

Dance teaching pedagogy: A time for change

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Abstract

The dance world has a dance teaching pedagogy problem. The typical dance teaching model follows an authoritarian approach, which is increasingly criticised for causing more harm than good to our developing dancers. It is contended that this is not a necessary element of the equation of creating a competent dancer. Our experiences as developing dancers, and now as emerging dance teachers, ignited a desire to seek change. This desire to improve our own teaching led us to explore our own pedagogies and identify the need for increased pedagogical knowledge in dance teachers. Through research and practice, we have come to embrace a combined pedagogy that incorporates somatic and student-centred approaches as an alternative approach to dance teaching. This approach to pedagogy has the potential to create not only dancers but choreographers, teachers, creators and critical thinkers. The opportunity to protect the rights of young dancers is present and must not be ignored.

Introduction

It was almost by chance that the two of us crossed paths, both admitting that if it had not been for receiving scholarships in dance that we probably would not have pursued dance in a university educational setting. It is through our experiences with dance in this tertiary academic environment where we were exposed to the possibility of working with the aims of empowerment and democratic collaboration. It was not until we experienced these kinds of values in a dance environment that our eyes were opened to the subtle and inexplicit physical and emotional manipulations that underpinned our own experiences in a dance studio environment as well as the experiences of so many others. This led us both to look further into the field of dance pedagogy, “the study of how best to teach” (Warburton, 2019, p. 82). Our research is an attempt to better understand our experiences and to try and improve our own teaching skills so that our students would not have the same trying experiences in dance studios that we had. Kaylee explored dance pedagogy specifically in relation to ballet, and Courtney explored the field from the other end of the pedagogical spectrum through looking at community dance approaches. Through these individual studies that explored dance pedagogies through entirely different lenses, we found that we came to similar conclusions: there is a greater

need for pedagogical knowledge amongst dance teachers; there is a place for traditional authoritarian teaching and for student centred approaches within the same classroom; and that the connections we make in the dance studio or the classroom as adolescents influence and shape the people, dancers and teachers that we become later in our lives.

Methodology and framework

This research developed through individual reflective studies, which highlighted our similar experiences as youth and sparked this collaboration. The individual studies we each undertook were reflective in practice, where we produced writings analysing our own experiences of growing up in a competitive authoritarian dance studio environment. These reflective writings were investigated alongside wider reading into pedagogical theory and dance practices. As the inquiry stems from and is driven by our own experiences as developing dancers in authoritarian studio environments, an autoethnographic approach drives this research. Autoethnography is an ethnographic practice that focuses on the experiences of the self, or the ‘I’, the particular worldview of the individual and the meaning making that surrounds their own life (Ellis, 2004). “Autoethnography can be defined as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, 2006, p. 187). This form of ‘self’ ethnography places the unique perspective of the researcher further into the focus of the research and requires them to unpack and analyse their personal experiences closely. This process of internal reflection allows for revelation and understanding of the deeper layers of self within the research context. Autoethnography “locates the researcher’s deeply personal and emotional experiences as topics in context related to larger social issues. [The] personal, biographical, political, and social are interwoven with the autoethnography, which in turn illuminates them” (Olesen, 2005, p. 253). Communication and evocation of our personalised dancing experiences through this autoethnographic and reflective first-person lens “enables the reader who has not witnessed or participated in the dancing, to gain an empathetic kinetic experience, moving, as it were, with the researcher” (Buckland, 2010, p. 340). Autoethnography, and ethnography in general, does not set out to find ‘the answer’; rather, it is a way of experiencing and starting conversations for further understanding (Buckland, 2010; Ellis, 2004; Madison, 2012).

Achieving an understanding of the proposed pedagogy problem within the dance world can be approached utilising Foucauldian and Feminist frameworks

regarding power relationships. Foucault's understanding is that power is everywhere and is not a fixed possession, instead Foucault understands power to be relational and present in all interactions with others (Clark & Markula, 2017). Despite this, the dance classroom sees asymmetry in the power relationship—an all-knowing teacher and a passive student (Alterowitz, 2014). Asymmetry in the power relationship is caused by individuals having a lesser capacity to exercise their own power (Clark & Markula, 2017). It is this lack of capacity to exercise individual power that results in docile bodies and other impacts of traditional dance teaching methods discussed below (Burnidge, 2012; Clark & Markula, 2017; Raman, 2009; Zeller, 2017). Foucault's understanding of power goes hand in hand with the feminist notion that power is characteristically fluid (Alterowitz, 2014; Burnidge, 2012). Feminist pedagogical practices appreciate the student as a whole being with equal right and interest in the power within a dance classroom. This sees natural changes in the shared power dynamic as supporting empowerment and the development of critical thinking skills (Raman, 2009). This research concentrates on calling for a shift in power within the dance classroom. Applying Foucauldian and Feminist ideas, power should be held jointly by teachers and students with freedom to ebb and flow naturally.

The studio

As children we were both enrolled in ballet classes, as many young girls are. As the years went on, we became more and more wrapped up in this studio world, taking more and more classes, putting in hour after hour of practice, our parents investing more and more money into our passion for dance, until it became almost our entire lives.

C: I cannot remember a time when I did not dance. It is more than a part of my life; it is an essential part of me. There are countless memories of dancing throughout my life that have been an integral part of shaping who I am. There were times that dance brought me immense joy, and there were times that dance brought pain and tears. There was never a time, however, when I did not love it, when I did not want to dance or when I wished I didn't dance for I knew that it was always going to be a part of me. I will admit though that at times it felt that dance did not love me. I was pushed to my physical and emotional limits. My studio environment was not always one that nurtured or supported, instead it was sometimes one that pitted students against one

another. We were constantly competing for the teacher’s attention and desperately holding out for any kind of positive affirmation that was seldom given, while struggling to fit the weight of the teacher’s expectations, our own low self-confidence and body image issues into the too small costumes that often pushed the boundaries of what was age appropriate.

K: While I enjoyed my time learning to dance as a child, my most prominent memories are negative experiences between the extremely vulnerable ages of 12 to 15—the key ages in developing as a young adult. My first studio was led by typical ‘traditional’ dance teachers who stood at the front of the room and dictated. We blindly followed without question, even when what was asked of us caused pain. Praise and approval were craved by every dancer in the room, though it was seldom given. Our learning, like that of most budding ballerinas, was grounded in the idea that we would never be good enough.

The traditional methods employed by most studio dance teachers are done so with the best of intentions. They are often considered the ‘best’ or ‘only’ method to provide dancers with the foundation required for a successful career in dance (Choi & Kim, 2014). Often this follows the idea that ‘this is how it has always been done’ without questioning if this is the way that it should be done. The consequences of such methods are considered a necessary sacrifice (Pickard, 2012). This is not evidence of dance teachers themselves being cruel individuals; rather, it is evidence that our traditional methods have prevailed for too long. Suffering should not be a prerequisite to succeed as a dancer, and we must make the conscious effort to change the way we teach.

Time for change

The dance world has a pedagogy problem in that “it is still notorious for its reliance on traditional authoritarian teaching” (Zeller, 2017, p. 99). The authoritarian teaching method favours complete obedience at the expense of individual freedom (Jackson, 2005). It is widely agreed in academic dance literature that teaching using an authoritarian method is harmful, although some do acknowledge benefits to its use in specific contexts (Alterowitz, 2014; Pickard, 2012).

Authoritarian methods in the dance classroom create what Foucault coined “docile bodies” (Clark & Markula, 2017, p. 440). Docile bodies are easy to teach and obedient, but mindless (Jackson, 2005). Learning is regarded as a passive act—students are seen as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by the teacher as

expert (Burnidge, 2012; Raman, 2009; Zeller, 2017). The teacher is portrayed as all-knowing, resulting in students acting to please the teacher and “dismissing their own learning needs” (Raman, 2009, p. 78). Not only is this disempowering (Dyer, 2009; Zeller, 2017), it also allows students to accept and never question authority (Alterowitz, 2014; Burnidge, 2012). Blindly accepting instructions and pursuing the teacher’s approval can cause students to undertake “extreme acts of over-conformity” (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010, p. 96) and develop harmful habits such as overtraining and dieting, which are prevalent in the dance world (Clark & Markula, 2017; Pickard, 2012).

Researchers further criticise the authoritarian method for creating mechanical dancers who ignore key expressive elements (Morris, 2003) which diminishes the nature of dance as an artform (Choi & Kim, 2014). This occurs as the dominant focus is on perfecting measurable technique goals—such as the height of a kick or number of turns—rather than the feeling and meaning discovered through performing movement (Burnidge, 2012; Dixon, 2005; Dyer, 2009). Jessica Zeller goes as far as to say that “movement and musicality [has become] dangerously militant” (2017, p. 102), with dancers only caring about perfecting technique and their physical appearance (Morris, 2003). This transforms the body from a biological experiencing entity into an object or tool, thought about only in technical terms (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011). Focusing on perfect technique and devaluing the expressive elements may also limit audience connection with the dancer (Burnidge, 2012; Jackson, 2005; Morris, 2003). The audience becomes critical of dancing instead, stripping dance of its instinctive enjoyment (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010) and leaving it with very little substance today (Dixon, 2005).

Perhaps the most immediately concerning consequence of authoritarian teaching methods is the potential to create harm in learning environments. This, in turn, can be detrimental to the physical and mental health of students (Alterowitz, 2014). Authoritarian methods often include damaging practices, such as insulting or humiliating remarks (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Zeller, 2017), negative surveillance and feedback (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010), and physical abuse (Zeller, 2017). Arguably, the aim of this teaching is to ensure dancers are completely submissive to authority and to prevent ‘undesired’ behaviour (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010). However, the cost of achieving these outcomes is extremely high. The focus on getting students to conform to extreme technical ideals creates an intensely competitive environment where students are isolated and compared to one another, causing a debilitating fear of failure (Alterowitz, 2014; Burnidge, 2012; Dryburgh &

Fortin, 2010; Dyer, 2009; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Raman, 2009). Various emotional and physical harm can arise out of such environments, including decreased self-esteem (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Stinson, 2010); mental illness, such as anxiety (Pickard, 2012) and eating disorders (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011); distress and pain (Alterowitz, 2014); and serious injuries (Alexias & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Alterowitz, 2014). Such harm is considered “accepted social practice” (Pickard, 2012, p. 43) in the studio dance class, meaning that students and teachers alike expect that students will suffer harm as a normal part of the dance learning process. This shows a clear example of why the authoritarian teaching methods in the dance class need to be reassessed—to protect and respect dancers’ basic human rights and dignity.

A turning point

C: Growing up and being taught that to be a good dancer you had to look a certain way, fit a certain sized costume and be able to pull your leg over your head like it was as easy as taking a breath, I did not always succeed in dance. I didn't think that I would be able to succeed in dance, but I knew that it was a part of me and so how could that be wrong? Did it mean that I wasn't good enough for dance, just because I couldn't do all the fancy tricks? This idea did not sit well with me, as it was still through dance that I found joy and space to process the outside world. Even at a young age I knew that dance was for everyone. I recall listening to the lyrics “Are we humans/or are we dancers”, to the song Human by The Killers which we were using for an exercise in a Jazz class in my early teens. I remember thinking, while methodically dancing our tendu exercises, that it was a ridiculous lyric because being human is to dance and to dance is to be human. I couldn't understand why people wouldn't want to dance, for it was the place that I felt safe and whole and alive. Dance was the place I went to make sense of the world, even when it was dance that sometimes wasn't making sense. Then I came to university and was introduced to this whole other world of dance where the very boundaries of what dance is, who could dance, and where we danced was being challenged ... my mind and heart were blown. I had found the place that dance was meant to take me; a place where dance was a way of life, where dance was a celebration, where dance was for all no matter where or how you danced. A place where I could let go of the competition, let go of the feeling that I didn't belong or that I wasn't good enough. A place where dancers weren't starved of praise

and a place where you danced for joy rather than for approval from an all-knowing teacher. I began to explore the notion of dancing for wellbeing, dancing so that it felt good and forgetting about what it looked like. I began looking beyond the steps and discovering that dance, when taught in specific ways, can teach us to communicate, to understand our bodies, to celebrate our unique selves and find connection with others. In this exploration I found a community of other dancers who had had similar disheartening experiences with dance in the past. Together with this community we found ways of working through this, of allowing ourselves as dancers to be flawed and to be human. It was here that I wholeheartedly fell back in love with dance and with myself as a dancer.

K: Retiring as a student, and ‘giving up’ on dance as a career path did not mean I had fallen out of love with dance. In fact, quite the opposite. When I moved to university, I joined a local dance school and attended both community and university dance classes. What I experienced was so different to anything I had been a part of before—and my initial scepticism turned to adoration for the method. The community classes were a shock to my system. Born and raised a studio dancer, being in a classroom of adults working towards personal goals, rather than an objective (and unattainable) standard, felt like going against the grain. My entire dance training to this point had involved competing to be the best, and relatively authoritarian teaching methods to produce high achievement. However, I was thrown into the deep end with student-centred and somatic teaching styles in classes that were developed to allow all dancers to enjoy their love of movement, and to enhance understanding of one’s own body as an individual. This involved a lot less being ‘told’ what to do, and a lot more discussion about what to do, how to do it, why we do it, and how we might benefit from varying the movement for ourselves. My ideas of who could dance and even what it meant to dance were challenged. I was afraid at first, but now I embrace the safe environment provided for all people to experience their love of dance within their own limits. I began to ask ‘why?’—not only in dance classes, but outside the studio as well. My critical thinking and analytical skills have improved exponentially since realising that just because something has always been done a certain way, does not mean it is right. I felt (and still feel) a renewed motivation to go against what was expected of me in studios and teach my young dancers to love first.

Our experiences establish a spectrum of how dance is taught—of dance teaching pedagogy—from the traditional approach, to the approaches that prioritise and empower the dancer. There seems to be a prevalent lack of understanding around the spectrum that exists, with many stuck in the mindset that the traditional way of teaching is the ‘best’ or ‘only’ way (Choi & Kim, 2014). Armed with the knowledge that there is a way to teach that may lessen the harm that is being inflicted upon generations of students through this ‘one-size-fits-all’ traditional pedagogy, it is difficult to create justifications as to why such an approach should not be adopted.

What comes next?

For change to occur, education is needed. Whilst the spectrum is wide, our research takes a narrow focus to explore what change would mean and what it would look like in practice. Student-Centred Pedagogy and Somatic Practices are the teaching styles that have been utilised by our own teachers, beyond the authoritarian methods, with positive results, and thus these have been the primary focus of this investigation. We have first-hand experience in the success of utilising such methods, as both students and as teachers, and seek to understand and share the possibilities available through their adoption.

Student-centred pedagogy

A student-centred approach is a teaching method that favours “strategies that encourage individual inquiry, self-discovery, and collaboration” (Alterowitz, 2014, p. 9). The valuing of opinion, individuality and active participation in the class lays the foundations for a democratic creative process, where the participants become co-creators in the work fostering a shared responsibility between the teacher and the class members (Buck & Barbour, 2015; Burnidge, 2012; Cheesman, 2011; Deasy, 2014). This feeds into the building of a supportive and safe community that accepts and respects “individual knowledge and cultural differences” amongst teachers and students alike (Burnidge, 2012), thus removing the dependence on the teacher as the only source of knowledge (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). The validation of individual experience allows for the development of necessary critical thinking skills (Burnidge, 2012) which increase performance abilities by being able to investigate, question and discuss one’s own thoughts and feelings (Raman, 2009).

Somatic movement pedagogy

A somatic approach focuses on the development of body awareness and the connection between the mind and the body (Choi & Kim, 2014; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010) so that learning occurs in an embodied way (Burnidge, 2012). An embodied approach to learning is also referred to by Stinson (2016) as learning through our “kinaesthetic sense” (p. 156). This enables dancers to, firstly, connect more deeply with the way their bodies feel while moving as opposed to how they look on the outside and, secondly, developing an understanding of how it feels for our bodies to move through space in relation to others (Barbour, 2016; Barbour et al., 2019). A somatic approach to dance enables participants’ differences to be celebrated within one’s own body through shifting the focus within the dance class from product to process, what is happening in the body (Brodie & Lobel, 2004), to encourage self-understanding and promote the empowerment of dancers (Dyer, 2009). A heightened awareness of what is happening in the body allows for better control over how and why we move (Deasy, 2014). This, in turn, improves understanding of movement coordination (Dixon, 2005), prevents injuries (Brodie & Lobel, 2004), and promotes explorative creativity (Burnidge, 2012).

Combined approach

The enhanced awareness of one’s body that is key to somatic pedagogy connects with the student-centred learning pedagogy as it allows for exploration and self-directed movements that align with the mind and the body (Burnidge, 2012). This enables the participant to have further control over their movement exploration and empowers them within their own bodies (Cheesman, 2011; Deasy, 2014). With the fundamental elements of the two pedagogies fused, a combined approach is created that protects our dancers and their rights, while producing dancers with an enhanced level of understanding who are safer and stronger. Combining these approaches also fosters creativity and critical thinking, so that our dancers are not only proficient dancers but also choreographers, teachers, creators and critical thinkers.

What would change look like?

With the combined approach in mind, it is important to consider how a shift to utilising new dance teaching pedagogies could be achieved. The responsibility to create change within the dance world is on teachers who can understand the importance of a move away from these ‘one size fits all’ authoritarian methods. This requires a change in values and active work towards learning about pedagogy to expand our knowledge beyond dance technique and into teaching technique as well. Beyond education on the potential harm caused, as discussed above, we must explore how we can implement a student-centred, somatic or combined pedagogical approach.

Increased pedagogical knowledge

In order to deal with complex issues, such as terminology, multiple learning styles and multiple abilities within a single community, dance educators need more than just content knowledge (Warburton, 2011). It is no longer enough for dance educators to only be proficient dancers, they also need pedagogical knowledge and an understanding of how to combine their content and pedagogical skills (Warburton, 2008). The non-traditional values of student empowerment, somatic awareness and co-creation that are promoted through this combined pedagogical approach we are proposing means that educators working with these approaches need to employ specific pedagogical knowledge in order to succeed in the communication and sustaining of these values (Fitzgerald, 2017). Fitzgerald (2017) says that “a capable facilitator [should be] someone who provides tools for creative exploration with the intention of allowing content to emerge from the participants’ shared experiences” (p. 2). This means that teacher-facilitators choose teaching strategies that ‘scaffold’ the exploration rather than simply ‘spoon-feeding’ the information (Burnidge, 2012). This again removes the teacher as the ‘all knowing expert’, with the understanding that the teacher-facilitator does not have all the answers (Cheesman, 2011), and allows for a “student centred learning environment” (Fitzgerald, 2017, p. 2) to emerge. This pedagogy also encourages participants to reflect critically upon their own experiences, movement, their wider world and how they fit into it (Cheesman, 2011; Shapiro, 2016).

Community building

Teacher-facilitators within this non-traditional pedagogy often work to build and maintain a sense of community through the deliberate structuring of classes, such as dedicating time to socialising, the greeting of every individual participant in order to build personal relationships with each participant and to foster a sense of inclusion (Cheesman, 2011). Traditional authoritarian pedagogy is less concerned with the building of community, socialising and individualised greetings than student-centred pedagogies. To be human is to be part of a community, it is an inescapable condition of humanity (Lomas, 1998). Community can be imagined and socially constructed or it can be based in locality of geographical borders; in all cases, however, community is bound and unified in “shared sentiments” (Rowe, 2015, p. 56) and a feeling of “solidarity-among and a solidarity-with others” (Clarke, 1973, as cited in Rowe, 2015, p. 57). Groves and Roper (2015) argue that participants are able to “learn about themselves, and their relationship to the world around them, through moving their lived experiences” thus building community connections through dance (p. 127). Rowe (2015) writes of how the Our Kids community project used community-based dance to repair ‘social lesions’ caused by political and societal tensions by providing a space away from the outside conflicts wherein the participants were able to move freely and reconnect both with themselves and with others in their “multi-faceted community” (Rowe, 2015, p. 57). This idea is reinforced by Houston (2008), who looks at the individuals within the community and how, through valuing “collective ownership of the dance work, equal opportunity to dance, [and] inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds and abilities” (p. 13), participants can learn how to work collaboratively and successfully with a wide range of people as well as learning to better understand the self. This both builds and then strengthens interpersonal connections and a sense of community responsibility (Parrish, 2011). In order for these sort of community developments to occur, the community movement must be held in a space that is neutral, safe, accessible and welcoming (Cheesman, 2011; Rowe 2015).

Value and empowerment

Building personal relationships with each class member enables teacher-facilitators to understand each individual participant’s past and present needs as well as showing the individuals that they are valued members of the community (Shapiro, 2016). It is widely agreed that the valuing of the individual and their experiences, as well as

their opinions and responses to different aspects of activities throughout the classes (Burnidge, 2012; Cheesman, 2011; Lomas, 1998; Shapiro, 2016), fosters strong connection and community building by empowering the individual to empower the community (Lomas, 1998). Empowerment is important as it “frees people from dependence on main-stream influences, and simultaneously frees them to question, critically observe and create” (Deasy, 2014, p. 125) in their own ways. This combined pedagogy empowers participants by offering them the skills to take control of their own learning, their own bodies, and their own experiences (Whately, 2007). By nurturing these skills and empowering participants, empowerment dance practices work to develop confidence, creativity and expression within individual participants as well as communities as a whole (Cheesman, 2011; Whately, 2007).

Celebration of diversity

Community building also goes beyond simply accepting differences, to the point where difference and diversity is celebrated (Cheesman, 2011). A celebration of authenticity, of being exactly who you are “with dance as the mediator, reconciles the natural and the cultural” (Lomas, 1998, p. 154). Through celebratory dance practice, participants are able to find a new sense of self, both within themselves and within the cultural/social constructs of society (Lomas, 1998). Community dance provides a model of community practice that “celebrates the diversity and talents of people in the community ... whose value is to build and express diverse community cultures, as part of the culture of wider society” (Williams, 2001 as cited in Dunphy & Scott, 2003, p. 13). Matos (2002, as cited in Matos 2008) also says that in regard to the inclusion of disabled bodies in dance, “they do not try to conceal their physical limits, but work in the in-between space, namely in the space of conjunction, exploring the physicality of each body that interacts and acts with and on the other” (p. 86). Community dance provides a place where people are free to be themselves, in all their beauty and difference, without feeling that they have to hide parts of themselves that may otherwise be excluded from society (Dunphy & Scott, 2003; Matos, 2008). The practice of celebrating is not simply limited to a celebration of self, but also to what it is to be one’s self with others, thus allowing participants to form connections with and understandings of other people within their community (Fraleigh, 2004). Celebration forms connections between participants as it fosters an enjoyment for the “uniqueness of each person in the group” (Barr, 2013, p. 117).

Holding the above goals in focus will be the most successful way to transition towards less harmful dance teaching pedagogies. It is acknowledged that this is not

a process that can be undertaken overnight, and will require significant knowledge, time and patience from all involved in dance teaching, including students. Within the above, there is space for the teacher (or facilitator) to get things wrong as well—this follows a move away from the teacher as expert. Mistakes are human and are likely to be made during the continued implementation of student-centred and somatic pedagogies. It is important, however, that we attempt these changes due to the urgent need to protect our developing dancers.

What would change bring?

It is important to consider the significant benefits there are to gain from implementation of different dance teaching pedagogies. There are many social and physical benefits of community dance approaches, such as somatic and student-centred pedagogies, that are infused in the learning, other than simply learning to follow steps (Barr, 2013; Burnidge, 2012; Dunphy & Scott, 2003). Participants are able to gain complex problem-solving skills, learn to work collaboratively with both other participants and facilitators and learn to move with people with a range of abilities (Cheesman, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2017; Matos, 2008).

By taking control of their own learning and learning to engage with both their body and mind through kinesthetic and somatic consciousness (Burnidge, 2012; Deasy, 2014; Stinson, 2016), participants are able to take responsibility for their own learning process. This enables them to take care of their own bodies to ensure that they move safely both with themselves and with others (Brodie & Lobel, 2004; Burnidge, 2012). This enhanced understanding further ensures that correct technique, alignment and strength is built. This will produce dancers who are better able to perform complex routines and would be able to remain performing for longer periods of time. Excellence can be achieved without the harmful aspects of authoritarian methods (Burnidge, 2012; Dixon, 2005). Further, a sense of community responsibility is fostered within the group when they have to rely on both themselves and others on the creating and sharing of work. Participants learn to work collaboratively and democratically together, working through any tensions that arise, towards a common creative goal (Fitzgerald, 2017), forming connections that are both social, physical and intellectual (Cheesman, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2017; Groves & Roper, 2015; Shapiro, 1998). Connections are also made on an individual level through the expressive and reflective process in community dance, allowing participants to connect with their authentic selves, without having to worry about societal expectations causing them to hide away (Lomas, 1998; Matos, 2008). The

shifting approach takes barriers that surround traditional ideals around who, where and what we dance is and reshape them to include any and all who wish to move (Cheesman, 2011; Matos, 2008). As well as this, when dance is made available to include any who wish to dance, the audiences or onlookers are able to confront their own preconceptions of what dance is and who can dance when faced with performers of all abilities working collaboratively together (Matos, 2008).

Conclusion

C: As I began to investigate further into pedagogical practices, thinking consciously about how and what I was teaching, I reflected back to my earlier teaching experiences before I consciously thought about pedagogy. In 2015, I was working at my local dance studio as a junior dance teacher. I taught 3–4 classes a week to young children all under the age of eight. Three of these classes were syllabus classes that taught specific exercises at the barre, in the centre and short pieces of choreography. The other class, my favourite class to teach, was a 30-minute introductory class for children aged 2–3-years-old. There was no strict syllabus to follow, no set exercises: it was just me and the kids. I got to design my own classes and my own activities, and choose my own music. In these classes, we travelled through the jungle on a safari, we tamed lions and walked the trapeze at the circus, we built sandcastles and surfed at the beach. The classes were fun—for me and the children. We danced and played together, and it didn't feel like any other dance class. I saw the children grow in confidence, imagination and in skill without them ever realising that they were exercising or 'dancing'. This, for me, is what dance is all about, finding the joy and the celebration and allowing everyone to share in it. I managed to find my own piece of community dance within my dance studio before I even knew that it was 'community dance'. Now, five years on, I actively work to promote the values and utilise the teaching styles discussed here. This is still a work in progress, as I often make mistakes and often return to the drawing board to reflect and revise so that I can find a new approach to try again. That is what it means to be human, and to be a dancer, and to be a teacher. All we can do is try our best to do better than we did yesterday, and engage with the change making of today so that our students can dance into the future and engage with the change making of tomorrow.

K: Beginning to teach, I thought I had a clear grasp on what it meant to be a 'good' ballet teacher. It was an idea born out of a combination of my past experiences—what had worked for me, what had worked for others, and what had been of more harm than good. I made promises to myself to never yell at my students or make them feel worthless. No part of me believed this could be beneficial to dance training, or development in life generally. However, more of the practices I had taken on were harmful in other ways, more subtle ways, without me even knowing. I had only questioned what obviously felt like bad ideas passed on from my previous dance teachers, instead of questioning all the habits I had automatically picked up on and implemented without conscious thought. I am slowly progressing away from the 'teacher as expert' concept to incorporate a more collaborative approach. In one-on-one lessons, I discuss with the student what they can feel when they are learning—what do they think creates challenges, what they might be able to do to improve. They try it out, and if it doesn't work, we brainstorm again. I direct them if they are struggling, but the learning and the analysis comes from them. In larger classes, before an exercise, I ask the students for some ideas of what they want to focus on. The answers range from port de bras to turnout, smiling to 'not doing that thing with my tongue when I'm concentrating'. The atmosphere in my classes gets considerably brighter, the students more determined and empowered by their involvement. My attempts to approach teaching in a student-centred way are not perfect, but perfection is not the aim. The aim is to engage in the conversation of change.

We have shared in experiences that have opened our eyes considerably to how important it is to be aware of how we teach. Dance teachers have such a powerful impact on young dancers' lives, in shaping them as both dancers and people, and this responsibility must be treated with care and respect. Awareness of the positive and negative pedagogy is the first step towards implementing more beneficial teaching practices. We must be open and willing to try new ways of teaching and acknowledge that there is no 'one size fits all'. As the world of dance and our students change so too must our teaching practices. It is no longer enough to accept that this is the way it has always been. We must do better, and engage with pedagogical knowledge as well as content knowledge, so that we can create a sustainable foundation of dance for our young dancers. Looking inwards to examine our own values will allow us to evaluate what values we wish to instil into our

students. We need to shift the approach of teaching back to the element of most importance—the dancer.

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