

Mind-body, knees over the second toe, supported arms, internal that becomes external and then again internal & a bit of nostalgia.

This project explores the challenges of transitioning from dancer to teacher. More specifically, it looks at how the joy of performing shifts to a different kind of joy—sharing knowledge and teaching. The essay has an autoethnographic tone and reflects on my personal teaching methods through a reflective lens.

As a dancer, there were clear moments of joy during ballet classes—times when I felt I was truly dancing, not overthinking or focusing on external distractions. These moments came after years of hard training and a deep understanding of ballet technique in practice. I still remember how the anxiety of the ballet lifestyle would fade away during the first plié exercise. That moment brought a strong connection between mind and body, a rare break from societal expectations and worries.

However, I must acknowledge that as a white male body, certain dissociations and privileges contributed to this experience. While this essay stems from an inner reflective perspective, I am aware of the egocentricity that such introspection might imply for the person living it. These contradictions form part of the complexity of the mind-body connection in my practice, both as a dancer and as a teacher.

During an internship as a psychotherapist in social street work, my supervisor once said: “You need a strong, secure base to help others. You can’t help if your boat is shifting and swayed by the emotions of every client.” This idea also applies to teaching personally. As a teacher or facilitator, in order to overpower some of my insecurities I have to go back and forth between the role of student and teacher. For me, this sense of stability comes from gratitude for what I do and moments of joy in teaching.

However, I have to admit that in a capitalist system, working long hours for many days a week can make teaching feel repetitive, like you're part of an "educational machine." These feelings of disconnection can drain the joy from the work. Ironically, though, I've found that after some rest—whether it's a long sleep, good food, or hours of scrolling through TikTok—I often feel my excitement return. Sometimes, all it takes is a small pause to regain what the daily grind takes away.

Of course, there are also days when my only motivation to go to work is to “get through it” and make a living. I'm not some endlessly positive mentor who can always rise above life's challenges. Sometimes, the paycheck feels like a way of coping, and I've come to accept that this is okay—for now, at least.

But back to plié. When I was a dancer, plié felt like a deeply personal experience—a moment of connection between body and mind. Teaching plié, though, feels very different. It's outward-focused, meant for others, and doesn't carry the same internal process for me. While it's sometimes a relief to step back from the physical demands of dancing, teaching still holds a sense of nostalgia for the way it used to feel.

Even so, teaching brings a different kind of joy. It's about helping—making the journey easier, helping individuals to feel seen and understood. There's something incredibly fulfilling about building trust with students and creating a space where they feel valued and respected. This joy is less structured and often catches me by surprise, but it's meaningful in a new way. Helping others find enjoyment and connection in dance has been a real blessing, even if it's different from performing.

Reflecting on my ongoing journey to better understand the connection between mind and body in the highly social and outward-facing world of teaching isn't easy. As I transition from dancer to teacher, I'm exploring what it means to balance introverted feelings with the outward act of teaching, counting in 3/4s and explaining the port de bras, uncovering new ways to find joy in both.