

Cindy Jones

DCE 646 Final Reflection

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My experiences both in the classroom as a student and as an instructor with my students have been rich and ripe with self-discovery and learning. Sometimes I worry that there is not enough room in my head for all the new discoveries I am making in my own personal learning and learning in the classroom with my students. Reflecting on my own learning, planning, and instruction this past semester has solidified for me the importance of life-long learning, pedagogical knowledge, instructional methods that encourage critical and creative thought, and the reflective process. I learned much about my students, the content being taught, and myself as an educator through well thought out questioning strategies, listening, and on-going formative assessment. I also learned that with proper guidance my students started to ask more probing questions themselves improving the quality of thought and learning taking place.

What I learned about my students

My students are eager to learn and move. Many enter my classroom with more technical dance knowledge than academic dance knowledge. They have a strong understanding of how to execute certain movements with skill but they cannot articulate why that is or why they move a certain way. Their understanding of the elements of dance, (Body, Energy, Space, Time) both in technical movement and dance making was rudimentary at best. I have learned that many of my young college students are new to problem solving in the dance classroom. They are accustomed

to a didactic teaching method that feeds instruction rather than leading them toward inquiry. I also learned that they were open, eager even, to thinking for themselves and making discoveries together.

What I learned about the content I was teaching

The content I was teaching is rich and necessary. My students began looking at dance through multiple lenses and incorporating new information into previously conceived ideas and theories. Allowing and encouraging questions and discovery was a new concept for many. I realized as we progressed through the lessons that my students were eager to discover things on their own and with each other. They no longer requested answers to questions. Rather they were content to look for multiple solutions to a question and to accept that there is more than one right answer to a query. Application to real life scenarios was easier than I thought it would be. Students often paralleled what they were learning in the classroom to life outside the dance studio. If they didn't go there on their own, a few well thought out questions got them thinking in that direction.

Something else I discovered about the content I was teaching was the limitless possibilities for cross-curricular and collaborative exploration. I started researching dance companies and realized that some truly leant themselves to the concept of Body and movement. Incorporating Pilobolus Dance Theatre into the learning process for Body allowed my students to see in real life what we had only recently been discussing in the abstract. It wasn't such a large leap to go from creating shapes with their bodies from a photograph after seeing done so expertly by Pilobolus.

What I learned about myself as a dance educator

The more I learn, the more I realize I still have to learn and want to learn. I enjoy being a student and plan to be a life-long learner. I know this makes me a stronger teacher. Learning for myself feeds my passion to share knowledge and understanding with my students. The more I learn the more I want to share. This has bred openness in me that I don't believe was there in my younger dancer years. I like this newer me and believe (and hope) my students benefit more from it.

Developing, implementing, analyzing, and reflecting on curriculum and teaching are on-going processes. Education is not static. It is ever changing, evolving, growing, and becoming. I can teach the same content to a different group of students with completely different results. On-going formative assessment is necessary to gauge student understanding and thought processes along the path of learning. Each new group of students is unique in the prior knowledge they bring to the classroom and their abilities to assimilate new knowledge with old. One group of students may progress at a quick rate while another group may need more instruction or processing time before moving on to the next level. Therefore, the curriculum should be structured but flexible. As an educator I must ebb and flow along with my students in order to maximize learning potential. I have learned that establishing a systematic way of creating, implementing, analyzing, and reflecting on curriculum strengthens my teaching, delivery, and ability to veer off the planned path when prudent and necessary.

I was pleased with everything we completed in this session on the element of Body in dance. I don't believe at this point there is anything I would want to delete. An opportunity to introduce my students to aerial work presented itself during the course of implementing the curriculum. This was one of those "teaching moments" that I felt was too good to pass up. This allowed my students to look at the element of Body in movement from even another perspective and opened up opportunity to question and discuss spatial intelligence in relation to body in space.

One of my biggest weaknesses is implementing current technology in innovative ways. I use technology in useful ways but not really innovative ways. I am not teaching my students anything new in this realm. Rather, they are often teaching me when it comes to new innovative ideas with dance and technology. This is an area in my own learning I hope to improve on this summer!