

Julia Amber Adams
MAED 2019
Synthesis Essay

Recalculating...

In June of 2017, I walked the stage of graduation from MSU for my completion of the Masters of Arts in Teaching and Curriculum program. By this point, I had paved a road towards both my passion for dance as well as for education through the study of teaching within the context of my dance career. Reflecting back to this day when I so proudly walked across the stage, diploma in hand, I remember looking to my future with certainty and direction. Little did I know that my path would take such a prominent shift. By this time, I had completed my BA in Psychology from UC Davis in 2016, moved to Pittsburgh, PA to train with Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre as a dancer, taken on a faculty role at PBT, obtained my MA in Teaching and Curriculum from MSU in 2017 focusing on educational psychology and language and literacy instruction, worked on curriculum building opportunities, and looking into the relationship between dance instruction and academia. I developed a keen interest in the relationship between dance and language, and unsatisfied with the end to my educational pursuit after my MATC completion, I decided to continue with my second Master's degree in Education focusing on p-12 school and postsecondary leadership as well as sports coaching and leadership. Over my time in the MAED program, I have followed an unset path, balancing between the challenges of building myself as a teacher, leader, and learner. I now walk the stage of graduation with new perspectives on building connections, bridges between ballet coaching and leadership in building professional development programs to better support educators and coaches. Prior to this program, I felt pressured to input a specific destination into my academic and professional GPS, follow specific steps towards a predetermined goal. I looked out to my future, seeing a multitude of potential pathways, each leading to a singular destination. Leaving now, I look back to see how my path has allowed me to pull from each to create a new walkway of growth and application. I found frequent moments where my GPS stopped to "recalculate" my path based on a new opportunity presented, and each step taken allowed me the opportunity to integrate my many areas of interest and passion to pave the way for new instructional strategies and support for ballet instruction.

Ballet as a language...

Building from my original goal of bridging ballet and literacy instruction, one of my first courses as a part of my MAED program was CEP 804A, Literacy Instruction for Students with Mild Disabilities instructed by Dr. Carol Sue Englert. I took this course as an opportunity to lay the stones of this bridge through a study into "Breaking the Boundaries and Unfolding Language: Learning to Read through Dance." (Adams 2017, Artifact 1) Dr. Englert worked with me through this course as I aligned the specific aspects of literacy with those reflected in ballet instruction. This opportunity enabled me to fully break down the language of ballet into specific aspects of literacy including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. I examined the application of specific literacy interventions including FOOR (Fluency-Oriented Oral Reading, a reading technique and instructional method where students participate in either echo or choral readings to strengthen fluency skills) and SAIL (Students Achieving Independent Learning, a transactional strategy instruction utilizing prediction, visualization, questioning, clarifying, making associations, and summarizing to enhance comprehension) to ballet instruction to build stronger comprehension and more fluency in the repetitious development of dancers. As stated in my paper: "Through a literary process of establishing phonological

awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension in ballet, we can utilize strategies designed for language and literacy acquisition to produce similar results in the improvement and progress of the physical and movement language of ballet” (Adams 2017). This continuation pushed me towards the realization that dance could not only be used to aid in the strategies for addressing learning challenges in children, but that these strategies could also be applied to ballet in restructuring the way ballet is coached. With this laid bridge, I was able to see new possibilities including a search into changing the structure of ballet education

A new approach...

This new pathway led me towards two prominent aspects of my program accomplishments within the course KIN 868, Skill Development in Athletes instructed by Dr. Andrew Driska. The first was a beginning research into “A Constraints-Led Approaches to Ballet Pedagogy: Developing Dynamic Movement Solutions” (Adams 2019, Artifact 2). This course challenged the way I thought about ballet coaching and instruction. I took the opportunity to examine coaching ballet through a constraints-led approach in an effort to utilize student uniqueness building individualized coaching strategies to specific skill development. I began with skill instruction, creating a coaching menu to guide the way I structured a coaching session for specific skill development. Utilizing this coaching menu, I conducted an individualized coaching session with a pre-professional dancer from which I identified the importance of individual specific constraints in building a ballet coaching strategy supporting that unique dancer’s strengths. This in-depth focus on individual constraints led me to a further application of similar concepts in an effort to “Restructure Classical Ballet Coaching through a Motor Learning System Integrated Network of Individual Influences and Constraints” (Adams 2019, Artifact 3) as perhaps my most profound work from my MAED program. This paper examined the methods of ballet coaching under the light of a nonlinear pedagogy utilizing ecological theory of instruction and responding coaching strategies to work within the constraints of an individual. This course provided the resources for several crucial components to my development of a coaching perspective model utilizing three stages of motor learning focusing on individual dancer strengths in order to identify effective coaching strategies through a hybrid system of implicit and explicit coaching techniques. This study provided an opportunity to look for diverse movement solutions for individual constraints. This synthesis of course learning proved to be my most profound research in my MAED program, with a strong and compelling need for application, fueling my future goals to continue the research into a restructure of a more accepting and encompassing ballet coaching model.

Leadership through training programs

During this time of exciting new research, I also was becoming more involved in leadership positions at my school and took on a new role as an early childhood development educator. I developed a curiosity for continuing my growth in restructuring ballet on a smaller scale focusing on child development. The course, EAD 863, Training and Professional Development instructed by Professor Emerald Templeton provided the tools I needed to design a professional development training program I entitled, TAP (Teacher Assistant Program). This program is based upon a pre-existing system of student teacher assistants at my school. I aimed to restructure this program utilizing theories of adult learning within a reflection-in-action approach maximize program potential. The goals of this program included to place more focus on the “transition from assistant to teacher through a collaborative, active approach, facilitated by a

focus of reflection in action as pertaining to immediate experiences in the teaching setting...to create individually capable teachers of each person,...[and] allow participants to integrate the general information learned with their own uniqueness, building autonomy in the creation of their teaching style” (Adams 2019). Through my work in this course, I was able to design a program utilizing a synergistic self-directed learning foundation with transformative learning, guided informational instruction, and cognitive apprenticeships to accomplish these aims. This work provided the link I was missing from my research into restructuring ballet coaching in my own classroom to that of a larger scale

A child development focus...

Continuing on this path, EAD 863 also provided the opportunity for me to further develop my concepts of ballet coaching restructuring through the creation of a “Child Development Relevance Program [as] an Active Learning Professional Development Training” (Artifact 6). As stated in my paper, “The objective of CDR [Child Development Relevance program] is to educate current teachers and TAP participants on relevant child development information in connection with teaching applications, within the specific context of participant personal experience” (Adams 2019). With information collected throughout this course, I compiled a review of presentation, observation, and writing and reflection strategies to achieve active learning objectives of this new program. I was also given the chance to create effective active learning assessments of CDR and identify ways to combat potential problems within the implementation of CDR. Not only did this course provide the chance to create such a program, but I was also given the guidance to build my skills in professional development program design and proposals. After the completion of my paper regarding CDR’s structure and design, I was challenged to also create a detailed program proposal. This opportunity was important to my skill growth for application, as I learned how to compose an effective program proposal including program highlights, audience targets, specific needs, program objectives, and how to describe discussions and training activities, plan for assessment and evaluation, and design a follow up plan for further contribution to project objectives for the long term. This skill is an essential link between my program design and applications.

Final Thoughts

As I look back upon the path that my work in the MAED program has lead me to create, I am appreciative of the many opportunities I have received to integrate my passions in both academic and professional pursuits to create a new path towards the design of both strategy and support of ballet instruction. Prior to my experiences in this program, I felt torn between the decisions I had thought must be made to lead me in prescribed directions towards existing destinations. Society dictates a pattern of typical academic trajectory, beginning from early ages with the singular question “what do you want to be when you grow up.” We are directed to select a job, a career, from a list of options, complete the predetermined steps down the path towards that known destination, arrive, and settle into adulthood. What if this structure could be challenged? What if we deliberately chose to not follow the societal voice of the academic and professional GPS, allowed the system to continue “recalculating” as we accumulated seemingly unrelated pieces of opportunity, making frequent stops at new experiences, collecting knowledge to pull from, becoming openly active participants in the never ending and ever-growing learning society around us to synthesize and create our own path? My time at MSU in the MAED program has both encouraged and allowed me to continue “recalculating” my trajectory, creating and reaching

new opportunities for research and application along the pathway of ballet instruction. This valuable perspective is one that I will carry with me into my next steps as I continue following my passions with an open mind, receptive to the learning society around me. I aim to continue this research into restructuring ballet coaching, and eventually continue my academic pursuit into a child development doctoral program to further examine both language and motor development in children. I plan to converge these experiences and further utilize the skills I have accumulated throughout my time at MSU to continue designing programs that can better support these aspects of child development through the leadership of teacher education and enrichment of curriculum design.