



NEBT Final Report for Teaching Artist Hub 2024 Mentorship Grant

For this project, NEBT Artistic and Executive Director Rachael Gnatowski (mentor) worked with Development Manager and Faculty teaching artist Fiona Connolly (mentee) to run the student classes and rehearsals for NEBT's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

The project began with a community audition, which was held on March 2, 2024. Students ages 6+ from other dance studios and schools were invited to participate in an audition class (separate classes were held for ages 6-10 and 11+) and were then placed in groups along with NEBT's full time students to fill roles in the production. Rehearsals began later in the month, consisting of 1-2 hours each week for the students to come learn and practice choreography. The performances were held on June 8 and 9, where the students were able to share what they have been working on with their families, friends, and all audiences in a 2 hour long professional ballet production featuring 20 professional dancers, 30 students, custom costumes for each dancer, and stage design.

Rachael and Fiona collaborated in numerous ways throughout the entire process. During the audition, Rachael led the class while Fiona observed, and then led a few activities at the end of the class. Starting rehearsals, Rachael and Fiona would take turns leading different parts of each lesson, from a warm up activity for the students, to running the choreography the students had previously learned, to adding on new choreography. This way, Fiona had the opportunity to try out different teaching techniques she observed from Rachael that could be best used in different teaching scenarios, and Rachael was able to observe how Fiona was picking up on these different techniques. Later in the process, Fiona would lead the entire rehearsal time block for a group of students, putting all these techniques together for an extended period of time.

The success of the participating students in their final performance is of course the most obvious meter of success in this mentorship process, but Rachael and Fiona both learned more that they can now take with them into future teaching projects as well. Fiona learned many different age-appropriate techniques for teaching dance technique and choreography, like games to practice counting music and using animal imagery to help younger students find different types of muscle control. She also learned the importance of setting very clear expectations for students at the very beginning of the process. When the students know exactly what they are aiming for, they are able to achieve even higher levels of performance that they may not have even believed they were capable of. Watching the students reach that highest potential with confidence and feel the joy of performing onstage has further inspired Fiona's love of teaching!

The performances on June 8th and 9th were incredibly successful and were the best attended performances the company has ever had. We are incredibly proud of the students' dedication and commitment to learning and rehearsing this ballet.