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<div align="center">Restructuring a Learner-Centered Teacher Assistant Program</div>

Adult learning workshops in training programs are typically teacher centered or in a lecture format mode. One teacher training program referred to in this essay as TAP, teacher assistant program, prepares graduate students to become stronger ballet teachers through the opportunity to assist current Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre faculty members in classes for children ages 2-10. TAP includes classroom experience coupled with basic training in child development matched to PBT technique training. While shadow teaching as a teacher's assistant provides hands on experience, participants must be taught general principles and strategies for learning in the classroom. Currently, this requirement is satisfied through a single official training session designed as a lecture and teacher-centered workshop. This program could be enhanced by employing several learner-centered theories within the workshop including concepts from synergistic self-directed learning, transformative learning, and experiential learning incorporated though cognitive apprenticeships.

Self-directed learning is grounded in the expectation that the learner takes control of the responsibility and direction of their own learning. In an advanced graduate level teacher training program such as TAP, allowing opportunity for self-directed learning could enhance the resulting teacher assistant success. TAP currently has one second year participant who is running her own class, but the teacher-centered format of this program has not prepared her for managing a classroom based on unique aspects of each class dynamic. She maintains a "copy paste" teaching style and approach from her paired faculty member, however, the program has not provided her the opportunity to develop her unique applications of teaching strategies applied in creative ways to different class dynamics. To establish a self-directed learning plan, Knowles (1975) describes a six-step process. These six steps can be used as a backbone for restructuring TAP to allow for more learner-centered growth. These six steps are described by Merriam & Bierema (2013). The first step is to address the climate setting of TAP, building a stronger mutual bond of respect and support. Rather than a top-down direction of information, paired faculty could initiate discussion for the assistant's perspectives and ideas to support their interpretation of class instruction. Faculty can discuss participant's learning needs in order to formulate useful learning goals for their individual specific skill set. By providing participants with an abundance of relevant resources, including a variety of learning strategies, participants create and direct their own learning experience within guidelines set by a paired faculty member. Lastly, the faculty member can assist the learner with an evaluation of their learning outcomes based upon their own classroom management. However, as Kerka (1999) points out, "no one may be completely autonomous all of the time…[calling] for a wider recognition of the interdependent and collaborative aspects of SDL" (Kerka 1999). Incorporating this collaborative concept into the reformation of TAP, the role of paired faculty members as learning scaffolds would allow for synergistic SDL as described by Clardy (2000) in which learning would be "inspired by the opportunity to take advantage of a learning situation made available by another person" (Merriam & Bierema 2013). Kerka (1999) describes an instance cited by O'Mahony and Moss (1996) in which learners found success in the development of a collective self-direction, allowing individual strength to build in each participant towards a higher self-directedness (Kerka 1999). Implementing this understand towards TAP, the restructured organization can be manipulated to include opportunity for participants to learn with other participants, sharing

individual experiences and understandings. Also in this structure, TAP would provide a paired faculty member who could scaffold the participant's learning experience through opportunities within the classroom. The use of synergistic self-directed learning would restructure the execution of TAP to a more learner-centered program, evolving into a transformational learning experience.

Within the restructured framework of TAP to incorporate a synergistic self-directed learning foundation, transformative learning becomes possible. The current structure of TAP provides a top-down knowledge accumulating, or informational learning, approach to instruction. However, "Kegan (2000) differentiates between 'information learning,' that learning that adds to 'what we know' and is cumulative, and transformational learning—learning that 'changes…how we know'" (Merriam & Bierema 2013). By utilizing a self-directed learning foundation, TAP participants will be able to participate in transformative learning experiences. Rather than memorizing accumulating bits of information, learners will partake in experiences that restructure and integrate new information with prior conceptions. Transformative learning was articulated by Mezirow (1978) as including content, process, and premise reflections (Merriam & Bierema 2013). Within a self-directed learning structure, the paired faculty member assists in guiding these three reflections. In a content reflection, TAP participants reflect upon the objects of perception, thoughts, or actions, including strategies used in the classroom. In a process reflection, participants reflect upon how the strategies were executed and utilized. In a premise reflection, the participants reflect upon why they chose the strategy that they did, leading to the perceptive transformation where they are able to restructure their schema of teaching strategies to integrate information received from individual experiences. By this process, the faculty member would guide the participant in directed experience based learning of integrated techniques.

In restructuring TAP using a synergistic self-directed learning framework designed to enhance opportunity for transformational learning, it is essential to consider the relationship between experience and learning through experiential learning. Transformative learning requires a presupposition of experiential learning through which personal schemas are altered by the integration of new information and experience (Merriam & Bierema 2013). Kolb describes four stages of experiential learning as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. When provided with all four experience types, TAP participants would learn through the resulting styles of diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating (Merriam & Bierema 2013). TAP is similar to a described teacher learning program from the Professional Development School where senior students integrate themselves in the teacher setting while still learning themselves (Merriam & Bierema 2013). This design is reflected in the structure of TAP. While participants are involved with child development and teaching strategy informational learning, they are simultaneously given opportunities to engage with reflective practice in the teacher role. Providing TAP participants the opportunity for guided informational instruction within the integrated experience of teaching and assisting, experiential learning is conducted through a framework of synergistic self-directed learning with a goal of transformative learning.

Lastly, an integration of experiential learning, transformative learning, and synergistic self-directed learning, could be utilized through use of cognitive apprenticeships within TAP. In the original structure of TAP, participants are paired with a faculty member and given the opportunity to interact with other learning participants. This can be enhanced and specified through the explicit use of cognitive apprenticeships. Hansman (2001) describes the function of

cognitive apprenticeships through modeling, approximating, scaffolding, fading, self-directed learning, and generalizing. Modeling is represented in participant opportunity to assist their paired faculty member in classes. Behavioral modeling is observed while cognitive modeling is incorporated through faculty explanation of their own teaching decisions (Hasman 2001). In the approximating stage, learners attempt the activity and explain their thought process throughout and compare their choices and outcomes to those of the faculty member (Hansman 2001). During this stage, faculty members use scaffolding to guide learner's decisions in the classroom, and as the learner becomes more capable, fading occurs as the faculty member lessons involvement. Eventually, self-directed learning occurs as the learner's ability to practice and reflect individually increases, leading to generalization where learners are able to reflect and relate new information to practice (Hansman 2001).

The use of cognitive apprenticeships through synergistic self-directed, transformative, and experiential learning in TAP could create an integrated experience leading to greater efficacy in classroom management for student teachers in ballet. One concern that would benefit from ongoing research is the potential to work with several different faculty members. Further research could provide a better understanding of the effects of multiple mentors in different learning experiences. Additionally continued follow up research for the new TAP is necessary to address the unknowns in regard to self-directed learning for ballet specific instruction. It would be worth looking into the effects of transformative learning in this setting on the student teacher. The new TAP could connect the gap between educational strategy and ballet instruction. [1349]

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