

Peer Reviewed Article

Assessing Social and Emotional Learning in Physical Education Through Photo Journaling

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ABSTRACT

Photovoice seeks to change policy and enhance lives by creating dialogue about personal and communal strengths through introspection and reflection of photographs. Similarly, photo journaling provides opportunities for participants to express themselves and become self-aware through reflection of visual imagery. Photo journaling may also be used as a qualitative means for physical educators to authentically assess social emotional learning (SEL) within the classroom and provide opportunities for students to build interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship skills (IIRS) that can be applied to all aspects of their life. The objective of this paper is to provide physical educators with an outline to the A.R.T. (*authentic, relevant, and transformational*) assessment of social and emotional health within the classroom through the use of photo journaling.

Keywords: photovoice, assessment, physical education, psycho-social equilibrium.

The aim of this practitioner paper is to provide K-12 physical educators with suggestions, tips, and resources related to using photo journaling as an authentic assessment for social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. This paper will address three fundamental questions regarding the use of photo journaling as a viable option to assess SEL in physical education (PE). First, what is photo journaling and how has it been used in the PE classroom? Second, why is using photo journaling of particular importance when looking to authentically assess SEL? Finally, how can teachers start to use photo journaling within their own classroom?

What is a Photo Journal?

A photo journal or photo journaling is a

qualitative technique that creates space and opportunity for individuals to express and become more self-aware. In other words, how one represents his or her personal world through visual imagery. Photo journaling is modeled after the photovoice method (Wang & Burris, 1997) and was created by Sue Sutherland at The Ohio State University as a means to qualitatively capture SEL taking place in a college level PE teacher education course. Thus, a photo journal is a modified version of photovoice in that some, not all, of the components are similar. For example, both photovoice and photo journaling require the participant to select and reflect on photographs taken by participants. The primary difference between photo journaling and photovoice resides with the intended purpose. Photovoice seeks to change policy, promote

dialogue and knowledge about personal and communal strengths, and improve conditions to enhance lives (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice has been called a “participatory action research method” (Wang, 2006, p.148), and was created by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris based upon health promotion principals (Wang & Burris, 1997). Whereas the purpose of the photo journal is for the student to capture visual representations of SEL concepts introduced in the classroom and to reflect on the photos in an effort to develop and strengthen intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship skills (IIRS). One plausible method to help students start to think about the IIRS in relationship to their personal life is through the use of a photo journal. Once students can comprehend, discuss, and show the meaning of the IIRS (through the photo journal) the focus changes to applying these social skills to areas outside the classroom, thus creating an authentic learning outcome.

The process of creating a photo journal includes: selecting a topic, taking or finding a personal photo (or photos) that represent the selected topic, and critically analyzing and reflecting on the photo(s) in such a way that represents the individual’s perspective of the topic in relation to his or her own lived-experiences. For the K-12 student, photo journaling can be seen as a valid way to *reflect on* social and emotional topics that are discussed or practiced within PE (e.g., communication, social responsibility, teamwork, trust, or any social skill). As a pedagogical tool, physical educators can use photo journaling as a means to *authentically* assess student comprehension and application of social and emotional skills that are taught in the classroom.

Photo Journaling & the A.R.T. of Assessment

Below is an outline of the A.R.T. in assessing social and emotional health within the classroom. Photo journaling provides the foundation for *authentic, relevant, and transformational* student assessment that fosters IIRS and SEL in the classroom. Authentic assessment assists students in cultivating new skill sets and competencies that can be applied to all aspects of life while also providing an aspect of perceived meaning within the intended learning task, so that *transformational assessment of*

the learned skill can occur. Therefore, physical educators can integrate the A.R.T. of photo journaling into K-12 physical education programs and help students foster and transfer learned SEL skills from the classroom to their own lived-experiences (Stuhr, De La Rosa, Samalot-Rivera, & Sutherland, 2018).

A = Authentic. Authentic competency-based assessment aligns instruction, learning, and assessment through construct and consequential validity for students (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004). For instance, to authentically assess if students have learned the intended task, educators must set and explicitly explain the task criteria and make it relatable to the student, such that complete understanding and integration of the skill can be learned. Moreover, authentic assessment should be constructed in a way that measures the skill(s) being learned. In contrast to performance-based traditional learning, authentic student assessment emphasizes realistic values of the task (Gulikers et al., 2004). For example, the cognitive demands of an assessment may be reflective of a real-life situation that students have currently experienced or could experience in their academic or professional careers. Ultimately, authentic assessment requires students to develop skill sets, competencies, knowledge and attitudes that can then be applied to new situations and circumstances (Gulikers et al., 2004).

R = Relevant and meaningful ways to demonstrate learning. A successful, authentic assessment for students implies that a pre-authentication process has been instilled by the teacher, such that students have gained a positive and meaningful learning experience through competency-based assessment (Huang, 2002). A five-dimensional framework provides guidelines for implementing an effective authentic assessment and can vary with grade level and professional experience. For example, college students are able to learn and apply skills that are more complex toward professional real-life situations. In contrast, K-12 students may be cognitively overwhelmed with such tasks and instead would be better assessed with less complex criterion situations that don’t focus on professionalism but are tailored toward their education level and real-life experiences.

Regardless of education level, the five-dimensions that compose authentic assessment are: (a) the task (b) physical context (c) social context (d) the result and (e) assessment criteria (Gulikers et al., 2004). The aim of an authentic task works to engage students with activities that are also carried out in real-world settings. Therefore, an authentic assessment should include a task that is relevant to the student but also include some form of perceived meaning within the intended learning of the task.

T = Transformational. Transformational assessment provides teachers the ability to design and implement assessment within PE that offers students meaningful learning experiences where they can develop social and professional skill sets and competencies. Integrating photo journaling within a physical education program holds tremendous promise in helping to promote and transfer IIRS for students. Hence, the claim being made by the authors is that transformational assessment for SEL can be accomplished by allowing students to complete a photo journal. Use of photo journaling within a unit of instruction creates space for students to critically think about social and emotional health inside and outside of the classroom (Sutherland, Ressler & Stuhr, 2011; Stuhr et al., 2018).

Using Photo Journaling in Physical Education

Photo journaling can be used as an effective method to integrate social and emotional dimensions into a PE learning climate (Stuhr, Sutherland, Ressler, & Ortiz-Stuhr, 2015). SEL in PE guides the student and gives inroads to discovering empathy for others, sharing and understanding both their own, and others, experiences, and opinions. The implementation of photo journals can provide a learning environment where students can reflect on visual representations of social and emotional topics discussed or practiced in class, to emphasize and enhance IIRS (i.e. communication, social responsibility, teamwork, trust, etc.). For example, physical educators can focus on developing and enhancing students SEL by providing in class activity (s) that focus on fostering those specific IIRS. After the activity(s) are complete, students (outside of class time) can find or take a picture, create a PPT, or

even draw a picture in relationship to the IIRS (i.e., SEL) and the activity conducted in class. Students can then reflect and critically analyze how the image relates or represents what they have learned during the PE activity, and how it can be applied outside the classroom into other areas of their life. Thus, physical educators can use photo journaling as a means to *authentically* assess student comprehension and application of social and emotional skills that are taught in the classroom. Teaching and assessing SEL skills can essentially be broken into three essential steps (introduce, teach, and assess the SEL skill).

Introduce the SEL skill. The first task for the teacher is to choose and define the specific SEL skill for all students. Example SEL skills include communication, cooperation, trust or even something more complex, like the construct of mindfulness. During this introduction step the teacher can explain to students, what is the SEL skill, why it's important to learn, and provide real-world examples on how the skill can be used in everyday life. The teacher can use a variety of pedagogies to further highlight the SEL skill, such as quotes, stories, poems, video clips, or even pictures.

Teach the SEL skill. Once the students know which SEL skill is of focus, the next step is to provide students with opportunity to practice the skill during class. Practice opportunities will allow the students to develop the SEL skill "in action" or "hands-on" and can occur through an experiential activity. This type of learning is considered a primary experience. These types of experiences are more effective, with regard to skill mastery, as opposed to secondary experiences (e.g., listening to the teacher, reading text, or watching a video). Primary learning experiences are active, whereas secondary experiences are considered passive. There are many types of pedagogies that can be used to teach SEL skills. Within physical education, teachers can use a variety of curriculum or instructional models to help students' practice SEL skills. Models such as Sport Education, Adventure-based Learning, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility, and Cooperative Learning are all empirically tested and evidence-based curriculum models that have been found to be effective in helping students develop SEL skills (Stuhr et al., 2018).

Assess the SEL Skill. Photo journaling is one way to assess SEL skills. Considered an authentic assessment, photo journaling can be used at the elementary, secondary school, or university level. The following are three model examples of how to assess using photo journaling. Each one of the following examples should be considered samples, as the authors recognize that photo journaling can look quite different depending on context and student populations. At the university level the instructor can provide students with both guidelines and a scoring rubric in an effort to help students complete the photo journal assessment. Please see figure 1 for the university level guidelines example. Additionally, please view figure 2 for one completed photo journal entry from a college student.

Photo journaling can also be used at both the elementary and secondary school level, depending on the grade and developmental level of the student. At the elementary and secondary school level physical educators can dedicate classroom days for the photo journal process and provide allotted time for students to complete the photo journal assessment. Classroom days are essential in the photo journal assessment and should be designed to introduce the process, the purpose it serves in PE, and provide students with a check-off sheet or guidelines for the expectations of the journal. Figure 3 and 4 are example photo journal guidelines that could be used with elementary and secondary school students respectively. As seen in figure 4, a check-off sheet is provided as a means to help guide students in completing the assignment. The overall purpose of this check-off sheet is for students to comprehend the expectations for the assignment and provide them with the elements that will be assessed by the teacher.

Additionally, figures 5 and 6 are student examples of completed photo journals at the elementary and secondary level respectively. Specifically, figure 6 is a photo journal example from a group of eighth graders demonstrating their knowledge regarding communication. This particular group was able to represent their understanding of this SEL skill through the use of the quotes, the pictures, and the explanation of the connection between the two. This is important because it

actually demonstrates students are able to unpack the SEL skill in a way that demonstrates their understanding.

Concluding Remarks

Schools play a vital role in fostering socially and emotionally intelligent youth (Greenberg et al., 2003). SEL programs offer a way for schools to achieve this by providing students with the necessary skills, behaviors and attitudes to effectively develop their emotional, cognitive and social behaviors. SEL programs help students to develop self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making skills, relationship management skills, and social awareness skills (Portnow, Downer & Brown, 2018). Teachers who are able to design and implement SEL-based content can create a safe, emotional environment that is challenging but developmentally appropriate for student academic success (Ciotto & Gagnon, 2018). Since physical activity and movement provides a unique opportunity for students to practice and develop personal, social, and cognitive skills, an SEL program is ideal for PE. Moreover, an SEL-based PE classroom can promote leadership, cooperation and teamwork opportunities that have the potential to impact student's lives outside the classroom and into adulthood. Therefore, using SEL in PE, and assessing these skills through the use of photo journaling can provide students with critical lifelong, personal, and academic skillsets.

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Figure 1. University Photo Journal Guidelines Example

Photo Journal is an innovative approach that provides a way to understand your perspectives and experiences related to the SEL concepts of adventure-based learning, and fuse what you know with the current literature. The purpose of this photo-journal is for you to capture visual representation of the concepts of this class. You will be asked to elaborate on the photos using the following guiding prompts. *Total value of this project is 25% overall grade (i.e., 50 points possible).*

Process

For this journal you will take/find 4 pictures of concepts related to class. For each of the 4 intra- and inter-personal relationship skill (IIRS) entries include and clearly label the following 7 steps.

Step 1: Select four IIRS that you feel strongly about and value.

Step 2: Write an assertion for your selected IIRS. 1-3 sentences max. An assertion is a confident and forceful statement of fact or belief about your IIRS. *This step is worth 2 points.*

Step 3: Locate and include a powerful quote that aligns with your IIRS and assertion. Then write 1-2 sentences describing how your quote aligns. *This step is worth 2 points.*

Step 4: Take or find a photo that represents the IIRS and your assertion. *This step is worth 2 points.*

Step 5: Write a description of the photo in relation to your IIRS and assertion. *This step is worth 5 points.*

Step 6: Write a detailed and in-depth explanation of how your IIRS relates to the concepts of ABL - This part of your photo journal is where you “deconstruct” and “unpack” your IIRS (i.e., Expand on IIRS using literature, textbooks, PPT, lecture notes, course articles or other articles you may find). Use citations for each entry. Provide a minimum of eight (8) different references throughout the journal to support your four IIRS entries/sections and the claims being made. *This step is worth 20 points.*

Step 7: Write what you have recognized about how the IIRS is applicable to your life (i.e., how will you apply your IIRS to your future self). *This step is worth 15 points.*

Your photo journal should be organized and aesthetically sensible. Be sure to check sentence structure, grammar, and flow of your writing. *This step is worth 4 points.*

Figure 2. University Photo Journal – One Completed Student Entry

University Student Photo Journal

Mindfulness Step 1

Being mindful is the ability to be present in any given moment in time. You're aware, attentive, and observant. You not only notice the small details of your thoughts, but you are also aware of the small details around you – the chirp of a bird, the vibrancy of colors in our world or a child laughing in the distance. Being mindful is the absence of allowing your life to flow on auto-pilot. Step 2

"The practice of mindfulness begins in the small, remote cave of your unconscious mind and blossoms with the sunlight of your conscious life, reaching far beyond the people and places you can see." Earon Davis

This quote aligns with the interpersonal skill of mindfulness because it forces you to understand a deeper meaning of mindfulness. The remote cave represents how dark your mind can be until you introduce light to it bringing consciousness to your life. With mindfulness, you're able to fully open your mind and see things that we have never seen before.

About This Picture Step 5

This picture represents the never ending thoughts in our head. The thoughts lead to endless paths. Mindfulness is the ability to quiet the noise of the world and be aware of the moment –being able to channel your thoughts. Once you have channeled your thoughts the nonstop motion of the world seems to stop. There is a stillness that is welcomed. Your body, mind, and soul are on the same page allowing you to feel things that



only your mind is aware of. The statues in this picture represent the solidarity we wish to achieve in mindfulness, understanding is something we hope to gain. The people off in the distance represent our distant thoughts in a state of mindfulness, being aware of it but also being able to tune it out. This is a perfect representation of mindfulness because mindfulness is an intimate experience with just yourself. Step 3

Mindfulness in Adventure Based Learning

Step 6

A simple textbook definition to understand mindfulness is that "mindfulness has to do with particular qualities of attention and awareness that can be cultivated and developed through meditation. An operational working definition of

mindfulness is: the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In Adventure Based Learning (ABL) being mindful is imperative to being able to see the full picture of the activities, themes, and debrief. To get a full sense of understanding for the events, coming into a state of awareness through purposely paying attention helps an individual connect to their deeper sense of self and in return they are entirely able to grasp the bigger picture.

Often times individuals, especially children, will feel stress in their daily activities and interactions with other people. Every person has some sort of personal struggle going on beneath the surface so another aspect to mindfulness that is so important in ABL is that "it increases focus while decreasing stress" (Stuhr, Community and Sunday Drive Model, 2016). Even if the mindfulness activity lasts for only five minutes, the stress reducing qualities can be a person's only outlet in a day filled with non-stop reminders that the world is expecting more of you. On a clinical and more medical level, one study found "...the usefulness of MBSR as an intervention for a broad range of chronic disorders and problems. In fact, the consistent and relatively strong level of effect sizes across very different types of sample indicates that mindfulness training might enhance general features of coping with distress and disability in everyday life, as well as under more extraordinary conditions of serious disorder or stress" (Grossman, P., 2004). With stress being one of the leading reasons people go to doctors' visits, mindfulness activities will help decrease that stress and alleviate going to the doctor and spending money on therapies. Mindfulness is free and effective and when used in ABL it will enhance your learning not just for the ABL activities but in all other aspects in life.

Life Application of Mindfulness Step 7

2

After participating in nine weeks of Adventure Based Learning, I have reaped all the benefits of being mindful. I think the ability to step back and observe yourself and your whole body in its entirety is important but also the ability to focus on very specific things is important too. There are many exercises in mindfulness that allows you to focus on a big picture spectrum or a small scale. Becoming more mindful in the past few weeks, I have had the ability to become at peace with myself – I am more willing to accept situations in my life that are less than desirable because being mindful has allowed me to breeze over the stress of things.

If I were to describe my previous mindfulness exercises, it was always calming. Mindfulness centers me and my thinking – it gives me the opportunity to slow down and appreciate the moment, to be fully aware of what is happening right now. Being aware and in the moment is so important in a world that is non-stop. To me, mindfulness is a way for me to clear the slate of my brain, the continued effort to focus in on a subject and dissect it and in that process I'm essentially massaging my brain.

Because I have learned the importance of mindfulness not just through scholarly articles, but from actually practicing it on my own, it will now be something I practice for myself daily. I plan on waking up in the mornings and appreciating the sounds that I hear and the feelings that I feel. I want to spend five minutes in the morning really appreciating myself and centering my thoughts. Another way I want to implement mindfulness in my life is to have my young daughter participate in it. Just because she is five years old she is not immune from stress. It is important for her and I together to be mindful and to start our days off with an emotionally and mentally strong state of mind.

Figure 3. Elementary School Photo Journal Guidelines Example

Photo Journaling is a creative way to understand your thoughts and feelings as they relate to your experiences during PE class. The purpose is to combine and apply a social and emotional learning (SEL) topic or skill with an experience you had during class. In this photo-journal, you are to draw a scenario that represents how you applied the selected SEL topic in class. In addition to the drawing, you will be asked to write 2-3 sentences about your experience by following the prompt below. *Total value of this project is 15 points.*

Process:

For this journal you will draw one picture of the chosen SEL concept and how it related to class. For the one journal entry include the following steps.

Step 1: Write your name at the top of your journal entry. *This step is worth 1 point.*

Step 2: Give your journal entry a title and include the chosen intra- or interpersonal skill in the title. Be creative! *This step is worth 2 points.*

Step 3: Draw a picture that represents how you used an intra- or interpersonal skill in class today. *This step is worth 4 points.*

Step 4: Write a description for your drawing. The description should include the following: (a) In 1-2 sentences, describe the scenario in which the intra- and inter-personal skill was used (b) How or why was this important to you? What did you learn from it? (c) Describe one way you can apply this skill to your life or in a similar situation *This step is worth 6 points*

Step 5: Handwriting should be legible and please check for spelling. *This step is worth 2 points.*

Figure 4. Secondary School Photo Journal Guidelines Example

Ideally, the photo journal should be completed in a classroom setting. The following are sample guidelines from a middle school PE class.

Overview

Students should participate in four classroom days in order to complete the photo journal assignment. Two lessons should occur in the middle of the unit. Day one should be dedicated to: (a) the introduction of the photo journal process, (b) the purpose it serves in physical education in helping promote social and emotional learning, and (c) reviewing the rubric and student expectations (See directions labeled *Photo Journal Check-off Sheet* below). During the second classroom day, place students in groups of 3-4 to work on the journals. The teacher's role is to answer any questions and supervise the progress of students during this day. The final two classroom days should be at the very end of the unit and allow students optimal time to finish their photo journals. We recommend four classroom days are needed so students do not feel like they're rushed in the process and can develop their thoughts on the social and emotional learning concepts. However, additional days may be needed depending on various contextual variables of the PE program (e.g., length of class, developmental level of students, the type of photo journal you are asking students to complete).

Labeling of the Assignment

Students will turn in a powerpoint slide(s) that has the following labeled - Students Full Names, Teacher, Class Period, and SEL skill chosen. Please choose two photos that represent one the SEL skills covered in our class during this unit. All photo journal pictures must come from school/teacher approved websites and must have link attached. For your photo journal complete and clearly label the following four steps:

Photo Journal Check-Off Sheet

Step One: What does the social and emotional learning (SEL) skill presented in class mean to you (personal definition 3-4 sentences)

Step Two: Find two pictures that represent the SEL skill and write a description of the photo in your own words. What does the picture represent and how does it relate to SEL skill?

Step Three: Find a quote for SEL skill, the quote MUST match the SEL skill you described and align with the picture you chose.

Step Four: Describe what the quote represents.

Figure 5. Elementary School Photo Journal – One Completed Student Entry



Last month during
pe. someone ^{needed} help on an
activity. Then, I helped her
and she said "Thank you very
much"

It was important to me
because it was "ownership"
to help others.

Figure 6. Secondary School Photo Journal – One Example Student Entry

Seek First to Understand

"I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."-- Robert McCloskey

"The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply." -- Gabriel Garcia

The two above quotes relate to the pictures, since their deeper meaning is all about listening. The first quote relates to the man with the magnifying glass, since to understand, he needs to find the deeper meaning of what the person really said.

The second quote relates to the picture of the classic peanuts character, Lucy, because like the quote says we should, Lucy doesn't just listen to reply, she listens to figure out what they meant, and then to help.

