



**HSDC EDUCATION
& COMMUNITY PROGRAMS**

Creating Reflective Choreographers: The Eyes See/Mind Sees Process

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Authors, choreographers, painters, composers and architects are creative individuals who shape a community's culture. Receiving feedback or their ability to reflect on their work often plays a role in their creative process for them to generate the best of themselves. *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® is a reflective method for looking at the arts and, in particular, dance. This process was developed by dance educators Janet Brooks, Kathryn Humphreys, and myself, Sinead Kimbrell, while working at Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, was shaped around the teachings of Professor Mickie Geller of Ohio University, Dr. Larry Lavender of the University of North Carolina, and choreographer Liz Lerman. Oftentimes, the feedback that choreographers get from audiences and critical friends is based upon audience preference and can lack objective, constructive comments that can help choreographers. *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® gives the audience a structure to provide constructive feedback to performers and choreographers about the salient features of the performance. This process is intended to be more objective than subjective. It does this by focusing on what is literally seen by the eyes as well as by focusing on how the brain abstracts meaning based on movement choices.

Children are innately drawn to moving their bodies as they develop from babies to adults. Many preschool to fifth grade students would much rather be moving around a classroom than be sitting in a desk for six hours each day. As Hubbard Street partner classroom teacher David Groves (2011) sees it, building instruction around fun and happiness is a positive thing, even if it is "not on a standardized test" or "easily assessed by school administrators."

The Purpose

But why dance in academic classrooms? By providing opportunities to connect art making and core curriculum, students, too, can express how essential details and broad themes are related to their lives (Millman, 2009). Authentic arts integration is thus, learning tied to both content and instruction in art, and leads to multifaceted comprehension gains by students, while also assisting them in applying higher level thinking skills of Bloom's Taxonomy (Smilan & Miraglia, 2009). Since creating and interpreting is due in part to what we each as individuals bring to a situation, there are countless answers or solutions to how we experience the world.

Eyes See/Mind Sees® is used in the editing process of creating choreography. The purpose of this process is to allow students to link their prior knowledge with new learning

experiences with the ultimate goal of communicating how they interpret the world. Artists are ultimately storytellers that, when given the space and time, can weave two thoughts together to help society understand cultural values, while also developing their artistic voice. Choreography courses offered in schools can allow students this same opportunity. At times, when people cannot explain their personal understanding of a situation or topic, they may get frustrated, leading them to act out or drop out. The two-step process of *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® gives students a structure and language to translate their experience for their peers.

Additionally, this reflective process offers other opportunities as well. It can provide feedback on instruction. The teaching artist can witness which dance concepts the students retained and demonstrate in their work, as well as identify as an audience. Furthermore, how students respond can shed light on their prior knowledge, or lack thereof, as well as the strengths and/or weaknesses within lessons. If the students were asked to make their dances around a certain theme and the audience does not make any connections to the theme, the teacher may need to revisit the curricular material for students to explore in more explicit detail. Their choreography is the application of their knowledge. Lack of application may be a result of lack of understanding.

The Education & Community Programs staff at Hubbard Street Dance Chicago uses the *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® process throughout all of their education programs. While abstract thinking tends not to develop until 3rd grade, HSDC staff has found that this simple two-step process can be utilized by pre-school age children, first graders, fifth graders, and adults, because each can engage in the process with different amounts of prompting from program staff. Participants tend to naturally want to create meaning, or find a theme within the movement, no matter what their age. In addition, while distinguishing between literal and abstract thinking may be a challenge for some, a facilitator, such as the teaching artist, can help draw the line between what the eye and the mind sees. This connection can be done with such questions as, "Did you literally see a lion in the room, or did the strong, bound movements of the upper body help create that in your mind?"

A teacher from a Chicago Public School who collaborates with the Hubbard Street Dance Chicago's Movement As Partnership (MAP) program, came to the following conclusion about her students' use of dance as a learning tool during a research focus group. "She used what she learned about the Inuit culture to construct her own dance, and I feel that actually creating movements based on the research she had done changed her knowledge and helped her truly experience what life as an Inuit is about. It moved her away from copying facts from a book and towards really interpreting her newly learned knowledge (Smolin, 2011)." At some point in the choreographic process, the student had to think about the audience and what movement choices she was making to help her build connections and create meaning. Consequently, the teacher was able to describe the student's transfer of knowledge from one subject area to another, generating a connection between the student's book learning and her choreography. This learning was supported by the use of the *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® process as part of the editing of student work during the HSDC dance residency.

The Process

By beginning with the "eyes", the audience starts by simply recalling what body parts, energy, use of space, or use of time the dance contained. The choreographer and dancers hear what is clear or stands out, and what is absent or unseen. Moving onto the "mind", the choreographer gets feedback about how his/her movement choices impact the multiple meanings of the dance for the audience. Choreographers can later go back to the

audiences' comments to modify or edit the movements to form a more coherent dance relative to their source material or original inspiration.

Classroom Applications

In an elementary classroom, this method can be used by teachers to build inference skills. This is done by providing time and opportunity for the students to connect how the movement choices within the dance build meaning in their minds. Teachers can form a list of student responses to the question: What did my *Eyes See*? Next to those answers they can make a list of student responses to the question: What did my *Mind See*? Finally, they can then have students build connections across the two list to complete the statement, "My minds sees____, because my eyes saw____." This process allows the teacher to hear what evidence the students pull from the dance and how they draw conclusions about what the movement communicates to them.

Figure 1 shows how this process of *Eyes See/Mind Sees*© can be used as an assessment in a written form, based off a visual prompt of a shape frozen in time, rather than movement. A teacher can still observe a student's dance knowledge via their use of concepts as well as the vocabulary included in their answers.

Figure 1



Hubbard Street dancer Robyn Mineko Williams.
Photo by Todd Rosenberg.

What do your eyes see in this picture?	What does your mind see or what do you imagine is going on in this picture?

This assessment tool has dance students inferring in a different modality. Figure 2 is the second part of this written assessment. By connecting the two side of the chart in an extended response, students can display their ability to infer meaning from a picture in writing.

Figure 2

What do your eyes see to help create a story or image in your mind? What specific details did you write in the <u>left column</u> to support your interpretation in the <u>right column</u> ?
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The two-step verbal process of *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® may also be adapted for music, or for a visual art form. Students can describe what their ears hear, such as the instruments, tempo, melody, or discord, and then relay the imagines these elements create in their minds. They can do the same for defining the use of line, shape, or texture for visual arts.

The Difference

There are other reflective processes that students can use to critique arts products and performances. These often include audience's likes, dislikes, suggestions, and "what if's". This process of *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® is best used by an artist to get feedback from his/her peers about "what is", and to modify the work as he/she moves forward. For example, The architect of the dance demonstrates meaning, or his/her view point, through their arrangement and purposeful use of the elements of dance. This all stems from his/her original inspiration. The audience responds by articulating what is vivid. It is the artist's choice though how the objective feedback received will ultimately impact her editing process, allowing the artist to build upon and generate more ideas that further employ what the audience's eyes and minds see in a finished product.

Results: Student Impact

"By taking what we know in one sign system and recasting it in terms of another sign system-language, art, movement, mathematics, music, and so forth-new signs and new forms of expression are created, and new knowledge generated" (Harste, et al. pg. 528). Teachers working with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago for several years began to observe multiple higher level thinking skills generated throughout classroom instruction by the use the *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® process. We have found that it becomes a strategy they use as they teach the skill of inferring in both literacy arts classes and science. In, science, they do this in part by paralleling parts of the scientific method of recording observations and drawing conclusions, based on data collected, to this reflective process.

A fifth grade Hubbard Street partner teacher says that "the experience of having dance in the classroom broadened the school experience for my students in a variety of ways. They were able to learn movement vocabulary and apply it to new concepts. They were also given tools for creating ideas and revising them through movement, and were able to make connections between the creative process of dance and other processes such as writing and reading (A. Darley, personal communication, May 18, 2010)."

In one of HSDC's fifth grade MAP classroom, students were asked by teaching artist Mandy Beck to describe what they had seen in their classmates' dances. One student replied that she liked the part when one female dancer was on a low level and the rest of the group was above her with their arms moving upwards with shaky energy. "I like it because in my mind they look like magicians pulling her off the ground with magic." "That's great," exclaims Mandy, "because your eyes see their hands moving in that *direction* and with that *energy* you mind interprets magic (M. Beck, personal communication. February 16, 2011)."

As educators, we recognized that students needed a clear method of reflection that was accessible to multiple ages and that allowed clear feedback on both performance skills and choreographic choices. The *Eyes See/Mind Sees*® process allows students to make clear choices when revising their choreography, ultimately allowing them to better communicate their ideas to the audience. It provides student audiences with a concrete strategy for understanding and communicating what they see in dance, as well as creating meaningful strategies for teachers to understand the knowledge transfer occurring in the classroom while also validating students' inference skills.

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