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Understanding education for the profession of a classical dancer – contexts of education of children and adolescents at ballet school

Zrozumieć edukację do zawodu tancerza klasycznego – konteksty edukacji dzieci i młodzieży w szkole baletowej

Abstract

Aim. The aim of the study is to present selected contexts of educating children and teenagers at ballet schools, and to draw attention to the multi-level perception of the dancer’s profession in the literature on the subject. The complexity of the education process for the profession of a classical dancer allows the acquiring competences to combine intensive body

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training with the development of aesthetic sensitivity and broadly understood cognitive competences. The profession of a dancer is elitist and requires special predispositions, both physical and mental.

Therefore, the dancer should have competences in four categories.: substantive, practical, artistic, and psycho-physical.

Methods and materials. The authors collected material through empirical evidence (Malewski, 2017), *i.e.*, participation in the life of the studied community. Based on observations, the authors made theoretical interpretations, which in the grounded theory methodology is called theorizing (Malewski, 2017). The research report consists of the conclusions presented below.

Conclusion. Among the detailed problems discussed in the text, the authors discuss: the specificity of the dancer's profession, the profile and competences of a ballet dancer, the educational path of a ballet dancer, and the everyday life of dance students. The authors believe that publications on ballet education for children and young people do not exhaust the topic or are no longer up to date. The authors point out that the preparation of a ballet dancer does not verify students' specialization in the profession of a dancer, and artistic education in Poland is struggling with numerous problems, such as low recruitment to schools, or housing conditions.

Keywords: classical dancer, artist, dance, dance education, ballet school.

Abstrakt

Cel. Celem badawczym opracowania jest ukazanie wybranych kontekstów edukacji dzieci i młodzieży w szkole baletowej oraz zwrócenie uwagi na wielopłaszczyznowe postrzeganie zawodu tancerza na gruncie literatury przedmiotu. Złożoność procesu edukacji w zawodzie tancerza klasycznego pozwala na nabycie kompetencji do łączenia intensywnego treningu ciała z kształtowaniem wrażliwości estetycznej oraz szeroko rozumianych kompetencji poznawczych. Zawód tancerza ma elitarny charakter, wymaga specjalnych predyspozycji zarówno fizycznych, jak i psychicznych. Tancerz powinien mieć kompetencje w czterech kategoriach: merytoryczne, praktyczne, artystyczne oraz psychofizyczne.

Metody i materiały. Autorki zgromadziły materiał poprzez ewidencję empiryczną (Malewski, 2017), czyli uczestnictwo w życiu badanej społeczności. Na bazie obserwacji autorki przystąpiły do teoretycznych interpretacji, co w metodologii teorii ugruntowanej nazywa się teoretyzowaniem (Malewski, 2017). Sprawozdaniem z badań są wnioski przedstawione poniżej.

Wnioski. Wśród problemów szczegółowych poruszanych w tekście autorki omawiają: specyfikę zawodu tancerza, sylwetkę i kompetencje tancerza baletowego, jego ścieżkę edukacyjną oraz codzienność adeptów sztuki tanecznej. Autorki uważają, że publikacje podejmujące zagadnienie kształcenia baletowego dzieci i młodzieży nie wyczerpują te-

matu lub są już nieaktualne. Zwracają też uwagę, że podczas przygotowania do zawodu tancerza baletowego nie weryfikuje się uczniów pod kątem specjalizacji, a szkolnictwo artystyczne w Polsce boryka się z licznymi problemami, takimi jak np. niewielki nabór do szkół czy warunki lokalowe.

Słowa kluczowe: tancerz klasyczny, artysta, taniec, edukacja taneczna, szkoła baletowa.

Introduction*

To achieve the necessary and complex competencies for stage work in the profession of a classical dancer, education in a ballet school begins at the age of 9–10. At this age in the Polish education system, there is a transition from the first stage of school education to the next, which involves numerous challenges for the young adolescent. Pupils in the first grades of art schools not only have to confront the standard difficulties of the next stage of education, such as the introduction of summative assessments, the shift from integrated education to subject teaching, the change of tutor or a greater abundance of didactic material, but in addition, they are confronted with a dramatic change in the educational environment and new tasks related to the challenges of vocational training. Ballet school pupils, due to the scarcity of schools in the country, are often forced to leave their family home and live in a boarding school, which amplifies the children's stress. It should also be remembered that vocational subjects absorb a great deal of children's physical and mental energy, which affects their emotional condition.

Young people at the age of 10 or 11 are just entering adolescence, they often still have a strong need for closeness to the family environment, they show a strong interest in play and contact with peers, and the time of adolescence beginning at the age of ten requires special care towards the child from adult carers, both parents and teachers.

Specifics of the dancer's profession

According to Zofia Konaszkiewicz, a Polish researcher of dance education in the field of dance pedagogy: "Dancers are workers whose livelihood is based on the sustained performance of dance activities, as well as creating and teaching dance. These activities

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are performed for the benefit of others. Their performance requires appropriate talents, skills and knowledge” (Konaszekiewicz, 1987, p. 24).

By law, a ballet dancer is a separate professional entity (*Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy*, 2014). However, according to the *Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 7 August 2014 on the classification of professions and specialities for the needs of the labour market and the scope of its application*, a ballet dancer is not perceived as an artist and is thus treated as a performer of a given dance technique, but not as a creative individual (*Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy*, 2014).

There are still many dilemmas and

There is no single binding definition of the word “artist” that clearly indicates who is an artist and who is not. Graduation from an art school or university cannot be regarded as the sole determinant of an artist’s status, as in all disciplines we have for centuries been dealing with artists who are artistically and commercially successful even though they have not received formal art education (Jagodzińska, 2013, p. 170).

Anna Bąk, who deals with the motivation of classical dancers in her research, notes that the classical dancer, despite the systemic solutions in place, is an artist, as he or she “develops a wide range of movements and behaviours, which he or she combines into unique compositions. Throughout a season, these compositions change and are subject to constant evolution as the dancer develops” (Bąk, 2016, p. 80).

The education of ballet artists, as already indicated, starts relatively early. Anita Makuszevska draws attention to the specificity of the educational pathway in question:

The absolute harmony between soul and body, which lies at the heart of dance and has been appreciated since antiquity, is because movement training strengthens and develops motor activity, fostering the correct development of the body and the closely related development of the psyche. The sense of joy of participating in a joint dance game, training or choreographic project builds awareness of the physical personality and develops the ability to overcome difficulties, creativity, self-discipline and responsibility for the joint artistic endeavour. But a dancing person’s body also tells stories, expresses a worldview, and finally participates in the perpetuation of tradition and the understanding of multiculturalism (Makuszevska, 2019, p. 49).

The opinion expressed above shows the complexity of education in the classical dance profession. It consists primarily of a combination of intensive training of the body (similar

to the training performed by professional athletes) with the simultaneous formation of aesthetic sensitivity and broadly understood cognitive competence. To a certain extent, the ballet student becomes a carrier of music, an instrument that must acquire perfect motor skills, the ability for bold exposition and teamwork. The classical dancer becomes a brushstroke on a canvas, illustrating the intentions of the composers of musical works.

All the competencies acquired during continuing education, which lasts from the threshold of adolescence to the end of one's professional career, are intended to serve the reception of art, which becomes a subject in the process of training and improvement in the classical dance profession. Art as a subject of education is therefore both a point of departure and a point of arrival. It accompanies young dance students and adult ballet artists continuously and uninterruptedly. Already at the stage of school education, art dictates the conditions for the student's functioning, body and mind, shapes personality and identity, seizes consciousness and privacy, deprives leisure time and the right to a free existence, characteristic of adolescence, to school normality, which is marked by bells. Art excludes the abuse of technology, spending hours at the computer, and watching television. The mode of life of the future ballet artist is divided between lesson time and time for repeating and practising what has been achieved during lessons.

Art, therefore, demands discipline and sacrifices from its carrier – the dancer – dictates the daily schedule, manages activity, and does not allow for holidays or worse moments, for doubt in the process of achieving successive educational goals. It prevents prolonged illnesses, arranges diets and even orders the camouflaging of titanic effort, which is supposed to seem like a game during a human stage exposure.

The ballet artist is shaped from the beginning of his or her education in a world of paradoxes. Obtaining lightness in dance is the result of using force. The effect of beauty in dance is derived from ugly, often injured feet and unnaturally shaped muscles and tendons through the repetition of movement exercises. The dancer obeys the music, communicates its meanings to the audience, and remains silent and still himself. There is no time for reverie; the music plays out in time and at a pace that dictates a person's reception of particular phrases, motifs and sentences. Music, although not an animated entity, becomes a dictator that must be loved in order to live up to its expectations. It is a dictator constantly persuading one to transgress.

Education as a dancer therefore requires a variety of competencies which, only when they all occur at the same time, will enable a person to interpret works of art in an informed, skilful and sensitive manner.

Relevant to the issue at hand is the fact that:

Essential elements of the path to success in ballet, such as the early onset of intensive training and the focus on the profession from an early age, make many aspects

of young dancers' lives different compared to the everyday lives of their non-dancing peers. Young dancers spend up to 15 hours a week training and this contributes to the emergence of a new subculture. This subculture is introverted, emotional and motivated to achieve career goals. In turn, the way of achieving success may be met with acceptance or disapproval, and there may also be a negative evaluation of success by the immediate social environment, resulting from jealousy or envy of others or a sense of different ethical values (Alexandrovich, 2016, p. 383).

Silhouette and competences of a ballet dancer

On issues related to the classical dancer's physique, it is important to emphasise that in order to achieve perfection in classical technique, ballet performers must continually maintain the physical condition and technical quality of their skills. Ballet dancers are a small professional group dominated by women. It is an extremely difficult, time-consuming profession, paid for by an uneasy educational path. To be a classical dancer, one needs to have an extensive range of qualities to achieve one's chosen goal from a very young or even child age.

A dancer should have competences in four categories: substantive, practical, artistic and psycho-physical. The first group of competences, that is substantive, can include the skills he or she must acquire through education. Thus, he or she should acquire knowledge of classical dance technique, the applicable terminology, the rules of execution of given elements, steps, movement sequences and the aesthetic framework of a given dance technique. Equally, he or she should acquire knowledge of other dance techniques, which include: contemporary dance, folk dance, partnering, character dance, historical dance.

In addition to dance subjects, a musical knowledge of rhythm and the basics of musical forms is necessary to be able to render music with movement.

Dance is an art involving the activity of the human body, it requires above all practical skills. It requires daily training, physical fitness, and the correct and precise execution of movements in accordance with the requirements of the technique. The development of fitness is to be achieved through the systematic and consistent work of the student. For this reason, self-discipline and personal work (individual training) to improve muscular strength or increase body flexibility are also important. Stage work is also essential, i.e., practicing, performing, and presenting the skills acquired in front of an audience (so-called "stage practice"), which prepares for the specifics of the future profession.

In addition to knowledge and technical skills, artistic competence is important, i.e. the specific element of an individual's ability, which is expressed by personality,

creativity and aesthetic sensitivity, generally referred to as talent. The famous British ballet critic Arnold Lionel Haskell believes that a ballet artist, in addition to having the right physical build, should be characterised by musicality, acting ability, personality, temperament and intelligence (Haskell, 1969). Technical skills in his view are a means of artistic expression. The researcher emphasises that equipping a dancer with classical dance technique is essential, but it is definitely a means of expression, not an end in itself (Konaszkievicz, 1987).

Zofia Rudnicka, a Polish dancer, choreographer and dance educator, believes that the profession of a ballet artist requires the display of personality, which is why it is extremely important that the education of future dancers is not limited to the study of dance, but also develops social and emotional competencies (Rudnicka, 2012). Moreover, a dancer, in order to convey his or her artistic message, needs to have knowledge of various fields of art, analyse and synthesise his or her own current activity, so that movement and gesture become carriers of an artistic message (Rudnicka, 2012). However, all the above competences are significantly determined by the psychophysical conditions of the future dancer.

In order to describe psycho-physical competence, it is worth noting the approach of A. L. Haskell, who sees the classical dancer's body as an instrument through which the dancer externalises his or her artistic creation (Haskell, 1969). According to him, it is not only the physical conditions necessary to master the technique that are important, but also the face of the artist, which is a carrier of emotions and a means of expressing the interpretation of the role played on stage. The aforementioned author also emphasises that it is, as it were, a gift for a dancer to have a perfect physique, suitable for such a specific and demanding profession (Haskell, 1969). The physical and health conditions of a dancer should include: "[...] good health, beauty and correct body proportions" (Tancerz, 2009). As already noted, "[...] even excellent physical fitness is important. In addition to this, excellent dexterity and coordination of movement, well arched feet, flexibility and high mobility of the hip and ankle joint are necessary. Visual and auditory dexterity is also important (sense of distance, perceptiveness, working to the accompaniment of music)" (Tancerz [Dancer], 2009). The specific nature of the work involves exposure to sudden physical injuries and trauma, and "[...] above all to permanent damage to the joints and spine" (Tancerz, 2009). Consequently, a ballet artist must be "[...] tenacious, resistant to stress and setbacks. Disorders of even a minor degree of the respiratory, circulatory and skeletal-muscular systems are contraindications to working in this profession" (Tancerz, 2009).

August Bournonville, a Danish dance scholar, ballet master and choreographer from the 19th century, presented in his studies a relatively long list of physical qualities that a classical dancer's physique should have. These are: beauty, strength, suppleness, vivacity, and musical hearing, but also technical and intellectual qualities, among which

he specified: good taste, energy, perseverance, fantasy, sense of harmony, artistic qualities, i.e., grace, lightness, prudence, softness, precision, and dramatic qualities, i.e., posture, facial expression, gait, manner of carrying oneself and gesture (following: Konaszekiewicz, 1987).

As can be seen from the above, the profession of a dancer is somewhat of an elite one. Not everyone can practice it because it requires special predispositions, both physical and mental. A dancer should be characterised by perceptiveness, imagination, acting talent, musicality and sensitivity. Performing this profession requires extraordinary responsibility, diligence and regularity (*Tancerz*, 2009). In the profession of classical dancer, “the ability to cooperate with people and to submit to the decisions of others, e.g. the choreographer, is essential. These qualities are necessary to maintain the level of one’s work” (*Tancerz*, 2009). Despite the strong competition in the job market, “professional integrity and respect for the work of others is very important” (*Tancerz*, 2009). In the work of a ballet artist, what is essential is

[...] ability to concentrate and divide attention and motor memory, which is related to the rapid acquisition of dance steps and arrangements. Stamina for prolonged physical exertion is necessary due to long hours of training and frequent performances. The dancer must have emotional resilience and the ability to self-control, which is related to the frequent injuries in this profession that can temporarily exclude the person from professional work. The ability to exercise self-control and perseverance are important qualities (*Tancerz*, 2009).

The educational path of a ballet dancer

The methodology of classical dance education (the main subject of professional ballet schools) in Poland is still based on the methods developed by the Russian dancer and pedagogue Agrippina Vaganova (1879–1951). While the Russian classical dance style grew out of a combination of French Romantic technique and Italian virtuosity, A. Vaganova combined the two schools and focused primarily on precision, harmony and balance of the dancer’s entire body at every moment of the dance, in every *lane** and every pose (*Dictionary of Modern Dance*, 2022). Agnieszka Narewska-Siejda notes that although A. Vaganova’s methodology is the foundation of the Polish system of classical dance education, the system is not limited to her (Narewska-Siejda, 2021). Each teacher builds on its foundations, but based on their own experience and the predis-

* *Pas* (from French) – a step in classical dance, the term has several meanings, it describes one of several codified movement combinations: *pas de bourre*, *pas de chat*, etc.

positions of the classes they teach, they should introduce their students to the widest possible range of styles and nuances characteristic of the leading schools of classical dance, discuss the similarities and differences between each of them, and make their pupils aware of the need to shape not only a fit body, but also a receptive and open mind (Narewska-Siejda, 2021).

Dance education can be understood as a purposeful and conscious effort made primarily by teachers, educators and instructors to impart competence in the art of dance, as well as to develop a person's personality through dance in the intellectual, spiritual, physical and socio-cultural fields. The professional, targeted training of a dancer begins quite early in his or her life. As A. Makuszevska notes:

The vast majority of people who become professional ballet artists began their dance training at the age of eight or nine, but this age is now decreasing as interest in dance increases. The defining moment that opens the way to a career in this art is the ballet school exam and the prerequisite for becoming a professional dancer. The American dancer, sociologist and dance researcher Cynthia J. Novack wrote about the "kinetic imprint" that learning to dance leaves on the body and the simultaneous "process of internalising dance practice – the longer it takes to learn, the stronger the conviction that dance is an inseparable part of our lives" (Makuszevska, 2019, p. 52).

In Poland, ballet schooling should be started at the age of 9-10. This age is based primarily on anatomical and physiological reasons. The classical dance technique requires, according to Irena Turska: "constant overcoming of the natural law of gravity, it was developed on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the anatomical structure of man and the laws of the mechanics of his movement, and is based on four fundamental concepts: dilation (so-called *déhors*), equilibrium (*aplomb*), flexibility (*plié*) and opposition (opposition)" (Turska, 1957, p. 137).

In the education process for becoming a classical dancer, it is necessary to establish certain movement habits early on, as the body of a young adolescent at this stage of development manifests flexibility and susceptibility to the desired formation of the musculoskeletal system. In Poland, learning classical dance takes nine years. Abroad, this time is often shorter, such as in French schools. However, it is sometimes the case that learning begins at pre-school age, and in public schools this is often the norm. On the website of the Royal Ballet School in London, we can read that this institution enrolls children as young as four years old and – in contrast to Polish traditions – early classes are organised for young adepts of the arts (Royal Ballet School, 2022). In Poland, in professional ballet schooling, in addition to teaching professional subjects such as classical, folk, characteristic, contemporary or partnering dance, lessons are

given in general subjects, which means that the student is expected to make an intensive intellectual and physical effort almost all day long. Importantly, the specificity of the ballet school (its format) is primarily to teach classical dance technique and related disciplines (partnering technique, point technique, repertoire). Specialised preparation for the classical dance profession therefore consumes the largest number of hours; the other dance techniques are, so to speak, complementary to the training programme, allowing the school's students to develop comprehensively only to a small extent.

For most professions, the decision about their choice and career path is made at the final stage of adolescence, when the young person has undergone the greatest identity-building crises (Cybal-Michalska, 2006). Meanwhile, the choice of ballet school comes at a time when the child is not ready for it. He or she has to make the decision that young adults generally make.

In the case of professional classical dance training, the decision is made by the children or their legal guardians, with the risk that the choice is not fully informed. It happens more than once that adults are guided by various intentions, not necessarily consistent with their children's beliefs. After crossing the threshold of the school, young ballet students develop their identity beyond the construction of the world as perceived by the average person. From the beginning of their apprenticeship, the child subordinates his or her life to a single, overriding value: dance.

An important determinant of entry into an art vocational school is the child's developmental period and the changes in the body. The candidate is most often unaware of his or her readiness for vocational education, often remains unaware and perceives his or her own predisposition mainly through the statements of outsiders – parents, other adults, dance teachers, rhythmic teachers, etc. It is they who perceive the desirable conditions for learning dance. Prospective students are also often unaware of the difficulties they will face and the time it will take to practice every day. And yet

[...] ballet school, through successive years of study, requires from its pupils a great commitment and an enormous amount of both physical and mental strength. As it has already been pointed out, in the profession of a dancer one often observes a very strong emotional connection with the practised field of art, which makes the ballet artist adept and capable of many sacrifices for the sake of his or her profession (Konaszkiewicz, 1987, p. 83).

Furthermore, Z. Konaszkiewicz notes that the decision to enter a ballet school raises another question, as getting into the ranks of students does not guarantee the finalisation of ballet education. A great many factors contribute to success at school. These include, but are not limited to: the physical and mental predisposition of the student, the role of the school's educators or the proper support of the student by

the parents. It is also often the case that bodily changes associated with puberty prevent students from continuing their education. Physiological changes that make it impossible to continue classical dance education include, for example, pubertal growth spurt and changes in body structure that usually occur between the ages of 8 and 18, changes in body weight and body shape, postural changes, changes in body proportions, e.g. typically male development of the shoulder girdle, development of muscle tissue, development of skeletal mass, female nature of fat mass gain, fat redistribution, smaller shoulder-hip ratio.

The end of professional training at a ballet school is at the age of 19, at which point the student becomes a graduate after obtaining a professional diploma as a classical dancer. However, this is not tantamount to a profession. A long path of further, continuous training and professional development is open to graduates. Among others, Z. Rudnicka notes that the dancer's body after graduation becomes a tool for the choreographer's professional work. It thus becomes a material subject to constant development and numerous reconstructions that the dancer makes in the course of a continuous process of technical improvement. It can therefore be said that the professional dancer continuously deepens his or her own awareness of his or her work with the body. Both technically and artistically, he or she undergoes lifelong training and his or her personality matures over the years in the profession.

The everyday life of dance students

Regardless of the style, dance training poses certain challenges to children that they are not aware of at the beginning of their learning, driven by the enthusiasm and joy that comes from the mere fact of participating in movement games. So, in order for the educational values to have a positive impact on the learners' mental and physical development, they need to participate regularly, only then will the effects appear [...] (Makuszczyńska, 2019, p. 53).

Training at a ballet school differs considerably from the well-known teaching in public primary and secondary schools. Daily professional lessons are interspersed with general classes. Pupils have two hours of classical dance lessons each day and other vocational subjects for fewer hours. The dimension of the hours of practical subjects in primary school is 13 to 14 hours per week, and in the high school vertical this range increases gradually from 16 to 21 hours per week (Konaszkiewicz, 2006). The compulsory teaching hours in ballet schools range from 33 to 40 hours, to which repertory classes and stage practice add over time. With such a busy schedule, there is little time

left for any extra-curricular activities for students, and the time after classes is usually used for individual training or regeneration.

Classical dance lessons are held in groups of up to 12 people. Due to the differentiation of classical dance elements into male (involving turns and jumps) and female (dancing in pointe), there are separate groups for girls and boys. Pupils at ballet schools have to reckon with constant evaluation of their achievements during their education. At the end of each class, they have a promotion exam, which is a summary of their achievements and an examination of the elements they have mastered during the school year. The exam may be unsuccessful and the student is told that he or she must transfer to another school.

At successive educational stages, the dance education programme is increasingly complex. The exercise routines are more complex, requiring the young student to have efficient coordination, flexibility, increasing muscular strength and constant attention to movement quality with an increasingly fast tempo. Classical dance teaching units at the ballet school take place in blocks of 1.5 hours each day. The student practises classical dance technique five times a week, which adds up to seven and a half hours a week for this one activity alone. Note that there are also other practical subjects each day that exploit physical strength, including folk dance, contemporary dance or complementary techniques.

The proportion of hours from classical dance to other compulsory subjects in a ballet school influences the classical dance teacher to become the most important in the whole educational process. This is the so-called “main subject teacher.” The relationship with him or her becomes crucial for the student, which, for the educator, entails great responsibility for both the quality of the educational process and the education. As Z. Konaszkiewicz states:

The teacher not only teaches children and adolescents, he draws them into his problems, disappointments, frustrations, anguish, prejudices, and fears, poisons them with his pride, or conveys to them his hopes and aspirations, his ideals and faith, his love and enthusiasm, his family happiness, his inner peace. He creates for them an atmosphere conducive to the development of mental health or hinders this development (2006, p. 119).

It should be noted, following Carey E. Andrzejewski, that a student’s identity is formed in a relationship with the teacher, but also a dance teacher’s identity is formed in a relationship with the student, other performers and teachers (Andrzejewski, 2009). A dance teacher’s identity encompasses three distinct but interrelated worlds: the world of dance, the world of teaching and the world of the dance teacher. The identity of the dancer and teacher may evolve separately, depending on the individual’s career path.

The dance lessons are conducted in groups, which makes it difficult for the educators to concentrate on the individual difficulties of the student, to watch over the precision of movement in each of their charges and the formation of artistic expression by each young dancer. An offshoot of this difficulty is the problem of selecting a pupil who needs to be particularly observed in order to show support.

Teachers generally focus on the most talented students, investing their time and commitment in educating the dancers who are gifted with the best aptitude. They are most willing to work with students who succeed with ease in completing tasks, such as new movement elements.

To make the work of the dance educator a little easier, the pupils use uniform dress and hairstyles to enable the teacher to see the smallest nuances in their work on classical dance technique. During ballet lessons, teachers line up the children at the bars to classify them according to their skill level. This unwritten tradition determines that the pupils with the highest potential are placed at the centre bar of the room, while the children who have problems with the demands placed on them usually stand at the side bars. Thus, the positioning of pupils in a dance class already provides the child with information about his or her abilities, but at the same time determines his or her status in the peer group. Young dancers, through this classification in the classroom space, often look at each other with dislike, contempt, there is rivalry and a lowering of self-esteem among the pupils positioned on the sides of the classroom. As a result of this positioning, the child who needs more time to master the learning material or who does not perform as well as his or her more able peers is labelled by his or her peers already during the lesson and thus occupies a lower position in the social hierarchy of the class and school.

The dance lessons take place to the accompaniment of the piano, the teacher presents an arrangement of exercises and the pupils repeat it by imitating his movement. Education as a classical dancer is thus largely based on imitative methods. When introducing a new movement element, the teacher explains how to perform it, shows how the body, the resistant side of the body*, the limbs, and the head are positioned in a given exercise, how to place the poses in space, and even the direction of the pupil's gaze. A given element of movement is therefore made up of a myriad of minute details that need to be understood, perceived and then realised. All these elements have to be coordinated within the set tempo and nature of the exercise.

* The resistant side of the body – a term used in dance teaching, it describes that part of the body which, in a given exercise, stabilises the dancer's silhouette with the simultaneous movements of the working side, i.e. making various movements of the limbs in different directions and at different heights.

The teacher strives for correct body tensions, proper student body line and precise, smooth transitions from element to element. The student is assessed and corrected by the teacher to perform the element correctly.

It should be mentioned that classical dance is a very complex technique, and the teacher, during the course of the lesson, has to simultaneously consolidate the elements introduced, constantly build the students' muscular strength and follow an extensive programme. She has a dozen or so pupils in her class, and each of them is equipped with different physical and mental predispositions, so learning grows into a breakneck task. The pupils, on the other hand, struggle daily with physical pain and exceeding their limitations. As a result of these circumstances, there is a lack of time to address the difficulties of the individual student individually and to explain in depth how to achieve the correct performance of an item. This model does not stimulate young people to discover their own way and to approach movement intellectually in order to achieve the desired result. By the same token, it deprives students of responsibility for themselves and their bodies, with the result that they often perform the movement mindlessly, disregarding the way to reach a given goal. Teachers, on the other hand, become frustrated that the model they work according to is not very effective. They often shift the blame to a lack of motivation on the part of the pupil or try to achieve an effect with behavioural methods, which sometimes resembles training.

In this context, it is worth reflecting on the thought expressed by C. E. Andrzejewski that dance teachers function together with their students in a kind of symbiosis, "they are responsible for educating students in an integral way, both as future dancers (i.e., in the area of dance technique) and choreographers (i.e. in terms of creativity or creativity); they should also make students aware of the role dance plays in the society" (Andrzejewski, 2009, p. 18). The author emphasises the need for a holistic approach in dance education: "The application of reflective learning in education creates meanings that lead to personal growth, transformation and spiritual development" (Andrzejewski, 2009, p. 18).

Education as a classical dancer requires extraordinary maturity, effort, patience, determination and total focus on continuous training. Although it involves many challenges, even today's young people choose to take it up because:

However, dance is an extraordinary art – it is not just physical work, but a special quality, different from the usual bodily mechanics, characterised by a combination of many activities and each of which is present in the successive stages of the dance education process: from acting, essential in recreating characters, not only with body movement but also with facial expressions, related to dramatic theatre of literature and history as sources of inspiration for ballet scripts, through ear training and exposure to works of classical and contemporary music, and finally the use of fine arts in creating the visual setting of the performance (Makuszezwska, 2019, p. 51).

A graduate of a ballet school is familiar with different dance techniques (classical dance, contemporary dance, folk dance, characteristic dance, early dance), has coordination and memory for music and movement, knows different ways of implementing musical rhythm, can creatively create a dance piece, consciously uses the language of dance, knows the stages of development of the art of dance in Poland and abroad and the canon of dance works, knows the work of eminent dancers, choreographers and dance theoreticians, analyses works on dance, knows the basic knowledge of music literature with special emphasis on ballet works, knows the activities of prominent dancers, choreographers and dance theoreticians, analyses dance works, knows the achievements of music literature with special emphasis on ballet works, knows basic information about music, its types, forms and styles in historical development, knows how to perform make-up applied in professional work, combines and applies knowledge of theoretical subjects in practical activities, independently searches, selects and evaluates information in the field of theoretical subjects, e.g. uses information and communication technology, uses theoretical methods in the field of dance, uses information and communication technology, knows and observes the principles of safety and hygiene at work in the profession of a dancer, has the necessary skills to perform in public, publicly presents a prepared artistic programme (solo, in a duet or in an ensemble) (*Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage*, 2023).

In terms of knowledge, a student graduating from ballet school uses the terminology of classical dance, its notation and pronunciation, defines the principles of exercises, identifies the relationship between the anatomical structure of the body and the quality of dance movement execution, defines the structure of classical dance lessons, recognises the variety and specificity of the styles of recognised ballet schools, analyses the relationship between music and movement, recognises world ballet literature, analyses dance by identifying different qualities of movement, evaluates the work of others, characterises ballet forms in technical and artistic terms. The skills that the student should acquire according to the core curriculum are the correct positioning of the body in classical dance exercises at the bar and in the middle of the room, the correct positions of the arms and legs and the position of the body (*épaulement*, poses), controlling the position *en dehors* during exercises, a sense of balance on two and one legs. In addition, the student performs:

- a. all kinds of *pliés*,
- b. all types of *battements*,
- c. all forms of *ronds de jambe*,
- d. a complex *adagio* form,
- e. half-finger exercises,
- f. various phrases and turns (e.g. *pirouettes*, *tours*),
- g. different types of *fouettés*,
- h. classical dance couplings (e.g. *pas de bourrée*, *glissades*, *pas couru*, *pas tombé*, *pas chassé*, *pas de basque*, *flic-flack*, etc.),

- i. various forms of *allegro* (small, medium and large) in exercise combinations,
- j. *pointe* dance technique – applies to the girls' group (*Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage*, 2023).

A student demonstrates musical-motor coordination, performance freedom, fluency and elegance, performs exercises at a pace characteristic of a professional dancer, skilfully and consciously uses his or her own bodily potential, corrects his or her performance mistakes independently. The result of teaching in a ballet school should also be a developed artistic form of classical dance, allowing the student to express aesthetic values and personality. In terms of preparation for work in a professional dance company, he or she should be equipped with mental resilience, passion, perseverance and professional discipline. He or she should be characterised by a sense of healthy ambition and motivation to continuously improve his or her professional skills, organising his or her work in accordance with the health and safety rules of the dance profession. A significant learning outcome should be the ability to work responsibly with a team of creators and performers (*Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage*, 2023).

Conclusion

Although ballet undoubtedly delights, it is noticeable that on the Polish publishing market studies on artistic education in dance, unlike in other arts, are still few or outdated (Rutkowska-Sagata, 2019). Agnieszka Rutkowska-Sagata rightly observes that dance, and classical dance (ballet) in particular, does not “occupy its rightful place in the pedagogical theory of aesthetic education – it does not appear autonomously alongside the listed types of education: visual arts, theatre, film and music (it is only an element of the latter)” (Rutkowska-Sagata, 2019, p. 7).

The aforementioned author also emphasises that artistic education in Poland, especially ballet education, is facing a number of problems, the most prominent of which are issues related to low school enrolment, which results in, among other things, fewer students and underestimation of the admission criteria (Rutkowska-Sagata, 2019). Ballet schooling is overly resource-intensive and therefore quite problematic. The school building has to meet high accommodation requirements, as teaching takes place in small groups. The ballet school employs a large number of people with varying competencies: both professional and general subject teachers and accompanists.

It is also worth adding that preparation for a classical dancer's job involves many years of study during which students are not verified in terms of specialisation as such specialisations have not been introduced in Poland so far. Any student who does not fulfil the key criteria for traditional classical dance is not promoted to the next grade and leaves

the school, even though he or she could have stayed there for example for a musical, group or contemporary dance profile or for another one if such profiles were created.

It is also worth mentioning the dilemmas of the dancer's profession, among which A. Rutkowska-Sagata mentions the low social status of the profession itself, the short stage career, "the high level of injury, the mismatch between education and labour market requirements, the huge competition from foreign dancers, the abolition of early retirement" (Rutkowska-Sagata, 2019, p. 8).

In addition, there is also a paradox inherent in a dancer's career – when a dancer reaches the heights of artistry and the peak of maturity, when his or her professional personality becomes stable and mature, his or her body ages and thus begins to limit his technical capabilities and fitness. Then the conscious dancer is forced to give way to more attractive and physically fit colleagues – younger dancers.

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