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**The eClass series ‘Mark Morris workshops’**

Below are notes that summarise the process and feedback for Mark Morris eClass 3:

**‘Approaches for dance students with intellectual disabilities.’**

In this workshop series filmed as a partnership between The Arts Unit and the Sydney Opera House, Mark Morris Dance Group explore approaches to training and creative movement generation presented to dance students with intellectual disabilities from James Busby High School.

**Tutors: Chelsea Acree and Sam Black**

**Tutors Biographies:**

**Chelsea Acree**grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, where she began her dance training with Sharon Lerner, then continued at Carver Center for the Arts and Technology. Since receiving her B.F.A. in dance from Purchase College in 2005 she has had the opportunity to work with a variety of artists including SYREN Modern Dance, Laura Peterson, Hilary Easton + Company, and Michael and the Go-Getters. Acree is on the faculty at The School at the Mark Morris Dance Center, where she teaches kids and adults how to move through space. She began working with Mark Morris Dance Group in 2007 and joined the company in 2011.

Chelseais on the faculty at The School at the Mark Morris Dance Centre, where she specializes in teaching children and adults with special needs how to move through space.

**Sam Black** is from Berkeley, California, where he began studying tap at the age of nine with Katie Maltsberger. He received his B.F.A. in Dance from Purchase College and also studied at the Rotterdamse Dansacademie in The Netherlands. He has performed with David Parker, Takehiro Ueyama, and Nelly van Bommel, and currently teaches MMDG master classes and Dance for PD®. He first appeared with MMDG in 2005, and became a company member in 2007. Samis currently teaching MMDG master classes and Dance for PD.

Link below for more information on The Arts Unit Dance Programs:

<https://www.artsunit.nsw.edu.au/dance>

**Content:**

Chelsea begins by describing the importance of setting the tone of a class. She found this group of dancers receptive as they were curious, eager and attentive. She presents a motto that teachers should focus on the abilities not the disabilities of the students.

Sam advises that the most important thing is to be adaptable in your lesson plans, some times it is not possible to force the students in one direction. Also he cites Chelsea saying: ‘Practice makes progress’ (not perfect). This the best way to encourage students to achieve, making their goal improvement rather then perfection.

**Warm up** :

* To stimulate the body and the mind:

1. Breathing exercise: Students interlock their fingers and raise their hands parallel to their chest.
2. Then move hands up and down with long deep breaths.
3. Little taps like rain drops all along the body, beginning on the arms then progressing to the head, face, neck, chest, back, belly, legs and feet.
4. Increasing tempo racing up and down the body before finally shaking it out.
5. Imagery used: Imagine you’re a little deflated balloon (draw arms into the body and hunch over) then expand arms up and out to ‘inflate’.
6. Continue to ‘inflate’ and ‘deflate’ incorporating legs, then spine, also change the directions your limbs expand into.
7. Arching and curling the spine: moving between over curve and arching spine.
8. Focus on belly button on the curl in and then up at the ceiling as arching.
9. Isolating the body: Image lower half of the body is frozen in ice, so only the upper body can move, curling, extending, swinging arms and more.
10. Switch to upper body being frozen and lower half moving in different ways.
11. Spinning and bouncing: Chelsea checks in with the class to see if anyone is uncomfortable with getting dizzy and then encourages everyone to do the exercise. Spread arms out like wings and then spin on the spot.
12. Stop suddenly and do little bounces in place while focusing eyes to adjust rebalance.

**Travelling Steps and Direction Changes**:

* Using a motif the students have been familiarised with, tutors build in more challenging choreography and co-ordination.
* The original motif was side steps, teachers adding on arms circling in the same direction before turning the body 180 degrees with a hop then repeating on the alternate leg.
* Teachers pair an oral description with a slow physical demonstration, helping students to understand the techniques and memorise the movements.
* Chelsea encourages students reminding them that sometimes movements are easy and sometimes difficult, but practice will make them all easier.

**Follow the Leader**

* Students follow one another in a line, a designated leader creating a step/body movement that then flows sequentially down the line of students.
* Although students at the back can’t see the leader, by mimicking the person directly in front they focus on faithfully recreating movement.
* All students are given the chance to be the leader and create steps in any direction or place in the theatre.
* Chelsea and Sam continuously encourage students to keep up and keep paying attention.
* The exercise progresses to putting their hands on the person in front’s shoulder, then working together like a snake’s body whilst also walking around the room.

**Themes**

* Exploring possible themes a dance piece could be based on by asking students to:
* Reference the jumping from the previous dance piece they created with the students.
* Explaining to students that this piece is about birds and comes from Galatea
* Sam demonstrates four fast paced upper body moves.
* He then draws their attention to note the differences of each move.
* Students continue practicing the four movements.

**Developing Transitions**

* Chelsea draws responses from the group by asking ‘In what ways do birds travel?’ They respond: fly, walk, hop and even when on the same spot they sharply move their heads around.
* Sam focuses on the different tones of each movement: soft flying or sharp head movements.
* The students have the opportunity to show a solo to the group, demonstrating how they incorporated all these different movements.

**Creative Exercises**

Structured improvisation and interacting within group:

**First exercise**

* One student begins by taking a static pose then another student joins as they think of a complimentary shape.
* More students join until the entire group are statues.
* Tutors suggest to students to choose simple poses, as they will need to be sustained.
* After the final person joins the students release.
* Tutor reflects on how from this simple exercise a clear theme arose, the initial tone set by the first student, also complimenting the students creativity highlighting the use of levels, angles and facing.

**Second Exercise:**

* Person one makes a shape, person two joins them with a complimentary shape, third person enters adds a pose, first person exits.
* Fourth person enters, second person leaves.
* This continues whilst the tutor calls out the names of the student who should enter next.
* This helps to include students who maybe hesitant to participate. The tutor encourages them by connecting and saying: ‘sometimes we all feel awkward’.

**Choreography**

* Students are separated into dance groups.
* A starting pose is generated by using the previous statue exercise.
* Five steps are added selected from the bird movements.
* Then they create anther group pose with statues.
* Students show their work to each other.

**Positive feedback**

* Tutors focus on one student in particular who is doing well. Other students are encouraged

to share positive feedback amongst themselves

Chelsea and Sam discus the advantage of taking time to build relationships with students, as then it is possible to draw out more from each individual. They comment on how the class ran efficiently due to the students familiarity and understanding of the format in which a class is run.

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