

# Peer Coaching in the Secondary Arts Classroom

An Action Research Report by  
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Submitted on May 5, 2008  
in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree  
The College of St. Catherine  
St. Paul, Minnesota

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## Abstract

The intent of the research was to find out the effects of peer coaching in the secondary arts classroom on the transfer of skills and content into final performances. The research study took place in two public high schools, one a suburban high school and the other a first ring suburban high school. The students were 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in an elective speech class and a required dance class. Our data collection included: (1) initial and final student surveys, (2) pre and post intervention assessments, (3) teacher journals, (4) field notes from fellow educators and (5) student reflection sheets. The level of internalized learning, which allowed for the transfer of skills and content into performance, increased. The results of this research indicate that using peer coaching positively effects final performances, classroom community, and the revision process in speech and dance classrooms.

“To be effective, feedback needs to cause thinking. Grades don’t do that. Scores don’t do that. And comments like ‘good job’ don’t do that either” (Leahy et al, 2005, p. 22). Performance classes such as speech and dance at the high school level are exciting venues for students and teachers. Students learn skills and content and then perform for each other. Generally, the process of teach, practice, perform works reasonably well. We are experienced high school teachers of speech and dance. We use class time to teach content, research, practice skills and evaluate performances. Practice and revision have been encouraged, but not given allotted class time. Many students learn, improve and perform well. However, those who teach performance classes probably understand well the struggle to help all students transfer the skills and content taught into their actual performance. They can grasp the theory and do drills, but then often neglect incorporating what they have learned and practiced into their speech or dance. The skills are not internalized. In addition, they do not take advantage of, nor do they usually seek, practice time or opportunities to receive feedback. As a result, some final performances are excellent, but too many are not of high-synthesized quality. We watch decent content overshadowed by poor performance qualities, and conversely, poor content sometimes performed flawlessly. The students often lack the vocabulary and theory to understand that the performance skills are not inherent talents, but rather skills that can be learned, applied and practiced. They do not value a revision process and often believe the adrenaline of performance will somehow bring it all together. This common problem led us to consider what might help our students perform better. Intuitively, we believed that structuring practice time and encouraging learning that is interdependent might help them improve. This would move us away from teacher-centered learning and embed deeper a

constructivist approach. The old paradigm is “teacher coaches, students listen.” We were interested in breaking that paradigm by allowing the students a strong voice in the rehearsal and evaluative process, alongside the teacher. This brought us to the concept of peer coaching and learning, which we hoped would be a reciprocal, reflective cycle.

One of our research projects took place in a public suburban high school with 1800 students in grades 10-12, the other in a public residential statewide arts high school with 300 students in grades 11 and 12. The students in both projects were a mix of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, both genders, in an elective speech class of 30 and a required dance class of 25. The speech class had a balance in terms of gender, but very little ethnic diversity. The dance class had few boys, but a wide range of ethnicity. Both classes had a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The question we wanted answered through our research was what effect does peer coaching in the secondary arts classroom have on the transfer of skills and knowledge into a final product? Our goal with the action research was to discover the benefits of peer coaching in terms of the quality of performance, the revision process of the students, the development of skills in communicating feedback, the use of exemplars to facilitate the coaching and the effect on the classroom community.

Much research has been conducted in the area of peer coaching and learning. Peer learning is defined by David Boud as “the use of teaching and learning strategies in which students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher” (Boud, 1999, p. 413). Peer learning might include group projects, study groups, arts criticism and development, and peer review sessions. This meant that our students could be grouped together with the purpose of being both teachers and learners. We have

both used small groups in the past, but not for structured practice and coaching. We already teach peer evaluation of final performance, so adding peer coaching within a structured process seemed like a natural intermediary step. We both felt the students needed to utilize a revision process based on coaching they received in order to maximize the quality of their performance.

We examined several models of peer coaching and learning that included direct teaching of communication, the use of exemplars, creating criteria and reflective feedback. What we read affirmed much of what our instincts were telling us and highlighted some areas we would need to consider. Students sometimes lack the vocabulary and theory to understand that performances require frequent practice and revision. Boud claims that “peer learning activities have an advantage over other teaching and learning strategies in that they have considerable potential to promote critical reflection” (Boud, 1999, p. 420). This is a key element in a performance class. The feedback loop from the peer coach optimally starts the critical thinking toward revision and improvement. Liu and Carless define peer feedback as “a communication process through which learners enter into dialogues related to performance and standards” (Liu and Carless, 2006, p. 280). Students discussing what makes a “good” speech or dance facilitates learning. However, proper communication skills need to be taught. Nilson explains that sometimes peer feedback is faulty because of questions that call for judgment or because of the students allowing emotions to color their responses, being ignorant of the standards, or being lazy (Nilson, 2003, p. 35). This indicated we needed to teach directly the skill of giving feedback that is descriptive and tied to an agreed upon rubric. In addition, we wanted to hold them accountable for their coaching feedback.

Boud supported this by saying that assessment tends to boost the perception of value, which may encourage student commitment (Boud, 1999). Commitment to and comfort with peer coaching would be critical.

In addition to teaching how to communicate coaching feedback and assessing that process, other interpersonal factors needed consideration. A performance class is high risk for most students, so trust and a sense of community are essential. Butler and Hodge posit that feelings of trust grow from the feedback process, as well as enhancement of learning from listening, discussing and offering suggestions (Butler and Hodge, 2003, p.3). A supportive classroom climate must develop in order for that trust to build and the process to be effective. Also important are perceived competency and a positive social component. We wanted to avoid the idea: Will she give me better feedback if she is my friend? Liu and Carless address the idea of power relations, “power relations also impact on students because the audience for learners’ work is no longer just the teacher, but their peers” (Liu and Carless, 2006, p. 285). Problems could occur in the raters’ inflated idea of their worth and the resistance of the coached to the peer feedback. Being on a quarter block schedule, Becky had a new group of students to acclimate, whereas Mary had an established class with ingrained groups. Clearly, we needed to group or regroup with care.

Even with careful teaching of communication skills, grouping needed particular attention. There was conflicting research regarding this. Brewer et al suggest grouping students with parallel needs to reinforce learning. Coaches would learn from the process and shared backgrounds may lead to improved results (Brewer et al, 2003, p. 113). However, Johnson et al contend that grouping heterogeneously is a better option.

Including students with an ability range will facilitate discussion, peer teaching and justification of actions taken as a result (Johnson et al, 1988, p.9). Becky grouped heterogeneously and Mary grouped in more than one way. This made sense since Becky's students were new to each other, and Mary's had been together for quite a while. The types of assignments also were a consideration. Another factor we needed to consider was the timing of feedback. Chiviacowsky and Wulf developed a protocol that allowed the performer to choose when he or she would receive feedback. In other words, the students had some control over the coaching they received. This encourages self-monitoring and boosts the collaborative element (Chiviacowsky and Wulf, 2005). We were hoping this would stimulate ownership of the process and therefore, more commitment to positive results. Overall, we synthesized the research and acted accordingly with the end goal of answering our question, what effect will peer coaching in the secondary arts classroom have on the transfer of skills and knowledge into a final product? The next section will give a description of our research process.

#### Description of Research Process

We chose to gather data on peer learning and coaching in our classrooms for a six-week period, beginning on November 6, 2007 and concluding on December 21, 2007. The research involved twenty-five dance students and thirty speech students, a mix of juniors and seniors. Our data collection included: (1) initial and final student surveys, (2) pre and post intervention assessments, (3) teacher journals, (4) field notes from fellow educators who came in and observed the process, and (5) student reflection sheets. With these methods, we had a range of quantitative and qualitative information to analyze. Some procedures were identical for both speech and dance, but others were slightly

different due to the nature of the classes. The speech class was beginning a new quarter, and the dance class was a continuation. We hoped our intervention would improve final performances, their revision process and the community in the classroom.

We began with our initial student survey (see Appendix A), which included twelve multiple-choice questions centered on perceived skill and comfort level with performing, communication patterns, and attitudes toward practice and a peer coaching process. We encouraged honesty and acknowledged the possibility of more than one answer to circle for a question. We offered a place for general comments, but almost no one used it. All fifty-five students completed the survey. Since speech was just starting, the results were used to form groups for peer coaching. The dance class had already been running, so groups were already in place. They were rehearsing several large group dances, two of which were cast as junior only or senior only dances. Once established, the speech groups remained mostly unchanged. Performance classes can be emotionally volatile, so attitude was an important element to consider. For example, if a student had had negative experiences with group work in the past, we grouped him or her with those who had had positive experiences. If a student thought peer coaching would be ineffective, he or she was placed with students of a more positive mind toward the process. We placed together those who said they rarely practiced with those who said they usually practiced. In this way, no groups centered on a negative outlook.

The second part of the survey was the post intervention survey (see Appendix B), which we gave after the final performance. Again, all fifty-five students completed it. The first twelve questions changed to past tense, and we added questions to gauge the students' perceptions on peer coaching and any transfer of skills and/or content into the

final performance. The added questions were more reflective of the experience and concerned the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. We knew what improvements we saw or did not see, but we wanted to hear what the students discerned. We encouraged honesty and gave plenty of quiet writing time.

After the initial survey, we worked toward the pre intervention assessment, which was a short individual performance. No peer coaching happened before the pre assessment, but we taught several concepts related to communication and performance evaluation. In the week leading up to the pre intervention assessment, the communication process was taught and practiced, including the concepts of sender, message, receiver, feedback, interference, verbal, non-verbal, and technical language. Students then applied these concepts to coaching in their respective areas through role-play. In addition, students participated in facilitated discussions about “good” performances and “poor” performances. We showed exemplars, agreed on expectations for delivery and content, and then the students generated the scoring rubric. The rubrics (see Appendix C) were on a four-point scale and included the qualities required. Additionally, we taught the value and process of evaluating performance. When performances were given, the students evaluated several of their peers. We taped the pre intervention performances for further analysis and comparison.

After the pre intervention performance, we continued to teach content and skills in large group and then gave time for peer coaching groups to help each other construct meaning from what we taught as they worked toward performance. Overall, the peer coaching process consisted of filling out pre coaching forms, participating in group or partner coaching, giving feedback, actively revising and then filling out post coaching

reflection forms. Although we followed this general process in both classes, some details differed. In the dance class, adult professionals choreographed some of the dances on which the students were working. These dances provided the opportunity for each group to coach the other exclusively on performance skills. These groups were uneven, nine in one and fifteen in the other. This led to some uneven pairings for the coaching. The other dances rehearsed were a suite of three dance poems collaboratively choreographed by the students. The students were a mix of junior and senior dancers in each poem. There were eight dancers in each poem. These pairings for coaching worked evenly. The dancers coached on both choreographic content and performance skill for the dance poems. In the speech class, the peer coaching groups were comprised of five groups of four and two of five. Informal role-plays and skits were done to increase their comfort level with each other. Speech involves content related to organization and rhetorical models, so peer coaching was used to increase comprehension and transfer of content, as well as delivery skills such as eye contact, stance, vocal expression and non-verbals. On peer coaching days, they reviewed each other's outlines, visual aids and/or watched each other speak. Based on feedback received, they made appropriate revisions before they spoke for a grade in front of the large group. The speeches involved student chosen topics and had increased rigor in expectations as they learned and practiced more. For both speech and dance, coaching included verbal instruction as well as physical demonstration. Often heard was the phrase, "like this." We used pre-coaching forms to encourage planning and preparation on their part. We also wanted the coached to be able to self assess and then focus the session. The pre coaching form asked them to consider possible outcomes and focus of the coaching. Both coach and coached were asked to anticipate any possible

challenges. This forethought seemed to help, since there were no conflicts that needed teacher intervention.

Our third data source was teacher journals. We wrote in them mostly on peer coaching days, or days when the students were working in their groups. Also included were notes about the direct teaching of communication skills, viewing of exemplars, students' creation of the rubric and the review or teaching of content. We noted events that seemed significant and/or surprising and how well the groups were functioning and staying on task. The entries reminded us of which groups might need some intervention from the teacher. The journals often brought to light particular student reactions and communication patterns. We also recorded any apparent difficulties with learning content and/or skills. In this way, we were aware of anything that needed re-teaching or further demonstration. Sometimes there were references to peer coaching on non peer coaching days, and that was noted as well.

Aside from the teacher journals, one of the most useful data sources was field observations. Outside observers attended two class sessions at each school. For the dance class, the observers were not teachers of the same content area. They came in and watched the entire session, from group setup through performance and coaching. They circulated through the groups, occasionally asking the students clarifying questions. They recorded students' reactions and attitudes as well as documented actual conversations of the students. They observed conversations and demonstrations in peer coaching. In speech class, the observers were teachers of the same content. They came to half the class time and took notes on the peer coaching they witnessed. This included quotes from students as they coached each other, documentation of revisions in process and

behavioral notes of how group members were interacting with each other. We did not create a form for outside observers to use, because we wanted their objective, unguided responses. Scheduling visits was a challenge, but well worth the effort.

Whether focusing on content or delivery, reflection is one of the critical elements in the development of a performance. Student reflections were culled from two sources; the second survey (as described previously) and the coaching reflection sheets (see Appendix D). We developed the question sheets based on two of the models we studied in our research. We handed them out and gave quiet writing time after most peer coaching sessions. The students reflected on what it was like to receive coaching and what it was like to give coaching. In this way, they were thinking about the revision process for their performance as well as their communication skills and how coaching others helped them with their own assignment. The coaches reflected on their perceived response to the feedback, the possible application to their own work and the coach's plan for the next session. The coached reflected on the value of the feedback, the plan for revision and the application to their own coaching. In dance, they filled out reflection sheets each time. In speech, when they were in their groups only to work on content or practice one particular skill, they did not fill out a reflection sheet. Instead, discussion was facilitated on the progress made in deepening understanding or improving on the skill. The next section will present our analysis of the data we collected.

### Analysis of Data

Our primary research question asked how peer coaching affects final performances in speech and dance classrooms. Secondary questions asked about the effect of peer coaching on classroom community and the enhancement of a revision

process. Our data sources were an initial and final survey, pre and post intervention assessments, field observations, teacher journals and student reflections.

The first data we gathered was from the initial student survey. We analyzed questions one through twelve quantitatively and grouped them into categories of student perception of confidence level, performance skill level, communication style and use of practice time. We gave the survey at the beginning of our research process and all fifty-five students completed it. For confidence level, the majority of those in speech felt confident but nervous when speaking. Just ten percent said they felt very frightened. This seemed like a low number, based on speech students Becky has had in the past. However, they seemed to be at a fine starting point for peer coaching. The dance class reported only four percent who felt very frightened when performing. Though a low number, it was still surprisingly high in a class of dance majors. The rest of the dance class was divided between comfortable and relaxed at thirty-three percent and confident but nervous at sixty-three percent. In perceived skills, almost half the speech students felt they had something important to contribute and one third felt they had a strong, clear voice. Credibility is a factor with self-reporting at the beginning of a class. For example, students often overestimate their vocal capability until they learn how to evaluate other speakers and start to understand the complexity of vocal production and expression. Overall, they wanted to improve in all four areas of delivery, but primarily in practicing/memorizing and organization/timing. The dance class reported strengths in all the skills listed, with the highest in rhythm and musicality at fifty percent. They reported that their greatest need was the ability to replicate and remember movement. Again, we considered the problem with self-assessment and self-reporting. They are not always

aware of their greatest need as a performer. The high need to remember is notable because all other dance performance skills build from that. In terms of feedback, seventy percent in speech said they accept feedback if it happens by chance, and twenty-seven percent said they actively seek feedback from others. In contrast, fifty-seven percent of the dance students reported that they actively seek feedback. Seventy-five percent of the dance students and fifty percent of the speech students strongly agreed that effective communication skills could affect their relationships in the classroom community. The difference in percentage may be because the speech students were new to each other. The majority of the speech students had usually positive experiences with group learning, and there were only a few with limited or usually negative experiences. Dance students reported various experiences in learning groups prior to the peer coaching; sixty-three percent had usually positive experiences, eight percent had usually negative and twenty-nine percent had neutral experiences. When grouping, perceived skill level played a smaller role than attitude and experience; therefore, the groups had mixed ability levels, and we tried to avoid grouping those with negative experiences with others of the same.

The last series of survey questions asked about the students' beliefs in terms of peer coaching helping them learn course content, delivery skills, and improve community in the classroom. For each question, between fifty-seven and seventy percent of the speech students were willing to give it a try. No one strongly disagreed and only a small percentage had no opinion. The results were similar in the dance class; with even higher numbers in strongly agree. Both classes were open-minded about the peer coaching process.

We gave the follow-up to the initial survey after the last peer-coached performance. There was a notable change in confidence level (See Figures 1 and 2).

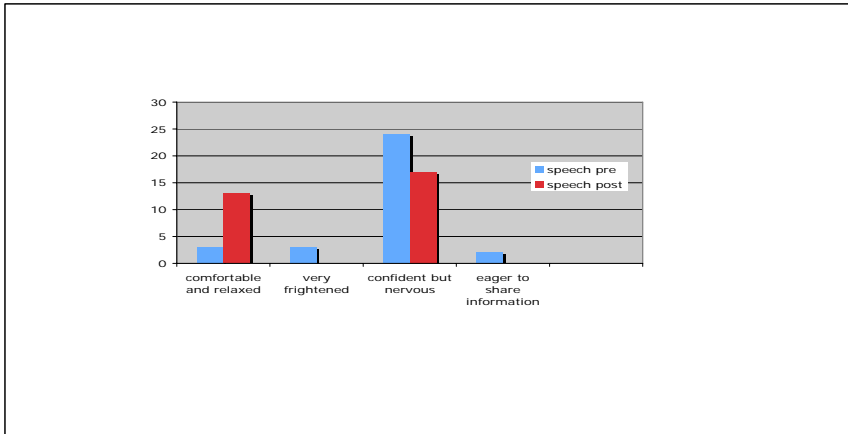


Figure 1. Speech confidence level pre and post intervention.

For speech class, the number of students who were confident and relaxed while speaking jumped from ten to forty-three percent. The remaining fifty-seven percent were confident but nervous. In the open-ended question part of the survey, most commented on how much more relaxed they were to speak in front of each other due to peer coaching. One said she would have dreaded the class without it.

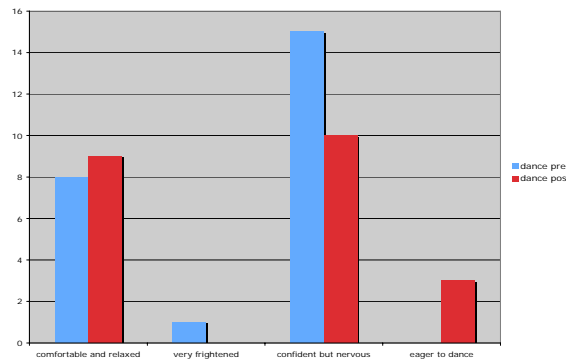


Figure 2. Dance confidence level pre and post intervention

The dance class (see Figure 2) reduced the very frightened category to zero percent. They increased the others, including boosting eager to dance from zero to fourteen percent.

Beyond comfort level with speaking and dance, community in the classroom showed an improvement worth noting. In speech, when asked if peer coaching helped the community in the classroom, ninety-seven percent strongly agreed or felt it might be true. The close community may have influenced the jump from one to twenty percent who enjoyed giving speeches. The dance class remained stable in the sense of community. This result might have been influenced by the timing placement of the research. Speech class was starting a new nine week quarter, and the dance class was well into the second semester of a yearlong course. Many community-building experiences, such as performances, had already occurred in the dance class.

In another category, the speech class reported a rise in actively seeking feedback from others, from twenty-seven to forty-seven percent. The speech responses to the open-ended survey questions indicate this was because they valued the feedback they were getting. Many said they would not have known what to work on without peer coaching. The dance students reported that they actively seek feedback more after the peer coaching intervention, a jump from fifty-seven to sixty-four percent. The percentage that accepts feedback if it happens by chance remained stable, and the percentage avoiding feedback was reduced. The responses from both classes correspond directly to Boud's promotion of students serving as both teachers and learners in a cohort (Boud, 1999, p. 414), and to Teichmann who said that learners need to believe their comments to another are meaningful and that those they receive are valuable (Teichmann, 1992, p. 10).

In speech, the skills they felt they improved on were using their voice effectively and eye contact. This makes sense, as these are skills they were adept at coaching. On the more difficult level, twenty-three percent said they improved with practicing/memorizing and thirty-three percent felt their organization/timing improved. The lower level of improvement in those areas may be due to difficulty level of coaching, lack of preparation for peer coaching, and/or lack of commitment to practicing outside of class. The dance class reported a jump from nineteen to forty-four percent in the skill of practicing while applying feedback. This may be indicative of the actual structure of the peer coaching process. Students grew slightly in musicality and performance presence, as well as in their understanding of the sense of the whole dance. As in speech, these areas of smaller growth are the more difficult areas to peer coach.

Also of note is the self-perceived transfer of learned skills and content into final performance resulting from peer coaching (see Figure 3).

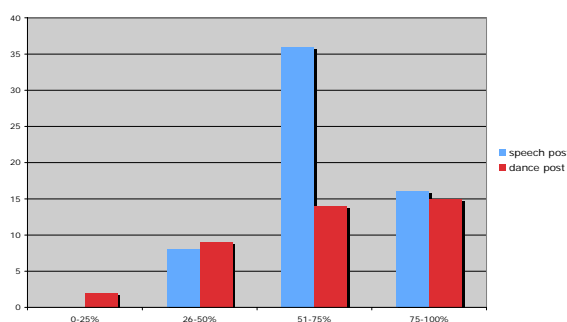


Figure 3. Speech and dance transfer of skills and content

For speech, ninety-three percent said that between fifty-one and one hundred percent of the skills learned transferred into their performance, and ninety percent believed that between fifty-one and one hundred percent of the course content learned

transferred into performances. Their belief in peer coaching helping them with this transfer of skills increased from twenty-three to seventy percent, and the transfer of content from thirty to sixty-seven percent. When asked how they would have performed without peer coaching, more than half said they would have felt less comfortable in front of class, more than a third said they would have done less well with content and skills, and one fifth said they would have procrastinated until the night before. This may be because peer coaching increased their level of accountability as they developed their speech.

The dance students mentioned the transfer of peer coaching or “intentional watching,” to everyday rehearsals. They reported strong gains in the belief that peer coaching could help them learn course content better and improve their dancing skills. They reported a rise from forty-six to sixty-four percent strongly agree for course content and from sixty-five to seventy-seven percent in performance skills. This result coincides with a later question in the post survey and the open response questions. The students felt strongly that peer coaching helped them in actual skill development. They also reported a jump in belief that peer coaching helped them use practice time for effective revision. There was an increase from fifty to eighty-one percent that strongly agreed with this statement. This could be a result of both the structure of individual coaching and the actual increased class practice time.

As far as the response to peer coaching in general, results were overwhelmingly positive. Even for those who did not prepare fully for peer coaching in speech, it was a positive experience, with ninety-three percent reporting it as such. No one found it negative or the experience limited, and only seven percent were neutral. This was echoed

in dance class, ninety percent of whom reported usually positive, no one saying negative or limited and just ten percent neutral. For both classes, this speaks highly of the specific peer coaching experience.

When asked about unexpected outcomes, one third commented on making new friends, learning about themselves and becoming more comfortable with performing. The two largest categories for change were suggestions for reduction in the paperwork and change in the rotation of partners. In dance the groupings changed, but in speech they stayed the same. Overall, the open-ended question responses mentioned an increase in skills and increased performance, an increase in sense of community and an increase in self-awareness.

In addition to the surveys and reflections, we gathered data from pre intervention and post intervention assessments (see Figures 4 and 5). The student-created rubric (see Appendix C) was used for all assessments.

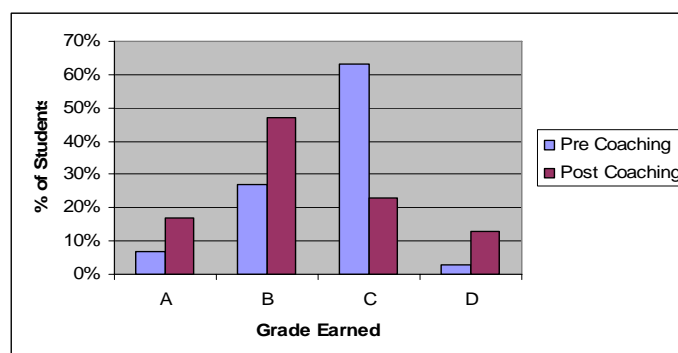


Figure 4. Speech Pre and Post Intervention Assessments

Performance in speech (see Figure 5) improved overall. The majority of students had a grade of C on the performance before the intervention. These are typical results for a first speech. The performances after the intervention were better, with sixty-four as

compared to thirty-four percent earning an A or B and only twenty-three versus sixty-three percent at a C level. One of the students who earned a C said he would have been at a D or F level without peer coaching. In contrast to those positive trends, the percentage of D's went up. Becky was disappointed, but those who earned the D's gave some revealing reflective comments. Each of them indicated they had not practiced much and did not come to peer coaching days prepared to receive coaching. They had positive comments about peer coaching improving the community of a classroom, but said they did not give it much of a chance in terms of allowing it to help them transfer learned skills and content into performances.

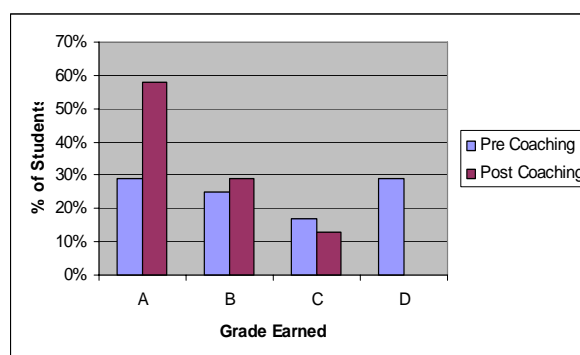


Figure 5. Dance Pre and Post Intervention Assessments

The dance grades show a decrease in D's and C's and an increase in A's and B's after the intervention. An explanation for the differences in grades may be the fact that the dance assignment remained the same from pre to post assessment, whereas the speech assignments changed. We may presume that increased feedback and practice time for the same dance would increase the positive results. In addition, these dances were graded at formal, public performances. The increase in high stakes pressure may also be an

influence. Finally, the dance students are in an arts high school as dance majors. Their interest and motivation may influence the outcome.

Our third data source was the teacher journals. The dance teacher journal shows description of the process and observations during peer coaching. The journal entries record active engagement in peer coaching, continuous conversations between students while peer coaching and many physical demonstrations to either illustrate or emphasize a coaching point. The most frustrating moments were in the confusion surrounding partners and the reflection papers. However, two rewarding moments stand out. The first time the dance class rehearsed the “peer coached” dances without peer coaching showed a distinct difference in class focus and concentration. The two groups actively watched each other. Their posture and eye focus were different; they were more attentive, and they were quiet throughout the run. Students spontaneously joined their peer coaching partners and offered comments. Mary asked the class what was the difference, and one student answered, “This was intentional watching; I wanted to see if my partner made her corrections.” This “intentional watching” spilled into rehearsals as the class moved toward their final performance. The second rewarding moment occurred in a conversation with students after the third peer coaching session. Several students expressed frustration with the inherent process of coaching/teaching, timing and accuracy of feedback. They wondered about how much feedback to give at once, what to start with and how to give the comments effectively. They were really discussing the layering of instruction that occurs in any classroom. They knew that they could see problems, but sometimes could not identify a good solution. This conversation helped Mary realize that teaching communication skills and creating a rubric is not enough. This was validated by a

specific comment in the survey requesting more understanding of teaching in the next round.

The speech teacher journals contain observations of student response to content and instruction and during peer coaching. The first exercise the groups did was form a skit demonstrating their understanding of good and bad coaching, and there was unanimous engagement in the process. The class responded well to each other's creative work. However, within another week two concerns arose. One was a particular student who was extremely shy, to the point of being unable to speak with the other members. The second male member of the group was absent regularly, and this left the shy student with two girls. The girls were making a genuine effort to include him, and he did not seem averse to that. Becky intervened two separate times, using humor to help ease social tension and refocus on the language of feedback. The shy student was finally able to face the girls during peer coaching and read his feedback off the sheet. Each of them improved greatly, except the student who was habitually absent. The second concern was over three students who did not buy into the process at all. They did not prepare for peer coaching, and their speeches reflected lack of feedback, revision and practice. Becky made participation more grade heavy, but they did not respond. Their reflections in the open-ended section of the second survey at the end of the quarter were quite honest. They admitted their procrastination and the fact that they did not give peer coaching a genuine attempt.

The fourth data source was the field observations from fellow teachers. Looking over the notes from speech class reveals a pattern. Each noted that peer coaching seemed like a great idea for an arts classroom, and that the groups that were functioning well

were helping each other work toward optimum performance. Not all the groups were consistently functioning well, however. One group continually found it challenging to be on task. The one girl in the group did not assert herself with the boys. The others were unequal in their work ethic. Several of the groups used the rubric and appropriate language, others did not but managed to communicate what they meant. Sometimes students stood and showed what they meant; some said the lines aloud in the way they thought would be more effective. Those who were not prepared admitted to the field observer that peer coaching would go better if they had actually done the work. One group tried to avoid doing anything unless an adult was right there. Some of the students did not know how to help an already skilled speaker improve. They felt they lacked the vocabulary and precision of observation and wished that they could have helped more. This coincides with the work of Nilson, who clarified the challenges peer coaches face (Nilson, 2003 p. 34).

The first dance class field observer watched the entire rehearsal process. Her notes describe the discussion, physical demonstrations and self-critiques. She saw a high level of engagement and use of technical language and reported many direct quotes of the students. These involved the use of technical language, encouragement, physical demonstration, clarifying questions and specific technical feedback. The second observer watched on the first day of new groupings. He reported on the structure of the coaching and then watched three groups with more focus. He noted that overall the coaching process was working for most of the students. Most were engaged and gave both verbal and physical feedback. He noted that the varying levels of dance expertise and dance vocabulary were problematic for some students. Some had a good critical eye, good grasp

of vocabulary and good communication skills. Others were stymied by lack of vocabulary, or the inability to correct the dance problem. He also noted that the students with less expertise were less engaged and purposeful. He wondered if this was a problem in perceived expertise or a problem with actual experience, critical eye or grasp of vocabulary. He noted that students perceived vague feedback as a negative even if it was “good job.” This corresponds to Leahy et al indicating that quality feedback is vitally important to learning (Leahy et al, 2005). He also noted that students spoke in the past tense in their coaching conversations and suggested adding a plan in the reflection process.

The final data source was the reflection papers written by the students after each coaching session. The use of the reflection papers rather than group discussion allowed every voice to be heard. The papers yielded a broad range of responses and generally indicated that communication skills, technical language and teaching knowledge are important concerns for the students. The dance students responded positively overall in the reflection papers though there was some resistance to the repetition of questions. There was some concern about interpersonal issues among the students. Mary believes this is indicative of the length of time these students spend together in the dance program. Additionally, interpersonal problems are inherent in any group of human beings. The addition of high school social dynamics and subtle competition in a performing arts program will heighten these.

One surprising result from dance was the disbelief a student expressed when the other student took his corrections. As coaches, they noted the difficulty of following the one dancer rather than following the focus of choreography and wished they knew the

choreography better to help that individual more efficiently. Unlike speech, most dances are group configurations. The dancers wrote about the change in their own performance when they knew they were being watched throughout the rehearsal. This element of peer coaching, the becoming visible, is important in a large group rehearsal setting. In the peer-coached rehearsals, each dancer was visible to his/her coach throughout the dance, and the students commented on this as a positive. As performers, they observed that their self-awareness and performance level were raised because they were an individual in a group. They relished receiving individual feedback from “someone who was in their position as a dancer.”

As with dance, the speech class resisted the repetition of completing the reflection papers after each peer coaching session. The reflections showed a pattern of appreciating the reciprocal nature of peer coaching, which helped them learn about learning while also teaching. They did have some hesitancy about coaching the speakers who were already at a high level. Several indicated they improved at viewing with a critical eye and communicating needs for improvement without personal attack. A few said it was hard to remember the notes they received during coaching; a few said they sometimes were stuck helping each other improve on content. All who saw their suggestions incorporated into a performance were pleased and then motivated to help more. Any who were absent expressed regret and those who were not prepared to receive coaching admitted they would have performed better if they had been.

The next section will explain our action plan for the future based on what we learned from our research.

## Action Plan

We certainly found the answer to our question: What effect will peer coaching in the secondary arts classroom have on the transfer of skills and knowledge into a final product? The simple answer is that peer coaching has a positive effect on that transfer and thereby the final performance. Therefore, the first element of our action plan is to keep peer coaching in the curriculum. We agree that most speech and dance students will benefit from it, so we will change our practice to enable its use. The level of internalized learning, which allowed for the transfer of skills and content into the performance, was certainly higher with the peer coaching than without. In addition, peer coaching enhanced the community of these high-risk classrooms, which led to more relaxed and engaged performers. Although we are keeping peer coaching in the curriculum, we will make some changes.

First of all, we will group the students differently. Our research showed conflicting theories, with Johnson et al recommending homogeneous grouping and Brewer et al saying the opposite. We decided it is best to have flexible grouping. Mary did due to the nature of her dance assignments, and achieved good results. Becky will start with heterogeneous groups again, but will change them after the first speech assignment based on student preference and ability. This will allow for the differentiated learning curve and will help those students who felt limited in their ability to help high skilled speakers.

In addition to grouping changes, both Mary and Becky feel that the role of the teacher in the process is a sensitive one. The students got better as they peer coached, and we in turn became more observers than direct teachers. However, students did ask for

more information on coaching and building skills. As teachers, we need to be sensitive to continually teaching coaching skills as well as content skills. Those who struggle need teacher involvement to remain consistent, while those who excel need coaches that are more skilled. It is possible that certain students could be designated “go to” people for their peers.

Along with more consistent teacher involvement, we will change the paperwork we employ during the peer coaching process. The students need to write down what the coaches tell them, so we will use a form that allows for such note taking. It will also have a place for the student to plan a specific revision process for their speech or dance based on the feedback they receive. Instead of requiring written reflection after each peer coaching session, we will limit this formative evaluation to two per quarter. The planning sheets we used for coaches and speakers will be reduced to one for the speakers. This will encourage forethought and self-monitoring of learning without becoming too redundant and/or cumbersome for the students. This should boost their engagement level and therefore their learning.

The difference in grades on the post intervention assessment showed that performing in a higher stakes setting might increase student motivation to improve. Mary’s students did not earn a grade lower than a C. Becky’s students who earned D’s admitted they did not buy into peer coaching. It would be a fascinating future investigation to find out if this lack of motivation would change if the audience was some group other than peers with whom they have grown comfortable. The use of peer coaching increases the opportunities for a student to “perform” in front of an audience. High stakes performance may still lie at the end of the process, but each “performance”

has its own sense of visibility. These multiple rehearsals/performances combine with specific critiques to improve student skills.

Ultimately, we believe peer coaching is important in the classroom for many reasons. Our research showed an increase in the transfer of skills and content into performance, an increase in confidence and sense of community in the classroom and in increased sense of self-awareness. The sense of support created by peer coaching can help shy students perform and communicate better, and written reflections allow each voice to be heard. Peer coaching offers multiple perspectives, which students welcomed. The peer coaching process does spread the power of teaching and fosters ownership of learning. As one student expressed, “Without peer coaching, I would be at a D or an F, that’s all I’m gonna say.”

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## Appendix A

**Speech Survey**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Hour \_\_\_\_\_

*Please respond honestly to the following questions by circling the appropriate answer(s) or by writing out a response. The information will be kept confidential and will be used for grouping and planning.*

1. When speaking before the class, I feel:

- |                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. comfortable and relaxed | c. confident, but nervous     |
| b. very frightened         | d. eager to share information |

2. On speaking assignments, I:

- |                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. am always well practiced.  | c. am rarely well practiced.      |
| b. am usually well practiced. | d. speak from the top of my head. |

3. My strongest assets as a speaker are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. I have a strong, clear voice             | c. I can keep the audience's attention |
| b. I have something important to contribute | d. I enjoy giving speeches             |

4. Skills I need to improve on are:

- |                               |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. using my voice effectively | c. practicing/memorizing |
| b. organization/timing        | d. eye contact           |

5. When I work on a speech, I:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. actively seek feedback from others.     | c. accept feedback if it happens by chance. |
| b. avoid feedback until final performance. | d. listen to, but disregard feedback.       |

6. As a communicator, I:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. am an active listener.                  | c. speak my mind.                                    |
| b. am uncomfortable expressing my opinion. | d. sometimes don't listen; I'm planning my response. |

7. Effective communication skills can affect my relationships in the classroom community.

- a. no opinion
- b. might be true
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

8. My experiences with learning in a group have been:

- a. usually positive
- b. usually negative
- c. neutral
- d. limited

9. Peer coaching can help me learn course content better.

- a. no opinion
- b. willing to give it a try
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

10. Peer coaching can help me improve my speaking skills.

- a. no opinion
- b. willing to give it a try
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

11. Peer coaching can help me use practice time for effective revision.

- a. no opinion
- b. willing to give it a try
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

12. Peer coaching can help improve the community in a classroom.

- a. no opinion
- b. might be true
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

Additional comments:

## Dance Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Hour \_\_\_\_\_

*Please respond honestly to the following questions by circling the appropriate answer(s).  
The information will be kept confidential and will be used for grouping and planning.*

1. When performing before an audience, I feel:

- |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. comfortable and relaxed | c. confident, but nervous |
| b. very frightened         | d. eager to dance         |

2. On performing dance assignments, I:

- |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. am always well practiced.  | c. am rarely well practiced.    |
| b. am usually well practiced. | d. go for it with no rehearsal. |

3. My strongest assets as a dancer are:

- |                                     |                                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. My ability to replicate movement | c. My spatial memory and focus |
| b. My rhythm and musicality         | d. My performance quality      |

4. Skills I need to improve on are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. ability to replicate and remember feedback | c. practicing while applying                 |
| b. musicality and counts                      | d. performing the meaning of the whole dance |

5. When I'm working on a dance performance/rehearsal, I:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. actively seek feedback from others.     | c. accept feedback if it happens by chance. |
| b. avoid feedback until final performance. | d. listen to, but disregard feedback.       |

6. As a communicator, I:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. am an active listener.                  | c. speak my mind.                                    |
| b. am uncomfortable expressing my opinion. | d. sometimes don't listen; I'm planning my response. |

7. Effective communication skills can affect my relationships in the classroom community.

- a. no opinion
- b. might be true
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

8. My experiences with learning in a group have been:

- a. usually positive
- b. usually negative
- c. neutral
- d. limited

9. Peer coaching can help me learn course content better.

- a. no opinion
- b. willing to give it a try
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

10. Peer coaching can help me improve my dance performance skills.

- a. no opinion
- b. willing to give it a try
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

11. Peer coaching can help me use practice time for effective revision.

- a. no opinion
- b. willing to give it a try
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

12. Peer coaching can help improve the community in a classroom.

- a. no opinion
- b. might be true
- c. strongly agree
- d. strongly disagree

Additional comments:

## Appendix B

**Speech Final Survey**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Hour \_\_\_\_\_

*Please respond honestly to the following questions by circling the appropriate answer(s). The information will be kept confidential and will be used for the evaluation of peer coaching.*

1. When speaking before the class, I now feel:

- |                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. comfortable and relaxed | c. confident, but nervous     |
| b. very frightened         | d. eager to share information |

2. On speaking assignments, I:

- |                                |                                   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. was always well practiced.  | c. was rarely well practiced.     |
| b. was usually well practiced. | d. spoke from the top of my head. |

3. My strongest assets as a speaker now are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. I have a strong, clear voice             | c. I can keep the audience's attention |
| b. I have something important to contribute | d. I enjoy giving speeches             |

4. Skills I have improved on are:

- |                               |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. using my voice effectively | c. practicing/memorizing |
| b. organization/timing        | d. eye contact           |

5. When I worked on a speech, I:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a. actively sought feedback from others.<br>chance. | c. accepted feedback if it happened by<br>chance. |
| b. avoided feedback until final performance.        | d. listened to, but disregarded feedback.         |

6. As a communicator, I now:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. am an active listener.                  | c. speak my mind.                                       |
| b. am uncomfortable expressing my opinion. | d. sometimes don't listen; I'm planning my<br>response. |

7. Effective communication skills can affect my relationships in the classroom community.
- a. no opinion
  - b. might be true
  - c. strongly agree
  - d. strongly disagree
8. My experiences with learning in my coaching group have been:
- a. usually positive
  - b. usually negative
  - c. neutral
  - d. limited
9. Peer coaching helped me learn course content better.
- a. no opinion
  - b. didn't give it much of a try
  - c. strongly agree
  - d. strongly disagree
10. Peer coaching helped me improve my speaking skills.
- a. no opinion
  - b. didn't give it much of a try
  - c. strongly agree
  - d. strongly disagree
11. Peer coaching helped me use practice time for effective revision.
- a. no opinion
  - b. didn't give it much of a try
  - c. strongly agree
  - d. strongly disagree
12. Peer coaching helped improve the community in the classroom.
- a. no opinion
  - b. might be true
  - c. strongly agree
  - d. strongly disagree
13. Evaluate the percentage of transference of skills (voice, eye contact, poise, posture, gestures, and rate) into your speeches.
- a. 0-25%
  - b. 26-50%
  - c. 51-75%
  - d. 76-100%
14. Evaluate the percentage of transference of course content (organization patterns, rhetorical devices, application of S.P.A.M. analysis, primacy and recency) into your speeches.
- a. 0-25%
  - c. 51-75%

b. 26-50%

d. 76-100%

15. Describe any unexpected outcomes that happened as a result of peer coaching.

16. Describe fully the hardest part about peer coaching.

17. Describe fully the most valuable part of peer coaching.

18. How would you change peer coaching to make it more valuable to future speech students? Think about grouping, paperwork, time allotment, rubric development, etc. Explain fully.

19. How do you think you would have performed in class without peer coaching? Explain fully.

## Dance Final Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*Please respond honestly to the following questions by circling the appropriate answer(s). The information will be kept confidential and will be used for the evaluation of peer coaching.*

1. When dancing/performing, I now feel:
 

a. comfortable and relaxed	c. confident, but nervous
b. very frightened	d. eager to dance
  
2. In rehearsal and performance, I:
 

a. was always well practiced.	c. was rarely well practiced.
b. was usually well practiced.	d. went for it with no rehearsal
  
3. My strongest assets as a dancer now are:
 

a. My ability to replicate movement	c. My spatial memory and focus
b. My rhythm and musicality	d. My performance quality
  
4. Skills I have improved on are:
 

a. ability to replicate and remember feedback	c. practicing while applying
b. musicality and counts	d. performing the meaning of the whole dance
  
5. When I worked on a dance, I:
 

a. actively sought feedback from others. chance.	c. accepted feedback if it happened by chance.
b. avoided feedback until final performance.	d. listened to, but disregarded feedback.
  
6. As a communicator, I now:
 

a. am an active listener.	c. speak my mind.
---------------------------	-------------------



a. 0-25%

c. 51-75%

b. 26-50%

d. 76-100%

14. Evaluate the percentage of transference of course content (as a performer, understanding of choreographic forms, choreographic intention, design in a specific dance) into your speeches.

a. 0-25%

c. 51-75%

b. 26-50%

d. 76-100%

15. Describe any unexpected outcomes that happened as a result of peer coaching.

16. Describe fully the hardest part about peer coaching.

17. Describe fully the most valuable part of peer coaching.

18. How would you change peer coaching to make it more valuable to future dance students? Think about grouping, paperwork, time allotment, rubric development, etc. Explain fully.

19. How do you think you would have performed in concert without peer coaching?  
Explain fully.

## Appendix C

**Speech Rubric**

<b><u>Excellent</u></b>	<b><u>Undeveloped</u></b>	<b><u>Basic</u></b>	<b><u>Proficient</u></b>
<i>Delivery:</i> Makes consistent eye contact Connects w/every peer.  Includes entire room.  Purposeful connection.	Looks mostly at note cards.  Mostly reads. Little or none.  Only looks at teacher.	Occasionally glances up.  Scans room quickly.  Eye contact with some.	Remembers sides.  Holds gaze.  Not purposeful.
Effective Enunciation/Rate Purposeful  enunciation and	Words mumbled, garbled.  Pace too slow or fast,  unchanged.	Some clear, some mumbled.  Some variety of pace.	Words clear and crisp.  Pacing helps audience  interest.                      Pacing.
Uses appropriate volume Volume purposeful.  confident	Can't hear.  Too loud for room.  Whispers or yells.	Some heard, some not.  Heard some, but not all.  Barely heard.	Loud enough.    Steady,  voice.
Uses appropriate tone Purposeful tone and expression personal	Monotone.  No emphasis given.	Expressive at times.  Some sections/words	Variety of expression.  Emphasis clear.              and

dynamism.	Tone very informal, slang used.	emphasized. Some dynamism. Dynamic tone.	
Stance communicates poise at sides, feet open. and confidence Balanced, relaxed.	Closed off body.	Sometimes open, or closed.	Stance correct, Arms
natural.	Fidgety, moves around.	Weight to one side at times.	yet not natural
	Hands in pockets.	Occasional hands in pockets.	and relaxed. Stance
	Weight on one foot, swaying.	Some swaying.	
Posture communicates poise Shoulders straight, and confidence up. Posture yet relaxed.	Slouches, bends over.	Slouch comes and goes.	Open, upright posture.
Arms/hands natural.	Leans, lowers head.	Hunches or leans at times.	Not fully relaxed. Head
	Visible tension in body.	Tension comes and goes.	upright
	Hands behind back or in front.	Moves arm position at times.	
<i>Content:</i>			
Introduction gets our attention, Purposeful opening.	No or plain attention getter.	Maybe catches a few.	Catchy opening.
has a clear thesis, preview, just right.	No thesis and/or preview.	Attempt at thesis.	Thesis correct. Thesis

	relates to audience. Related to audience.	No relation to audience.	Attempt to relate to audience. Related to audience.	
Body uses appropriate organization Purposeful and pattern, main points well creative organization supported, effective, support. creative transitions. content.	Content disorganized. No support for points. No transitions. Limited content.	Some organization. Some support for ideas. Ineffective transitions. Incomplete content.	Clearly organized. Thorough support. Transitions just right. and Plenty of content. Precise	
Conclusion summarizes main enough. Memorable finish ideas and leaves audience ties everything with a memorable thought. together.	No summary. Says "That's it" or "The end," etc. Thesis not restated. Ending not memorable.	Weak summary. Not really sure when it ends. Some loose ends. Some may remember.	Summary just Ending is final sounding.	that

	4	3	2	1
Accuracy	Exact replication of shape, musicality, spatial design and dynamics according to choreographer's intention	Exact replication of movement phrases; movement transitions are weak	General replication of movement with loss of detail; transitions are slow.	Little replication of movement; transitions are abrupt and late
Musicality	Consistent accuracy of beat and subdivisions; Body flow anticipates and matches musical intention; natural anticipation of music	Some accuracy of beat; Body flow matches musical intention; Appearance of hesitation or off count	Little accuracy on beat; Follows other dancers for musical intention; Mouthed counting and clear mistakes	No accuracy on beat; Follows other dancers by a beat or two; hesitation and full stops in rhythm.
Spatial Accuracy	Clear shape of body; clear relationship of self to floor patterns and design; makes instantaneous spatial corrections	Clear of shape of body; inaccuracy in spatial/design relationship in dance; makes spatial corrections in time	Some inaccuracies body shape; inaccuracies in spatial design; aware of spacing mistakes but not able to correct.	Many inaccuracies of body shape; inaccuracies in spatial design; not aware of spacing mistakes.
Dynamic Range	Able to replicate desired energy/dynamics at the appropriate time within the movement	Stated understanding of appropriate dynamic range; limited physical ability to demonstrate quality range	Some variation within the structure of movement and choreographic intention; little emphasis on appropriate quality of movement	Little to no variation within the structure of movement and choreographic intention
Performance Quality	Dances through transitions; replicates movement with accuracy, musicality,	Dances through intermittent transitions; replicates movement with accuracy,	Dances movement phrases but not transitions; replicates movement with	Dances some movement phrases but not transitions; replicates movement with

	<p>spatial clarity, dynamic range; confidence in movement; eye and head focus appropriate to choreographic intent; completely full out; personal expression appropriate to intention or style.</p>	<p>musicality, spatial clarity, or dynamic range; confidence in movement; eye and head focus appropriate to choreographic intent; completely full out; directed expression appropriate to intention or style.</p>	<p>some accuracy, musicality, spatial clarity, or dynamic range; confidence in movement; eye and head focus sometimes appropriate to choreographic intent; intermittently full out; little expression appropriate to intention or style.</p>	<p>some accuracy, musicality, spatial clarity, or dynamic range; confidence in movement; eye and head focus down or watching others; infrequent moments of full out; little or inappropriate expression connected to intention or style.</p>
--	--	---	--	--

Additional Comments:





**Pre Coaching Form for Coachee**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Speech/Dance \_\_\_\_\_

1. How do you want to guide this feedback session?

2. What questions or confusions do you have?

3. What fears do you have?

4. What do you hope to get out of this session?

