

## Awareness Through Movement® as Critical Pedagogy in Ballet

**Rainy Demerson \***

*The University of the West Indies Cave Hill, Barbados, U.S.A. Lecturer*

*Feldenkrais* methods emphasize individualization, freedom, and ease. Ballet methods emphasize perfection and hierarchy, and this can lead to injuries. This paper asks how *Awareness Through Movement (ATM)* and ballet - two practices that seem to have disparate philosophies and goals - could ever align, given the long history of authoritarian pedagogy inculcated in ballet. By cross referencing my experiences as a ballet and *ATM* student, interviews with teachers who combine these techniques, and documented research, I argue that ballet pedagogy can be reconstructed with an emancipatory approach using *ATM* to help disrupt institutionalized practices of body shaming, racism, and elitism. I interview teachers who engage both modalities within one class to imagine what a professional ballet community could look like with critical pedagogy and somatic practice at its core. I propose *Awareness Through Movement* as a vehicle for reconstructing our understandings of the interplay between race, class, and gender issues in ballet, restructuring thoughts and practices not through dialectic, but through the body itself.

Key words: *Awareness Through Movement*, Ballet, Critical Pedagogy, Dance, Diversity

### **Introduction**

In 2014 I found myself in a unique ballet class at Hollins University as part of the MFA program in Dance. In this class the teacher asked us to sit and really listen to the percussionist, Vladimir Espinoza, before we took our places at the barre. She spoke softly and made eye contact attentively. She wore a t-shirt and sweatpants cut off at the knees. Tessa Chandler, former dancer with the Vienna

---

\* Corresponding author.

Email address: rainydemerson@yahoo.com

State Opera, Royal Danish, and Dutch National Ballet companies, is now a New York-based teacher of ballet, *Feldenkrais* somatic methods, and a fusion of *Awareness Through Movement (ATM)* and ballet. Taking Chandler's ballet and *ATM* classes, I became very intrigued by her method. I initiated this research curious to know how two practices that seemed to engage such disparate, even opposite, philosophies and goals could ever align. Previously all of my dance teachers who were interested in Somatics taught within a modern/contemporary dance class, and usually it was a few exercises in the beginning warm-up that often felt disconnected from the rest of the class. They seemed to look back and down on ballet as the problem, and post-modern dance as the solution - artistically and physically. Much of the writing on *ATM* within the dance field is applied to modern/contemporary dance studies where movement vocabularies can adapt to unique philosophies and pedagogies of different choreographers and teachers. While the ideas explored here can certainly carry resonance in other dance genres and somatic practices, I focus on ballet and *Awareness Through Movement* in order to highlight how seemingly irreconcilable differences could be overcome with powerful implications. Given the long history of ballet and the depth to which the authoritarian pedagogy is inculcated, I was curious how emancipatory pedagogy could manifest in ballet curricula, and succeed in training dancers. More importantly, I question what a ballet community could look like with critical pedagogy at its core and *Awareness Through Movement* as a methodology. Cross referencing my personal experiences, in-depth interviews with teachers, and documented research, we can begin to see a clearer picture of how ballet lessons can be reconstructed with a critical pedagogy using *Awareness Through Movement*. This paper examines how a practice that is based on hierarchy, idealized bodies, and discipline can reconcile with one based on freedom, individual experience, and ease. I argue that in their fusion, there is a potential to transgress the traditional physical, artistic, and political borders of professional ballet training and institutionalization.

## **Dancing Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is based in the Brazilian educator/scholar Paulo Freire's theories, expounded upon in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and built upon by educators and theorists such as bell hooks. This term is used to describe practices guided by the premise that teachers must account for the individual needs of students of all socio-economic backgrounds and facilitate their perspectives being voiced and honored in the learning environment. Students and teachers are equally responsible for learning, and learning should be engaging and holistic for students by addressing their unique needs and challenging them to think critically. Freire worked with students in a way that invited and challenged them to question their previous modes of understanding and operating, and to imagine other

possibilities for being in the world. He writes, “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.” (Freire, 1996, p. 64) The ideas of process and transformation are crucial to the study of dance where we are perpetually experiencing a sense of transformation (physical, metaphysical, or mental), or revisiting processes striving toward an ideal. What Freire calls problem-posing education is a part of critical pedagogy which is centered in students’ critical thinking and experiential learning. When applied to the study of ballet, critical pedagogy can restructure the hierarchical learning experience of most pre-professional training programs. *Awareness Through Movement* is one somatic practice that can be used towards this end.

Despite stylistic variations, traditionally and most commonly, ballet classes are taught in an authoritarian style, which places the teacher as the all-knowing authority to impart knowledge upon the students who respond by doing their best to reach pre-determined goals in a pre-determined fashion. Dance scholar, Brenda Dixon-Gottschild describes a typical class:

*The class or individual learns movement from the leader and performs it for her...The object is to correct one’s body and one’s performance to the aesthetic value that the leader knows but that you, as a student or dance company member, aspire to and must be taught. Structurally inherent in this relationship is the inferiority of the dancer, in the sense that the approval of the authority and one’s willingness to acquiesce to the authority are essential to success. (Gottschild, 2005, p. 11)*

Paolo Freire called this method *the banking system* of learning where a teacher, described as a conduit for the oppressive aspects of a society, views students as empty containers to be filled with the teacher’s knowledge. We can see this pedagogy enacted in many ballet classes. Chandler describes:

*As a result of this externally-oriented bias, young people brought up in this context -- especially those who train every day alongside older students moving through and beyond puberty while in this context - often become good at ordering themselves around, but less good at listening to themselves and following their own internal compass. (Chandler, 2016, interview)*

Without being encouraged to question or explore a full range of options, student quickly fall into a habit of obeying authority figures and pushing through painful circumstances in the hopes of reaching an idealized shape, technical ability, or status. Despite its popularity, for many dancers, ballet also elicits strong feelings of inadequacy, or bad memories of emotional abuse. Even Chandler, who was

very successful in the field, recounts feelings of inadequacy during training. “Spending my childhood and early adulthood in front of mirrors and with such clear ideals of how (ballet) bodies should look and be formed meant that when I looked in the mirror I saw only what I was not, and those “failures” were exaggerated at that. I only saw myself in parts, not as a whole.” (Chandler, 2016)

A dancer’s self-esteem is influenced by many factors, two of the most powerful being self-talk, and what we hear from teachers. Some teachers abuse the dedication their students have for the form. Stories of teachers throwing chairs or holding cigarettes under dancers legs to “encourage” them to increase the height of their extensions are so well-known and representative of a type of teacher so many of us have had at one point that we actually laugh about them, assuming the old guard will eventually die off, and feeling relieved we made it out alive. The problem is, this teaching style *does* succeed in its aims. “Although this description may sound harsh, the process works. Either it weeds out those who can't put up with it or it strengthens, develops, and creates dancers by practice, repetition, and pointed criticism.” (Gottschild, 2005, p. 11) Some of these dancers will have stress fractures throughout their twenties, or hip replacements in their fifties. Most of them will teach the way they were taught and many won’t question it or seek to change it. We tend to consider blind obedience foundational to the ballet tradition.

## **Tradition and Trajectory**

Never designed for liberation, Ballet has its roots in Western European court dances designed to entertain and praise royal families. These traditional roles further instruct behavior in the current ballet community. In the United States, ballet schools and companies have not reflected American diversity and have been particularly stringent on their desire to maintain a thin White look. In countries like the United States with a long history of legal segregation, and where arts institutions are largely funded by small organizations and private donations rather than federal or regional governments, ballet academies and companies have directly excluded people of color and indirectly excluded poor people who could not afford lessons.

Professional ballet demands that dancers begin their dedicated training early in life, peak at an early age, and often offers little time or support for an education that will prepare them for careers offstage once their bodies can no longer support the demands of performing professionally. For most, starting during or after puberty is unimaginable. Misty Copeland, principal ballerina with American Ballet Theater, is an *exception* on all accounts. The first African-American principal of the company, Copeland started late and had to fight for her place at the barre. Fueled by the desire to overcome racist and ageist expectations, but also gifted with natural talents like quick learning, flexibility, and

control, Copeland faced uncertainty throughout her ascent: “Most ballerinas start to dance when they are sipping juice boxes in preschool. I was thirteen years old. Self-doubt taunted me.” (Copeland, 2014, p. 97)

Because of the early start and rigorous expensive training, American ballerinas often have to choose between college or ballet, and are too young to consider the ramifications on their lifelong career viability. This is important to keep in mind when considering the ways traditional pedagogy strips away their sense of agency and demands total commitment. Pre-professional schedules are grueling. Copeland describes a typical performance season schedule for a dancer at ABT. “We’ll go to the theater to take our morning classes, and then rehearse and perform from ten thirty a.m. to eleven at night. That’s the routine, Monday through Saturday.” (Copeland, 2014, p. 158) With such intense demand put on the body and mind, professional ballerinas can expect to endure injuries. “Injuries are common in the ballet world. Every day there is someone who suffers from a stress fracture, a pulled muscle, a neck spasm because we are constantly dancing dancing, dancing.” (Copeland, 2014, p. 160)

Augusta Moore, Feldenkrais instructor, director of the Ballet program at ODC Dance Commons in San Francisco, and former dancer with the San Francisco Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, and Chicago City Ballet teaches what she calls, Embodied Ballet, this infusion of *Awareness Through Movement* principles and techniques into ballet. She concurs, “In the San Francisco Ballet, when I was there, there were like, sixty people in the company, and doing eight shows a week. There was even a time once when they had five casts of a ballet, and they couldn't cover it. There were so many injuries that the five casts were all injured.”(Moore, 2015, interview) With so much at stake, we have to ask: What is it that inspires and requires such bodily sacrifice?

As a genre that was developed, in part, as a tool to exalt European royalty and continues many exclusive practices today, we can consider the ballet community of students, teachers, performers, choreographers, and company directors, a global micro-society. Randy Martin positions technique as the interlocutor between a student’s sense of self and of becoming and state mandated norms of behavior. “In the studios where dance is taught and learned, the legacies of technique cross with the institutions of self-formation. Even more, bodies are held together by the unrecognized authority of the state...” (Martin, 1998, p. 153) In other words, what the body does helps create who the person is. Within the technique, one’s role as authority or subordinate is practiced, lived. As Brenda Dixon-Gottschild writes, “Figuratively speaking, dancers as a group are a subjugated “race.” (Gottschild, 2005, p. 11) This is particularly true in the studios where students are expected to conform dress and hairstyle even before being allowed to dance. “Dance technique can be considered a political practice precisely to the extent that it represents a moment where bodies that are primitive with respect

to their subordination to a given authority develop the means to move for and against that very authority.” (Martin, 1998, p. 156) Within the context of a dance class, power is established and negotiated. We can embody the status quo or create new ways of negotiating choice and action.

Even when abuse isn't present, coercion and submission are common. Angela Pickard's longitudinal ethnography of twelve young British ballet students concluded that silence and suffering is normalized for the students such that they often have trouble asking questions or expressing concerns even when abuse isn't present in the class (Pickard, 2012). Even Augusta Moore could recall students who were clearly suffering from injuries but too afraid to let her down by admitting to it when she asked. It would seem that in many ways the culture promotes the idea that the dancer is to be seen and not heard. The ballet student is not to question or contradict his or her instruction and is brought up in a highly competitive system that leaves little room to rebel if one wants to succeed. Pickard's study shows that the body's negotiation between pleasure and pain, real and ideal, is fragile and heavily influenced by the language employed by the teacher or director. This dynamic is of particular concern given the additional pressures young women are subjected to in society at large and the fact that by far, most professional choreographers and company directors in ballet are men - men telling young women how to look and even how to emote like a woman “should.” By not seeing people who look like them in positions of power, young women can feel their efforts are limited and determined by men. The same can be said for ethnic minorities within the community, being led by those of European descent. Copeland reports, “There's just generations of white girls who can see themselves as ballerinas. It's not even a question because everyone looks like them on the stage. And it's this psychological thing where we don't see ourselves up there, so it's not something we think we can even dream.” (Ajaka, 2016)

Of course all career fields are subject to the possibility of encountering unjust managers making biased hiring decisions and unfair labor conditions. That the site and tool of labor in the dance field is the dancing body itself, makes the dancer particularly vulnerable to abuse without recourse. However, Pickard's study can also remind us of the power of utilizing the body to work hard towards a goal. “The young dancers were encouraged to embody values such as resilience, determination, self-control, coolness, emotional discipline and self-belief.” (Pickard, 2012, p. 41) If in its organization and discipline, dance technique is creating a body politic, what are the salient modes of resistance within it? In a ballet class, the teacher is the first point of contact between a sanguine child and a world of exclusions. Somatic awareness poses an educational intervention that values self-care and offers self-empowerment as a tool for grace. This is perhaps a revolutionary scene change for ballet.

## Feldenkrais and Fouettés

*The Feldenkrais Method* accesses movement to uncover individualized knowledge and engages change as a mechanism for pleasure and freedom under the motto, “Make the impossible possible, the possible easy, and the easy elegant.” (Moore, 2016) Most somatics pioneers first studied one or more Asian meditation/movement practices rooted in the belief that movement and perception influence psychological and spiritual well-being (Eddy, 2002). A Ukrainian-born Jew, Feldenkrais, was an engineer and physicist who injured his knee playing soccer. He was also a black belt in Judo and one of the first practitioners to teach it outside of Japan. His recurring knee injury prompted him to explore his own body and eventually devise his own healing techniques. With this embodied knowledge, Feldenkrais developed two methods of helping people become more aware of their patterned habits and their untapped possibilities. *Functional Integration* involves a trained practitioner using their hands to skillfully and gently manipulate the client’s body and guide passive movement in one-on-one sessions. *Awareness Through Movement* is a group class where the practitioner instructs clients to do gentle movement sequences developed by Feldenkrais in order to retrain the neuromuscular pathways. Both forms have been used with dancers, actors, non-performers, as well as those suffering from mental and physical disabilities. Feldenkrais once said, “I don’t work on the body. I work on the person, not on the body. I don’t know a body without a person...I’ve never seen a person who didn’t think, feel, sense, and move as one action.”(Feldenkrais and Zemach-Bersin, 2010, p. 203) This understanding is fundamental to somatic work.

Somatic systems are designed to do reframe one’s relationship with one’s self and environment through the body. Somatic practices encourage acknowledgement of the inherent connection of mind and body by emphasizing internal perceptions of physical and emotional sensations. Somatic practices, such as *ATM*, encourage practitioners to reconfigure and sometimes heal themselves by developing awareness of their bodies through sensorial exploration and neuromuscular retraining. Various somatic systems, including certification programs, have been used by dancers and in dance education settings since the 1970’s and continue to grow in popularity within dance. In the United States, many new teaching positions in college dance departments seek professors who are experienced in one or more somatic practices and have begun offering or requiring this training for their dance majors (Burnridge, 2012). *Feldenkrais* methods aim to decrease stimulus in order to increase awareness. *Awareness Through Movement* sessions usually start with students lying on their backs on the floor so there is no effort against gravity and it’s easier to focus one’s eyes and mind on a single task. An instructor will guide them through a process of relaxing and noticing various aspects of their posture and tonus - low-level muscular activity that can be observed even in restful stillness. Basically, practitioners are instructed to carry out small simple movements with great attention. “By shifting our attention

to the means of achieving instead of the urge to succeed, the learning process is easier, quieter, and faster.” (Feldenkrais, 1981, p.93) The goal is to increase awareness of what is happening and aim to do it as simply as possible. By doing so, the student may access an easier and more pleasurable route to this and other movement, and may eventually discover a strong sense of empowerment through the subtle changes in quality of movement enacted. This awareness creates the foundation for changes in movement, sensation, feeling, and thinking.

In *Awareness Through Movement*, the goal is not to have every student moving in unison timing or form, or using the exact same pathways to reach a destination. The student distinguishes when a movement feels right, the teacher doesn't tell him/her if it is right or wrong. For a ballet dancer, these characteristics can be frustrating at first: no music, no aesthetic goal, no exciting shapes. In many ways it seems to be the antithesis of ballet. There exists a need to bridge the two practices to enable the dancer to truly benefit from them. Pre-professional training schedules are generally extremely full so incorporating *ATM* into the ballet class allows them to access and apply the information directly, and to see it as fundamental to their training rather than something extra or to be done only as a recuperation from injury.

Teachers may also experience anxiety about their own ability to teach so radically - it is a challenge. They may also worry about students losing technical acuity. But ballet/*ATM* teacher Ann Burnridge reports, “I have been working for more than ten years on the establishment of an egalitarian environment in the ballet and modern classes I teach. From my own observations, my students are reaching the same, if not higher, levels of technical and artistic proficiency now as before I began implementing an alternative to traditional teaching methods.” (Burnridge, 2012, p. 46) Burnridge emphasizes that traditional forms need not be taught by traditional methods. Chandler seems to agree: “I do think the authoritarian nature of the training can be shifted, if not made entirely democratic. Discipline and rigor can be taught without negative reinforcement and oppressive means, and out of respect for young people and the future of ballet (and any profession), I think a departure from old modes of exclusively top-down learning is necessary and has begun in some schools already.” (Chandler, 2016)

We can challenge ourselves to imagine beyond the tradition for its own sake and actualize a contemporary pedagogy to revamp a form whose beauty has survived centuries. Chandler offers a dynamic perspective worth quoting at length.

*I think that inviting creative variation into ballet study could shed important light for both teachers and students. Everything could be explored and toyed with, from the way we orient ourselves in the studio and to each other (student, teacher, musicians), to dancing lying down, to incorporating internal*

*rotation, to verbally narrating our experience while dancing and viewing dance, to re-choreographing old ballet stories in contemporary terms, to flipping roles in the classroom (have students watch and teach each other, make music, choreograph combinations, etc.), and on and on. All of these experiments could bring attention to the givens of most ballet classrooms and open them up to embodied critiques. (Chandler, 2016)*

While Chandler's proposition may seem threatening to those who love tradition, we might do well to remember that Marie Taglioni, George Balanchine, and Vaslav Nijinsky also caused a stir with their innovations - innovations ballet still embraces today. Misty Copeland's persistent media presence and powerful statements have opened a space for dialogue about the institutions of ballet on a much larger and broader scale than had been happening prior. American Ballet Theater has since created Project Plié which partners with Boys and Girls Clubs and other professional ballet companies nationally, to introduce youth to ballet and identify children who have the interest and potential for future training. This initiative sparked similar programs in other ballet companies nationwide (Collins, 2015). These interventions are important, overdue, and welcomed. But what if, in addition to institutional interventions in access and casting, the ballet community decided to work from the inside out - using the "embodied critiques" Chandler describes to use the body itself as the site of critical exploration and evolution? Our bodies are not only representing ideologies, they are living and constructing them. As such, our *corporealities* (Foster, 1996) are both inscribed through language and created through movement. Movement is a dancer's primary mode for understanding and expressing the world. How movement is experienced is vital to how a dancer perceives and proceeds in the world.

All the teachers I interviewed are invested in classical ballet, but not wed to it as an exclusive practice. Imagining the field of ballet as an injured dancer, are we to simply bandage a limb (hiring one exceptional Black dancer), offer a pain-killer (require teachers to stop making insulting comments), or advise the patient to sleep on it ("It's tradition!"). We must see the dance community as interdependent with the whole social structure. I argue that by addressing the body, we address the social structures it designs and operates in.

I spoke with Kevin Cregan, who was a soloist with the Dutch National Ballet and danced with Ballet Frankfurt, Lines Contemporary Ballet, and others. He is also a *Feldenkrais* instructor who works with injured dancers and uses *Feldenkrais* in his ballet classes at the School of Modern Dance in Copenhagen. He explained that the parameters of his teaching change to adapt to each class. "All of my classes infuse *Feldenkrais*. Some of them use it explicitly - I actually do *Awareness Through Movement* and then create ballet exercises around that lesson. Other times it's implicit - I don't mention it at all but I structure the class around a *Feldenkrais* idea. By this point it's implicit in me so I

can't make a ballet class without thinking and analyzing movement in terms of the *Feldenkrais Method*.”(Kevin Cregan, 2015) By responding to the needs of the particular individuals in the room, a teacher will find a need for variation, which *ATM* lends itself to. Cregan explains, “My teacher used to have this thing he'd say: ‘It's never always.’ So I taught the same classes to two different groups but I changed different parameters in the second class from the first class.” (Kevin Cregan, 2015) Moore and Chandler also remarked on changing the format of classes, the amount of actual *ATM* exercises used, and the order they're used in, depending on what class they were teaching. Sometimes a simple change in language can shift a dancer's experience, especially with a form she/he may have already been familiar with for years. In Cregan's example, “The vocabulary is classical ballet but I'd use the more generic and scientific language to explain what the movement is.” (Cregan, 2015)

Guiding the student to “listen” to their internal sensations and focus on economizing effort throughout the class, the pedagogy becomes student-centered and self-care is encouraged without detracting from the virtuosity of dance. Students can focus on the joy of moving within the form rather than just the accuracy of the shape. Chandler explains,

*I find that the holism (sense, feel, think, move) and direct applicability to and derivation from real life activity of the Feldenkrais lessons helps the students identify on a very fundamental level as people, because their learning experience did not depend on achievement but rather on what it is they discovered while exploring a certain theme...perhaps because I require group discussion in every class in order to help the students connect language to their subjective, embodied experiences. I also think that one's subjective experience being treated as a primary resource by the teacher/form invites students to respect each other and themselves, since rather than trying to get the right answer the students are offering their personal experience of what happened in the lesson IN ORDER TO MAKE USE OF IT. (Chandler, 2016)*

*Awareness Through Movement* is student-centered, so we can surmise that using this strategy with ballet students can increase their enjoyment and success. Further, since ballet promotes a culture-specific idealized body type and behavior, a contemporary and inclusive model for teaching is needed now that the form is taught internationally. Somatic education has focused on the power to heal the body and somatic dance education emphasizes this alongside greater facility and enjoyment of movement. These are wonderful aims with sometimes miraculous results, but where do we go from there? How do these changed individuals change their communities?

## Social Awareness through Movement

*Awareness Through Movement* trains practitioners to become more self-aware and self-empowered, so a new generation of ballerinas might be less likely to endure traumatically authoritarian teachers and directors, and more likely to look at the beauty of the efficacy of their bodies in motion rather than superficial idealizations. I remember sitting in the lobby of ODC Dance Commons preparing to start my interview with Augusta Moore. She sat with a young woman who was on winter break from her first term of training at an esteemed ballet academy in England. She shared how surprised she was that they didn't use mirrors, nor expect total obedience from their students. As they ended their conversation, Moore encouraged the young dancer to find what really makes her happy explaining how she likes to ask herself, "What would future me regret not doing?" (Moore, 2015) The young woman explained that although she was excited and grateful to be training at the school, she wasn't sure exactly what she wanted but was open to auditioning for several companies and genres and she seemed determined to not be a muted corps member. I couldn't help but to wonder how much of this young dancer's wide-eyed-ness, willingness to explore, and sensitivity to feeling silenced, was due to her early and frequent training in Moore's Embodied Ballet class. Cregan reminds us that, "Institutions are made of people so if more people did it [Feldenkrais] they would feel more sense of authority...and that of course would make an impact - make a change." (Cregan, 2015) We can require a school to enforce a minimum weight rather than a maximum, but a dancer can still experience self-hatred or be without the tools for self-determination. This pedagogy is certainly not a cure-all and absolutely cannot bear the sole responsibility for radically transforming institutions of ballet; but *Awareness Through Movement* does restructure the mode and direction of the transmission of information in the class and this is what can open up a fundamental change in attitude and sense of responsibility to something beyond one's self.

## Conclusion

Because it transforms the habitual hierarchical thinking and doing that traditional ballet reinforces, *Awareness Through Movement* as critical ballet pedagogy holds potential to initiate progressive change in the global institutions of ballet. In 2008, Heidi Diaz created an experimental course using *Feldenkrais* methods with dance and documenting her college students' experiences as they self-reported them in journals. Across the board, "participants reported: an enhanced self-image; greater internal authority; transfer of experiences from *Awareness Through Movement* lessons to dance classes and other forms of movement training and daily life; and recognition of the pedagogic model used within *Awareness Through Movement* and its potential effectiveness in dance training." (Diaz, 2008, p. 79) The shift

doesn't only happen within the students. Teachers, choreographers and directors could find themselves valuing different things from dancing bodies after participating in *Feldenkrais* praxis. Cregan acknowledged areas where the paradigms of expectation in the mainstream ballet community have largely remained stagnant while his experience with *Feldenkrais* changed his own perspective.

*I know I see things differently than someone who comes from the traditional ballet world. I look towards the way a person moves more than the way they are when they're in a position. Most people in ballet, even in contemporary ballet situations are still focused on what they call the facility...the feet, the turnout, the extension of the legs, all the static stuff. I look at how much of the world do you bring with you when you move? How connected are you to the world beyond ballet? Some dancers go beyond the form. As dance artists, we engage bodily movement as our vehicle for understanding and expression. Feldenkrais taught that, "movement is a way of thinking. The two are inextricably intertwined."(Kevin Cregan, 2015)*

Why then should it not be our vehicle for change - for reconstructing our understandings of the interplay of race and gender issues in our work, for restructuring our thoughts and practices not through dialectic, but through the body itself? Attending to the sensations of grace and strength that we can all access through movement, is a way of embodying the ideals that we claim to uphold in dance. When we practice self-care and self-determination as a community, we practice the beauty of dance that drew us in as children, rather than the racist, capitalist hetero-patriarchy we learn as adults. Discovering avenues for freedom through the body can help us to physically experience a better way of being in the world and encourage us to manifest that world.

## References

- Abrams, A. (2015). Raising a ballerina will cost you \$100,000. *FiveThirtyEight*, <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/high-price-of-ballet-diversity-misty-copeland/.html>.
- Ajaka, N. (2016). A ballerina's tale: The incredible rise of Misty Copeland. *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/459849/a-ballerinas-tale-the-rise-of-misty-copeland/.html>.
- Burnridge, A. (2012). Somatics in the dance studio: Embodying feminist/democratic pedagogy. *Journal of Dance Education*, 12(2), 37-47.
- Collins, K. (2015). The Misty Copeland effect. *Dance Magazine*, 89(10), 14-14.
- Copeland, M. (2014). *Life in motion: An unlikely ballerina*. Simon & Schuster.
- Diaz, H., Steven J., Chaffield, S. and Cox, J. (2008). Cultivating presence in movement student reflections on the practice of Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement in dance training. *Journal of Dance Education*, 8(3), 79-93.
- Eddy, M. (2002). Somatic practices and dance: Global influences. *Dance Research Journal*, 34(2), 46-62.
- Feldenkrais, M. (1981). *The elusive obvious*. Meta Publications.
- Feldenkrais, M. and Zemach-Bersin, D. (2010). *Embodied wisdom: The collected papers of Moshe Feldenkrais*. Edited by Elizabeth Beringer. North Atlantic Books.
- Foster, S. (1996). *Corporealities; Dancing, knowledge, culture, and power*. Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Group.
- Gottschild, B. (2005). *The Black dancing body: A geography from coon to cool*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Martin, R. (1998). *Critical moves: Dance studies in theory and politics*. Duke University.
- Moore, A. (2016). Embodied ballet - Augusta Moore. <http://www.augustamoore.com/archives/269>.
- Pickard, A. (2012). Schooling the dancer: The evolution of an identity as a ballet dancer. *Research in Dance Education*, 13(1), 25-46.

Received: October 30, 2020

Reviewed: December 13, 2020

Accepted: December 13, 2020