



Self-Assessing Expertise in Creative Dance Teaching From Constructivist Perspectives

by Weiyun Chen

A teacher's expertise in teaching plays a crucial role in promoting students to achieve desired learning outcomes. Expertise in teaching reflects how teachers use their repertoire of instructional skills in teaching a specific subject matter to a certain grade level. In creative dance, the content is the use of elements of movements for expressing and communicating ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Teaching creative dance involves encouraging students to actively explore movement possibilities and create unique dance sequences individually and collectively. The nature of instructional strategies in creative dance reflects a constructivist perspective of teaching, which means encouraging and facilitating students to actively construct their knowledge. Based on the unique content and constructivist-oriented instructional methods in creative dance, teachers are challenged to possess pedagogical expertise specific to teaching creative dance.

What are the characteristics of pedagogical expertise in creative dance teaching from constructivist perspectives? How can teachers identify their own levels of expertise in creative dance teaching? What aspects of teaching do teachers need to improve on? The self-assessment rubric presented here, Creative Dance Teaching, will help you answer these questions.

Does the Rubric Reflect Expert Characteristics of Creative Dance Teaching?

To ensure that the rubric can capture characteristics of expert creative dance teaching practices, I designed and developed the assessment tool primarily by studying the teaching practices of a nationally renowned expert dance teacher, Theresa Purcell Cone. Among her many distinctions, Theresa was named the National Dance Association's Educator of the Year in 1989; she is the author of two distinguished books, *Teaching Children Dance: Becoming a Master Teacher* (Human Kinetics, 1994) and *Interdisciplinary Teaching Through Physical Education* (Human Kinetics, 1998); and she has assumed numerous leadership roles in professional organizations. I interviewed Theresa twice and observed and videotaped her teaching 16 lessons on creative dance to 2 kindergartens, 2 first-grade, and 4 third-grade classes. The field-based

research helped me understand how an expert teacher incorporates her command of elements of movement, choreographic principles and processes, dance structures, other subject areas, and students' developmental levels into creative dance lessons. Through analyzing her thoughts and actions, I found that her teaching practices reflected essential characteristics of both constructivist-oriented teaching and expert creative dance teaching and gave me firsthand information for designing the assessment tool.

What Are the Expert Characteristics of Creative Dance Teaching?

As presented in Table 1, the rubric includes three essential dimensions of expertise in creative dance teaching from constructivist perspectives: (a) activating prior knowledge, (b) facilitating active creation, and (c) facilitating self-regulated refining.

Activating Prior Knowledge

The first essential dimension of the rubric focuses on assessing the extent to which teachers link new dance learning experiences to students' prior knowledge and life experiences and use students' interpretations of ideas in creating dance movements. Constructivists suggest that new learning begins where learners are. Learners use their prior knowledge and life experiences to make sense of new information. Learning becomes meaningful to learners when learners' prior knowledge and life experiences are tapped and activated.

The expert teacher's instruction provided examples of implementing this dimension of constructivist-oriented teaching in a creative dance lesson. For instance, when teaching "Beach Dance" to first graders, the expert teacher started a lesson by telling a story about swimming in an ocean. The first graders had experiences playing at the shore because their homes are not far from beaches. She used the story as an inspirational tool for helping the students make connections between what they already knew about swimming and what possible movements they were going to explore and create for expressing the idea of swimming in this lesson. She introduced another lesson by reading familiar poems to evoke students' ideas and feelings for creative movements. She used children's picture books and/or actions words as images to help children explore a wide range of movements. The expert teacher also incorporated the children's interpretations of shapes, pathways, and ways of moving their bodies into dance learning experiences.

TABLE 1—The Rubric for Creative Dance Teaching Practices

ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS

LEVEL OF EXPERTISE	Activating prior knowledge	Facilitating active creation	Facilitating self-regulated refining
Expert	<p>When introducing new dance lessons, expert teachers intuitively and automatically relate dance learning to students' prior knowledge of dance elements and life experiences by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing examples, telling stories, or reading poems that are relevant to students' understanding levels. • Using images that come from students' life experiences as an inspiration tool for exploring movement possibilities. • Incorporating students' creative interpretations of dance ideas into learning tasks. • Designing dance learning experiences that are relevant to students' knowledge level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluently presents small-stepped learning tasks to lead students to creative use of elements of dance for expression. • Automatically asks sequenced, open-ended questions to help students discover all possible movements for expressing an idea. • Appropriately provides examples and suggestions to help students get ideas about and elaborate on how to use dance elements creatively. • Uses learning criteria to help students contribute and share ideas, offer explanations, and listen to others while creating dance sequences with a partner or group members. 	<p>Automatically provides relevant cues or suggestions to help students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify elements of dance for artistic expression. • Refine ways of using elements for expressing ideas and feelings clearly. • Identify the problems of their dance sequence. • Rearrange elements and refine the structure, transitions, and movements in a dance sequence. • Match movement in a dance sequence to the music. • Self-evaluate or evaluate the quality of a dance sequence by using a given criteria.
Proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fluidly and less consciously demonstrates 3 out of 4 expert characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fluidly and less consciously demonstrates 3 out of 4 expert characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fluidly and less consciously demonstrates 4 out of 6 expert characteristics
Competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consciously demonstrates 3 out of 4 expert characteristics. • Sometimes uses images as imitation instead of exploring movement possibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consciously demonstrates 3 out of 4 expert characteristics. • Inconsistently uses and reinforces cooperative learning criteria for guiding students in exploring and creating dance ideas cooperatively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consciously guides students in refining dance structure and movements. • Pays little attention to guide students in refining transitions in a dance sequence. • Is unable to guide students in refining ways of using dance elements for artistic expression.
Advanced beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans to use some expert characteristics, but only demonstrates 2 out of 4 expert characteristics with more effort and concentration. • Uses images primarily for imitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages students to explore different ways of moving their body and making shapes. • Is unable to guide students in creating movements beyond obvious dance movements. • Lacks strategies to guide students in working together cooperatively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to guide students in practicing their dance sequences in order to match the movements to the music. • Is unable to guide them in clarifying and refining ways of using elements, structure, transitions, and movements in a dance sequence.
Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs learning experiences that are relevant to students' understanding level. • Whenever images are used, the images serve as imitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents open-ended learning tasks but pays little attention to guide students in exploring various ways of using dance elements. • Is unable to build one learning task on another to help students explore all possible dance movements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has students practice their dance sequences. • Is unable to provide any guidance for clarifying and refining dance movements and sequences.

Facilitating Active Creation

The second essential dimension of the rubric centers on assessing the extent to which teachers encourage students to actively explore, create, share, and elaborate upon their dance movements in order to express their ideas in dance. Constructivists advocate that learning involves active construction of knowledge. To facilitate students to become active learners, creative thinkers, and critical problem solvers, teachers must engage students in exploratory, creative, and problem-solving activities. In the process of doing such activities, teachers must guide students to elaborate upon their initial ideas, to generate alternative solutions, and to share learning responses.

The expert teacher modeled how to use constructivist-oriented teaching strategies to promote the students' active creation. In her lessons, for example, the expert teacher consistently presented a series of open-ended tasks accompanied by questions to encourage students to explore a wide range of dance movements. She created learning environments for students to share ideas for generating various dance movements with their partners or group. She also guided students in exploring beyond the obvious dance movements by providing verbal cues and demonstrating various movements.

Facilitating Self-Regulated Refining

The third essential dimension of the rubric aims at assessing the extent to which teachers engage students in refining the quality of dance movements and sequences. Constructivists note that providing students with exploratory and problem-solving activities is necessary, but helping students concentrate on tasks, identify problems, analyze consequences of actions, clarify and refine previous learning responses, and evaluate learning outcomes is also important for enhancing the quality of learning. To help students gain a deep understanding of new information, teachers must engage them in using thinking processes while refining learning products.

The expert teacher's teaching exemplified how to incorporate such constructivist-oriented teaching into creative dance lessons. She provided students with cues to help them make dance movements clearer. For example, in her "Happy Veggie" lesson taught to first graders, she used a cue of "stretching" to help the students extend and open their body parts. She posed questions to help the students identify the problems and successes in their dance movements. She provided suggestions and clues to help the students adjust their initial dance ideas and refine their use of dance elements and sequences. To help students gain a better understanding of the quality of a dance sequence, the expert teacher also encouraged them to self-evaluate their dance sequences and/or evaluate their peers' dance performances using criteria she provided.

How to Assess Levels of Expertise in Creative Dance Teaching

As seen in Table 1, the rubric consists of the three essential dimensions and five levels of expertise—novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert—as proposed

by Berliner (1988). Berliner delineated teaching characteristics corresponding to each of the five levels of expertise in teaching. His work provided the theoretical framework for developing the key creative dance teaching indicators in the rubric.

The rubric can be used to assess teachers' instructional practices in a single creative dance lesson or across a creative dance unit. When the rubric is used to assess teachers' levels of expertise in a single creative dance lesson, it gives teachers information about what goes on in the lesson even though teachers are not expected to demonstrate all expert teaching characteristics across the three dimensions. When the rubric is used to assess expertise across a creative dance unit, the rubric provides teachers with information about their teaching performance in two ways. First, the descriptions of expert practices provide teachers with targets for their teaching development. In other words, the rubric provides a "road map" for moving teachers from a lower level of expertise to a higher level of expertise and ultimately the expert level. Second, the rubric gives teachers concrete information about three dimensions of constructivist-oriented teaching. The rubric tells teachers which dimension(s) of their teaching is (are) close to the expert level and which dimension(s) they need to improve. Teachers may demonstrate the competence in the first dimension while exhibiting proficiency in the third dimension.

The rubric offers immediate feedback for improving the quality of teachers' instructional practices and provides information about what it means to be an expert teacher in creative dance.

References

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