



Memorization of Routines

by Anne Easterling Freifelder

As we get closer to the spring show, a few parents have inquired about how well students should know their routines, should they be helping their children to remember their routines, and/or what is the expectation for students regarding the memorization of routines. Because over the years I have put a great deal of thought into this issue, and have a specific approach that differs from some ballet schools, I thought that I would take this moment to share my viewpoint with you.

It is my experience that, generally for students under the age of 7, unless the routine is extremely simple, while some classes are able to memorize their routines very well, more often than not, this is not the case, and while it can be done, it usually requires a level of militant drilling that I believe is inappropriate for young children.

My concern is that the level of drilling required for young students to memorize their routines can potentially instill fear and anxiety in a young student and create inhibitions that have lasting negative effects. While it is impressive to see very young students memorize their routines and perform without any assistance, it is not evident that being able to do so at a young age gives students any meaningful advantage as they get older, whereas instilling fear can have lasting negative effects.

For students around the ages of 8 and older, the memorization of a routine becomes a more natural process where, while some students may have difficulty with memorization of sequences, usually there is a significant percentage of the class who are able to memorize their routine naturally, and therefore as a group they are able to execute their routine with minimal or no assistance. Students also begin at this age to be at a point where they are better equipped to understand their anxieties and where a lack of memorization could inhibit their performance, in contrast to when they are younger.

Therefore, at The Ballet Club, it is the goal of every class to try to memorize the sequence of the routine, and in nearly every class in the last half of the term students are given the opportunity to practice their routine all by themselves to see how well they can remember. It is not, however, a requirement for performance for the younger students.

When students are older, it is an expectation and responsibility for them to memorize their routines. I do want to note however, that this is not an instant process, and that we begin to perform without assistance around age 7/8, but different factors are taken into consideration, such as the complexity of the choreography and/or selected music, the number of classes a student is taking per week, has there been a flu epidemic, etc. It is a transition - not an abrupt change - in expectations.

Given the range of students' abilities and personalities in any given class, this means that, except on occasion, I, or another teacher, will nearly always help to lead the students ages 7 and younger in their performance routines. For students ages 8 and older, while I may give minimal cues to the younger students in this bracket, it is an expectation that students will be able to execute their routines without assistance.

So please absolutely encourage your students to work on their routines at home and to try and memorize them, but it should be a positive and worry-free experience for young students. The focus is on making them feel as comfortable and confident as possible for the day of the show, and to focus on the joy of moving and dancing to beautiful music and showing what they have learned this year.

Also note that, with very young children, it is inevitable that some of them will completely freeze and/or have a melt down on the day of the show (there is no way to predict) and if they refuse to perform or do not do as well as they or you had hoped, stay positive and keep it light. They can join the audience, and will learn from watching the performance. Focus on the joy of dancing.