**Wiggle Genius on Assessment**

While there are many ways to assess dance in the classroom, my favorite is a simple rubric because it states the objectives clearly and can thus be used formatively and summatively with students during the learning process. Because integrated dance classes typically involve a culminating creative activity where there are many interpretations or “solutions to the creative problem” that are accessible and fulfill the objectives of the lesson, a rubric can provide needed guidance for what “doesn’t work” or “falls short” for the student or group of students as they work to interpret the dance element in combination with the academic concept.

Watching the students dance as they learn is perhaps the best way to determine if they comprehend and are beginning to retain and apply the academic (and dance element) objectives being taught – if they “get it” they are doing it clearly in their bodies. Observation, as well as continually injecting critical thinking and questioning into instruction, can not be over-used in this type of class.

Below are some other things to employ during an integrated dance class to help you assess your students as they are learning. I have used them in dance technique classes, dance education classes, and dance integration classes and they are “tried and true” – particularly the ones designed to get students to “see, think, analyze, describe, and embody movement” more.

**Formative Assessment:**

*“intended to provide information to teachers and students during the learning process”*

*Used by teachers and students to adjust/modify instruction and product, short term (R. Stiggins).*

*The following forms of assessment provide valuable feedback during the learning process, and allow the teacher to diagnose learning for the midline student and adjust instruction as needed. Certain assessment activities also invite student interaction and contribution to learning – collaboration and communication – that are extremely effective, and also foster leadership and community in the classroom.*

**Peer Assessment** – I typically pair up students and ask them to give guided feedback to one another, but if students are in groups creating something together, partnering groups is also a great idea if objectives (both the dance elements or compositions they are working on as well as showing the academic concept through movement clearly) are articulated and understood. Another way to say this is **“Think – Pair – Share”.** I use peer assessment every time I teach ballet. For an entire class period I have one student be the “teacher” and one student stay the “learner”. The “teacher” gives comprehensive feedback to the learner the entire class and is their “personal coach” watching no one but them. We do this at midterm and it changes the rest of the term because the student being watched has pages and pages of feedback to reflect upon and apply separate from what I, as the teacher, might be directing them to pay attention to that day in class and in that particular lesson.

How to apply something this focused to an integrated dance class? When your students get to the point where they are familiar with all the dance elements, you might ask them to demonstrate them all through a set combination that has every single one of them in it, or create a long phrase that includes them all. They perform this to demonstrate that they are well versed in dancing, and a peer comments on what can be clearer, what is truly creative and excellent, etc. Students in the classroom will get more and more creative in their movement explorations the more they learn by dancing. Giving them opportunities to “do” or “dance” the dance elements on their own will make them more fluent here, and eventually expand their “movement vocabulary” when they are applying these in integrated lesson plans.

**Self-Assessment** – I love handing a rubric out at the beginning of a unit or even a lesson, when it culminates in a creative activity that is designed to demonstrate understanding and application of the objectives. The rubric is part of the lesson’s introduction, and includes a discussion of what can be interpreted and what needs to be done in a certain way if both of these must be answered to in the final product or in the activities in the lesson along the way.

**Praise – Question – Polish –** This comes from master teachers in Baltimore (Glenna Blessing, Sharon DiPace, Karen Kuebler) who use this when reviewing and fine-tuning creative projects that either culminate at the end of a class (a simple dance composition or sequence) or are the product of an integrated dance unit that is more comprehensive and detailed (a choreographic work that involves many designed phrases of movement). The dancer or group of dancers shows what they have “for feedback” and specifically receives from their observers (either a specific assigned peer or the entire class) a compliment, followed by a question to help the dancer(s) consider options or opinions on their performance, and a specific suggestion for making the dance even better. The teacher agrees, expands upon, or offers addition perspectives in tandem with student observations and commentary, but I love this approach to “polishing” the final product because it once again directly involves students in instruction, it gives students the opportunity to “talk intelligently about dance”, and also learn how to respectfully share their opinions about each other’s creative ideas. In other words, the exercise is a valuable learning experience in and of itself and if time allows, it is recommended every time a group or a dancer is working towards showing dance to the class or in performance of some sort.

**Simple Checklist** -- Instead of a narrative rubric, the teacher distributes a checklist of things that he/she desires the student(s) to learn or demonstrate to evidence learning during instruction. A checklist is a great way to keep everyone on track, including the teacher! If creative work is involved, a checklist also helps to offset students asking the same questions again and again or needing to run to a board to see what is required of them. They have their list and they can check things off, rearrange options/elements if it is an option, and keep each other on track in their own space.

**Narrative Rubric (see attached Integrated Dance Rubric)** – This is a comprehensive and descriptive restating of lesson or unit objectives. I have found that the best rubrics are developed over time and continue to evolve each time the accompanying lesson/unit is taught and in response to each student population it is used with. I tend to create these for assignments that occur often during integrated dance instruction or are taught annually to my students. For example, I have included a rubric in the assessment section that can be tailored to many different types of integrated dance lessons. It stresses what should be considered by students when they are working in the areas of creativity, collaboration, and clarity with movement, and allows the teacher to inject specific dance elements and academic concepts in the rest of the rubric to ensure it addresses assigned lesson plan topics and focus as needed. I encourage you to use this for both formative and summative feedback and continue to adjust it as needed as a valuable partner in instruction.

**Summative Feedback:**

*“those assessments that happen after the learning is supposed to have occurred to determine if it did”*

*Used by teachers to give grades, long term (R. Stiggins)*

**Narrative Rubrics** – see above. I personally feel that rubrics are the most objective measure of stated objectives because they describe what expectations are and leave less room for misinterpretation. As many categories, or specific areas that will be measured, can be written as well, to make “what to do” even clearer. Rubrics take the most work to write and fine-tune as I stated above, but once they are polished, I find that they translate very well to different groups of learners and stand the test of time too as instruction of the dance elements and academic concepts might shift and evolve.

**Reflective Journals (see attached Reflective Journal Rubric)** – One of the most important things I teach my dance majors is how to write about, talk about, and reflect upon dancing and also their learning of it. I encourage the K12 classroom teacher who is integrating dance into instruction and ideally teaching integrated dance classes, to do the same. The idea is that if the student can do this in written reflection, they will be able to do this verbally while offering formative feedback during instruction. A dancer needs to be able to “speak the language of dance” and this happens at a basic level by identifying and talking about the dance elements and the basic tenets of dance composition with the correct terminology and with confidence when articulating opinions on whether something is “good” and “why.” **Daily reflections** during a unit plan can be assigned and done as homework or done at the end of class as part of the lesson plan’s closure. **Weekly journal entries** can be done to summarize the learning and related creative and academic experiences that happened over a five day period. Both are effective if students are given clear writing prompts and objectives to write about and answer to. These entries can also illuminate student preference, potential, and ability to persist when faced with challenge. I find that journals help me to know the student as a “person” as much as a “learner” and contributes to my instruction staying responsive to who they are as much as what they know and can do presently and moving forward. Because journals can sometimes be hard to assess objectively simply because they often include a lot of subjective commentary along with answering to stated requirements, I developed a reflective journal rubric to use when giving these kinds of assignments. I encourage you to hand it is as a way to guide students in the writing process and make expectations clear from the start, but also use it to summatively assess the written work that is submitted.

**Portfolios** – Portfolios are a great way to assess students summatively. Visual art teachers do this all the time in elementary school. Parents often receive a portfolio of their student’s work at the end of the term so that they can see their student’s progress for themselves. If you integrate dance into your curriculum often (even if it occurs weekly), I encourage teachers to do this for their students. A portfolio entry can be: a written journal reflection, the math problems that served as a source of inspiration for the dance they made about fractions and a picture of this dance, a videotape of a culminating dance phrase based on a poem that the student wrote and created movement to show to the class, formative feedback that they wrote about a peer when watching and helping to polish their dance, written responses to watching dance, BEST analyses of different dances or dancers, a colored skeleton or body system that was used as the source for a rap and an accompanying dance about it, etc. I recommend that if you do a portfolio with your students, that you include them in the assembly and maintenance process. Take time along the way to add to these, put them together, make them special and presentable. Students will take pride in what they are gathering and will share with their parents at some point. If the teacher needs to advocate for this type of instruction in their classroom – either to parents, administrators, colleagues, or the students themselves – portfolios are a fantastic way to do this. Portfolio submissions can also be easily displayed in the room before going into individual folders.

**Written Tests** – Because dance is a subject in and of itself and a distinct discipline of study with specific knowledge to teach and measure, I encourage the teacher to use formalized and traditional tests occasionally to assess student understanding, retention, and application of both the dance elements and the academic concepts they are partnering with. Of course, written tests in the form of comprehensive exams are best to assess summatively, but I also encourage quizzes or open-book tests to assess students formatively. There is much to know and be able to incorporate in integrated dance. I suggest testing students on the Braindance patterns, especially if the teacher plans to have students take over instruction of this as “student leaders” (see the “student leader handout” in the resources section). I have also tested students in integrated dance lessons on the dance elements, on the many ways a dance element can be shown through movement, on the academic concepts that the dance elements worked to review, introduce, teach to them, etc. A written test is not a bad thing and definitely has a place in assessing dance. For schools that prefer traditional forms of assessment, a written test might also lend a certain validity to this type of instruction and provide important aggregated data (similar to a rubric) that can “prove through numbers and statistics” that dance in instruction improves student learning in measurable ways.