Microteaching Reflection: Ballet

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On May 3, 2013 at 9:30 a.m., Miss Dixon and I co-taught a ballet lesson to twenty students. In this lesson, we engaged the students in active learning and used instructional methods that highlighted critical thinking and teaching for understanding on a variety of levels. At the end of the lesson, our objective was to have the students be able to explain and demonstrate five specific ballet moves. In order to reach these objectives, students were broken into mixed ability and ability groups as they actively engaged and focused on each element of the lesson: the anticipatory set, modeling, guided practice, cooperative learning, feedback, independent practice and finally, review/closure. By the end of the lesson, the students were unofficially the “Education Department’s Prima Ballerinas.”

After I reflected on our lesson, I found the co-teaching process with Miss Dixon to be beneficial. Miss Dixon and I were able to take our skills and combine them together. Keeping in mind co-teaching skills, Miss Dixon and I pre-planned ahead and equally fulfilled our roles. We also made sure we had a complete understanding of the content so we can best teach and answer any questions. Keeping in mind how the students best learn, at all times, both of us were active in the lesson. During modeling, at the same time, one demonstrated a move and the other explained it. For guided practice, we split the whole group each taking a side and walked around to help the students as they practiced, making sure we met with each pair of partners. For the independent practice, we planned for Miss Dixon to explain what the purple group was doing and I would explain to the pink group what they were going to do. Whoever was finished first, we planned, would go to the mix-ability group so the students were not wasting their time. At any time, if we forgot to mention something, we supported one another. For example, during modeling, I forgot to ask the students to say “plié.” Miss Dixon jumped right in and asked the
class, “Can everyone say, “plié?” I found co-teaching to be beneficial for this type of lesson because we were able to work together to help the students meet our objectives.

In order to have the lesson transition smoothly, the classroom was set up in a precise way. All tables were pushed to each side of the room in order to ensure a giant space so the students could come to the center and get the ambiance of a real ballet studio. On the right hand side, two tables were placed together with chairs wrapped around for cooperative learning for the purple center. Placing the tables together was beneficial because it allowed the students to work together to share ideas and to help each other determine the answers. On the left hand side of the room, the tables were completely against the wall, providing as much space as possible for the pink center and the yellow center, so the students could practice their moves. This classroom arrangement was supportive to all students in a kinesthetic manner so all students could have space to complete the given task.

The elements of this ballet lesson incorporated key aspects of a positive lesson design so all students could learn. Throughout this ballet lesson, a PowerPoint was used as a visual to help the students follow along. The first slide was used to “set the stage” for the anticipatory set. Miss Dixon and I asked students to come up and choose an index card that best applied to them. The pink card was if the student had recently taken a dance class and the purple card was if the student had not recently taken a dance class. This anticipatory set was helpful to all students because it prepared them to learn ballet as they excitedly put a ribbon in their hair and observed the point shoes. Seeing the point shoes was a way to inspire them and get them excited to learn about the topic. As for Miss Dixon and I, the index cards gave us an idea of each student’s ability level and provided a starting point for our instruction. Ballet can be a naturally engaging topic for students, however, for some, it can be uncomfortable to do moves that are unfamiliar. After
watching the video, I observed the students laughing as they put the ribbons in their hair. This indicated to Miss Dixon and I that the students were excited to learn, which all students should be at the beginning of a lesson.

For the input section, students were briefly told about the history of ballet so they could have an understanding of its purpose. Then, we were ready to teach them the moves. As students came to the center of the room, Miss Dixon and I modeled each of the five ballet moves. These are five moves that are important to know in order to become more advanced in ballet. Before doing so, we explained and demonstrated how both hands should be on the hips, and introduced first position and fifth position in order to set them up for success for when they practiced the moves. Keeping in mind valuable co-teaching skills, Miss Dixon would demonstrate the move and I would explain the move step-by-step as Miss Dixon slowly showed it. We would take turns fulfilling each role. This was helpful for visual and auditory learners. Visual learners were able to see the move flow from the very beginning to the end, and auditory learners got to hear each part of the move. After explaining and demonstrating each position, the students practiced each role with their partner, which was the guided practice of the lesson. Working with a partner helps support one another, making sure no one would hurt themselves and also builds cooperative learning as students learn from one another and learn how to work with one another. As the students actively engaged in practicing each role, one explained and one demonstrated the move, Miss Dixon and I walked around to assist, check for understanding and feedback. We remodeled if needed. At this time, we used observational assessment to see the different abilities and took that into consideration for the rest of the lesson in order for the students to practice on their ability level, yet also be challenged.
After practicing in a whole group with their partners, students were then asked to break up into groups using their colored index card chosen for independent practice. The pink group was considered the advanced group and the purple was considered the beginners. To have a variety of activities to best support all students, we pulled two advanced and two beginners, which created a mixed-ability group known as the yellow group. As the pink group worked together, students had to match a picture of a move to its term. We believed this would be completed quickly, so we created index cards of the moves and the explanations were written so the students could practice. These students practiced on their ability level starting off with the worksheet, but there was not enough time for the index card activity. Just in case the students breezed through it, we had the index cards prepared to further challenge them.

It was nice to observe how the mixed-ability group worked. The mixed-ability group was incorporated into the lesson on the spot. We planned that if the groups were large, we would break them into smaller groups, allowing each student to gain the most out of their group. This reminded me of peer tutoring. As a group, their goal was to be able to demonstrate all the moves together, in a synchronized way. The advanced girls helped the beginners, taking what they knew and learning how to teach it, and the beginners with support, were able to master the moves.

As for the pink group, since they already knew how to demonstrate the five moves, they had to pick at least three moves and put it into two eight counts using other moves. Due to time, they only got to create and perform one eight count, however, we stressed that, that was okay because it teaches the students, even if you do not finish something, to always keep going and show what is done. After watching the video several times, I believe all students were challenged and were placed in the right group. All the students were able to fulfill the role in their group. Most importantly, what stood out to me was their confidence. Students had to perform and
explain what was assigned for each group, which was their independent practice, also known as, “dress rehearsal.” During this time, we also used observational assessment. One student at first did not want to perform in front of the group. Once she saw her group go to the center, she joined them and beautifully performed the given task. Seeing confidence and students trying in my eyes is what matters, rather than if they can perfectly demonstrate and explain the moves.

After students had their “dress rehearsal,” students were instructed to sit down for the beach ball activity. This beach ball activity was a part of our assessment and review. If students had a difficult time answering these questions and if there were another lesson, I would have my co-teacher or I, use a checklist to mark down the students who are struggling, this way we could work with them more one-on-one at another time. All students were able to successfully demonstrate the moves, as we gave just the right amount of wait-time. This beach ball activity was beneficial for tactile learners because they were able to catch the ball to determine their question. This also caught the students’ attention because they did not know when the ball would be thrown to them. To bring the lesson to a closure, just like any dancer would do after they performed, all students stood up and took a curtsey.

As mentioned above, there were many positive and beneficial elements to this lesson, however, after watching the video, there were some weaknesses that stood out to me. After watching the video, I realized we did not incorporate the element of activating prior knowledge. If I were to reteach this lesson, I would first ask the students some specific questions about ballet and about their previous experience, before they would take an index card. As the PowerPoint slide was up, I also noticed the word “honor” was spelled wrong. This was not the first time I saw this and had corrected it for the final PowerPoint. We had put up the unedited version by accident. I have learned for future lessons that I will always check for my final, edited copy
before using it to teach the students. The second thing I noticed in the video is that I told the yellow group that they were the mixed-ability group. I would not say mixed-ability group in the future, but rather just explain their role and purpose for this group and why it is beneficial. As for the pink group, they did not sit at their table as planned. This may have not been clear to them and they may have felt rushed. Next time I teach a lesson, I will be more specific with where they can go instead of just handing out the worksheet. Also, after watching the video, I noticed during the beach ball review when a student did not know an answer, I would simply just say the right answer. Next time I use this beach ball activity in a lesson, if a student does not know an answer, I would ask, “Would you like to ask a friend for help?” instead of saying the answer. Thirdly, I recognized that there were no critical thinking questions in the lesson. I feel the students demonstrated and explained the moves well, but we didn’t push them to take these moves and do something more with them. This would have made it more of a challenge and made them think more deeply. I will keep this in mind for future lessons, and make sure students will be able to critically think through the content next time. Finally, after watching the video, I noticed we had ten more seconds left. It is important to make the most of every second in a lesson. With ten seconds left, I would have asked students if they had any questions. Then, students would be able to stand up and take their curtsey!

After reflecting on this video, there were some aspects I would have changed. First, for the modeling and guide practice as students came to the center, I would have asked the purple group to come up first. This way they would be in the front and have a clear view of the moves being demonstrated. Then, I would have asked the pink group to come up. In a classroom, I will always remember when calling students to transition, to call them up in groups. Secondly, I noticed some students were unsure about the answer to the history questions during the beach
ball review. Before the beach ball review, I would review with the students everything from the beginning of the lesson to the end. This way the students are set up to thrive during the beach ball review, and so students can gain confidence about the content.

My personal learning goal was to not say “um” or rush through the lesson. After watching the video, I did not say “um.” This is very exciting for me. As I reflect back on teaching past lessons, I always would be hesitant and say “um.” As for this lesson, I wish there was more time for the students during independent practice, however, understanding that I will have time limits, the students were still able to successfully complete the task and I did not feel I rushed through the lesson. One other aspect that stood out to me was my confidence. If I were teaching this lesson two years ago, I probably would not have seemed like the same girl. My confidence has grown throughout the years and that is what makes a good lesson. If the teacher is confident, the students will be confident. Overall, I believe I have reached my goal. I feel this lesson was full of energy as the video displays smiles and laughter, and it also demonstrated positive co-teaching skills, various learning styles, and showed how to make decisions on the spot, which will happen all of the time in a future classroom and as a future teacher. I am amazed by how I can take elements of what I have learned in this class, and put it together in a lesson. I have learned to reflect not only on my strengths, but also to recognize my weaknesses and turn them into strengths for future lessons.