From Both Sides: Assessment Benefits for Teacher and Student

MARLEEN PENNISON

PLAYWRIGHTS HORIZONS THEATER SCHOOL
NYU TISCH SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

ABSTRACT

This paper examines my past and present experiments with assessment as a vehicle for learning for both teachers and students. Initially, the assessment experiments grew from two directions: the need to create clear standards for students and the need to find a stronger structure for a student-centered, project-based curriculum. These needs led to a study of the assessment techniques developed by Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Project Zero, as well as a series of consultations with Heidi Andrade, one of their foremost assessment researchers. In the semesters that followed, I introduced three assessment tools into my courses: rubrics co-created with students who then used the rubrics as a guide for self- and peer-feedback, process-folios added to student conference materials, and collaborative assessment techniques employed as an alternative method of mentoring project work. As a result of these efforts, students involved in the project classes, as well as in other classes gained a

clearer understanding of class standards, became more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and took more responsibility for setting and reaching higher goals in their work. An additional and unexpected benefit for me, as teacher, was the precise reframing of the class content material that became evident with the helpful magnifying lens of the assessment tools. Thus, what started out to be a simple search for standards and structures quickly evolved into a method by which I was able to articulate tools and skill sets that have been the underpinning of more than twenty-five years of teaching. The paper cites examples of student interviews in tandem with my own notes and observations to look at the benefits of implementing assessment techniques from both sides of the classroom.

When asked for feedback on the process of building and using a rubric in class, one student commented, "Unfortunately, I have never had a good experience with rubrics. It has always limited me because it becomes a physical manifestation of the right way. As an artist, I have continuously and consciously tried to steer away from the rubric."[1] His reluctance to engage in a process that at first glance seems constrictive shows the basic mistrust some artists feel toward definitions of any type and points to the larger question of how creativity is to be fostered in an educational environment where accountability is a necessary part of the landscape. Of course, the student who demands absolute freedom of expression often at the same time, expects the instructor to provide a foolproof recipe for success. While the contradiction may be apparent, the problem remains: What is the best vehicle through which the process of art can be taught and the results measured?

I have always strongly believed that a project-based class, where the teacher acts as a coach/guide for student-centered problem solving and peer review, provides an ideal vehicle for arts education. To this end, over the past seven years, in addition to the more traditional classes in acting and choreography that I teach, I have been developing a curriculum referred to as "COW," short for Creating

---

[1] See Andrade (1991, pp. 91-99) for an excellent introduction to the use of rubrics.

Original Work, that is based solely on project-based work. Here, the student chooses the media to be used, sets the problem/goal, creates the steps to solve the problem, presents the results, reworks the presentation after receiving feedback, and presents a final version of the project. In the process of developing this curriculum, I realized how important students' ability to self-assess is in their educational process, and how a stronger structure for self-assessment, in both a project-based class and in more traditional classes, would be of great benefit.

In project-based classes, the student's ability to self-assess as well as offer non-judgmental assessments of peer work in class discussions is an especially important part of the set of skills being taught. The importance of student self-assessment as an integral part of the learning process in this context is clearly delineated in John Dewey's 1916 classic work, *Democracy and Education*:

> Thinking is the method of an educative experience. The essentials of method are therefore identical with the essentials of reflection. They are first that the pupil have a genuine situation of experience—that there be a continuous activity in which he is interested for its own sake; secondly, that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought; third, that he possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; fourth, that suggested solutions occur to him which he shall be responsible for developing in an orderly way; fifth, that he have an opportunity and occasion to test his ideas by application, to make their meaning clear and to discover for himself their validity (Dewey, 1916, p.163) .

One current student describes her experience: "Part of the beauty of this process is the level of self-discipline involved. You are responsible for giving back to yourself, for rehearsing yourself, for listening and not disclaiming yourself, and ultimately, you have a chance not only to formulate rehearsal procedures and strong work habits, but you will have a final product that reflects these elements."

It is pivotal for students to practice taking responsibility for their work process if they are to continue productive work cycles beyond the years spent within the supportive structure of an educational framework. Developing that responsibility begins with the skill to form a challenging question that can fuel the creative process. In their

publication, *Teaching Through Projects*, researchers at Harvard's Project Zero outline the successful use of a project-based curriculum developed for an after-school program that served lower grade school students. Their ideas for structuring project work with a problem-solving framework and the use of ongoing assessment techniques are equally applicable to university level coursework. The authors offer this advice about setting goals, which they consider to be one of the first steps in basic self-assessment:

> The kind of sustained work required by relatively long-term endeavors like projects requires that students understand what they are working toward and what they will need to do to get there. Because project work is unfamiliar to many students, the goals of a project and the steps involved in reaching them need to be made explicit from the start (Goodrich, Hatch, Wiatrowski, & Unger, 1995, p.8).

The authors outline a framework for creating and problem solving projects and encourage further reflection after the completion of the work, so the student can take note of how to make improvements with the next project.

Because the framework outlined by the Project Zero researchers mirrored the structure of the project-based course I had been developing myself for several years at the university level, their work encouraged me to further articulate the goals I had set for that curriculum. In general, I felt that my expectations of students and the overall goals for each class could be better articulated.

Soon thereafter, an additional factor pointed to the need for a more formalized method of assessment. The school administration expressed concern that the grade-spread throughout the studio was concentrated too much at the high end; a higher level of accountability was required for measuring the standards for grading.

These two factors, the desire to more clearly outline the goals of the coursework and the need to set clearer standards for grading, led ultimately to a study of the creation and use of rubrics. With the help of Heidi Andrade, a Project Zero researcher and one of the authors of *Teaching Through Projects*, I began to implement rubrics as an integrated learning tool into each of my classes.

In the spring semester of 2002, separate rubrics were co-created

with each section of two university level courses: Choreography for Directors (a required course for second-year directing students) and Creating Original Work (C.O.W.) (a project-based elective for second-year students and an elective or track requirement for third- and fourth-year students). The classes were taught at the Playwrights Horizons Theater School under the auspices of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts Undergraduate Drama Department where I have been teaching since 1985. Figures 1-5 contain the rubrics created for these classes. After explained to the class how the grid was structured, we began to create the rubric by assigning names to the four levels of degree, least favorable to most favorable, that run horizontally across the rubric. Each class discussed for some time what those levels meant, and the names chosen reflected the unique identity of each class. A list of criteria was then created that ran vertically down the rubric and identified the most important elements of the course such as participation, collaboration, organization, process, tools, and craft. Finally, each class discussed at length the details of the body of the rubric.

Figure 1. Choreography rubric, section 1, Spring 2002

	blackhole and/or desklamp	headlights	moon	sun
Participation	3 or more absences, negative, disrespectful	Some unexcused abs. lots of lates present but stoned blasé	absences but excused involved w/out contributing	ready, willing and able to work. Cooperative receptive
Collaboration	dictating, negative	Compromises w/a grudge - passive aggressive	inbalanced sense of contribution	empathetic, listener, responsible use of time. Contribute but not control
Organization	no batteries	wrong batteries	low batteries	Palm Pilot
Creativity	plagarism	copying well but not exploring	inconsistent inspiration plays it safe	moxie, unique
Craft	huh?	gets concept but can't apply	applies concept w/out finesse	understands and uses tools with finesse -application
Problem Solving	what problem? or anger	trying w/ an attitude- wimping out	Trying hard but not succeeding great ideas, no follow through	work on their feet, has idea + follows through

Figure 2. Choreography rubric, section 2, Spring 2002

LEVELS

criteria	smashed	intact	polished	smashing
Choreographic tools	not knowing the tools or being able to use them	understands the tools but can't put them to use	understands the tools and puts them to use adequately	knows them and uses them well
problem solving	isn't aware that there's a problem	sees a problem, but can't fix it	tries to fix the problem	flexible, open minded, responsive
organization	unprepared, no-show at rehearsal	has it written out but doesn't know where it is	rough edges, but prepared	prepared, ready, rehearsed, has stuff written out neatly, good use of time
creativity	copycat	cliché	moments of good idea but not fully thought out	imaginative, willing to take risks, unique approach.
communication	tunnel vision / closed off blind to peoples' needs	confused but you're talking anyway, bullshitting	communicating but inefficieNtly	good, collaborator, free exchange of ideas, clarity, articulates ideas
collaboration / participation	useless dumbass	only physically present, does bare minimum	doing your best when asked	collaborates well, eager but not annoying
attitudes	"fuck you, I'm going to Starbucks"	"I wish I was at Starbucks"	ready to work	"I came early to class and I brought my passion for choreography"

Figure 3. Choreography rubric, section 3, Spring 2002

Criteria	Unfortunate	Pretty Good	Pretty Dern Good	Genius
Participation	Too many absences, coming + doing other	late sometimes absent sometimes	excused absences	always present, punctual, positive active
Collaboration	nasty, controlling, apathetic	doing what you're told half-way participating	Trying to articulate idea whether own, image is clear or not	open to exchanging ideas, communicates ind willing to compromise
progress	no interest in understanding or applying the tools	understands but does not apply	understands & applies tools but not as polished	understands + can apply the concepts, well
creativity	apathetic, unwilling to experiment, copies w/o variation	copying w/ variation following, having ideas and not following ongoing	willing to try but inconsistent, relatively open minded	tries exciting things, willing to risk + fail
problem solving	giving up if something goes wrong, unaware of problem	identifies problem but can't solve or continue	attempting to fix but showing great frustration	Flexibility, calm, think on fit incorporate ideas of others.
attitude	resistant, negative, putting people down	listens but doesn't really consider	accepting but not change contributes occasionally	Give + receive feedback in a balanced + constructive way, aware of effect on others
Organization	unreliable, unprepared, sloppy	inconsistent, occasionally prepared not "together"	procrastinate, gets it but at the last minute	know what day they work, has all material dependable, prepared

2 pm   Choreography

Figure 4. Rubric, Creating Original Work, section 1, Spring 2002

CREATING ORIGINAL WORK 1

	SUCK	ALRIGHT	GOOD	BITCHIN'
Attendance	Missing class without notice. (3 = fail)	Missing class, but giving notice.	Miss class, but make up in 8-10 class.	Present and attentive for every class.
Participation	Not showing work.	Talking in lieu of work.	Combination of talking/ performing.	Performing every week.
Discussion	Inattentive to other's work. No commenting.	Non-constructive comment.	Offering "directorial" suggestions.	Watching and commenting in an empathetic and constructive manner.
Physical Support	Refusing to help another or flaking on commitment.	Assist begrudgingly.	Assist only when asked.	Offering assistance, support and time.
Process	No progress, no follow through. Paralyzation.	No exploration of ideas. "Half -assed."	"Money Player"	Exploring ideas, failing and recovering, using critique.
Creativity	Unwilling to experiment.	Following critique or direction verbatim.	Lack of commitment to idea.	Willing to fail and work out of the dark.
Organization	Unable to show because of unpreparedness.	Adaptability- winging it.	Problem solving during class time.	Being prepared for class. Having a prepared crew.
Performance Skill	Staged Reading or on book for final presentation.	Self conscious performance. Lack of rehearsal.	"Money Player."	Prepared and committed. A good performance.
Final Product	No show. Different show.	Undertime, on book, under-rehearsed.	Overtime, or missing one element of "bitchin" piece.	10 mn. Well organized, well rehearsed piece.

Figure 5. Rubric, Creating Original Work, section 2, Spring 2002

CREATING ORIGINAL WORK 2

	AMERICAN POO	ADEQUATE	WELL DONE	EXCEPTIONAL
Attendance	Missing class with no notice. (3 = fail)	Missing class, giving notice. Leaving early.	Miss class, but make up in 6-8 class.	Present and attentive for every class.
Participation	Not showing work.	Talking in lieu of work. "Bullshit."	Combination of talking/ performing.	Performing every week.
Discussion	Inattentive to other's work. Doing other work.	Distracted, inconsistant attention.	Less vocal, but attentive.	Engaged and responsive. Actively participating in discussion.
Physical Support	Self centered.	Occasional button push.	Assisting with set up and clean up.	Giving time to another's project.
Process	Paralyzation.	New ideas every week- the kleenex approach.	Reaching only first draft stage of material.	Exploring material, taking risks, editing, fully realized piece.
Personal Process	Closed minded to feedback.	Following critique or direction verbatim.	Experimentation without rehearsal.	Incorporates and uses feedback as springboard.
Organization	Unable to show because of unpreparedness.	Adaptability- winging it.	Problem solving during class time.	Being prepared for class. Having a prepared crew.
Product	No show. Different show.	Undertime, under-rehearsed last minute show.	Overtime without cuts.	10 mn. Entertaining, engaging, organized, and well designed piece.

Although the list of criteria was similar from class to class, the variations and separate descriptions used in each class reflected the individual class discussions that were an important part of the process. As the students voiced their opinions and negotiated the details of the rubric to capture their joint vision on paper, they assumed more responsibility for their work and, in doing so, made their peers equally accountable for the standards being set. For example, the ability to work well with people in a team setting is an important skill for theater practitioners. In developing the descriptions for levels of "Collaboration," the students were able to articulate to each other what makes a working relationship more and less productive. Having verbalized these ideas openly to each other, the students had to become more accountable for their behavior in rehearsals and design meetings.

The rubrics were also helpful to me as a teacher, as they soon became a basis for discussion during individual student conferences at mid-term. The rubrics were used to identify specific areas where students needed help and to discuss what steps might be taken to address those problems. To facilitate this process, the student mapped out his/her position within the various levels of each criterion, and we would discuss ways in which the student could work toward a better understanding or application of the material being taught. For final evaluations at the end of that semester, I handed out a single choreography rubric that represented the work of all three sections (see Figure 6). Note that the layout of the rubric was altered in one small way at this point. To place more emphasis on the most positive descriptions, the horizontal descriptors were listed from most positive to least positive rather than the reverse. Meanwhile, as the initial rubrics developed for the C.O.W. class were more detailed, these rubrics remained the same. Students marked their position among the descriptors on the rubric and were encouraged to add additional comments regarding their work in prose on the back of the page.

Figure 6. Combined rubric, Choreography, Spring 2002

Choreography Spring 2002	4 Sun/Smashing/Genius	3 Moon/Polished/Pretty Darn Good	2 Headlights/Intact/Pretty Good	1 Black Hole/Desk Lamp/Smashed/Unfortunate
Participation	Always present, punctual	Mostly present, excused absences	Late at times, some absences, some excused absences	Three absences
Preparation	Well rehearsed, written material clear, knows the schedule and is ready to work	Prepared, but still rough Procrastinates	Somewhat prepared, or prepares inconsistently Not well organized	Unprepared, under-rehearsed, sloppy work
Collaboration	Free exchange of ideas, not overbearing with opinions, communicates well, willing to compromise, empathetic, listener, responsible use of time, contributes—but doesn't control	Communicates, but not always efficiently; tries to articulate ideas, but not always clear; imbalanced sense of contribution	Doing what you're told to do, compromises ideas—but with a grudge, or displays passive aggressive or manipulative behavior, doesn't always use time well	Controlling, dictatorial, or apathetic, resistant to other people's ideas, unreliable, No show at rehearsal
Attitude	Cooperative, receptive, positive, dependable, enthusiastic, ready, willing, able	Helpful to others when asked, involved—not always contributing to energy of class, ready to work	Physically present, does bare minimum, blasé	Negative, disrespectful, closed off to other people's needs, tunnel vision, coming to class and doing other things
Creativity	Willing to risk and fail, tries new ideas, imaginative, unique approach	Moments of good ideas—not fully thought out, willing to try—but inconsistent inspiration, relatively open-minded, plays it safe	Cliché, having ideas—but, not following impulses, copying with variations, not able to explore material	Unwilling to experiment with new ideas, copycat, plagiarism
Choreographic Tools (Craft)	Applies the concepts with consistency, work shows finesse	Applies the concepts, but not consistently, work shows adequate design	Concepts applied in a very rough, inconsistent way Lacking design	Does not apply the concepts
Problem Solving	Flexibility, work "on their feet", follows through with ideas	Attempting to fix problem, not always succeeding, inconsistent follow through, not always able to be flexible or is sometimes frustrated by process	Identifies problem, but can't solve it, gets stuck, little or no follow through	Isn't aware of the problem, gives up on process, shows frustration or anger
Communication (Discussion)	Gives and receives feedback in a balanced way, aware of how others are affected, comments show clear understanding of choreographic concepts	Sometimes contributes to discussions, comments show inconsistent understanding of choreographic concepts	Confused, but tries to talk anyway, contributes to discussions occasionally	Rarely contributes to discussion, no understanding of choreographic concepts
Project Production Value	Costumes, props, sound—well integrated and well designed.	Elements of costumes, props, sound—integration and design with some success.	Inconsistent or little use of production elements.	No elements.
Use of Text	Text well integrated with movement, tells the story, supports the design concept.	Use of text integrated with movement, but not always.	Text used inconsistently. Story or design concept unclear.	Text not well used, unclear.

After this first semester of rubric use, some of the benefits being sought, such as clearer standards for grading and better goal-setting, were immediately apparent. The rubrics clearly outlined the expectations of each aspect of the class, from levels of participation in class discussions to how and in what way students would collaborate on assignments. Students responded very positively to the process of laying out specific criteria that would be used in grading their work. In response to this, one student noted, "I am glad to see on paper what I need to work on rather than a value for my work."

The process of creating rubrics with the classes and using them for mid-term conferences and final evaluations was repeated in the following fall semester with incoming students who were new to the process (see Figures 7-10). Because the classes involved were year-long courses, the rubrics were carried over in the spring semester, re-evaluated, and modified.

In re-evaluating the rubrics, the content of the course was viewed in greater detail. Here, the choreography rubric posed a particular challenge to me as teacher. In the choreography class, unlike in the C.O.W. class, when the initial criteria of the rubrics were developed with the students, important content aspects of the course had not been fully articulated. At that time, with students who had little working knowledge or vocabulary of the material to be covered in the class, this seemed an impossible task. As it stood, the five choreographic tools introduced in the first semester were still represented as a single criterion—"Tools." These tools needed to be broken down, a process referred to as "unpacking the rubric." In addition, I felt that a criterion dealing with the fundamental skill of physical awareness, which was not represented in the rubric, needed to be included.

Figure 7. Choreography rubric, section 1, Fall 2002

9:00	Cream of the Crop	Pick of the Litter	Salt of the Earth	Pain in the Ass
Attendance	Always Present Never Late	Sometimes Late Excused Absences	Some Absences Often Late	3 Absences
Participation	Willingly Engaged Passionate	Without full commitment/ Guarded	Little energy/ Distracted	Doesn't give a shit/ Negative/ Being an obstacle
Collaboration	Good sense of give and take/ Facilitates the work of others/ Empathetic/Generous	Some control issues/	Sometimes negative or too controlling/ Difficulty compromising	Selfish/ Obstacle/ Obstinate/ Destructive/ Irresponsible
Organization	Clear concept/ Ability to communicate ideas/ Very well prepared	Not fully prepared/ Not always able to communicate/ Mushy/ Not specific enough	Somewhat prepared/ Not able to communicate ideas/ Unprofessional attitude	Not prepared/ Non-communicative/ Rude/ Frustrated/ Not specific
Process	Faith in working from the unknown/ Confident balanced attitude/ Good problem solving	Identify problem, can't solve it/ Lack of balance/ Not enough confidence and/or information	Non-specific identification of problem/ Overwhelmed or stuck in unproductive habits	Defeated/ Despairing/ Unaware/ What Problem?
Tools	Open to risk/	Understands theory/ Not applying fully in practice	Tries, but doesn't get it	Not using tools/ Being safe

Figure 8. Choreography rubric, section 2, Fall 2002

2:00	Cowabunga	Tubular	Hang Loose	Wipe Out
Attendance	Always Present Never Late	Sometimes Late Excused Absences	Some Absences Often late	3 Absences
Focus/ Participation	Ready to work/ Involved/ Connected Positive Energy Takes direction well	Mostly cowabunga, But sometimes wiped out	Mostly wiped out, But sometimes cowbunga	Sleepy/ Disconnected/ Disruptive/Negative Uncooperative
Collaboration	Leader who listens/ Doesn't control/ Open to new ideas/ Facilitates/ Willing to compromise/ Very professional	Good ideas, but doesn't take control/ Too directorial	Neutral/ Ineffective/ or Indifferent attitude "Whatever"	Stubborn/ Doesn't Contribute/ No compromise/ Lazy/ Negative/ Unprofessional
Organization	Plan ahead/ Well prepared home work/ Manages time well	Not good time management/ Notes, but not clear/ Frustrated/ No clear concept	Inefficient/ No confidence	Making it up/ Not prepared at all
Process	Experiments with material/ Aware of developing a process/ Asking questions/ Self-motivated/ Problem solving	Difficulty being flexible/ Not easily problem solving/ Tries	Inconsistent Tries, but gives up Passive engagement	Gives up/ Easily discouraged/ Unwilling/ Disinterested
Tools	Takes risks/ Integrates tools/ Understands theory	Some understanding of theory/ Not always able to put it into practice	Fake or weak understanding of theory/ Inconsistent in practice	What tools? Close-minded

Figure 9. Choreography rubric, section 3, 2002

4:00	Oscars	Golden Globe	People's Choice	Razzie's Award
Attendance	Always present Never late	Excused Absences Sometimes Late	Absences Often Late	3 Absences
Participation	Mentally present/ Constructive/Positive energy Involved	Mostly Oscar, Sometimes Razzie	Mostly Razzie, Sometimes Oscar	Reading Magazine/ Distracted/ Disruptive/ Negative energy
Collaboration	Committed to give and take/ Open to new ideas/ Willing to explore material/ Motivates, doesn't control/ Balanced attitude/ Nurture/ Facilitate/Inspire	Mostly Oscar, Sometimes Razzie	Not helping, Not hindering	Takes away from the process/ Destructive/ Close-minded/ Lazy/Uninvolved/ Irresponsible
Organization	Well prepared/ Well equipted	Some preparation/ Not really ready to work/ Still kinks in concept/ Not completely clear	Last minute/ Little, but some preparation	Clueless/ Incompetent/ Unfocused/ No notes/ no preparation
Process	Open to experimenting/ Problem solving/Flexible Perseverence/ Concentrated	Knows problem, Can't solve it/ Tries	Knows problem, doesn't try to solve it/ Indifferent/ Overwhelmed Not aware of problem	Devoid of process/ Disengaged in work
Tools	Understands theory/ Using tools/ Communicating using vocabulary	Some understanding/ Some use/ Knows what should be done, can't always do it/ Sees the goal, and tries	Less use of tools/ Less understanding/ Not as much effort to problem solve	What tool? No understanding No use No care

Figure 10. Rubric, Creating Original Work, Fall 2002

COW FALL 2002

	EPIC	WELL DONE	RARE	UNDERCOOKED, MAD COW
ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION	Present, attentive and engaged.	Present, but not participating. Mostly there.	Inconsistent, wishy-washy. Absent, but called.	Present, but disruptive or inattentive. Absent, no call.
DISCUSSION	Insightful, empathetic and observant. (Talk show host)	Mostly. Observant, but directorial. (Mom- self involved)	Listening, not sharing. Completely directorial. (Howard Stern)	Inattentive or negative. (Telemarketer)
PHYSICAL SUPPORT	Aware and forthcoming. Ready, willing and able to help.	Mostly helpful. Helps when asked.	Half-assed assistance. Poor attitude.	Just sits. Flake. Leaves own mess.
PROCESS	Willingness to fail. Works consistently. Faith in process.	Less committed. Mental rehearsal.	Uncommitted. Not invested. Spinning wheels.	Indulges self in own despair.
ORGANIZATION	Well communicated needs. Props, music, cue sheets, rehearsed.	Works on the fly. Not enough copies, etc. Unrehearsed props.	Disorganized. 15 mn. setups. No props.	Flake. Helen returns the equipment.
PRODUCTION VALUE	Made visual design choices: costumes, lights, and props.	Most design elements.	Few design elements.	The ink's not dry. No performance.
FINISHED PRODUCT	Revised and rehearsed 10 mn. piece.	Mostly rehearsed. 13 mn. or 15 mn.	Last minute additions. 20 mn.	Change piece. No show.

Therefore, in the second semester, as the students understood the nature of the rubric and the course tools, I was able to elucidate the course content at a more detailed level and created a second, advanced, instructor-driven rubric based on the rubric used during the first semester. Thus, the students were given a two-page modified rubric that included a breakdown of the choreographic tools on the second page (see Figure 11). This exercise revealed the benefit of using the rubric to elucidate course content from the instructor's point of view. The process of unpacking, or breaking down, each individual tool brought into focus a clear way for me to articulate the relationship between the skills of physical awareness and the use of choreographic tools, a connection that directors who do not have a strong background in physical work have a hard time understanding.

Tracing steps from a sophisticated use of each tool to its fundamental source made it easy to identify the skills needed to apply each tool at different levels and pinpoint the way in which each tool is based in physical perception. Having identified the source, the entry point for the student was clearer. For example, the basic source of rhythm is the ability to hear and follow a pulse in text or music or, even more fundamentally, to be conscious of the rhythm of a breath. From that point, the tool of rhythm can be expanded to include the ability to communicate that pulse to actors in rehearsal, build small movement phrases, eventually create complex overlays of movement phrases that employ choreographic devices like cannon, and develop other skills that make it possible for choreographers to manipulate large numbers of dancers in interesting spatial patterns. As each specific tool was unpacked in a similar way, the exercise clearly identified the new criterion "Physical Awareness" as the source of each of the newly unpacked "Choreographic Tools."

Figure 11. Combined rubric, Choreography, Spring 2003

Choreography	4	3	2	1
Attendance	Always Present Never Late	Sometimes Late Excused Absences	Some Absences Often Late	3 Absences
Participation	Willingly Engaged/ Passionate Ready to work/ Involved Connected/ Positive Energy Takes direction well Open to new ideas	Engaged without full commitment Inconsistent focus Guarded	Low energy Distracted Unwilling to experiment	Negative energy Being an obstacle Disconnected Disruptive
Collaboration	Good sense of give and take Facilitates the work of others Empathetic/Generous Leadership without control Good listening skills Willing to compromise	Sometimes too directorial Overly controlling Too critical at times Difficulty compromising Inattentive listener Shows partiality	Negative or too controlling Neutral/ Ineffective Tunes out and goes along Indifferent attitude "Whatever" Frustrated with peers	Selfish Obstacle Obstinate Destructive Irresponsible Unresponsive
Organization	Clear concept Communicates ideas well Very well prepared/ rehearsed Plans ahead Manages time well Helpful/Mindful of Bigger Picture	Not fully prepared Not always able to communicate Mushy/ Not specific Doesn't always use time well Sometimes shortsighted	Somewhat prepared Not able to communicate ideas Misuses others' time Shortsighted Unaware	Not prepared Non-communicative Not specific Irresponsible
Process	Faith in working from the unknown Self-motivated Strong sense of perseverance Confident balanced attitude Aware of developing a process Asking questions Creating steps/following through Good problem solving skills Experiments with material Open to risk	Sometimes afraid of failing Not enough confidence and/or information Difficulty setting goals Can't identify problem Identify problem, can't create steps to solve it Problems with follow through Hesitant to take risks	Stuck in fear of failure No confidence Too result oriented Non-specific or no identification of problem or goals Overwhelmed or stuck in unproductive habits Judges ideas before trying Little or no follow through Little or no risk Blames externals at times	Paralyzed Defeated Disengaged in process Not aware of or unwilling to set goals Gives up No attempt to follow through Blames externals
Physical Awareness	Skills associated with awareness: Rhythmically responsive Sensory aware/able to express a range of movement qualities Flexible movement range/able to translate images into shapes Centered in relation to gravity Spatially aware Sequences, imitates, and invents movement or gesture	Some theoretical understanding of skills Some vocabulary use related to skills Physically articulate, strong in most skills, but weak in others	Limited theoretical understanding of skills Limited vocabulary use Limited physical articulation, strong in some skills, weak in many, but working to acquire skills	Mistaken or no theoretical understanding of skills Little or no vocabulary use Physically inarticulate, and not willing to work to acquire skills (Continued)

Figure 11. Combined rubric, Choreography, Spring 2003 (Continued)

Rhythm	Hears pulse in music Maps out music well Internalizes and accurately holds pulse without listening to the music Accurately counts and communicates pulse of music Keys design elements in relation to music changes Applies rhythm to images and descriptions of movement or gestures Uses rhythm to guide energy of cast in warm up or as improvisational tool Experiments with rhythm as basis of exploration	Some theory Some use of vocabulary Not applying fully in practice	Fake or weak understanding of theory Little or no vocabulary Inconsistent in practice	Little or no understanding of theory Wrong or no use of vocabulary or tools
Texture	Sensory aware Internalizes and expresses sensory information through movement and gesture Creates movement metaphors evocative of sensory experience Uses texture to guide energy of cast in warm up or as improvisational tool Experiments with texture as basis of exploration	Some theory Some use of vocabulary Not applying fully in practice	Fake or weak understanding of theory Little or no vocabulary Inconsistent in practice	Little or no understanding of theory Wrong or no use of vocabulary or tools
Shape	Visually aware of the elements of shape: circular, angular Uses shape to guide actors/designers through interpretation of script Employs vocabulary of visual design elements to communicate ideas Experiments with shape as basis of exploration	Some theory Some use of vocabulary Not applying fully in practice	Fake or weak understanding of theory Little or no vocabulary Inconsistent in practice	Little or no understanding of theory Wrong or no use of vocabulary or tools
Weight	Kinesthetically aware of elements of weight Uses weight to guide energy of cast in warm up or as improvisational tool Employs images of weight as part of vocabulary Experiments with weight as basis of exploration	Some theory Some use of vocabulary Not applying fully in practice	Fake or weak understanding of theory Little or no vocabulary Inconsistent in practice	Little or no understanding of theory Wrong or no use of vocabulary or tools
Space	Kinesthetically and visually aware of spatial elements: positive and negative space, tension lines, territory Applies spatial elements to images and descriptions of movement, body language, or gestures Uses spatial elements to guide actors/designers through interpretation of script Uses space to guide energy of cast in warm up or as improvisational tool Employs spatial imagery as part of vocabulary Experiments with space as basis of exploration	Some theory Some use of vocabulary Not applying fully in practice	Fake or weak understanding of theory Little or no vocabulary Inconsistent in practice	Little or no understanding of theory Wrong or no use of vocabulary or tools

The newly created rubric provided a tangible outline that made it easier for students to grasp the seemingly intangible concepts of physical training. Dance educator Margaret H'Doubler, in her book Dance: A Creative Art Experience, stresses the importance of sense perception as the source of more complex movement concepts. She closes the chapter entitled "Form and Content" with the following assertion:

> In building from the simple, immature beginnings to more finished art results, we must not lose sight of the importance of the elementary, sensorial type of human response. …It is necessary, through the conditioning processes of education and training, to lead away from it and beyond it, but we must keep in mind that it is a physiological necessity and that it remains the indispensable source upon which later art developments depend (H'Doubler, 1940, p.130).

The unpacked rubric helped students understand and work with subtle ideas such as this.

With the use of the modified choreography rubric over the course of the spring semester, the students' skills showed marked improvement. Not only did their conscious use of choreographic vocabulary in class discussions increase, but the students were more aware of when and how tools were being applied in class assignments. They began to integrate choreographic concepts with their process as directors and saw more purpose in developing their own level of physical awareness. A number of directors began to use the choreographic tool portion of the rubric as a checklist in rehearsals to ensure they were applying the concepts in practice.

In this second year of experimenting with assessment, the Creating Original Work class also benefited in many ways from the use of rubrics (see Figure 12). Here, the benefits came as less of a surprise to me as I was more aware of how integral self-assessment is to project-based work. The category "Process" evolved into a very detailed criterion that held specific advice about possible future pitfalls when it was unpacked. "Physical Support," a category unique to this class, allowed students to place value on technical assistance given to each other in rehearsals and presentations.

Figure 12. Rubric, Creating Original Work, Spring 2003

COW	4	3	2	1
Attendance Participation	Always present Never late Willingly engaged Passionate Ready to work Involved Connected Positive Energy	Sometimes late Excused absences/calls in Makes up absences Engaged without full commitment Inconsistent focus	Some Absences/calls in Late often Low energy Distracted	3 Absences Does not call in absences Negative energy Disconnected Disruptive Inattentive
Discussion	Useful/ non-directorial comments Empathetic/ non-judgmental Good listening skills Emotionally supportive	Comments too directorial at times At times too critical/judgmental Sometimes inattentive	Comments too often/or too infrequently Mostly directorial Passively critical Shows partiality/frustration/indifference	Inattentive or negative comments
Physical Support	Ready, willing, able to help in class setups/ clean up Anticipates problems Volunteers as designer Volunteers as s.m.	Helps when asked Sometimes anticipates	Only helps when asked Sometimes avoids problems Reluctant attitude	Never helps, always avoids Creates problems, leaves mess for others
Organization	Clear concept Communicates ideas well Very well prepared/ rehearsed Plans ahead Manages time well Helpful/mindful of Bigger Picture	Not fully prepared Unrehearsed material Not always able to communicate Mushy/ Not specific Doesn't always use time well Sometimes shortsighted	Somewhat prepared Mental rehearsal Unrehearsed material Wrong or no props, music, etc. Not able to communicate ideas Misuses others' time Too long setup, unprepared cleanup Shortsighted Unaware	Not prepared Non-communicative Not specific Irresponsible Makes excuses Blames other people
Process	Faith in working from the unknown Self-motivated Strong sense of perseverance Confident balanced attitude Aware of developing a process Asking questions Creating steps/ following through Good problem solving skills Experiments with material Open to risk	Sometimes afraid of failing Not enough confidence and/or information Difficulty setting goals Can't identify problem Identify problem, can't create steps to solve it Doesn't ask hard questions Problems with follow through Hesitant to take risks	Stuck in fear of failure Wheel spinning No confidence Too result oriented Non-specific or no identification of problem or goals Overwhelmed or stuck in unproductive habits Doesn't pose enough questions Judges ideas before trying Little or no follow through Little or no risk Blames externals at times	Paralyzed Defeated Disengaged in process Not aware of or unwilling to set goals Gives up No attempt to follow through Blames externals

The rubric work significantly raised the standards of the class, not only from the point of view of project content, but also from the point of view of identifying modes of ethically responsible behavior. The students invested more time in their projects, worked more consistently to problem solve their ideas, and held each other accountable for the atmosphere of the class. In addition, creating a rubric became a vehicle for students with project experience to share what they had learned with incoming students.

As the long-term goals of the class became clearer, students gained a better understanding of how to build on what they had learned from one project to the next. Because they could articulate for themselves what it was they were working on, they looked forward to the possibility of improvement with the next project, and, therefore, were better able to set more challenging goals for future projects. The assessment tools were teaching the students how to track their own progress in an articulate and responsible way.

In the past three years, since the idea of assessment was first introduced to the C.O.W. class, the class expanded from one section to two, and in the last year it became an alternative track, or major area of study in which a student can continue and extend project work through the second, third, and fourth years of study. Originally, C.O.W. projects were limited to a ten-minute solo work. Students now have the option of extending their projects to include a larger number of cast members and an extended length, ranging from ten minutes to one hour. There is no doubt that the implementation of assessment tools contributed to this expansion. By encouraging students to invest more time and energy in their project work, the use of assessment tools led to a natural expansion of the curriculum offered to them within the program.

As the number of projects increased among the third- and fourth-year C.O.W. students, I was able to implement two other assessment techniques. Drawing on the work of Steven Seidel, current director of Project Zero, I decided to put in place a mid-term collaborative assessment panel.[2] The panel consisted of four professionals from theater-related fields including design, choreography, and directing, who viewed third- and fourth-year C.O.W. works-in-progress and offered feedback to the project creators. A student who participated in the mid-term assessment by the panel commented on his experience: "Knowing that I would have to show something to a panel of people I knew (mostly) and respected gave me enough drive to push through my frustration and get something out there, and I ended up discovering the structure of my piece because of it. The feedback from the panel was also invaluable in terms of learning at that still early stage, what exactly was getting across to an audience and what was not. It was great that the panel knew nothing about my piece before seeing the rough draft; that fresh eye was obviously super important."

A second new assessment tool, the use of process-folios, was also included in the C.O.W. classes as part of the mid-term and final evaluations. Based on the work of Howard Gardner, founder of Project Zero, the process-folios were aimed at allowing students to share the process of creating their projects in greater detail.[3] The associated work took the form of a variety of media. In one case, a student shared a drawing he had made of the inner life of the character he was working on (see Figure 13). The final project was a spoken monologue.

In another case, a student with a more cinematic approach shared the storyboard that outlined his solo project (see Figure 14). His project ultimately incorporated video work with live-spoken text. Students have become more inclusive in their own view of what feeds their process, a critical awareness in learning to move the creation of a project forward.

Having invested a good deal of time, both in and out of the classroom, in the creation and investigation of assessment techniques over the last several years, it is clear that the return has been well

---

[2] Steven Seidel has written extensively on the subject of collaborative assessment. His working paper "Collaborative Assessment Conferences for the Consideration of Project Work" describes this technique and, in particular, gives excellent guidelines for panel members to follow in their discussion of the work (1991, p. 7).

[3] See Gardner (1990, Table 2, p.i) for a concise outline of this technique

worth the effort. In all, the benefits derived from the assessment experiments for both teacher and students were more far reaching in scope than I had ever imagined when I first set out to establish clear standards for evaluating student work. Although the use of rubrics, a collaborative assessment panel, and process-folios did not totally resolve the inherent conflict of grading a creative process, these assessment tools created an environment in which the creative process and accountability mutually flourished.

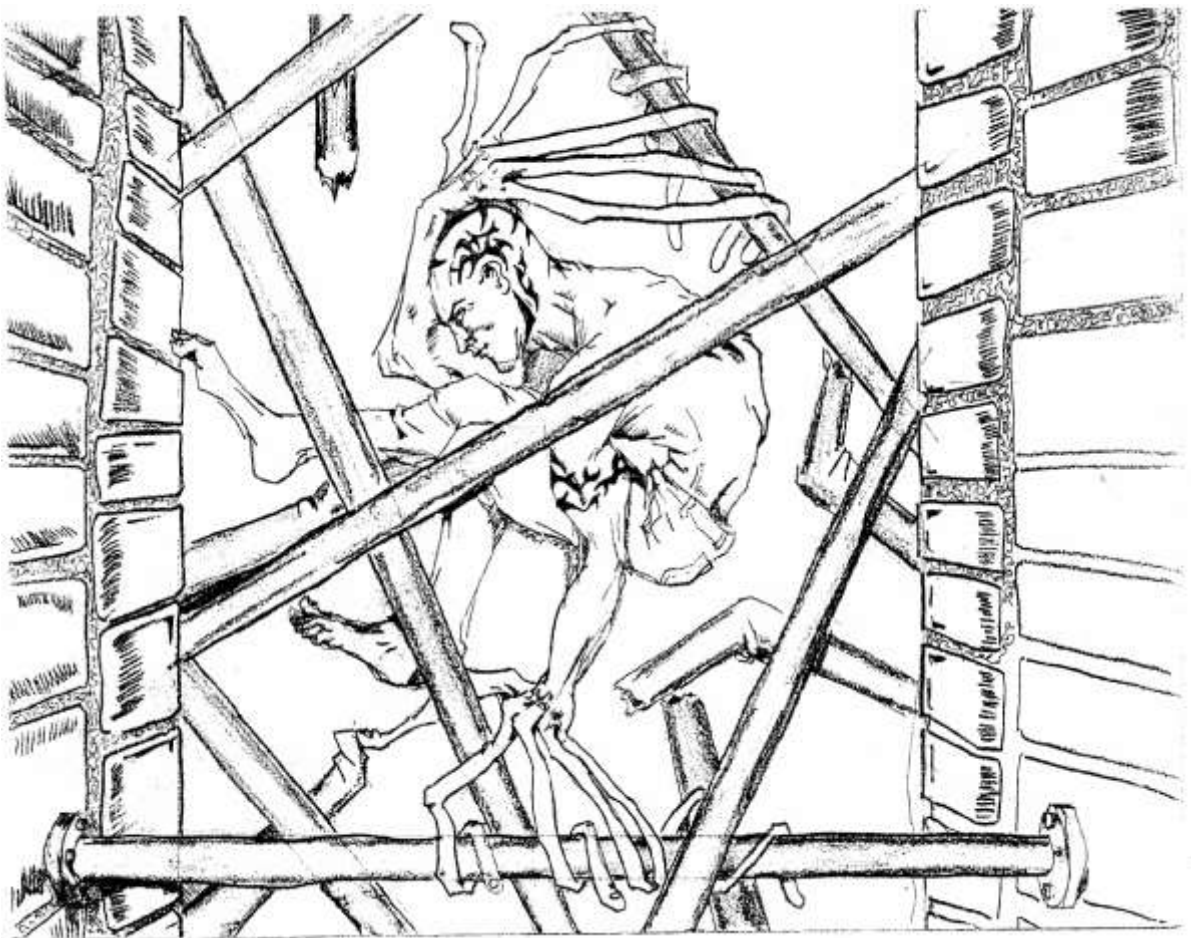*Figure 13.* Drawing by Michael Newman. Used by permission.

Figure 14. Storyboard by Dylan Dawson. Used by permission.

In closing, I would point out that, not surprisingly, problems remain that point to the need for further investigations—the first being the influence of student grade-consciousness on the rubric process. At the end of the semester, when final evaluations were due, knowing that the more detailed rubric was also a grading instrument inhibited some students from mapping their position among the criteria in an honest way. One student who was taking the choreography class as a required course commented that, "As a student who is being given a grade, I have difficulty being honest when I know that my negative comments about myself may reflect on my grade…it's a strange public school throwback that I can't shake." In counterpoint, another student referred to the rubric saying, "What I like about it is that it does give me a chance to be honest about where I am [in relation to learning skills] that you may not always get to see in class."

Honest self-evaluation became an important issue because the higher learning values of the rubric process itself seemed endangered without it. Class discussions ensued about whether or not realistic self-assessment should be considered a new criterion. Here was my argument: Because the teacher is conceivably in the position of seeing the progress in a student or lack thereof and can judge whether or not a student is being realistic about their work, the student who marked the highest level of each description in order to get a better grade would not necessarily succeed but would definitely be losing the real benefit of the assessment process. Therefore, honest self-evaluation needed to be seen as a value in itself as well as part of grade consideration.

"You really have to do some honest soul-searching to provide honest answers, which (I think) is an important thing to do", reacted one student, while another added, "…after being released by the freedom of no wrong if honest—the [rubric] exercise is very revealing." It was important to make honesty a value to be considered. . . It seemed a new criterion was in the making. As that was the final day of class, it was obvious the discussion would continue with the creation of a new rubric in the upcoming fall semester. I reminded myself again how the value of a rubric lies in its use as an ongoing process, a means of communication that, at its best, is created and maintained with each new class. The fact that new criteria appear and take on importance as the need becomes apparent, shows that the rubric itself is a grid only seemingly fixed in time and space. When used as an

integrated learning tool, it is a map filled with possibilities, fixed yet fluid, not unlike a piece of choreography.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Pennison, M. (2004). From both sides: Assessment benefits for teacher and student. *ArtsPraxis, 1* (1), 34-61.

REFERENCES

Andrade, H.G. (1999). When assessment is instruction and instruction is assessment: Using rubrics to promote thinking and understanding. In L. Hetland & S. Veenema (Eds.), *The Project Zero classroom: Views on understanding* (pp. 91-99). Cambridge, MA: Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education.* New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience.* New York: Perigee Books.

Gardner, H. (1990, December). Assessment of student learning in the arts. Paper presented at the Conference on Assessment in Art Education, Bosschenhooft, The Netherlands. Cambridge, MA: Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed.* New York: Basic Books.

Goodrich, H., Hatch, T., Wiatrowski, G., & Unger, C. (1995). *Teaching through projects: Creating effective learning environments.* Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.

H'Doubler, M. N. (1940). *Dance: A creative art experience.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Ross, J. (2000). *Margaret H'Doubler and the beginning of dance in American education.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Seidel, S. (1991). Collaborative assessment conferences for the consideration of project work. Working paper. Cambridge, MA: Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Marleen Pennison is the Artistic Director of Marleen Pennison and Dancers, Inc. In this role, she is regarded as a leader of the narrative form in dance. Her choreography fuses movement and text to create danced short stories and plays. Under her direction, the company has been produced to high critical acclaim since 1975. As a teacher, Ms. Pennison brings to her students more than twenty-five years of experience in teaching dance and theater to adults and children: From 1974-77, Ms. Pennison taught dance and theater for the Ethical Culture Schools. She served as an instructor for the National Shakespeare Company Theater Conservatory from 1974-78 and directed the Movement Program at the Stella Adler Theatre Conservatory from l977-85. Since 1985, Ms. Pennison has remained on the faculty of the Playwrights Horizons Theater School where she serves as Director of New Programs and teaches under the auspices of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.