

Alita Cabrera Marcaida's educational work as dance heritage in Cienfuegos

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ABSTRACT

The present research responds to the need of signifying the work of Alita Cabrera Marcaida as a ballet teacher and her contribution to the dance heritage in the city of Cienfuegos. For its development, theoretical and empirical methods were used to synthesize the highlighted sources. The research provides a qualitative study on Alita's work linked to the study of choreology, kinesthesia and affective aspects from her performance as a teacher at the Ballet Academy in Cienfuegos.

Keywords: Educational work; Dance heritage; Choreology; Kinesthesia; Affective-emotional

Introduction

An educational work refers to any project, program, material or activity designed specifically to promote learning and skill development in an educational context. It can take many forms, including textbooks, multimedia materials, educational games, online courses, tutoring programs, workshops, seminars and more. Educational works are often designed with clear educational objectives, such as teaching academic concepts,

developing practical skills, fostering creativity, promoting problem solving, instilling values, or improving comprehension and critical thinking.

“The revelation of the study of the educational work of prominent 20th century educators. Scarce theoretical-practical arguments for the systematization of the educational work of outstanding educators of the Cuban teaching profession” (Oliva, 2022 p. 29).

The present research highlights the work carried out. His pedagogical work began in 1947-1960 when he inaugurated the Academy on July 1, 1947 at 123 Argüelles Street between Santa Isabel and San Luis between the upper floors of the old Cienfuegos School. From the beginning, he received technical advice from the Alicia Alonso Ballet Academy, a factor that had a decisive influence on his artistic and aesthetic successes in the dance heritage of the locality.

The term dance heritage refers to the collection of traditions, forms of expression and knowledge related to dance that are considered valuable and worthy of being preserved and passed on to future generations. This notion includes a wide range of dance forms, from classical, folk and traditional dances to contemporary dance forms. (Bonilla, 2023).

Dance heritage is an important part of the culture of a community, region or even a country as a whole. It includes the diversity of dance styles, movements, music, costumes, rituals and meanings associated with the different dance forms that have developed over time and in various cultures.

The preservation of dance heritage not only contributes to the conservation of a community's culture and identity, but also enriches the global cultural landscape by promoting diversity and intercultural exchange. It also enables future generations to understand and appreciate the importance of dance as a form of artistic and cultural expression.

Cienfuegos has had few opportunities to see the fine and expressive ballet performance. But it is unquestionable that the teaching work of Nina Fedoroff, Herminia Veliz López and now the peerless enthusiast Silvia (“Alita”) Cabrera Marcaida, have spread the fundamentals of this difficult art. (Díaz, 1950)

To begin the study it is necessary to keep in mind the period in which the figure develops, it is in this period (1947-1960) that Cienfuegos cultural life was the economic, political and social reflection of the region that the country was living, being motivation of the protest of prominent figures against the penetration of foreign customs and tendencies.

His work is framed in the value he gives to social progress from the dissemination of knowledge, solidarity and harmony as the basis of social development. These last two ideas are centered on the criterion that rich and poor children should dance on the same dance floor, in order to promote equality, communication and cooperation between them. The conceptions of the New School also penetrate our educational systems, and they are present in his work when we appreciate a different conception from the Traditional Pedagogy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, since he considers the teacher as the one in charge of directing learning and providing the means to stimulate the necessary response, as well as assisting the free and spontaneous development of the child.

Her motivation towards the profession she performed, led her to develop a great will, which resulted in the intense work of searching for solutions to the problems of education through dance and the culture of the people. The intention to achieve this end made her deploy a pedagogical activity of high rigor, which required her to develop and transform the conditions of the educational process that prevailed, to form another type of man. This undoubtedly produced in the educator a self-transformation of her personality, necessary to achieve a teaching process that responded to the characteristics of her students, and of the moment in which they lived.

The commitment assumed by this teacher, regarding the formation of her students' personality, nuanced her pedagogical activity and brought as a consequence favorable results in their education.

We can appreciate a creative educational thought in Alita Cabrera Marcaida in her ideas intervene the resources of this educator, her professional motivation, her self-valuation, her will and her feelings, her systematizations about education are very valuable and original contributions, of extraordinary novelty. It is evident in her, her constant mental effort, her implication in creation and assembly of the works that she implemented in the Academy of ballet. In order to achieve her goals, to educate everyone through dance, she used all her energies, took risks, opened ways to traditional teaching schemes.

Her work has been studied by several researchers, in this occasion and taking into account the state of the social and cultural historical situation, we propose to value the educational work developed by Alita Cabrera Marcaida as a manager of education through dance, assuming that the teaching and artistic work deployed by her in the field of ballet, has been of significant importance in the study of the safeguarding and enhancement of the

dance heritage in the city of Cienfuegos. The research is sustained under the principles of the historical-logical, analysis-synthesis and inductive-deductive methods, and the rigorous revision of documents and bibliography found in the Provincial Library of Cienfuegos, Rare Funds room, Provincial Museum, Archive of Tomás Terry Theater. His contribution lies in his contribution to the dance heritage of choreology, kinesthesia and the affective-emotional.

Development

Ballet is a highly structured form of dance that requires years of training and study to master. Ballet schools and dance academies offer formal educational programs where students learn specific techniques, physical skill development, artistic expression and knowledge of ballet history and tradition. Through these institutions, the knowledge and technique necessary to become a ballet dancer, choreographer, teacher or dance professional is transmitted.

Ballet has a long history and tradition dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries in the European courts. Over the years, it has evolved and developed into different styles and schools, such as classical ballet, romantic ballet, neoclassical ballet and contemporary ballet. Each style and period in the history of ballet has its own repertoire, techniques and performance styles that are part of the cultural and artistic heritage of mankind.

Classical ballet, in particular, with works such as “Swan Lake”, “Sleeping Beauty” and “The Nutcracker”, is considered a priceless cultural heritage that has been preserved and passed down through generations. These masterpieces are not only artistic representations, but also historical documents that reflect the aesthetics, customs and values of the times in which they were created.

Ballet can be considered an educational work due to its rigorous teaching and learning process, as well as a dance heritage because of its rich history, tradition and contribution to culture and art worldwide.

At the Alita Cabrera Marcaida Ballet Academy, the social and cultural educational aspects were adequately worked on. Human beings, as social beings, need to be interrelated with

others; socialization, according to Lefrancois (2001) is fundamental for the development of emotions and to understand the behaviors that are appropriate for their age and sex; they learn and assimilate traditions, beliefs, values and customs of their groups.

There are different ways of socializing, as many as there are human beings in the world, since everyone knows how to approach others. The socialization of emotions includes: learning to interpret them, having control over them and determining the right moment to apply them. This also makes it possible to work on the cultural formation of society in the process of teaching ballet in the city and the following indicators were taken into account:

- Formation of specific attitudes
- Development of capacities, knowledge, abilities and habits necessary to perceive and understand ballet in its most varied manifestations.
- To propitiate both theoretical and practical knowledge on the concrete type of ballet; between both there must exist an adequate balance in the system of influence of the artistic.
- Development of collectivism: being a discipline that is practiced collectively, it stimulates the girls and young women to learn to collaborate in a common goal when they share the space, the sound stimuli or when they perform their work in duets, trios and groups.
- Release of energy and tensions accumulated by sedentary life.
- Development of the ability to feel and enjoy music, movement, silence and stillness.

Ballet, because it is a discipline that is considered within the Fine Arts, favors, in addition to artistic appreciation, the development of various qualities and abilities in the people who practice it. One of the aspects that are benefited through its practice is the socio-affective development, which covers a great diversity of concepts.

Some of the concepts that integrate it are: socialization, self-esteem and discipline; and the development and evolution that each of these concepts have in children and adolescents who practice classical and creative ballet. The “Alita Cabrera” Ballet Academy sought to foster and reinforce self-esteem in its students, understanding self-esteem as the general judgment that a person makes of himself; it inspired the students to feel confident and satisfied with what they want to be or with what they are capable of doing, not only before themselves, but also before society.

Founder of the Ballet Academy. Silvia Cabrera Marçayda, born on April 24, 1922, comes from a family belonging to the Cienfuegos petty bourgeoisie. Her father had been acting mayor of the city of Cienfuegos.

A dynamic, intense, creative woman, with a restless and persevering soul, capable of achieving her goals (Sopo, 2011).

Since she was a child she always liked dancing and ballet, she studied Physical Education and taught at the “Cienfuegos Home School”, today ESBU: “5 de September”, at the “Apostolado” School where today is located the ESBU “Rafael Espinosa” and at the Intermediate School (where only sixth grade was studied) where today is located the ENU “Julio A. Mella”. Between 1945 -1946 Alita travels to Havana and receives ballet classes with eminent national and foreign dancers, she is taught by specialized choreographers and make-up artists.

She sees twenty-two times this ballet that she loves, she gets the music that composes it and already in position and mastery of all the elements, she contacts Julio Lamas, a young Cienfuegos native who already works as a professional in the ballet of Alicia Alonso, calls the great instrumentalist José M. Vázquez, who dedicated it to her. Vázquez, who dedicated the Ballet Romántico to Silvia Cabrera Marçayda makes Professor Allen come from Havana, and thus begins day after day, with an unwavering constancy, the adaptation of the Ballet Las Sílides to the conditions of its environment and the human material at its disposal. (Insausti, 1957).

On April 18, 1957, the Jury of the Ateneo met to award the “Annual Medal” to Professor Alita Cabrera. On January 22, 1960 offering her last work “Nutcracker” at the Luisa Theater closes the Academy of ballet and devoted herself to teach gymnastics classes with all the necessary equipment and good manners, at home. At the end of the sixties she travels to the United States and creates another Academy in Miami (Verdecia, 2014).

Alita's Academy offered shows for different audiences. She integrated in her performances, public from other provinces, attended by people from the elite of Havana and Santa Clara, performed in social welfare institutions, charities and sometimes celebrated anniversaries of girls turning fifteen

Alita Cabrera in her artistic work worked to bring to the people a dance culture and the taste for ballet, the taste for classical works from the meaning of discovering in that perception the expansion of the horizon of consciousness, of its “amplification”; which

meant placing the artistic work at that point of human spiritual growth, in which man is born as a spiritual being. This also highlights the place of the psychic and spiritual organization of man to which he directed his attention, a direct link with the cultural-historical psychology of art, and with this, the emphasis he placed on the orientation towards man and, consequently, oriented to dominate the process of man's development.

This is one of the fundamental values of cultural-historical psychology in general. The indicators stated in the derivation of the aesthetic contribution of the Academy of ballet “Alita Cabrera” allow to realize an insight into the functions of art: educational, ideological, cognitive and aesthetic.

The man in contact with the artistic phenomenon is instructed and educated at the same time, all of which requires preparation and sensitivity to be able to understand it. The transcendence of the aesthetic contribution of the Academy of ballet “Alita Cabrera” up to the present time is given by her condition of teacher and renovator of the ballet for 15 years that allowed her to contribute systematically to the artistic work. She led by example by considering art and dance as one of the most important tasks in the formation of man, dedicating herself devotedly to cultural, social, educational and artistic work, which makes it possible to discover regularities and milestones of change in her thinking and action in relation to the formative and socio-cultural process.

His thinking enabled him to stimulate, encourage, guide, clarify and design the necessary changes to this process according to the conditions of development of each stage in which it was developed. He conceived that education through dance should be in continuous transformation according to the changes of the world.

His aspirations transcend in the formation of a ballet Academy whose pretensions coincide in the determination of an end for the education of an artistic culture in society, in the desire to develop the total personality of the students. Its insistence on the link between education and collective and social work, which puts girls and adolescents in contact with such a sublime manifestation of art as ballet, sensitizes them, develops their corporal dance expression and uninhibits them.

It transcends the Romantic Ballet composed by José Manuel Vázquez, currently performed by the flute orchestra of the Provincial School of Arts “Benny Moré”. Transcends until today the classical technique, the modern dance technique, the Spanish dances and the flamenco dances.

The aesthetic contribution in the ballet academy is essential to keep this art form alive and allow it to evolve over time. By providing sound technical training, encouraging artistic exploration and promoting innovation, ballet academies prepare dancers to be accomplished performers and contribute to the continued growth of ballet as a form of artistic expression.

Dance education is a powerful form of teaching that focuses on movement and bodily expression as a means for learning and personal development. There are some ways in which education through dance can be beneficial for example (Fuentes, 2006)

1. Physical development: Dance is a form of exercise that improves cardiovascular health, muscle strength, flexibility and motor coordination.
2. Emotional expression: Dance provides a means for people to express their emotions and feelings in a non-verbal way, which can be especially helpful for those who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally.
3. Cognitive development: The practice of dance involves learning and remembering sequences of movements, which can improve memory and cognition.
4. Social development: Dance encourages collaboration and teamwork, as it is often performed in groups or pairs. It can also promote confidence and self-esteem as dancers gain skills and become more confident in their ability to express themselves.
5. Culture and Creativity: Dance is an art form that reflects the culture and traditions of a society. Through dance, people can explore and celebrate their cultural heritage, as well as experiment and create new forms of artistic expression.
6. Therapy and wellness: Dance is also used as therapy to help people overcome trauma, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. Movement and bodily expression can be powerful ways to release emotions and improve emotional well-being.

Dance education offers a variety of physical, emotional, cognitive and social benefits, and can be an effective and enriching way to learn and grow. In combination with choreology, it focuses on the analysis of movement in dance, theater and other forms of artistic expression, as well as the study of body movements in sports and everyday activities.

Choreologists use a variety of tools and techniques to analyze movement, including direct observation, video recording, measurement of movement speed and force, and analysis of movement patterns across time and space. From these analyses, choreologists can

better understand the relationship between music and movement, nonverbal communication, and how body movements can influence audience perception and emotions.

Kinesthetic-bodily intelligence focuses on the ability to use the body effectively to solve problems, express ideas, and learn through movement and physical activity. Individuals with well-developed kinesthetic-bodily intelligence may be skilled in activities such as sports, dance, acting, crafts, body expression, surgery, handicrafts, and other forms of physical movement and manipulation.

Individuals with this intelligence often learn best through hands-on experience and physical movement. They may have a special sensitivity to balance, coordination, body language and spatial perception.

Educators and coaches often recognize the importance of involving different types of intelligence, including kinesthetic-bodily intelligence, in their teaching and training methods to meet the needs of all students and address their different ways of learning and expressing themselves.

The affective aspect plays a crucial role in dance, both in the dancer's experience and in the interpretation perceived by the spectator. Here are some aspects of how the affective can be an important indicator in dance:

Emotional Expression: dance is a means of emotional expression that allows dancers to communicate feelings and internal states through movement. Dancers use their body as an instrument to convey a wide range of emotions, from joy and happiness to sadness and distress.

Personal connection: Dancers often develop a personal connection to the music and choreography they are performing. This connection can be deeply rooted in their own experiences and emotions, allowing them to connect with the audience in an authentic and meaningful way.

Emotional impact on the viewer: Dance can have a profound emotional impact on the viewer. The ability of dancers to convey emotion through their movement can generate an emotional response in those watching the performance. Viewers can experience a wide range of emotions, from empathy and sympathy to joy and inspiration, depending on the nature of the performance and their own personal interpretation.

Catharsis and emotional release: For both dancers and spectators, dance can serve as a form of catharsis and emotional release. The ability to express and experience emotions through movement can be therapeutic and transformative, allowing people to process and release feelings that might otherwise remain trapped or repressed.

Emotional and creative exploration: Dance can also be a form of emotional and creative exploration for dancers. Through movement, they can explore and experience a variety of emotions and internal states, allowing them to connect more deeply with themselves and their art.

Therefore, the affective in dance is an important indicator of the emotional depth and authenticity of the experience for both dancers and spectators. The ability to convey and experience emotions through movement is fundamental to the richness and meaning of dance as a form of artistic expression.

Dance education involves several important aspects, including choreology, bodily kinesthetic and affective. Below we explain a brief description of each:

Choreology: Choreology refers to the study of movement in dance, including movement patterns, technique and choreographic structure. In dance education, choreology involves teaching students about how their bodies move, how to execute specific steps, and how to interpret and create choreography. This may include learning different dance styles, understanding the relationship between music and movement, and exploring expression through movement.

Bodily kinesthetic: Bodily kinesthetic refers to awareness of one's own body and sense of movement. In dance education, it is essential that students develop a deep understanding of their own body: how it moves, how it balances, how it aligns, and how it relates to space and other bodies. This involves developing body awareness, coordination, flexibility and physical strength, as well as the ability to control and manipulate the body in a conscious and expressive way.

The affective: In dance education, the affective refers to the emotional and expressive dimension of movement. Dance is an art form that allows students to explore and express a wide range of emotions, feelings and experiences through the movement of the body. Teaching students to connect with their emotions and express them authentically and meaningfully through dance is an important aspect of dance education. This involves

fostering creativity, improvisation, emotional interpretation, and emotional connection to the music, choreography, and dance partners.

Dance education is not only about learning steps and techniques, but also about developing a deep understanding of movement, a conscious body awareness and an ability to express emotions and experiences through movement. (Ossona, 1984).

Integrating choreology, bodily kinesthetic and affective in the teaching of dance helps students to develop technical, expressive and artistic skills in a comprehensive manner.

The critical-valuative ascertainment of the transcendence of Alita Cabrera Marcaida's contributions implies a deep and objective analysis of the contributions that this person has made to the Ballet Academy.

First, it is important to identify and understand the specific contributions that the personality has made in her field. This may include scientific discoveries, innovative theories, influential artistic works, significant political changes, among others. In the case of Alita we identify the aesthetic contribution of her work.

The second is historical and social contextualization, it is essential to contextualize the contributions within the historical moment and social context in which they were made. This can help to better understand the relevance and impact of the ideas or actions of the personality at the time and today.

The third is impact analysis, which should evaluate the impact of the contributions in the specific field and in society in general. Have they generated significant changes in the way we think or act? Have they inspired others to move forward in the same direction or have they generated controversy and debate?

Fourth, originality and innovation. The originality and innovation of personality contributions should be considered. Have they introduced new ideas or approaches that had not been considered before? Have they pushed the boundaries of knowledge or challenged established conceptions?

The fifth aspect to analyze is legacy and durability: It is also important to consider the legacy of the contributions over time. Are they still relevant and significant today? Have they laid the foundation for future developments in the field?

Sixth, balanced criticism. The evaluation should be critical but balanced, recognizing both the achievements and limitations of the personality and his or her contributions. No

historical figure is perfect, and it is important to recognize both their successes and failures.

We believe that a critical appraisal of the significance of a personality's contributions involves a detailed and objective examination of his or her impact and legacy in his or her field and in society at large. It requires a careful and contextualized analysis of the contributions and a recognition of their importance in the broader landscape of knowledge and culture.

Alita's aesthetic contribution is considered to have been significant and diverse at the Ballet Academy in terms of:

Dance Style: dancers and choreographers often develop a distinctive dance style that can influence future generations of dancers. This style may include movement techniques, body expression, use of space, and musical choices that become part of their aesthetic legacy.

Choreographic Innovation: Alita introduced new movement forms, narratives, and dance styles that challenged existing conventions and expanded the boundaries of the art of ballet. Her work can inspire her dancers to explore new aesthetic possibilities in dance.

Emotional Interpretation: He had the ability to convey a wide range of emotions through his interpretation. His ability to communicate emotions and tell stories through movement may influence the aesthetic perception of the audience and the way ballet is appreciated as an art form.

Cultural Impact: Dancers become influential cultural figures whose work transcends the boundaries of the ballet world and reaches wider audiences. Their presence in the media, collaborations with other artists and academies, and participation in multidisciplinary projects can contribute to the appreciation and understanding of dance as an art form.

Conclusions

The Academy of Alita Cabrera since its founding in 1947, favored the formation of dancers that some transcended to the Academy of Alicia Alonso, current National Ballet of Cuba. Alita Cabrera Marcaida's aesthetic contribution can be manifested in dance

education through her unique dance style, choreographic innovation, ability to transmit emotions, and her cultural impact on society. Her work can influence the evolution of the art of ballet and the way dance is perceived and appreciated in general. Alita's teaching work at the Ballet Academy, linked to the enhancement of the dance heritage in Cienfuegos, are aspects of her professional work that make her transcend in Cuban history and culture.