

A reflection on my practicum:

I worked in conjunction with Ann Williams and Molly Breen at Ballare Teatro in order to complete my practicum. I observed March 19th, taught a few across the floor combinations both March 26th and April 16th (the 16th being a refresher for me), and taught the full warm up and technique combinations April 23rd. When observing Molly teach the first day, I created a basic outline of her class. I also took note of the things the dancers did well with and what was difficult for them. When I taught on both the 26th and 16th, I again took note of what parts of my combinations proved difficult for the dancers. That way, when creating my full lesson plan, utilizing all my observational data, I could create a lesson plan familiar but different, and challenging but accessible.

For the 26th and 16th, I mainly had to use my knowledge about the dancers' strengths and weaknesses, and the steps they already use in their warm up, to create a battement combination and a turning combination. I was glad I was able to teach something small two times, because the second time I felt much more comfortable and felt like my combinations were better geared towards them and I taught them with more direction and guidance, learning from the first time. Creating my final warm up lesson plan, I had a lot of information to incorporate and also a lot of knowledge from previous classes to incorporate into my structure.

My biggest question I had while creating my lesson plan was, what information do they already have on their bodies that I can use as well/will they know what is this movement? The first day I taught a combination was probably my most abrupt

learning day. The students were very engaged, but also very confused which slowly pulled them away from me. The combination was much more difficult for them than I anticipated which at first grabbed their attention but very quickly caused their focus to dwindle. However, learning from that initial experience, the second and then the third time I taught, I was much more prepared for that to happen and also took measures to prevent it. One example is, I discovered from the first day I taught that they were easily thrown off when there was a lot of changes in facing. So the second and third day I simplified the combinations with facing changes to just have one or two changes in facing in order to still challenge them with their weakness. With all that being said, I do feel I achieved a sliver of my learning objectives.

As said earlier, my main goal was to warm up the dancers while utilizing familiar movements while layering differences and challenging their weaknesses while having the combination accessible to them. After those first three classes, I determined that I would lightly focus my class around clarity and body awareness. As the final class progressed I became more diligent about reminding them of their arms, their legs, their focus, and their hips in particular. While it is something I stressed more throughout the class I don't feel as though they are going to necessarily "take away" clarity from the class. Because I utilized a lot of Molly's warm up material and also the same across the floor combinations I had done in the past, the exercises were created specifically for their benefit in regards to clarity. So to me, I don't feel clarity was a learning objective but rather the over arching theme of the day. While my lesson plan was fairly vague and more geared towards giving them a strong warm up, there actually aren't a lot of things I would change.

I feel as though my lesson plan ended up working very well for them. There were a few awkward transitions and combinations that didn't work well. The one portion that I want to keep but still need to work the kinks out of is my pas de bourrées into jazz squares. I believe it is vital to have these basic steps for new jazz dancers as it coordinates their upper body to lower, has a complex series of steps and are fundamental steps in the jazz world. However, right now they are still a little hard to follow. I think once I time out my warm up to ensure the same song comes on for that portion so I know the beat it will be much easier. In other words, what needs to change is practice prior to teaching. Another thing I don't think added to the class other than filling time was doing grapevines across the floor. They had a hard time with it, which surprised me because I thought it would be something they would do in gym class, but evidently not. Although in a way it works along the same line as jazz squares and pas de bourrées, they are actually less challenging and not as useful in a dance context especially after warm up. In the end, I feel I walked away a better instructor.

While I still need to working on my confidence level, Molly also stated she saw improvement just across the three days I taught. She saw improvement in my confidence and also how I instructed the dancers: the vocabulary, the tone, the encouragement, the control and many other things. Aside from my overall instructing improving, I feel one of the best things I learned from this experience is one thing Molly reiterated to me. She stressed the importance of creating a discussion with the dancers in order to number one, keep them attentive, number two, help them to create a vocabulary and ability to articulate their problems, and number three make

you a better instructor via what they felt was unclear or difficult so that you, as an instructor, are learning and progressing with them rather than seeing the teaching position as a way to bring other to your level. I don't think there is one plane, all people grow on, therefore teachers or people with more experience need to bring others up to their level, but rather it is a web of knowledge and you just beckon them over to your position on the web of "dance". How's that for a cheesy metaphor?