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Physical literacy and the participant perspective: Exploring the value of physical literacy according to individuals experiencing disability through composite narratives

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ABSTRACT

Background: Physical literacy (PL) is essential to the holistic human experience, emphasizing embodied capability and affording opportunities for inclusive engagement. Despite its recent use as a core programming element, PL from the experiential point of view of individuals experiencing disability has yet to be explored. Excluding these perspectives promotes a culture of ableism, one that devalues the embodied capabilities of those experiencing the world differently. The purpose of this study was to highlight the participant perspective related to PL and explore the value individuals experiencing disability attribute to PL and its development.

Methods: Using the *communities of practice theoretical model of knowledge* as a conceptual framework, 13 participants experiencing disability participated in two focus groups. Participants' experiences were thematized via the use of thematic analysis, and voices were portrayed through composite narratives, highlighting the shared participant experience and value associated with PL.

Results: Three themes emerged: (1) *imagine the possibilities*, (2) *dance like nobody's watching*, and (3) *no wrong way to move*. Composite narratives reflect PL as a valued means of exploration and learning, personal growth, and opportunity related to physical activity and social interaction. Participant value was considered to be enhanced via a learning climate affording opportunities for developing autonomy and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion: This research provides an authentic understanding of PL within the context of disability, and what might be used to facilitate its development in such an environment. Individuals experiencing disability contributed to this knowledge and must be continually involved to ensure PL development is inclusive to all.

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1. Introduction

The health benefits of regular physical activity participation are undeniable with everyone, regardless of age or ability, benefitting from ongoing engagement.¹ A commitment to a physically active lifestyle has the potential to not only impact physical well-being but also cognitive and social functioning, resulting in a holistic improvement in quality of life.^{2–5} Despite this, physical inactivity

has reached problematic levels,⁶ with individuals of all ages and abilities accumulating significantly less physical activity than needed to achieve health benefits.⁷ In Canada, inactivity is rapidly increasing,⁸ with only 28% of youth, and 57% of adults, meeting the physical activity recommendations within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines.^{8,9} A leading suggestion presented to address these declining levels of physical activity is the development of physical literacy (PL).¹⁰

PL is the opportunity to capitalize on our human embodied capacity toward movement wherein “the individual has the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activities for life” (p. 8).¹¹ The nurturing of a positive attitude

Abbreviations: Physical Literacy, (PL).

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toward movement potential, and the motivation to establish a personal connection and interaction with the surrounding environment, increases opportunities for the development of PL.^{11,12} This, in turn, provides motivation for ongoing engagement and creates a cycle for continuous development.^{11,12}

Like the benefits associated with physical activity, the value of PL and its development cannot be overlooked. It is suggested that value in PL exists through the provision of clearer frameworks for the reconceptualization and reorganization of policy,¹³ and there is plausible association between the concept of PL and positive health outcomes.¹⁴ Almond and Whitehead advocate that value exists in PL as it fosters each individual's human capability.¹⁵ In other words, it is beneficial to one's total well-being, impacting not only their physical ability but also their self-confidence and self-esteem to engage in a wide range of physical pursuits; aspects that contribute to the development of human flourishing.¹⁶ Finally, Whitehead et al. assert that PL is valuable in its own right, deriving enriched experience through the capitalization of the human-embodied dimension, and enabling "every participant to realize a significant aspect of being human" (p. 253).¹⁷ Such a proposition derives support from various disciplines including philosophy, neuroscience, social justice, human development, psychology, sociology, and education.¹⁷

Given that PL has incurred such value,^{14,16,17} it has been implemented as a core programming priority for individuals living with disability on the premise that it is inclusive to all regardless of ability.¹⁸ Nevertheless, context-specific understandings of PL from the perspective of individuals with disability are limited in the literature.¹⁹ This lack of an authentic perspective in relation to the value of PL and its development, a concept that is thought to be unique to each individual,^{11,12} leads to poor understanding and overall confusion regarding the development of PL for all.^{20,21} This confusion can result in the reinforcement of practices that devalue the embodied capabilities of those with atypical development,²² legitimize ableism,^{23–26} and foster a physical activity climate that excludes and marginalizes.^{27–29}

With PL thought of as being beneficial for all regardless of ability level,³⁰ the intention of the research was to address the lack of authentic perspective gathered on the concept to date. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to explore and highlight the value that individuals living with disability attribute to their PL development. It is anticipated that the insight from this investigation can be used to provide authentic perspectives on PL from those with lived experience, leading to the co-creation of meaningful opportunities for physical activity engagement through the development of education and training platforms on the concepts of PL and its inclusiveness of all.

1.1. Conceptual framework

To date, the literature on PL and the inclusion of individuals experiencing disability has been dominated by outsider viewpoints, lacking consideration for those possessing lived experience.¹⁹ As such, the messages that have been conveyed have lacked a sense of authenticity, with knowledge being constructed primarily through speculation and assumption. Recognizing the importance of the insider perspective to knowledge creation,³¹ and that knowledge is produced through dynamic interpretation and collaboration with others,³² the authors used an alternative knowledge model for pursuing the value that PL has for those with disabilities – the community of practice theoretical model of knowledge.³³ Communities of practice operate on the premise that learning occurs as a process of social transformation, and that its members share a passion or focus and deepen their knowledge through continual interaction and collaboration.^{32,34} It is a model

whereby learning occurs according to the ongoing dialogue and interpretations of all stakeholders. Here, participants are afforded the opportunity to be actively involved and contribute the 'expert' knowledge they hold regarding their own experiences and perspectives, eliminating the assumption of participants being passive recipients of knowledge.³² Given this learner-centered focus, the communities of practice model is advocated for use within inclusion contexts.³²

Communities of practice consist of three basic elements: a joint enterprise (domain), mutual engagement (community), and a shared repertoire (practice).³³ The joint enterprise, or domain, "inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions" (p. 28).³⁴ The shared goal of this study was to understand PL development and how it is valued from the perspective of those experiencing disability. As PL is something unique to the individual,^{11,12} and something that several stakeholders contribute to,^{35,36} the perspectives of those possessing specific lived experience were thought to be integral to developing an all-encompassing and definitive understanding of PL; an understanding holding true to the inclusiveness that PL is thought to embrace. Mutual engagement refers to the "social fabric" (p. 332) of the community of practice,³² encouraging "a willingness to share ideas, expose one's ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully" (p. 28).³⁴ The strength of the community is developed by the quality of relationships established between all members. Building trust and rapport with all stakeholders (i.e., researchers, facilitators, and participants) was considered crucial to the success of the research as a whole, allowing for authentic discussions on the concept of PL to take place and meaning-making to be created.³⁷ Shared repertoire or practice refers to "the specific knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains" (p. 29).³⁴ The shared knowledge acquired through this study was the understanding and value that individuals experiencing disability perceive in regards to their own PL development, that which was ultimately conveyed to the research team. Such perceptions contribute to the development of specific practices used to establish increased meaning-making on behalf of participants, and that can be later used to promote ongoing engagement and collaboration amongst all stakeholders.

2. Methods

As our aim was to interpret subjective experiences, this study was grounded within an interpretivist research paradigm, comprised of a relativist ontology, a transactional/subjective epistemology, and a hermeneutic and dialectical methodology.^{38,39} We assume that multiple forms of social and experiential realities exist, that knowledge is subjective, and that an interactive and interpretive process between researcher and participant subjectivities co-creates knowledge. We acknowledge that our varied roles, positions, and identities are embedded in the processes and outcomes of research.⁴⁰ The authors are experienced qualitative researchers, White, and non-disabled, with backgrounds in professional practice and teaching adapted physical activity.

Consistent with the paradigmatic assumptions, a case study design^{41,42} of a single program within one community-based recreation center was utilized to: 1) uncover meaningful results by including individuals with authentic lived experiences, and 2) frame the findings to be useful and tangible for other, similarly designed programs for individuals living with disability. Specifically, an instrumental (using one case to understand other cases),⁴¹ and descriptive (describing a phenomenon in its real-world context)⁴² case study approach was used to explore the value associated with the concept of PL and its development for individuals living with disability, therefore, addressing the lack of

authentic perspective gathered on PL inclusive of those with a disability to date.

Following approval from [Blinded] University Ethics Board, a community-based organization familiar to the research team, and known to provide physical activity programs addressing the specific needs of individuals with disabilities and incorporate the principles of PL into its programs' curricula and structure, was approached and provided with a recruitment letter of information. Representatives from the organization sent the recruitment letter to prospective participants, who then contacted the research team expressing interest. Once vetted according to the eligibility criteria, prospective participants were invited to take part in the research. Prior to the commencement of data collection, the research team members provided additional information pertaining to the participant's involvement in the study (e.g., benefits, risks, time commitment, study withdrawal). Each participant provided written consent or assent with parental consent. To protect anonymity, all identifying information was removed from research materials, and pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants.

2.1. Participants

A purposive convenience sample⁴³ was used to select participants that could highlight the value they attribute to PL and its development. Thirteen participants met the eligibility criteria, which included: (1) possessing some level of physical and/or developmental impairment as formally documented in the community-based recreation center records; (2) being over 15 years of age; (3) being English-speaking; and (4) having been or are current participants in a program focused on PL development. Exclusion criteria for the study included: (1) an inability to communicate independently; and (2) participation in programs beyond 2 years prior to data collection. Eight males and five females, with an average age of 22.8 years (range 18–33 years) made up the participant group. Seventy-three percent of the participant group identified as having a developmental impairment, while other impairments identified included physical impairment, sensory impairment, learning disabilities, and mental health concerns (see Table 1 for details). Two participants chose not to disclose disability/impairment type.

2.2. Community program

Participants were recruited from a Therapeutic Recreation program at the community-based recreation center. It is a 2-h, once-per-week program that promotes physical activity, social interaction, and skill-building in a group setting. During the first hour,

participants engage in physical activity through different court-based movement activities. The goal of this hour is to support PL development and a healthy, active lifestyle by providing individuals the opportunity to move alongside peers of similar ability and interests in a semi-structured context (i.e., developed collaborative between facilitators and participants). Here, they can develop their physical and cognitive capabilities, including skill development, knowledge of rules and strategies, and how to engage in physical activity safely. During the second hour, the group focuses on goal setting and achievement to build their confidence and motivation. In its entirety, the program incorporates opportunities for socialization, relationship building, and social skill development, while addressing all developmental domains associated with PL.^{11,12}

2.3. Data collection

Data were collected through two focus groups, composed of 6 and 7 participants, lasting approximately 60 min each. Two experienced focus group moderators (second and fourth authors) conducted the focus groups, while the first author recorded reflexive field notes (i.e., observations, commentary on facilitator-participant interactions, and reflections on researcher positionality within the focus groups). After group introductions, all participants were provided with information on PL and its development via a video describing the concept and its development in a way that was thought to be easily understood by the participant demographic. Simplified information pertaining to the philosophical underpinnings and developmental domains of PL (i.e., PL development occurs everywhere, PL is in all that we do, PL is individual to each and every person, and PL is a holistic aspect of being) was conveyed via the metaphor of water, with visual depictions supplementing spoken language. Metaphors are powerful means of conveying information as they highlight aspects or features of a topic allowing for the learning of novel concepts or ideas to take place.^{44,45} Following the video presentation, members of the research team administered a predetermined list of questions. These included those to establish rapport (i.e., Tell me about the programs that you are involved with.; What are some of the things you like/dislike about the programs you participate in?), those related specifically to the program they were drawn from (i.e., Can you tell me about the most fun you have had within the program?; What do you like about your program instructors?), and PL-specific questions (What part of the video on PL was the most important to you?; What part of the video do you believe is most important for your instructors to know?). All questions were open-ended and broadly constructed to allow for a free exchange of ideas, including those drawing participants into the discussion, key questions

Table 1
Participants' demographics by pseudonym.

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Disclosed Disability
Edward	22	M	Developmental disability
Margaret	25	M	Developmental disability
Sydney	21	F	N/A
Angela	18	M	Physical disability, Developmental disability
Natalie	21	M	Developmental disability
Joshua	21	M	Developmental disability
Trent	26	M	Developmental disability, learning disability, physical disability, hearing loss, CNS deterioration, low eyesight
Kimberly	33	F	Developmental disability, mental health disability
Thomas	26	M	Developmental disability, learning disability
Brittany	21	F	Mental health disability, developmental disability
Shannon	20	F	N/A
Nathan	21	M	Developmental disability
Madeleine	21	F	Developmental disability

Note: Participants with N/A chose not to disclose.

focusing on the research objective and ending questions to tie the session together and bring closure. Development of all focus group questions occurred through the process of discussion by the research team and others within the organizational department assisting with the investigation (e.g., program facilitators).

In recognition of potential participant limitations regarding question comprehension, all questions were presented individually to minimize confusion and rephrased to support individuals as needed. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to respond to questions in a way that they felt comfortable (e.g., verbal, written text, pictures). Participants were reminded that there are no right or wrong answers and that group members are encouraged to build off previously made comments.

All focus groups were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. However, due to the complexity of interactions (e.g., many participants talking at once, the need for facilitated dialogue) between focus group facilitators and participants, we realize that some information may have been lost or inaudible, and therefore may have been excluded within the transcripts. As a result, the research team immersed themselves in the audio data, repeatedly listening to the recordings to familiarize themselves with the information conveyed by participants. Furthermore, additional data were collected through written responses from participants (i.e., written responses, drawings, and one-word descriptors to facilitator questions), and reflexive field notes on behalf of the first author used to fill in any gaps. Upon completion of each focus group, research team members engaged in a debriefing session as a supplementary means of reflection.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis included the development of thematic trends,⁴⁶ followed by the creation of composite narratives to capture the essence of the participants' voices.^{47,48} It should be noted here, that the first, second, and fourth authors were primarily responsible for the process of data analysis, while the third author acted as a 'critical companion' (p. 340),⁴⁹ offering added perspective and insight, clarifying ideas, and providing impartial feedback. Analysis was initiated with members of the research team becoming fully immersed in the data, repeatedly listening to the focus group audio recordings, and reading and re-reading the transcripts, field notes, and participant written responses. Team members were then independently tasked with developing thematic trends across focus groups. Trends were then shared with and discussed among the research team until a consensus was reached. Field notes supplemented the focus group data, providing the researchers with context to conceptually return to the research setting during analysis.^{50,51} Additionally, the conceptual framework of the community of practice theoretical model of knowledge³³ was drawn upon to bring a deeper understanding of the meanings held by each participant, and the collective group.⁵² Specifically, the conceptual framework was used as a means to foster dialogue and reflection amongst the research team (both individually and as a collective), assist in contextualizing participant/focus group accounts, and as a means of helping "the sense-making process [of the target phenomena] to be more explicit" (p. 6).⁵²

Once finalized, thematic findings were developed into composite narratives⁴⁸ as a means of representing the data. Composite narratives allow researchers to reflect on participant data and communicate a story to the reader that captures participants' emotional truth.^{53,54} Moreover, they convey the richness and complexity of lived experience in a way that is relatable for readers from a range of backgrounds,^{48,54} thus enhancing research impact through the transferability of findings.^{47,54} The first, second and fourth authors developed narratives independently. Despite having

immediate consensus on intention and meaning, differences in the approach, tone, and key elements to be included existed and required discussion. After much deliberation, a dominant voice was selected offering space to the other authors to include additional explanations, elaboration, and input prior to creating a final merged version. This was then shared with the third author who provided critical appraisal and feedback regarding the truthfulness of the representation.^{49,55} Given the involvement of all authors in the process of creating the final 'composite', the approach as a whole was considered as group authorship.

Despite being a credible means of representing the original data,⁴⁸ composite narratives are a relatively modern method of articulating findings and lack a detailed step-by-step set of guidelines regarding the methods surrounding their construction.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, to ensure a level of transparency, and thus rigor, was maintained in creating quality composite narratives, several criteria were considered.^{48,56} First, all members of the research team responsible for creating the composite narrative possessed an understanding and familiarity with the context of the study. Such an understanding is imperative for developing narratives that 'fit' the underlying data.⁴⁸ Second, choices regarding the content to include within the narrative were carefully considered, discussed, and verified by all members of the research team. Here, members engaged in a series of conversations and writing tasks (all of which have been documented resulting in an audit trail of research activity) to ensure that the narrative account was well situated within the broader context or structure of participant stories, rather than being representative of a small number of perspectives (i.e., a 'privileged narrative').⁴⁸ Third, the presentation of the narrative was carefully chosen and anonymized. Though differing opinions exist,^{48,54} the composite narratives were written in the third person to highlight the participant-researcher interactions. Fourth, multiple sources (e.g., audio recordings, written participant responses, reflexive field notes) of information informed the construction of the composite narrative. These sources serve as a method of triangulation, providing context to the narrative and helping understand the topic under study.⁴⁸ Fifth, the composite narrative represents the research team's interpretation of participant data, which after its presentation, will be thoroughly unpacked leading to a deeper understanding and meaning.

2.5. Research quality

The quality of the research was addressed according to four criteria for evaluating qualitative research: a) sensitivity to context, b) commitment and rigor, c) transparency and coherence, and d) impact and importance.⁵⁷ The authors achieved *sensitivity to context* by demonstrating a theoretical, philosophical, and methodological awareness of the research process, including the relevant literature on PL, previous work using the community of practice theoretical model of knowledge as a conceptual framework, case study as a research approach, and composite narratives as a method of conveying participants' lived experiences. Additionally, sensitivity to context was demonstrated by using a purposeful sampling strategy and ongoing researcher reflection throughout the research process.^{57,58}

The authors established *commitment and rigor* by developing thorough data collection and analysis strategies and by comparing participant themes against the reflexive field notes, thus adding a level of credibility to the research.⁵⁸ The authors achieved *transparency and coherence* by maintaining an audit trail of all research activity, including research meetings and conversations, and full disclosure of the participant's role in the research prior to their involvement in the study (see the previous section for additional details on how transparency was established). Theory was used

throughout the research process (e.g., analysis and interpretation, and discussion context), further strengthening the cohesiveness and consistency of the study. *Impact and importance* are determined by what the reader considers as important and what they do with the results of the study. By offering a detailed description of the research process, readers can decide whether the findings are pertinent to them and transfer them to their context.

3. Results

Three themes were generated from the analysis. The themes represent the value to which individuals living with disability believe to attribute to their PL development. They include: a) *Imagine the possibilities*, b) *Dance like no one is watching*, and c) *No wrong way to move*. These themes are depicted in a single composite narrative over three distinct time periods (i.e., chapters). Quotes taken directly from the focus groups have been italicized in order to highlight participant voice.

3.1. Chapter 1 - background

Taylor enjoyed being active. "*It [physical activity] makes me feel good,*" was a comment that they frequently made when asked about their participation and engagement. They possessed the capability to be physically active, having ample motivation, and embodying a level of confidence and physical competence. They also understood why physical activity was so important, expressing that "*It [physical activity] helps my mental health*" as "*your body needs to move all the time*". However, due to the difficulties they experienced in expressing themselves in ways that others could easily and quickly understand, they found that opportunities to participate in activities were often minimized. These challenges impacted Taylor's involvement in team-based activities. Taylor felt frustrated with the lack of opportunity to play and participate alongside their peers. The limited collective engagement that Taylor experienced, reduced their prospect of making friends with those having common interests, minimizing their opportunities for physical activity involvement in an environment where they felt they belong. With limitations in opportunity, Taylor struggled when trying to discover new interests. They were often left with trying to capitalize on what was available, which was already a less-than-optimal selection of physical activities.

Taylor's family supported their desire to participate in physical activity, however, they faced barriers such as time constraints, the location of programs, and a lack of peer support. These obstacles, as well as, the commitment required to create and assist in opportunities exacerbated the number and types of physical activity opportunities available to Taylor. As this issue continued, Taylor and their family sought new ways for Taylor to be active. They were interested in a place where Taylor could independently engage in physical activity and seek assistance if needed. Ideally, the location would be close to home so that Taylor could take advantage of more opportunities, and even get their family members involved if it worked with their schedules.

3.2. Chapter 2 - Imagine the possibilities

After an extensive search of the nearby communities, Taylor and their family discovered a recreation center offering a variety of physical activity programming for individuals with varying ability levels. Upon their first visit, they took a short tour, where an employee showed them where the change rooms, fitness studios, and exercise rooms were. They were then led to a large recreation area and encouraged to explore the space. Walking into the space for the first time, both Taylor and their family were amazed by the

options available for physical activity; not just for Taylor, but for individuals of all abilities. There were people walking laps on a track, people working out on exercise machines, kids playing at the indoor park, and a group of people chatting and moving around on basketball courts. Furthermore, Taylor and their family were taken aback by the positive energy that was emanating from any, and all, the activities around them. Not only were their smiles noticed, and laughter heard, but the 'high-fives' were widespread. Moreover, the air was filled with encouragement from instructors, who appeared to know everybody by their first name. Without any doubt, they received the impression that this was a place where individuals come, not only to enjoy themselves but to explore their interests in physical activity.

At one point during the visit, Taylor and their family walked by the basketball courts and noticed music playing. Motivated by pure curiosity, they stopped to see what was going on. Noticing Taylor and their family observing, an instructor casually came over to them and informed them that this was the first session of a regularly offered Dance Fit program, asking if they would like to join. Not sure what to make of the class, Taylor declined the offer, stating that they would rather watch for now. Over the next 15 min or so, the instructor played a variety of music types, dancing and encouraging participants to move as they saw fit. During this time, Taylor and their family observed several different styles – some people were super enthusiastic with big, silly moves, while others were more reserved and subtle with their movements. Nevertheless, they collectively agreed that all, despite how they moved, were having a fantastic time.

On their way out of the recreation area, Taylor turned to their family, expressing how much they enjoyed watching the Dance Fit group, and that they would be interested in trying something like the program in the future. Their family, with much fervor, began their inquiry into the program. They asked one person, then the next, and by the time they reached the front door, they had Taylor enrolled in the program for the next week. Upon leaving the center the employee who had initially provided the tour to Taylor and their family, offered a quick fist-bump, saying "I hope to see you back here, Taylor!"

3.3. Chapter 3 - Dance like no one is watching

The next week, Taylor made their way back to the recreation center for the Dance Fit program. While initially excited to begin and seize an opportunity to be involved in some sort of physical activity, mixed feelings soon settled over Taylor. They were worried about not being as good as others in the group, which also led to feelings of not fitting in. After all, some of the participants looked as if they had been doing this program for a while, and Taylor was just a beginner. Nevertheless, Taylor recalled something they overheard from a participant when watching the previous week's Dance Fit program. "*Everyone can do everything together, but it's just different*". They remembered that not everyone followed the instructor's movements, providing a sense of comfort in that, perhaps, they could engage at a level they felt appropriate.

As Taylor made their way to the basketball court where the Dance Fit program took place, they were met by the instructor who introduced himself as Jacob. Jacob helped Taylor find a place for their items and encouraged them to pick a spot on the court with enough room to express themselves. As it was their first day, Taylor was reluctant to choose a spot amid the rest of the group, and as such, chose to stay closer to the back of the court – they were not sure how the day would go, so they thought it would be better to play things safe. Almost immediately, the person beside them introduced themselves to Taylor. She said her name was Aisha, and she expressed to Taylor that she has done this class a few times

before and was excited to see new people. Instantaneously, Taylor felt at ease. Aisha seemed nice, providing a level of comfort that they had not previously experienced in any physical activity context before. They thought to themselves that, perhaps, this was someone they could become friends with.

In starting the class, Jacob demonstrated several dance moves that could be used for various songs. Moreover, he provided numerous variations to the dance moves, given the wide range of abilities that existed within the class. As Taylor had not done much dancing before, they decided to slow things down. They liked Jacob's moves, but they were way too quick. Aisha did the same as Taylor, and they thought it was nice not to be the only one moving at their own pace. At the end of the song, Jacob asked the group whether anyone wanted to move spots to dance beside someone else. Taylor looked at Aisha and they both decided they were good with where they were. As more songs played, they seemed to feed off each other's energy. They were constantly smiling and giggling their way through songs, challenging each other to try different moves. It did not matter what kind of music was being played, or how they were moving, one could see that they enjoyed each other's company.

As the class finished, Taylor realized that though some parts were new and different to them, they had so much fun. Everyone moved differently and that was okay. They thought that Jacob was an awesome instructor, who encouraged everyone to express themselves how they saw fit. Jacob showed everyone different ways to move, and provided breaks when needed; in other words, he adjusted according to the needs of the participants. Taylor had not had this type of interaction with an instructor before, but they knew that they liked it.

Leaving the courts, Taylor looked visibly tired from all the dancing. Nevertheless, they had a smile on their face and could be overheard saying they were excited to come back next week. Aisha, too, was enthusiastic to come back to the class. As they left the courts, Aisha turned to Taylor and smiled. She whispered, "Thanks for dancing with me today, Taylor. I'll see you next week!" Taylor smiled and walked away from the class knowing that they made a new friend and were a little bit happier because of it.

3.4. Chapter 4 - No wrong way to move

Wow! The first 12-week session of Dance Fit flew by, and it was a hit. Taylor discovered new opportunities at the recreation center, that they had a thing for dance, and they made a good friend in Aisha. They couldn't wait to start another session. However, despite the success of their first 12 weeks, some of those old worries about not fitting in started to creep back into the fold. Taylor did not get to know anyone aside from Aisha, and as such, their confidence lacked and the ability to meet new people was still not easy; there was a constant worry about what others thought about Taylor's abilities and how they presented themselves. Thank goodness for Taylor's motivation and the enjoyment they got out of that first session with Aisha. If it were not for these things, then they likely would not have returned.

Upon the start of the first class of the new session, Taylor met the new instructor, Bianca, who replaced Jacob for this session. Taylor did not know how to feel about this change, as over the previous 12 weeks, they got used to Jacob and felt comfortable in his class. Recognizing that change may be difficult for some participants, Bianca took the necessary steps to help alleviate participant discomfort. She began her session by informing everyone that she wanted to get to know them all to optimize every individual's experience. She also emphasized the idea of fun and participation, rather than ensuring individuals follow a set routine. These were things that Jacob also did, so Taylor's mind was somewhat at ease

with Bianca and her participant-centered, collaborative approach to the program.

To initiate the first session, Bianca took the time to get to know everyone. She started the music for a warm-up and then moved around the class to get to know everyone's names. Taylor was standing with Aisha. When Bianca came up to them, she asked for their names and their favorite music. Aisha responded with "anything on the radio!" As nobody had ever really asked (other than perhaps Jacob) for their input, Taylor was not sure what to say, so they shared their name and then decided to stay quiet. Bianca smiled and said, "if you want to share your favorite songs with me, you can come up beside me and lead the dance when that song comes on." Aisha was excited about the chance for such an opportunity and turned to Taylor. Aisha thought it would be even more fun if they did this together. After some convincing, Taylor stated, "after class, let's figure out a song for next week."

The first class with Bianca went well. She did a good job providing options, but Taylor still wasn't sure how they felt about Bianca and all the change. When they got home, Taylor informed their family about the new instructor and her idea for different people to take turns being the leader. Taylor's family said that they had already received an email from Bianca telling them about her idea. Their family was thrilled about the approach to empowering the participants to take an active role in the class beyond participating. Relating this to Taylor, they expressed that it sounded cool and that Taylor should try and take advantage of the opportunity. They encouraged Taylor to think of a song they love and give leading the class a try. They also loved the idea of Taylor and Aisha working together on their song, as very few opportunities to work with a partner or group were presented to Taylor in the past.

After a few phone calls between weeks one and two, Taylor and Aisha picked a song and submitted it to Bianca. Upon submitting the song to Bianca, Taylor was nervous as they had never led a dance before, but given Aisha's excitement, they realized things would be okay. A couple of weeks pass, and Taylor and Aisha's song had yet to be selected and played by Bianca in class. However, on the fourth week, before the start of class, Bianca notified Taylor and Aisha that their song would be played that day. Bianca asked if they would rather have their song at the beginning of the class, or the end. Given her excitement, Aisha expressed that she wanted to go immediately, however, Taylor's nerves were still a bit of an issue. After some discussion, Taylor and Aisha chose to have their song played at the end of class. Bianca smiled, suggesting that the end of class would be perfect. Aisha and Taylor went to warm up.

While warming up, Taylor noticed a new person in their class. They thought to themselves that this individual looked nervous and unsure about what to do. Taylor recalled their own experiences and decided that they want to make sure this person is comfortable, just like Aisha did for them. So, they introduced themselves. "Hi, my name is Taylor. Welcome to Dance Fit. What is your name?" He responded with "Mateo." Right before the dancing started, Taylor turned to Mateo and smiled at him, asking if he was ready to have fun. Mateo seemed unsure and hesitant. Turning back to Taylor, he asked, "Why do you like this program?" Taylor, continuing to smile, responded "I love being here because I get to see my friends and friendly faces." They continued, "I also like coming to the program to meet new people". Mateo instantly felt better. He smiled, and signaling that he was ready, gave an enthusiastic 'Let's go!'

As the class wore on, Taylor became somewhat obsessed with the time, constantly recognizing that it was getting closer to the end of the class. Then, Bianca waved Taylor and Aisha forward. Taylor was again filled with nervousness, but upon noticing Mateo beside them, who looked like he had been having fun, there was a gradual move toward the front of the class. As this was Mateo's first class, Taylor and Aisha invited Mateo to join them. At first, Mateo

shook his head, as to indicate a definite 'No'. However, Taylor informed Mateo they planned to make it easy, and it would be a lot of fun to have a third person at the front. With this reassurance, Mateo quietly agreed and made his way to the front of the class alongside Taylor and Aisha.

Everyone was excited for Taylor, Aisha, and Mateo to lead them through the last dance. The song that they chose was one that everyone knows from the radio. Before the song started Taylor turned to the whole class and said "I want to see everyone's silliest moves for the whole song. The craziest, goofiest moves you got!" The class smiled and cheered. Taylor then turned to Mateo and said, "If they are doing silly moves, we just need to do our best!" They smiled and got ready to start. Taylor pulled out some of their silliest dance moves, as did everyone else. Mateo was laughing so hard he could barely dance. At the end of the song, everyone cheered, giving each other hugs and high-fives. Taylor was very glad they tried something new. More important, though, Taylor was excited to make a new friend. Bianca smiled and ended the class, knowing that one more person learned how to be themselves and dance like no one is watching.

4. Discussion

Through the application of the community of practice theoretical model of knowledge and the use of composite narratives, the present work sought to illuminate the value that individuals living with disabilities place on the concept of PL. The accounts of these study participants reflected an understanding of PL that mirrored Whitehead's conceptualization.^{11,12} PL was valued by participants as both a means and result of exploration, reflecting the continuous, lifelong process of becoming that is inherent to Whitehead's holistic understanding of the concept.⁵⁹ The influence of the physical and social contexts of participation shared within participants' accounts emphasized an abstract and non-linear conceptualization of PL. This connection with the built environment and interpersonal relationships is at the heart of holistic PL development,⁵⁹ facilitating curiosity, self-exploration, and individual enrichment.⁶⁰

Participants' acknowledgement of PL as a means of encouraging personal development and change through the process of self-discovery (i.e., likes/dislikes, interests), is well aligned with their accounts of opportunities for new experiences and relationships, what Durden-Myers et al. would describe as human flourishing.¹⁶ Participants believed that PL facilitated the development of connections within the physical activity environment, which can be understood as a key contributor to their willingness to push boundaries and challenge themselves, and the broaden their attitudes towards different types of physical activity.^{12,15} The privilege and flexibility of exploration granted via their personal PL development fostered their 'love of learning',⁶¹ and enthusiasm for additional opportunities for physical activity engagement. PL was considered more as an ongoing means to an end, rather than an end in itself.^{11,12}

Through their understanding of PL as something developed according to the unique capabilities of the individual, and thus as a personalized journey¹² where they are free to express themselves, participants articulated value in the form of empowerment and expressed a sense of personal responsibility for their physical activity engagement. Participants and their PL facilitators engaged in partnership, within which they were granted agency to act in a self-directed manner,¹⁶ facilitating autonomy and independence, and a strong sense of belonging to a larger group. In this way, participants' PL and its development were considered as a 'joint enterprise' where the participants themselves embodied the role of active collaborators with opportunities to contribute and guide their own learning through the demonstration of their capabilities

and sharing of their ideas. Participants not only attributed value to these opportunities, but considered themselves as valued members of the learning process. More prevalent, however, participants valued PL as a means to cultivating new relationships. Participants believed that engaging with others was increasingly pleasurable, and even rewarding as collective engagement created an overall sense of camaraderie with members of the larger group, and therefore a community striving towards a common goal or objective. Such 'mutual engagement' between themselves and their PL facilitators and peers, equipped participants with a deeper sense of meaning and greater environmental connection because of their experiences, both of which are considered essential for maintaining a personal commitment to lifelong physical activity participation (i.e., motivation for ongoing engagement).^{11,12,17}

Participants also expressed an understanding that PL is individualized, and that opportunities are provided in their program devoid of judgment and evaluation,¹⁹ which increased the value in their own PL development through feeling heard and respected. With no comparisons being made to other individuals or a standardized norm, personal barriers including fear and hesitation to participate were minimized.²⁹ Participants were not concerned with how they engaged, but rather the act of engaging itself; they were free to be themselves, interacting with others and the surrounding environment as they saw fit. This level of control towards their personal engagement contributed not only to a heightened sense of overall enjoyment and fun during participation in activities, but also encouraged learning within a comfortable and safe space. With participants feeling a sense of ease, they were free to test their personal limits, engage in various activities, and capitalize on opportunities to develop their embodied potential.¹⁶

Participants also had the opportunity to build skills that could be transferred to activities beyond the program they were involved in, as a result of reduced barriers and facilitated self-exploration. This understanding of PL as fostering opportunities for physical growth further aligns with Whitehead's conceptualization.^{11,12} These positive experiences promoted a return to the activity context on subsequent occasions, indicating a sense of intrinsic motivation which has the potential to inspire an ongoing commitment to participate and lay the groundwork for the development of added meaning to experiences.¹⁷

Together, participants' understanding of PL and the value they assign to its development provide an essential starting point for the creation of meaning-making opportunities for all. These gained perspectives assist in forging a 'shared repertoire' of knowledge that may be used to guide the operationalization of PL, devoid of marginalization and current exclusionary practices to date.⁶² Furthermore, given the dynamic nature of PL and its development,^{11,12} programs must provide individuals to voice their desires and be heard. Acting as a community with a shared passion for equitable opportunities in physical activity allowed participants to express their unique understandings and values toward PL, therefore building a foundation for practical discussions on PL development within current and future programs. In addition, this added insight into how to best optimize physical activity environments to meet individual needs will drive PL-specific education and training for various stakeholders (i.e., teachers, coaches, team-based practitioners) across a variety of contexts (i.e., education, sport, recreation and leisure).

5. Study limitations

We acknowledge several limitations to the study. Individuals living with disability from a single case (i.e., one program within one recreation center) comprised the sample of participants in the study, and therefore the findings may not be transferable to others

with similar levels of ability in other programs and/or centers. However, naturalistic generalization and transferability of the findings may occur for the reader if the experiences of the participants of this study resonate with readers' personal experiences of PL or bring meaning to the experiences of other individuals with differing abilities.⁶³ As well, participants were asked to provide their perspectives on a concept (i.e., PL) considered by many to be complex and dynamic.^{64,65} Despite efforts to translate the concept in a way that is easily understood by all (i.e., a video representation of PL) and the authors' beliefs that participants could attribute value to the concept, consideration must be attended to the participants' comprehension level on the concept. Finally, the authors of the investigation, while all possessing knowledge of impairment and disability, the concept of PL and adapted physical activity, do not experience disability themselves. As such, the research team brings a non-disability perspective to the analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of the participants' stories.

6. Conclusion

This research provides a valuable starting point for understanding PL from a participant perspective and what is needed to promote its development within the context of disability. The understanding and value that participants attributed to PL indicate that individuals living with disability possess a unique, yet congruent perspective to Whitehead's conceptualization of PL and its development,^{11,12} one that should be considered to promote human flourishing via a physical activity approach.¹⁶ As well, participants demonstrated the knowledge and capability to understand and attribute value to various aspects of PL, highlighting that their voices can and must be considered when developing programs to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the conceptual framework of the community of practice theoretical model of knowledge³³ taken in this investigation exposes the need for gathering authentic perspective on the concept of PL and incorporating individuals experiencing disability as collaborators in learning process, to facilitate experiences that are meaningful to physical activity participants, thereby providing them with the ongoing motivation required for engagement. Future exploration of PL from a participant perspective is warranted to ensure the practices (i.e., practitioner education and training, program development) used to foster its development are increasingly equitable and inclusive for all, regardless of ability level.

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