

Some Thoughts for Teachers and Coaches **Kelvin Giles, June 2009**

With so many organisations and individuals purchasing the resources I thought it worthwhile to make some general observations.

When I started to make inroads into this form of assessment a decade ago it was because I was facing serious issues when attempting to progress the athletes in my charge. Much of the early work at the Brisbane Broncos in the early 1990's developed due to the lack of certain physical qualities in the talent identified by the Club. Their destination (First Team Squad) remained fixed yet their journey was fraught with problems as they displayed a lack of all-round athletic development. Certainly 'they could play' but the journey to the cauldron of the NRL competition was to be a difficult one if we couldn't eradicate the limitations.

As the Physical Competence assessment took shape I had to step into new territory and there was much trial and error when assembling standards and processes.

This is what those who have purchased the resources will face – a period of 'try and try again' to find the answers. The answers won't lie in simply conducting the assessment. The key is 'what do you do next' in terms of the process that sees the athlete undertake athletic development.

For the Schools environment there can be no greater benefit of your intervention and creativity than to see young people being more physically active. The essence of hard work during PE and Games lessons was lost many years ago as we witnessed a capitulation to the 'warm and fuzzy', intellectual process of the new age 'do-gooders'. The focus on competitive games within most PE curriculum designs has added to the malaise.

Using the Physical Competence assessment to create a personal journey of hard work and commitment to achieving a range of movement efficiencies could be the focus of your efforts if you so wish. Young people, their cheeks ruddy with effort and their bodies appropriately fatigued should be enough reward for the practitioner in today's ever-sedentary existence. All the data we receive from the Physical Competence assessments and subsequent exercise prescriptions done by the committed practitioner illustrates improvement in movement efficiency. There is no magic formula involved – get the young people to do the work! Encourage them to do some activity each day; give over curriculum time to physical work; challenge the students to improve their scores; reward them with respect and recognition for getting better at their task; the physically illiterate student who improves from a 1 to a 3 deserves the well-being that grows from success.

For those Teachers in the UK you will find myriad opportunity within the National PE Curriculum to express yourself in the development of Physical Competence – it just takes a little bit of imagination when interpreting things from the following document:

QCA (2007) Physical Education Curriculum document

1.1 Competence

1.1a) Developing control (QCA, 2007: 190).

2.1) Developing skills in physical activity (QCA, 2007: 192).

2.3) Developing physical and mental capacity (QCA, 2007: 192).

2.4) Evaluating and improving (QCA, 2007: 193).

Now don't get fooled by the document itself. It is typical of all those well meaning exercises where an organisation sets out a new vision and purpose for everyone to feel good about. Most National Governing Bodies do this intermittently for their sport. They gather together some 'experts' and set out a 'new' strategy as a means of showing how up-to-date and concerned they are about things. After several acres of forests have been destroyed we usually see a series of nebulous statements of intent, expressed with a new age language and usually completely void of substance and practical action for the practitioner in the field to actually deliver. Fear not, they have done this on purpose. By

stating general and fluffy mumbo-jumbo they are giving you the chance to be creative. They are handing out an approval for you to find the answers to the problems we all face. If you do get things right and actually produce a fitter, healthier generation of young people then they will expound the virtues of their advanced thinking and take all the credit. Who cares who gets the glory? Here is your chance!

Stop being hemmed in by the Curriculum – use it to the student’s advantage and take some bold steps towards giving them some real work to do. This won’t be an easy task as the current generation have nearly drowned in a sea of complacency and compromise. They will be quick to complain if they break into a sweat or their heart-rates rise above anything resembling a resting rate. If their muscles begin to ache and they carry with them some residual fatigue through the rest of the day then be ready for the complaints from fellow-teachers and parents that you are putting them at some physical risk or that the poor dears were too exhausted to learn the Periodic Table in their next lesson.

Coaches will find themselves in a similar position to PE Teachers. NGB’s will present some new fangled strategy and in it will be all those clichés such as:

'The system should:

- *enable players and coaches of every ability to improve – and derive the maximum enjoyment from our national sport*
- *generate players and coaches who can perform at the highest international level'*

'These new awards and modules highlight that coaches need to understand more about fitness, psychology and social issues. They are crucial to supporting the coach of today in accordance with the Long-Term Player Development model, which stresses the need to work on the whole player, not just his/her technical aspects.'

That’s as far as it usually goes so be prepared to look beyond the vocabulary and get to grips with what you intend to deliver at today’s training session. Some organisations have grasped the nettle and set out a progressive series of Physical Competence markers for each athlete to aspire to at each training stage. These competencies have become the spine of work carried out and allow the coach to have a series of aims with respect to athletic development. The early stages (usually in the 8-12 age group) sees the competencies being all-round and general with the selection based around the broad aspects of Squat, Push, Pull, Brace, Rotate and Range. As the training stages unfold the competencies build upon the early adaptation and success and expand to more sports specific actions but still revolve around the fundamental movements. From a national strategy point of view these common competencies glue the scheme together with all practitioners involved (including sports medicine) working to a common cause.

Coaches should not underestimate the commitment they will need in both time and effort to redress the imbalance between sports specific skill development and athletic development. There is a chasm between the two elements at the moment as the majority of training sessions revolve around technical and tactical work. For those who embrace the concept of a major commitment to athletic development you will have to answer one simple question – ‘what are you willing to give up?’

The days of sending the players for a jogging lap of the field followed by some stretching and then a headlong dash into technical and tactical drills must end now. Consider giving 50% of the training time to developing athletic qualities. Utilise the warm-up more effectively by ensuring that it contains activities that actually prepare the players for what is yet to come in the session. Use this time to explore movement development. Consider breaking the rest of the session up into athletic development / skill development packages where the two are linked together by the fundamental movements that the skills require.

I know – it will require you to change the way you think about each session and demand a new skill set from you as a coach. It will make you see the skills and drills that you have used for years in a different light. You will see that for the player to express agility when moving across the playing

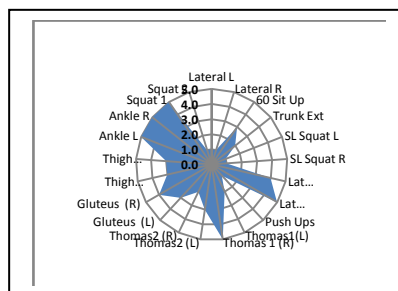
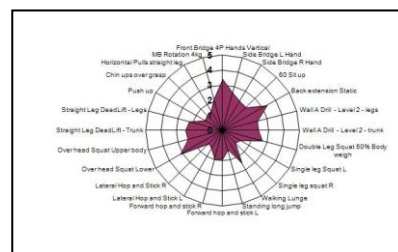
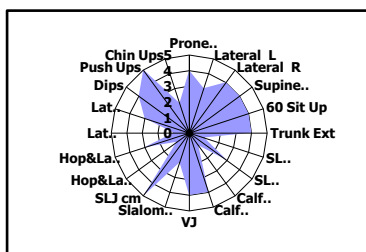
surface they will need Single Leg efficiency + Ankle-Knee-Hip integrity + appropriate Range of Movement. Your task will be to give them these physical qualities before you place agility at the centre of the session.

Taking this stance will test your mettle – not as a Teacher or a Coach but as a member of our world-wide community who has decided to 'be the difference'. The Physical Competence concept is not a spell, potion or gadget nor was it designed to ease anyone's burden. It is simply a tool to focus teaching and coaching delivery. It places fundamental movements and all-round athleticism at the centre of the process coupled with a commitment to wholesome, regular physical work. The process allows each individual student or athlete to embrace their own unique exercise journey; it allows the student or athlete the benefit of a muscular skeletal system that is well adapted to be able to execute all the postures and actions of the physical activity or game they are involved in; it will support injury prevention processes and it just might make them feel better about themselves as they feel the improvement they can accomplish.

There is little current research into the effects of exercise interventions on posture, skill acquisition and injury prevention let alone the specifics of these interventions during the physical, emotional and cognitive changes all young people undergo during their maturation. Don't wait for the intellectuals to convince you of all this – young people were born with the capacity to be active, to run, jump, throw, kick and catch. Watch the toddler play and experiment, crawl, twist, turn, rotate, stumble, run – they were born to move. Something goes wrong as they grow older and capitulate to the loathsome standards that our community now accepts. Challenge them physically every day – they are robust and will keep going until they have to stop and then once rested they will go again.

Those who do commit to finding out 'where are they now?' by a Physical Competence assessment and who then commit to a powerful intervention of individualised, consistent physical activity will soon see the results.

The practitioners involved worldwide in this process continue to share their results with me and seldom do I see anything but a series of physical limitations in those who are tested – see below.



Some clients have started the process by working with one athlete as a pilot. In this way they can develop the skills of assessment and prescription and see the effects of their decisions. Some PE Teachers have made a quantum leap and given up one games-based PE lesson per week in favour of a commitment to athletic development. Schemes of work have been designed with outcomes and processes linked coherently with the National PE Curriculum.

Give them the physical competence to do the technical stuff and the technical competence to do the tactical stuff....in that order.