CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This research book offers insight into enacting 'physical education' (PE) to optimize children's wellbeing. The educational question is no longer whether or not physical activity enhances children's wellbeing, nor is it whether or not wellbeing enhances academic achievement, this is axiomatic; further reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic data and findings regarding learning in schools. Rather the educational questions being asked today are 'how' regular quality PE classes and movement experiences can act as a platform for wellbeing in all schools, and 'how' wellbeing can be successfully implemented in schools for all children.

This research book offers insight into enacting 'physical education' (PE) to optimize children's wellbeing. The educational question is no longer whether or not physical activity enhances children's wellbeing, nor is it whether or not wellbeing enhances academic achievement, this is axiomatic; further reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic data and findings regarding learning in schools. Rather the educational questions being asked today are 'how' regular quality PE classes and movement experiences can act as a platform for wellbeing in all schools, and 'how' wellbeing can be successfully implemented in schools for all children. PE is defined as "education through movement" (Pangrazi, 2001, p. 5) and as the book's title suggests—global and holistic approaches relating to the physical dimension of education are investigated. Hence, 'education

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through movement' is adopted as a lens to explore a holistic approach towards child health and wellbeing.

PE has been advocated for many years within schools as an essential curriculum area, as have the holistic benefits of learning through the physical dimension. "Physical and health education has the potential to become one of the cornerstones of the education of tomorrow that contributes to the holistic development of students, fostering the development of crucial competencies and the physical and mental health of students" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2019). However, the education problem that continues to exist, the gap in practice that modern research illustrates, is that PE implementation is not progressing (unlike educational policies). Cale and Harris (2019) recognise gaps in children's knowledge and understanding of health and the physical dimension in the UK. Also, literature implies to some degree, that the holistic HPE ideal has failed in practice (Lynch, 2017; Tinning, 2009). However, we were reminded by the Covid-19 pandemic that holistic HPE is at the core of school wellbeing and academic achievement (Lynch, 2022). For "the COVID-19 pandemic has altered certain trajectories in ways that we are still unpacking today" (OECD, 2024).

UK Government research, involving school leaders and teaching participants, highlighted the significance of wellbeing for recovery in pupil attainment from the Covid pandemic; "School leaders described the continued impact of the pandemic on pupils' education and personal development… The pandemic continues to affect pupils' attendance and leaders also reported an increase in pupils with poor mental health and well-being" (Ofsted, 2021). Another contributing factor to the impact was that "Primary school pupils' learning was often dependent on the level of support parents were able to give and the confidence parents had in helping their children in different subjects" (Ofsted, 2021). School attendance remains a concern with more than 20% of children in England frequently missing school in a sign attendance is still struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels (Rhoden-Paul, 2023). Furthermore, a crisis of school refusal is also gripping Australia; in 2023 38% of all students in Years 1–10 were absent for more than 20 days, considered chronically absent (Amin & Ettinger-Epstein, 2024). There is a clear link between not wanting to go to school and wellbeing.

The UK Government's response resulted in new policy documents, namely the introduction of UK Government statutory guidance for Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing in primary and secondary schools. The Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing guidance is followed closely by the UK Government's 'Relationships education and health education' statutory guidance. The significance of Health, Wellbeing and Physical Education on a global scale was recently investigated:

> OECD education systems support child empowerment. This ranges from providing them with the civic skills and knowledge to effectively participate in democracy, to supporting their social, emotional and physical well-being, and reducing inequalities that threaten the empowerment of vulnerable or marginalised groups.… Child empowerment is increasingly recognised as a policy goal and priority by governments around the OECD. Many countries have taken effective steps in realising this goal. However we still have far to go in ensuring that all children are empowered today and in the future. (OECD, 2024)

This includes Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Health, Wellbeing and Physical Education. One definition of EDI is "ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to participate and succeed in meaningful learning experiences, ideally at a level of optimal challenge for them" (Alfrey & Jeanes, 2021). This is "regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, ability or indeed any other personal characteristic" (Youth Sport Trust, 2024). Hence, this research book will explore the need to continue the journey of improvement in Health, Wellbeing and Physical Education (Kirk, 2014).

The book uses research gathered from around the world and adopts 'didactical questions' borrowed from France, Germany and Scandinavian countries—specifically, Swedish didactics of Physical Education research. Didactical in this context refers "to an interest in the relations between teaching, learning and socialisation" (Quennerstedt & Larsson, 2015, p. 1) and "in many European countries, the concept stands for a research tradition with an interest in theories and practices of teaching and learning" (p. 2). Hence, the term's meaning is different from that of the English language.

> Sometimes research in didactics asks slightly different questions regarding educational practice, where didactical questions traditionally are addressed by the questions what, how, and why, in terms of what and how teachers

> teach, what and how students learn and why this content or teaching is taught or learned. Questions such as who is teaching, who is learning, when and with whom are also relevant. (Quennerstedt & Larsson, 2015, p. 3).

Subsequently, this book's purpose is: to identify the 'what' of 'physically educating' children; 'how' literature and research suggest this should be done; to identify 'why' this is not happening as effectively as it should be and to offer global direction for our journey of improvement. Sub questions such as who is teaching and what qualifications do they have? Who is learning? Exploring beyond the children and students' wellbeing to explore general staff, teachers and school leaders. This is very relevant at present with inquest findings identifying Ofsted inspections in the UK officially contributing to the death of Headteacher Ruth Perry (Courts & Tribunals Judiciary, 2023). When and with whom learning happens is also considered as part of the learning context. Through research, problems with implementing the PE curriculum with a focus in primary/elementary schools are identified and recommendations are made for advancing the physical dimension in children's learning, enabling subsequent lifelong wellbeing benefits.

Purpose of the Book

Physical education provides a platform for wellbeing and wellbeing provides a platform for children's learning and development. Specifically, Quality Physical Education (QPE) enhances children's lifelong wellbeing and holistic health (Lynch, 2016; UNESCO, 2015). This is a simple statement, a given within the realm of education and validated by quantitative research relating to the benefits of physical activities (detailed in Chapters 12, 13, 14 & 15). However, understanding the implementation of QPE to enable holistic health is complex (Kirk, 2014; MacDonald, 2012). The concept of QPE implementation is multidimensional, containing many layers which contribute to this book's global significance and timeliness, as it investigates how educators, schools and community leaders can optimize children's wellbeing through the enhancement of PE. Subsequently, the book investigates how learning in schools can be optimised through the enhancement of wellbeing (cf. Figure 1.1).

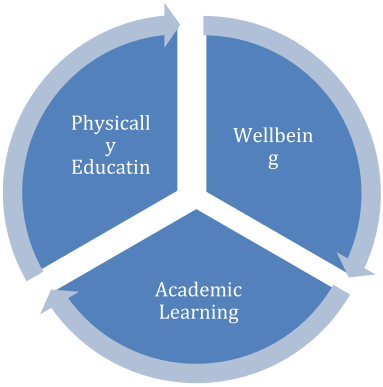

Fig. 1.1 Quality physical education, wellbeing and academic learning cycle

The global definition of PE offered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) illustrates the holistic benefits of PE:

> the planned, progressive, inclusive learning experience that forms part of the curriculum in early years, primary and secondary education. In this respect, QPE acts as the foundation for a lifelong engagement in physical activity and sport. The learning experience offered to children and young people through physical education lessons should be developmentally appropriate to help them acquire the psychomotor skills, cognitive understanding, and social and emotional skills they need to lead a physically active life. (2015, p. 9)

While many books advocate wellbeing through the physical dimension, this book uses evidence-based research to authenticate the power of QPE and subsequently offers direction in developing whole child wellbeing. Furthermore, it uses evidence-based research to authenticate the power of wellbeing and subsequently offers direction in developing children's academic learning and development. The book sits within what Greenfield refers to as 'deep thinking', 'content' or 'meaning' derived from research (2012), also referred to as 'ideas, thinking, and constructing' (Hattie, 2009, p. 26), and more recently, critical reflection (Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE]):

> Educators who are critically reflective are also committed to their own ongoing professional learning and development, actively seeking out

> opportunities that develop capabilities, as well as collaborating with their colleagues as aspects of practice. (2022, pp.18–19)

Hence, the book is a culmination of years of evidence-based research, practical experience and internal insight, carefully constructed to make meaning. Therefore, different aspects of research have been embedded "into a whole nested hierarchy of associations that have accumulated" (Greenfield, 2012) in building knowledge.

The 'meaning' clarified relates to QPE and wellbeing and how they can be best achieved within the school community. Cook and Odom (2013) define 'evidence-based' practice in connection to 'meaning'; "practices and programmes shown by high quality research to have meaningful effects on student outcome" (p. 136). The meaningful objective evidence in this research book has been gathered from qualitative in-depth data from case study primary schools involving teacher and student participants; qualitative in-depth data from a recognised model Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Physical Education case study programme; interviews with secondary trained PE teacher participants who are responsible for teaching primary school children; a questionnaire carried out by educators across nine US states and qualitative and quantitative data gathered from a large empirical ex-post facto survey involving nearly 400 government primary school principals/headteachers. Zach et al. (2017) identify that qualitative research in this area of PE is lacking, describing it as a void which should be filled.

> While student health and well-being are a priority, robust research evidence and policy knowledge on which policies and practices in physical and health education support student health and well-being are lacking. The evidence base on comparative policy in physical and health education curriculum is comparatively under-developed relative to core academic learning areas such as literacy and numeracy. (OECD, 2019, p. 3)

Once again the didactical research thread interweaves; "In didactical research, education and educational practices are explored and scrutinised in terms of their institutional and political prerequisites and their consequences for the processes of educational practice. Teaching is thus regarded as a political and moral act" (Quennerstedt & Larsson, 2015, p. 2). Hence, this building of knowledge fills two current gaps; contributing clarity with regard to 'how' the physical dimension can be

best implemented to enhance students' wellbeing and 'how' wellbeing can be implemented to enhance academic learning for all—this is a moral act.

Research suggests that the optimum time for children to learn and refine their motor skills and to be introduced to QPE experiences is during preschool and early primary school years (Branta et al., 1984; Cale & Harris, 2019; Commonwealth of Australia 1992; Espenschade & Eckert, 1980; Kirk, 2005; Lynch, 2016). Hence, it is ideal to begin the physical learning journey as early as possible and to reach all children, which only the schooling system enables (Lynch, 2016). "Children's early learning influences their continuing educational journeys. Wellbeing and a strong sense of connection, optimism, resilience and engagement enable children to develop a growth mindset, and a positive attitude to learning" (AGDE, 2022, pp.18–19).

A glance at the education efforts in Australia evidences such priorities. Australia is a significant nation throughout this book as it is argued that Australia has been a leader of holistic Health, Wellbeing and Physical Education (H, W & PE) curriculum reform (Lynch, 2016; Stirrup & Hooper, 2022). In Australia, since 1901 each of the eight Australian states and territories has been formally responsible for education (Braithwaite, 1994; Lynch, 2014). However, in more recent times two national curriculum reforms have transpired in efforts towards a national curriculum; 1994 and 2013.

In 1994 the nomenclature of the key learning area was officially changed from 'Physical Education' to 'Health and Physical Education' and a holistic socio-cultural approach was adopted—the inclusive sociocultural approach is discussed in detail in Chapter 11. "The task of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationship between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional and historical contexts in which action occurs on the other" (Wertsch, 1998, p. 24). Supplementing health to the physical education nomenclature was momentous for the discipline, acknowledging strong wellbeing connections across the physical dimension. This is supported by neuroscience; while the 'physical' body slows down and deteriorates as one gets older, our brain connections known as plasticity, actually gets better as one ages (Greenfield, 2012). Hence, holistic physical education (health and wellbeing) throughout the entirety of one's life was acknowledged in policy, giving PE as a subject/learning area, increased significance throughout one's lifespan—'lifelong education'.

Problem

The problem that this research book builds upon and contributes towards is 'how' PE can be successfully implemented in primary/elementary schools around the world, thus enhancing student wellbeing. Subsequently, 'how' can wellbeing be successfully implemented in primary/elementary schools around the world, thus enhancing student learning (cf. Figure 1.1). Cale and Harris (2019) argue the importance "to reflect critically on how best to promote active lifestyles for all children and young people" (p. 4). Quay argues that a current problem "is the unquestioning acceptance of the everyday structures and practices of education" (Quay, 2024). Hence, this book questions the everyday practice and structures in search of improvements for QPE, wellbeing and subsequently, academic learning (cf. Figure 1.1).

Quantitative research has examined the benefits of physical activities and literature has advocated QPE and the notion of lifelong physical activity in schools since the 1940s (Kirk, 2014). However, while it can be argued this has been achieved in various schools, sadly research suggests this has been far too few in number, including developed nations (Lynch & Soukup, 2017). Literature and research have indicated this flaw for many years and despite more recent focused efforts, enacting policies continues to be a major barrier to children's health and wellbeing (UNESCO, 2014). This flaw was reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically data and findings regarding learning in schools. Simply, more needs to be done in improving PE and wellbeing in all schools as supported by OECD Education 2030; "We are committed to helping every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential and help shape a shared future built on the well-being of individuals, communities and the planet" (OECD, 2018, p. 3).

There are some perceptions within education systems that require change; global research has found that physical education (PE) in primary schools is often:

- taught by inadequately trained teachers;
- has insufficient curriculum time allocation;
- has a perceived inferior subject status;
- has inadequate provision of facilities and equipment and teaching materials, frequently associated with under-funding;
- has large class sizes and funding cuts and

- in some countries, limited awareness of pathways links to wider community programmes and facilities outside of schools (Hardman, 2008a, p. 5).

Much has been written about classroom teacher's lack of confidence and competence and subsequent absence of interest and preparation to teach physical education in England. Many teachers are not confident in providing physical education and have had minimal training—therefore they have little understanding and knowledge (Cale & Duncombe, 2008; Cale & Harris, 2019). This is not only the case in England but extends internationally, in PE and across all learning areas within the teaching practice. Alarmingly, it is recognised that while everyone working as a teacher *should be* qualified, not all staff members being employed as teachers (and school leaders) *are* qualified (Kissock, 2017):

> Findings from a recent Council of British International Schools (COBIS) large-scale research project, based on 1,600 surveys from senior leaders and teacher participants in British International Schools, found that 43 per cent of senior leaders believed there was a need for Initial Teacher Training qualifications to train local and *international staff* (such as international qualified teacher status, iQTS) (COBIS, 2022, p. 17). Hence, in the big business of international education, questions are being raised about quality assurance, standards and qualifications. (Lynch, 2023)

It has also been noted that insufficient school leaders' reduced training in England, through National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) in middle, senior and executive leadership, as well as NPQH (headteachers), have replaced school expectations for higher degrees by research. In particular, it is argued that Programmes such as the NPQSL need to be flexible and open to the most recent research findings in education (Lynch, 2022). Furthermore:

> The range of NPQs has now grown to eight, including 'leading literacy' and 'leading teacher development' – any area can seemingly be tagged 'leadership' to make money. But with all NPQs strictly following the same 'golden thread' of evidence, and from such a narrow range of closely linked providers, a skilled and supposedly valued work force of teachers and school leaders is being bluffed. (Innes, Murtagh & Gregory, 2024)

NPQs are a government initiative which can be used as credits towards a Master of Education degree for a small number of identified universities. This varies from 15 to 50% credit but is not equivalent. The NPQ research projects illustrate the significance of research for school improvement, whether through formal postgraduate education qualifications or professional development.

> The NPQSL uses research as a framework for improvement in leadership and school performance. This does raise questions about recognised prior learning within the education realm. The project leader would have designed a similar initiative for academic recovery given they are a Senior Fellow in the UK Higher Education Academy (2021); identified as an experienced educator able to demonstrate, impact and influence, responsibility for leading, managing or organising programmes, subjects and/or disciplinary areas within Higher Education (in the UK). However, this educational accreditation, evidencing a readiness and ability to be an effective senior leader, was not recognised by DfE. A recommendation to come from this research would be that all NPQSL programmes be aligned with other UK Government education accreditation programmes. (Lynch, 2022, p. 16)

Education as a platform is essential and requirements of becoming a teacher and school leader change from nation to nation (especially between constituent countries of the UK; Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England). In leading educational countries of the world, it is essential that teachers (P—Year 10) begin with a platform of at least 4 years of study in Education at university which combines theory and practice (and teachers specify in certain subjects). For example, in New South Wales, Australia every teacher is required to complete an accredited teaching degree (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2024)—an accredited four-year teaching degree (e.g. Bachelor of Education) or a combined degree (e.g. Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education), or an undergraduate degree (e.g. Bachelor of Science) and an accredited graduate entry teaching degree (e.g. Master of Teaching—2 years).

In Finland, teachers must also have a master's degree in education in addition to the 4-year Bachelor of Education.

Griggs (2012) supplements that in England as little as nine hours are often donated to PE preparation on a one-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course and just five hours for those involved with School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT). Griggs (2012)

states that as a result primary PE is delivered 'ineffectively'. Subsequently, this negatively affects pupil's experiences in this vital stage of their learning (Ofsted, 2000, 2004, 2009; Physical Education Association, 1998; cited in Keay & Spence, 2012). Then the didactic questions about the quality of a PGCE come into play. Not all PGCEs meet the qualification requirements to teach in other countries, for example in Australia. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) mission is "Promoting excellence so that teachers and leaders have the maximum impact on learning in all Australian schools and early childhood settings" (AITSL, 2024a). According to AITSL, the UK Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is not regarded as an academic qualification and cannot be considered as such (2024b).

Prospective Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students with a key interest in PE and children, in England are often faced with a systemic choice; follow their physical passion and become a secondary physical education specialist, or follow their passion for working with children in the 5–11 year age group and become a classroom teacher in the primary school. Courses that qualify teachers to specialise in PE and become a classroom teacher (specifically for primary education) are rare, with only approximately three identified (Lynch, 2015). This is not only the situation in England but throughout the world as primary school generalist classroom teachers are most often responsible for teaching PE, whereas "In secondary schools, specialists are predominantly responsible for teaching physical education classes" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 8). With the exception of Singapore which is detailed in Chapter 9.

Hence, literature and research indicate in primary schools there is an absence of PE specialist teachers in England and some Australian states (Griggs, 2012; Lynch & Soukup, 2017). This also seems to be duplicated throughout many parts of the world. Within Australia, for example, teacher PE preparation has been described in the past as general physical activity courses rather than developmentally appropriate preparation for delivering physical education (Lynch, 2013). Hence, recommendations throughout history for tertiary-qualified PE specialist teachers in primary schools have been ignored (AHKA, 2018, Commonwealth of Australia, 1992; Lynch, 2005).

Within Europe PE delivery is mixed—some countries are considered as being stable to good and others are identified as only being in the initial stages of PE development. Hardman describes a "widespread perceived

decline or marginalisation of physical education in schools" (2008b, p. 5). Problems identified specifically with primary school PE in Europe include:

- insufficient curriculum time.
- limited quality mainly due to inadequate training of teachers.
- an undervaluing of motor development and motor learning (Hardman, 2008b).

Scandinavian countries are considered to be better than many other countries around the world. "In Sweden, for example, the climate vis-à-vis physical education is now much more positive, and the subject has regained status and resources. The situation for physical education in Finland and Norway also looks positive, if not quite as good as in Sweden. Physical education in Denmark, however, still waits for a breakthrough" (Annerstedt, 2008, p. 303).

The subject of PE is marginalised; "Globally, and for the most part regionally, in actual practice physical education is considered to have lower status than other subjects" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 7). Furthermore, specifically "in primary schools, there is an admixture of generalist and specialist teachers for physical education classes" (Lynch & Soukup, 2017; UNESCO, 2014, p. 8). A summary encapsulates support for previous concerns about PE quality:

> Evidence points to deficiencies in teacher supply, particularly of physical education specialists, inadequate preparation of physical education teachers, especially, but not exclusively so, in primary/elementary schools and to negative attitudes and low levels of motivation of some teachers responsible for physical education delivery. Concerns about the quality of physical education teacher training, teaching and teaching resources, inadequate supervision of practice, lack of professionalism and appropriate ethics and impacts on the quality of school pupil experience are also globally evident. (UNESCO, 2014, p. 9)

Within Asian nations supplementing the global concerns, there are:

- Limited space and equipment for PE and sports co-curriculum.
- Overcrowded classes of forty or more students in each PE class.
- Not a strong sports culture.

- Important decisions on PE and sports are often made by government officials, with no academic or professional qualifications in the discipline.
- PE and sports are commonly considered as "play" rather than subjects that develop the "thinking" capacity (UNESCO, 2008).

Furthermore, a study indicated that over 60% of elementary school teachers did not have any physical education training in the Canadian province of Ontario (Faulkner et al., 2008). Hence, the historical structure of teacher preparation appears to not be meeting the needs of today's society. This has a direct impact on children's wellbeing in schools. It is suggested by UNESCO (2014) that globally the subject of PE is marginalised and it does appear to begin with Teacher Education. Yet, physical education is described "as the only curriculum subject whose focus combines the body and physical competence with *values-based learning* and communication, [which] provides a learning gateway to grow the skills required for success in the 21st Century" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 6) (cf. p. 26). Thus, it appears that educators and society more generally are not capitalising on the physical dimension and subsequent wellbeing benefits.

A study released in 2013, 'The wellbeing of young Australians', conducted by Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) involved over 3700 people. This study evidenced that Australian children and youth were not doing as well as they should despite being regarded as global curriculum leaders. The data for this study was compared with other countries within the OECD, which includes most of Europe, North America and advanced Asian, Latin American and Oceanic economies.

Australia ranked in the top third of OECD countries for around one-quarter of the indicators (12 out of 46). Areas of concern where Australia was ranked in the bottom third included "jobless families, infant mortality, incidence of diabetes and asthma, young people in education, 3–5 year olds in preschool and carbon dioxide emissions" (ARACY, 2013, p. 4). The 2018 'Report Card: The wellbeing of young Australians' indicated that Australia was in the bottom third of OECD countries for:

- bullying in Year 4 (ranked 40 out of 49);
- child obesity (ranked 28 out of 39);

- pre-primary enrolment rate (3–5 yrs) (ranked 35 out of 40);
- participation in organised learning one year prior to primary school (ranked 36 out of 37);
- feeling of belonging in school (ranked 26 out of 34);
- school pressure (ranked 24 out of 26);
- youth numeracy skills (ranked 15 out of 22) and
- teenage pregnancy (ranked 30 out of 41) (ARACY, 2018, p. 7).

Building on the 2018 Report Card (ARACY, 2018), The Wellbeing of Australia's Children report (ARACY & UNICEF Australia, 2023) identified that "the main drivers of inequitable outcomes, have been largely enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic" (p. 7).

> COVID-19 living conditions have created an environment fostering reduced mental wellbeing for children and young people. For example, young people had the largest drop-off in life satisfaction due to the pandemic (Biddle & Gray, 2021). Three in four people aged 12 – 25 reported worse mental health in August 2020 than before the pandemic, and half reported the pandemic had hurt their confidence in achieving their future goals (Biddle & Gray, 2021). (ARACY & UNICEF Australia, 2023, p. 14)

Despite the rhetoric about children's wellbeing, social justice and a holistic H, W & PE curriculum reform, this report indicates that there has been no improvement in the majority of areas from the previous reports dating back to 2008. This is of concern as while Australia has addressed wellbeing in policy, it appears that this is yet to influence practice.

The negative effects of Covid-19 for Australian schools were similar to that of the UK; "Covid 19 related restrictions disrupted the normal social and environmental systems within which children live, learn and play" (Straker et al., 2022, p. 1). Overall, in Australia:

> Throughout 2020 and 2021, Australian regions experienced different 'lockdown' situations - ranging from just a few days to over 250 days of significant restrictions including limited opportunities to leave the home, no in-person schooling, no organised sports, no mixing with friends and extended family and closures of local playgrounds. (Straker et al. 2022, p. 1)

AITSL designed a Spotlight for wellbeing in March 2022; an evidence summary offering the latest educational research for wellbeing in the school community. The Spotlight is part of the Student Wellbeing Data Project, which in June 2020 was endorsed by the Australian Government's ministers. "The objective of the project is to support the development of a national approach to understanding student wellbeing, including the development of tools for the measurement of student wellbeing that support decisions about improvements in school climate at the system and school level" (AITSL, 2022). Key findings were:

- educators and school communities play a significant role in supporting and developing learner wellbeing.
- wellbeing is crucial to academic achievement, and wellbeing programmes can support and accelerate students' learning (Fig. 1.1).
- teaching is a demanding profession and educators require time and experience to determine which non-teaching tasks to prioritise in order to best support learner growth and achievement, as well as professional learning to best support their students' wellbeing.
- as is the case for their students, the wellbeing of educators and school leaders has come under increasing strain in recent years and various initiatives have been developed to foster their wellbeing.
- choosing the right wellbeing programme and measuring its impact and effectiveness are important components of a whole school community approach to wellbeing.

Subsequently, within the Australian state of Victoria it is planned that wellbeing will be increased in every primary school, by employing a Mental Health and Wellbeing leader to lead and implement wellbeing:

> The Labor Government will invest $200 million to expand the successful Mental Health in Primary Schools program to every single government and low-fee non-government primary school in Victoria – 1800 school campuses.
> Scaling up across the state from 2023, by 2026 every school will employ a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader to implement a whole-school approach to wellbeing. (Victoria State Government, 2022)

Furthermore, if we look at a country whose PE has an explicit focus on the physical dimension only rather than a holistic approach; "the UK

ranked last for children's wellbeing among 21 of the world's richest countries in 2007, 16th among 29 in 2013 and 20th out of 35 of the richest countries in 2016" (United Nations Children's Fund, 2007; 2013; 2016; cited in Cale & Harris, 2019). This wellbeing concern continues today with the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2023 Report which found that 20.3% of 8–16-year olds had a probable mental disorder in 2023, rising to 23.3% for 17–19-year olds and 21.7% for 20–25-year olds (NHS England, 2023).

Reflecting on the wellbeing in the school community research finding, "as is the case for their students, the wellbeing of educators and school leaders has come under increasing strain in recent years" (AITSL, 2022). This was most recently evidenced in the UK by the death of Headteacher Ruth Perry, caused by an Ofsted inspection. Applying research of didactics which involves asking slightly different questions regarding educational practice, such as who is teaching, who is learning, when and with whom; a clear correlation exists between the wellbeing of educators and school leaders in a school community, and the wellbeing of the children (cf. Chapters 9 & 10).

Primary schools play a key role in children's health and wellbeing and according to education policy and guidelines around the world, should be prioritised. Kirk (2005) argues that early learning experiences are crucial to continuing involvement in physical activity and that currently only particular sections of the population are in a position to access quality experiences in schools and sport clubs. Furthermore, "the contribution of PE specialists in secondary schools may come too late to impact a majority of children in relation to their competence, perceptions and motivation" (Kirk, 2005, p. 240). It is argued that early years of education and primary school physical education have been neglected in education infrastructures around the world (Hardman, 2008a, 2008b; Lynch, 2015; Lynch & Soukup, 2017; UNESCO, 2014) which is a major problem. Hence, this research book investigates QPE implementation in primary schools around the globe, offering realistic directions to universally enhance children's health and wellbeing.

When exploring how educators can optimize children's wellbeing through quality physical education (QPE), there are a number of key themes and interwoven elements that need to be considered. The elements are borrowed and extended from the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) model but differ in that they have a 'movement' priority. Beginning at the top of Fig. 1.2 is the first element; the curriculum, teaching

and learning focus. Evidence-based research asserts that the movement focus in the PE curriculum also enhances the cognitive dimension (cf. Chapter 14)—this element explicitly states the value of movement in PE. The next key theme in Fig. 1.2 (moving clockwise) is holistic wellbeing. The wellbeing dimensions to consider in the whole child are split into two: 'social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing' and 'health and physical wellbeing'. At the bottom of Fig. 1, it is important to contemplate the 'school context' and how PE is inclusively implemented (including EDI). That is, how it is best organised and managed given the unique environment and facilities available (cf. place-based pedagogy, p. 90). This illustrates why this book is pertinent—it supplements quantitative research with qualitative, contextual evidence-based research (Chapters 11–15). Hence, this element is the inclusive 'socio-cultural' approach and 'whole school' approach, which literature suggests requires strong leadership and communication (IUHPE, 2009; Lynch, 2017). Continuing to move clockwise, the last key theme to be considered is community partnerships. These four elements offer a framework; helping to paint a 'big picture' of the relevant research to be explored in relation to how educators and schools can optimise children's wellbeing through the physical dimension.

Reflection

In this chapter the power of physical education (PE) to promote wellbeing is introduced. Think about your context. How is PE implemented? Who is responsible for teaching PE? Do all children/students enjoy PE and look forward to the lessons? Is PE integral to the wellbeing of all community members? Can you identify connections between PE implementation, wellbeing and learning in your context?

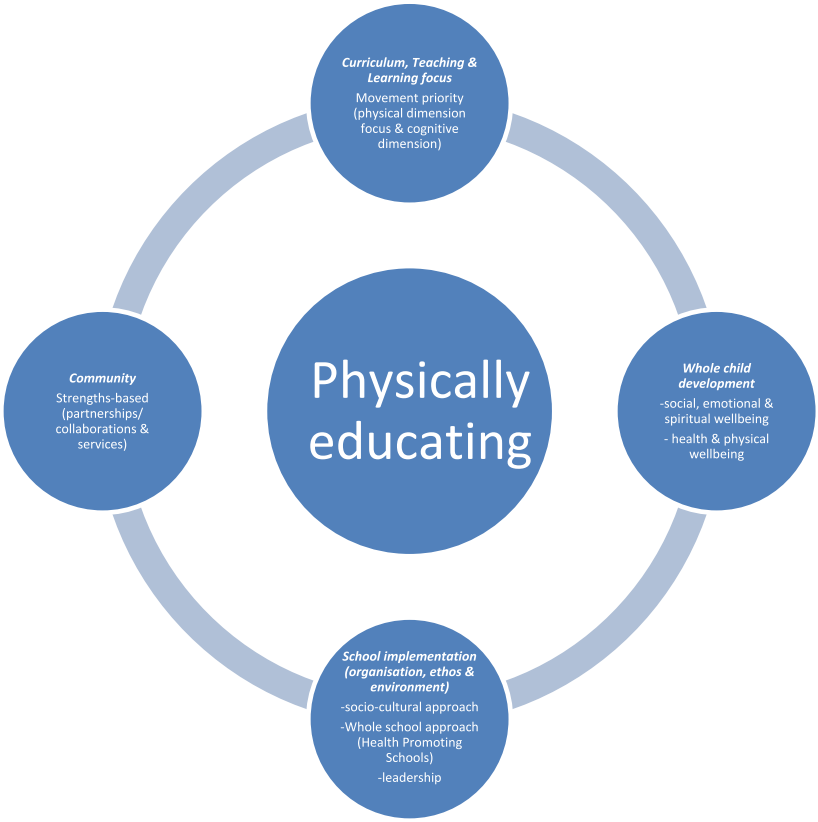

Fig. 1.2 Elements of quality physical education

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