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Professional Issues in Dance Education
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Before And After: The Ed.M. Program

Before I started the Ed.M. program, I wasn't exactly sure what it took to actually be a full-fledged dance instructor. When dancing in high school, I didn't know that my teacher, Ruth Clark, had mapped out curriculums for all four grades that targeted certain standards. I simply assumed she did whatever popped into her head: one day it was exploring movement qualities, the next day it was Rudolph Laban, and then in months it was contact improvisation and choreography. I had zero idea that at the end of every academic year, Ruth was educating us to be more advanced dancers and stronger choreographers. For example, I now can recognize from the National Core Arts Standards which parts of my high school years were major accomplishments in each category: creating, performing, responding, and connecting. What I thought was just making a dance for fun was actually a walk through of standards necessary to appreciate art itself. Collaboration using Photoshop, iMovie, or Garage Band became ways of my teacher infusing our craft with technology and building essential skills for college. Without her, I would have never come to accept dance as something more than competition, flashiness, and commercial.

Also before the Ed.M. program, at Rutgers, I hadn't seen modern dance as something I'd want to ever teach. While most think modern dance is the most freeform expressions of art, I've found it to be so constrictive; because it's only as

good as those interpreting it, and can be as ridiculous as the one creating it. I felt if I were a teacher of dance, there would be no other option but to instruct my students in modern dance; how was I supposed to do such a thing when I myself was struggling to enjoy it? But then I realized later on that what styles I instruct are within my power, to an extent, and how I teach relies more on the standards I cover along with the SLOs I plan daily, weekly, or monthly.

My last bit of ignorance prior to the Ed.M. program was simply how much work it would take and how many times it was possible to come off track and fail. At first I thought it was easy inserting all the extra classes into my BFA schedule: General Psychology, Topics in Mathematics, Adolescent Development, Educational Psychology, and additional liberal arts. However, I didn't realize that combining traditional style classes with a dance schedule would be so draining. Many times I had to remind myself that I wasn't like other students: I had to get up at 6:50am to make morning ballet, I had to maintain participation in DancePlus to keep my repertoire from sinking, and dealing suddenly with classes that would not only happen in the evening, but require me to board a bus for different campuses. Being an Ed.M. candidate forced me to live the "college" experience that so many BFAs could avoid, because my mandatory classes were all over Rutgers. The admissions for the Graduate School of Education weren't at all subtle or casual either: testing was nerve wracking, constant list checking, and the overall worry that a teacher simply didn't like you was always following. Even after I graduated with my BFA, I didn't realize I still had mounds to still learn, nor how fast it would hit me only ten days after having my first diploma.

There were many times during my senior year of college that I felt near failure: balancing choreography with Laban classes, keeping up with morning attendances despite being up till 1am the night before doing work that most of the BFAs didn't have to do, and even during the summer when our projects came into view was nerve wracking. And while the Teaching Internship portion of my Graduate year was no doubt fun and exciting, it was nothing compared to my experience in Practicum and Practicum II. The learning of Student Learning Objectives and Student Growth Objectives suddenly made generating a lesson less about simply teaching, and more about stressing about your students succeeding. It was a peer into the world my high school teacher was living in after my departure from high school: No longer free to administer her curriculum how she wished or have lessons that had freedom for adaptation or change, I worried how my high school experience would have been if every mid-year, my teacher dropped everything we did and assessed us for whether or not we lived up to her future predications.

Now that my time with the Ed.M. program is over and coming to a full-circle close, I'm so much more aware of the responsibilities an instructor must bare. Especially dance teachers, who simply get to walk in every day, point some toes, and jump around right? Wrong. If anything, dance instructors will have it twice as hard as the average subject instructor. Because while we have to maintain a level of artistic merit and value, we have no choice but to also adhere to the quickly accelerating method of learning, as well as the idea of standardized testing. We as teachers must predict our students' futures while still

acknowledging that dance isn't about getting ahead or simply earning grades, but learning a physical craft of self expression; one that opens hundreds of doors in the performing world.

As I end my time with the Graduate School of Education, and my *truly* final year as a college student, I am both excited and worried. I have learned so much and gained so many new connections, with both my collaborating and supervising teachers, and those networked with me through other courses. But I worry if I'll be able to keep both my performing life and my teaching life polished simultaneously. While I will audition, dance, and hopefully add a few more paying jobs to my resume, I'll have to maintain my teaching abilities so I'm not out of touch with younger interaction. Teaching will also keep my abilities to generate and implement SLOs fresh, and hopefully I'll be able to serve as a substitute for both my cooperating high school and my home high school, keeping the students who have known me since Practicum and my internship in touch and knowing I care about them, love them, and hope for their own dreams to come true. There will also be that inevitable time when I will no longer perform commercially, and dedicate the last of my body's abilities to classroom demonstration.

In closing, without the Ed.M. program, I don't think I'd have the immense respect and clarity for the teaching world that I hold right now. I wouldn't have found my confidence to teach, or know that I can teach effectively. I'm still extremely young. I'm very much still naïve. But at least when I address my students, I'll hit the stage running.