

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN TEACHING DANCE ART TO CHILDREN

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„<<The manner of seeing>> must be taken in the broad sense,
which includes the manners of being, being able, knowing, wanting...”
Paul Valéry

ABSTRACT

The fascination for *the painter of ballerinas* made me approach this topic, a topic that becomes the basis of a thorough research and, at the same time, materializes in a performance with syncretic valences. Thus, carefully going through the ballerina paintings by Edgar Degas, the idea of a story appeared in an instant, a real treasure that houses all the poses a ballerina goes through, from preparation - warm-up - studies - rehearsals - backstage - performance. Coincidentally or not, chronologically or not, this discovery/observation...I consider worth researching and why not explored and materialized in a show, which brings to fruition the collaboration between the performing arts: music, dance, painting and scenography. Starting October 2023, Pro Napoca Art and Sport Association has operated as an open laboratory for the students who attend its ballet classes. Through the interference of the arts, they participated in experiences and experiments from the perspective of the ballerina, which took place within the *DegasDans project. Ballerina Diary*, to be completed with the performance of the same name, at the end of April, 2024.

Keywords:

Interdisciplinarity; Degas; Debussy; ballet; education through art; the art of dance for children; the interference of the arts; syncretism.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from the paintings of Degas, nicknamed the painter of ballerinas, the one who captured them in multiple poses, we will unfold within *The DegasDans project. Ballerina Diary* the journey of the ballerina in dance steps, starting from the moment of preparation, working in the ballet hall, passing with emotions through the backstage and finally to the brilliance on the stage. The paintings will come to life to the music of

Claude Debussy for piano: *Clair de lune*, *Arabesque nr. 1*, *Dans Bohémienne*, *Rêverie*, *Nocturne*, *La Plus que lent*, *Valse romantique*, *Ballade*.

Claude Debussy wrote in a letter (1911) to composer Edgard Varèse: "*J'aime les images presque autant que la musique*" ("I like images almost as much as music"). His own writings and the memories of those who knew him attest to the close connection between music and visual art in the composer's creative mind, as well as the pictorial suggestiveness of some of his compositions, such as *La Mer*, *Images*, *Estampes*, *Arabesques*, etc. Romain Rolland says about Debussy's music: "The musical writing, nuanced and diffuse, with blurred contours, often achieved through a certain pulverization, a certain division of the musical substance, we can approach it to the pictorial technique achieved through small touches typical of the Impressionists." (cf. Marc Vignal, 1966: 382).

Debussy's musical discourse often reveals the presence of pictorial and literary elements that exerted a strong influence on the composer, among the artists and styles he admired, including Edgar Degas. The parallel between his music and Impressionist art is already a well-known and frequently studied topic, so the Debussy-Degas association seems to come naturally.

Emblematic of the universe of Degas' ballerinas is the painting entitled *Danseuses en bleu*, a color whose meanings are often associated with open spaces, freedom, inspiration, but also nostalgia, dreaming, melancholy derived from *the English blue*. The painting will be integrated into the graphic concept of the poster and other promotional materials of the show.



Edgar Degas, *Danseuses en bleu*, 1890

Here is a mysterious and at the same time so natural interweaving of the arts, which serve the concept of this show and which have the role of ennobling, rounding off, fulfilling the ballerina ideal. Because “Unmoved, indifferent, nowhere else but in itself, blue does not belong to this world; he suggests the idea of a quiet and serene eternity that is superhuman” (Chevalier, 2022: 79).

The idea comes to life within the Pro Napoca Art and Sport Association, which, in addition to ballet and dance courses, runs numerous programs and projects whose objective is to implement the performance-exercise, through which children become little artists, are part of the show's story, interpret roles, convey the character's feelings, familiarize themselves with the notions of music, act according to the show coordinator's instructions. Starting from 2008 up to the present, the association has run over 30 projects with young people and children from non-vocational backgrounds, in the form of recitals, productions, camps, workshops, shows.

In order to illustrate this article as relevant as possible, I chose to present the process of making *the DegasDans performance. Ballerina Diary*, which will take place on April 21, 2024, at the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, being a preview of the International Dance Day, celebrated on April 29.

The concern to get as close as possible to the child's mind and soul sends me to harmonize the information from classical dance by integrating disciplines that widen the area of study. This is what happens in the present case, when, in order to understand a world (here the world of dance and ballerinas) the child has the opportunity to penetrate inside it not only through the art of dance, but through this fusion with related worlds and domains.

DegasDans show. Ballerina Diary aims to bring before the viewer the very metamorphosed life of a ballerina spent in the ballet hall, dressing room, backstage, cabin, culminating with the one on stage. In the life of a ballerina, this goes hand in hand with rigorous, exacting and consistent study and training. Dream or fulfillment, sacrifice or fame, ups and downs, tears or applause, all are part of the ballerina's experiences. The participants of this project will be introduced to the idea of dancing with their thoughts, with their eyes, with their hearing, in general with their senses.

The directorial-choreographic vision transforms the audience into a participant to the journey of the ballerinas, from the routine of warm-up exercises and the preparation of a stage appearance, to the polishing of the movements and the transmission of the artistic message on stage. The stages leading up to the actual artistic act are revealed to the public, and they witness the "unraveling of the mystery" of the artist's life, thus

contributing to the consolidation of the role and status of the ballerina profession in contemporary society. At the same time, both performers and spectators are drawn into the full range of feelings, thoughts and experiences of the ballerina on her way from the ballet hall to the spotlight.

A selection of Degas' paintings and drawings related to the theme of the ballerina serves as a backdrop in the form of a video projection while punctuating each journal tab. The use of this type of digital, designed setting allows the show to be performed in spaces that do not have stages in the traditional sense, training the adaptability of the child performers who come entirely from mainstream education, without that stage experience specific to the vocational environment.

The promotion of a new posture, in which I can make use of both the stage and pedagogical artistic experience, to which the skills acquired as a graduate in Performing Arts are added through the development of this project, generated by the interference of all professional facets, is materialized in the concept of *the DegasDans show. Ballerina's diary*, having the conviction that an artist is constantly developing and is obliged to contribute to the promotion of their profession, adapted to the new requirements - much diversified - of the contemporary artistic world.

The chosen topic responds to the curiosity of all little girls, for whom ballerinas and ballet represent an exemplary and challenging world from multiple perspectives: grace, refinement, appearance, discipline, work power, creative spirit, the fascination of the stage and success. The main objective of this project is to practice the behavior of a ballerina, starting from the paintings of Degas and going through a pre-set libretto. For this we chose a working group within the Association Pro Napoca Art and Sport, which is offered the chance to perform an exercise-show, driven by imagination, correlated with practical applications. By the end, participants will acquire general knowledge that will help them connect with the professional development of the ballerina, which is complex and permanent.

Also, the chosen subject responds to the need of the contemporary public to reveal the unexpected world behind the curtain, but also the entire creative process up to the artistic act itself, bearer of message and emotion.

Interactive dance teaching strategies used as applied activities to prepare the process of creation of the show

The use of a set of operations and teaching-learning methods in order to achieve the established objectives is a well-known model of action in working with children. Every

piece of information acquired at one stage prepares the transition to the next level of learning. This complex system is designed as a didactic scenario and has a methodical route appropriate to the interests of the students. It was envisaged to set clear objectives and to make the most of the intended time on the one hand, and on the other hand, the active and conscious involvement of students in the learning process and the stimulation of their creativity, favoring the connection with the practical part of the project and its final target: the spectacle.

Taking into account the age particularities of the students involved in this project, the level of learning of dance, we worked in two groups, one of intermediate level - age 6-9 years, age, and the second advanced - age 12-15 years.

The didactic methods merged the traditional with the modern, so that the exercise merged with the problematization, and the – conversation with all its hypostases - led to the modeling of some individuality, which was, using the maximum potential of each participant.

Developing the student's way of thinking by guiding the educator to problematization, by exercising question-answer, by encouraging participatory composting from learning to becoming. The issuance of opinions by students and their experimentation stimulates the creative spirit. The search for choreographic elements in a given space, for a fixed duration, with an expressive outfit, was an exercise of thinking and self-valuing their own possibilities in a given situation, followed by the choice of the optimal solution to the proposed theme.

For some methods, photos from practical applications will be attached.

Didactic methods used: frisco method, improvisation, learning by experience, exercise.

Frisco method - is a method of stimulating the imagination and creativity of students. This involves the interpretation of roles by the pupils-participants according to certain typologies:

- Conservatory – traditionalist type
- Exuberant – original, nonconformist type
- Pessimist –negative and critical, envious type
- Optimist – positive spirit, easily finds solutions, ambitious type

I used this method in order to perform different roles. After identifying the theme and different typologies, the work tasks were correctly formulated so that there was clarity at the time of starting the activity. The organization and division of roles followed. The exercise aimed to identify the body language, gestuality and mimicry according to the typology of the role received, building even choreographic micro-compositions. Then there was the use of role shimburs and communication between different types of characters. In the end, each student managed to define herself, assigning a realistic and representative role.

Advantages/benefits:

- The development of the triad thought-imagination-creativity
- Non-verbal expression capacity according to the role received
- Formation of decision-making capacity
- The manifestation in front of colleagues

Improvisation of dance - means of exploration body-space-time

- Dance improvisation - a learning method available to children through which they work with their own body and its possibilities, in space and time/rhythm with visual and auditory support
- Develops spontaneity in support of imagination
- Cultivate exploration in support of (self)discovery



Choreographic improvisation and the benefits pursued in body-gesture expression:

- ✓ How to express themselves in front of others

- ✓ How to imagine with the whole body who they are
- ✓ How to adapt more easily to new situations
- ✓ How to express their opinion in front of others
- ✓ How to react and feel prepared in new situations

Learning through experience: after experiencing improvisation the student has contact with imagination, forms a vision and is ready, perhaps even curious to experiment. Thus, the correlation between imagination, organicity, creativity and experimentation is articulated, with positive implications in the education of students:

- Active participation in the creation process
- The impulse of the desire to explore and the development of intellectual curiosity
- Developing independence
- Forming and developing new skills
- Improvement of expression and communication by body means
- Acquiring knowledge that contributes to the harmonious development of the child



Practicing various skills and attitudes. Practical exercises within the group:

Exercise 1:

- Transposing paintings
- Statues game

- Snapshots
- Individual and group photos
- Time and space



Exercise 2:

- *Watching – What ideas come to you when you look at the painting?*
- *Curiosity – What would it be like to be the character in the painting yourself?*
- *Play – Make a drawing starting from the viewed painting.*
- *Position and attitude – Report to the viewed painting.*
- *Improvisation/creativity – How do you imagine the ballerina in the painting? How do you imagine a ballerina in reality? How do you see yourself as a ballerina?*
- *Diversification – Practice different postures, attitudes and movements in space and time by changing points and tempo*

- Linking posts - *Achieves a succession of three body situations starting from the album/paintings viewed.*
- Compound and composition – *Form three "dancing paintings" increasing each time the number of participants. (ex. 1-2-3, 2-4-6, etc.)*

The stages of the show: from idea to production. Materialization of the subject

The subject of this project is about: the hypostases of ballerina life, the road from the ballet hall to the stage, the diary of a ballerina, things seen and unseen in the life of ballerina, costume and color.

Extracted ideas:

- spontaneous hypostases - realistic, sometimes opposed to grace on stage
- prosaic aspects of the life spent in the Opera: exercises in the mirror, on the bench, bored, bind their pointe, etc.
- ballet hall/opera – an open/closed laboratory
- during performances, rehearsals, at rest
- beyond appearances, the lightness of the ballet movements hides a hard and exhausting work, often doubled by the unfortunate condition of the ballerinas of those times
- impresses with gestural language
- ballerina body on the move
- poetry in motion

Libretto

Prologue: ballerinas „parade“ – models/types of ballerinas - ballerina style: dreamer, curious, naive, envious, etc.

Scene 1: Preparation for studies – arrival in the ballet hall, doing the bun, warming-up...

Scene 2: Classical dance class and ballet master

Scene 3: Relaxation/pause

Scene 4: Preparation for the show – in the cabin, backstage, accessories, makeup, etc.

Scene 5: The show and the applause

Stages of working with students

Following the strategies outlined above, the students were prepared to participate in the finished artistic act: the show. Based on the libretto, the scenes in which the

students implement the ones learned and practiced according to the strategy outlined above are established. Thus, students are direct participants based on what they previously learned in the prologue, scenes 1, 3 and partially 4. They continue to learn the choreographies taught by the teacher, which constitute the other parts of the show, to complete the artistic act.

Results and impact

Following the participation of students in this project, they will achieve/obtain:

- Contact with culture and interaction with the world of arts
- Corporatizing paintings and sounds/music – What does my body feel/what do I think when I see these pictures and when I hear that music? = developing a system of own thinking + finding your own body correspondents in the process of participating in this project.
- Knowledge that leads to self-knowledge
- Teamwork through nonverbal communication
- Curiosity, courage, initiative
- Interdisciplinary learning: ballet/dance, visual arts, music education

The realization of the performance incorporates not only the objectives stated in the present work but some extreme directions as well which are beneficial to the student development exercise:

- Kinesthetic perception
- The body perceived as an instrument
- Precious time
- Healthy eating

Conclusion

Creating a context in which children have the opportunity to experience ballerinas behavior is beneficial both in terms of personal development and in terms of connecting with the art of dance in particular, but also with the arts in general. Artistic education through the cumulation of disciplines leads to integrated learning. The interrelationship of various elements results in building a harmonious whole that meets the expectations and needs of students. In this approach, we noticed that they discovered working techniques and qualities that can be improved with the help of ballet exercises and choreographic improvisation, but also with the help of the interdisciplinary connection with the other arts: painting, music. Each chosen discipline

has its own specific language, based on visual, auditory, body-kinesthetic perception. Thus, improving the power of concentration, discipline, expression and communication in front of the public, teamwork, are some important skills acquired and developed in each participant of this project.

Depending on the intelligence and qualities of the student following such a teaching-learning approach, one discipline will complement the other in being better appropriated. Last but not least, children learn to efficiently channel excess energy, it is creative from diverse perspectives, it forms their own vision, and the professor-coordinator-choreographer has the opportunity to value the excellent memory capacity, the openness to the new, the desire to progress and to overcome oneself and, above all, children's play lust.

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