

Preparing your Participants

Participants in our interactive events have included a range of students. We have facilitated events that have focused on children, teens, young adults, and people with disabilities. These participants have come from the inner city, the suburbs, and rural areas. They have also ranged in performing arts experience from public school students with in-school arts classes, to athletes unfamiliar with the performing arts, to pre-professional and university students. All of this is to say that no matter the community you reach, TPL's method of interactive exchange in the performing arts is accessible to all ages and ranges of participants.

Along the way we have gathered some helpful ideas to aid you in preparing your participants, who ever they may be, for an interactive event. Due to the fact that the interactive studio is a sometimes overwhelmingly stimulated environment, you may want to consider trying several of these ideas at once or using them midway through a series of exchanges to regain participant's focus and attention.

Reducing the number of monitors

For some participants seeing the far site on one monitor and themselves on another monitor is too much information. Children in particular can get so focused and distracted on playing with their image in the near studio monitor that they forget completely about the far site and the group they are connecting to. We have also found that participants with disabilities can also get easily over stimulated with too many monitors on at once. In these situations we have recommend starting the interactive event with only one monitor on –the far site monitor at the front of the studio.

Preparing the studio in advance of the students

For some participants is it advised that you fully prepare the interactive studio in advance of the participants arriving in the space. These preparations will include connecting to the far site, checking the audio levels, having the cameraperson be ready with the mobile camera, and removing any possible distractions from the studio. This will allow participants to enter into the space and begin class right away. Capturing the attention of participants (in particular children and young people with disabilities) right away can help to reduce the possibility of distraction or over stimulation. Other kinds of participants will need time to warm-up and "arrive" into the space before event. In this case, which is more common, revealing the process of connecting to the far site and various technical preparations of the space to the participants can help them tune into the environment and become more aware of the unique aspects of an interactive studio.

Reducing the switching of images by limiting the number of cameras in use.

Some of the ways participants can get over-stimulated and disoriented include: when the switching of video images becomes too frequent, when the participant is uncertain of which camera is being used to capture the image they see in the near monitor, or when the image they see in the near monitor does not connect with the movement/activity they are feeling in their body. These kinds of disorientation can easily be a part of events including improvisation. It may be less so in a technique class where a constant attention to the front of the studio is always in place. Dancers in particular may

refer to this by asking, "where is my front?" One of the ways you can reduce this disorientation is to choose to interact with only the mobile camera for a specific activity. An example of this would be to have an improvisational duet dance involving one dancer from each site. The dancers would respond to each other by seeing their partner's image on the far site monitor and by interacting directly with the camera-person. This way the dancer is in control of the video image being sent to the far site because they are interacting with only one camera. Focusing on the mobile camera, having students interact directly with the camera person and staying with one camera angle can help ground and anchor participants and reorient them to the far site studio. This in turn will also reduce the job of the Assistant Coach and give all of the participants a sense of the angle through which they are seeing the far site. This can also be done using the front camera.

Mixing participating and watching

Continual group participation with both sites can easily become overwhelming for participants and Coaches alike. Particularly if there are more than 6-8 participants at each location. Planning activities that mix participating and watching can help participants refocus their attention, reduce over-stimulation, and provide everyone an opportunity to learn kinesthetically and visually. Additionally, depending on the focus of the interactive event, one to one interaction with the far site can often be the most effective method of exchange. An example of this may include having two dancers perform a segment of choreography in unison with one dancer at each site. This gives the dancers an opportunity to connect directly with a partner at the far site and provides you with an opportunity to give specific feedback to each pair of dancers. The participants who are watching can be given an assignment to direct their attention in a particular way or notice something specific about the movement. An example of this may include asking the watchers to look at the two monitors (far and near) and see how the video images relate to one another. Can they see the two monitors as one image?

What to wear?

Believe it or not, what you wear greatly affects the quality of the video image and how well the body is seen at the far site. We recommend not wearing white, black, stripes, patterns, or baggy clothing because these distort and hide the contours of the body. This is true for all art forms, particularly dance. Colors in the middle tones of gray and tan, pastel or bright colors are recommended because they enhance the clarity of the body on video. We recommend you let your participants know ahead of time what to wear for the interactive class.

A different kind of participant

Participants in an interactive class have a new responsibility to speak up and make themselves known. They need to be willing to ask for what they need to see, in order to make an activity/movement or any kind of emotional exchange "work" better and be able to ask to see it again. Requesting a change in the camera angle for a better perspective is welcomed throughout the event. This kind of verbalizing is uncommon in most performing arts environments but is required in an interactive event. This is particularly true for participants who are not in the same location as the lead Coach. The camera people are the eyes for the participants, but sometimes the participants are not able to see the activity/movement clearly enough. For example if the participants are struggling to hear the Coach clearly, it is better that they ask for the volume to be turned up than to struggle hearing the Coach for an hour.