

The Buddy Visit — an Essential Lesson in a DCP Ballroom Residency



The Buddy Visit lesson is one of the most important and impactful classes in a Dancing Classrooms Philly Ballroom residency. This lesson occurs mid-way through each residency when a second DCP Teaching Artist (TA) visits as the “buddy” teacher for the day. “The Buddy lesson is an opportunity for the students to see the material they’ve been working on performed by professional dancers. It changes the game,” DCP Teaching Artist Ms. Rhonda explained.

A few lessons prior, students watch videos of these dances being performed by kids their age in each dance’s country of origin, which helps DCP students start to visualize how both partners work together. The Buddy lesson takes it one step further by allowing them to see the dances live and ask questions. As students have spent the past 11 classes learning and memorizing the moves, they’re ready to begin focusing on improving their technique.

On Monday, March 20th, the fifth graders at St. Pio Regional Catholic School in South Philadelphia were visited by “buddy teacher,” Ms. Sandra to demonstrate the six dances the students learn in the DCP Ballroom dance residency. As DCP has adopted gender-neutral circles in recent years, where students are paired randomly rather than by gender, watching two female-identifying teachers dancing together felt typical for the students. Rather than referring to the dancing pair as the “lady” and the “gentleman,” in gender-neutral circles, the dance partners are referred to as the “lefty” and the “righty.” As Ms. Rhonda noted, “The roles are entirely switchable. It doesn’t matter. It has nothing to do with gender.”

After introducing Ms. Sandra to the class, the two teachers jumped right into the first dance: the Merengue. After the two professionals elegantly demonstrated their moves, the students shared how the pair of professionals were in sync and made eye contact. The students were then asked

to perform the Merengue again, and Ms. Rhonda took the time to ensure they incorporated what they had just learned into their dancing.

After finetuning their Merengue skills, Ms. Sandra and Ms. Rhonda moved on to the next dance, the Foxtrot. Having Ms. Sandra was especially helpful since she described the movements differently than Ms. Rhonda. She provided imagery that another teacher taught her, which she found helpful. "Pretend your feet are like wheels on a car. If you want to go straight, your wheels — your feet — have to stay straight," Sandra explained. This comparison helped the students understand how to correct their footwork.

Next, the TAs performed the Rumba. Ms. Rhonda saw an opportunity to break down the flow of the steps and give the students the "Cuban movement" (as Ms. Rhonda put it) they were missing. Watching the pair of professionals helped make it easier for the students to grasp the Rumba's fluid motion.

The TAs showed off the final three dances: the Tango, the Swing, and the Waltz. The latter, the students had not yet learned, and seeing it performed by professionals made it easy to see the end result that they'll be striving for. With the Tango, Ms. Rhonda saw an opportunity for Ms. Sandra to help demonstrate the poses to help the students look just as sharp. They also pointed out how you couldn't hear their feet, compared to the students stomping during the dance.

One student in the class, Rylan, shared that he learned a lot in this class. "This class helps us understand because they're showing us all the movement and it's just fun. Everybody likes it," Rylan said. "[The Teaching Artists] help us as much as they can." Ms. Sandra shared that this lesson engages students because it's "a chance for them to show off a little bit and take pride in what they're doing."

After the Buddy lesson, the students have eight more classes to refine their performance before their Culminating Event, where their school community and families will watch them perform. Not only will St. Pio's fifth graders perform for their immediate community, but also for the public at our End of Year Student Celebration and our Colors of the Rainbow Team Match, both on Sunday, May 21st.