

## **Student reflective response to 'Reimagining reflective practice in the dance technique class' by Rachel Rimmer**

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My relationship to dance has been established from an early age, as I have been part of a musical theatre group for the past 16 years. Unfortunately because my school did not offer any GCSE or A Level dance, I have had very limited exposure to the academic side of dance. Instead, I was deeply involved in the sports, mathematics and science departments while in high school, completing A Levels in these subjects.

Therefore the experience of being taught dance technique in this creative way was a relatively new way of learning for me, as the majority of my past experience had been in a more 'traditional' environment where the teacher created the movement material, I observed this material as the teacher danced it, and then I found ways to embody the material in my own body. Because of this, at the beginning of this process I found that the teaching methods Rachel was using challenged my preconceived ideas about what the roles of the technique teacher and the dance student are, and this made me question the traditional hierarchy that I had been used to. I had always seen the teacher as the leader of the class, the person who would create the movement sequences and then direct the students on how to perform these sequences, giving the students feedback on any adjustments they should seek to implement in their performance of the exercises. In contrast to this idea, I felt that the teaching methods Rachel was using placed a big emphasis on myself, not only because I had the choice to create my own material, but also because I was asked to critically evaluate my own execution of this movement. At first, this seemed like a lot to take ownership of, but because of the atmosphere Rachel created in the class, I felt reassured by the fact that I could ask both the teacher and my peers for feedback, and this felt very supportive.

The tasks I was asked to engage with were challenging, as there was a large emphasis on my own creative practice, and I had to give a lot of thought to selecting movements that I thought were relevant to the task; this was both mentally and physically challenging. However, I also found the process extremely rewarding and enjoyable as it enabled me to take ownership of the movement I was performing.

During the process we were given two specific tasks, one was to create thirty-two counts of material with a partner as part of a battement tendu exercise. We were given quite specific rules in order to assist us with the creative side and to follow the theme of the exercise; the rules were to include pliés in our movement and a moment where there was a weight shift onto one leg. Because of these specific rules, it quickly became clear whether the movements we were selecting were relevant to the task. Also, because this task involved working with a partner, I found it reassuring and useful, as we were able to discuss and share ideas with one another, allowing us to critically evaluate whether our movement selection was meeting the criteria we had been set. Therefore, we were able to take a very

explorative approach to the task, using a 'trial and error' approach to creating movement, with the reassurance that together we would be able to determine the validity of the movement in relation to the task.

The second task was to create my own movement phrase, which would be incorporated into an already established phrase I had been taught by Rachel. We began by using Laban Movement Analysis in order to describe some of the qualities and themes within the phrase. We then worked individually with some of these words as a stimulus to create our own individual sequence of movement. I found this task more challenging, as there was less of a specific requirement regarding what the movement should incorporate, and more of an emphasis on our own creative and reflective relationship to the material. The biggest issue I experienced during this task was being able to trust my own reflective judgement of the material I was making, and whether or not my material was portraying what I imagined it would to an outside eye. Also, I found it challenging to trust my own critique of my body movement, and at moments I was questioning my execution of the movement and whether I was doing it correctly. This may be because in the past I have always had a teacher or choreographer critique the execution of my movement, and therefore to self-critique was something fairly new for me. On the other hand, I found it eye opening as it allowed me to think of my movement in a more detailed way; for example, I started to think about the origin of my movements, and I noticed the effect that moving one body part had on another. This helped me to start understanding how different parts of the body are connected, making me think of my body as more of a integrated 'whole', rather than in sections.

Altogether I found this way of learning very rewarding and I noticed myself engaging with the movement more, attempting to understand the technical details of the movement more deeply instead of getting preoccupied with the external aesthetic of the movement in relation to what I had observed in the teacher's example.