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Reflection Paper: Assessing My Teaching

The aspects of my teaching I'm most satisfied with are my ability to communicate with students effectively, recognize and honor varied learning styles, and give expectations and directions explicitly. In my Masters' program, my instructors constantly noted, and texts we read constantly reinforced, that teachers need to be clear and explicit when giving instructions or assignments, and that there is not really any value in things like 'pop' quizzes or surprises for students. Because of that, I have always tried very hard to be clear with students about what we are doing and why. Students have also told me, personally and via course-end evaluations, that they appreciate my willingness to communicate with them effectively.

There are many aspects of my teaching I am dissatisfied with, or, at least, constantly working on. Two of the biggest ones are learning to not take things so personally and learning to manage my time better so that students can get what they deserve: the best instruction and class possible. As to the former, I have improved in the past couple of years, but I still tend to take it very personally when a student complains about my class, assignments, or teaching style. It is difficult for me to let it 'roll off my back' or let it go; even if there is one negative student or comment in a class of twenty, I see that one more clearly than the other nineteen positive ones. What I can do to change this is just remember to ask myself if there is anything I could have done differently or anything I didn't try in reaching out to that student, and, if so, implement it (or remember it for next time). If not, I need to know that there are probably several other factors in that student's life that are affecting him/her, and I don't know the whole picture. I have to meet the student with compassion and also be gentle on myself.

As for managing my time, I always set out with the best intentions of not over-scheduling myself and making sure that I leave some of my schedule open to have enough time for planning and reaching out to students. Inevitably, however, by mid-term I feel exhausted, burnt out, overscheduled, and as if I am just surviving week to week or even class to class. By the end of the term, sometimes I'm just glad I made it. I know that this doesn't serve my students well. For example, because I have to take the classes I'm offered, and I need the credits and money as an

adjunct, I have agreed to teach five technique classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays next semester. Most full-time faculty don't even teach five classes, let alone five on the same day that are all physical/movement classes. So what is left of me for that 7:00 – 8:20 pm group of students, when I've already been dancing and teaching since the 7:00 am one? It isn't fair to them, and I feel tired, sore, and out of animated teacher juice by then, but I need the money. I don't exactly know what I can do about this one. . . suggestions are welcome.

The most surprising thing that has happened in my class this semester has been the level of community in my Introduction to Modern class. In past semesters, this class has been a difficult one to create a strong sense of community. I find, as a generalization, that the beginning dancers are more reluctant to trust one another, take artists risks, or offer each other verbal and non-verbal support than my more advanced classes. This particular section, however, has a strong sense of connection and community; several of *them* have even noticed it and commented on it in their journals. I really love seeing them work together, help each other, and mix themselves up for choreography assignments. They are willing to try things and work with different people each week.

The most difficult thing that has happened in my class this semester has been a very sticky situation having to do with casting. It isn't even in my class, per se, but within the Dance Company; I was hired to choreograph a piece for their winter concert, aside from my teaching requirements. There is one student who was cast in a duet, and she has been chronically ill. She has missed several days, and even when she is there, she often sits out and observes. The director finally decided to cast an understudy for her part because we were two weeks away from the performance, and I still had not been able to finish teaching them the dance since she had been gone or sitting out so much. She took this decision very harshly, responded very inappropriately, and has been directing her anger at me. She stormed out of rehearsal and refused to learn the rest of the dance, making the understudy the performer by default because now the understudy is the only one who knows the choreography. This situation has been hard because, as I mentioned above, I struggle with taking things too personally anyway. I felt that the director and I could have communicated more clearly with the dancer, and been more sensitive to how she would feel, but I also felt her response was entirely unreasonable and out of proportion to the events. I am now just hoping she can pull it together and have a good concert next week, without letting this incident affect her performance or the morale of the company.