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CONTEMPORARY TEACHING APPROACHES IN BALLET
EDUCATION

Annotation

This article serves as an abbreviation of Author's Master thesis: Contemporary Teaching Approaches in Ballet Education and their Implementation in Dance Programmes of Slovenia (Germ 2024) and identifies contemporary teaching approaches, methods and styles that would be appropriate for ballet education in the 21st century. The author further investigated to which extent ballet teachers in Slovenia implement defined approaches, methods and styles in their teaching processes. This article will present main findings from the theoretical and empirical part of the thesis.

Keywords: contemporary teaching approaches, teaching methods, teaching styles, ballet education.

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СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ В ОБУЧЕНИИ
БАЛЕТНОМУ ИСКУССТВУ

Аннотация

Статья представляет собой краткое изложение магистерской диссертации автора: Современные подходы в обучении балетному искусству и их реализация в танцевальных программах Словении (Герм 2024) и определяет

современные подходы, методы и стили обучения, которые подходят для балетного образования в XXI веке. Автор также исследовал, в какой степени балетные педагоги Словении применяют определенные подходы, методы и стили в своей педагогической практике. В статье будут представлены основные выводы теоретической и эмпирической части диссертации.

Ключевые слова: современные подходы к обучению, методы обучения, стили обучения, балетное образование.

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БАЛЕТ БІЛІМІНДЕГІ ЗАМАНАУИ ОҚЫТУ ӘДІСТЕРІ

Аннотация

Бұл мақала автордың магистрлік диссертациясының қысқаша мазмұны: Балет біліміндегі заманауи оқыту әдістері және олардың Словениядағы би бағдарламаларында жүзеге асырылуы (Герм 2024) және XXI ғасырда балет өнерін оқытуға сәйкес келетін заманауи оқыту тәсілдерін, әдістерін және стильдерін анықтайды. Сондай-ақ, автор Словениядағы балет мұғалімдерінің осы анықталған тәсілдерді, әдістерді және стильдерді оқыту үдерісінде қаншалықты қолданатынын зерттеді. Бұл мақала диссертацияның теориялық және эмпирикалық бөлімдеріндегі негізгі тұжырымдарды ұсынады.

Түйінді сөздер: заманауи оқыту тәсілдері, оқыту әдістері, оқыту стильдері, балет білімі.

Introduction. Over the 20th century, dance has evolved along with modern and further contemporary concepts, choreographic processes and methods in an eclectic field of performing arts in the 21st century. Even classical forms as ballet have adapted and changed their means of performance. Additionally, through globalisation, ballet become a transnational art with traditional as well as innovative repertoires that are performed alternately by the same dancers and companies (Sečak 2020). Therefore, ballet companies around the globe nowadays require versatile (ballet) dancers with the capacities to adapt to different styles and working processes [3].

Meanwhile, as Paula Salosaari noted in her research *Multiple Embodiment in Classical Ballet* (Salosaari 2001), there is still a gap between traditional ballet methods (modes) of teaching and contemporary (choreographic) demands of the 21st century. In other words, while concepts like holism, inclusion, integration, awareness and reflection are long known concepts and approaches of teachers in contemporary dance field, ballet education seems to still struggle with the traditional – autocratic, teacher-centered ways of teaching.

Therefore, we have been interested in the research of teaching methods and styles that ballet teachers globally and in Slovenia use – Do they still use autocratic and traditional teaching methods which were characteristic for vocational ballet schools (especially in autocratic systems) or have they adapted a more holistic and inclusive approach coming from the Western, contemporary conceptualisation of dance pedagogy?

Materials and methods of research. We examined the literature regarding current aims, teaching approaches, models, methods and styles of teaching and learning in contemporary dance pedagogy and extracted those essential for the field of ballet education. In addition to the studied literature, we used observation methods, description, reflection and analysis of own experiences in the dance field. In the empirical part we used the method of questioning with the help of a questionnaire. We looked for final answers through qualitative analysis.

A review of the literature on the topic. The inspiration for our investigation came from Anu Sööt's and Ele Viskus' article *Contemporary Approaches to Dance Pedagogy – the Challenges of the 21st Century* (Sööt and Viskus 2014) in which the authors identified seven main themes regarding general development trends in dance pedagogy. We considered along contemporary teaching approaches identified by Vesna Geršak in her doctoral dissertation: *Creative Movement as a Holistic Learning Approach in Primary School* (Geršak 2016) and the *Road Map for Art Education* by UNESCO (UNESCO 2006).

To propose a general model according to the current aims of dance education we considered the *midway model* after Jacqueline Smith-Autard (Smith-Autard 2002) together with supportive statements of David Best (Best 1992) and Graham McFee (McFee 1992). Further we proposed *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (STS) for the use of vary teaching styles after Muska Mosston and Sara Ashworth (Mosston and Ashworth 2002) which was further transformed by Elizabeth Gibbons (Gibbons 2007) for the field of dance and researched in ballet practice by Paula Salosaari (Salosaari 2001).

Writing on *how* to teach dance, we could not neglect the matters of safe dance technique, injury management and prevention which we presented through authors like Julia Buckroyd (Buckroyd 2000.), Justin Howse (Howse 1992). and further authors discussed in seminars of Svebor Sečak (Sečak 2022).

The results of the study. In the theoretical part, we first introduced the *midway model* after Jacqueline Smith-Autard (Smith-Autard 2002) which integrates two poles in the aims of dance education that have evolved in the 20th century – the professional and educational model – the first emphasizing the acquisition of dance technical skills (acquisition of the techniques, dance literacy) and the other emphasizing creativity (individuality, subjectivity and feelings after Rudolf von Laban). The *midway model* demands knowledge of theatre dance as a precondition for creativity, imagination and individuality of expression (Best 1992). Dancers must understand the meaning, structure, form, conventions and history of their final product (McFee 1992). Further, as Jacqueline Smith-Autard (Smith-Autard 2002) explains, a comprehensive art of dance curriculum should expose students to a range of techniques and styles so that they can adapt according to the requirements of a dance piece they are learning or to know how to select movement material and character for their own compositions. Through mutual performing, creating, responding and reflecting, pupils progress as dancers (in their technique and performance), as dance-makers (in creativity and choreography), and as

appreciators of dance as an art form (in understanding of dance in society, describing, interpreting, and evaluating dances) which leads them toward artistic, aesthetic and cultural education (Smith-Autard 2002).

The shift to a more integrative, non-autocratic model, *midway model* of teaching changes the relationship between the teacher and the learner and therefore invites the use of vary teaching styles. The first who formulated *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (STS) for the development of a variety of educational goals and different needs of students was Muska Mosston in 1967. Together with Sara Ashworth (Mosston and Ashworth 2002), they developed their theory upon the notion that all teaching behaviour is dependent on series of decisions – gradually shifting decision-making and responsibilities about the learning process from the teacher to the learner, first through reproductive styles (A–E) and then through productive styles (F–K) to meet an independent learner in the end. Elizabeth Gibbons (Gibbons 2007) transformed STS along with practical tips and application suggestions for the field of dance. “A versatile teacher should develop mobility along the Spectrum, applying teaching strategies appropriate to the task at hand” (Gibbons 2007, 184). Paula Salosaari explained in her research (Salosaari 2001) her interest in qualitative content of dance as art by opening out the formal content in ballet with the help of structural images.

After considering general aims in terms of the *midway model* and teaching styles, we have further looked for more specific teaching approaches considering the article of Anu Sööt and Ele Viskus (Sööt and Viskus 2014), the *Road Map for Art Education* by UNESCO (UNESCO 2006) and the *doctoral dissertation of Vesna Geršak* (Geršak 2016). We have extracted main principles and approaches to be considered in contemporary dance pedagogy:

- holistic approach – addressing a person as a whole, considering physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of learners;
- inclusive approach – providing quality education for all students invites the use of

differentiation in ballet studios (considering diverse physical predispositions and abilities of learners);

- transformative approach – including active, experiential and reflective learning;

- creative approach – inviting creative and problem-solving processes;

- somatic approach – addressing self-awareness and self-perception through practices like yoga, *Pilates*, *Alexander's* technique, *Feldenkrais'* method;

- interdisciplinarity – horizontal and vertical integration of knowledge, content and skills;

- integration of new technology – constant acquisition of new means and devices;

- safe psycho-physical approach – considering safe dance technique, injury prevention and management, psychological support and motivation.

Through recent researches in sports, dance medicine and science, the teachers have become more responsible for the application of safe dance technique, injury management and prevention in addition to safe execution of specific ballet steps (Buckroyd 2000 and Howse 1992). Therefore, teachers nowadays need to constantly revise and extend their knowledge in these areas, take into account the physical predispositions and capabilities of their students, explain the reasons for extra practices, warm-up and warm-down (Buckroyd 2000) as to carefully plan the methodological introduction of ballet steps. Besides strictly physical issues, psychological issues such as emotions, anxiety, attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, mood and confidence are important aspects in dance class as in performance (Sečak 2022). As Julia Buckroyd (Buckroyd 2000) advises, teachers should use positive forms of speech, recognize achievement and effort, use encouragement praise and specific, focused and particular feedback.

Discussion. Regarding the studied literature, own observations and experiences, in the field of ballet, autocratic – traditional teaching methods and the *command style* after Muska Mosston's and Sara Ashworth's (Mosston and Ashworth 2002) taxonomy are still mostly in use, especially in vocational ballet schools (especially in autocratic systems or in former socialist

countries (Kunst 2017). A more holistic and inclusive approach has come from the Western, first modern and then contemporary conceptualisation of dance pedagogy and is gradually changing the means and methods in ballet pedagogy as well. While some ballet academies and schools have already recognized and integrated contemporary aims and approaches in their programmes and curriculums, several are still struggling with negative and rigid attitudes of their ballet teachers. Therefore, we propose that ballet teachers, regardless of their achievements in their active carrier, transform their content knowledge through reflective pedagogical, physiological and psychological studies for teaching and learning in the 21st century.

In Slovenia, the results of the questionnaire showed that traditional teaching methods are no longer dominant in Slovenia, but rather that teachers are quite divided in their approaches and methods – a few following traditional – product-oriented methods, a half process-oriented methods and near 45 % the *midway model*. It must be taken into account that the research was limited through the low participation of ballet teachers in the questionnaire (41–45 %) and could be extended further through the comparison to teacher's methods in the contemporary dance field. However, the division among teachers can be linked to the geographical position of Slovenia between the East and West and to the key political and economic term after the fall of the Berlin Wall – transition – which defines the self-understanding of Eastern European dance as a delayed practice (Kunst 2017). Further, the research showed how dance programmes in Slovenia lack in teaching hours as well as in contents at the primary (at music schools) and professional level (at the conservatories of music and ballet) and would need to be transformed and complemented through additional subjects and united aims and approaches in dance (ballet) pedagogy.

Conclusions. As contemporary pedagogy strives to induce continuous learning abilities and provide independent learners, teachers need to use different modes, approaches and teaching styles to create

situations in the class for different kinds of learners, personalities and interests. Ballet teaching therefore cannot longer be simply that of teaching ballet steps, demonstrating and correcting but rather a conscious guidance in a world of different possibilities on the background of acquiring dance technical and compositional knowledge and skills. As teachers we have to be aware of the wide field of professions that our students will engage in and have the responsibility to guide them safely (mentally and physically) to become reflective, independent and creative individuals.

As our research showed, the established traditional teaching approaches and methods in ballet education are already changing, we just have to stay firm on that path, defend and promote dance as an art form of importance and further encourage academic dance education with pedagogical, physiological and psychological insights.

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