

J.S. Peterson
Dark Side of Light
8th grade Science/Engineering

Strengths:

In your written lesson, the understandings and essential questions have improved in clarity and focus over the semester to now connect directly to the learning objectives and assessments. Your ideas for theatre activities that work in service or in tandem with other content areas are highly engaging experiences for students that invite them into the learning process and ask them to think. I have enjoyed the creativity and connection between arts and other content that is so prevalent in your lessons. For example, in this lesson the combination of technical theatre and science is particularly effective and creative. I enjoyed it tremendously!

In all your lessons you have a real talent for performance, improvisation, and engaging the students through your ability to play with them as they learn. You used the group idea of “promiscuity” (which was not what you intended to get from them) and reacted to them continuously throughout the lesson with such a spirit of play that the students learned about light in spite of themselves. You allow students significant autonomy and control over the content they are discovering which is known to enhance learning. You answered all of the questions they posed in a way that validated learning and invited thoughtful engagement. (Why is the sky blue? and your discussion of color-blindness are examples of this.)

From our discussions in class, I know that grading theatre and theatre participation is a point of concern for you and others in the class. I am thrilled to see you robustly demonstrating elements of formative assessment in your lesson facilitation and plan. You use solid questioning and reflection techniques with students that allow you to assess where they are at in their learning.

When you paused and waited (for quite a while) to get the students to focus and listen to you, was a fantastic classroom management tactic to maintain classroom control without calling anyone out. Use this as often as needed, it is a powerful tactic. Also redirecting students by asking questions and by answering questions worked very well in your lesson to manage student behavior. These skills are so valuable.

Suggestions you may consider:

When it comes to explaining an activity to the students, really think through the simplest most efficient way you can share with them what they need to do. (I struggle with this sometimes too and forget steps along the way that I have to go back and explain.) When I take the time to consider what the student needs to know to be successful in engaging with an activity, I explain it more clearly and simply. As the teacher I know the purpose and outline of the activity, but I forget the students do not know any of those things. I am a big picture person and sometime overlook the details the students need. I notice the same tendency in you sometimes when you lead an activity. So, I wanted to share this, if it is useful to you.

When it comes to more summative types of assessment, I would encourage you to use things like rubrics based on skills for performances and essays, short written reflections of activities, and portfolios of what students accomplished combined with writing that addresses how they might critique, change, improve, or reflect on what they have done and learned. I have found that giving the students a chance to demonstrate to me what they feel they have learned makes for a robust summative assessment. I hope this helps you as you move forward in your teaching!