OPDI 124: Movement Behavior Analysis – Observing Behavioral Differences in Dance Performance
Paula Johnson
Module Seven, Part Two
Reflection Paper: Live MBA/P Observation: Individual
March 17, 2023

Module 7 8 pts assigned

Very good – comprehensive. I asked that you observe a live subject because live observation presents the analyst with a distinct set of challenges…BUT, you did well in addressing the observation in reference to the questions posed in the manual. A couple of notes in the text.

Link to observed dancer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Domq3ZXtaQ

For my first MBA/P observation of an individual, I have chosen to watch a Pacific Northwest Ballet advanced ballet class from summer school 2022. I chose this video because the camera stays mostly centered on the center barre and I can watch the male dancer who is standing where the teacher demonstrates without obstruction. I am focusing my observations of space, time, and force on the first half of class at the barre. I plan to attend to each in the same order that I thought of them for exploration four from last week: space, time, force, because that is the way it feels most natural in my head. I will pause the video when I change from space to time and from time to force to review the points I will be looking to observe and to organize my thoughts. I realize I would not be able to do this as easily in a live class situation but it is nice to have this option during my first attempt.

Space
Start of video – 8:16 (warm-up facing the barre, tendus, port de bras, and pliés)

Personal
1: very small
2: small – gestures when marking the exercises with hands
3: adequate
4: large – grande plié in second was deep and beautiful, port de bras forward hips uneven but large in space
5: very large

Environmental
1: very small
2: small

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3: adequate He is doing exercises at the barre and is restricted to the space in which he can move while continuing to hold the barre. I am trying not to go back and peek here. I don't feel like he exploded to large in space when moving through his exercises. He stayed in his space. I also had the feeling that he is very aware of the camera being focused on him because of his place at the barre. His confidence starts small and is just starting to grow at this point in class.
4: large
5: very large

Does the subject look comfortable and confident in the space they occupy?
The dancer is a central focal point for other students and the camera because this is where the teacher, Jonathan Poretta, demonstrates the exercises. I feel as though this dancer is aware of this. He is comfortable but not full of confidence at this point in class. I also get the feeling that as he got to the second side of the plié exercise, he was beginning to gain in confidence. I think maybe this is..

Are the spatial paths they are taking (whole body and body part) to accomplish their task managed well?
The dancer uses pathways with his tendu en avant and brushed back through first to derrière and these are precise and clear but I do not get a feeling like the foot is extending in energy past the line on the floor that he reaches physically. This gives me a feeling that his environmental space is adequate and not large.

You may notice the subject appears confident when their orientation is forward but less so when it is to the side or back. Are body parts (for instance, hands, arms, head) clearly directed in space?
The dancer did not appear less confident when tenduing his leg derrière or rond de jambing to the back. Both his mini and normal port de bras to the back also looked comfortable. I would assume this to be normal for most dancers at this level who have been performing these exercises over their entire lifetimes. Had I been watching this dancer move in a dance genre that was less familiar to them and watched their movements orientated to the back or side, I might have a different opinion. However, for warm-up and pliés, he is comfortable in all directions.

Do you observe preferences in their use of spatial levels?

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This is a set exercise, so the subject does not get to choose levels or lean on one in particular. The dancer showed levels in the plié and looked comfortable throughout that exercise.

They are comfortable moving up and away from the body center but appear less confident when their task involves moving down and toward the body center or off their base of support.
There was one part of the plié where the dancers rotated their upper body away from the barre and reached back for the barre with their outside arm stretching the body in two directions. This is the only spot where I might have been able to observe a position or movement that was a little less centered. These were two very centered warm-up exercises.

How about the overall size of their actions?
I would say that the overall size of his actions and movements were adequate. He had a large grande plié. I think that was the most outstanding for me when observing his movement for space. **Again, I did not get the feeling that his movements were adequate but I did not get that feeling that the energy went past in all directions. – Not sure what you mean here..** It was more contained. I was distracted by his gapey, claw-like fingers that were taking up space. I even had to look at my own hand and question if my own hand looked like that. I questioned if this was a new style as I accidentally looked around to see other hands. I thought maybe a female hand might hide the thumb and have a smaller or more delicate look. But, I quickly caught my attention drifting to this question and brought my focus back to my subject.

Do these seem appropriate and economical?
The movements are appropriate and economical **but I wanted that feeling of more and scooping up space and extending pass if only in the mind and energy of the movement. Again – not clear to me what you're trying to say…**I think this comes with the start of class, or confidence, or being filmed? I have taken many ballet classes and I have seen some beautiful pliés that fill the space though. Maybe it is the age?

Are gestures and actions kept close to the body center, or are they expansive, moving away from the center?
This dancer articulates the exercises with his hands as Poretta is demonstrating. These gestures and small and weak. I am talking about space only. These gestures are small

and in towards the body. The movement got a little larger or more exaggerated when he flexed his hand up to show the flexing of the foot. The elbows were bent and in.

Looking at their whole-body use, would you assess it as expansive, or contained? I would assess their whole body use as contained. This could be because he is at the barre and it is the start of class. I wonder what he looks like in grande allegro? That would be a contrast – or would he still look contained? I might have to fast forward to check that out at the end of this activity.

What about the subject's attention to space most draws your attention? He is careful and calm with the space that he uses. He does not project his energy further than the space he physically takes up.

Additional observational considerations:

I think the main things to keep in mind with these space observations are that these are the first couple of exercises, he is at the barre, he may or may not be totally comfortable with all the students in the class since this is summer school. These could be students from all over the world. He is being filmed, he is a teenager, he is in an advanced class and is familiar with these exercises, and he is at the teacher barre.

Time

8:16 – 17:23 (three sets of tendus)

1: very slow

2: slow – when transferring weight to use the other leg for a tendu from the back.

3: adequate – most of the time with the music

4: fast

5: very fast

Does the subject appear comfortable and confident in their use of time? During the first tendu exercise the dancer was not in the video until the second side. The camera view had moved to the barre next to him. For the second tendu exercise I saw him from the start and he was comfortable and confident in the task.

Does their movement appear comfortably organized in its rhythmic patterns? Does it appear rhythmically interrupted, or arhythmic?

The third, quicker tendu from fifth, had a different rhythm and he seemed to be right on time. If anything, I would say he filled the music and was on the edge of adequate/slow but definitely not adequate/fast. This is making me thing that it is difficult to assess someone speed when there is music and a set exercise. I am realizing there are other clues that I need to be on the lookout for, like the hesitation when changing the working and supporting leg.

Does the subject appear hesitant or adaptable if their pace or rhythm is required to change?
The speed, pattern, and rhythm of the third tendu was the most challenging and the dancer did not have a problem adapting to these changes. However, perhaps this question is relating to a change in pace or rhythm within the same exercise. I guess there is a change in that one exercise, slow and slow and in and in then wrap. So, he did not appear hesitant for the two quick ins.

Given the task they are attempting to complete, how would you classify their overall use of time?
Again, I am hesitant, because I still see him tied to the music and the exercise. I would say he is adequate overall with slow on the transfer of weight.

Let your intuition and understanding of movement in time, its pace, its rhythm, its speed, provide additional observational considerations.
I feel like this student knew the exercise and was confident in the task. However, there was a slight hesitation as he transferred his weight and used the leg derrière. Perhaps this was a blip in his memory? I noticed his gestures again when he was marking the

Force
17:23 to 25:32 (jetés, fast tendus, developés)
1: very weak – marking exercises with his hands
2: weak – marking exercises with his head
3: adequate
4: strong – all exercises
5: very strong

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Does the task's force initiation seem appropriate, or does there appear to be a weak or too strong force initiation for the task?
The force seemed appropriate for the tasks. For force I found myself drawn to the times he was marking the exercises. The dancer has not only marked with his hands, but also his head and eyeline. At least, I remember that from the first exercise – the jetés. My eyes kept moving to his head and the strength of the movement in comparison to the very weak hand gestures to mark the exercise.
In the adage there was a retiré that had a strong force and initiating up and closing to the back. That was a stronger movement moment in the exercise and demonstrated by the dancer.

Is weight management controlled and confident?
The dancer easily finds controls his weight placement over the supporting leg.

Do you sense an overall resistance or indulgence in body weight management?
Would an example of this be someone who is struggling with finding their balance over the supporting leg? That could have been evident in the dancer as they removed their hand from the barre and found their balance with the foot in coup de pied. **The struggle for balance involves weight but the question is asking did you see evidence of the subject's resistance or indulgence in weight's management as an outcome of their intention…?**

You may observe force managed differently for different body parts, the arms and hands are managed well, the legs appear heavy and weighted, or use of the head has its own force and weight characteristics.
Interesting that I saw this difference in the marking with the head and the hands. I think another example of this would be the strong legs with the floating, airy port de bras. This student has an amazing **bendy back**. ….**has a flexible back, 'bendy' is not a word the sophisticated movement behavior analyst…uses.** 😊

Let your intuition and understanding of force and movement provide additional observational considerations.
Overall, I felt that this dancer was using strong force during the three different exercises. The jetés used a strong force to raise the leg and bring it quickly back in to fifth. The fast tendus required speed and control which I believe also shows a strong force. While the adage showed

strong force through control and a slower speed. It also had the quick burst to retire and the balance.

When looking back at the neuromuscular excitation patterns (NEPs) and reflecting on my observations of the male dance student, I would characterize his overall movements at the barre as burst with sustained port de bras and upper body. I could also say that there were restrained movements in the adage. I believe I could say that the patterns in the quicker tendus and the jetés could be a rebounding undulate pattern. It is hard to separate the set exercise from the movement affinities of the dancer. It is definitely easier, at least now, at the start of my journey, to see movement behavior patterns in improvisation or free movement. I found this activity enjoyable but challenging. I would like to try it in a live setting. Having a video was helpful for me to take my time writing in between each section but having the pressure to assess the dancers movement behaviors live will be a whole different race against time.

Works Cited

Ballet, P. N. (2022, August 12). *YouTube*. Retrieved from PNB Summer Course 2022 | Full Advanced Ballet Class LIVE: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Domq3ZXtaQ

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