Deep Learning in the Department of Theatre and Dance  
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Deep learning is most likely to be occurring when three things converge. Those three things are:

1. students engage in intensive or extensive experiences;
2. students encounter an experience that makes a life-long impression;
3. students successfully transfer knowledge learned in one context to another application.

In our programs, students regularly engage in extensive learning experiences when they take year-long course sequences in Dance History, Theatre History, Choreography, Directing, Dance Technique, or Acting. Opportunities to perform in a show or build a show also give students very extensive learning experiences.

Students engage in intensive learning experiences in the various writing courses. They also have intensive learning experiences when they are producing shows (Senior Showcase, Choreography Showcase, One-Act Plays). When you live with a single dance or a play for six weeks or more, you attain an intimate understanding of its features.

Oftentimes, the culminating experience in a program leaves a life-long impression on senior students. It represents all that students have worked to achieve as artists, and it becomes for students the defining experience of their undergraduate lives. Students may unconsciously use their culminating experience as a “measuring stick” for evaluating much of what they do thereafter. Choreographing in the Senior Showcase, or designing a Main Stage theatre production, or directing a Studio Theatre production, or stage managing a Main Stage production, or performing a major role in a play all are powerful experiences for students in our programs. Sometimes the life-long impression does not exist as a conscious experience for students. The methods of creating and executing artistic work inculcate good professional habits in students. They may depend on these good habits, they may act on them constantly, but they may not be fully conscious that their education has imbued itself so completely into their lives.

Our department’s combination of classroom/studio learning with artistic production work generates many opportunities for students to develop their skills at knowledge transference. All the research in the field of learning confirms that this is the most difficult kind of learning to acquire. Theatre and dance students regularly take what they learn in studio classes, such as Improvisation or Directing, and apply that to their artistic work on productions. Moreover, they take what they learn in theory classes such as Script Analysis, Dance History, Theatre History, and Kinesiology and apply that learning to their artistic work.

In all the above situations, we evaluate students’ deep learning through multiple assessment techniques. Student learning is measured by:

1. examinations for content and knowledge in the disciplines;
2. faculty-mentored creative projects that demonstrate students’ creativity and problem-solving skills;
3. faculty-mentored production work that demonstrate students’ technical/craft skills;
4. auditions, portfolio reviews and programmatic progress reviews that faculty use to evaluate students’ progress;
5. outside evaluations by professionals through professional organizations, festivals, regional auditions, production respondents.