

Coláiste Feirste

Art & Design: Using Teacher Observation to Assess TSPC and Knowledge and Understanding

Guidance on
Subject Assessment
at Key Stage 3

Introduction

Coláiste Feirste is a co-educational, non-selective, Irish medium secondary school with around 600 pupils. This case study considers assessment in Art and Design and, in particular, using teacher observation to assess Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC) and knowledge and understanding.

Teaching and Learning in Art and Design

The Art and Design department are developing an infusion approach to teaching TSPC alongside subject skills, knowledge and understanding. This means that specific strands of the TSPC, such as Working with Others or Being Creative, are developed as part of the learning process of gaining subject knowledge and understanding.

In Art and Design at Key Stage 3, pupils engage in a range of practical activities that are thematically based and taught over a period of six to eight weeks. The theme provides a context and helps to make clear the learning connections between their learning in Art and Design and other subjects. In Year 8 Art and Design themes contribute to the subject strands of Learning for Life and Work:

- Employability – Career Management (Bainistiú Ghairme)
- Home Economics – Home and Family Life (Saol an Teaghlaigh)
- Local and Global Citizenship – Equality (Comhionannas)
- Personal Development – Personal Health (Mo Shláinte)

Each theme provides a range of opportunities for pupils to develop their subject knowledge and understanding in addition to Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC).

For example, in term one under the Career Management theme pupils participate in a pottery project to create model angels made from clay. They learn about painting, modelling and glazing. This is linked to learning about careers in the creative industries and researching information about the work of artists, designers and craft workers from their own and other cultures. This includes exploring South American, Aboriginal, Native American and African art and design pieces and looking at the work of local artists.

In term three pupils explore the citizenship theme of equality (social equality and social justice) as they learn about and develop some of the skills required for graphic design. Pupils research and explore images and symbols associated with equality and social justice before creating their own symbol and making a polystyrene print to illustrate a social injustice or social inequality issue.

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Assessing TSPC, Knowledge and Understanding

In Year 8, as part of the school's assessment planning, the Art and Design department agreed to take responsibility for assessing and reporting on Working with Others and Being Creative. These are assessed in different activities alongside knowledge and understanding and planned in the Year 8 scheme of work. For example, in the pottery project each of the three strands of Working with Others are assessed and in term three, under the theme of Equality, the focus is on assessing two of the strands of Being Creative alongside knowledge and understanding.



Teacher and pupil discussing learning

Teachers also discuss what aspects of knowledge and understanding they intend to assess and set assessment criteria, ensuring that these are linked to the intended learning outcomes for lessons. Through experience teachers recognise the importance of selecting a few success criteria for assessment rather than trying to assess too many at once as this makes assessment unmanageable.



Pupils participating in a project discussion

Teacher Observation

In Art and Design, formative assessment is an ongoing process and involves the teacher gathering evidence about the pupil's learning on a regular basis. One of the ways the teacher does this is by observing pupils as they work in class activities. Teacher observation is not a new practice to teachers in the department. However, the teacher's focus on assessing TSPC in this way is relatively new. Teacher observation allows the teacher to capture evidence that other types of assessment, such as tests, would be unsuitable for. This enables teachers to gain an insight into the pupils' thinking and level of understanding.

In Year 8, Art and Design classes typically consist of around 15 pupils. Many of the activities involve pupils working in groups of three or four, as in the pottery project. This provides opportunities to assess the three strands of Working with Others. To make teacher observation manageable, teachers do not try to assess all the pupils at once, nor do they try to assess all the strands of Working with Others or Being Creative. They think about and select the aspects of learning they want to assess and plan how and when they will do this.

Teachers also recognise that they can't observe everything or remember everything they observe. So to help them focus on what they are assessing and to record information about the TSPC pupils demonstrate, they created an observation checklist for Working with Others (Appendix A) and Being Creative (Appendix B). The checklists are based on the assessment criteria set by teachers using the TSPC Art and Design Progression Map (CCEA, 2009). Table 1 shows an example of the assessment criteria designed to assess one of the strands of Working with Others: Learning With and From Others.

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Table 1

Assessment Criteria for Learning With and From Others		
Progression		
Pupils begin to demonstrate the ability to:		
engage with others, for example ask questions and participate in group discussions about their art and design work; and share ideas and value the contribution of others, for example talk to others about their clay model and the reasons for their design.	help others to learn by giving them constructive guidance, for example show others how they could improve their clay model; and listen to and accept the criticism of others.	show willingness to help others with aspects of their work, for example ask others if they need help with designing and creating their clay model and find ways to assist; and take on board others' suggestions and ideas.

When assessing Being Creative the teacher looks for evidence to show how the pupil has displayed curiosity, exploration, flexibility and resilience, depending on the assessment focus (CCEA, 2009). Table 2 illustrates the assessment criteria used for two of the strands for Being Creative: Curiosity and Exploration.

Table 2

Assessment Criteria for Curiosity and Exploration		
Progression		
Pupils begin to demonstrate the ability to:		
show eagerness to learn more, for example be keen to find out about the printing process, other artists, issues of equality and social justice; and use their imagination to generate their own ideas and images for print.	pose interesting questions about aspects of their learning, for example what would happen if ...? Why are things done this way instead of another? Why is art used to make statements about social inequality and injustice? and combine their ideas with others to create a poster to illustrate social injustice/inequality.	seek out their own answers to some of the questions posed and find other questions to ask; and experiment with different ideas and approaches to create a visually stimulating poster that conveys a key message about social injustice/ inequality.

The teacher also assesses knowledge and understanding by engaging pupils in discussion, asking effective questions, looking at their sketch books and reviewing their class work and homework. By the end of the project, pupils are expected to be able to demonstrate a degree of knowledge and understanding as illustrated by the assessment criteria in Table 3.

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Table 3

Pottery Project – Assessment Criteria for Knowledge and Understanding		
Progression		
Pupils demonstrate the ability to:		
describe how to create a model using clay; describe what happens when clay is heated in a kiln; and identify three types of careers a young person could pursue in the creative industry.	explain the processes involved in making a clay model; explain why a glaze is used and why the composition of clay changes when it is heated in a kiln; and describe two types of career a young person could pursue in the creative industry and explain what three skills they would need.	analyse the processes involved in making a clay model and explain why the heating process and glazing is important; and make connections between their learning in Art and Design with possible career paths in the creative industry.

Table 4 shows the assessment criteria for the knowledge and understanding that pupils are expected to demonstrate in the polystyrene print project.

Table 4

Polystyrene Print Project – Assessment Criteria for Knowledge and Understanding		
Progression		
Pupils begin to demonstrate the ability to:		
describe how they made their polystyrene print; give two reasons why polystyrene is a good material to use for making prints; explain why it is important to make sure ink is applied evenly over the tile surface; give an example of social injustice or social inequality; and explain why everyone should be treated equally.	explain why oil-based paints should not be used on polystyrene; explain why polystyrene is a good material to use for making prints; explain the reasons for their choice of colours and use of text; explain why people use art to highlight social injustice/inequality issues; and express the key message of their work.	analyse why oil-based paints should not be used on polystyrene; recognise that polystyrene is recyclable and the benefits to the environment of using recyclable materials; recognise the impact of social injustice and social inequality on individuals and groups; and explain how they used art to visually express their key message.

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When using teacher observation to assess pupils, the teacher explains what they are doing, why they are doing it and what they are assessing. The teacher also involves pupils in discussion about, for example:

- how pupils might show how they are Learning with and from Others;
- how the teacher might judge a pupil's Curiosity or their ability Explore;
- how the pupil could demonstrate what they know and understand about pottery, its link to careers and local craft workers and artists; and
- how the pupil could show their learning about polystyrene print, the use of colours and text to create a stimulating visual image about social justice or social equality issues.

The discussion leads to pupils agreeing success criteria.

Over the course of activities for the pottery and polystyrene print projects the teacher selects one or two groups of pupils to assess at a time. During the course of a lesson, the teacher pays close attention to the individuals in the group(s) being assessed. The teacher records instances where they demonstrate the TSPC and knowledge and understanding being assessed.



Teacher assessing pupils' learning through discussion and observation

Using the Information to Improve Learning

The information from teacher observations, along with other evidence, forms the basis of a discussion with individuals about their learning. As these conversations take place on a daily basis, the teacher plans time for a more formal discussion with pupils at the middle and near the end of the course.

In preparation for meeting the teacher, usually when they have completed certain stages of their projects, pupils are given time to engage in peer and self-assessment activities. They are introduced to the idea of assessing their own and others' work early in Year 8. They are given prompt questions to help them think about and reflect on their learning and to become familiar with the idea of talking about, for example, what they can do well and what they find challenging.

During the discussion the teacher aims to find out what the pupil can do, what they know and understand and the specific areas that they find challenging. The teacher supports the pupil by providing useful comments about how they can make improvements in their learning and helps them to set personal learning targets. The pupil and teacher then use these to monitor progress.

The Next Steps

Teachers in the Art and Design department found that developing their ideas for assessing TSPC and knowledge and understanding, made them more aware of the interconnections between the Thinking Skills and knowledge and understanding.

At the end of the year the department will evaluate their assessment practice. This will include asking pupils about their experiences of assessment, for example whether it helped them to improve their learning. In the meantime teachers are exploring how they can further translate some of the progression statements (CCEA, 2009) for Working with Others and Being Creative into assessment criteria that they can apply to other learning contexts in Art and Design.

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Appendix A Art and Design

Teacher Observation Checklist

Working with Others: Learning With and From Others

Pupil Name _____

Class _____

The pupil demonstrates the following:

never

sometimes

often

Takes part in group discussions

Asks questions of others

Shares ideas

Values the contribution of others

Gives constructive guidance to others

Shows others how to do work

Actively listens to others' views

Accepts criticism

Shows willingness to help others

Asks others if they need help

Finds ways to help others

Takes on board others' suggestions/ideas

Comments

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Appendix B Art and Design

Teacher Observation Checklist

Being Creative: Curiosity and Exploration

Pupil Name _____

Class _____

The pupil demonstrates the following:	never	sometimes	often
Shows eagerness to find out more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asks questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses their imagination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinks of new ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poses interesting and thought-provoking questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Builds on others' ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seeks answers to their own questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finds further questions to ask	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiments with new ideas and approaches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combines their ideas with others to illustrate a social injustice/inequality issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiments with new ideas to create a visually stimulating print that clearly conveys a key message about a social injustice/inequality issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creates a print image to illustrate a social injustice/inequality issue	_____		

Comments
