

A perspective from the Republic of Ireland

Assessment tools

in primary physical education: enhancing teaching and learning

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Introduction

Assessment is emphasised as a key aspect of the teaching and learning process in primary school physical education curricula internationally. Key principles include:

1. The child should be at the heart of the assessment process
2. Assessment of the child's learning should provide a view of the whole child including attitudes and skills
3. Assessment should form part of the teaching and learning process, shape teaching and result in actions and decisions
4. Assessments should provide reliable judgements, linked where appropriate to national standards and curriculum (QCDA, 2009).

While the importance of using a range of assessment tools to support these principles is recognised, a study in Ireland found that assessment practices in physical education in primary schools was severely deficient (DES, 2002). In reality, many primary teachers are unsure how to assess in practical subjects such as physical education and have difficulty finding time to assess (NCCA, 2005; 2008). This article describes the experiences of two generalist primary teachers and the children in their classes using assessment tools in physical education. The teachers planned a variety of assessment strategies for their context including teacher-led methods, peer-assessment and self-assessment to examine different aspects of the children's learning. Examples of assessment tools that were used with eight to ten year old children in games and gymnastics classes are presented here.

Teacher-led Assessment – Observation checklists

Teacher observation is the most regularly used assessment in primary physical education. Observation checklists provide a structure for

the teacher to record their observations to support discussion and future action. This is a sample of an observation checklist used in a games lesson:

Name	Listens to teacher and others	Participates well in class	Uses equipment appropriately and follows directions	Encourages and supports others
Sam				
Pat				
Ann				

In this study the use of teacher observation checklists helped focus both the teacher and the children on the specific learning intentions of the lesson.

“When I was observing the children it was very structured and I knew exactly who I was looking at and what I was looking for.”

(Teacher journal entry)

They also motivated the children to practice and informed practice:

“Cause when you tested us we were more aware of it and ‘cause we knew how to do it that way.”

(Pupil 1)

The following steps can guide your use of observation checklists:

Before the lesson:

1. Based on learning intention select area to observe and make checklist
2. Select who to observe – don't try to observe all the children

During the lesson:

1. Explain to the children that you will be observing them
2. Make sure you position yourself in a position to observe the selected children – station teaching may help you organise viewing the children
3. Assign a score of 1-5 as appropriate where 5 = advanced, 3 = progressing, 1 = practice encouraged.



After the lesson:

1. Reflect on observations
2. Take appropriate action in your teaching and further planning.
3. Keep a record for future consultations with children and parents

Peer Assessment – Partner Observation Checklists

The children were also involved in observing each other using a skill checklist where a tick mark was used to indicate agreement with a visual. This is an example of a checklist used in a gymnastics lesson:

The teacher who used this checklist with her class commented that:

“Children were enthusiastic about doing peer assessing today. Some groups were waiting anxiously for their turn to assess their partners.”
(Teacher journal entry)

Peer assessment allowed the children time to practice the skill, reinforced the main teaching points for the skill and provided immediate feedback on performance.

“My partner told me to raise my hands at the end of my roll so I can get up. I need to practise this next week.”
(Pupil 19, Journal)

The use of feedback also increased the children’s motivation to participate in the lesson.

“The partner checks were good because I was able to figure out myself the part I needed to improve on.”
(Pupil 7, Journal)

The following steps can guide the use of peer checklists with your class:

Before:

1. Based on learning intention select skill to be observed and devise checklist

During:

1. Introduce and model use of the checklist – emphasise use of positive language
2. Two children model the process of checklist observation
3. Circulate and assist children where necessary

After:

1. Review results in the classroom. These reflections can be incorporated in student journals as discussed below.

Self Assessment – Journaling and Conferencing

The children were also involved in assessment strategies that required the children to consider and evaluate their own experiences and performances: journaling and conferencing. These self-assessment strategies had a significant impact on children’s engagement in learning.

Journaling

Journals permit students to reflect upon their thoughts, feelings, impressions, perceptions, and attitudes about their performances, events, tasks or other learning experiences (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000: 194). The teacher introduced the journal through class discussion with the children. The children recorded entries in their journal after every lesson. Initially this was structured asking the children to answer specific questions though they quickly moved to free writing.

Sample journal prompts:

- What did you do in today’s lesson?
- What new skills did you learn?
- What went well?
- What skills do you have to work on for next week?
- Did you work well with your partner?
- What did you like/dislike about today’s lesson?

The children reviewed their previous journal entry at the beginning of the next lesson. This encouraged them to reflect on their progress, be accountable for their learning and consider strengths and weaknesses.

Partner Check of Forward Roll	
Name of demonstrator: _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name of observer: _____	
A. Stretch	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Crouch with hands overhead	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Hands flat on the ground Balance 4 parts and knees bent Head tucked	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Push from feet and roll	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Arms reached out in front	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Finish standing position (hold position)	<input type="checkbox"/>

SCORE = ___/8

(sourced from Primary School Sport Initiative)

“ For next week I need to work on keeping my head tucked doing the forward roll. ”

(Pupil 10, Journal)

“ I need to hold my balances longer and keep my body straighter in balances. ”

(Pupil 15, Journal)

It also allowed the teacher to track progress as a basis for future learning and provided insight into aspects of the children's experiences that might not otherwise have emerged:

“ I felt really awkward in today's lesson. I was partnered with a boy and we had to hold hands to do some of the balances. ”

(Pupil X, Journal)

Conferencing

Conferencing involves the teacher (and/or other parties concerned with the child's learning) and the child having an informal conversation regarding the child's progress in a particular area of learning. Journal entries can inform teacher-child conferencing. In this study the teacher used a self-evaluation rating scale to support the conversation. The above is an example of a rating scale used in the study.

Conferencing provided an opportunity for the children to rate their own learning and discuss their learning in an informal way with the teacher.

“ I liked it when we were filling in the sheet because you could know what you could do and what you need to practice. ”

(Jill – interviews)

This provided insight into the progress of each individual child in a supportive and focused learning environment where effort could be acknowledged. Conferencing also informed future planning:

“ I really gained an insight into how the children felt about the lesson and their learning during the conferencing. This will certainly influence my teaching of future lessons. ”

(Teacher journal entry)

“ I know where they are in their learning. I know what they need assistance with. I can identify the learning gaps...thus improve my teaching and the quality of learning. ”

(Teacher journal entry)

Please fill in this rubric based on the lessons that we have just completed. Colour in the phrase that you think suits how you are performing the skill. Think about anything that you feel you are having difficulty with.

Skill	I can	I am having difficulty with	I cannot
Chest pass	I can do this Pass/receive	I am having difficulty with this Pass/receive	I cannot do this Pass/receive
Bounce pass	I can do this Pass/receive	I am having difficulty with this Pass/receive	I cannot do this Pass/receive
Dribble	I can do this Left/right hand	I am having difficulty with this Left/right hand	I cannot do this Left/right hand
Shoot	I can do this Left/right hand	I am having difficulty with this Left/right hand	I cannot do this Left/right hand

The following steps can guide your use of conferencing with your class:

Before:

1. Focus the children on the aspect of their learning and performance that will be discussed in the conference (in the example above the focus was on basketball skill performance).

During:

2. Motivate children through prompts focused on area to be targeted in conferencing session (e.g. 'Think about how comfortable you feel shooting with your left hand – is the ball going in the basket most of the time?').

After:

1. Following the lessons ask each child to fill out a rating scale based on the learning focus.
2. Hold a conferencing session with each child.
3. During the conference let the child share their experiences of success, difficulty and how they felt they achieved the learning intention and fulfilled the success criteria.
4. The teacher can give feedback based on observation and discussion, identify areas of success and advise on areas of improvement.

This study demonstrates how assessment tools can be used in primary physical education to enhance teaching and learning. The use of self-assessment was particularly effective as it actively involved the children in the assessment process. Difficulty experienced by many teachers in accessing sample assessment tools highlights the importance of providing teachers with information and samples of

assessment instruments that are aligned with curriculum content. This may promote the use of assessment in primary physical education. Though planning and devising assessment tools was time consuming both teachers are committed to using assessment tools regularly in their physical education classes following this experience.

References

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