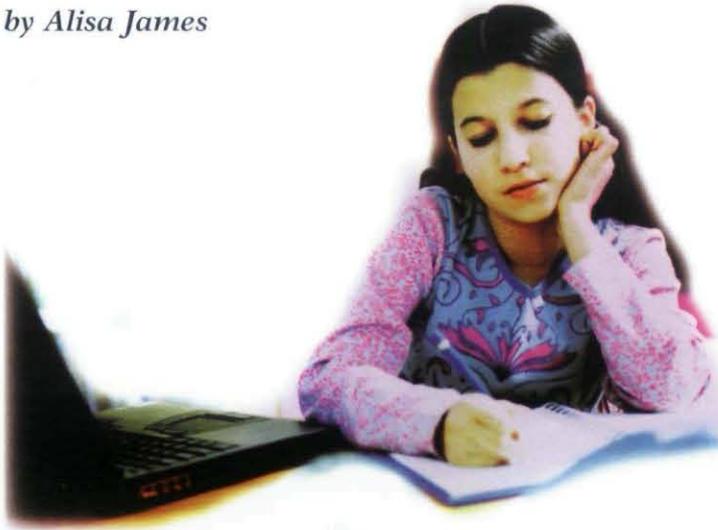


Journaling as an Assessment Option

by Alisa James



Assessment refers to a variety of tasks and settings where students are given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skill, understanding, and application of content in a context that allows for continued learning and growth (Siedentop & Tannehill, 2000). A number of different types of assessments can be used to evaluate student learning and growth including teacher, peer, and self-evaluations using tools such as checklists and rubrics.

Student journals are a specific assessment tool teachers can use to examine student learning in the affective and cognitive domains. Journaling also provides a nonthreatening venue for students to communicate their knowledge and feelings about physical education. This article examines the use of student journals as an assessment tool in physical education.

Aspects to Consider

It is important to consider five aspects when using student journaling as an assessment tool: organization, management, effective writing prompts, using journals as assessments, and grading the journal.

Journal Organization

Organization ensures that students have a journal organized and large enough to hold all entries. One easy and inexpensive way to do this is to provide (or require) that students have a 3-prong folder with pockets. In addition, all journal pages should be three-hole punched to help students be effective and efficient in placing assignments into the journal.

Encourage students to personalize the cover of their journal. This allows the journal to be easily identified and also produces a sense of ownership and pride for the student.

Journal Management

Since many young students may misplace their journals, it is beneficial for the physical education teacher to store the journals in bins or crates in an office or storage area. If this is not feasible, other teachers may allow students to store their physical education journals in the classroom.

Storage in the classroom is sometimes the best management procedure. If classroom teachers are agreeable to storing the journals in their classrooms, they may also be willing to provide classroom time for students to work on them. Physical education teachers are pressed for time, and many students receive daily classroom time to write in a journal, so it benefits both the physical education teacher and students if the classroom teacher is amenable to using classroom time this way. Classroom journaling time allows physical education teachers to use more of their limited time for instruction.

Writing Prompts

Effective writing prompts usually ask questions to probe student understanding. It is important to create writing prompts that are developmentally appropriate and match students' ability levels. For very young children, responding to a writing prompt may be very difficult. Having them circle a choice or draw a picture may be more appropriate. For example, when learning the difference between a curved and a zigzag pathway, young children might demonstrate their understanding by drawing pictures to represent the pathways.

Older students can also use drawing as a way to communicate in their journals, but they are more developmentally ready to write out responses as well. Design the writing prompts in a way that forces students to do some type of interpretation and encourage them to respond to in their own words (Lund & Kirk, 2002).

Writing prompts should also relate to learning outcomes, aligning both with instruction (Cohen, 1987). Therefore, creating writing prompts helps the teacher reflect on learning outcomes. In other words, each writing prompt initiates a learning activity, and responses to it should be assessed relative to a specific learning outcome. For example, if a learning outcome for a cooperative games unit is that students will be able to communicate both verbally and nonverbally to solve a

Writing Prompt Ideas

- Write a paragraph about a personal fitness goal you would like to reach. Explain why you want to reach that goal.
- Write a paragraph about what you did today that helped you to be successful in today's activities.
- Write a paragraph about your sporting behavior for the day. What things might you do to demonstrate more sporting behavior in the future?
- What was the hardest thing for you to do today? Why was it hard?
- Write a paragraph that includes the cues of striking that we learned today. What will you do outside of school to practice these cues?
- Write a paragraph that includes the main aspects one should consider when developing a fitness program. Hint: Remember the FIT principle
- Write a paragraph that describes activities that you can do in your community that promote cardiovascular endurance.
- Write a paragraph that explains the difference between verbal and nonverbal communication. Why is it important to use both in cooperative activities? Be sure to give specific examples of both verbal and nonverbal communication.

TABLE 1 Sample Writing Prompts

problem, a good writing prompt would ask students to write about how they used verbal and nonverbal communication to solve a problem. Other ideas for writing prompts are included in Table 1 above.

In addition to writing prompts, students might be asked to compare aspects of skills they are working on, describe similarities between skills, and identify important aspects of a specific skill as it is performed (see Figures 1 & 2). These worksheets are not truly journal entries because students are not required to respond to a writing prompt; however, they are useful for enhancing students' knowledge about specific concepts and activities. Therefore, worksheets such as these can be kept in the journal portfolio as a supplement to written entries that students create.

Graphic organizers such as concept webs, sequence chains, and graphing may also be included as journal components to complement other content. For example, a student may use a sequence chain to represent a progression of movements or skills in a gymnastics routine. Or, graphing may be used to show student progress or improvement on skills or health related fitness. Such tasks require students to go beyond simple recall knowledge and move to higher levels of thinking, such as comprehension and application.

Using Journals as an Assessment

Journals can be used to assess student learning as well as student perceptions of learning activities and the learning environment. In addition to identifying and correcting gaps in students' cognitive knowledge, teachers may be able to identify issues in the learning environment that may be interfering with student learning. For example, in their journal entries, students may communicate frustration with other class members regarding what might be impeding their ability to learn and enjoy physical education. This information can be used to enhance instruction as well as guide the teacher in planning future lessons.

Figure 1: Sample Catching Comparison Assessment

Name _____

Directions: In column 1 describe the critical cues for catching a ball up high. In column 2 describe the critical cues for catching a ball down low. In column 3 describe how the critical cues for catching a ball up high are different from catching a ball down low.

Column 1

Column 2

Column 3

Critical Cues for catching ball up high	Critical cues for catching a ball down low	How are the critical cues for catching a ball up high different from catching a ball down low?

Figure 2

Sample "Match the Critical Cues" Assessment

Name _____

Teacher _____

Directions: Draw a line to the correct critical cues for each skill.

Overhand Throw	Face wall Arm way back behind seat Step with opposite foot Follow through straight to wall
Underhand Throw	Face wall Arm back sideways, behind seat Step with opposite foot Follow through across body
Sidearm Throw	Watch ball Reach to meet ball Pull ball in Give with ball
Catching	Side to Target Arm way back, hand behind head Step with opposite foot Follow through, point to target

In addition to the teacher assessing student learning and feelings, the journal is a tool students can use to communicate with the teacher and self-evaluate their learning progress. Students are able to ask teachers questions in the journal about specific skills that they may be too shy to ask in class. Overall, the journal helps students express their own perceptions of the extent of their learning in physical education.

Grading Journals

It is important to hold students accountable for their work to ensure not only that it is completed but also that it is useful in enhancing student learning. There are several ways to assess journal entries. One way is to create a rubric containing criteria by which the journal entries are to be evaluated. A second way is to create a checklist, evaluating specific criteria with a Yes or No for each entry. It is also appropriate to check the entries for completeness, correct spelling, and readability (Lund & Kirk, 2002).

On the other hand, it is important to consider the psychosocial implications of grading journal entries. It may not be appropriate to grade the content of some entries. Honest responses are critical. It is reasonable to expect that a strong emphasis on grading may cause some students to begin to write what they believe the

teacher wants to read rather than what they really feel. So it may be more appropriate for teachers to simply read the journal entries and provide feedback about the content in order to communicate to students that their work is important. To ensure that the journal reflects students' true feelings and values regarding physical education, feedback might be in the form of asking the student questions, providing written comments, and using stickers or ink stamps (depending on the developmental level and interests of students).

Even though some journal entries may not be formally evaluated, they still should be assigned. Journal writing provides teachers with valuable insights into student learning and their thoughts about physical education. Journals provide an efficient means to access information about student perceptions of physical education that may be difficult to obtain by other means. The information gleaned from journals can help teachers meet the needs of all students, particularly needs they were unaware of until they read the entries. Moreover, journal writing promotes students' abilities in other areas of the curriculum, such as critical thinking and writing skills.

Conclusion

Using student journals as an assessment tool in physical education is effective for several reasons. First, it provides students with another means to demonstrate their learning as well as to communicate their feelings about physical education to the teacher. Second, student journals are an effective tool for identifying gaps in students' cognitive learning, as well as pointing out events in the learning environment that may contribute to a student's lack of learning in physical education.

When student journaling is used as an assessment that is aligned with both learning outcomes and learning activities in a lesson, it can be a valuable tool that provides student assessment data to both the students and teacher. When teachers use this information to guide their instruction, it provides an efficient means to enhance the teaching-learning process in the gymnasium. Students are better served by knowing that their voices are listened to and valued in physical education. In addition, through journals students may also begin to find more meaning in their participation in physical education because they are more involved in the teaching-learning process.

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