

CORPS DE BALLET INTERNATIONAL  
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CAROLINE ROCHER BARNES

TITLE: *The Everlasting Legacy of the Ballet Russe Ballerinas on 21st Century Ballet*

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the profound influence of some of the most renowned Ballet Russe ballerinas, shaping the world of ballet in the 21st century. The Ballet Russe, a ballet company established by Diaghilev in 1909, brought together extraordinary dancers, choreographers, and composers, creating a cultural phenomenon that transformed the art form. Through their innovative techniques, artistic collaborations, and groundbreaking performances, the Ballet Russe ballerinas left an indelible mark on ballet that continues to resonate today.

As I draw from historical research, interviews, and critical analysis, my study examines how the Ballet Russe ballerinas' contributions have shaped classical and contemporary ballet. It explores their influence on choreographic styles, training methods, and artistic expression. Additionally, my research delves into the impact of the Ballet Russe ballerinas' legacy on the development of ballet as a global art form. It explores how their international tours and collaborations with renowned artists have fostered a cross-cultural exchange, enriching ballet's repertoire and expanding its audience base.

Ultimately, this research highlights the enduring relevance of the Ballet Russe ballerinas' artistic vision and their invaluable contributions to the evolution of ballet in the 21st century. By recognizing their legacy, we gain a deeper understanding of the art form's history and the ongoing quest for innovation and artistic excellence in ballet.

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## DIANE BEDFORD

TITLE: *21st Century Ballet Pedagogy: What can Educational Psychology Teach Us?*

### ABSTRACT:

The traditional colonial power structure of the ballet class historically gives the instructor ultimate authority with the expectation that students obey commands and directives given to them. A praxis with such prescribed etiquette offers little to no room for students to build a sense of autonomy, and it disregards the unique needs of each student's social, emotional, and cognitive learning processes. While educational psychology methodologies have become more and more a part of traditional education, this information has not become fully absorbed and utilized by the ballet community. Educational psychology research demonstrates that effective pedagogy often employs student-centered learning by promoting, "informed, consensual, and egalitarian human relations," (Burbules, 2005). Building on the theory of constructivism, student-centered learning occurs when, "the teacher shares control of the classroom and students are allowed to explore, experiment, and discover on their own," (Brown, 2008). Furthermore, studies on collaborative leadership demonstrate that group members feel more welcomed and confident in a collaborative learning environment when their thoughts are pursued, and their responses accepted (Kramer et. all, 2011). As such, I argue that instructors who wish to build mutual respect with their students can employ strategies to foster the student's agency and autonomy. Instructors can implement opportunities for students' choice making, creativity, and individuality. By applying principles of the scientific method, students can objectively learn to analyze, experiment, and determine their own best practices in a ballet class. This paper will discuss specific methodologies I employ within my own ballet classes to support student success.

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**ABBY CASS**

**TITLE:** *Letting Go: A Care-Centered Undergraduate Ballet Class*

**ABSTRACT:**

As calls for inclusion continue to increase in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implication of traditional authoritarian pedagogy and the role of rigor requires critical consideration in collegiate dance institutions. Specifically, ballet technique has historically been taught within a rigorous, unbalanced power structure that centrally positions the instructor as all-knowing while students exist as passive and empty, waiting to be filled by a teacher's wisdom to successfully enter the world post-academia. A robust body of scholarship addresses these approaches, as well as those that oppose the authoritarian teacher-student dynamic, in undergraduate dance studio practices. However, a dearth of research exists regarding a care-centered pedagogy in the dance studio and how intentionally centering care can upset an unbalanced power structure.

The idea of education itself as an act of care is not novel, nor is the pursuit of pedagogical practices and strategies for ballet educators to ensure the traditions they pass on are inclusive of a broader student population. In a push for inclusivity, it is often assumed that care and rigor cannot co-exist when educating collegiate student performers. As a recent MFA graduate and graduate teaching assistant, I draw upon my simultaneous experiences as a ballet educator and student during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and explore how I came to understand a pedagogy of care as foundational to an inclusive teaching approach. This paper outlines how I enacted a pedagogy of care within my undergraduate ballet classes in post-pandemic years, including challenges, successes, and lingering questions.

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## CARLY HERRMANN

TITLE: *The Tension Between Ballet and Mental Health*

### ABSTRACT:

My research examines perfectionism among female-identifying pre-professional and professional dancers within the ballet world. Though many people dance ballet, I chose to concentrate on female-identifying dancers since many of my experiences as a female-identifying dancer guided me to my questions. The focus will be on perfectionistic qualities that become internalized emotions that can strip away a dancer's love, joy, and passion for ballet (and for themselves as individuals in ways that affect mental health and performance). I want to see change within ballet culture and improvement in how the ballet community and female-identifying pre-professional and professional dancers can improve mental health, self-perception, and career sustainability. I investigate how refining resilience, mindfulness, and self-care can help improve ballet dancers' mental health. My research stems from personal experiences, choreography, theory, and my certificate in Applied Positive Behavioral Psychology at the University of Utah.

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## CHELSEA HILDING

TITLE: *Choreographing the Ballet Dictionary: Anarchist Teaching Strategies for the Higher Education Ballet Classroom*

### ABSTRACT:

Ballet is known for its fixed traditions, including a movement vocabulary that utilizes 17th-century French terminology. Numerous ballet manuals inscribe ballet steps through written descriptions and images of “correct” execution, often depicting slender, hyperfeminine, white women and muscular, broad-chested men, reinforcing not only an oppressively binary understanding of gender but physical “perfection” rooted in Eurocentricity.

The values underpinning these manuals often extend to ballet pedagogy, classes aiming to mold the body to achieve aesthetic and virtuosic “perfection,” leaving little room for difference or creativity. Dance programs in higher education, typically requiring ballet for matriculation, face particular challenges as they foster diverse student populations for whom these traditional pedagogical philosophies are inadequate and even damaging.

“Choreographing the Ballet Dictionary: Anarchist Teaching Strategies for the Higher Education Ballet Classroom” aims to challenge the hyper-thin, Eurocentric, heteronormative “ballet body” as the ideal body for ballet and show that ballet is a form with myriad possibilities for creative engagement.

Significant scholarship has discussed critical pedagogies in ballet. However, paralleling Thomas DeFrantz’s notion of space-making, scholarship tends to center on welcoming difference into an already established ballet classroom built on Eurocentric values and conventions. This project engages with anarchist pedagogies by questioning the status quo, encouraging critical thinking, and co-creating a classroom community.

This project draws on university dancers’ unique knowledges and identities, offering a video ballet dictionary where each ballet term is uniquely interpreted, articulated, and demonstrated to show that ballet technique is fluid and can be used to celebrate rather than suppress diversity.

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## JOELLEN MEGLIN

TITLE: *Against Insularity: Ballet as a Site of Intermedial Knowledge*

### ABSTRACT:

In her book on the 18th-century history of ballet theory, Olivia Sabee explores ballet's theoretical transition from an interdisciplinary art form with underpinnings in poetry, theatre, visual art, and music, to concrete practices encompassing a specialized dance vocabulary. These historical roots fascinate me, as I ponder ballet's potential in higher education to help students understand relationships between the arts and to develop intermedial, "new" knowledge. In my own research on X, a highly successful women choreographer of the 20th century, I discovered that intermedial experimentation was central to her creative process.

I propose intermediality—the search for creative practices in the spaces between art forms—as an alternative model for ballet pedagogy of the future. My integrative approach synthesizes pedagogical strategies from two curricular-development trends of the 1990s: Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) and experiential inquiry. The Getty Center for Education in the Arts fostered the development of DBAE with the goal of improving arts education and securing its place within general education in the United States. Experiential inquiry achieved philosophic clout with the embrace of phenomenology as a research method central to the discipline of dance.

In a case study, I explore the curricular rationale, objectives, structure, evaluation, etc., of a 200-level course, offered at a liberal arts college, which integrated teaching/learning of ballet's cognitive and kinesthetic/creative dimensions. The final group project required students to create mini ballets "in the manner of" different historical periods and, for visual design elements, to collaborate with papermaking students in the art department.

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## TRENT MONTGOMERY

TITLE: *Ballet on Tour: Pedagogy for the Traveling Body*

### ABSTRACT:

My proposed project examines current pedagogical understandings of training the ballet dancer on the road. More specifically, looking at the most efficient methods of keeping the body moving healthily with the added difficulties that comes with performing on the road (i.e. warm-up space, flooring, raked staging, tight spaces, etc.). When I am on tour, I often question the effective way of training the body, without exhausting the physical body about to jump into a three-act performance en pointe. In my experience, a challenging class tends to lead to over-exertion, leaving dancers unable to perform to the best of their abilities. Looking at the certain pedagogical understandings of structuring a ballet class on the road, specific training for the dancer en pointe, and other methods of keeping the body moving in a healthy manner, my research will culminate in an oral presentation. I will draw upon my own personal understandings, other dancers' experiences, academic articles, books, ballet teacher manuals and cross training methods to conduct my research.

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Various Ballet Teaching Manuals (i.e. American Ballet Theatre, Vaganova, Cecchetti, 4Pointe).

Interviews with regularly touring company dancers.

## ROBYN PASTERNAK

TITLE: *Creating Space for Classical Ballet Technique in Multidisciplinary Dance Programs*

### ABSTRACT:

There is a recent movement away from classical ballet technique training in multidisciplinary dance programs. The underlying rationale for this is that the technical and artistic needs of the current generation of dancers can be met by other dance forms outside of ballet. For example, a predominately contemporary modern dance program may bridge a plethora of movement analysis studies with diverse dance forms to replace the ballet elements that would have in the past been pedagogical staples. This trajectory, however, is detrimental to both the ballet community and to the students of multidisciplinary programs. For ballet technique holds valuable insights about the body that are unlikely to be introduced in other dance forms. My thesis is that behind this trajectory are two core misconceptions. The first is that ballet technique cannot be applied safely to dancers whose anatomy is other than the ideal "classical" ballet body. The second is that ballet technique is a fixed methodology with an unyielding aesthetic. The goal of my paper is to explore ways to open dialogue between faculty and students so as to better explain the intricacies of classical ballet technique and its vast importance to dance training. Throughout, I will provide examples of the science behind ballet technique as well as delve into the aesthetic and stylistic contributions it has to offer.

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## THEA PATTERSON

TITLE: *"Tits and Ass": Tracing the Demonization of Female Corporeality in Ballerina Self-Talk*

### ABSTRACT:

What is a "ballet body"? Specifically, what are women's bodies in ballet supposed to look like? Although predominantly transmitted via a physical medium, the ballet aesthetic has also been upheld and perpetuated through language, specifically how we describe and unconsciously degrade the body. This article investigates and analyzes American instructors' and ballerinas' language referring to their bodies, gathered from pre-existing interviews, articles, and autobiographies from the late twentieth century to the present day.

The close-reading analysis of language relies on the theoretical frameworks of philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, whose work investigates the lack of women within bodily theory, in coordination with philosopher Susan Bordo and her social-cultural analysis of thinness as the ultimate form of control. Grosz's description of the gendered body/mind split that permeates Western society, in addition to the Cartesian ideology of the "body as a metaphor," situates itself well within the context of ballet: the woman's body is something to control.

The late theorist and educator bell hooks reminds readers that theory can and should be a liberatory practice. Analyzing ballerina language highlights not only how language can be harmful but also can also point Ballet educators toward new ways of speaking about and training bodies in ballet. Reframing the metaphor as an image-based tool, rather than laying it on the body as a value statement, has the power to enhance instruction instead of reducing a ballerina's body to a tool or an animal to be subjugated.

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## TYLER SCHNESE

TITLE: *Integrating Queer Self: Leading a Ballet Classroom*

### ABSTRACT:

While recently teaching at a summer program, a professional dancer taking my class commented that it was refreshing to witness me, a queer instructor, blending queerness into my facilitation of a ballet class. While I currently value integrating and expressing my queer self through verbal phrases, physical gestures, and ballet vocabulary which could be understood as outside classical ballet's adherence to a Western gender binary, this was not always the case. Upon transitioning from dancer to instructor, I became increasingly aware of the queer parts of myself which had been suppressed through years of training and working in transphobic and homophobic environments.

Twenty years after Doug Risner addressed unspoken truths in dance education in relation to sexual orientation, what remains unsaid for queer dance educators? In particular, what deterrents remain for instructors who might not have had opportunities to express their queerness as dancers? "Integrating (Queer) Self" explores methods for integrating identity into teaching and the unique challenges and rewards for queer ballet educators. The act of making space for queer self while leading a ballet classroom provokes questions surrounding the role of expressivity as an instructor as well as the possible risks posed by the disclosure and integration of one's queer identity. While this negotiation has been documented in traditional education settings, ballet's history and incremental progress surrounding queer representation provide a rich landscape for continued inquiry.

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## CHRISTA ST.JOHN & JAMIE JOHNSON

TITLE: *Releasing the Binary: Embodied Empowerment in Ballet Technique and Performance*

### ABSTRACT:

Despite positive shifts in ballet in higher education that aim to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, there remains an opportunity to address outmoded paradigms which perpetuate the gender binary, heteronormativity, and conformity to aesthetic ideals embedded within balletic traditions. As co-artistic directors of a student ballet performance ensemble, choreographers, and technique and theory teachers, we are uniquely positioned to effect change in practice and performance. In this presentation, we will illuminate conscientiousness, gender-inclusive, and equity-based pedagogical approaches to foster embodied empowerment. These methods developed through the application of feminist pedagogies (Alterowitz 2014, 2021; Fisher 2021; Ritchie 2019; Zeller 2017), empathetic leadership concepts (Kock et al. 2018; Cuddy 2016; Brown 2018), and Functional Awareness® principles (N. Romita and A. Romita 2018, 2023). We fuse this broad spectrum of scholarship in combination with in-practice exploration to cultivate inclusive studio environments that weave personal agency with artistic and technical achievement. Our pedagogical interventions, which promote a gender-expansive future, offer new perspectives on inclusive ballet training and performance to promote growth-oriented mindsets and eschew the perpetuation of the gender binary in ballet.

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## BETH TWIGS

TITLE: *Veiled Assault: The "unseen" side of ballet partnering*

### ABSTRACT:

Partnering in ballet is an incredibly intimate act. To dance in tandem with another involves intimate touch, emotional vulnerability, and an incredible amount of trust. However, in practice, the partnering experience does not always consist of empowering and/or healthy elements. Based on my own experiences with and within ballet partnering through training, a professional career, and now my own choreographic practice, I am personally aware that there can be a myriad of both negative and positive aspects and norms surrounding the culture and within the acts of ballet partnering. In order to gain a deeper understanding on a larger scale of the dynamics within ballet partnering, I have focused my research on exploring both the positive and negative aspects within the field.

To obtain both qualitative and quantitative data, I conducted research on the perspective of female-identifying professional ballet dancers through both surveys and one-on-one interviews. Using these methods, I unfortunately found that harmful behavior is too commonly weaved throughout the partnering experience for many women in ballet. Often veiled under the guise of the mechanics of partnering, or the nature of the job, women reported experiencing physical, psychological, and sexual abuse by their male-identifying partners in and outside of the rehearsal studio. While the majority of the women who participated in this research reported having many or mostly positive experiences with partnering throughout their careers in ballet, many also experienced abusive behavior. This behavior of veiled assault includes: Triggered Partnering, Negligent Behavior, Intoxicated Partnering, and Sexual Harassment and Assault.

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## EDWARD WARBURTON

TITLE: *Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance, Revisited*

### ABSTRACT:

To teach ballet is to bring dancers into a world of meanings and movements. Despite several hundred years of inherited traditions to guide us, contemporary ballet educators face a myriad of questions about what and how, why and who, where and when to do just that. Since at least the early 2000s, some ballet educators have used the concept of a critical pedagogy to address social and cultural issues arising from our complicated histories: from the messages behind our pedagogical methods to the hidden curriculum of ballet's authoritarianism and whiteness in relation to diversity, equity, inclusion and access. Most of these authors cite Joann Kealiinohomoku's (1970) article "An anthropologist looks at ballet as a form of ethnic dance" as a starting point for interrogating ballet roots and problematizing ballet bodies. Ironically, I argue, what's missing from such critical ballet pedagogies is serious consideration of what makes ballet a form of ethnic dance in the first place, and its implications for ballet training, pedagogy, and performance. The purpose of this paper is to revisit Kealiinohomoku's influential phrase: to examine what "ballet-as-ethnic-dance" meant to her and to consider how this provocative idea from 50 years ago may be applied in support of ballet in higher education today. I ask, how might this idea shift perceptions about ballet; in what ways might it shift languages for teaching; and, what might it reveal about the felt experiences needed for doing, making, and viewing ballet?

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## ILANA GOLDMAN & PAIGE CUNNINGHAM-CALDARELLA

TITLE: *Building Community in Ballet Class*

### ABSTRACT:

In this collaborative lecture/demonstration, we will utilize our recent book chapter in the forthcoming anthology *Anti-Racism in Ballet Teaching* as a jumping off point to explore devices for cultivating a sense of community in a ballet class and upending the individualistic nature often found in daily ballet praxis. We approach this through a contemporary ballet lens, employing contemporary ballet choreography and partnering to cultivate connection, collaboration, and joy. Taking partnering outside of traditional ballet pas de deux classes and placing it into our ballet technique classes, it becomes a tool for developing interdependence and highlighting elements of the technique itself. Beginning with the idea that the ballet barre is a student's first ballet partner and moving into non-gender-specific partnering work in center exercises, our strategies are particularly suitable for university settings, where we both work. Our invitations offer a rich array of options for educators, including incorporating the choreographies and processes of artists such as Jehbreal Jackson, Justin Peck, Amy Seiwert, William Forsythe, Ballez, and more to develop new relationships with the "ballet tradition" and each other in the studio. This lecture/demonstration is an invitation to share ideas, reimagine ballet classes, and encourage each educator to explore, develop, and experiment to find new opportunities to reignite connection and community in a post-pandemic world. We will share video excerpts of various community-building tactics used in the studio along with synchronous explanations and demonstrations.

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## ELIZABETH JOHNSON & LUC VANIER

TITLE: *Searching for Upright Instead of Neutral: Towards an Adaptive Ballet Alignment*

### ABSTRACT:

Ballet has become so culturally ubiquitous that its postural signifiers, for example the standing posture at the barre, are often regarded as exemplary, neutral/normal, or balanced. Documenting ballet postures, in white, male representation, de Blasis drew the positions of body mechanically—the dancer a supposedly neutral entity shifting the shape of the limbs as the form required. This colonial postural archive has reverberated across all genres of dance, disrupting an understanding of the evolutionary ancestry of human movement. Shifting pedagogical perspective towards a developmental movement lens has important ramifications in the ways we might approach the basic steps associated with ballet barre and centre. We assert that recognizing the overall extension necessary for standing, plus the extra opening of the body required to stand in turn out, clarifies the use of the arms, legs, pelvis, and trunk— including the highly important and complex activity of épaulement. Our years of somatically informed work with developmental patterning provides a clear methodology that supports stability in extension/hyperextension as well as tempers unconscious habitual overworking and overarching of the spine often internalized as part of learning ballet “technique.” Our session shares and elucidates the foundational underpinnings of our current understanding of “upright,” bipedal posture which we insist is not special/specialized for dance more so than for any moving body. We’ll also discuss and demonstrate this dynamic relationship to basic steps such as tendus, pliés, passés and battements as they go from front to side to back. The workshop is for all abilities and styles.

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## NANCY ROMITA & ALLEGRA ROMITA

TITLE: *Equity-informed alignment cueing for external rotation & pelvic stability in the ballet aesthetic through Functional Awareness®*

### ABSTRACT:

Ballet instructors in higher education are poised to lead the field toward equity-informed cueing that can honor and lift up all bodies that dance. Equity-informed movement coaching enhances dance skills and develops student agency. The presenters' research challenges historical perspectives in anatomy education that exacerbate implicit gender, racial, and body image biases within anatomical texts. These images and 'norms' unwittingly inform dancers to perpetuate alignment cueing that may compromise rather than encourage body integrity. This experiential movement session provides innovative anatomical perspectives on alignment cueing. It employs a Functional Awareness® approach to maximize pelvic and lumbar stability and enhance potential in external rotation. Participants learn student-centered discovery cueing, anatomical visualizations, tactile cueing, & neuromuscular recruitment strategies to improve dynamic alignment. The Functional Awareness approach provides specific and purposeful cueing language to self-assess without subjective judgment, honor the body structure of each student, and support dance wellness. The presenters propose that the practice of assessment without judgment and equity informed alignment cueing nurtures student agency and efficacy in action.

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## EMILY STEIN

TITLE: *Not Opposites: Ballet and the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education®*

### ABSTRACT:

This experiential workshop will explore the power of integrating somatic pedagogy into ballet technique. The presenter will offer a Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement® lesson, followed by an exploration of how this somatic approach might be applied to ballet education, both mechanically and pedagogically. The goal is to open dialog among teachers to expand the possibility for healthy, vital embodiment of the art of ballet by a larger population of our students.

In higher education, many students emerge from required ballet classes feeling excluded and deficient, and that ballet is irrelevant to them. Ballet is still often taught through pedagogical processes that reinforce its problematic idealized qualities. Familiar approaches to cuing and imagery often obscure the true mechanics required to execute a step, and are especially unhelpful to students whose bodies don't conform to the ballet ideal.

Moshe Feldenkrais stated "We act according to our self-image," proposing that a more complete understanding of self, a more detailed self-image, was necessary for a person to reach maturity. I propose that through a grounding in somatic education, specifically the Feldenkrais Method, dancers can embody ballet more fully as a tool for their own artistry, emerging not "hating ballet," but feeling it can serve their artistic voices.

Developing greater awareness of the map of their unique body helps a dancer mature: grounded in their own physical experience, more confident in their voice, and more able to take risks aesthetically. This risk-taking is necessary for the growth and usefulness of ballet as a training technique, and as a vital art form.

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