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The Shift in Pedagogy:

Authoritarian and Egalitarian Styles of Teaching

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The understanding of how dance should be taught varies among dance teachers from different styles. Ballet has a history of employing, an oftentimes criticized, authoritarian style of teaching while modern dance and more recent styles emphasize an egalitarian style encouraging somatic techniques among dancers. The pedagogical styles of ballet and modern differ because of their historical background and what each tends to emphasize and find important in the art. The western culture which introduced the traditional authoritarian dance pedagogy, as somatic theorists Don Johnson and Elizabeth Behnke explain, "creates the myth of a mind/body split" (qtd. in Green, "Somatic Authority" 82). The traditional pedagogical styles of teaching, especially with ballet, are still being used today, but a need for change in how dance is taught is being emphasized by many dance teachers who believe the next move in pedagogy is through understanding somatic technique.

From the beginning of the formal teachings of dance when Louis XIV began the Academie Royale in 1672, ballet was structured around and focused on technique (Bull, 272). Ballet's long standing history of technique, precision, and grace has created an expectation and normalcy that ballerinas should exhibit these qualities. This expectation requires ballerinas to be taught and perform in a certain way. Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull, a dancer, choreographer, anthropologist, and writer on the subject, explains that ballet is visual for the audience and the dancer. Dancers mimic what the choreographer wants them to do and use the mirror to develop a perfect execution of the movement. Ballerinas are constantly being watched by their teachers and choreographers who critique their performance (Bull, 272). It is understood that ballet teachers expect respect, quiet, and structure in their classes. A ballerina's flaws are pointed out and fixed by their teachers at all times. This can appear to be harsh and demanding as ballet teachers yell to

students to jump higher or point their toes and shake their arms to loosen up instead of using words to correct them.

The power of the teacher in ballet is evident even in the expectation of a ballerina's physique. Many dancers are aware of the ideal ballerina body. Being thin with long legs and arms are required to produce the right lines and "geometrically proportioned shapes" (Bull, 272). The visual aspect of ballet is what appeals to audiences with their technique, precise placement, and perfect shapes (Bull, 282-283). The need for a perfect visual explains the authoritative nature of ballet. Jill Green describes the "typical dance class" mentioning the visual aspect of it all (Green, "Somatic Authority" 81). Green says the body becomes "objectified" as the view of the body through the mirror and the audience's perspective is based on the external physical aspects and movements (Green, "Somatic Authority" 81). The body is objectified also through the ways they are expected to look, as previously discussed.

Michel Foucault believes that the body is more than just for movement but is also a part of a larger order which requires it to obey "disciplinary procedures, the lines, hierarchies, and spatial organizations….as part of the disciplinary lineament of culture" (Foster, 236). More details about Michel Foucault and his perspectives on the body and power will be discussed later in this paper. The presence of an ideal body for a certain form of dance has produced a pressure for dancers to look a certain way in order to get a job. The force which produces the demand for ideal body types is connected to the culture and traditional ways of teaching. Dancers are expected to look a certain way in order to be considered in the dance world. The need for a dancer to look a certain way depends on the techniques being used. Susan Leigh Foster, a dance historian, provides examples of different body types which work best with various forms such as ballet technique, Duncan technique, Graham technique, Cunningham technique, and contact

improvisation technique (Foster, 241-252). Lastly, Foster introduces the "hired body" which is able to work with whatever technique is being performed (Foster, 253). The recent developments into the exploration of new dance technique possibilities have given rise to this sought after body type. Ultimately, the visual expectations for a dancer's body provides evidence that in the dance world there is a power over those who are within the art to behave and look a certain way.

Power also describes the ability for a teacher to become the "all-knowing expert and authority" from which dancers expect critique and corrections from after they perform for them (Green, "Somatic Authority" 81). This power relation is typical in many dance classroom settings although there are varied degrees of power gaps between students and teachers. Of course, there are educators who are not as rude, harsh, and demeaning as others but the expectations, dynamic, and role of the visual in ballet is generally the same.

Robin Lakes, a dance pedagogy scholar, discusses various ways authoritarian teachers talk and address their students and their mistakes. Lakes explains that corrections from teachers can range from being told to continuously perform movements until they are correct to humiliation through yelling or pointing out flaws to harsh comments about body weight and appearance (Lakes, 4). Dale Johnston, a professional ballet dancer turned Dance Education scholar, states that, "Traditional authoritarian ballet pedagogy is high on structure and expectations, but low on teacher warmth and responsiveness" (Johnston, 3). The author goes on to discuss the problems with the lack of communication between students and teachers which he argues affects their intelligence as young minds (Johnston, 3). Johnston finds that the authoritarian teaching style of many ballet teachers "can have a devastating impact upon a child's ability to learn ballet when they are scared and disciplined into silence" (Johnston, 4). The goal of a ballet dancer is to perform with grace and perfect movements but there are many

critics like Johnston and Lakes who disagree with the harsh teaching style. However, because of the expected and routine way ballet classes are held it becomes normal and second nature for ballerinas to deal with the discipline-first ways of traditional ballet pedagogy.

In ballet, power is held by the teacher. Students listen and do as they are told. It has always been this way. Michel Foucault's theories of power and the body are often used in comparison with dancers and the ways in which they are treated and taught (Green, "Foucault" 100). Foucault believes that schools train "docile bodies" which eventually behave in a correct manner for the environment, for example, dancers respecting teachers and being silent during class, on their own as if they are being trained (Green, "Somatic Authority" 83). Foucault is a postmodern theorist most notably known for his ideas on power. Previous editor of the *Dance Research Journal* and professor, Jill Green who presents the problems of power in ballet pedagogy proposes possible tips on how to increase skill and ability in dancers without the use of a commanding speech. Foucauldian analysis presents that dance technique classes allow teachers to oppress students through observation and corrections in their classroom routines (Green, "Foucault" 100). The expected behavior of dancers in the classroom and the authoritarian way of teaching is a style that has been passed down through many generations of dancers (Green, "Foucault" 100). The power a teacher can have over young students can train them to never question the harsh ways of teaching as the only way they know how to learn (Green, "Foucault" 101). Dancers may find their teachers to be demanding but do not always do anything about it because of the normalcy in this style to teaching. However, recently there has been a shift to pedagogy based on somatic techniques (Green, "Somatic Authority" 101). Thoughts about a move toward a more integrated approach to learning and teaching dance began to bloom and be used in dances within the past fifty years (Eddy, "Dance and Somatic Inquiry" 119).

The move toward a more liberal, democratic style of teaching in the dancing world is beginning. Ballet may still work within an authoritarian realm but other styles, like modern dance and contact improvisation, encourage the fostering of a strong relationship between the body and mind over technical movements and perfection. It is understood that modern dance and recent contemporary dance styles are rooted in the exploration of mind and body understanding (Rouhiainen, 241). There has been a surge of discussion about *"somatic studies"* which is a discipline that tries to view the body from the dancer's perspective, a "first-person perspective" (Rouhiainen, 242). A large part of somatic studies, as Leena Rouhiainen, a dancer, choreographer, and dance scholar explains, is the concept that viewing the body from an internal perspective where the dancer can understand their own body and from there initiates a different movement that comes from a more internal source (Rouhiainen, 242). Many researchers have introduced techniques and ways to integrate somatic processes into teachers' dance technique, for example co-authors Julie Brodie, professor and choreographer, and Elin Lobel, academic and dance journal editor. They believe that connecting the mind and body through awareness of breathing, sensing, connecting, and initiating students can improve their movements through self-correction (Brodie and Lobel, 80). The somatic practices they introduce include The Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Laban/Bartennieff Movement Analysis, Body-Mind Centering, and Ideokinesis (Brodie and Elin Lobel, 80). As opposed to a commanding style used in ballet technique classes, Brodie and Lobel propose that, "Shifting the focus from product (skill acquisition) to process (what is actually happening in the body) can promote optimal functioning and help prevent injury" (80). When learning a combination for a ballet class or performance, it is most important to learn the steps and then the best dancers can put the emotion (that somatic technique emphasizes) on top of the movement after it is mastered. There are many

theorists who propose more effective ways of teaching dance in the development their dance student's abilities and dance knowledge.

One technique incorporated as a way to teach in a less restrictive way is Body-Mind Centering; a somatic technique that encourages dancers to understand their thoughts and feelings and transposing them into movement (Eddy, "Practical Application" 86). Developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in the 1960s, Body-Mind Centering describes different body systems that movement can come from and assist in the creation of intentional and accurate movements (Eddy, "Practical Application" 86). Cohen was influenced by many other techniques and therapeutic methods which she brought into her own work such as, "neurodevelopmental therapy (NDT - a method of restoring developmental movement patterns in children with brain injuries) along with yoga, Laban Movement Analysis, dance therapy, and katsugen undo (a Japanese method of training the involuntary nervous system)" (Batson, 4). The use of Body-Mind Centering is discussed as a technique for varying the expressions and movements done in technique classes. The International Association for Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS) explains that, "The BMC learning environment ensures a space for non-judgmental self-discovery and openness" (Batson, 4). The School for Body-Mind Centering exemplifies this idea of a "non-judgmental" environmental environment by employing what is at the core of BMC "to understand how the mind is expressed through the body and the body through the mind" (Batson, 4). A dancer who understands how the physical anatomy of their body works and moves can send different understandings of how to move a body part to create a clearer image of how the movement can be performed. As opposed to the forced moving of body parts (i.e. hips or lifting legs) by authoritarian teachers to get their students to perform a certain way, Body-Mind Centering encourages the dancer to understand the way their body works to initiate correct

movement and placement (Eddy, "Practical Application" 87). Eddy suggests the use of Body-Mind Centering in dance pedagogy for dance in general, presenting possible alternatives to other styles of teaching. Many developers of new pedagogies merely propose these styles, but for forms such as ballet, the commanding ways continue to be the traditional mode of teaching.

Dance teachers, who are advocates for dance students to be educated in somatic technique and developing an awareness of the mind and body, can use this understanding to "find ways of using the body effectively in technique classes" (Green, "Somatic Authority" 80). In her article, Anne Burnidge, an advocate for somatic practices and artistic director of Anne Burnidge Dance, declares that recently there has been a shift in what is being learned in the dance studio with somatic practices and techniques. However, what must change is the way in which these practices are taught (Burnidge, 37). Burnidge believes that with the spread of body-mind learning in the classroom a move from the traditional authoritative ways of teaching will occur, moving the dancing world toward a more equal sort of pedagogy which doesn't involve teachers being given ultimate power. Through Burnidge's own experiences she has taken it upon herself to reflect on her traditional ways of teaching and exploring the integration of teaching in a more "democratic" way so her students can "take ownership and responsibility for their own learning, and above all to facilitate an educational terrain that valued inner experiences and self-knowledge" (Burnidge, 38). Burnidge believes that in teaching her students it is important for them to be taught in such a way that harvests an environment that is positive, non-competitive, and encourages growth (38).

Martha Eddy, founder and director of the Center for Kinesthetic Education, affirms that, "When the dancing body is approached from a holistic perspective, which involves experiential inquiry inclusive of physical awareness, cognitive reflection of physical awareness, cognitive

reflection, and insights from feelings, the dancing is somatic" (Eddy, "Dance and Somatic Inquiry" 119). The author continues her introduction on somatic inquiry to reveal that its main goal is for the dancer to understand "the awareness process". The use of somatics and the obvious techniques used to teach dancers are not always emphasized in classes and instead are more hidden within the dance pedagogy (Eddy, "Dance and Somatic Inquiry" 120). When dance programs work with somatic techniques like Laban/Bartennieff Movement Analysis or Body-Mind Centering, they tend to be open about the fact that they are grounded in the technique.

Rebecca Enghauser points out the need for somatic understanding but takes it a step further to incorporate an ecological perspective. Enghauser, who is a professor and researcher in the field of dance, believes in the importance of students being aware of their relationship with the earth in order to foster their mind-body relationship (80). She also asserts that the ability to understand the motives of the dancer's movement and how they fit into the world help to bring the two together to give dance a greater part in a healing process of the world (Enghauser, 89). The author applies Laura Sewell's five skills (learning to attend; learning to perceive relationships, contexts and interfaces; developing perceptual flexibility; learning to re-perceive depth; and the intentional use of imagination) which was "originally intended to enlighten our view of the natural environment and our place within it" (80), to design a way to expand what and how dance is taught. Another good point brought to the foreground of the problems with repetitive, authoritative teaching by Sylvie Fortin, is that the habits that can be formed do not nurture an environment and mental state of mind that can easily change and adapt to obey the corrections or new styles a dancer is trying to learn and perform (Enghauser, 82). Enghauser provides evidence from other dance academics, including Eddy, to point out that it is important

in the move toward a more somatic dance world that educators introduce the importance of understanding the self and environment.

> As defined by Eddy, a somatic approach to dancing exists when awareness, reflection, experiential investigation and even acknowledgement of feelings are engaged in a holistic context. This orientation needs to become an increasing priority in dance training and education. According to somatic practitioner and dance teacher Glenna Batson, as revealed in a case study by Fortin, somatics can positively affect the teaching of dance because it emphasizes 'attending one's sensing self by giving oneself over to a receptive mode, not only a doing, moving one.' [Fortin S, 1998, p. 53.] (Enghauser, 82)

Understanding the body or soma can be useful in teaching dance and dancers' technique for many reasons. Linking mind and body to create movement involve dancers with the world around them whether it is societal, cultural, ecological, or gender related. Traditional dance pedagogy is described as an authoritative, discipline-based way of teaching students, often times seen in a typical ballet classroom. However with the ever-changing society we live in, there has been a shift to a style of teaching involving the understanding of the self and connecting the mind and body as its main focus. Many dance teachers and theorists believe that this move to a more "democratic," as Burnidge would say, way of teaching and an emphasis on somatics is the most efficient way to develop the most effective, talented dancers. Many of the programs which incorporate somatic teachings into their classrooms include modern and contemporary dance styles but some theorists such as, Burnidge who is a ballet teacher, have suggested that ballet students can benefit from understanding the body in a more somatic way. Evolving the dance pedagogy can be a difficult process with the inherent, natural instincts of dancers and teachers

who have already been trained in the longstanding historical way of a stricter teaching style but the proposals and evidence provided by experienced dance teachers gives an array of new possible perspectives on the teaching of dance.

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