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LAURE Research Essay

Designing for Movement: Rethinking the Space for the Dance Community

As a dancer, I have spent years moving through rehearsal studios, backstage corridors, and performance venues. These spaces become second homes for dancers, places where technique is refined, choreography is developed, and artistic collaboration takes place. Because of this experience, I have always been aware that the physical environment surrounding dance matters. The size of the studio, the quality of the flooring, the availability of rehearsal space, and even the circulation between rooms shapes how dancers train and interact. While dancers often adapt to whatever spaces are available, I began to wonder how thoughtfully designed environments could better support the realities of the profession. This curiosity became the starting point for my Interior Design capstone project and guided my research question, how can architecture and interior design better support the people who dedicate their lives to dance?

Although dance is frequently understood by audiences only through performances on stage, the daily life of a dancer involves far more than just performing. Rehearsals, classes, teaching, and collaboration make up the majority of a dancer's time, yet these activities often take place in limited or temporary spaces. To better understand the broader context behind this issue, I began my research by examining the cultural and historical role of dance. Using scholarly books and journal articles available through the university library, I explored how dance has historically functioned not only as entertainment but also as a form of storytelling, ritual, and social connection. This research helped me see dance as a cultural practice embedded within communities rather than simply a performance art. Recognizing this broader role

encouraged me to think about dance spaces as environments that support learning, collaboration, and cultural exchange.

As my research progressed, I expanded my focus to include studies on the educational and cognitive benefits of movement. Through interdisciplinary academic databases, I reviewed research in education and neuroscience that examines how dance influences cognitive development, coordination, and emotional expression. These studies emphasized that dance training supports more than physical skill, it can also strengthen memory, creativity, and social awareness. Learning about these benefits helped me realize that the design of a dance facility should not only consider physical requirements such as floor systems or ceiling heights, but also the ways space can support interaction, concentration, and collaboration among dancers.

While these early sources highlighted the value of dance education, another set of research revealed a more complicated reality. As someone familiar with the dance world, I already understood that many dancers face financial instability, but I wanted to examine the issue more closely through credible data and policy research. Using reports and statistical information available through library databases and government sources, I investigated the economic conditions that shape professional dance careers. These sources showed that many dancers rely on multiple jobs, irregular contracts, or freelance work in order to sustain their practice. The challenge becomes even greater in cities like New York, where high living costs and rising real estate prices make rehearsal space difficult to access.

This research suggested that the larger issue was not only about design quality but also about access to space. In many major cities, dancers compete for limited studio availability, often rehearsing in borrowed classrooms, rented community centers, or other temporary environments. To understand these issues further, I reviewed policy reports and cultural funding

research from organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts. These sources helped me see how arts infrastructure, funding systems, and urban development policies influence the availability of rehearsal and performance spaces. At this point in my research process, my questions shifted from simply designing a dance facility to exploring how architecture might respond to a broader lack of accessible dance spaces.

Another important step in my research involved studying existing dance facilities and performance spaces. Through architectural publications, design journals, and digital archives available through the library, I examined precedent projects that had been developed specifically for dance education and performance. Analyzing these examples helped me understand how architects address technical requirements such as sprung flooring systems, acoustics, lighting, and spatial adjacencies between studios, dressing rooms and performance areas. More importantly, these precedents showed how circulation and transparency within a building can create a sense of community among dancers. Seeing movement through windows or open corridors, for example, allows dancers to observe and learn from one another, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the discipline.

Throughout this process, I learned that research rarely follows a straightforward path. My investigation moved through several stages, each raising new questions and reshaping the project. I began by studying the cultural meaning of dance, then explored its education and cognitive benefits, before eventually focusing on the economic and spatial challenges dancers face in urban environments. Each stage required consulting different types of sources, from scholarly books and academic journals to policy reports and architectural documentation. Access to library databases and research materials made it possible to connect ideas from multiple disciplines and apply them to a design problem.

Reflecting on the research process, I now see how essential it was to move beyond my personal experience as a dancer and examine the topic through academic and professional sources. While my background initially sparked the question, the research helped me understand the broader structural issues that shape the dance community. Ultimately, this investigation reinforced the idea that designing for dance involves more than creating visually appealing spaces.

I developed a design proposal for a dance education and performance center that responds to these findings by emphasizing flexibility, visibility, and community engagement. More importantly, the research demonstrated how design decisions can be grounded in evidence gathered from multiple disciplines. By combining personal experience with scholarly research, I was able to approach the project not only as a designer but also a researcher seeking to understand how space can better support artistic practice.