be able to throw hard and accurately, but the exact way in which he throws a ball is impossible to grasp when neglecting the excitement and tactical situations during a game. Considered from this phenomenological perspective, throwing a baseball varies every time due to the indefinite number of different circumstances in which the ball can be thrown. This means that throwing a baseball can only be meaningfully learned if it happens within the context of baseball. Just learning to throw a ball, like advocated in PL, may enhance the skill of throwing a ball and the pleasure experienced in doing that. It may even lay the foundation for fun and skill in a ball sport. However, it may also counteract enjoyment and sustained participation in baseball, as a child may find out (too late) that there is more to throwing a ball in the context of a baseball game than the mere skill of being able to throw a ball. In contrast to what is suggested by Whitehead (2010, p. 179), mere stacking of movement competences does not necessarily lead to certain refined or specific movement patterns, such as sports. However, building blocks may be defined, learned and taught, when deduced from a meaningful movement context.

What follows from this line of thought is that sport participation cannot be stimulated by learning fundamental movement skills. Nevertheless, many projects and initiatives aimed at increasing sport participation focus on learning the technical skills needed in a certain sport without the specific intentionality of performing these actions in a (competitive) sport context.

In summary, it can be concluded that the (dualistic) language and the metaphor of building blocks of movement that are being used in the conceptualisation of PL leave room for the interpretation of PL as (fundamental) movement skills without references to a context in which these skills become meaningful. Drawing on the phenomenological framework that underlies the concept of PL, it can be argued that these building blocks become meaningful when they are considered in the light of meaningful (sport) context. Therefore, it can be questioned what value PL
has when discussing sport participation. Does it, for example, include the socio-cultural aspects of sport participation?

**Sport as a socio-cultural phenomenon**

It is conceived in policy and practice that learning FMS or becoming physically literate will lead to sport participation. The “fundamental” in FMS presupposes that these movement skills are universal. However, the idea that these building blocks of movement are culturally neutral is misleading. Based on the work of Mauss (1934), it can be argued that the execution of movement actions is essentially shaped by culture. Techniques, as Mauss termed movement actions, are executed differently in different societies. Mauss illustrated this by comparing the different marching and digging techniques of French and English soldiers. These techniques are not just a product of physical arrangements and biomechanics, they are shaped by cultural habits. Therefore, an objective and universal measure of motor skills is not possible, as Mauss (1934) demonstrated that these skills are not objective and universal, but shaped by individual social and cultural circumstances. This begs the question what the relevance is of testing (fundamental) movement skills or PL, as Tremblay and Lloyd (2010) suggested.

The culturally dependent manifestation of motor actions can be illustrated by a young child playing with a ball. A child from North America is likely to pick up the ball with the hands and throw it. Whereas, if the child is European, it is more likely to kick the ball with its foot. The way in which these actions are executed are dependent on what can be described as social affordances (Kaufmann & Clément, 2007). These social affordances are the culturally and socially determined boundaries that limit the action possibilities for a given person. Mauss termed these culturally dependent behaviours habitus (Mauss, 1934, p. 73). Therefore, it can be argued that what is considered ‘fundamental’ is already culturally shaped and that this culturally shaped habitus is less likely to be influenced by policy interventions.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1978, 1984) used the habitus concept to signify the important influence of inherited predispositions on all kinds of thoughts, judgements and behaviour, including sport participation. He described how the possession of different types of capital (economic, social and cultural capital) unconsciously shapes the habitus (Bourdieu, 1986).

Capital refers to resources that are valuable in a certain area (Bourdieu, 1986; Wacquant, 2006). In sports this would be knowledge about the rules of the sport and the skills to participate in the game, but, for instance, also knowledge about
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how to behave within a sports club and the sport mindedness of the social network of friends and family. Possession of this kind of sporting capital enables one to participate in sports (Bourdieu, 1984; Coalter, 2007a; Wilson, 2002). The acquisition or inheritance of sporting capital leads to an unconscious and natural tendency to participate in sports, something that could be termed sporting habitus (Skille, 2007). As this kinds of disposition has a lasting influence on the behaviour of an individual, it can be argued that sporting capital and habitus are crucial for long-term sport participation. Because people from different social classes are differently endowed with this capital, sport participation is stratified along social lines (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984).

The importance of inherited sporting habitus for sport participation has been found in many studies indicating the importance of family context on sport participation (e.g., Birchwood, et al., 2008; Dagkas & Quarmby, 2012; Wheeler, 2012). Families are able to transfer what could be termed the social aspects of sporting capital, consisting of, for instance, that one knows the social rules at a sport club, has a social network that endorses sport and feels comfortable in the sport (club) context. These social aspects of sporting capital are crucial for sport participation, in addition to the more technical aspects of sporting capital (which is akin to what is termed FMS or sport skills), such as the motor actions, rules and tactics of sports (Green, et al., 2013; Jakobsson, Lundvall, Redelius, & Engström, 2012; Light, et al., 2013; Nielsen, et al., 2012; Stuij, 2013). Although the technical aspects of sporting capital can be learned during PE, school sport or sport projects, whether a child will actually participate in sports is largely determined by the social aspects of sporting capital. For instance, an underprivileged child might learn the ‘vocabulary’ of cricket during PE, such as the techniques, rules and tactics, but without the social aspects of sporting capital, such as network, money and knowledge of the social rules of cricket, it is not very likely that the child will continue to ‘read’ and ‘write’ cricket throughout its life. When considering ways to engage more children in sports, it is important to recognise the influence of these social affordances (Kaufmann & Clément, 2007) that may or may not facilitate sport participation in the long run.

However, it can be argued that the socio-cultural aspects of sport socialisation are unable to explain its full reality. Although sport participation is still stratified along social lines, the reality of sport participation does not seem to be as static (anymore) as Bourdieu (1978, 1984) suggested. For instance, individuals from the upper class start to try out traditional ‘lower’ class sports, (e.g., boxing and cycling) and persons from lower classes tend to pick up golf and tennis. In addition, sport
participation rates have increased in the last decades (Klostermann & Nagel, 2012; Scheerder & Vos, 2011), which might indicate more flexibility in sport socialisation than theorised by Bourdieu and his followers (Ohl, 2000). We argue that both skills (FMS or PL) and the social and cultural aspects of sport participation are important when considering ways to increase sport participation levels. Therefore, sport socialisation should be regarded as a qualitative process in which skills are matched to the specific, individual preferences (habitus). In the next section, we will suggest different terminology that incorporates more of these relevant aspects of sport socialisation without resorting to dualistic language.

**Bridging the gap between movement skills and sporting habitus**

If sport socialisation is indeed more complex than either the possession of movement skills or the influence of family structures by itself, a concept is necessary that encompasses both the influence of movement skills, explicit sport knowledge (rules, tactics) and the social and cultural constraints on sport participation. Although PL has these characteristics to some degree, the (dualistic) language and the metaphor of building blocks of movement that are being used in the conceptualisation of PL leave room for the interpretation of PL as (fundamental) movement skills without references to a context in which these skills become meaningful. The concept of *sport identity* (Brewer, et al., 1993; Curry & Weaner, 1987) can explain more of these relevant aspects of sport socialization.

Sport identity can be defined as the role that sport plays in someone’s self-concept (Brewer et al., 1993; Lau, et al., 2006). This means that sport identity has an influence on behaviour (sport participation), but also on someone’s values and decisions. It brings together two important elements of sport socialisation: embodied capacities and the social context in which these capacities can be manifested. Within the conceptualisation of PL (Whitehead, 2001, 2007) it is comprehensively described that embodied capacities are an important aspect of the self-concept. It is conceived that the possession of embodied capacities influences how human beings conceptualise themselves (identity) and their action capabilities. It can also be expected that someone with a strong sport identity is motivated to learn new (sport) skills, as they reinforce their sport identity.

Drawing on identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), the formation of an identity is also strongly influenced by the social context, in addition to the perceived embodied capacities. This influence of the social environment is in line with the influence of social contexts on behaviour that Bourdieu (1984) described.
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For instance, a person with a strong sport identity is able to perform the skills of a sport (technical sporting capital), searches for contexts in which sport plays a role and knows how to behave in these contexts (social sporting capital). This interaction between embodied capacities and the social context can be illustrated by the example of a young girl that might learn how to row a boat during PE or an extracurricular programme. From the concept of sport identity, it could be argued that this girl needs to see herself as a sportswoman, or rower in this example. Of course, this includes more than the embodied skills of rowing. For instance, when she wants to use her embodied rowing skills, she will need to know how to get access to a rowing club, how to behave at the club and her parents will need the money to pay for her tuition and gear. These social and cultural constraints have an influence on how the girl sees herself as a rower, i.e. her sport identity. This girl is not likely to view herself as a rower if she is socially constrained not to row, even though she has the embodied skills to pull the oars through the water.

The relationship between sport identity and long-term sport participation has been demonstrated in several empirical studies (e.g., Curtis, et al., 1999; Downs & Ashton, 2011; Lau, Leung, Ransdell, & Wong, 2010). A strong sport identity makes sport participation self-evident, as it is part of how a person sees him- or herself. This means that even if sport participation is temporarily hindered, for instance when transferring to another school or by circumstances such as having children or a high demanding job or study programme, a person with a strong sport identity is more likely to continue participation, even if this means that frequency, intensity or type of sport has to be changed. Therefore, the drop-out rate of sport participation, which is often seen in these circumstances (e.g., Birchwood et al., 2008; Humbert et al., 2008), is expected to be lower for people with a strong sport identity.

Sport identity is a useful concept when discussing sport participation, because it merges the strengths of both the necessity for embodied skills and the social and cultural constraints of sport participation. Moreover, it circumvents the use of the contested and dualistic concepts “physical” and “literacy” and aligns more closely with questions about (changes in) sport participation during life events, such as transitions in school context (Wright & Laverty, 2010). Whether this concept will lead to less simplistic interpretation in policy and practice compared to the concept of PL should be investigated.
Conclusion

In this paper, it has been discussed how the concept of physical literacy might be useful for gaining insight into the question how sport participation can be influenced and what role the school context can play in this. Based on the concept of PL, it is suggested in sport policies that increasing fundamental movement skills or embodied capacities is an important stimulus for increasing sport participation levels. Although this application of PL as a framework for FMS is not in line with the original conceptualisation of PL, it has been argued that the language used provides opportunities for instrumental and dualistic interpretations. Neither learning movement skills during PE nor the cultural and social constraints can completely explain (changes in) sport participation patterns. Therefore, it was suggested the introduction of another concept when discussing sport socialisation: sport identity. In this concept, both the embodied skills and the social constraints have an influence on the role sport has in the self-concept of a person and the actual sport participation. Policy and curricula aimed at sport participation should not merely concentrate on skill acquisition, but on a proper and realistic introduction in the social context of sports in which the sport identity can be developed. In other words, curricula should be aimed more at learning what it is like to be a sports(wo)man (sport identity), instead of just how a sport must be played (sport skills). However, the growing tendency to look for accountable results in PE (e.g., FMS or fitness tests) (Tremblay & Lloyd 2010) may stand in the way of stimulating (harder to measure) social and cultural relevant practices in PE, such as a realistic introduction into the world of sports (Feingold, 2013).

Within the school context, sport identity might be facilitated by elements of Sport Education (Siedentop, 1987), sport literacy (Pill, 2010) and extra-curricular school sport competitions within or between schools, as they appear to have the potential to stimulate sport skills development in a socially relevant and realistic sport context. Furthermore, in countries where youth sport is mainly organised in sport clubs independent of schools, alliances between schools and sport clubs might facilitate an introduction in a socially relevant and realistic sports contexts. Future studies should investigate if elements of these PE practices can indeed stimulate the formation of a sport identity.

The health argument for stimulating sport participation has led to a ‘medicalisation’ of the sport (participation) discourse, in which sport is reduced to mere physical activity. Based on this idea, it was conceived that by teaching children the building blocks of movement, physical activity (including sports) can be stimulated. In this
paper, it has been argued that sport is a social and cultural activity that has merits that go above and beyond fundamental movement skills or health. This also means that socialisation into sports demands more than just being physically literate or knowing the rules of a game. Children can be introduced to the social and cultural praxis of sport in order to stimulate the formation of a sport identity, which is worth propagating and stimulating from a cultural and pedagogical perspective. The pedagogical and cultural ‘story’ of sports should be told and educated, before embodied capacities can become meaningful, contribute to the development of a sustainable sport identity and have a lasting influence on sport participation.
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