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Autonomy of the Student: Maintaining Ballet's  
Relevance as an Art Form Through Pedagogy

Daniel Cho

Special Major in Dance and Education

Advised by Elaine Brenneman

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## **Abstract**

In response to the negative critique that denounces ballet as an irrelevant art form, I was interested in analyzing alternative methods of teaching classical ballet. Comprised of a brief history of classical ballet, a literature review of writings within the fields of modern educational theory and dance pedagogy, and interviews of students and teachers, my inquiry argues that the autonomy of the student needs to be maintained within the classroom for classical ballet to maintain its relevance through pedagogy.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The topic of classical ballet today is subject to a myriad of negative criticism. Art critics and dance historians bring up a multitude of issues with ballet, such as how it “buttresses a sense of white Euro-privilege by dramatizing how colorfully nasty things are elsewhere” (Segal, 2) or how its strict codified choreography perpetuates “violent undertones...with its sadomasochistic pattern: man manipulates powerless woman” (Daly, 14). Beyond just the performative aspects of ballet, the methods of pedagogy have received more attention and harsher censure. A vast majority of the critique lies with the thought of ballet being taught with a overly strict, demanding teacher ordering acquiescent children to perform mundane exercises repeatedly. The common trope of ballet teachers whacking students’ legs and feet with canes leads scholars to question: “We don’t want to subsidize the abuse of animals...isn’t it time we extended the policy to the dedicated young men and women at the barre?” (Segal, 3).

Amidst all this criticism, I wanted to look specifically upon how ballet can be taught to maintain its relevance as an art form. As an aspiring professional ballet dancer myself, I disagree strongly with critique that emphasizes the irrelevance of ballet as an art form in society today. For me, ballet is a living, changing performing art form that speaks about what is happening in the world while maintaining a rich classical tradition. From the lens of a Dance and Education major at Swarthmore College, I felt that to focus upon how ballet is relevant, it is essential to look upon how ballet is being taught in the first place. Analyzing alternative methods of ballet pedagogy that highlight the autonomy of

the student, I was interested in researching how ballet can be taught so as to implement change in negative perceptions of ballet today.

My primary means of research came from scholarly literature and interviews. My sources included books about the history of ballet, a combination of educational theories, current journal articles on alternative teaching methods of ballet, and articles analyzing the lived physical experiences of ballet. I felt that in order to comment upon how ballet can maintain its relevance, it was essential to at least understand where ballet came from and how the art form has fluctuated over time. I then wanted to survey a wide array of current literature in the fields of dance pedagogy and modern educational theory to see what scholars and theorists thought about alternative methods of ballet pedagogy. As a physical and embodied art form, I wanted to be sure to include literature that acknowledged that the lived experience of ballet was an essential aspect to how ballet feels relevant to people in their own physical experiences with the art form. I was interested discover how students and teachers felt about the negative critique that surrounds ballet today in the context of their own personal experiences within the ballet classroom.

For the interviews, I interviewed 3 students and 3 teachers from different summer dance intensives. I auditioned for and chose the two programs (Point Park Conservatory in Pittsburgh, PA and Ballet X in Philadelphia, PA) based upon the diversity in teaching styles of the faculty members. I prepared the interview questions for both the students and the teachers, and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board to legally conduct interviews. Because ballet ultimately is a very personal, performing art form, I felt it was important to include real voices and perspectives within the process to

supplement the ideas within the scholarly research. As active practitioners of ballet, what was it they enjoyed about ballet that inspired them to pursue something so strict and codified?

I was interested to look at how the autonomy of the student could be a crucial factor as an alternative means to teach ballet. It was evident from looking at the history of classical ballet that ballet slowly transformed from a religious, aristocratic symbol to an art form that facilitated the expression of different perspectives. Looking at the interviews and the literature, two clear themes emerged—the first theme emphasized ballet being a lived, physical experience for both students and teachers, and the second theme proved the significance of a sound student-teacher relationship. Both of these themes ultimately highlighted the importance of the student being the primary agent in his/her own learning. Looking at the history of classical ballet and how this classical art form gave way for unique, individual voices to emerge, I argue the pedagogical methods of ballet need to parallel the historical democratization of ballet to allow for the agency of the ballet student. In order to implement change towards how ballet is negatively perceived in society today, an emphasis is needed upon the autonomy of the student within the field of ballet pedagogy to maintain the relevance of this art form.

## Chapter 2

### **History of Ballet: A Gradual Process of Democratization**

For the purposes of this inquiry, I will be presenting a brief consolidated summary of the history of classical ballet. In order to analyze and comment upon ballet pedagogy, it is essential to have a basic and fundamental understanding of where the art form originated and how history has shaped and spread it throughout the years. By observing trends and analyzing changes in the history of ballet, we can gain a fuller understanding of how to maintain ballet's relevance in the context of today. The focus of this section will look at the timeline of ballet from the past to the present, emphasizing how the art form has responded to changing sociocultural conditions in varying times. From this summary, one can gain a solid understanding of the origins of ballet to comment upon how to look into alternative pedagogical methods of ballet.

The first significant evidence of ballet's pedagogical origins can be found around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Académie de Poésie et de Musique in France was established. The academy served as the first real school of ballet, in which a formalized institution actively brought in teachers and students. Yet the way ballet was perceived then differs greatly from how we understand ballet to be today. The founders of this academy saw in ballet a “chance to take man's troublesome passions and physical desires and direct them towards a transcendent love of God...man might break some of these earthly ties and raise himself up, closer to the angels” (Homans, 2010, p. 6). Ballet held a religious importance to these early practitioners, and this belief was furthered under the reign of Louis XIV. As the first royal figure to spur the growth of ballet, his interest in ballet “was a matter of state...he made it integral to life at court, a symbol and requirement of

aristocratic identity...under his auspices the rules and conventions governing the art of classical ballet were born” (Homans 2010, p. 12). He was certainly interested in ballet as a performing art form, writing and rehearsing in multiple ballets, establishing the Royal Academy of Dance in 1661 to train aspiring ballet dancers, and codifying the basic steps and positions that are still taught today (Clarke/Crisp, 1973, p. 30). Yet to Louis XIV, ballet was an integral performing art to the functioning of an aristocratic court, as well as an aesthetic, cultural entity that defined the noble lifestyle. Themes of aristocracy still remain implicit within the movement vocabulary, a primary example being the elegant and noble posture commonly associated with classical ballet. It almost can be considered common knowledge that ballet was first originally performed to kings within royal courts.

The next major occurrence that happened within the history of classical ballet was the Romantic Movement near the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which the image of the ethereal, feminine ballerina that we understand today was created by Marie Taglioni. Europe during this time was shaken with the French revolution, the Napoleonic wars and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. These tumultuous times, however, led to great advances within the development of ballet as a highly respected performing art form. The great spur of intellectual ideas present within these changing times led to artists and choreographers expanding their imaginations to create ballets in the more fantastical realm (Clarke/Crisp, p. 64, 1973). It was in this specific setting in which Marie Taglioni famously premiered in the ballet *La Sylphide*. The ballet focused upon a young crofter James, who falls in love with a sylph who lures him into the forest. Taglioni was famous



for being the first ballerina to dance en pointe upon the tips of her toes to convey the image of a light and airy sylph. When she danced,

She appeared ephemeral and light, as if she had left the dross of the world behind. Yet in order to produce this spiritual or supernatural effect, she did not defy gravity or own physicality: on the contrary, to stand on toe is to send the body weight down into the ground with ever-greater force... a weighted weightlessness and muscular spirituality that made Taglioni both earthly and elsewhere at the same time (Homan, 2010, 156).

Marie Taglioni's dancing presented a paradox—while her dancing conveyed a sense of floating and airy elegance, it was her extreme strength and musculature that allowed her to perform such feats. It was a testament to her dedication to ballet as well as her strength that she was able to dance with all her weight upon the tips of her toes and make it appear completely effortless. She is still remembered today as the “first of the Romantic ballerinas...her image is for us the essential picture of the Romantic dancer...none could match her lightness and poetic delicacy or the modest grace which she brought to every role” (Clarke/Crisp, 1973, 66). Taglioni effectively set the precedent for the Romantic movement within the ballet canon, inspiring the image of the feminine and ethereal ballerina that we are familiar with today. We see here an instance of how classical ballet begins to mold and shape to represent emerging ideals within society.

Beyond just inspiring a new image for the female dancer as a graceful ballerina, Taglioni also emerged as a social figure who reinforced the ideal qualities of the French bourgeois woman of the time. Around the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, men and women had separate and established social spheres that they were to follow; Men were expected to undertake

issues in the realm of business and government, while women were resigned to be motherly caretakers who worked primarily within the household. Marie Taglioni's established fame as a ballerina intersected with her role in the social sphere so that people sought to emulate her modest and virtuous ways. To her admirers, she appeared "to be an ideal bourgeois woman. She was hailed for her simple and gracious demeanor...she was an exemplary woman and devoted mother...her house was meticulously kept and modestly furnished" (Homans, 2010, 161). Even within the public sphere, it was apparent that Taglioni not only personified womanly grace through her dancing but also through her daily lifestyle. Yet the women of this period admired Taglioni with conflicting feelings of envy and jealousy—to them, she lived the life that they all wished to lead. Taglioni was able to live a "public, independent, and fully expressed life that nonetheless seemed to uphold the tenets of feminine decency and grace" (Homans, 2010, 162). While women of this period were forced to stifle their emotions to upkeep the image of modesty and grace, Taglioni was able to express emotions through performances as a famous ballerina while still being viewed as the ultimate paragon of the French bourgeois woman in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Russia's great history with ballet started when Peter the Great came to power and instigated a nationwide Westernization to convert Russian society into the image of their European neighbors. He ambitiously planned and built the new capital of St. Petersburg, as he was focused upon "not only to shift the country's center of gravity away from Moscow and 'open a window' into the West; it was to radically re-create Russian society in a European image—to make Russians into Europeans" (Homans, 2010, 246). As ballet began to be adopted as part of Russia's culture, however, these two cities responded to

the art form in very contrasting ways. Ironically enough, “St. Petersburg’s preeminence as capital of the country meant that the ballet there...was more classically pure than in Moscow, which was the ancient capital of Russia” (Clarke/Crisp, 1973, 95). Within this desire for a ballet aesthetic reminiscent of the aristocratic courts of France, Marius Petipa emerged as the father of the Imperial Russian Ballet movement. His choreography remains relevant today in the famous classics that are still performed worldwide, including *Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, and *The Nutcracker*. However, his success was attributed to not only his deep understanding of the Romantic, French ballet aesthetic but to his ability to adapt that in a completely different context within Imperial Russia. His choreography effectively “transported to the fleeting Romanticism of wiles and spirits to a far grander and more formal Russian idiom...by expanding the entire choreographic structure...the steps were French, but the arrangement echoed the vast architectural proportions of the hermitage and the Peterhof gardens and recalled court balls” (Homans, 2010, 269). As a Frenchman who had been invited to St. Petersburg, Petipa effectively preserved the essence of the ballet present in the French Romantic movement and was able to adapt it to Russia’s bold, imperial culture by creating classical ballets that portrayed vast storylines with intricate choreography. Ballet here was adapted to reflect the grandness of the Russian culture, while still remaining true to its French roots.

Yet by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, revolution and war had brought Russia to the brink of collapse and classical ballet was at the serious risk of being lost; with the arrival of Sergei Diaghilev, however, classical ballet was once more brought to the forefront of European culture. As a “wealthy connoisseur of the arts who had become dissatisfied with the ossification of ballet in Russia,” Diaghilev took steps to change ballet to

maintain its relevance within a worldwide arts movement towards modernism (Coward, 1970, 28). No longer were the great classics of Imperial Russia the only works of ballet, dancers and choreographers now began to question the austere rules that were for so long unchallenged within the classical ballet canon. For instance, Diaghilev presented the works of Michel Fokine, a choreographer who set the precedent for a generation of ballet works in a modernist time. Fokine was frustrated with what he saw as outdated conventions in ballet, questioning why “did ballet dancers stand with such unnaturally straight backs and ridiculously turned out feet? And the corps de ballet...since when did crowds of peasants line up and dance in perfect synchrony?” (Homans, 2010, 293). To him, the rules of classical ballet within performances had become contrived and fake past the point of relatability.

In complete contrast to how classical ballet was portrayed from the beginnings of Louis XIV’s reign, Fokine initiated the modernization of ballet. Fokine was interested instead in “dramatic strength and credibility...he believed the dance must be exactly coordinated with the music...the dance, the music and the décor must be all specially created to go together, so as to unite in expressing some dramatic idea” (Coward, 1970, 29). He went on to create ballets such as *Petrouchka* and *The Firebird*, which are still performed today, that emphasized the idea of using more natural and pedestrian movement to convey a clear narrative. Though now the idea seems somewhat rational, it is hard to convey just how radical of a thought this was at the time. The fact that someone was starting to question conventions within classical ballet was a revolution in and of itself. Fokine was one of many members of Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes; a touring ballet company that instigated the ballet modernism movement. This company effectively

“gathered up the energy and vitality of Russian ballet and returned classical dance to the forefront of European culture...although the company had its greatest successes in the French capital...the inspiration and source of Diaghliev’s new ballet always came from Russia” (Homans, 2010, 291). Though the company only lasted for a duration of about twenty years, it was the company’s strong roots within the Russian Imperial ballet tradition that allowed it to gain such renown and fame within the European continent.

When ballet began to spread to Europe and America, both nations took the art form and developed it to create their own distinctive styles. It was finally in the mid-twentieth century in which the British were able to do this; Frederick Ashton, an emerging choreographer, created an aesthetic to ballet that still remains synonymous to what English ballet is thought of today. His upbringing had much to do with the works he created, as he “lived between two worlds: the constant rounds of parties and indulgences were offset by the discipline and rigor of his daily morning ballet class and the rule-driven ethic of Russian ballet...he had grown up on the edge: of the middle class...moreover, for all his captivating charm and giddy social life, Ashton was also very much a loner” (Homans, 2010, 417). His constant negotiation between these two social spheres is evident in his choreography that is frequently described as “a romantic approach to classicism:” movement that remains lyrical, lush and emotional while requiring a strong grounding within the classical ballet technique (Coward, 1970, 53). His works, such as *La Fille Mal Gardée* and *Romeo and Juliet*, remain within the repertory of world-class ballet companies today and are famous for maintaining a distinctive British wit and style within the choreography.

Britain's shining star who is still viewed today as the most profound interpreter of Ashton's ballet was Margot Fonteyn, who was the reigning ballerina of the 20th century. Beyond her demure, beautiful movement quality and her flawless embodiment of classical ballet technique, she acted as a source of national pride for the English during the Second World War. Fonteyn "danced for the troop and the people...even as the bombs fell hourly over the area. Like the queen, Fonteyn never flinched or fled the capital city" (Homans, 2010, 423). In times of hardship and war, Fonteyn's dancing served not only aesthetic purposes but as a source of morale and hope for the troops and for the British people. She took ballet and democratized it, utilizing this formerly aristocratic art as a source of inspiration for people of all backgrounds and classes. Her simple, clean execution of ballet technique "removed the jewelry from the Russian aristocratic tradition: entirely without pretense, she had made herself a dancer of the people" (Homans, 2010, 429). It was through the efforts of Fonteyn and Ashton that classical ballet assumed a distinctively English flavor and aesthetic.

Ballet was long regarded in America as a foreign art. With classical ballet's origins in kings, courts, and the aristocracy, it made little sense for ballet to thrive in a nation founded upon ideals of democracy and limited centralized power. Yet ballet found its way to America through the Russians who immigrated to the country in the early twentieth century: "dozens of Russians...toured America in various Ballet Russes spin-off troupes...when they were too old or too tired to perform, many of these dancers opened schools...they fanned out and set down roots in cities and towns across the country" (Homans, 2010, 451). Though the Russians laid down the foundation for ballet to emerge in America, it was not until after the second world war when ballet suddenly assumed a

very American identity. Funding to the performing arts increased after the economy experienced a post-war boom from World War II and the Cold War, and the national presence within performing arts contributed greatly to Americans taking ballet as their own.

This movement was very much dependent upon the efforts of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. George Balanchine created an aesthetic based upon the teachings of the Russian classical school which he grew up with, except he stretched the classical rules to make “the American body become leaner, faster, longer-legged, more brilliant in physical cut and thrust...intensely musical, Balanchine makes ballets that...are music made flesh, visible and beautiful” (Clarke/Crisp, 1973, 193). His ballets are still performed by esteemed ballet companies all over the world, such as *Serenade* or *The Four Temperaments*. Jerome Robbins’s early training was dependent upon “The Jewish tradition of vaudeville and Broadway...and the narrower but deeper tradition of Russian ballet” (Homans, 2010, 487). His career was a constant negotiation between creating dances on Broadway and for a ballet company, and much of his choreography shows frequent overlap between these two seemingly contrasting styles. A particular example is his *West Side Story Suite*, which is a ballet comprised of the original choreography of *West Side Story* on Broadway. These two artists radically converted classical ballet into the context of twentieth century America, laying the foundation for ballet to continually grow and change as an art form today within America.

Within this overarching history, we see a movement from classical ballet’s roots as an ethereal and aristocratic art form towards a more democratic entity. Starting with the strict codification of the ballet technique under the rule of Louis XIV, ballet managed

to preserve its classical tradition while at the same time serving as a means for different nations (Russia, America, England) and cultures to express unique and individual perspectives. This gravitation towards the democratization of ballet within this history, however, is incredibly relevant in the importance of centralizing the student's experience in the teaching of ballet. If we wish to maintain the relevance of classical ballet as an art form, the democratization of the art form needs to be carried into the learning processes of ballet. It is not enough to dictatorially teach students the rules of classical ballet; rather, students need to be given the tools to express themselves and their individual selves within the classroom. The same approach in allowing for unique voices to emerge from the spreading of this rich, classical tradition should be adopted to allow students to be autonomous beings within the classroom. For specific methods and approaches, we can look at the data presented from the literature review and the interviews to observe real examples to allow students to take ownership in their experiences learning classical ballet.



## **Chapter 3**

### **A Literature Review: How Educational and Dance Pedagogy Theorists**

#### **View the Autonomy of the Student**

Through analyzing different sources of literature, I argue that learning in the classroom is most effective when certain teaching strategies are adopted to allow the student agency in learning ballet. Commonly attributed as an art form where students are to passively follow the instructions of the teacher, I am interested to see how students can be active, engaged participants within their own learning of a codified and difficult art form such as ballet. This literature review is comprised of journal articles from fields of both dance pedagogy and modern educational theory, and I hope to establish connections between the two fields to comment upon how students can maintain their individual selves throughout their learning.

Through surveying present literature on ballet pedagogy, the idea of autonomy within the classroom context still remains relevant to both ballet educators and students. For instance, the concept of “supportive communication” as described by Galeet BenZion enables ballet teachers to positively critique their students as a means to embrace their confidence through learning. The stereotype of ballet being taught as a strict and mechanical art form with harsh, critical teachers ordering their students still holds true in many classrooms today. While ballet is indisputably a very specific, demanding art form that takes extreme commitment to perfect, BenZion argues that there is a way to encourage students to work hard while still maintaining their emotional wellbeing. With

the use of supportive communication, the approach is “comprised of implicit and explicit messages that teachers send their students both during and away from studio practice” (BenZion, 2012, 5). The approach emphasizes teachers being aware of the messages they are sending to their students, whether they be direct, explicit messages or subtle and implicit.

Supportive communication is focused upon how to deliver constructive criticism to students. For instance, BenZion cites an example of a teacher who criticizes a student for her weight in front of her classmates, and then proceeds to harp on her inability to utilize her turnout. The student, who feels mortified and publicly humiliated, becomes distracted and distraught and is thus unable to perform at her best potential. Rather, if the teacher uses the approach of supportive communication and is aware of the implicit and explicit messages she sends to her student, the teacher could pull the student aside and privately discuss her diet or give her specific critiques in how to best implement her turnout (BenZion, 2012, 6). This approach proves much more productive; instead of crushing the student’s morale, the teacher is ultimately treating the student as a unique individual by acknowledging her feelings and emotions as a person. Supportive communication “empowers students both as performers and as individuals...it builds their self-awareness, confidence, and self-esteem” (BenZion, 2012, 5). The use of supportive communication allows students to embrace their individuality, allowing them to build upon teacher’s critique to inform future experiences and to eventually find success through the ultimate goal of performance.

The principle of supportive communication finds parallelism with ideas present in modern educational theory, specifically from the works of both John Dewey and Jerome

Bruner. Both of these authors are famous for contributing to the field of modern educational theory, particularly in their research in establishing progressive educational frameworks that emphasized effective learning. Dewey argues that the educator needs to also be sensitive to the needs and capacities of students as unique individuals. In his view, traditional education was focused merely upon the product of learning rather than focusing upon the important process of each student learning by his/her own means. Dewey characterizes old means of education as neglecting the “powers and purposes of those taught. It was assumed that a certain set of conditions was intrinsically desirable...the lack of mutual adaption made the process of teaching and learning accidental” (Dewey, 1997, 45). In his opinion, it is the teacher’s responsibility to pay attention to each individual’s needs and abilities in the context of learning. Similar to the views of BenZion, Dewey also advocates for the teacher to be aware of the needs of the students and to react to those needs. He argues for a mutual understanding between the teacher and each student as to what learning methods work best for each individual in order to maximize the learning within the classroom setting.

Bruner advocates the idea of the teacher being a consistent source of interaction in which the student utilizes as means of independent learning. Bruner is focused upon the teacher acting more as “a day-to-day working model with whom to interact...the teacher can become a part of the student’s internal dialogue...it involves a deep human need to respond to others and to operate jointly with them toward an objective” (Bruner, 1966, 125). The teacher should not act simply as a source of information; rather, the educator is a means in which the student can better understand and grasp the information. Bruner encourages the existence of a constant dialogue between the teacher and the student, in

which both are working collaboratively towards better understanding of a specific goal. With the teacher acting as a means of interactive conversation, the student is able to negotiate his/her opinions, questions, and ultimately further his/her understanding of the concept. The student is thus able to become an autonomous figure of learning through interaction with the educator. The same approach can be adopted to the idea of constructive criticism through supportive communication, in which a teacher is willing to actively interact with students to help them better understand principles taught within a ballet classroom.

Johnson argues that students need to be active agents of their own learning to successfully embody the principles of ballet within a dance university setting, an approach consistent with the tenets of both Dewey and Bruner's theories. Specifically within a context of dancers aspiring to specialize in more contemporary forms of dance, Johnson illustrates how these students quickly lose their enthusiasm for learning ballet. To them, ballet feels "aesthetically anachronistic and without creative resonance for their dancing selves" (Johnson, 2011, 96). The codified and strict art form to contemporary dancers feels incredibly stifling and in a way, boring. Dance majors who have no desire to dance the repertory present in classical ballet fail to find the relevance of taking ballet classes when they would rather dance more modern, stylized genres of dance. By having the students be "guided to be the agents of their own learning through exploration...in which students themselves are the authors of their creative movement choices," the dance educator will find that the students are more receptive and available to honing their ballet technique (Johnson, 2011, 98). Due to the strict, classical nature of ballet, it is easy for students to feel their creativity being suppressed. However, Johnson proposes that by

tapping into the students' sense of creativity and self-authorship while learning ballet, the student can embody and apply learned principles of ballet to his/her dance experience.

Johnson advocates taking basic principles of ballet and then encouraging students to embody them through their own creative means. The principle of port de bras, otherwise known as epaulment, deals with the utilization of arms in classical ballet. There are various arm positions that must be learned, and each arm position has a specific place within the ballet vocabulary. Johnson encourages teachers to use imagery within the classroom to stimulate students' creative senses, such as "cues to help students discover their own movement intent by encouraging them to explore the space surrounding them, a multidimensional canvas....epaulement can thus be understood as a movement idea, rather than a static position" (Johnson, 2011, 98). The use of arms then grows beyond codified positions--instead, students feel their outer extremities as a means of movement through space. This approach inspires students to explore how to use their arms to move the space around them, and still holds relevance to the principles of the ballet technique while providing important information for their experience with other dance genres as well. By stimulating students to creatively embody ballet ideas, Johnson argues for teachers to take innovative approaches to inspire their own students to become agents of their own learning. Teachers who pay attention to the needs of their students and recognize ways to keep them as active participants within the classroom can find their learning of a codified, strict art form to be highly successful and ultimately to inspire them for future experiences and performances as dancers.

Dewey builds upon Johnson's argument by focusing upon a student embodying agency within the classroom through the idea of meaningful experiences. Dewey's

philosophy views the process of teaching and learning through a series of experiences; the success of whether knowledge was passed on can be determined by how a student's reaction to a specific experience. An experience only proves useful if there is future application as a result from it. In the words of Dewey, he argues that a student gains insight from an experience if that "experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes....every experience is a moving force...it is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading" (Dewey, 1997, 38). We see here that the success of an experience from the perspective of the teacher can ultimately be judged by the initiative of the student to build upon that experience. Dewey proposes that it is a teacher's job to create experiences to inspire students to embrace autonomy in their own processes of learning. The goal then, as an educator, is to guide students through multiple experiences that cumulatively build upon each other. In turn, these experiences should constantly pique the students' interest, as well as motivate the student to be an active participant in his/her learning. Therefore, if a student feels a certain sense of ownership of the ballet principles through creative choices within the classroom, he or she is inspired to take initiative and be autonomous throughout the learning process.

Building upon this notion of motivational experiences, Bruner engages with the idea of autonomy within the classroom by encouraging educators to instill a sense of curiosity within students. Rather than just simply focusing on curiosity as a goal, he is focused upon how to take this curiosity and transform it into a clear initiative towards action. To channel this curiosity to more powerful actions requires a "transition from the passive, receptive, episodic form of curiosity to the sustained and active form...artificial

education can in fact be made less artificial by relating it to the more surfacy forms of curiosity...and then cultivating curiosity to the more subtle and active expression” (Bruner, 1966, 117). In Bruner’s opinion, it is not enough as an educator to remain content in merely cultivating a superficial sense of curiosity within the students. Rather, the curiosity should be created in a way that encourages the student to take what he/she has learned and apply it in future contexts. We see here the relevance between Bruner’s concept of curiosity with Johnson’s argument for dance students to take creative initiative with classical ballet principles; Bruner remains preoccupied with the incentive behind students in their ability to create their own meaningful experiences.

Amidst all this literature regarding ballet pedagogy, however, it is important to acknowledge that ballet is an embodied, physical art form. Therefore, to be able to comment upon discovering the agency of the student within the classroom, it is essential to analyze the physical, concrete experiences of students to understand their perspective as practitioners. Students find an inherent sense of agency through learning ballet, as the arduous learning of the difficult, codified art form brings them both physical and mental pleasure.

In response to the multitude of critiques that denounces classical ballet, Kolb et. al. all calls for a focus upon students’ lived physical experiences that defines why they find pleasure within ballet. Critiques of this art form range from topics such as ballet crushing the mental well-being of students to perpetuating a focus upon shallow aesthetics of beauty. There exists a paramount body of literature that criticizes each aspect of ballet, from the sacrificial use of the pointe shoe to the supposed objectification of women in the chauvinistic plots of the prince saving the damsel in distress. Most prominently, feminist

writers such as Ann Daly and Cynthia Novack propose that “the ideas expressed in ballet, elements of its practice...are degrading to women...forced to fit into stereotypical patriarchal roles...accept their oppression in a way wholly inconsistent with emancipatory objectives” (Kolb et. all, 2012, 108). Yet amidst all this critique, Kolb et. all argues that there is a serious dearth in the literature regarding the lived experiences of those who engage with ballet. These authors contend that “research on ballet has overlooked an essential feature...the notion of pleasure....a fundamental belief in the importance of listening to and acknowledging the voices of participants to illuminate the role of ballet in women dancers’ personal growth, development and other aspects of their lives” (Kolb et. all, 2012, 108). As a performing art, ultimately ballet depends upon a person to take the initiative to train his or her body to follow the rules that classical ballet demands. An emphasis upon the potential representational faults of ballet instead of upon a person’s own physical experience of ballet deprives people of their choice and their autonomy to engage with ballet. Rather, it is necessary to highlight what it is about ballet in their experiences that they derive pleasure from.

Students of ballet ultimately discover pleasurable experiences through ballet from the high physical demands that learning the technique requires. Ballet requires discipline, repetition, and a lot of concentration, which many immediately dismiss as negative attributes that deter them from taking a ballet class. Yet, almost paradoxically, these qualities of ballet are what appeal to students and solidify their commitment to perfecting their balletic technique. Within the study, Kolb et. all found that the reasons most frequently cited “for participating in ballet were the enjoyment of discipline and the challenge, sense of achievement and/or determination associated with the art form...these



were closely followed by the perceived harmony of mind and body” (Kolb et. all, 2012, 116). It was evident that from their findings, the people they interviewed enjoyed the difficulty and the challenge that ballet presented to them. By concentrating so intently upon disciplining themselves to learn more about this art form, students can embody a harmonic relationship between the mind and the body that ultimately contributes to an enjoyable experience. While some would argue that the difficulties that ballet presents are grounds for various critiques, ultimately students anticipate rising to the challenge of perfecting a seemingly impossible art form. Furthermore, students find ways to express themselves and their emotions through this supposedly restrictive, inhibited dance form. The strict codification of the technique instead “seems to usher in a form of expression which still allows the individual dancer a range of personally meaningful movement that is both physically and mentally satisfying...and the sense of a self-expressive identity channelled through ballet’s codified language” (Kolb et. all, 2012, 118). It would seem apparent that dancers would feel stifled and jaded with the meticulous specifics of ballet; however, ballet students begin to project their own feelings and emotions upon the movements to make them meaningful to their own individual character. Learning ballet involves diligent repetition of the same steps throughout each class; while that would deter some, these students find pleasure in performing these steps because the movement holds a personal significance to them. The embodied, physical experiences of students are crucial to the principle of autonomy within the ballet classroom. By acknowledging the choice to pursue ballet and the enjoyment of the experience of students, ultimately both key components of a student's way to maintain independence in the classroom, we can

gain a better understanding of why students choose to challenge themselves in the context of a ballet class.

In addition to calling for a focus upon embodied experiences in ballet, Aalten argues that ballet can be utilized as a means of empowerment for female figures. While ballet is certainly done by male students as well, a major body of critique focuses upon the objectification of women within the classical ballet canon. Ballet, Aalten argues, provides an outlet for females to utilize and understand their bodies that is not commonly accepted within the societal restraints of western culture. In “western culture...the body and femininity are closely related, but bodily control and physical strength are not considered feminine...it is obvious from the stories of the dancers that ballet offers women an opportunity to excel physically in ways that are comparable to sports” (Aalten, 2013, 272). Through ballet, women can find a means to challenge themselves and excel physically, qualities that could be deemed almost masculine, while still very much maintaining their femininity. By providing a means in which women can embrace their desire and ambition to perform athletic and physically exerting movements, they are ultimately autonomous figures with their choice to engage in ballet.

Furthermore, the attention to specifics within the ballet technique that many female students focus upon is a key element to how ballet is an empowering experience. Such a focus upon “technical prowess and virtuosity of the ballerina counteracts the stereotyped images of gender” (Aalten, 2013, 272). Everyone is familiar with the image of a ballerina, gliding across stage with her pointe shoes, making the movement look effortless. Yet the effortless quality that is apparent in ballet is a result of painstaking, scrupulous attention to the countless rules of the ballet technique. A dancer who can

execute a ballet step and make it look effortless demonstrates a strong physical understanding of the virtuosic technique. Thus, though at first glance balletic movement may not appear physically exerting, it is instead an outlet for female dancers to demonstrate their autonomy and independence and ultimately as a means of empowerment.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Interviews: Why Students and Teachers Choose to Pursue Classical Ballet**

To provide a personal perspective on the idea of autonomy within the ballet classroom, my research process involved interviewing various students and faculty members who actively engage with ballet. As evidenced in the literature review, it is not enough to study ballet as an academic, detached subject when discussing how to better methods of pedagogy. For active practitioners of ballet, the art form requires so much physically and mentally that it is essential to include these aspects within researching ballet pedagogy. Furthermore, as a performing art form, there lies so much information within how ballet allows for people to have pleasurable, emotional experiences that is also crucial to include. The opinions and statements offered by the interviewees echo certain themes within the literature review that may elucidate how ballet can be most effectively taught by teacher to students.

The three ballet students I interviewed were clear that they actively chose to pursue ballet because they found the experience pleasurable, despite the physical and mental challenges it presented. All three students were quick to acknowledge within the interviews just how difficult ballet was, and especially how strenuous it was physically and mentally. Beyond just the sheer difficulty of it, the students also pointed out that ballet was ultimately an endeavor towards something physically impossible. Each movement of the ballet vocabulary is dependent upon the idea of turnout; that is, that your legs are fully rotated from the hip with your knee and foot to turn outward away

from the center of your body. The ultimate ideal is that each move can be performed with 180 degrees turnout; however, having that mobility within the hips is almost nonexistent within human bodies. Therefore, ballet proves itself as a constant striving for perfection as practitioners strive to obtain said mobility within the hips, though it is physically near impossible. As one interviewee said about ballet, “it’s so mentally and physically challenging to do...physically because it is impossible” (Jess, personal communication, July 2014). Another student, Andrew, pointed out that that most challenging part of ballet for him was “the mental aspect...you’re always striving for perfection and you’ll never get there...it is more mentally than physically challenging” (personal communication, July 2014). Amidst the impossibility and the challenges of ballet however, the students were clear that for them it was a clear choice to pursue ballet. Jess expressed that “at the beginning you really don’t know how much work it is...at a certain point you have to realize that you really really want to do this” (personal communication, July 12th 2014). She was very explicit in saying that it was very much her choice to do ballet and confront the challenges that came with it. Objectively, it would seem strange that anyone would work so hard and voluntarily spend so much time to something that requires both extreme mental concentration and physical rigor. Yet no one is forcing her to do this to herself; for her, her realization that she wanted to pursue ballet demonstrates her autonomy in choice to become a professional ballet dancer. There is evidently a sense of pleasure and satisfaction that these students realize from pursuing ballet. There is a clear acknowledgement of the difficult nature of ballet, both physically and mentally, but her determination for the art form clearly surpasses the sacrifices it presents for her. Andrew at the end of his interview summarized his feelings by saying “ballet is so physically

exhausting and sometimes you hate it..but the payoff is so great because you see all your hard work and you think of how far you've come when you look at a video of yourself 2 years ago" (personal communication, July 12th 2014). For these two students, the constant striving for perfection is not a negative aspect of ballet; rather, it is what motivates them to push themselves and to be better. It is evident that as practitioners of ballet, they are agents in their own choice to pursue this difficult art form.

While they recognized their clear decisions to pursue ballet, the students also articulated that they desired an acknowledgement of their independent selves and a mutual respect from their ballet teachers. Because of the difficulty of the art form, it was evident that they desired teachers who could teach them the proper technique and also motivate them to perform their best. There seemed to be a mutual agreement among all three of the students that they preferred teachers who respected them as autonomous beings. Jess discussed how "all [she] really wants is a teacher who gives her time and effort and corrections...someone who notices that [she] is working hard" (personal communication, July 12, 2014). She was quick to denounce teachers who exhibited favoritism, or teachers who exhibited no passion or energy to teach students. Jess wants the teacher to reciprocate her hard work and effort by giving her corrections and helping her improve. Essentially, she expects a reciprocal relationship between her and the teacher, in which both are working hard towards the same goal. She discussed an example in which she had a teacher who completely ignored her hard work ethic to focus all her attention in giving corrections to her own daughter in class, who was lazy and simply benefited in the class by being the teacher's child.

Leah, the third student, presented an interesting issue when she discussed how she wanted her teachers to acknowledge how she was an independent figure in her negotiation with classical ballet. Leah was older than either Jess or Andrew, as she was preparing for her second year in an intensive undergraduate dance conservatory program. Because she is at an age where she has many years of training of classical ballet and will soon have to audition for companies, she discussed how she is at a point in which she needs to adapt ballet to her own body to find her individual voice as a performer and an artist if she wishes to get a job. She expressed frustrations with teachers who “don’t recognize my independence...as a more mature dancer I know my body, I know what I am doing and I have had experience” (personal communication, July 13th 2014). Leah said this in reference to teachers who treat their students as if they lack a deep understanding of classical ballet principles, despite their many years of training. An example she gave was a teacher who gave them a very basic, repetitive, and taxing pointe warmup for an advanced pointe class; she felt it was clear that such an exercise was unnecessary for students of that caliber. Both Jess and Leah express a desire for teachers to respect the students as autonomous beings. Jess emphasized a yearning for teachers to recognize her hard work, and Leah wanted teachers to acknowledge her maturity and independence. Ultimately, these students desire teachers who are actively invested in working with students in their effort to become better ballet dancers.

Just as the students highlighted how physically intense of an experience ballet is, interviews with three teachers revealed the importance of ballet teachers drawing from their past lived experiences as ballet students to be effective educators. As a performing art form, it is necessary to realize that ballet is an embodied and physical activity and the

incorporation of a teacher's own lived experiences is essential in being an active teacher.

Samantha, the first teacher, was explicit in her belief that

“a good dance teacher depends heavily on their own classes, their own training, and their performance career...it all comes from there...you can read a lot and there are a lot of books on the subject but at the end of the day you have to refer to what it felt like on your body and to translate that to your students” (personal communication, July 24th, 2014).

Samantha felt very strongly that it was impossible to be a great dance teacher without having been a dancer. No matter how many books one can read, the teacher has to know what it feels like to execute the technique in order to pass that information onto students.

This argument ties in once more to the idea that ballet cannot be studied from a theoretical, outsider's view; the active and lived physical experience is essential in understanding ballet pedagogy. The teaching of ballet, as opposed to being a clear-cut objective form, is instead a very personal one as it “comes from inside...passed on from teacher to student, and that is what is so beautiful about it” (Samantha, personal communication, July 24th, 2014). Almost reminiscent of their experiences of ballet students constantly striving to be better, these teachers are constantly learning on how to best translate to their students their own physical experiences of ballet. Joanna cited that “every year I try and learn to better myself...I try and learn from other teachers..I still took ballet class even after I retired” (personal communication, July 24th, 2014). There seemed to be a sense of humility with the teachers I interviewed, as they all acknowledged that their teaching constantly grows from every class they teach and that they were always looking for better ways to communicate with different types of



students. Just as their own students are constantly striving for a perfect ideal, these teachers look to find better methods to pass on what they have learned from their own lived experiences.

Samantha, Joanna, and Mark also emphasized the importance of maintaining an active relationship with students to engage them and to motivate them positively. Three of the faculty members cited their own negative experiences as students dealing with harsh or overly critical teachers to inform their own teaching practice. Samantha discusses her approach to work with the students: “I try to have a conversation with the student....we try lots of different things and sometimes it doesn’t work...and then we look at it from a different approach with multiple efforts” (personal communication, July 24th, 2014). Her teaching approach demonstrates an equal engagement from the efforts of both the student and the teacher. Rather than merely telling a student what to do, Samantha is focused on discovering what the student’s specific needs are and addressing them in different ways. She makes sure to include the student’s own voice in the process of learning. All the teachers said similar things in their interviews regarding working with students. Furthermore, there was a particular significance placed upon viewing ballet students as real human beings. Mark talked about how for him, “teachers are not only training dancers, we are training people...my teaching practice should inform dancers how to be a good person” (personal communication, July 28th, 2014). By treating their students as real people and acknowledging their emotions and feelings as human beings, teachers are motivating them in a positive way to be agentic influences in their own learning processes. In direct contrast to the stereotype of ballet being taught with overly strict teachers and meek, complacent children, these teachers highlighted their desire to

actively listen to the needs of the students and to respond to them in their teaching methods of ballet. Treating students as simply recipients of knowledge deprives the students of a sense of autonomy and creates an inhibitive environment for them to apply what is being taught. In the end, the teacher needs to recognize his/her role as someone who “is dealing with human bodies...[we] need to be aware and responsible for what they are doing” (Samantha, personal communication, July 24th, 2014).

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Importance of the Student's Autonomy within the Ballet**

#### **Classroom**

Ultimately, to maintain ballet's relevance as an art form, alternative methods of pedagogy in the classroom need to be implemented. From the information presented within the history, interviews and the literature review sections, various themes arise regarding effective means of teaching ballet. However, to understand the role that ballet plays in society and to make strides towards changing how we can teach ballet, it is essential to survey the history of where ballet came from originally.

Looking at the history of classical ballet, we see a general gravitation towards a democratization of the art form to allow various perspectives and voices to emerge over time. Starting with classical ballet serving a clear social and religious role under the reign of Louis XIV to the 20th century where ballet finds different voices through the cultures of America, Russia, and Britain, I argue that this same approach needs to be adopted in the pedagogical approach to ballet. The history of classical ballet seems to indicate that in order to continue to maintain the relevance of ballet as an art form, we need to encourage the ideas of agency and individuality to emerge within the context of the classroom for the benefit of the students. By taking ballet and its strict rules and rich history and allowing students to adapt it to their own needs as autonomous beings, we allow the learning of ballet to be an agentic process that encourages their involvement. And thus, by giving students their own sense of individuality and autonomy in learning ballet, we ultimately can maintain its relevance as an art form.

Looking cumulatively at the data presented from the literature review and the interviews, two major themes clearly emerged. The first theme that emerged was the idea of ballet being a lived, physical experience. Ballet's primary focus is attaining the unattainable; the entire art form is created based upon the impossibility of having perfect rotation and turnout within the hip. Within the interviews, the students were clear about just how strenuous and taxing ballet was on their bodies as well as their mental beings; in fact, some students argued it was much more of a mental challenge than a physical one. When faced with the question as to why they dedicated so much time to pursuing a seemingly impossible art form, it was clear that to them ballet was their passion that they actively chose to pursue. Within the literature review, authors argued for the importance of considering students finding pleasure within ballet through physical and lived experiences. By critiquing ballet as irrelevant simply by denouncing its representational issues of eating disorders, the objectification of women etc., the simple choice of students in their autonomy to engage with ballet is disregarded within the conversation. It was clear from the research data that students very much wanted to learn ballet and to improve their understanding of the technique to better themselves. The literature and the interviews presented instances that illustrated that through the incredible difficulty of the codified technique, students found great satisfaction in seeing their progress and improvement through hard work and determination. The immense physical demands also provided an outlet for students to express themselves on an emotional level. From the perspective of the student, many reasons arose explaining their passion for ballet that reinforced their autonomy and agency in their decisions to pursue this difficult endeavor.

As well as for the teachers, the idea of ballet being a lived experience was a very significant one. All the teachers collectively agreed that all their individual experiences being active ballet students and practitioners before turning to pedagogy effectively informed how they taught. Ballet is not something that can be read and learned simply from books; the teachers discussed how one needs to know firsthand how something feels on their own individual bodies before attempting to pass on that information to someone else. This again emphasizes the importance of considering the physical, lived experience of ballet when looking at how to encourage students to embrace autonomy within the classroom. Ballet retains its traditional roots as an art form that is communicated from teacher to student in a very personal manner, and a teacher highlighted that the passing on of an art form with a significant and rich history was very important to her. The importance of ballet being a lived experience proved just as important for the teachers as it did to students.

Another motif that arose constantly from the data presented within the interviews and the literature review was the importance of a sound student-teacher relationship. Within the literature, the concept of “supportive communication” encouraged teachers to give students constructive criticism in a way that encouraged their growth as an individual dancer. Rather than harshly critiquing the students, the approach of supportive communication focuses on teachers being aware of the explicit and implicit messages they send to their students in a way that encourages them to work hard. Another author highlighted the importance of allowing dance students to tap into their sense of creativity when learning ballet. As opposed to simply being told what to do, this approach pushes students to explore through their creative movement choices how to apply the learned

principles of ballet upon their own unique bodies. Especially within the context of contemporary dancers who could find a codified technique such as ballet to be somewhat stifling, by allowing them to maintain a sense of self-authorship while learning ballet they can feel a sense of autonomy within the classroom. Both of these perspectives suggest innovative and alternative ways for teachers to collaborate with students for them to become autonomous figures without sacrificing the rigor of classical ballet training.

Furthermore, to expand my understanding of what it meant to have a meaningful student-teacher relationship, I felt it was essential to tie in resources from modern educational theory to complement the dance related aspects of the research. Dewey and Bruner in their educational theories both suggest methods for teacher-student interaction to consider the individuality of the learner throughout the process. Dewey advocates for the idea of meaningful experiences, in which the educator guides the students through cumulative experiences that pique the student's interest and encourage the student to take initiative to be an active participant in the learning process. From the perspective of the teacher, he highlights the necessity to see each student has an unique way of learning and to incorporate this awareness to maximize the learning within the classroom setting (Dewey, 1997, 45). Bruner agrees with Dewey's concept of meaningful experiences by emphasizing the need to instill within students a sense of curiosity that gives them the incentive to create their own autonomous learning experiences. Furthermore, his argument that the teacher needs to be a consistent source of interaction with the student in a collaborative means aligns with Dewey's opinion of student-teacher relationships as well (Bruner, 1966, 125).

The common arguments that Dewey and Bruner present within their educational theories came up constantly within the data presented in the interviews, from both the voices of the students and the teachers. Students were clear that they not only wanted knowledgeable teachers who could advance their technique, but teachers who respected them as individuals as well. When asked about negative experiences with teachers, they were quick to denounce teachers who exhibited favoritism, or demonstrated no enthusiasm in teaching. It seemed apparent that because these students were so eager to work hard and improve, they felt they deserved teachers who reciprocate and acknowledge their individual, hardworking selves. The teachers cited instances where they expressed their desire to maintain an active relationship with students to motivate them in a positive manner. While they talked about working with individuals on their respective needs and pushing them to make creative choices, they also emphasized the importance of viewing the students as real human beings. Within the responses to the interviews, we see clear examples of an emphasis upon a significant teacher-student relationship backed by the literature. Both students and teachers exhibited a desire for there to be a collaborative relationship of respect where the educator worked on his/her individual needs. In addition to this collaborative relationship, however, the students clearly voiced that they wished to be treated as autonomous beings who were agents of their own learning processes. The results from both the interviews and the literature review strongly support the idea that autonomy of the student within the ballet classroom is an essential factor that needs to be included within ballet pedagogy to keep this art form relevant.

## Chapter 6

### Future Applications

Inquiries and research into the field of ballet pedagogy is a fairly recent development. Because ballet is primarily passed down orally, there is not a very comprehensive body of literature that is available to analyze. However, the field is definitely expanding as more and more scholars are interested in this subject, and for the purposes of my goal in finding alternative methods of ballet pedagogy I feel I have only touched upon the surface of such a dense topic. For further research, I would want to delve deeper into the history of classical ballet to focus upon ballet pedagogy. Looking at the different time periods in the different countries, I feel that looking specifically at the teaching methods and the history of how ballet was taught in different times and places can shed light on certain methods that could be effective today. I also believe this inquiry can reveal more information regarding how ballet reacts to different historical sociopolitical contexts.

In terms of my literature review, I would want to research more articles in the field of dance pedagogy, and to look at more varied approaches in how the student can be an autonomous figure within the classroom. It could be an interesting perspective to look at the different ballet aesthetics and interpretations of the technique that exist across the world, and to perhaps include a comparative analysis of the different teaching methods that accompany those different approaches. I would also want to interview a larger and more varied body of people. Instead of just students aspiring to be professionals, I would want to interview amateurs, people who have experience ballet but only on a recreational level, professional dancers who have years and years of experience, etc. to receive a



diversity in responses to how classical ballet maintains its relevance. I would also probably adjust my questions a bit, to be more specific in asking how the physical and mental rigor of classical ballet feels to interviewees as their own lived experience, and what aspects of the learning process really inspire them to keep pursuing classical ballet specifically.

The research compiled from the literature review and the interviews lends itself to certain pedagogical strategies that could be potentially adopted within the classroom to achieve the goal of making the student an autonomous figure in his/her learning. The structure of a ballet class is fairly standard in terms of starting with barre and ending with center, but certain approaches could be followed to find ways for the ballet student to be agentic. First and foremost, I would suggest that the teacher make the effort to know each and every single students' names, and to memorize them as quickly as possible. This would show that the teacher is keen to establish rapport with the students, and is taking the initiative to get to know the students as individuals. Perhaps before the first actual ballet class, the teacher could ask each student to fill out a form of sorts that asks for the students' background in ballet training as well as any goals they have for the class. Having this information before the classes begin is extremely beneficial in again, getting to know each student and their individual selves. As one of the teachers highlighted in the interview, it is ultimately the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that students do not injure themselves, and knowing how much exposure to ballet students have had before can be helpful in designing a curriculum that is challenging but also safe. Knowing the goals of each student in the class, if there are any overlaps or parallels that arise from multiple voices the curriculum could be designed to foster that specific

endeavor. For instance, if multiple students put down “increasing their range of turnout” as their goal for the class, an effort could be made to include an emphasis on how to properly utilize one’s turnout muscles, and how to utilize your maximum turnout potential without overexerting your physical capacity. This ensures that the students’ needs are incorporated into the curriculum of the ballet class.

A crucial strategy for ballet teachers would be to avoid favoritism. As supported by the students in the interviews who denounced the teachers who had favorites, students are ultimately discouraged to work hard or push themselves when they see the teacher is paying no attention to them. While it is certainly a possibility that there may be a diversity in levels in any classroom, it is important to equally address all of them and to make each of them feel they have something to contribute and to aspire to. The teacher should try to distribute as many corrections and comments towards as many of the students within the classroom as possible. Another important strategy that I would strongly recommend would be to ask the students questions. Ask the students questions that push them to inquire things about the classical ballet technique; this will in turn allow them to understand and internalize concepts more effectively. For instance, when demonstrating pliés at the barre, the teacher could ask a student what the correct muscles are to use when performing pliés. This gives the student a different way of learning, where he/she has to think and speak out loud, and also allows other students to maybe learn things they did not know before. Furthermore, the teacher asking the students questions lets them know that asking questions is okay, and could potentially encourage them to ask and inquire more frequently.

Allowing the students to teach parts of classes could be another effective teaching strategy. A clear example of the student being an agentic influence in their learning processes, giving the student the responsibility to come up with exercises and material for a class and to teach fellow students provides yet another opportunity for them to comprehend what they are learning in the classroom. Perhaps a class could be divided up between three students, with each student teaching a specific part of each class. The teacher also should assist the students if they require any help coming up with material or any questions in how to go about teaching.

Finally, having individual meetings with the students throughout the learning process could be a meaningful way to provide feedback and to also hear their thoughts. This again reinforces the idea that the teacher is willing to get to know everyone individually, and to provide each student with comments and critique. Having a one on one conversation with each student allows the teacher to perhaps say what could be improved, and also what the student is doing very well in a private setting. It also allows the student to be an active participant in this conversation, one can have a conversation with the teacher maybe about what the student is struggling with and how they can collaborate to assist the student.

This thesis was intended merely as an exploration into the topic of ballet pedagogy, in responses to the critique claiming ballet was ultimately irrelevant within today's day and age. To look at how ballet maintains its relevance as an art form, analyzing the pedagogical methods of how ballet is taught is a crucial factor in pushing against the critiques that denounce ballet as outdated. Looking at the history of classical ballet and how this elitist and grand art form slowly gave way for unique, individual

perspectives to emerge, I argue that the pedagogical methods of ballet need to parallel the historical democratization of ballet to allow the agency of the ballet student. Though the research presented in this inquiry suggests certain pedagogical methods regarding the autonomy of the student that could be helpful within the ballet classroom, further research could definitely be explored regarding the topic of alternative methods of ballet pedagogy. Through the data presented within the literature review and the interviews, it is clear that the idea of autonomy for the ballet student is a prevalent one that needs to be acknowledged if we wish to maintain the relevance of this historical art form. By incorporating the ideas of analyzing ballet as a pleasurable, lived experience and the teacher's role to motivate the student to find his/her individual voice within the learning process, ballet can be passed on as a relevant, moving art form for generations to come.

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