Arts Assessment For Learning

REFLECTION: SCRIPTWRITING

Without judgment, describe what you did:

Session 1:   Students were introduced to the concept of writing in proper script format as opposed to writing a story. Students then selected a partner (or a group of three in some cases) to work with and in pairs, they then wrote the story of what their script was going to be based on (for this unit, I asked them to write forum theater pieces based on oppressions that they had viewed in their community and in New York City in general).

Session 2:   I introduced the concept of the 5Ws of scriptwriting (Who are the characters? What is the conflict? Where is the scene taking place? When is the scene taking place? Why does the conflict exist?), which most students were already familiar with from the ELA version. I modeled how to extract the 5Ws out of an already written example script about bullying. Then, I asked the students to create the 5Ws of their script.

Session 3:   I asked the students to create character biographies of their three main characters. I asked that they have one character be the oppressor, one character be the oppressed and one character be the witness in the situation. I used the example scene to show that the "Bully" in the scene was the oppressor, the "Victim" was the oppressed, and the "Friend" was the witness.

Session 4:   Students came up with an objective for each character they had created and continued to work on their biographies as well.

Session 5:   Students came up with the tactics that the characters would use in order to achieve their objectives utilizing an "Active Verb List" to aid in this process.

Session 6:   I introduced the checklist, rubric and goal sheet. The students then brainstormed about how to begin their first scene.

Session 7-10:   Students were introduced to a new element of the script structure based on the class' needs. As a "Do Now" for each session, students would

write a goal for their writing based on their progress. The students would write in their pairs. At the end of each class, one pair would volunteer to share their progress by allowing other students to be the readers of their script and hearing a short whole class critique at the end. The critique consisted of "What did you like about their script? What do you wish could have been different to make the script better?"

Session 11: Students' first draft was due and they wrote that their goal for today was to receive feedback on their script. Then, each partnership exchanged scripts with another pair and filled out a feedback form for them. Then they shared their feedback with the pair whose script they had read and discussed any changes that they might make and wrote that they needed to work on that for next time.

Session 12: Students went back to the pair who gave them feedback and began the editing process together. Each pair helped one another change what they thought needed to be changed and edit the script for improvement.

Session 13-16: Students edited their own scripts and re-wrote the script in order to submit it as their final draft.
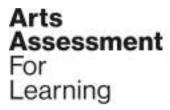
Session 17: Students wrote a paragraph explaining how they worked with their partner and then gave their partner a grade. Finally the students submitted their final script for me to grade and we discussed their feelings about their process. I eventually selected two scripts that would be performed for their Spring Show.

What went well?

I felt that the students really were able to grasp the concept of scriptwriting based on the rubric and checklist they were given. I saw the students in constant conversation with one another and in the final discussion about their work, students expressed that they were able to utilize their partner to bounce ideas off of and it made the process easier and more fun. This proved that the partner relationship ended up being overall successful and beneficial to the students' learning and their final script. They consistently asked each other and me questions about the checklist, clarifying that they were at the right place in their progress. Their goal setting seemed to keep them on track with constant reminders from me to check in with their goals and their scripts.

What was so-so?

In the peer-feedback forms, students seemed very focused on grammatical and spelling errors. I hadn't thought that they would have been so overly focused on that element of the rubric as opposed to the content of the script. This focus lead to feedback that may not have helped their editing process in the most effective way. The students may have needed much more guidance on a particular part of the rubric to focus on or not focus on.

What was the most challenging part of trying this?

The most challenging part of this unit was allowing the students to have enough time to write in class. Because this unit inevitably led to a performance in front of an audience, there was pressure on the students and me to meet deadlines. I suppose this is a natural part of theatre, however I wonder if this impacted the students' work negatively. They also consistently questioned the fact that they were not allowed to bring their work home. I tried to clarify that they had to complete their work with their partner, but at the same time, I wondered if having the time away from the group to create freely, without the pressure of a 42-minute period would have yielded more powerful work. That may have also lead to plagiarism or other forms of unoriginality due to access of the media at home. Each process has its challenges, but I think that forcing the students to create in a confined space and time tested their creativity, ensemble building skills and ingenuity.

What was the impact of this strategy on student learning? (specific examples)

After this unit, I feel confident that my students would be able to write a script on their own in proper format. I know this because during readings and peer editing, I saw students correcting one another about the proper placement of stage directions, colons and other theatrical devices. The peer feedback forms had some focus on grammar and spelling, however, when scriptwriting, it is important to focus on those things when considering that actors need to be able to read it to perform. I also noticed on some feedback forms, specific details from the script were included that ended up creating scripts that were selected for the final performance. One group had commented that they wished that the group's script that they had read were more serious. Given that the topic was involving a serious issue, this comment made their script that much better in their final revision.

What questions were raised for you as you implemented the assessment practice?

- How much time should be allotted for a scriptwriting unit?
- Should the students work in partners/be able to take their scripts home to work on?

- Should grammar/spelling be included in a scriptwriting rubric/checklist? If it is included, does it take away from the creativity of the work?
- What parameters need to be set in order to strike a balance between educated students on proper script format and allowing for creative choices?

What new insights or understandings are forming as a result of this experience? (share with group)

My students continued to surprise me throughout this process. The thoughtfulness of their feedback to one another got more useful the more into their writing they were. I certainly came to understand that it is very difficult for me to tell a student, "No," when their idea does not fit into a prescript idea for scriptwriting, but is a perfectly logical, theatrical and creative decision to make in general. Perhaps teachers of English struggle with this daily. I think that making a rubric and corresponding checklist can be as general as possible, the students are then free to create whatever they feel is important for their play. The older the students are, the looser the teacher can be on the parameters.

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

My action plan confirms that working in pairs and involving students in peer editing definitely informs their work in a positive way. Some of their scripts grew and changed by leaps and bounds due to peer conversations. This was documented through their peer assessment feedback forms and their first draft versus their final draft. Some partners even decided to make several drafts to perfect their work, which shows that they valued the editing process. It seemed that the students were constantly checking in with their goal sheets and relating it to their progress in their scripts. Though most of their goals indicated how many lines they would write that day, they at least had a deadline in mind and were working within the understanding that a line of dialogue was not necessarily one line on the paper. After selecting the scripts for performance, I can definitely say that most of the students' scripts were cohesive enough for performance due to their collaboration with their classmates. This made my final decision on whose script would be performed very difficult, and I could not have been more proud of that fact.

Documentation to bring (student work, photos, writing, teacher journal, etc):

- Session Breakdowns
- Completed checklists and rubrics
- Drafts and Final copies of student scripts
- Peer feedback sheets
- Final partner evaluation