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Module: Core Techniques 2 (ADPA5000)

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Critical Evaluation

In order to critically evaluate my developing knowledge and physical skill across my dance technique, I shall pay particular attention to how my physical understanding and embodiment is supported through the broadening range of vocabulary in both contemporary technique and ballet.

Within this module I have developed my technical dance skill with enthusiasm and a positive mind set. Although still not as advanced or equipped as my peers, I am confident I am learning to the best of my ability and advancing at an increased pace than the previous year. I still have a long way to go but am pleased with my progress. My range of vocabulary knowledge has broadened. This in itself has made a positive impact on my overall application. Through this increased vocabulary my timing has been improved as I am able to carry out the instructions without asking questions about the vocabulary or observing others beforehand. My movement memory has increased because of this also as there are less words to physically remember, for instance using the words

“tendu” and “plie” whilst repeating an exercise has proven more effective to me than “stretch your leg and point your toe” and “bend your knees” which is how I would memorise the exercises previously. Becoming more familiar with ballet positions have also proved helpful as I am now able to get into position swiftly and transition smoothly without hesitation or question. Last year I wrote that I felt like I’d been dropped in a foreign country or world where everything felt alien to me. This year I feel I have adapted extremely well and am becoming more comfortable in this new world. Learning the correct terminology plays an important role for a dancer as House(2017) explains. A Dancer becomes more adaptable with the correct terminology knowledge. They are able to take classes with multiple teachers with different teaching methods as well as classes in different environments with the same confidence in the movements. With the majority of ballet terms applying also to contemporary technique, developing my knowledge further has been a great advantage in both classes.

Within ballet in particular in my view I have made improvements in posture and alignment. Quin, Rafferty and Tomlinson (2015) describe the importance of good posture in order to improve performance due to the correct alignment of muscles and joints. The possibility of injury is reduced when good alignment is achieved, therefore less stress is placed on the body which results in the body becoming stronger with increased stamina. Although I have improved in this area I do still have to correct myself in some areas. My knees turn in slightly which is referred to as

"Tibial torsion or cross-eyed knees" (Quin, Rafferty and Tomlinson, 2015, p41). This results in my lower legs facing outwards when in parallel position due to my knees facing in. With increased concentration I can minimise the appearance of this but on occasion, when focusing on other areas, this sometimes slips back and I often get corrected on my parallel. Overall I do feel my alignment has improved and am increasingly able to adjust my body's alignment and weight placement through combinations and exercises. I do have a tendency to struggle with balance at times which frustrates me as this was improving last year. This can be a result of varying factors, all due to the current pandemic with a number of local and national lockdowns, such as a reduction in technique classes, a reduction in physical training and a slight increase in weight over this period. I am currently learning to work with this new slightly heavier body and am working to improve these areas which will hopefully result in a noticeable improvement in my core strength and balance through stronger weight distribution and weight transfer. Kassing (2013) notes the connection between weight distribution, weight transfer, correct alignment and turn out in ballet and the importance of correcting these in order to benefit the dancer's performance and overall health. I have been unable to distinguish whether my turn out has improved. There is always room for improvement in my turn out but in my opinion tutors and observers may notice improvement before myself. I have possibly remained at the same level with my turn out this year as I have been focusing in other areas.

Another area in which I have seen great improvement is the use of my arms in ballet. This year is the first time I have incorporated my arms into the exercises. Last year my focus was just on my legs as the use of arm movements alongside became confusing and resulted in messy application for myself and observers. My understanding of arm placement has increased hugely and I no longer get confused when trying to concentrate on both arm and leg movements together. My focus going forward for this is my thumb placement as this has a tendency to extend upwards when my concentration is focused in other parts of my body. Also the consistency of curved arms through practice rather than the straight rigid arms which often occur in my application at present. Through practice I hope to develop this further.

The way I perform with music has changed this year. I have danced increasingly more in time with the music which is my preferred choice and find this easier to learn. Last year I learned to dance against the music and relied more on counts which became helpful at times recently when through Zoom classes the music was delayed. Through the rhythm of the music I am able to embody the movements with emphasis on smoother transitions and actually feeling the music and performing the dance rather than concentrating so hard on the counts that embodiment or enjoyment are not visible. Musicality also assists in increasing my movement memory at a faster pace.

Within contemporary technique, my strengths are my ability to try new things and to repeatedly practice sections or individual movements in which I am unsure of. I am not afraid to ask for help or clarity as often as needed even if sometimes I can feel as if it could be annoying to others who may already be confident in those certain sections. I hope that this is not the case and my questions help others in the group also. Flexibility continues to be an issue for me although I do not let this hold me back and continue to work to increase my flexibility in order to perform at a higher level with greater range of motion and more aesthetically pleasing. As I am now over forty years old it is important to continue to work on improving my flexibility to get the best out of the classes and prevent injury. I enjoy floorwork and consider this to be one of my stronger areas within contemporary technique. In order to continue improving in this area there are a number of things I can do to increase my upper body strength, core strength and transitions as explained by Dancehelp (n.d). Dedicating a few days a week to a routine of pushups, pull ups and handstands would increase my upper body strength. While crunches, leg lifts and back bends will assist in strengthening my core.

There has been a noticeable improvement in working out the other side in contemporary technique. Previously this was a problem which I could not work out. I do continue to struggle with direction after turns. These seem to cause confusion but when slowing things down and processing for myself, this situation is improving.

There have been many obstacles everyone has had to deal with due to classes being moved remotely. Space has not been an issue for me as I have a big area to use but I have had to make adaptations due to other issues. I have realised I learn better from physically being in the studio and corrections being able to be made through feedback from lecturers as well as visually correcting myself with the use of mirrors. I have also noticed that I take cues from my peers in my peripheral vision during exercises which have not been able to happen over digital learning. During Zoom classes, everyone appears the opposite way to myself which resulted in having to concentrate harder for myself. Distractions and other responsibilities have also played a part such as homeschooling my children but I have learned not to be too hard on myself, everything is going in the right direction and I am learning so much even with the obstacles all of us have had to overcome currently. I am adapting and will possibly learn new skills in ways I would not have in other circumstances. Overall I am pleased with my progress and will continue to work hard to see further improvements in the future.

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