

Developing and Supporting Physical Development in Early Childhood

Reflective Journal

This reflective journal is a reflection of my personal experience of teaching SKIP Cymru lessons and how I have been able to make a difference within my year group. I have been fortunate enough to attend the course and then implement what I have learnt in my school setting with all pupils becoming more enthusiastic and motivated when it comes to physical movement.

I teach in Year 2 in a school with a high rate of deprivation with approximately 90% from ethnic minority groups or non-British backgrounds. Within our school setting, 36% of pupils are recognised as having additional learning needs. This is above the national average of 22%. (Estyn, 2015) The need for physical activity within our school is high with many pupils not being able to access outdoor parks or gardens due to cultural circumstances or their living arrangements. We also have a high number of pupils who find it difficult to sit and concentrate for long periods of time and are therefore in a supported class. I feel privileged that I am able to make a difference, not only within my year group but within the school as a whole as I can provide the children with a love of physical movement, giving them a positive outlook from a young age which will encourage them to take part in physical activities as they get older. Fisher et al states *"We suggest that young (early childhood) children's physical activity might drive their development of motor skill competence. Increased physical activity provides more opportunities to promote neuromotor development, which in turn promotes FMS development"* (Fisher et al., 2005; Okely, Booth, & Patterson, 2001a, 2001b). This reflection will identify how the sessions have been implemented so far and the positive impact that the SKIP Cymru sessions are having within my setting.

I began my journey with my mainstream Year 2 class who were, from the beginning, demonstrating very good physical skills. I decided to baseline the children on their locomotor skills initially as a benchmark to be able to support them appropriately. Over the next few sessions I continued to reflect. The children in my class were able to find a space with some stretching out and mimicking what was introduced last session. Most children were stretching forward, backwards and sideways to make their 'bubble' - this had been demonstrated during the first SKIP session so I was really pleased that it had

been retained by the pupils. During the warm up game all children were able to run, skip and jump around the cones with some being able to gallop after correct modelling was demonstrated. As I was joining in with the movements the children were able to copy my proficient movements which I feel helped with their understanding and encouraged them to use their bodies in the correct way. Some children were able to explain what was good about each movement and I ensured that I was specific with feedback, such as 'You are fantastic at skipping, I love the way you are using your arms to help you get higher' This was then demonstrated to the rest of the class.

For the main activities there were two gardens for the children to engage in. One being a throwing and catching activity using the gates and an obstacle course that I would change each session. Most children were able to throw the ball in the x-zone and catch in the x-zone with more confident catchers catching out of their x-zone. After modelling these activities many children were able to catch out of the x-zone and were thoroughly engaged in the activities provided. As my class are extremely competitive (especially the boys) they enjoyed working together to see how many catches they could do within the set time frame. When I observed children finding the activity too easy I would change the constraint and would move the cones further apart so the distance was longer for the children to throw/catch in. I also changed the size and texture of the ball - from a large foam ball to a smaller spikey ball. The children throwing the ball were encouraged to use a rainbow throw and to step with opposition. With reminders most children were able to do this confidently. I also had a group of children who were proficient catchers and could catch outside of their x-zone. I identified their next steps as being able to catch the ball in all directions including their non-dominant side and during PE lessons currently we are playing games that reinforce this skill.

In the second garden the children enjoyed using the equipment independently in the obstacle course. I ensured that I demonstrated before-hand and encouraged the children to think of different ways to travel around the equipment. We discussed this together before the children started. I also made sure that all children were moving at all times so they started at different places in the course. The children particularly enjoyed using the ladders which is something I wouldn't have thought about using before the SKIP training. One member of the class asked if we could take the ladders back to the

classroom to practise more so this is something that I am now using regularly with my class as part of continuous provision.

Over the next two weeks I continued working with my class, delivering 45 minute sessions twice a week for all pupils. All children were able to follow the teaching points and could all throw and catch into their x-zone with many able to catch the ball whilst moving. The class were evidently confident movers as noted by other staff. It was at this point that I liaised with staff about the physical skills of the children in my class. It became obvious why the children were more confident than previous classes - they had received lots of rich physical opportunities as their previous teacher was a Commando Joes specialist with a keen interest in Physical activity. It was clear that the exposure to lots of physical opportunities had a huge impact on their physical confidence and overall competence in their physical movements. I continued to reflect here - was there a class who would benefit more from these sessions? According to Fisher et al *'Increased physical activity provides more opportunities to promote neuromotor development, which in turn promotes FMS development'* (Fisher et al., 2005; Okely, Booth, & Patterson, 2001a, 2001b). I therefore felt that it would be highly beneficial to change the group of learners accessing the SKIP Cymru sessions. It was at this point that I decided to step out of my comfort zone completely and do something that I had never done before!

During the 10 years that I have worked at my setting I have always taught in mainstream classes. After reflecting on my practice and delving into research I decided that children in the mixed year 1/2 supported class would benefit more from the SKIP Cymru sessions. After liaising with their class teacher it was evident that many of these pupils were not competent movers, many with poor concentration and some that were not able to sit comfortably at a table due to their poor core strength and overall physical ability. Many of the pupils live in flats and do not have access to outdoor space and in general had limited opportunities to develop physical skills. I felt that with the support of these sessions I would be able to develop the confidence of the pupils as well as improve their FMS.

The class were split into two groups - 9 males in the one group; two of which are selective mutes, two with ASD, two NTE (New to English) two EAL (English as Additional Language) and one with behaviour difficulties. The other group consisted of 10 pupils;

four pupils with communication difficulties, one pupil partially deaf, four EAL pupils and one male with Down's Syndrome with a supporting adult. I used the 'Mr Men' game to baseline the children and soon realised how poor their locomotor skills were. Clark and Metcalfe (2002) states that '*children must first acquire competency in FMS to apply these skills in different contexts*'. I realised that these children needed support with their FMS skills in order to gain a positive future relationship with physical activity. It is concerning that, without these skills, pupils will always have difficulties, not only during PE lessons but with their overall physical ability and as they get older and play sports with their peers.

During the first week I introduced the 'Splat the Frog' warm up activity which the children thoroughly enjoyed. Making the sessions enjoyable and energetic was my main focus and I wanted the children to feel confident and happy whilst also developing their physical skills. It quickly became evident that the children were in the initial stages of their FMS. The children would ask to play the same game as being the type of learners that they are, they felt comfortable with repetition. Each session I would introduce a different body part or a different way of travelling to keep the children enthused. Some pupils have extremely poor spatial awareness so this became a focus during every session. Going forward I will be exploring each movement concept through a range of warm up games that I was introduced to on the SKIP training in order to develop their spatial and body awareness, as well as relationships and dynamics.

I first introduced one garden - I demonstrated an underarm throw, stepping with opposition as the children had to throw a fluff ball into the hula hoop. After lots of repetition, most of the pupils were able to step forward onto the spot and throw underarm although not with an oppositional leg. The children tried hard to follow the teaching cues and I observed the concentration on their faces as they tried to throw into the target. I reflected on my practise and decided to put a sticker on the leg that the children needed to place forward. This supported most of the learners. The next week we progressed to the battleships game. The children needed lots of demonstrations and reminders before we started and had the previous week's skill reinforced. Some children needed the task modified as they found it too difficult. In this situation I moved the children closer to the target and if they were still having difficulty I changed the object to a ball and asked them to roll the ball to hit the target. For the pupils finding the task too

easy I asked them to stand further away from the target and I then changed the object to a beanbag and then progressed to a small ball. Prior to the SKIP Cymru training I had no idea how to manipulate the activity to differentiate for all learners using constraints. However, after researching and implementing 'Newell's Constraints Theory' I now feel confident in doing so to provide children with activities that they are able to complete and are challenged appropriately. As Newell suggests "*Constraints simply provide channels from which movements most easily emerge*" (Haywood and Getchel 2005 ch2). This reinforces the fact that activities need to be adapted appropriately for our children to be able to develop physically and gain more confidence in their physical ability.

During my sessions I would ensure that I was demonstrating a proficient example of the skill that was being taught. I also ensured that I am observing good practice and highlighting this to pupils, using cues such as 'Child 1 I love the way you are using your arms to jump' or 'Well done - you are remembering to step forward when you throw underarm'. I have recently introduced a second garden to the children which consists of a simple obstacle course. This activity has encouraged them to think about different ways of moving and using the equipment. It has encouraged independent thinking as well as developing skills such as coordination and balance. Due to the nature of the class I have to keep the same activity for the following sessions but will manipulate the way in which a piece of equipment is used and will change constraints where needed. For example, the children enjoy travelling across the ladders but one session they would be expected to move forward, whereas in the next session they would have to travel sideways. The children are developing their ability to think of different ways to travel and my next step will be to ask the more able children of the group to set up their own obstacle course and access independently. .

The confidence of the pupils has increased exponentially, as has their concentration and movement skills. When I initially used the benches with the children I had one pupil who was reluctant to walk along it; he would stand parallel to me and would hold on to my arms, needing constant reassurance and support to get him across. However, as a result of the regular SKIP sessions and my understanding he is now able to walk across the bench forward with just my hand as a support - this is huge progress for him and I am extremely grateful that I have had the opportunity to develop my confidence in order to support the pupils and to help them become confident movers.

As a result of this training I feel that I am able to support the children with their Physical movement skills and am aware of how to challenge the children according to their individual ability. The elements of Newell's constraints model has enabled me to reflect on my own practise and support the individual needs of the pupils. Through research and reading theories I have better knowledge of child development and feel more confident to plan rich physical activities for pupils in order to keep them motivated and enthused. The children are thoroughly enjoying the SKIP Cymru sessions and come to school twice a week in their PE kits ready to take part. After discussions with their class teacher she feels that the sessions are having a massive impact on their well-being and the children are excited when they come to school, especially on a SKIP Cymru day. I feel privileged to be able to share my new found knowledge and experience with teachers within my phase and provide the children with engaging activities that they enjoy. I have been fortunate to have attended the course with my colleagues as we have been able to support each other and share good practice and going forward this will be something that will be shared throughout the school and which will also involve parents and the wider community, which is a very exciting opportunity for all of us.

Word count: 2455

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