Arts Assessment For Learning

REFLECTION: IMPROVING MODERN DANCE TECHNIQUE

Without judgment, describe what you did. Just the facts:
First, I began by identifying how I could support my students in their learning of dance. I noticed that my students struggled with executing modern dance technique accurately. Next I developed my inquiry question: Does peer feedback that is based on specific criteria improve student execution of modern dance technique? Then I began to teach a Merce Cunningham modern dance unit. Once I identified the technique I was going to teach my students during the unit, I created criteria for each technique movement and designed a technique criteria peer feedback checklist.

I began teaching the unit by introducing the choreographer, Merce Cunningham, and discussing his style of modern dance. Next, I taught the criteria for each technique skill and posted the criteria on the smart board so the students could look at it as they learned each modern dance technique. I decided to teach the criteria of one modern technique skill each class so the students would not be overwhelmed.

During the second lesson I introduced the feedback protocol and explained the process on how to conduct paired feedback. Once I had taught the modern technique skill of the day I gave students an opportunity to practice both the skill and paired feedback.

I identified a student who struggled with performing a triplet, and decided to use her as my focus student. I then filmed her perform a triplet to capture how she executed the skill at the beginning of the unit before she had received any feedback.

At the beginning of each class students would retrieve their criteria feedback checklists, and then pair up to give and receive feedback. I walked around the room and listened to the feedback the students were giving, and then helped them fine-tune their critical eye and improve how they gave feedback. I also filmed pairs during the feedback process so they could see what they looked like while executing the technique.

In order to document the progress that my focus student was making on her triplet, I set a schedule to film her once every other week over the course of seven weeks.

What went well?
My focus student improved her performance of the triplet after peer feedback and was able to execute a triplet accurately in her choreography at the end of the seven weeks. Although I only had one focus student, all of the students in her sixth grade class

improved the accuracy of their modern dance technique because of the peer feedback that they received.

The selection of one focus student, instead of many, enabled me to see how peer feedback using a criteria feedback checklist improves the execution of technique.

My students were engaged in the learning process, and took pride in the quality of their work. They liked the feedback process because it was effective and then saw immediate results and improvement in their technique.

Another success was that my students learned how to give neutral feedback in a way that was non-threatening. The use of a feedback protocol helped create an environment where the students felt safe to be vulnerable in front of their peers, which in turn enabled them to grow and improve their technique.

What was so-so?
The students were not able to give feedback that was one hundred percent accurate until they developed a critical eye for observing their peer perform the movement. Initially students were not able to see exactly what their peer was performing inaccurately, because they themselves had not mastered the skill. Eventually the quality of their feedback improved once the criteria had sunk in and they had an opportunity to practice and experience the movement for themselves.

What was the most challenging part of trying this?
Time management was a challenge during this process. I had to make it a priority to set aside time for peer feedback and commit at least 6-10 minutes every class. There were one or two occasions where I didn't allot time for paired feedback. Sometimes the feedback sessions would last longer than 10 minutes because the students were engaged and making significant improvements - however, this cut into the other activities that were planned for the lesson.

What was the impact of this strategy on student learning? (specific examples)
By the end of the unit my focus student was performing a triplet with 100% accuracy. She was also able to accurately execute a triplet in her choreography. All of the students in the class improved the accuracy of their modern dance technique.

What new insights or understandings are forming as a result of this experience?
Formative assessment informs my instruction and helps to guide me in the planning of my lessons. As I walked around the room and observed peer feedback sessions I saw what

my students needed more assistance with and I planned accordingly to support them in the next lesson.

Peer feedback is an effective formative assessment method because middle school students value the opinions of their peers - especially if they are taught a protocol on how to give feedback

Feedback is more effective when it is based on established criteria. It is also beneficial to have students help the teacher create the criteria for the skill being assessed because it helps them have a better understanding of the material.

How do the results of your action plan inform your inquiry question?

Peer feedback that is based on specific criteria does improve the execution of modern dance technique. Every child in that sixth grade class improved their dance technique because of the feedback that they received from their peers.