

# UC Irvine

## UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Progressive Ballet Pedagogy: Prioritizing Empowerment and Agency in University Dance Education

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/03w1z7qr>

### Author

Chapman, Emily

### Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
IRVINE

Progressive Ballet Pedagogy:  
Prioritizing Empowerment and Agency in University Dance Education

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in DANCE

by

Emily Chapman

Thesis Committee:  
Professor Jennifer Fisher, Chair  
Associate Professor Kelli Sharp  
Assistant Professor Vitor Luiz

2024



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract of the Thesis .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
The Need for Progressive Ballet Pedagogy in Higher Education.....	1
Chapter 1 .....	6
Examining the Past: Problems Arising from Authoritarian Methods .....	6
The History .....	6
Expectations without Explicit Communication .....	8
Alternatives: Deriving from Feminist and Democratic Pedagogy.....	10
Chapter 2.....	13
Perspectives from Ballet Teachers: Common Experiences, Unclear Solutions.....	13
Setting Expectations and Creating a Culture .....	13
Student Agency and Choice in the Classroom.....	17
Grading Ballet Technique: Subjectivity and Fairness.....	19
“The Real World” of Ballet.....	24
Chapter 3.....	27
Principles in Practice.....	27
Progressive Ballet Class Plan.....	30
The Student Perspective.....	37
Community .....	37
Humanity.....	39
Agency .....	39
The Teacher-Student Relationship .....	40
Student Perceptions of Grading Practices.....	43
Conclusion .....	47
Looking Forward .....	47
Bibliography .....	51

# Acknowledgments

Thank you to my MFA thesis chair, Dr. Jennifer Fisher, for your endless support and guidance throughout this process. Thank you for sharing your time, patience, and excellent depth of knowledge. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Kelli Sharp and Vitor Luiz for your continuous encouragement and support of this research.

Thank you to my family for encouraging me to continue my education, always being so supportive of my ambitions, and for reminding me not to procrastinate. I appreciate your visits, FaceTimes, and pictures of Maggie and Charlie.

Thank you to my cohort of Dance MFA students, Ari Pulido, daniel monroy, Julian Xiong, Maggie Liang, and Yinqi Wang, for bringing fun, light, and joy to this process. Your friendship and support has made graduate school the best experience.

Thank you to daniel monroy for always listening to my rants about ballet education, and reframing them as passionate speeches about an important topic. Thank you for cheering me on, and reminding me of my strength.

# Abstract of the Thesis

Progressive Ballet Pedagogy:

Prioritizing Empowerment and Agency in University Dance Education

by

Emily Chapman

Master of Fine Arts in Dance

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Professor Jennifer Fisher, Chair

Dance scholars have long critiqued the idealization of perfection and abusive nature of authoritarian teaching methods in ballet education. This thesis adds to the critiques of traditional pedagogy by Robin Lakes, and explores avenues to move beyond authoritarian models towards a more empowering and supportive approach to teaching ballet in higher education.

This research draws on feminist pedagogical principles and educational theories, such as Constructivist Learning Theory and Reflective Pedagogy, to apply progressive pedagogy to ballet technique. I studied the current literature on progressive pedagogy in dance to learn more about leaders in the field and methods already being employed, and interviews with ballet professors from various universities provided insights into current attitudes and practices in ballet education, including grading principles. Building on the progressive pedagogy of Gretchen Alterowitz, Katy Pyle, and Jessica Zeller, I developed a ballet class plan that emphasizes student-centered approaches and active learning tools tailored to ballet training.

To assess the impact of progressive pedagogy on the university ballet student experience, a workshop was conducted, which entailed a progressive ballet class followed by post-workshop

questionnaires and group discussions. Though this study was small and limited in its voluntary participation, the results were significant. The findings indicate that progressive pedagogical models can offer alternative experiences in ballet training, fostering community, personal agency, and student empowerment. Moreover, it suggests that grading systems in ballet education can evolve to become a more transparent process and more accurate assessments of students' knowledge.

Ultimately, this research advocates for ballet education that honors tradition while rejecting harmful practices, prioritizing student experiences, and embracing reflective pedagogy. It envisions a future where ballet education is inclusive and empowering for all.

# Introduction:

## The Need for Progressive Ballet Pedagogy in Higher Education

I began taking ballet classes at three years old. It was my parents' decision, but soon, visions of tutus and pointe shoes would entice me to keep going. Ballet class was the happiest time and the most joyous experience as a child, so I didn't suspect at the time that it could become a space of anxiety and self-doubt in the future. At an early age, I decided that ballet would be my life — it would sustain me, fulfill me, and inspire me. I vividly remember the performance that convinced me that I could not live without ballet.

I was seventeen years old and performing in my dance studio's production of *As the Piano Rolls*, a ballet choreographed by my teacher Carol Guidry to the music of George Gershwin. The ballet was not your average affair of pink tights and tulle, but an homage to the flappers of the 1920s. The ballet highlights four characters: "The Two Sisters," "The Show-off" and "The Wallflower." I danced the role of "The Wallflower," a character very similar to myself. She was often quiet, or shy, daydreaming about fantasies she never thought she could turn into reality. The character discovers her power over the course of the ballet, just as I did in dancing the role. I remember standing on stage in the blackout at the end of my pas de deux with "The Showoff," listening to the audience burst into applause. I felt chills going down my spine as I stood firmly in what I would now call home. In this moment, I realized that I had a voice, and that the audience listened to my story. I felt the power that I had as a performer, and relished how different this feeling was to my everyday life. This moment was magic, and it made me fall in love with ballet all over again.



I didn't know then that ballet would also consume me— it would take from, discourage, and reject me. In the years of dancing that followed this magic moment, I would feel like I wasn't enough. I would hear from one professor that if I auditioned for a ballet company, they would expect me to be thinner. I would hear that my performance wasn't good enough minutes after I left the stage. I would be told that my body did not fit in with the ballet mold. I would be silenced, infantilized, and ignored. But I keep coming back to ballet for that one moment of magic where I transform into someone more powerful than myself.

As a student and teacher of ballet, I am increasingly aware of the “ongoing idealization of the ‘perfect,’ which is linked to whiteness, thinness, purity, and cleanliness” in ballet education.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, ballet pedagogies have relied on authoritarian models to teach the technique. This entails a plethora of strategies that can make a dancer feel like they are not enough. From humiliation and infantilization, to criticism of a student's body or appearance, to physical abuse, the dance world has normalized and praised this behavior in the past.<sup>2</sup> The authoritarian model was seen as a means to an end that could not be reached in any other way, but according to dance scholar Robin Lakes, the messaging behind this type of teaching can “create fear, anxiety, stress, or lack of affect in dancers, which does not foster an environment where deep learning can take place”(16).

As authors that argue for progressive ballet pedagogies have established, there is perfectionism encoded in the ways that ballet is taught, from the vocabulary used to the spatial organization of the classroom. This can lead students into what Carol Dweck refers to as a fixed

---

<sup>1</sup> Kate Mattingly, Keesha Beckford, Zena Bibler, Paige Cunningham, Iyun Ashani Harrison & Jehbreal Muhammad Jackson (2023) “Ballet Pedagogy and a ‘Hard Re-Set’: Perspectives on Equitable and Inclusive Teaching Practices,” *Dance Chronicle*, 46:1, 40-65, DOI: 10.1080/01472526.2022.2156747

<sup>2</sup> Lakes, Robin. 2005. “The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 106, no. 5: 3-18.

mindset,<sup>3</sup> damaging their belief that improvement is possible and crushing potential opportunities for growth. So why do educators continue to perpetuate these unattainable standards in the ways that the craft is taught? My research questions became: How can ballet move past models of tradition to create a more inclusive and supportive world of ballet education? What can be done to center the student experience in ballet? And how can ballet education empower students rather than tear them down?

This research will explore practical ways to apply progressive educational models to ballet technique. I will use several educational theories to steer this research, guided by a commitment to the principles of feminist pedagogy: reformation of teacher/student relationship, empowerment, building community, privileging voice, respecting diversity of personal experience, and challenging traditional pedagogy.<sup>4</sup> I will explore ways that *Constructivist Learning Theory* can be integrated into a ballet class, which proposes that learning is an active process in which students create their own meaning based on past knowledge and present experiences.<sup>5</sup> I will also practice incorporating John Dewey's principles of *Reflective Pedagogy* to the structure of a ballet class, which scholar Chelsea Weidmann refers to as "the structured cognitive process designed to aid the student as he or she creates meaning from an experience."<sup>6</sup> The culmination of this research was a ballet class plan with a focus on the principles of feminist pedagogy, and outlines of active learning tools tailored specifically to a ballet class.

---

<sup>3</sup> Dweck, Carol S, 2016. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* / Carol S. Dweck, Ph. D. Updated edition. New York: Ballantine Books

<sup>4</sup> Webb, L., M. Allen, and K. Walker. 2002. "Feminist pedagogy: Identifying basic principles." *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 6(1):67–72.

<sup>5</sup> Narayan, R., Rodriguez, C., Araujo, J., Shaqlaih, A., & Moss, G. (2013). Constructivism—Constructivist learning theory. In B. J. Irby, G. Brown, R. Lara-Alecio, & S. Jackson (Eds.), *The handbook of educational theories* (pp. 169–183). IAP Information Age Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Weidmann. (2018). A New Dialogue in Ballet Pedagogy: Improving Learner Self-Sufficiency Through Reflective Methodology. *Journal of Dance Education*, 18(2), 55–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2017.1346798>

The shift to progressive pedagogy prioritizes the experience of the individual by creating student-centered approaches to teaching. In order to understand the effect of progressive pedagogy on the university ballet student experience, I held a free ballet workshop, repeated three times, with serious ballet students from the University of California, Irvine. This workshop was used to collect information about how dancers experience different models of teaching. I began by asking the participants to complete a pre-workshop questionnaire that reported their past experiences with ballet education. Then, I taught the three ballet classes using the principles and theories established in my research of the current literature on progressive pedagogy. I held group discussions immediately following the classes, exploring thoughts, feelings, and initial reactions to different elements of the classes. After the three sessions, a post-workshop questionnaire was distributed to gather overall impressions, attitudes, and opinions about the dancers' experience in the classes.

Ballet students in universities are subjected to the additional pressure of receiving a grade for their work in a dance technique class, but how can an art form be accurately assessed by a numerical value system? Ballet in higher education will continue to evolve and change with time, but how much can it change within the structure of a university? I investigated this topic further through interviews with ballet professors at several universities across the country, exploring attitudes and opinions about how ballet is taught in their field. Educators have made progress in recognizing the authoritarian tendencies of the craft, and university settings have pushed for more diversity, equity, and inclusion in ballet, but there is still work to be done.

I suggest that it is possible to create a space for ballet in higher education that empowers students to become the best version of themselves, and also offers rigorous technical challenges. My goal was to acknowledge and honor the traditions of ballet without perpetuating the harmful

aspects often found in traditional ballet training. I began my research with the goal of finding out whether pedagogy models can offer different experiences in ballet training. I found that progressive pedagogy models from the field of education can be applied to ballet teaching, creating more access points to ballet technique, specifying appropriate vocabulary, and opening the form to a more critical examination. I also discovered that the systems of evaluation used to grade ballet students can adjust to become a more accurate assessment of students' knowledge and act as a tool that encourages students to take agency over their own education. My goal is to move toward ballet education for everybody, prioritizing student experiences and committing to a reflective pedagogical approach.

# Chapter 1

## Examining the Past: Problems Arising from Authoritarian Methods

A large, open space with barres along the walls and imposing mirrors, is filled with people in tights and leotards, evenly spaced and well organized to be able to see the teacher at the front of the room. There are dancers listening attentively to one teacher disseminating information, encouragement, judgements, and critique, nodding along as they absorb the language being thrown at them from the front of the room. The dancers keep a distance from the teacher, unless the teacher approaches them to give a personal correction, and they don't speak unless they are spoken to. There is a sense of trepidation and fear in the dancers, scared that they might be the one to get the combination wrong, the one to fall behind, to not be good enough, though some may simply describe it as a respect for their teacher. The dancers move around the space as they are directed to do so, their gazes often getting trapped in the mirror, closely analyzing their reflections. There are highs and lows around the room, with each individual dancer experiencing the same class through different bodies. There are gendered dance steps, dress codes, and rules about when the dancers can drink water or take a rest. At the end, the dancers line up to bow to their teacher and express their gratitude for the opportunity to dance. These are the images that are conjured up in my mind when I ask myself “what does a ballet class look like?”

### The History

Much of what is described above are surviving elements from the origins of ballet technique in the courts of Louis XIV. The ideas of performance, perfection, and hierarchy persist in what Sue Stinson would refer to as *traditional* ways of teaching ballet. In her essay, “Journey

Toward a Feminist Pedagogy for Dance,” she catalogues the elements of *traditional* pedagogy, including the one-way flow of information from teacher to students, which teaches dancers to “reproduce what they receive, not to critique or create.”<sup>7</sup> The use of fear and competition as a motivating tactic are also elements present in the authoritarian class and readily accepted by students as constructive. Stinson also points to the culture of silent obedience in ballet education, focusing on how traditional pedagogy reinforces the ideal of a “silent obedient woman.” She sums up the learning experience of ballet training as “learning how to follow directions and how to follow them well. The model for traditional dance pedagogy seems to be the authoritarian father.”<sup>7</sup> Essentially, this way of teaching takes any decision-making power from the dancers, and enforces a strict hierarchal power dynamic in which teachers have complete authority over students.

In her seminal essay outlining the history of this method in Western concert dance, dance scholar Robin Lakes aligns with Stinson in asserting that *traditional* ballet training does not involve learning how to make decisions for oneself, rather, obedience to a teacher or master is valued over speaking out with an individual perspective.<sup>8</sup> Lakes points to the presence of these values by citing several examples of from the ballet and modern dance worlds, highlighting the willingness of dancers to accept abusive behavior from their choreographers or directors. She explains that for dancers in this environment, “it is an honor to be attacked. The student learns to love the attention, even if it is negative attention. The perceived gift to the student of the ‘master’ teacher’s brilliance justifies the teacher’s behavior.”<sup>8</sup> This type of environment lacks the

---

<sup>7</sup> Stinson, Susan W. (1993) “Journey toward a feminist pedagogy for dance, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*” 6:1, 131-146, DOI: 10.1080/07407709308571170

<sup>8</sup> Lakes, Robin. 2005. “The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 106, no. 5: 3-18.

opportunity for students to hold agency over their dancing bodies. This lack of agency can also present itself in the way that dancers think about their own success in dance. Instead of coming to their own conclusions about their dancing, many students will accept or believe what they hear from their teachers to be true. Mattingly et. al found that “students deny their own sensations, questions, and concerns in order to fulfill a teacher’s vision or ideal” in this authoritarian model.<sup>9</sup> This pattern creates an almost guru-like worship of teachers, granting them the power to control what students believe.<sup>10</sup> The authoritarian model does not seem to support the growth of individual artists, rather the reproduction of one ideal.

## Expectations without Explicit Communication

Many authors and dance scholars have discussed the forms of insult or abuse that authoritarian teaching styles can lead to in pursuit of “correct” ballet technique. These include the highly visible, or easily recognizable traces of verbal and physical abuse. In my experience in higher education, much of this highly visible abuse has disappeared, or at least may be actively discouraged by administration. However, traces of the authoritarian roots of ballet may still appear in more subtle ways, especially as it relates to the idea of perfection. “Hidden curriculum,” a term coined by pedagogue Phillip W. Jackson in his book, *Life in Classrooms*, refers to the unwritten or unspoken values learned by students outside of the formal curriculum of lesson plans and content covered. “Hidden curriculum” in ballet can house a rubric for perfection, internalized by students, and unacknowledged by professors. Lakes recognizes that “the effects of the ‘hidden’ curricular agendas in authoritarian classrooms and rehearsal rooms

---

<sup>9</sup> Kate Mattingly, Keesha Beckford, Zena Bibler, Paige Cunningham, Iyun Ashani Harrison & Jehbreal Muhammad Jackson (2023) “Ballet Pedagogy and a ‘Hard Re-Set’: Perspectives on Equitable and Inclusive Teaching Practices,” *Dance Chronicle*, 46:1, 40-65, DOI: 10.1080/01472526.2022.2156747

<sup>10</sup> Lakes, Robin. 2005. “The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 106, no. 5: 3-18.

are great,” and they “have the potential to create fear, anxiety, stress, or lack of affect in dancers, which does not foster an environment where deep learning can take place.”<sup>11</sup> The silent demand for perfection shows up in several areas of ballet in higher education, most often in the language of teaching and the grading of ballet technique courses.

Small details in the way that educators and institutions speak about ballet can have a large effect on how students perceive themselves. For example, the language of dress codes for ballet can communicate a bias toward whiteness in asking students to put their hair into a “neat and secure bun.” Mattingly et al point out that “when teachers use this language, we cannot help but notice how dancers with curly or textured hair can only succeed through masking these attributes.”<sup>12</sup> This bias continues with dress codes that require all dancers to wear pink tights, rather than allow for tights that match a dancer’s skin tone. Another common example of language that idealizes a certain version of perfection is the use of the word “corrections.” This term, used in place of “feedback” or “suggestions,” connotes one way of performing ballet that is inherently “correct.” If a dancer receives a “correction,” it implies that the student is incorrect, or that there is something wrong with what they are doing. The dichotomy of right and wrong being used in this scenario creates a dangerous scale of measurement for dancers. When authoritarian power dynamics exist in a ballet class, anything the teacher says becomes fact. The words that a teacher uses convey a message, even if it is not consciously intended, thus hidden curriculums begin to emerge.

---

<sup>11</sup> Lakes, Robin. 2005. “The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 106, no. 5: 3-18.

<sup>12</sup> Kate Mattingly, Keesha Beckford, Zena Bibler, Paige Cunningham, Iyun Ashani Harrison & Jehbreal Muhammad Jackson (2023) “Ballet Pedagogy and a ‘Hard Re-Set’: Perspectives on Equitable and Inclusive Teaching Practices,” *Dance Chronicle*, 46:1, 40-65, DOI: 10.1080/01472526.2022.2156747



Hidden demands for perfection show up again in the way that ballet classes are often graded in university settings. When it comes to measuring success in ballet, university programs rely on the pre-existing system of standardized grades to mark progress. The issue is that this system was established to assess skills in more objective areas of study; there is a correct answer to a math problem, and if you mix two chemicals together, they will have a specific reaction. With ballet in university settings, an art form is being subjected to quantitative measurement of success, which can become problematic. It is difficult to fairly assess artistry with a numerical value, and bias can slip in even when technical grading rubrics are utilized. The teacher ultimately decides how to break down the elements of technique, how much weight to give each category, and how to judge a student's level of understanding. All of these subjective decisions are informed by the past experiences of the instructor, what they value in dance, and their idea of success. In my examination of grading policies in multiple university ballet courses, the criteria that professors use to grade their students is not clearly communicated, or stated in vague language leading students to make their own assumptions about how they are graded. This could exacerbate the ongoing issue of perfectionism among ballet dancers, pushing them to strive for a grade of 100% in an attempt to present themselves as flawless.

## Alternatives: Deriving from Feminist and Democratic Pedagogy

Progressive scholars have critiqued the way ballet has traditionally been taught, with its handing down of authoritarian methods, attitudes, and language. Much of a ballet class is organized the way it is with the idea of teaching a complex technique efficiently, but is there another way? Katy Pyle, dancer, choreographer, and creator of Ballez, answers this question with barres set up in a triangle or circle, multiple teachers leading class, ungendered partnering, and

queer reimaginings of classical ballet works.<sup>13</sup> Scholar and professor of dance at UNC at Charlotte, Gretchen Alterowitz, answers this question by engaging in critical discussion of the validity of balletic values as dancers move through class. She brings an element of critical thinking to the students' practice that encourages them to think deeper about the values that ballet upholds. Alterowitz also engages students in peer-to-peer assessment, collaborative in-class work and emphasizes personal discovery through dance.<sup>14</sup> For Sue Stinson, the answer lies in encouraging students to make their own discoveries, craft their own knowledge, and share it with their peers. Her evolving pedagogy places great importance on creating relationships through dance as a way to disrupt the isolating structures of ballet training, and enhance performance quality by embracing the idea of "dancing together."<sup>15</sup> These educators utilize a number of feminist and democratic pedagogical models to envision a different way of teaching ballet.

When these educational theories are applied to dance, Jessica Zeller suggests that progressive pedagogies can "champion each student's holistic development, consider their goals and aptitudes, and fit ballet's ideals to each student's reality" (99). These goals align with a student-centered approach to learning that directly opposes the authoritarian model of ballet. In my research, I approached ballet pedagogy through three lenses: feminist pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and reflective teaching. Feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks to transform systems of education to reflect a more equitable process, focusing on theories of

---

<sup>13</sup> Alterowitz, Gretchen. 2021. 'Feminist Practices in Ballet: Katy Pyle and Ballez', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, ed. Kathrina Farrugia-Kriel and Jill Nunes Jensen.

<sup>14</sup> Alterowitz, Gretchen. (2014). *Toward a Feminist Ballet Pedagogy: Teaching Strategies for Ballet Technique Classes in the Twenty-First Century*. *Journal of Dance Education*, 14(1), 8–17.

<sup>15</sup> Stinson, Susan W. (1993) "Journey toward a feminist pedagogy for dance, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*" 6:1, 131-146, DOI: 10.1080/07407709308571170

empowerment, community, and leadership;<sup>16</sup> constructivist learning theory posits that students actively create knowledge and meaning from their personal experiences;<sup>17</sup> reflective teaching outlines a pattern of thinking that is meant to aid students in the process of understanding. In a later chapter, I will demonstrate how these principles can be directly applied to ballet technique.

---

<sup>16</sup> Shrewsbury, Carolyn M. “What Is Feminist Pedagogy?” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 3/4, 1987, pp.6 14. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003432>. Accessed 17 Apr. 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Narayan, R., Rodriguez, C., Araujo, J., Shaqlaih, A., & Moss, G. (2013). Constructivism—Constructivist learning theory. In B. J. Irby, G. Brown, R. Lara-Alecio, & S. Jackson (Eds.), *The handbook of educational theories* (pp. 169–183). IAP Information Age Publishing.

## Chapter 2

### Perspectives from Ballet Teachers: Common Experiences, Unclear Solutions

In my last year as a graduate student, I had the unique opportunity to co-teach a ballet class for dance majors. This was a chance for me to develop my pedagogical practice, investigate new methods of teaching, and discover what I can contribute as a young dance educator. I set out to counter the authoritarian modes that persist in ballet, but it was easier said than done. In my observations, three main challenges rose to the surface: cultivating mutual respect, honoring student agency, and investigating grading practices. *How could I create a respectful classroom culture without resorting to intimidation tactics? How could I honor individualism in a ballet technique class? And how could I assign a letter grade to a subjective art form?* These questions remain as I continue with my journey as an educator, and I was curious to know if others in the field had the same questions, or had perhaps found the answers. In this chapter I incorporate discoveries from my own teaching, refer back to the literature, and highlight comments from ballet professors across the country, to report on the current state of pedagogy in the field of ballet in higher education. In my research, I conducted interviews with seven ballet professors from dance programs around the United States, and I came away with some helpful insights, some common grievances, and many more questions.

#### Setting Expectations and Creating a Culture

In August, I had big plans for radical shifts toward progressive pedagogy that I could implement in my teaching. I wanted to incorporate moments of improvisation, play with covering the mirrors, rearrange barre facings, create opportunities for collaboration, and

humanize the practice of ballet to start. With lofty goals in mind, I met with the students for the first time in September. They were mostly first-year dance majors, just entering into their college experience, so we embarked on this journey together, with the natural trepidation that comes with the unknown of a new environment. Within the first quarter, one of my main goals was to welcome this group of students into the university and foster a sense of community in our class. I wanted the ballet class to feel like a place where connection with peers was encouraged, where students had the freedom and comfortability to bring their true selves to class, and where their voices would be heard, and honored as valid sources of information.

As a graduate student teacher, fairly close to the age of the students that I teach, I felt that it might be difficult to gain respect as the leader of the class. I wondered if I needed to establish my authority in order to manage the students, which would be contrary to building a relationship of mutual respect. I worried that the students to take advantage of my kind demeanor, or my lack of experience compared to their other professors, but this was not the case. I found that as I stepped into this new role, the learned behavior of silent obedience that is embedded in ballet culture was persistent. As Ramón Flowers, Associate Professor of Dance at Butler University, put it in our interview, “they're all afraid to you know, to breathe, to live, to dance, to be.” These are the lasting effects of a practice built around authoritarian models, and they shape the way that dancers evolve in their practice. As Lakes suggests, this environment of fear is not conducive to deep learning.<sup>18</sup> Maggie Wright Tesch, Professor (Lecturer) at the University of Utah, wants to ensure that her students “feel like they can talk, like they can answer questions, they can use their voice: their literal voice, not just their physical.” To her, it was important to establish that

---

<sup>18</sup> Lakes, Robin. 2005. “The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 106, no. 5: 3-18.

information does not flow in only one direction, but is an exchange between students and teacher.

For my pedagogical practice, I had to find a way to let the students know that I value what they bring to the class. Their individual experiences and opinions would be valued here, and I needed to encourage them to share and become a part of the information exchange. I did this by embracing a few go-to tools. First, we began incorporating “check-ins” at the beginning of class. A familiar model to many in the progressive pedagogy community, this entails bringing everyone into a circle and answering a short prompt one at a time. These are some of the prompts that I used in these “check ins”:

*1. Share your name, your pronouns if you would like to, and what year you are in*

This prompt offered the students a way to start feeling comfortable using their voices without pushing them too far outside their zone of knowledge.

*2. Give one word or sound to describe how you are feeling right now*

This prompt now asks the students to share more about what they are experiencing. They have an opportunity to be vulnerable with their peers in this instance, and I am able to assess the energy level of the students before I proceed with class.

*3. Share one thing that you are proud of in ballet class?*

This prompt always catches the students off guard. This is the most challenging of the questions, as it asks the students to view their work in a positive light and share their self-praise with their peers.

Another way that I develop this reciprocal exchange of knowledge in the classroom is by asking students questions. This may seem like a common practice in other areas of study, but for ballet technique, Melonie Murray, Director of the School of Dance at the University of Utah,

suggests that “encouraging them [students] to speak up is also empowering, especially if they're coming in from a culture of sort of that learned silence.” In asking them questions that task them with critically analyzing the technique, I am requesting that they engage with ballet technique on an intellectual level. For example, if the students are struggling with a balance in arabesque, I might ask them “What can you think about to help in this balance? What tools do you have?” I know what could help them, and I could tell them what to do, but I prefer to take a constructivist approach to improving this balance. Students will create their own knowledge and meaning from their experience. Gretchen Alterowitz takes a similar approach. She makes sure to “validate ‘the many different.’ I don't ever just source information from one person. If I'm asking a question, I give a lot of different people an opportunity to respond to the question and then I try to synthesize some different ideas from those. Or I'll ask how they're approaching something.”

However, in my experience, students are not always eager to answer the questions right away. If the question is met with silence, I will ask the students to turn to a neighbor to discuss. Following the “think, pair, share” collaborative learning strategy, they will connect with their peers, share experiences and exchange information. I will then ask if anyone would like to share their knowledge with the class, so that we can learn from each other, valuing the student voice as another source of instruction.

The last method that I employ in my ballet classes, as a statement of appreciation for what the students bring to class, is a more communal approach to *r ev erence*, inspired in part by Katy Pyle’s approach to facilitating peer to peer interaction in class. As opposed to the traditions of bowing to the musician in the room and to the teacher of the class, I offer this alternative: first, rather than bow, I ask the students to give a “gesture of gratitude” to the intended person. The word “bow” can imply a power dynamic that relates back to monarchical structures, when what

we are actually performing is an expression of gratitude. Second, I will ask students to give a gesture of gratitude to our pianist, then turn to someone else in the room and give them a gesture of gratitude for bringing their energy to class today. We will repeat this four times, acknowledging the contributions of everyone in the room, not just the musician and teacher.

## Student Agency and Choice in the Classroom

As I continued to find ways to empower students in their ballet practice, I wanted to ensure that they felt comfortable taking ownership of their own learning path. In a university setting, we are not only preparing students for performance, but for many possible careers in the future. One may assume that “oh, you're in here, you want to be a performer? Well, not necessarily. You might want to be a teacher. You might want to be an administrator. You might want to be a historian, a scholar,” said Wright Tesch as we discussed student learning outcomes. Each person comes into the space with a different perspective, and a different end goal, so how can I approach the task of leading all of the students to their individual end goals? Zeller sees this as her main responsibility as a teacher. She is the facilitator of student learning, asking them to bring their own intentions to the course. She describes this process as “them [the students] telling me what they want to learn, what they want to do with it, how they want to get there, and I help.” This learner-centered method of education places trust in the students, honors their individual goals and interests, and encourages students to make choices about their own education.

On a daily basis, choice can be incorporated into the ballet class as a practice in artistic decision making and personal agency. Melonie Murray, who has served as the Ballet Program Head and as Director of Graduate Studies for the Ballet Program at the University of Utah, suggests that this can be “as simple as the dress code.” Allowing students freedoms in the way that they dress can be an opportunity for incorporating choice. Murray continued listing options:



“It can be creating improvisational moments in ballet class. It can be letting people choose which grand allegro combination we want to do today.” Rebecca Herrin, lecturer at the University of Oklahoma, offers students the opportunity to choose their “end or entry. You have option one, option two, or option three. Do you want the arms here? Do you want them here?” She offers these choices as a way to “give them some opportunity to decide on how to level up where they are,” learning in the process how to make choices that will result in their progress in ballet.

In my classes, I began to incorporate similar methods, offering small opportunities to exercise agency. In one of the first classes I taught with this group of students, I asked them to improvise with their port de bras for the first four counts of their rond de jambe exercise at the barre. The purpose of this task was to feel some freedom and flow in their upper body while maintaining strength and stability in the lower body. At first, the students were hesitant to stray too far from ballet vocabulary, opting for simple and familiar arm movements, but with time, they took bigger risks, committed to their choices, and brought a new level of artistry to their classwork. I continued to encourage choice by asking students to “add a challenge” to their balances, which might include a change in the focus of the eyes, a change in arm position, or the addition of an upper body improvisation. Similar to Rebecca Herrin, I also give students the option to place arms where they would like in some exercises, or add relevé where they would like to. I will sometimes ask them if they would like to add a coda including traveling turns to the end of class or a longer cool down with some additional stretches. Honoring and celebrating their choices with positive praise became an important element of empowering students to embrace their agency and take ownership of their work.

## Grading Ballet Technique: Subjectivity and Fairness

My last area of focus drew out the richest conversation among the professors I interviewed: grades. As a researcher, I tried to enter into this discussion without revealing any bias, asking the interviewees if they had any opinions on grading ballet in university settings: “Yeah, that's been a thorn in my side since I started teaching in academia,” responded Flowers. “I hate grading. I hate it. I hate it so much,” commented Herrin. Alterowitz responded “Oh, my God, this is the worst! I don't enjoy grades. I don't enjoy the process of grading. I don't enjoy that.” Dr. Murray added that she doesn't “like grades at all, I don't like it, I wish we didn't have to do it. That's my feeling about it.” This negative sentiment toward grading was consistent across every interview I conducted, which suggests a widespread issue that not many are addressing. Out of all my interviews, not one person praised grades as being conducive to a productive learning journey, and while some could defend their grading strategies, many admit that it is not a perfect system. Bias can inevitably seep into the process when a teacher is grading a subjective art form, so what can be considered fair and how can teachers improve the system of assessment that troubles them? How should I move forward with my own teaching?

One suggested solution to the issues present in grading is the idea of a rubric. A rubric is not just a list of elements that are assessed. It should include an indication of how these elements are assessed, along with a breakdown of how each element factors into the final percentage. For example, to say that a final exam is worth 70% of the final grade without any further explanation is not enough. Instead, breaking down the final exam into smaller categories, each with their own detailed description and outlined expectations would suffice. This would help to bring transparency and accuracy to the process of grading. In using a detailed rubric, students are aware of what they are being graded on, so there is less of a chance for miscommunication or

grades without justification. “I love the idea of the rubric,” says Wright Tesch, “and having that as a backbone to your grading, something concrete.” She noted that in her time teaching in the university setting, she has gone from assigning grades based on what she “felt” was the grade a student deserves, to a clear points system that takes into account steps of study, artistry, fundamentals and what she described as more than just classroom etiquette in the traditional sense, but “how do you treat your classmates? How do you treat your teacher? Are you a good citizen? Do you take care of your health?” The grading rubric is useful in providing specific feedback, but is often only revealed at the end of the semester or quarter.

Dr. Melonie Murray, who follows the same ballet rubric as Maggie Wright Tesch at the University of Utah,<sup>19</sup> stresses the importance of “making sure that there's constant feedback and input, so they are kind of aware of where they stand.” This gives students the opportunity to apply new information, and improve elements of their dancing before their final grades are recorded. It can open up a dialogue that improves the learning experience. Similarly, Rebecca Herrin gives “three-pronged feedback,” meeting with students to discuss their progress in the areas of behavior, artistry, and technique to make sure that they understand how they are doing in the class. This feedback loop helps to prevent students from wondering why they received the grade they did, offering transparent assessment of their dancing and participation in the class, something often missing from ballet programs.

The rubric solution has many positive attributes, but it can also be criticized. Some rubrics hold everyone in the class to the same impossible standard, and everyone is judged based on the same criteria regardless of their personal experience or end goal. Ramón Flowers highlights the fact that students enter a class with different levels of knowledge in the subject, so meeting the

---

<sup>19</sup> This rubric is published on the University of Utah School of Dance website, with the most updated version being from Fall 2022. <https://www.dance.utah.edu/ballet-bfa-technique-grading-rubric>

standards set by a rubric will “be easy for certain students to meet and very difficult for others.” He explained that setting one standard when grading ballet technique for all students will place some students at a disadvantage, particularly if the rubric requires a physical facility not everyone has. Perhaps a student does not have a large range of motion in their hip, so they have a smaller degree of turnout to work with, or maybe one dancer has a larger curve in the low back, so their “pulled up” posture looks different from the standard ballet “look.” These dancers could be penalized in a rubric-based grading system. Another con to the rubric solution is that it is still a subjective grading model. Ultimately, teachers, human beings, must decide if a student’s adagio work has earned them two or three points for example. Maggie Wright Tesch even notes that they “try to keep it as objective as possible, but I don't film every class, and I don't notate every turn that's missed.” In the end, it the grade a student receives in this system could be dependent on how the teacher saw them in class, what the teacher remembers them for, or their physical facility, whether their limbs, alignment, or “look” please the instructor.

“But what does it really mean to have a grade,” asks Gretchen Alterowitz, “does it actually mean you have the content knowledge? Does the grade at all align with the knowledge that you have?” Grading based on physical ability to execute the steps of ballet with precision and excellence may be giving some learners an advantage over others. Ballet is a difficult and complicated technique, and change or improvement does not happen at the same pace for everyone. When a teacher does not see immediate result or application of feedback, does this mean that a student is not learning? A student could be trying their best, understanding the concept from an intellectual view, and not quite demonstrating the concept in their movement yet. For Tong Wang, Associate Professor of Dance at the University of California, Irvine, grading is heavily influenced by the amount of effort a student puts into the work. He states that “if they

work their best, I will grade them higher. Yeah, it's not about your ability. It's about you. Are you working? Are you trying?" In this approach, the focus of the ballet class is not to achieve perfect technique, but to strive for improvement and personal growth. Murray echoes this sentiment in the desire to "reframe education as it's not about...whatever that quantitative letter or number is, it's about learning improving," but how is this measured? How much improvement must be made to deserve an "A" grade? When the emphasis on a grade at the end of the semester or quarter is diminished, and the focus shifts more to facilitating the successful learning journey of a student, the necessity of grades comes into question. Are they really helpful to students?

When students are receiving feedback in the studio from their teachers in addition to a letter grade, Jessica Zeller has observed a disconnect. She notes that the students are "getting assessed twice. It's the stuff that they hear in the studio, it's the feedback that they get, and then it's some random letter grade that has absolutely nothing to do with what they have processed in their bodies, or dealt with emotionally that semester." Zeller has become so disenchanted with grades, that she is a firm supporter and champion of the "Ungrading movement," which allows students full control over what grade they get. Expressing her frustrations with the current system, she acknowledges that "it doesn't make any sense, and we make it make sense because that's our job. But I've become very tired of lying," feeling as though she is deceiving her students in the act of grading them. Allowing students to assess their own work gives them complete agency over their grade, giving them the opportunity to earn the grade they think they deserve, but in Zeller's class, they must express through an essay what they learned and why they deserve the grade that they give themselves. This requires personal reflection and critical thinking from the students and includes them in the grading process in a way they don't normally encounter. Zeller even conveys to her students that "if they want an A because they need a good GPA, take the A, but

then tell me what you learned.” She trusts the students to decide what is best for their academic career, giving them a level of responsibility that they don’t usually have in a university course.

The Ungrading approach may be an enticing solution for many teachers, but it is not always a viable option within the university setting. Dr. Melonie Murray has come across this issue, expressing that she is “a big fan of the Ungrading movement... of course we can't do that because the university makes us give grades.” There have been other critiques of the Ungrading system, particularly in the ballet world, where students are already hypercritical of themselves. Rebecca Herrin worries about students being harder on themselves than a professor might be. “I feel like the expectation of that [students grading themselves] is to be overly harsh...if you are someone who's not innately like the bold person on the sidewalk that is going to make others move for you,” you may not feel confident enough to give yourself an A, even if that is the grade that you think you deserve. “That's not me, I would sidestep, you know. And that comes into how you're going to interact with this information, right?” This is where the Ungrading system could support the perfectionist mindset, already a problem in ballet, with self-criticism playing a huge role in the confidence of the dancer, and ultimately affecting their grade in the class.

At the moment, it seems there is no one model of grading that all teachers can agree on. There is a downside to each grading method, and so they remain open to individual biases. As a teacher who is new to the practice of grading students in ballet technique, it is difficult to find a way of grading that I feel I could defend to my students, and this feels extremely problematic. In my experience with a co-teaching model, where my grades are averaged with others who also teach the course, I am not solely responsible. But without a transparent or clearly defined system of feedback, it still feels problematic.

In the grading system at my university, all course instructors evaluate students during a final exam class, in which all of the ballet faculty, even those who did not teach this level in this quarter, observe the dancers. As listed in the syllabus for the course, this final exam class is worth 70% of the final grade. In this system, as it is currently outlined in writing, a student could show up to the final exam and demonstrate model student behaviors like showing up early, staying focused and engaged, participating by asking or answering questions, when for the past ten weeks they have been showing up to classes late with a lack of respect for their peers or instructors. In this practice, we are not measuring what the student learned in that quarter, their participation as an active member of the class, or the progress they made, only the end product of their work. In conversations with my fellow co-teachers, I have learned that they all take into consideration a student's work throughout the whole quarter, but this is not outlined in the written communication to students, so the dancers are still unaware of how they are being graded.

There are a few flaws in this system that leave students guessing as to why they received the grade they did. When grades are released, there is no practice in place for communicating constructive feedback or reasoning behind the letter grade. Students simply receive their final letter grade, and while the ballet faculty and I are happy to meet with students to talk about grades, feedback, and ways of improving, few students take up the offer. It is intimidating for students to question their teachers, especially in the field of ballet which already has a history of abusing the power dynamic between student and teacher.

## “The Real World” of Ballet

One argument that has been common with revising authoritarian methods in ballet teaching is that progressive methods may not prepare students for the “real world.” Ballet has a

long lineage of “survival of the fittest” mentalities and “some technique classes and rehearsals have as a partial purpose to toughen up the dancer. They become a rite of passage, a trial by fire, to see if the dancer fits in. If the dancer can survive this, he or she can survive the dance world,” explains Lakes in her seminal essay. In our interview, Ramón Flowers noted that “often students graduate, and then they come back saying, ‘Well, you didn't prepare us for that,’ or ‘how come you never...’ you know. And it's like what do you say? I would have gotten fired if I did.”

Flowers is referring to the much harsher realities of dance as a commercial endeavor, in which authoritarian behavior is often more easily accepted or even celebrated as rigorous training.

Autobiographies of many prominent dancers, like Gelsey Kirkland's famed memoir *Dancing on my Grave*, show how the “real world” of ballet companies and conservatories can be a cold and harsh environment. One Professor that I interviewed recalled recently being called into a major ballet company to stage a work and feeling as though they “couldn't go to the faculty lounge after about 2 weeks because of how they [the company faculty] speak about the dancers in private.” The professor recalled the ballet company faculty saying things like “‘My God, she's obviously ate too much this weekend. Can you believe so and so?’ And I'm like, what? Wait! You can't say that right?!” The disconnect between ballet companies in the “real world” of ballet and dance in higher education is apparent, so I question how professors could prepare students for the “real world” without subjecting them to cruelties.

My working hypothesis is that rather than training dancers how to accept abuse or cope with harsh criticisms, I could teach them skills of resilience and instill a positive self-worth. Rather than preparing students through authoritarian pedagogy that mimics conditions in the “real world,” I believe that progressive pedagogy could be a much more effective strategy. If I could help my students build their self-esteem enough to know their value when others try to break



them down, then they could be successful without letting the opinions of others affect them.

Helping students find empowerment through progressive ballet training will build their resilience and prepare them for the “real world.”

## Chapter 3

### Principles in Practice

Having gathered new information from my readings and interviews, I set out to put these principles into practice in a three-day workshop where I could ask for immediate feedback from the students present. I had heard from scholars and professors, but wanted to hear more input from the students of ballet. How do they experience a ballet class that follows progressive and feminist models? This may be the type of class that I want to teach, but is it the type of class they want to take? Though I already implement this style of teaching in the classes I regularly teach, I don't often get to take the time to sit down and have in-depth conversations with the students about their experiences.

IRB Approval for this research study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the University of California, Irvine (IRB). This workshop series consisted of three consecutive days of a progressive ballet class (one hour and thirty minutes long) followed by a daily group discussion (thirty minutes long). Participants were then sent a follow-up survey in which they were able to share any thoughts or feelings that were not covered in our discussions. In total, participants dedicated 6 hours to the in-person portion of this study. Participants were recruited through email and social media advertisement and were offered no compensation for their involvement in the study.

There were seventeen total participants in this workshop: sixteen undergraduate dance majors at UCI, and one graduate student in dance at UCI. All the dancers had an intermediate to advanced level of technical proficiency in ballet and had studied ballet seriously. They come from different ballet backgrounds; some from strict conservatory environments and some from

smaller supportive studio environments, and they all had in common having been graded in ballet technique in a university setting.

My approach to shaping my pedagogy was informed by all of the research that I had done thus far, referencing the literature, interviews, and my personal reflection. I tried to apply the principles of feminist pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and reflective pedagogy to the teaching of ballet. I realized that these theories are not about the content of the class, but the process of gaining knowledge and how the content was taught. These theories pushed me to consider how I could best support the growth and development of each student in an equitable and sustainable manner. I considered the advice of the professors that I interviewed, taking inspiration from their stories and personal experiences. From my conversations with them, I gathered new tools for engaging students in active learning while in ballet class, discovering new ways to critically analyze the elements of classical ballet while dancing. As I moved forward in my development as a teacher, I also reflected back to my experience as a student and what resonated with me the most. Considering all of this input, I designed a class that could serve as a replicable model for my teaching which includes a focus on classical technique while prioritizing the learner experience.

For this workshop, I created a class plan that looks at each exercise from two sides: ballet technique progression and pedagogical purpose toward engaging with the material. Each exercise serves as a building block for the most challenging technical steps in the class, so creating a clear and intentional progression was important to maintain the integrity of the structure of a ballet class. Once this technical progression was planned, I went through each exercise, looking for opportunities to shift perspective, gain new knowledge, or challenge authoritarianism. This particular class would have a technical focus on a progression of fouetté sauté, with emphasis on

finding healthy landing positions. It would have an artistic focus on creativity through moments of improvisation and choice. Rooted in principles of progressive pedagogy, influenced by feminist, and democratic ways of teaching in the aim of empowering students, this class would also be a positive, community building experience.

# Progressive Ballet Class Plan

**Level: Intermediate/Advanced**

**Duration: 1hr, 30 min**

Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
Beginning of class	<p>~ begin class by meeting the students where they are in the room, and asking if they would like the curtain closed or open today</p> <p>~ invite students to walk around the room, cueing them to push off with their toes in the back to engage the bottom of the foot</p> <p>~ invite students to lift their focus and meet the gaze of their peers, giving them the option to smile, make a funny face or exchange some positive energy</p> <p>~ ask students to lift their arms above their head, bringing some movement into the fingers, and sending their energy out</p> <p>~ tell students to find a plank position, holding for four breaths all together</p> <p>~ repeat the walking sequence backwards</p> <p>~ tell students to find a buddy or buddies to perform the next plank with, emphasizing that we should support each other through verbal encouragement</p> <p>~ Shift into a downward facing dog, then transition to the feet and slowly roll up</p>	<p>~ I give students a choice at the start of class, so that they know that I value their input.</p> <p>~ We begin class with simple walks to remind ourselves that we enter the ballet class as human beings, giving students the freedom to feel like they are bringing their whole self to class.</p> <p>~ Students are encouraged to connect with their peers through eye contact in an exchange of energy to help create a sense of community from the start of class.</p> <p>~ They incorporate short holds in plank position as a way to begin engaging the core to prepare for ballet. This is also the first "challenge" of the day, so having the students find moral support in a classmate sets the expectation that they will continue to support each other in this way throughout class.</p>

Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
Centering	<p>~ with feet planted underneath the hips, guide students through a breath/body scan with the following prompts:</p> <p>~ "I welcome you to close your eyes if you would like to"</p> <p>~ "Let's tune into our breath and just begin to notice, without passing judgment, what is happening in our bodies. You don't have to change anything, just notice."</p> <p>~ "Notice if you are breathing in through your nose or your mouth, notice if you are exhaling through your nose or your mouth"</p> <p>~ "Notice how long your inhale is, notice how long your exhale is"</p> <p>~ "Notice what is already moving in your body"</p> <p>~ Guide students to set an intention for the day by telling them: " While we are in this introspective space, I invite you to set an intention for yourself in today's class. You don't have to say it out loud, but in your mind find a clear intention for yourself. It could be as simple as 'take the whole ballet class,' or as complicated or technical as you would like"</p>	<p>~ I incorporate breathwork into the preparation for ballet class to emphasize the importance of breath as we dance, and to remind students that they are human as we approach ballet.</p> <p>~ This particular breathwork series is inspired by my experiences as a student in modern dance classes, Feldenkrais, Yoga, and Meditation sessions, and is intended to bring awareness to the breath without passing any judgment.</p> <p>~ Students set individualized intentions, choosing how they will approach their education with agency. I do not ask them to state their intention out loud as a way to communicate to students that I trust them to work in their own way</p>

Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
Plié	<p>~ Maintain a connection to breath as we move into ballet vocabulary, think about landings and takeoffs, imagining the future of your plié, balance with a challenge at the end</p>	<p>~ Keeping the connection to breath is going to remind students to bring their humanity into the work</p> <p>~ Asking students to add a "challenge" to their balance leaves room for student choice and decision-making</p>
Tendu in First Position	<p>~ Preparation for a brush through first position in a fouetté sauté, with emphasis on working through the floor</p> <p>~ In this exercise, I will ask the students what the specific movement will help with in the center.</p>	<p>~ Providing information that will inform center work gives the dancers the opportunity to engage with a constructivist approach and allow student voices to be a source of knowledge</p>
Tendu in Fifth Position	<p>~ Focus on "your fifth position," establishing a safe and stable home base for allegro</p>	<p>~ Using the language "your fifth position" establishes a space where each person can hold a unique relationship to ballet technique in their body</p>
Déagé facing the barre	<p>~Revisiting first position, focus on activating the feet in preparation for jumps.</p> <p>~Choose your own arm placement</p>	<p>~Giving the students options for where they would like to place the arms gives them some freedom and agency over how they are working through this exercise.</p>
Déagé in Fifth Position	<p>~ Focus on brushing the floor from the depth of a plié as in preparation for an assemblé, jeté, or fouetté sauté</p> <p>~ Work with your neighbor at the barre to decide on a port de bras that supports the exercise</p>	<p>~ Allowing students the opportunity to choreograph their own port de bras with a peer serves two functions:</p> <p>~ They interact with their peers socially, reinforcing the sense of community</p>

Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
		~They are exercising their creative agency in choreographing their own port de bras
Rond de jambe	<p>~ focus on turnout and stabilization of the standing leg</p> <p>~ balance sequence at the end with a challenge of not using the barre to transition between positions</p> <p>~ Discuss with a neighbor what might be helpful to your balance, then try it out as an experiment on the other side. Share what was most helpful to you</p>	<p>~ In discussing the balance with a partner, dancers are thinking critically about their task, and working as a team to build knowledge from a constructivist perspective.</p> <p>~ Giving students the ability to share their knowledge with their peers allows for information to come from multiple sources in the class, not just from teacher to student. This shows that students have a valued voice in the room as contributors to the learning environment</p>
Fondu/Frappé	<p>~ notice the contrast in textures and the use of a full plié in preparation for jumps</p> <p>~ sharp strike of frappé to engage fast twitch muscles for petit allegro and battu</p> <p>~ choose relevé or flat execution</p>	<p>~ the choice of whether to do the exercise on relevé as an extra challenge, or flat to conserve energy in the calf muscles allows students another small opportunity to exercise agency</p>
Adagio	<p>~ reach the fullest extent of a développé with épaulement thinking about the top of a jump</p> <p>~ include fouetté relevé in preparation for fouetté sauté</p> <p>~ cue connection to breath and intention</p>	<p>~ in a slower exercise, giving students the cue to check back in with their breath and the intention that they set for themselves will allow them to check in on their progress mid-way through the class in a reflective manner</p>



Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
Grand Battement	~ emphasize brushing down against the floor from the bottom of a plié, again preparing for jumps ~ include 8 counts of improvisation at the end of the exercise to find your own transition to the left side	~ allowing a moment of improvisation here gives students the opportunity for self expression, creativity, and to know that their contributions are welcome to the class.
<b>Center:</b>		
Tendu	~ repeating a similar pattern to tendu at the barre, as a reminder to bring the information from barre with them to the center ~ Choose which direction would you like to face	~ giving a choice of facing echoes the same sentiment as asking if they would like the mirror open or closed, emphasizing work from an internal perspective rather than only focusing on external feedback
Adagio	~ similar pattern to the barre with fouetté relevé ~ task activity will be applied to this exercise ~ One partner gives the other two “tasks” to incorporate into the exercise, which could be anything from adding a relevé, to changing a facing, to performing the exercise with a silly face, then switch	~ This is really an opportunity for the “task giver” to take back some of the power over the class, and practice artistic leadership. It gives them a glimpse at their potential to become choreographers, directors, and teachers.
Pirouettes	~ pirouette with waltz focused on musicality and clarity of a finished position at the end of the pirouette ~ choose your ending position out of chaînés	~ Here is another opportunity for students to use their creativity, and assert agency over their ballet practice

Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
Coda	<p>~ working on the speed of traveling turns into a full stop of momentum in a first arabesque plié</p> <p>~ Share what you learned at the barre that could help you here</p>	<p>~ the arabesque in plié will be a challenge for students, so asking them to recall what they learned in their rond de jambe at the barre will aid them and teach them how to look for patterns of knowledge in the class</p>
Warm Up Jump	<p>~slow warm up jump in first and second position with emphasis on controlled landings</p> <p>~ performed in a circle facing in toward the center of the room</p>	<p>~ using a circle formation for jumps reminds the dancers that they can rely on the people in their community to help them stay motivated in the most challenging part of class</p>
Petit Allegro 1	<p>~ changements and échappés with a focus on finding "your fifth position"</p> <p>~ Identify how you will use the mirror as a tool</p>	<p>~ bringing back the language "your fifth position" to emphasize functional takeoff and landing positions.</p> <p>~ Asking the dancers how they can use the mirror as a tool incorporates the mirror as a learning tool, not as a mode for comparison or scrutiny</p>
Petit Allegro 2	<p>~ glissades, assemblés, and jetés with emphasis on finding "your fifth position"</p> <p>~ Work with a neighbor to make sure that you both know the exercise</p>	<p>~ partnering up to support each other reminds students that they are not alone in this community, that they can learn from those around them, and that they have knowledge to offer their peers</p>
Medium Allegro	<p>~ sauté chassé down the diagonal to establish a pointed bottom foot in arabesque sauté, which will help with fouetté sauté in the next exercise</p>	<p>~ partnerships continue to grow as they are now dancing together and must work as a team to create a port de bras that they will perform.</p>

Exercise	Directions and Details	Pedagogical Intention
	~ travel across the floor with a partner and create port de bras that accompanies the exercise	~ Their contribution to the exercise is valued and encourages creativity
Grand Allegro	~ incorporating fouetté sauté, grand pas de chat, and grand jeté, which are the final steps in the progression of the class  ~ identify what you have already done in class that will help you with this exercise	~ asking the students to identify the progression of class asks them to work on recall and memory skills that will help them learn the material
Révérence	~ students follow me as I guide them through a port de bras, then we turn to stage left and follow the student who is furthest stage left, we then follow the student who is furthest upstage, and finally furthest stage right.  ~ at the end, turn to someone in the room and thank them for bringing their energy to class today with a gesture of gratitude. We will repeat the gestures 3 times, finding someone new each time	~ Allowing multiple leaders of a révérence breaks down the hierarchy of the teacher being the only source of direction in the group and gives students the opportunity to practice leadership and creativity  ~ "Gestures of gratitude" replace "curtsey or bow" as a way of breaking from the ideas of court behavior that are still present in ballet training  ~ Instead of the students only giving a gesture of gratitude to the teacher, they will show their respect for their peers' contributions to the community that we build

## The Student Perspective

After conducting the workshop series, including discussions and an additional survey, a few themes appeared in the responses of the dancers: a sense of community, bringing humanity to ballet, and exercising personal agency were all areas that the dancers highly valued in a ballet class. These three elements received the most praise and positive feedback. There was a conscious effort in the design of my class to include these elements, so to hear that the students took notice of them was encouraging. Community, humanity, and agency were the keys to bringing a joyful and creative atmosphere to ballet class. We had discussed their previous experience with teacher-student relationships in ballet and the power dynamics at play, and they felt liberated by the relationship of mutual respect built during this workshop. Another theme that the participants had strong opinions about was how they are graded in ballet, with each participant having questions about the methods being used to evaluate their performance in the class and how they could be more fairly assessed.

### Community

One of my goals for this class was to establish a sense of community, and make sure that each student felt as though they belong within that community. Ballet can feel like an isolating experience because of its individual nature. Yes, the whole class is dancing together, but dancers are working on their own improvement. Participant 15 noted that it is easier for her to find a sense of community in other styles of dance, like modern, where partner work is more frequent, and hip hop, where encouragement of peers is expected. Participant 13 described feeling like she was being judged by her classmates in ballet class, interpreting their silent gaze from the side of the room as a negative commentary on her dancing. She acknowledged that in reality, this may

not be the case, but she won't ever know if the thoughts in her head align with the thoughts of others if they do not speak to each other. She suggested that without the chance to build connections with each other and interact during class, dancers might not be able to understand each other, and thus they make assumptions that are detrimental to the overall sense of support in the classroom.

One participant, after taking the progressive ballet workshop, said that she appreciates the elements of collaboration and emphasis on community “in a college setting because it not only encourages more advanced intellectual discussion on ballet technique, but also facilitates a positive and non-judgmental learning environment, something that is important to me and my dance education.” When ballet is placed in a higher education learning environment, there is greater opportunity to critically analyze the technique through discussion in class, but if students are afraid to speak or feel that their voice will not be appreciated, it is unlikely that any meaningful discussion will be had.

When classroom culture encourages the growth of a supportive community, students may lean on each other for validation and celebration. Participants 5 and 13 both mentioned that though they enjoy receiving feedback from their teachers, it is sometimes more empowering to hear their peers cheering them on during class. One participant said that they “enjoyed being able to cheer on my peers and being able to speak to my peers especially when you would say, like, ‘talk to your peers to make sure you got the combo’ or to give each other tips, because it made me feel not alone in the class.” This sense of belonging in the ballet class is clearly a crucial element in what makes a successful classroom for dance students. One student mentioned to me that she would like to improve her ballet technique, but doesn't feel welcome in the classes

available to her. In this workshop however, she was engaged with the material, with her classmates, and having fun in ballet class again.

## Humanity

Being human is not typically a desire in the ballet world, with dreams of being a fairy, angel, or sylph prioritized in place of an earthbound existence. However, as ballet and ballet audiences evolve, our training should too. Acknowledging our humanity in a ballet class means encouraging breath, making and benefiting from mistakes, creating space for vulnerability, and honoring each individual in the room. Participant 11 noted that in this workshop the students learned human skills, like how to work with a partner, how to set goals, and how to think critically, not just ballet skills. “I appreciated that mistakes were pointed out as an element of being human,” said one participant in reference to me calling out my own mistake in demonstrating an exercise. I could have brushed past the way that I stumbled over my words, but instead, I made a conscious choice to point out my mistake. This let the students know that I am a human being who makes and embraces mistakes as a part of the learning process, so they then feel like they have a “safe space to make mistakes,” like participant 5 found, or like participant 1, they might feel free to “have fun in class and try new things.” It was particularly exciting to hear that this student felt that they could think creatively in ballet class, suggesting that innovation is possible.

## Agency

The third element of this workshop series that was appreciated by the dancers, was their ability to exercise agency through choice and decision making in our class. Even from the beginning of class, when I asked if the dancers wanted the mirror open or closed, students knew

that they were welcome to use their voice in this space. One participant mentioned in their survey that they “really liked when you asked if we wanted the mirror open or closed because it made me feel like the class was for me.” They went on to describe their appreciation of the “freedom to make my own decisions within the class, whether it was which direction I wanted to face, to if I wanted to go on relevé during certain exercises, to adding things to exercises of a partner,” referencing all of the choices built into my class plan. Giving options to the students allows them to take ownership of their practice, making conscious decisions for themselves about how to approach the class. Participant 16 felt more mentally engaged in the class with the addition of choice. She said that since the class was “much more interactive” with “much more choice,” and she is usually “just told what to do in class,” the choices kept her more present instead of just going on “autopilot.” Participant 9 appreciated the freedom to choose different “modifications” of the exercises, noting that he felt free to explore and have fun while still under the guidance of classical ballet technique. While still maintaining the structure and rigor of a ballet class, it is possible to include moments of individual expression for the dancers that will facilitate joy, empowerment, and innovation in ballet.

## The Teacher-Student Relationship

Participant 16’s comment about only ever being told what to do in a ballet class made me want to examine the students’ experiences with teacher-student relationships. When asked if they have ever encountered authoritarian teaching styles, several students provided stories of past traumas and present fears. One student recalled:

A male teacher told me I needed more estrogen, and I looked like a football player which was not very nice at all. I have tough skin and it didn't really affect me because I know that I need to be more graceful, because I just have a lot of strength and power due

to my training in my main dance styles, but he could have been a lot nicer with his words and gave me suggestions on how to be more graceful instead of just being rude. A few others related to this experience, with several of them having received comments about their bodies that were not constructive toward better ballet technique. Some students were fortunate enough to report never experiencing an authoritarian teaching style, though I suspect that traces of this pedagogy were present in their training. These dancers explained that their teachers were “strict, not mean,” which could encompass some of the behaviors that are excused and accepted in ballet training, like students not being allowed to talk while in class. One dancer described their experience with a teacher who incorporated some aspects of authoritarian teaching, but “mostly it was mixed with humor and wasn't serious or with ill intent.” This is another way that humiliation tactics can be overlooked in the ballet class culture. If someone is funny in their delivery of mean comments, then it is typically better received by the students.

One of the areas of the teacher-student relationship that I tried to change within this workshop is the flow of information. Typically, there is a one-way flow of knowledge from teacher to student in ballet. Scholar Robin Lakes explains that from the beginning of ballet's codification in the seventeenth century, “the teacher's role was to transmit and cause learning to occur. The student was viewed as a passive receptor. Metaphors for students such as blank slates, empty vessels, and balls of wax emanate from this era.” Similar to Alterowitz's research in this field, I employed methods to encourage students to speak in class; asking questions, giving them time to discuss in small groups, and share knowledge they discovered with their peers.

Participant 11 felt that hearing feedback or suggestions from peers “destroys that hierarchy that teachers have over the student... critiques become more helpful rather than degrading.” Perhaps the dancers are more open to hearing critiques from someone who is in the same position and



experiencing the same things as them. Participant 9 enjoyed hearing feedback from his peers, because “a lot of corrections from teachers can be repetitive, so hearing it from peers makes you think about it differently.” Every dancer in the room might deliver feedback in a different way, so what I say as a teacher may not always be the most effective feedback for everyone in the room. Including other voices and perspectives in the dialogue gives the best chance of reaching the most students.

Another way that I tried to subvert the traditional teacher-student relationship was by giving students the opportunity to be the director of movement. This was achieved through an exercise inspired by dance artist Katie Scherman, who was one of the most influential teachers I encountered in my undergraduate program. It involves teaching the students a combination, then pairing them up. One partner gives the other two “tasks” to incorporate into the combination, which could be anything from adding a relevé, to changing a facing, to performing the combination with a silly face. This is really an opportunity for the “task giver” to have some agency in the class, and practice artistic leadership. It gives them a glimpse at their potential to become choreographers, directors, and teachers. This was participant 9’s first encounter with choreography, and it felt as though he was discovering a whole new world. He said that “though I haven’t done much improv or choreography, even just making slight changes inspired me to think about how else I could change the combination to make it look how I want it to.” He became inspired to continue this process and empowered by the discovery that he could be the “person at the front of the room.”

Along with these larger shifts in dynamic, the dancers also appreciated some smaller acts that a teacher can do to make them feel like a valued participant in the class. Something as simple as using the dancers’ names was really important to them. Participant 16 emphasized that

“it makes a big difference when you know that a professor knows you and when you can feel comfortable asking questions.” Using their names, in the correct pronunciation, lets them know that they are seen in the class. The perception of being “seen” was another valued element of class for these dancers. Participant 1 felt “seen” when I acknowledged every group going across the floor, “even if you just say, ‘good job,’ it lets me know that you see me.” This participant also resonated with being invited to a challenge or chance for improvement. Instead of phrasing feedback in a demanding way, like “do a double next time,” I phrased this challenge as an open invitation. Instead, I told her “you have the balance for two turns, so if you want to go for it, I encourage you to try it on the left side.” In this phrasing, I am communicating the same feedback, but I am also giving her the option to interact with that feedback in any way that she wants.

## Student Perceptions of Grading Practices

In my interviews with studio professors from different universities around the country, I concluded that none of them felt one hundred percent confident in their grading system, and in my interviews with students, that same sentiment is reflected. The students that I spoke with perceive ballet grading practices as mysterious, unfair processes that can easily be influenced by personal bias. Though they don’t know what a perfect solution would be, they know that the current system does not work.

The most common comment I received from these dancers was, “I don’t understand how I am being graded.” The students feel that there is a lack of transparency in the way they are graded. This perception stems from the lack of written or spoken communication of standards for grading. In the current grading system at my university, there are descriptors of student learning objectives in their syllabus, but no specific rubric or detailed description of criteria. One

participant said that “it's hard to assess what knowledge has been gained in the first place, and personally I don't understand what criteria the faculty are using to grade us,” and they were not alone. One participant went as far to say, “Honestly, we don't even know how our grades are determined. The syllabus says it's determined by overall improvement, but how do I know if this is true if I never get a breakdown of my grade or a written reason for my grade with feedback.” The lack of clarity and explicit communication of expectations leaves room for students to interpret their grades in any way they might think of. Participant 15 explained that from their perspective, “It seems as though it is based on how much the teacher likes you, even if that isn't the case, the ambiguity makes it seem that way.” When feedback and reasoning behind grades is not communicated, it causes students to guess at why they received the grade they did, and oftentimes, their answer is that the teacher didn't like them. “It feels like they are grading based on how much they like your dancing,” said one dancer, and another suspects that “students are graded differently according to the instructor's personal biases.”

Another participant shared this confusion around grades saying that they “genuinely don't understand what they[professors] look for in the grade. It feels like none of the written or objective grading measures are factored into the final grade,” alluding to a case of not being able to see grades of written work throughout the quarter before the final grade is posted. Students also felt that they did not receive enough feedback about their dancing throughout the quarter, so by the time they received their final grade, there was no way to improve. One student described her disappointment: “When we get grades that are under what we were hoping for, despite our best efforts, we are unsure why or how to improve, and it is difficult not to take it personally.” Even at the end of the quarter, there is not often an exchange of feedback about their work. One

student suggested that “every quarter there should be some explanation behind why the grade has been given,” which seems as though it should be a common practice, but does not always occur.

When asked about how they would grade students in a ballet technique course, the dancers in my workshop placed a strong emphasis on improvement, effort, and attendance as their ideal grading system. However, even when the students were given a chance to create their own grading system in our workshop, there were disagreements about how fair the assessment could be. Participant 17 argued that improvement should be the primary element of grades, but participant 15 disagreed. She said that she “wouldn’t grade it on improvement, I would grade on effort and energy. Improvement is not linear, but you can tell when someone is focused and wanting to learn.” While improvement may be the goal of a technique course, the ten weeks in a quarter may not be enough time for visible and consistent improvement to appear. This doesn’t necessarily mean that progress on a conceptual level isn’t happening in that timeframe, but physicality may not reflect that. On the other hand, effort and energy is difficult to perceive when everyone shows their engagement differently. One dancer might need to physically try something right away while another needs to process new information mentally and observe before trying something new. To honor the individual in ballet class, individual performance of effort must be taken into account.

While the participants did not agree on a clear solution on how dancers should be graded in ballet, I wonder how progressive models might be able to improve the way grades are assigned. If dancers are given more agency over their own path of learning in the class, then they could be more invested in the grade they receive, striving for progress on their own goals, not the goals of someone else. This reach of student agency could be extended to hold power over a portion of their grade through a self-assessment as the “ungrading movement” would have it, or

even spark more collaborative grading between student and teacher. Turning to progressive models could be the answer to the dilemma of grading ballet class.

# Conclusion

## Looking Forward

As I think back to my experience as a student of ballet, I could make a long list of times where I was put down, belittled, or cast aside by the ideals of ballet technique and the teachers who upheld them. I could write pages of detailed accounts of authoritarian methods that I encountered and that I heard about from my peers. I could recount the times where I felt that I was not good enough or never could be good enough. But these are not the moments that helped me progress in ballet. Instead, I found growth in getting the chance to use my voice, empowerment in the times when I was encouraged to be myself, and confidence in knowing that I brought valuable experience to the class. Progressive pedagogy is what led me to personal improvement as a student, and it is what leads me as a teacher now.

In my research of the literature surrounding ballet pedagogy, I found encouraging stories and unique points of view despite the countless tales of authoritarian dystopias. In finding feminist pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and reflective pedagogy, I have gained resources for facilitating learning that could apply directly to ballet and improve the student experience. There are some teaching dance scholars who are already doing this in their practice. I am inspired by the work of Katy Pyle, who engages in radical changes to the ballet class culture, and Gretchen Alterowitz, who sought to bring progressive models to her university classes and gathered feedback from the dancers. Reading about the potential that progressive pedagogy holds for the improvement of ballet education was exciting, and gave me hope that I could cultivate a positive experience for my students.

As I spoke with ballet professors from across the nation, my desire to bring progressive models to ballet strengthened, and I began to question what parts of ballet education need

change. In conversations about what ballet can leave behind as it moves forward, authoritarian mindsets were the first to go. Reformation of the student-teacher dynamic was an important theme for all the teachers I spoke with, emphasizing a culture of mutual respect that helps to establish a supportive community in the ballet classroom. Giving dancers the opportunity to exercise personal agency over their craft was another common sentiment, pushing for dancers to use their voices and have the opportunity to choose how they approach their work.

But the most interesting topic that came up in my interviews was the subject of grades. This topic elicited such strong responses and deep conversation that I became enthralled with finding a solution to the problem. How can students be fairly assessed and graded in a ballet technique class? I thought surely there was a clear solution hiding somewhere in plain sight, but the further I probed into this question, the more issues and complications I found. As I heard about how each of the professors I interviewed graded their students, I could find a hole in their argument, and so could they. It seems that no one has a perfect solution to this challenge, and they know it, which becomes problematic when the grade that you give a student could impact them in a serious way.

Students look at ballet grades in a similar way to the professors I spoke with. In my discussions with students during our workshop series, they acknowledged the issues with grading. They were frustrated with the lack of transparency they experienced, and were tired of never getting the grade they felt they deserved. However, when I asked them how they would grade students if they were a teacher, they could not agree on one clear solution. Similar to the professors of ballet, the students were also divided, and unsure of their method. Perhaps this is where progressive pedagogy can help us. Even if there is no truly fair system of grading, we can still make improvements that allow more transparency and an open line of communication

between teacher and student. Is there a way to incorporate the concept of student agency into the way that grades are decided? If teachers could facilitate collaboration between themselves and the students to determine what grade will be given, would this ease some of the frustration felt on both ends?

Many questions are left unanswered on the topic of grading, but incorporation of progressive pedagogy into the ballet class has shown a positive impact on the student experience. In the workshop conducted in this research, students responded positively to the agency, humanity, and freedom that they were allowed in my ballet class. I was able to foster a sense of community in the ballet class, which is uncommon in the often-isolating practice. Students felt empowered by the ability to share their knowledge and experiences and know that the energy they bring to the class was valued. Most importantly, they experienced joy through ballet, something that is often lost.

In the future, larger scale research needs to be conducted to better understand the student perspective on progressive pedagogy. Though my small study was successful and gleaned rich insights about the dancers' perspectives, it is limited by size and voluntary participation. This study used a small sample size, but could be applied on a larger scale across an entire school of dance, or across multiple institutions. Additionally, since the participants of this study volunteered themselves, they are more likely to already have a bias toward progressive pedagogy. Though I learned a lot from this study, the information gathered from a broader sample of participants could be even more valuable to the field.

From the beginning of this research, I knew that it would be a large task to try to shift ballet forward into a more progressive place, but the work came with satisfaction of knowing that I could have a positive impact on the students I taught. I found simple ways to incorporate choice



into the classroom, discovered tools for guiding students through the learning process, and cemented my personal pedagogy in the foundations of progressive thought. While there are still unanswered questions about how to proceed in the development of ballet teaching practices, it is clear to me that the way forward is progressive ballet pedagogy.

# Bibliography

- Aalten, A. (2004). The Moment When It All Comes Together: Embodied Experiences in Ballet. *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 11(3), 263–276.
- Alterowitz, G. (2021). Feminist Practices in Ballet: Katy Pyle and Ballez. In K. Farrugia-Kriel & J. N. Jensen (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*.
- Alterowitz, G. (2014). Toward a Feminist Ballet Pedagogy: Teaching Strategies for Ballet Technique Classes in the Twenty-First Century. *Journal of Dance Education*, 14(1), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2013.824579>
- Banes, S. (1998). *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage*. London: Routledge.
- Berg, T. (2021). Kinesthetic Dialogue: The “Hands-off” Transmission of Embodied Knowledge through Silent Dance Pedagogy. *Journal of Dance Education*, ahead-of-print, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2021.1941976>
- Bouder, A. (2018). The Feminist Ballerina: How Do We Push for Gender Equality in an Art Form That Relies on Traditional Roles? *Dance Magazine*, 92(5), 42–.
- Daly, A. (1991). Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis. *Dance Research Journal*, 23(1), 2–5. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1478691>
- Dweck, C. S. (2016). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Fisher, J. (2007). Tulle as Tool: Embracing the Conflict of the Ballerina as Powerhouse. *Dance Research Journal*, 39(1), 2–24.
- Foster, S. L. (1997). Dancing bodies. In J. C. Desmond (Ed.), *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (pp. 235–257). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Garafola, L. (Ed.). (1997). *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Green, J. (1999). Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education. *Dance Research Journal*, 32(2), 80–100.
- Hill, A. P. (Ed.). (2016). *The Psychology of Perfectionism in Sport, Dance and Exercise* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315661100>
- Hoogsteyns, M. (2013). Giving More Weight to the Ballerina: Material Agency in the World of Pointe Shoes. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 119–133.

- Johnson, L. (2011). More than skin deep: the enduring practice of ballet in universities. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 2(2), 181–197.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2011.603350>
- Mattingly, K., Beckford, K., Bibler, Z., Cunningham, P., Harrison, I. A., & Jackson, J. M. (2023). Ballet Pedagogy and a ‘Hard Re-Set’: Perspectives on Equitable and Inclusive Teaching Practices. *Dance Chronicle*, 46(1), 40–65. DOI: 10.1080/01472526.2022.2156747
- Katz Rizzo, L. (2015). *Dancing the Fairy Tale: Producing and Performing the Sleeping Beauty*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kolb, A., & Kalogeropoulou, S. (2012). In Defence of Ballet: Women, Agency and the Philosophy of Pleasure. *Dance Research*, 30(2), 107–125.
- Lakes, R. (2005). The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 106(5), 3-18.
- Liu, C. (2023). The Challenges and Possibilities of a Pedagogy of Flow as a Foil to Self-Objectification in the Ballet Classroom. *Journal of Dance Education*, 23(3), 223–233.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2023.2233957>
- Montag, J. (2016). How to Survive the Harsh Reality of Grading in Ballet. *Dance Major Journal*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.5070/D541033893>
- Narayan, R., Rodriguez, C., Araujo, J., Shaqlaih, A., & Moss, G. (2013). Constructivism—Constructivist learning theory. In B. J. Irby, G. Brown, R. Lara-Alecio, & S. Jackson (Eds.), *The Handbook of Educational Theories* (pp. 169–183). IAP Information Age Publishing.
- Pickard, A. (2013). Ballet body belief: perceptions of an ideal ballet body from young ballet dancers. *Research in Dance Education*, 14(1), 3-19. DOI: 10.1080/14647893.2012.712106
- Risner. (2021). Activities for Humanizing Dance Pedagogy: Immersive Learning in Practice. *Journal of Dance Education*, 21(2), 114–120.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2019.1678753>
- Ritchie, & Brooker, F. (2020). Democratic and Feminist Pedagogy in the Ballet Technique Class: Using a Somatic Imagery Tool to Support Learning and Teaching of Ballet in Higher Education. *Journal of Dance Education*, 20(4), 197–204.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2019.1588463>
- Shilcutt, J. B. (2021). An Activist Approach to Teaching Ballet in a University Setting: Moving Beyond an Authoritarian Pedagogy. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*.

- Shrewsbury, C. M. (1987). What Is Feminist Pedagogy? *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 15(3/4), 6–14.
- Stinson, S. W. (1993). Journey toward a feminist pedagogy for dance. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 6(1), 131–146. DOI: 10.1080/07407709308571170
- Thorne, C. L. (2018). Practicing choice: Progressive pedagogy in contemporary ballet training (Order No. 10822200). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2054014367).
- Webb, L., Allen, M., & Walker, K. (2002). Feminist pedagogy: Identifying basic principles. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 6(1), 67–72.
- Weidmann. (2018). A New Dialogue in Ballet Pedagogy: Improving Learner Self-Sufficiency Through Reflective Methodology. *Journal of Dance Education*, 18(2), 55–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2017.1346798>
- Woo, B. N. (2021). Ballet Pedagogy in Higher Education: A Move Toward Gender Expansion, Inclusion, and Equity. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*.
- Zeller. (2017). Reflective Practice in the Ballet Class: Bringing Progressive Pedagogy to the Classical Tradition. *Journal of Dance Education*, 17(3), 99–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2017.1326052>