

Extended classical ballet with young people

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This presentation focused on three twisted and twinned concepts that I've used in my classical ballet teaching: exploration, improvisation, and composition. The pupils were 10-13-year-old girls in a dance studio setting. This research was developed through collaborations with young dance pupils over a lengthy period of time with the purpose of extending the teaching and learning process with their peers and the dance teacher. My questions were: How could I, together with children, develop the engagement, participation, and influence of the compositional process in dance? Which tools are available that will make classical ballet more accessible for children aged 10-13 years old? As the children were involved in the so-called twisted processes of exploration, improvisation, and composition, could their dance identities be enhanced through their own choices and preferred movements, as well as through their movement qualities and personal expression? Exploration was used as a tool to investigate and discover possible ways of moving and expressing oneself. This was used together with improvisation as a tool to raise awareness of the individuals' preferred actions and how these actions are connected. During this presentation, excerpts of compositions created by the dance pupils were shown to exemplify the way in which they were performed. The resulting composition was a combination of their movement investigation plus learning skills, and incorporated a substantial contribution of the students' own personal ideas, thus reflecting their identity.

A qualitative research method incorporating children's interview techniques was employed for the study and results demonstrate that early practice in exploration, improvisation, and composition twinned in ballet proved interesting, exciting, and accessible to young students. The questions were: Could you please tell me what improvisation is to you?; Could you explain what improvisation means and how it affects you?; What do you feel when improvising during a ballet lesson? Some of the answers were: "Improvisation is when somebody puts on music and you are swept into it"; "I think it's the most fun thing to do. You

can think yourself and every movement means something without the others knowing what.”; “It’s fun but also a little embarrassing.” A 12-year-old girl answered, “I feel, well, I feel like I’m a bird. I feel that I’m free and that you can perform a lot of things. It’s a wonderful feeling like as if you were flying over the ocean. I mean birds are pretty nice. You feel that you move nicely. And it feels that it’s going alright and that you move with grace.” Issues that arose during the discussions concerned the movement qualities that the girls used in performance and even the question of if they had been exposed to new qualities. Spectators reflected over the fact that the girls mostly moved with soft quality.

Keywords: classical ballet, exploration, improvisation, composition, and qualitative interviews

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