

SPECIFIC FEATURES AND CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AMATEUR CHOREOGRAPHY TO STUDENTS

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Qolqanatova Alfiya Nazarbaevna

Student of the Nukus Branch of the Uzbekistan

State Institute of Arts and Culture

Scientific Supervisor: Yuldasheva Zuxra Saliyevna

Senior Teacher of the Nukus branch of the Uzbek

State Institute of Arts and Culture

Abstract

This article analyzes the process of teaching amateur choreography, highlighting its unique pedagogical, psychological, and creative aspects. It also briefly addresses the challenges encountered in engaging students in dance, developing their creative abilities, and shaping stage culture and technical readiness. Additionally, the importance of amateur choreography in the educational process, contemporary approaches, and factors affecting its effectiveness are examined based on scholarly literature.

Keywords

choreography pedagogy, dance art, amateur students, analysis of creative processes.

Amateur choreography is a non-professional branch of dance that holds significant spiritual, creative, pedagogical, and physical value. Teaching amateur choreography to students presents pedagogical and psychological complexities. Choreography education involves teaching dance elements and cultivating discipline, creative thinking, and stage culture in learners. The process of teaching choreography is multifaceted, requiring the instructor to demonstrate sound methodology, psychological sensitivity, and a creative approach.

Today, the diversity of ballet-mastering and performance styles, as well as the breadth of repertoire programs in choreography, demand a high level of professional skill and expertise from instructors. This is particularly true when working individually or collaboratively in various creative processes, requiring the specialist-pedagogue to apply all practical knowledge effectively. Over time, the field has accumulated extensive theoretical and practical experience, along with research, in creating dance works and choreographic projects. Nevertheless,

students still have a growing need for specialized literature during classroom activities, which has not diminished.

There are certain shortcomings in systematizing existing materials and consolidating traditional and innovative practices of specialists in the creation of stage choreographic works, which is also clearly felt by instructors. This poses challenges for future specialist-choreographers (ballet masters, directors, and educators) in deeply mastering the foundations of their profession, emphasizing the need for more active scientific research. In the field of Karakalpak choreography, research and educational materials are also insufficiently explored, as the discipline relies more on practical exercises than theoretical study. Adequate curricula and resources for teaching the subject in depth are still limited, which can make the learning process somewhat difficult for students.

Dance educators face numerous questions such as “what and how to teach, why and to whom, where and when to teach,” all of which highlight the socially constructed nature of education itself. Humans’ ability to learn from others allows complex cultural knowledge to be faithfully transmitted and assimilated across generations. The idea that socially learned information (culture) is central to human adaptation is not new; however, recent evidence from biology and genomics suggests that humans and communities have actively shaped their own evolution for approximately 20,000 years, an argument that is increasingly accepted.

For many, dance is the quintessential example of social learning in human society. Learning dance involves experiencing various social formations and cultural activities. From a baby rhythmically bouncing to watching a pair of professional dancers in competition, humans experience dance in multiple forms throughout their lives. On the other hand, teaching dance involves enculturating the dancer into a world of meanings and movements. While biologists have focused primarily on the adaptive value of social learning, dance educators are concerned with how we learn from one another. Current ideas about learning and human development reflect shifts in evolutionary biology. Our bodies and minds change dynamically throughout our lives, and experiences (not just genes) affect brain structure, chemistry, gene expression, and ultimately personal and cultural development. Activities shape individuals. Individuals shape activities. This is the circular logic inherent in teaching and learning. The National Dance Education Organization (NDEO, USA) explains this distinction on its website as follows:

“The art of dance uses movement to communicate meaning about the human experience. It is far more than exercise or entertainment. It is a powerful medium to express one’s values, thoughts, and aspirations about the lives we live and the world in which we live... Education in the art of dance develops the knowledge

and skills required to create, perform, and understand movement as a means of artistic communication.”

Art, and choreography in particular, is a transformative force that helps individuals grow (broadening worldviews and fostering cognitive development), reveals inner resources, and positively impacts the psyche. Teaching this power to students has its own specific characteristics. Before analyzing these immanent qualities, it is important to emphasize what choreography as an art form entails. Art is a broad and profound concept. It is a sphere of human creative activity in which the world is expressed in a spiritual dimension through artistic and aesthetic means.

Art begins when a person reawakens feelings and thoughts experienced under the influence of their environment, giving them a specific representational form. Art is a universal model of creativity. Art is the act of creating. It is the process of awakening and strengthening human creative nature and abilities. This involves representing life symbolically, including natural phenomena, human activity, events and facts, social consciousness, and more. Art is a driving force of development and movement. Nothing remains stagnant. Art has no strict, universally binding rules. In art, one must create with inspiration! If you do not feel joy and excitement during the creative process, if you do not engage wholeheartedly, if you rush to finish your work, but feel no trace of emotion or reflection after completion, then you are not an artist. Dance is an art form that emerged in ancient times and has played an important role in social life since its inception. Dance possesses a life-affirming power. It exists for the sake of humanity, celebrates human dignity, and praises its greatness and healthy spirit. As K. Goleyzovsky stated, “Art cannot exist without thought and inspiration, regardless of its external appearance.” Choreography is a specific, holistic phenomenon.

While it shares certain features with other art forms—such as music, poetry, painting, drama, and graphics—choreography also has distinct characteristics that define it as a unique art form. This uniqueness is manifested in the expressive means specific to choreography, which differ from those in other arts and are used to create choreographic imagery. Choreographic art possesses unique qualities and distinguishing features. As with any art form, artistic truth in dance is revealed through specific, perceptible forms and through its unique expressive means. The expressive tools of dance include:

- The plasticity of the human body (movements, postures, gestures, facial expressions);
- Dance lexicon (traditional, figurative, natural-imitative);

- Dance notation (choreography, i.e., the spatial composition of movements);
- Music;
- Stage design for dance (costumes, makeup, lighting, decorations).

All of these expressive tools combine into a single whole called the choreographic composition. All of these ideas by E. Mejelaytisa fully pertain to choreographic art. The term “choreography” has Greek roots and literally means “to write dance.” Later, the term “choreography” began to be applied to all areas related to the art of dance. Choreographic art is a branch of dance, and according to the pan-European concept, the entire diversity of choreography is considered to consist of two main areas: ballet and dance art as a whole.

The concept of choreography encompasses all forms, types, and genres of dance, including folk dances, stage dances, ballet, classical dances, and others. Like other art forms, dance is an artistic means of exploring human life and the surrounding world. While sciences that study life processes “think” in terms of abstract concepts and generalizations, art studies life processes through spatially and aesthetically generalized imagery. Choreography also finds its ultimate completion in consumption. The term “consumption” refers to “satisfying certain needs.” Choreography fulfills aesthetic functions while addressing certain societal needs. The fulfillment of the aesthetic function occurs through the recognition of choreographic works as art. It is known that choreographic art affects the audience more actively through intellectual channels than through factual information. According to G. Aleksidze: “In daily life, we are constantly surrounded by the demands and needs of life. However, art is situated outside everyday life. In my opinion, it is a game, a conditional exhibition, even if it is based on real life facts.”

Dance, in its ancient forms, belongs to synthetic arts, which is a general characteristic of this art: the combination of singing, rhythm, dance plasticity, mimetic play, speech, clothing, postures, and so on. Modern directions in choreography typically consist of synthetic structures. The components that constitute them (music, dance, costume, and other elements) have long been differentiated and are manifested in a distinct synthetic form.

In dance pedagogy, students’ understanding of dance works is of critical importance in dance education. It involves studying the details of choreography, the emotions expressed through dance, and the stories conveyed by the dancers. By gaining a deeper comprehension of these elements, students can fully appreciate dance as a form of artistic expression. This understanding can be developed through various pedagogical methods, including practical exercises, discussions, and observing professional performances. Encouraging students to analyze and interpret dance works helps them develop critical thinking skills and fosters a

profound connection with the art form. Consequently, it enriches their overall dance education and enhances their ability to express emotions through dance.

In contemporary society, convenient methods such as watching dance dramas or videos promote the appreciation of dance. These new communication channels help quickly understand the charm and emotions of dance. Dance, as a refined art form, immerses the audience in the emotions and spirit conveyed through movement. However, truly perceiving the essence of a dance work is not an easy task. Teachers must convey the meaning of dance to students, helping them grasp its spiritual aspects. At the same time, students must approach learning and reflection seriously, actively participating in the creation of dance.

Educators need to guide students in fully demonstrating the charm of dance, enabling them to authentically express the emotions intended by the work. Furthermore, dance education is not limited to teaching movements; it also involves a comprehensive analysis of dance creation, allowing learners to fully understand the essence and background of the work. Only in this way can students better grasp the depth of dance, embody its essence and significance, and authentically express emotions in performances, captivating the audience.

Choreographic art, therefore, holds distinct significance due to its complexity. Consequently, teaching choreographic art to students presents certain challenges. Beyond the general principles that explain the professional nature and purpose of choreographic art, there are specific foundations related to particular directions of choreographic creativity that are not sufficiently addressed in specialized literature. Ballet masters, educators, researchers, practitioners, and scholars have attempted to provide detailed information in their works on various aspects of choreographic and pedagogical activity, performance skills, and labor. However, their perspectives and professional findings regarding the distinctive features of teaching choreography do not always fully align. In some cases, contradictions and varying interpretations of a topic or research object arise. This indicates that there remain many aspects of dance art that require in-depth study and analysis, providing rich material for scientific research. Another distinctive feature of teaching choreographic art is the dramatic nature of the choreographic work. Currently, in creating or analyzing a choreographic work, we distinguish five main components:

Exposition – introduces the audience to the plot’s characters, helping form an understanding of their personalities. This section determines how the plot develops; period markers are revealed through costumes, stage design, performance style, and technique; the setting and time of events are established. Movements in this section may develop gradually or immediately acquire a

dynamic character. The duration of the exposition depends on the task before the choreographer, the interpretation of the work, and the scenario and compositional structure of the musical material.

Conflict stage – as the name implies, this is where the action begins: the characters interact, and conflicts arise between them or with a third force. Initial steps in the plot development are taken by the dramatist, screenwriter, composer, and choreographer, leading later to the work's climax.

Pre-climactic stage – during this stage, the plot develops further. Lines identified in the conflict stage intensify, and tension increases. The pre-climactic stages may consist of several episodes. Their number and duration depend on the dynamics of the plot.

At each stage, the movement must intensify, preparing the audience for the climax. Some works require rapid dramatic development, while others demand a slow, even progression of events. Sometimes, to emphasize the power of the climax, it is necessary to reduce movement intensity – this is done to create contrast. In this part, the personal traits of the characters are revealed, their growth and development paths become apparent, and movement lines are defined. Characters interact with one another, sometimes complementing each other, and at other times being in opposition. These relationships, emotions, and conflicts must form a unified dramatic knot, which increasingly engages the audience with the events and the experiences of the characters. Additionally, in this stage, the lives of secondary characters may reach their own climax or conclusion. However, all these elements must serve the overall dramaturgical development of the stage work, the unfolding of the plot, and the deepening of the main characters' personalities.

The climax represents the highest peak of the choreography's dramaturgy. At this stage, the plot dynamics and the relationships between characters reach the maximum emotional intensity. If the work lacks a plot (i.e., it is an abstract dance rather than a thematic one), the climax should manifest through the most effective solution of the plasticity, the most interesting movement pattern, or the brightest choreographic text – the dance composition. In the climax stage, the emotional expressiveness of the performance usually reaches its highest level.

The conclusion represents the final stage of the work's movement. It can take two forms: sudden, where the movement is sharply halted, completing the work; or gradually developing, where the conclusion naturally emerges from the flow of events. The form of the conclusion depends on the conceptual and artistic objectives set by the authors. Aristotle stated, "The ending of the plot must arise from the plot itself." The conclusion is the audience's intellectual and moral comprehension of the events that have occurred throughout the performance.

Sometimes, the author surprises the audience with an unexpected ending. However, this “unexpectedness” must also be logically grounded in the progression of the plot—it must have an internal rationale. All parts of a choreographic work must be internally connected: each subsequent section should logically follow, complement, and develop from the preceding one.

One of the challenges in teaching choreographic art to students is the presence of learners at different skill levels within a group. Some students may have prior dance experience, while others are engaging in dance for the first time. This can slow the class process, create difficulties for certain students, and require the teacher to apply a differentiated approach. Physical challenges may also arise, as dance exercises often involve intense physical exertion. Consequently, back pain, muscle fatigue, and difficulties performing movements are common. The teacher must focus on standardizing exercises, warming up, and recovery exercises. Some students may experience stage fright, lack of confidence in their abilities, fear of losing balance, or hesitation to perform before the group. These issues are related to insufficient psychological adaptation, and it is important for the teacher to create a positive environment. Rhythm is the fundamental element of choreographic art. Since students’ ability to synchronize with rhythm varies, more time in the lesson is devoted to rhythmic exercises, music analysis, and familiarization with the meter and tempo of songs.

Teaching choreographic art is a complex and responsible process formed at the intersection of contemporary art and pedagogy. Choreographic art, as a powerful artistic form, influences the human psyche through its unique expressive means: plasticity, mime, composition, and musical harmony. Effective teaching requires a systematic approach, theoretically grounded methodology, and integration of practical experience. In conclusion, the process of teaching choreographic art, based on the essence and aesthetic impact of the art, plays a crucial role in the development of the student as a professional specialist.

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