Training Bodies/Training Minds:
A Model of Ballet Education for the
21st Century

By Caroline Griswold

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This paper is dedicated with admiration to my parents, for their
unending love, support, and encouragement through the ups and downs of
my ballet training, with hope that other parents, and students, will be
spared some of those challenges in the future.
Thank you.

I would also like to thank the wonderful ballet teachers I have had
over the years, the ones who have shown me unequivocally that good
ballet teaching does exist and can be extremely effective. Thank you for
your caring, your energy, your excitement, and your dedication.
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Part I: Introduction, and the Tradition

Chapter 1: Introduction

“As dance educators, we have a responsibility that is greater than training bodies.” (Hankin)

I have been taking ballet since the tender age of two, and while I fell in love with it pretty much the moment I stepped foot into a dance class, there have also been many things about it that I have found less than palatable. As I got older, I found that the incessant pressure to be thin, the anti-intellectual atmosphere in many ballet classes I took, and the favoritism and politics of various institutions stifled my own creativity and love of the art form and that of those around me. I noticed that while people were certainly willing to complain about the challenges they faced and share horror stories about ballet training, few seriously questioned why it had to be this way. The pervading attitude seemed to be that the more you had suffered or been abused in the name of ballet, the more legitimate a dancer you were. I have encountered precious few people who are both technically skilled and have managed to escape the various cruelties of the ballet world, and this bothers me. Sylvain LaFortune, as quoted in Not Just Any Body: Advancing Health, Well Being, and Excellence in Dance and Dancers, sums it up well when she says, “We don’t become dancers because of our current training system—we become dancers in spite of it. The lucky ones get through. All the others end up injured, discouraged, and unmotivated” (LaFortune qtd. in Jowitt et al. 85). I love ballet, and I am committed to its growth and believe that it has the potential to flourish and stay relevant in this day and age. It is for these reasons that I write this: I believe that there must be better way to teach ballet, a way in which we can foster dancers who are both highly
technically skilled and also physically, emotionally, and intellectually nurtured. I don’t claim to have all the answers about how to accomplish that, but I endeavor to present various theories about ballet training that I believe could ameliorate the system as it stands.

While ballet training may seem like a niche world in this country, in reality every year thousands of little girls put on tutus and tights and participate in what could loosely be termed a ballet class. Even if they never go further than those first few classes, these girls have now been exposed to ballet training. What if that were an empowering experience for them? What if ballet training fostered creativity, joy of moving, and love of one’s body? There is no doubt that there are schools that do that for their students, and I commend them, but I don’t think that the majority of ballet schools in this country achieve this. As part of my research, I surveyed about 70 ballet students and several teachers, asking them about their training experiences and their beliefs on ballet training (see Appendix A for survey information). Only 43% of student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ballet training improved their self-esteem. Similarly, in another study, “Ballet dancers scored highest on measures of emotional instability compared to other performing artist groups, and lower on self-esteem measures…13- to 17-year-old female dancers described their personality as less beautiful, pleasant, attractive, confident, lovable, and good than the nondancing girls did,” (Ackard 486). Finally, in the book Fit to Dance, the authors write, “Two thirds of the contemporary dancers felt that, on balance, their teaching had been positive…by contrast, two-thirds of the ballet dancers felt that their teachers’ criticisms had affected them negatively. They gave many more instances than the other dancers of ‘damaging’ comments made by their teachers, who
were accused of being unconstructively critical and giving no help with the individual needs of the dancers’ body” (77). These statistics clearly indicate that ballet training is not altogether a positive experience for all students. Even if most little girls do not go on to study ballet seriously, they not only deserve a good experience but the ballet world should have a vested interest in giving them one: these are tomorrow’s audience members, patrons, and advocates. If for that reason alone, ballet teachers should be invested in making sure every child, not just the “talented” ones, has a positive experience in ballet class.

I don’t think anyone would argue that things are perfect in ballet training. However, many people might believe that the negative aspects of ballet training are “necessary evils.” I do not believe this is so: the ballet world can, and must, do better than a culture of authoritarianism, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and militaristic training methods. Further, while I know that the dance world tends to protect its own (Lakes 2), we do ourselves a disservice by ignoring the need for change within it. With that in mind, I present the central tenets of my beliefs about ballet training, culled through research and synthesis of sources. I do not pretend to offer an exhaustive list of methods or strategies and I absolutely acknowledge that there is a huge array of possibilities for good teaching. Here I offer merely core values, with the guiding principle of respecting and nurturing the student as a whole person, not just as a body:

1. Teachers who work to improve student efficacy and self-esteem will allow students to achieve their full potential. In this vein, teachers should strive to create an effective relationship with their students in which the teacher has authority but the students have autonomy and in which the teacher pushes but also encourages and respects the student. It is possible to be both honest and kind: a teacher need not “sugar-coat” the realities of the dance world in order to avoid shattering a students’ self-confidence.
2. Teaching should not be a default career for professional dancers. Instead, it should be undertaken only if a person really wants to be a teacher, and it should be a respected profession within the dance world. Further, teachers should receive pedagogical knowledge as well as content knowledge.

3. Intellectual life can be integrated into the dance classroom: dance class need not be an anti-intellectual experience.

4. Students should be encouraged to have lives outside of dance and bring them into the classrooms. Students’ lives can be rich with experience, and this richness will enhance their dancing. World-famous dancer Dwight Rhoden, who danced with the Alvin Ailey company, very much supports this idea, writing, “Mr. Ailey really encouraged the concept of investigating other parts of your life, because you would bring that back to your art form and your dancing would become richer. You need to be a whole person in order to bring something to your role or an idea” (Jowitt et al. 43–44).

5. The classroom environment should promote learning: using educational psychology, sports psychology, and the science of learning, it is possible to create emotional, physical, and intellectual environments that encourage optimal learning. Ideally, this atmosphere will promote intrinsic (as opposed to extrinsic) motivation and foster mastery goals.

6. Dance teachers can be conscious of students’ physical and emotional safety while still pushing them to their limits. This can partially be accomplished by creating an environment in which it is ok to take risks and make mistakes.

7. Dance should be taught in a developmentally appropriate (both physically and emotionally) way. This is particularly relevant for teaching young children and also adolescents.

8. Dancers and dance students should be supported in ways similar to athletes—they ought to be provided with the health and psychological skills and resources that will allow them to succeed and thrive.

9. We can respect and use ballet tradition without becoming slaves to it. Dance pedagogy should be plastic and utilize both the good aspects of tradition as well as new developments that can improve it.

These core convictions can inform ballet training and help teachers mold the best dancers possible, dancers who are both technically skilled and healthy.
Chapter 2: The Tradition and Syllabus

“In reality, most dance training consists of learning how to follow directions and how to follow them well” (Sherry (ed), Stinson 27).

A traditional ballet class has remained almost the same for a hundred or more years. While technique has advanced and certain things have changed, the fundamental structure has stayed constant: there is one teacher with absolute authority, a group of quiet (mostly female) students facing wall-to-wall mirrors, and a highly structured system of repetitive exercises, starting at the barre and eventually moving into the center and across the floor. To use the language of Elizabeth Gibbons in her discussion of the “spectrum of teaching styles,” dance training is typically taught in the mode of “cued response,” in which the central goals include “immediate, precise, and accurate response to instruction,” “uniformity and conformity,” “maintenance of aesthetic standards,” and “perpetuation of tradition” (79). This method of teaching has been variously described as “transmission teaching” (Doddington and Hilton 56) or the “banking method of education” (Ottey), but the general principle is that passive, blank students are receptacles into which the teacher distributes knowledge (Ottey). This method of teaching encourages submissiveness, discipline, and accurate skill acquisition. Sherilyn D. Ottey, in her article “Critical pedagogical theory and the dance educator,” points out that this style of teaching functions effectively to preserve order, because it doesn’t produce “subversive” (read: creative) thinkers, and thus none of the students challenge tradition.

In a conventional ballet class, the teacher is considered the sole source of information, and communication is generally from the top down (Gibbons 14). This seems to have generally remained the case today, although renowned ballet teacher David
Howard says that “The way I was trained, students never said two words to their teachers. Here, there’s much more openness. I think it’s very healthy” (Howard qtd. in Warren 117). While it may be true that there is more variation today, the typical ballet class certainly functions in a traditional way. Indeed, many schools take pride in the traditional nature of their training. For example, Franco De Vita, the principal of the prestigious Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School, says “We insist that all students focus on doing what the teacher wants and on arriving on time…We have a strict dress code as well” (Green). Similarly, Leonid L. Nadirov, the executive director of the famed Vaganova Ballet Academy in St. Petersburg, says “What is unique about our school…is that we are conservative. By that I mean that we are uncompromising in our standards and traditions…since 1738…we have a formula that works” (Nadirov qtd. in Rumyatseva).

Certainly, it is true that the Vaganova Ballet School produces successful dancers, however, is that the only criteria for a worthwhile training model?

It makes sense that ballet training would have developed in the model of the “banking method,” as education functioned similarly in the time that ballet training was growing. Christine Doddington and Mary Hilton, in their book Child-Centred Education: Reviving the Creative Tradition, point out that “throughout the nineteenth century, with a growth of institutions such as schools, prisons and hospitals, a whole set of procedures had been carefully developed to help control, measure, and train individuals in the system so that they would not and could not resist authority” (21). There were rises and falls of the idea of “active learning” and “child-centered education,” (Bickman 135) and thinkers such as John Dewey argued that “genuine learning can occur only in schools where continual thinking and social interaction also pervade relations between teachers,
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administrators, and parents” (Dewey qtd. in Bickman 105). However, for various reasons, the structure of education remained largely in the vein of the “banking method,” and ballet training developed the same way.

Robin Lakes, in her article “The Messages Behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western concert Dance Technique, Training, and Rehearsals,” makes an astute comparison between ballet training and vocational training. The concept of vocational training (training for a specific skill or job) was growing in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century and was based on teaching a “narrowly defined set of goals and skills,” a curriculum based on product as opposed to process, accurate replication of skills by the apprentice, acknowledgment by all involved that the teacher is the expert, and “inculcation of moral virtues such as ‘industry, perseverance, and thrift’” (Lakes 21). Lakes’ comparison is a telling one because it points to the nature of ballet training as product, not process oriented (meaning that the process, whether good or bad, doesn’t really matter as long as the product is a “success”). With these methods of teaching, education becomes mechanical, based on disciplinary power “enacted through testing, grouping, and grading” (Doddington and Hilton 22). Despite the fact that this type of training has its merits (clearly, it is effective at producing students who are capable at executing required skills, highly disciplined, and excellent at following instructions), the emphasis on the product, rather than the process, and the narrow, anti-intellectual nature of vocational programs make it worth reexamining.

While I will argue in this paper that ballet training must go beyond the conventional method of teaching, I don’t mean to suggest that there is nothing in traditional training that deserves to be kept. There are aspects of ballet training that have
not only anecdotally proven to be useful but are also supported by current research and science. For example, the use of repetition in class is really the only way to learn and perfect the various technical skills necessary to be proficient in classical ballet, or any other skill, for that matter: researchers estimate that it takes an average of 3500 hours of practice to become a “competent amateur piano player” and the overall hours of practice undertaken by a student is the best indicator of future success, even more so than “talent” (Howe 50-51).

To understand this, it is useful to have a basic understanding of how learning is accomplished in the brain. Essentially, when a person learns something, neural pathways are established that form a memory trace in the brain (Hardiman 55). In order for those neural pathways to be strengthened and eventually “hardwired” (so that learning is not erased), the pathways must repeatedly be stimulated (Hardiman 55). When they are activated through repetition of the information, the knowledge becomes easy to retrieve and eventually becomes part of the person’s long-term memory (Hardiman 55).

According to Michael J. A. Howe, in A Teacher’s Guide to the Psychology of Learning, “repetition, whether it is in the form of rehearsal or self-testing, or whether it takes the form of practicing activities, is an absolutely crucial component of learning” (52). Clearly, traditional ballet training had this right: repetition, while it can be tedious, is absolutely necessary for learning.

Traditional ballet training also seems to have been right in terms of the type of repetition that is most useful for learning. Gregory Schraw, in his article “Knowledge: Structures and Processes” in the Handbook of Educational Psychology, says that in order for practice to be effective, it must have several essential qualities. First of all, it has to be
“intentional and highly goal directed” (Alexander and Winne (eds), Schraw 257). With its emphasis on the specific skills to be acquired and goal-oriented approach towards a certain aesthetic, ballet training definitely falls into this category. It is important that repetition have a clear purpose and relationship to the overarching task. For example, Coach John Wooden, one of the most successful coaches in college basketball, “is unabashedly an advocate of drill when it is used properly within a balanced approach that also attends to developing understanding and initiative…however, drill for Coach Wooden is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Drilling is intended to achieve an automaticity or mastery of fundamentals that opens up opportunities for individual creativity and initiative. To make certain the drills were understood by his students to be part of a larger, more meaningful whole, he tried to show the context in which the skill or habit would operate…” (Gallimore 132-3).

Second, practice must be “systematic” and frequent (Alexander and Winne (eds), Schraw 257). As I have already discussed, traditional ballet training is certainly systematic: it is very consistent in construction and teaches various skills in a progressive, structured way. Further, it is frequent: most serious ballet students have at least one ballet class six days a week, and unlike other sports, there is no “off-season.” Third, for practice to be effective, it must take place in an “authentic setting”: skills should be practiced in a real-world context or as close to that as possible (Alexander and Winne (eds), Schraw 257). This, too, has been the goal for ballet training. Traditional classes are held in a space that is similar in size and construction to the stage space, and students are placed in regimented lines similar to the way a corps de ballet is structured. Further, it could be argued that the pressure put on students by the teacher can emulate a performance or
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audition situation. Clearly, both the existence of repetition and the nature of repetition in ballet classes are elements that are useful and should be preserved. Interestingly, the question of mirrors could be raised here: I will take this up more specifically later, but it is worthwhile to consider the fact that having mirrors in the classroom does not mimic actual performance situations, as there are no mirrors on stage.

I also believe that even as training becomes more progressive and perhaps different from traditional ballet training, it is important that students retain a healthy respect for what came before them in their art form. This is best accomplished not by insistent on keeping ballet just as it always has been, but rather by educating students about the history of their art through videos, dance history classes, and reproductions of historical works. The rich and varied tradition of ballet is all the more reason to improve training methods: in order to continue that tradition and allow ballet to remain relevant and exciting in today’s world, it must progress.

Syllabus

In order to understand the history of ballet training, it is important to understand the origins and methodology of the various syllabi. I don’t intend to provide an exhaustive explanation of each syllabus, but rather I want to understand what the commonalities and differences are between the syllabi, as well as discuss whether there is a compelling reason to teach according to one particular syllabus or to use a syllabus at all. While there are others, the methods I will discuss here are the Vaganova, Cecchetti, Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), Bournonville, Balanchine, and Paris Opéra Ballet. I recognize that I may seem to be giving unequal attention to some of these, which is
merely a function of the amount of information, particularly information of a scholarly nature, available on some syllabi.

In an attempt to understand not only the history of these syllabi but their current applications and whether there are appreciable differences in the experiences of students trained in these syllabi, I created an anonymous survey (conducted and distributed online) that asked current and former dance students about what syllabus they studied, how strictly their teachers stuck to it, what they felt were the most notable aspects of that syllabus, how much artistry, musicality, and speed were emphasized, and how prepared they felt to adapt to other styles. I collected 116 responses to my questionnaire, and looked at the responses both across the board and split up by syllabus and other filters. As part of my discussion of each method, I will detail some of the findings of that survey.

Because I was surveying largely American students, the vast majority was trained either in mixed/no syllabus, Vaganova, Cecchetti, and/or Balanchine. There were a significant number of RAD students as well, a few from the French school, and no Bournonville-trained students. Thus, it would be valuable for future researchers to try to conduct this type of research with a more equally distributed sample group.

Overall, the biggest group of students had studied the Vaganova syllabus—50%. Next was mixed/no syllabus, with 31%, followed by Balanchine with 26%, Cecchetti with 20%, and RAD with 16%. Only four students (3%) had studied the French school, and 1 student had studied Bournonville. I realize that these percentages do not add up to 100, which is because I allowed respondents to check more than one syllabus if they had had significant training in both. 62% said their entire schools were structured around that syllabus, while the remainder said it was just one or a few teachers who taught it. 20%
said their school/teacher was not very strict about sticking to the syllabus, 41% said that the syllabus was followed fairly precisely, and 40% said their schools/teachers fell somewhere in between. 9% of students were taught nothing about the history of the syllabus they were learning/other syllabi, 41% reported that they were taught just the basics, 24% were taught “pretty in depth,” and 19% said they were taught a lot.

I then asked about different emphases in students’ training. 1% said musicality was not at all emphasized in their training, 4% said it was emphasized a bit, 10% said it was emphasized somewhat, 46% said it was emphasized a lot, and 39% said it was emphasized extensively. Speed was my next question, with 4% saying it was not at all emphasized, 14% saying it was emphasized a bit, 42% saying it was somewhat emphasized, 25% saying it was emphasized a lot, and 15% saying it was extensively emphasized. Next, I asked how often teachers gave translations of the French terms. No students said never, 11% said occasionally, 14% said sometimes, 38% said often, and 37% reported that they always knew the translations. I also asked to what extent students felt their combinations were choreographic: 6% said not at all, 16% said somewhat, 54% said about half and half, and 24% said that they had very “dance-y” combinations. In terms of set classes, my respondents were split almost exactly in half, with 51% reporting yes and 49% reporting no. My final multiple choice question was how prepared they felt outside of their “home” syllabus: 2% said they felt very unprepared, 4% said they felt unprepared, 23% said they were somewhat prepared, 50% said they felt prepared and adapted pretty easily, and 21% said they felt very prepared and that it felt natural to switch between styles.

Vaganova
Agrippina Vaganova, born in Russia in 1879, was admitted to the Imperial Ballet School in 1888 and became a principal ballerina with the Imperial Ballet. She was known for being an extremely technical dancer who had overcome various physical “defects” to develop an incredible command over ballet technique. After she stopped dancing, Vaganova pursued her other passion, teaching, and attempted to create a pedagogical method that would allow even students with less than ideal bodies to succeed, as she had (Willis-Aarnio). She was one of the first teachers to utilize scientific knowledge as part of her pedagogical system—she wrote, “Our schools must have the serious theoretical base. We must take care to establish a scientific research center for dance…” (Willis-Aarnio 446). Further Vaganova aimed to create a method that would allow students to dance for a long time free of injury (Willis-Aarnio 6). As part of her belief in creating a “pure” technique that would allow dancers to dance free of injury and technical concerns, she used specific anatomical language in her feedback to dancers, (Willis-Aarnio 378) and in this way seems to have been very much ahead of her time in realizing the kind of feedback most effective for learning.

Vaganova’s system was very focused on technical details, but she developed it that way with the larger picture of artistry in mind, wanting to “seek a more predictable way to develop the dancer’s body to free the artist of technical concerns and allow the artist to focus efforts on developing expressive powers” (Willis-Aarnio xvii). This was supported by one of the students in my survey, who wrote, “The Vaganova syllabus is incremental, building logically upon itself. It addresses common weaknesses that hinder mastery of technique and artistry…I feel it allows for mastery through repetition and slow progress…that eventually builds a dancer…who is free to focus on artistry because
of a thorough command of basic technique.” Similarly, another student wrote, “My Vaganova teachers emphasized establishing perfect technique [that] eventually set the body free to do the soul’s wishes. Once the body was trained and strengthened, each person could finally accomplish the artistry they envisioned…” Indeed, according to Willis-Aarnio, “…one of [Vaganova’s] goals became that of insuring that none of her students would be deluded into thinking that technical brilliance was a substitute for artistry” (xvii). This came through in several of the students’ responses—for example, one wrote that teachers “tell us that ballet is not just a technical collection of movements, but an expressive, emotional, and beautiful form of dance. They express something along these lines almost every class.” In that vein, one of the central things Vaganova wanted out of her students was emotional expressiveness, along with “strictness of form” and a “resolute, energetic manner of performance” (Vaganova xi). Ultimately, she sought to create dancers with pure technique who would be artistic dancers and not succumb to the focus on “tricks” that she abhorred in other syllabi. According to Marian Horosko, she attempted to take the best aspects of the French and Italian schools and unite them into a true “Russian” style (54).

Despite, or perhaps because of, her desire for her dancers to develop the ability to be highly emotionally expressive, she was extremely strict and methodical about teaching technique, using a progression of exercises designed to develop precision, understanding of the purpose of the exercise, and anatomical understanding (Kostrovitskaya 43). She believed that meaning in movement came out of technical perfection—Willis-Aarnio writes, “[Vaganova] meant that when a movement is perfected, it is no longer devoid of meaning; it takes on meaning to the eye” (421). Further, according to Natalia
Dudinskaya, Vaganova was very much interested in movement efficiency, trying to get “better results with less energy” (Dudinskaya qtd. in Willis-Aarnio 99). However, as part of her emphasis on teaching students to learn the technique regardless of the challenges their bodies presented, she did believe in working within the students’ limitations—in her book Fundamentals of the Classic Dance (Russian Ballet Technique), she writes, “If the feet of a pupil begin to hurt, especially the ligaments, it is best to refrain for the time being from working on her plié” (Vaganova and Chujoy 12). After reading this assertion, it was notable to me to find students who had studied the Vaganova syllabus who felt that it actually could cause injury—for example, one student wrote “I think that the Vaganova syllabus is great for strengthening dancers, but I feel it lacks emphasis on proper alignment of the spine/hips, articulation of the feet, and the lengthening of muscles…I think this makes many dancers prone to injury, particularly those who are not equipped with natural turnout and flexibility.” Another student agreed, “There was also an ‘extreme-ness’ about Vaganova technique, in reference to 180 degree turnout as a standard, and the height of leg extensions and jumps.” Similarly, a student wrote, “Vaganova strengthened my muscles but at the same time messed up my knees since the method required…extensive turn-out even if you are not naturally endowed with turnout.” Another student wrote, “I was lucky enough to be naturally turned out, because Vaganova is made for those who are. However, those who aren’t turned out aren’t taught how to perfect their technique within the limits of their bodies.” This focus on extreme turn-out was noted by several other students as well. It is fascinating to me that this has come to be seen as such a hallmark of the style while in many ways it is antithetical to the
ideas of Vaganova herself, who wanted to create a technique that would work for
students with less than ideal facility and would allow students to dance without injury.

Vaganova also wanted her students to be “thinking dancers”—she asked her
students not only to be able to execute a step perfectly but also to be able to explain what
its purpose was and how it should be performed (Vaganova xi). She demanded that they
understand the movement in detail, not just in terms of the legs but also what the entire
body was doing and how the step was beyond just mechanics (Willis-Aarnio 400).

Further, when students did not succeed in doing something correctly, she encouraged
them to think about why they were unsuccessful (Vaganova xi). Moreover, she
encouraged her students to listen to music and read books—sometimes even banned ones
(Willis-Aarnio 505), as she believed that music, in particular, was part of the “poetry of
human emotion” as well (Willis-Aarnio 438). According to Willis-Aarnio, this total
education of both the mind and the body and the insistence that students be “honest with
themselves regarding their strengths and weaknesses” meant that her students were
“secure, emotionally and professionally” (331).

Despite this assertion, Vaganova’s teaching style seems not to have been one that
would have always inspired a feeling of security—according to Willis-Aarnio, for
example, “most days she was angry, and her voice turned genuinely unpleasant. When
she was berating a pupil in full view of everyone, her tongue lashed the mortified sinner,
sorning a sloppy relevé, she became as crude as a market woman…” (489). Willis-
Aarnio also writes, “Because of her professional skill, alert eye and sharp tongue, she
gave striking models, mocking descriptions and nicknames that stuck for a long time, if
not forever…As part of her honest approach to teaching, she did not want her students to
have a false image of themselves. She did not believe in flattery, so much so, that sometimes she went to the opposite extreme, hurting feelings deeply…” (iv-xviii). In many ways, this method of teaching can be seen as a precursor to the kinds of authoritarian teaching seen today.

Although Vaganova had very specific ideas about how to use dance science and how technique should be developed, she did not develop her syllabus to be stagnant or taught the same by every teacher. Indeed, “the artistic innovations of choreographers did not escape [Vaganova’s] notice. She unhesitatingly introduced all new movements into her lessons in order to prepare the aspiring artists and young students for working in contemporary productions” (Vaganova xiii). This suggests that, had she lived to see the development of more contemporary forms of ballet, she would have wanted to prepare students to incorporate those kinds of movements into their dancing as well. Further, she wanted her teachers to “develop their own style of teaching, consistent with their own personality and values” (Willis-Aarnio xiv). When she began teaching pedagogy (which she thought was a very important aspect of a ballet training institution) she also encouraged her pupils “to develop their own lesson plans based on the scientific foundation of dance that she founded” (Willis-Aarnio xiv). This idea that all teachers should have their own styles seems to have continued to be true in her school in contemporary times—Kate Beswick in the article “A Visit to St. Petersburg” writes about the school, “No two [teachers] are alike; one lady has the manner of a drill sergeant, while the grandeur of another suggests that she has donated herself to the occasion.” It is important to emphasize, again, Vaganova’s strong feelings about the importance of pedagogical training—unlike many people in the ballet world, she did not feel that simply
having had a professional career qualified someone to teach ballet. Further, she wanted people who were genuinely motivated to become teachers: she writes, “Sometimes a ballet artist, who can no longer perform onstage or who has simply lost their motivation to work, turn to pedagogy. Of course, we must not take this type of teacher…not everyone can work as a teacher, and anywhere anyone who wants to take this position must be scrutinized carefully” (Willis-Aarnio 441-442). Here, she is again before her time in understanding the importance of autonomous motivation for teaching.

It is also interesting to note the interplay between technique and tradition, on the one hand, and innovation and individuality, on the other. Clearly, the Russian schools she founded are extremely strict about who they accept and how the students are trained. Beswick writes, for example, “At the Vaganova academy the teachers nurture artists and are quick to find and improve any facility; when facility doesn’t exist, they ignore the student with a ruthlessness that makes one wonder about the psychological development of the ‘failures’…Everyone here is part of an honored tradition, and that tradition is more important than any single member of it” (Beswick). This quotation is particularly interesting because it suggests that the devotion to tradition can make individual development and safety almost irrelevant. On the other hand, Lia Schubert discusses how individuality is nurtured at the Bolshoi School, writing, “Personality finds expression in the freer upper body. In the smaller Russian classes, the teacher shapes the body according to individual needs…all resulting in a unity of style in a company ensemble, but with individuality preserved” (62). This proves an interesting question to consider not only in Vaganova’s writing and the writing about her, but also in the survey responses of
Vaganova trained students. Many of the students in my survey who had studied Vaganova did discuss the upper body as one of the hallmarks of the style.

Students in my survey who had studied Vaganova also had experience in Balanchine (22%), RAD (16%), and Cecchetti (16%). Interestingly, Vaganova students came out essentially the same as my overall response rate on all of the multiple choice questions. Students had a variety of comments on the Vaganova syllabus. One wrote, for example, “I feel like the syllabus was too slow in the process….The Vaganova syllabus was set up to be used in a different setting than America…the children studied ballet all day every day starting at age 8. In America this isn’t always the case, so I think that going strictly by the Vaganova syllabus in American schools is not the greatest idea.”

**Bournonville**

August Bournonville was a prolific teacher and choreographer, who worked mostly in Denmark and founded the style still very much favored at many companies in that area of the world, notably the Royal Danish Ballet. His style was intended to prepare dancers to perform his ballets, and includes steps that he chose to become “characteristic of the style” as well as particular quality of “grace and effortless lightness” in the movement quality (Aschengreen and Godfrey 138). Bournonville’s syllabus is very unique in that it is a series of “schools” (classes) that were set, one for each day of the week. Interestingly, these classes were formally set by his students after his death in an attempt to preserve what he had created (Aschengreen and Godfrey 122). The schools were danced everyday “without deviation or consideration of individual differences” for fifty years after Bournonville’s death (Aschengreen and Godfrey 123).
These schools were performed by everyone in the school and the company, from the children to the principle dancers (Sutton 6). Only the youngest children, ages seven and eight, did not do the “schools,” instead participating in a “sort of pre-ballet class that teaches discipline and generally acclimates the children to the life of a dancer…” (Sutton 60). After that, everyone learned and practiced the set classes each day. According to Valerie Sutton, the general theory behind the Bournonville schools was “‘sink or swim’…Since all the steps of the Bournonville schools were in the same style, and often times, directly taken from Bournonville’s ballets, if the dancer could dance the schools well, he could also dance Bournonville’s choreography with ease” (6). He developed very strenuous, short barres (Sutton 6) combined with long, extremely choreographic center work (Terry 29) that prepared dancers to perform his complex, intricate choreography. He was also very invested in musicality, teaching that “the idea of dancing is impossible to separate from the idea of music” (Willis-Aarnio 309). Indeed, the steps in his schools were choreographed to specific music, so that “Like circus animals, when the music played [the dancers] would dance the steps automatically” (Sutton 7).

There seems to be some controversy among former Bournonville dancers about how strictly the schools were taught in terms of exact technique, arm placement, etc: Dinna Bjørn is quoted in Aschergreen’s article saying, “I think it’s an interesting thing now when we talk about the Bournonville Schools and the living tradition—and now we try to preserve it because I think in those times when they only did the Bournonville classes there was a lot more freedom in the class. They were actually not told exactly where to put the foot, exactly were to place a hand. Because it was the only style they were doing I think maybe they were even encouraged to do it in their own personal
This seems to be a theme that runs throughout different syllabi, that descendants of the founder are much stricter about sticking to the “law” than the founders themselves were.

In my survey, I did not have any students who were trained in the Bournonville style. This is unsurprising, as it is not often taught in America—even when his ballets are set, it is almost always on dancers who have not been trained in the Bournonville style specifically. This begs the question, for me, of how relevant it is to teach a technique that is so specific to a certain choreographer—it does not seem that a syllabus which uses set classes based on steps out of one choreographers’ repertory and style would prepare the dancers to have the kind of versatility they need to succeed in the larger dance world today. However, one could also see benefits to that kind of specificity in that it allows dancers to become specialized rather than attempt to do many different things that might eventually begin to conflict with one another. Further, there are examples of famous dancers from the Bouronville School who have been extremely successful in other styles (notably Peter Martins, now the Artistic Director of Balanchine’s New York City Ballet).

Cecchetti

Enrico Cecchetti was an Italian balletmaster in the early 20th century who created a syllabus that is still taught fairly widely in the U.S. today. Interestingly, his syllabus also used set classes, although many people teach Cecchetti style today without using them. Indeed, Richard Glasstone writes, “Important though [the set classes] aspect of his teaching was, it is not necessarily central to the way in which the Cecchetti legacy is being handed on today. In this respect, it is important to remember that Cecchetti’s often extremely complex adagios, pirouettes and allegro enchainements were intended for adult
dancers—he did not himself teach children” (835), suggesting that the utility of the center work of those classes may be limited. However, Glasstone defends the barre work that Cecchetti created, which emphasize repetition and aim, in many cases, to help students develop the proper mechanics for jumping, not only in terms of the actual steps but also “correct timing and precise action of each movement, with accent and dynamics being of paramount importance” (835). Like Vaganova, Cecchetti’s method emphasized musicality (even instructing how the counts of an exercise should be spoken by the teacher, either crisply or “in a singing voice”) (Beaumont and Cecchetti 30). Further, Diane van Schoor writes that in the Cecchetti technique, “The dancer is taught anticipation and to breathe musically and the method makes the most effective use of what is commonly known as the dancer’s ‘and’, providing great light and shade” (52).

Interestingly, one of my survey respondents reported that “Artistry was not taught as part of the set Cecchetti syllabus until at least grade V,” although this student wrote that teachers did emphasize it in other classes and rehearsals.

Also like Vaganova, Cecchetti focuses on anatomical understanding of movement. Indeed, van Schoor writes, “The Cecchetti Method is a system of training designed strictly upon the laws of anatomy stressing two essential ingredients: technical and artistic development in the dancer and a sensitive, musical response to all movements” (51). His method draws upon fourteen principles which “encompass a knowledge of classical technique and an understanding of basic anatomy”…with an emphasis on “rigorous training and constant repetition of a movement” (van Schoor 52). Willis-Aarnio also points out the importance of repetition in the Cecchetti syllabus (129-130). The similarities between the systems of Cecchetti and Vaganova also include the
emphasis on preventing injury and adapting to an individuals’ physicality—according to Janice Barringer, one of the ways that the Cecchetti set classes came about was in an effort to avoid working the same muscle groups two days in a row in order to prevent injury (215), an insight that was quite ahead of his time. Further, Barringer proposes that “another way the Cecchetti training avoided injury is that it adapts the ballet positions to each individual’s body,” for example, by allowing for different degrees of rotation (215). One of the respondents in my survey suggested this as well, writing, “Cecchetti works very closely to keep the dancer’s body comfortable and natural. Fifth position is not fully closed unless one has perfect turnout, for example.” Glasstone suggests that Cecchetti’s technique is also very valuable in its emphasis on the “ability to find and control a center of balance which deviates from the vertical” (837)—a skill which would be extremely useful for today’s dancers, who are expected to have the versatility to perform many off center movements.

Interestingly, I found a fair amount of writing questioning the absolute repetition of Cecchetti material—for example, Glasstone writes, “Adhering to the principles underlying Cecchetti’s exercises is ultimately more important than repeating his set sequences in parrot fashion, like some sort of balletic parrot” (837). Similarly, Willis-Aarnio writes, “one of the (unintentional) effects of [codifying the Cecchetti system] has been a tendency for students and teacher to lose sight of the full, rich expanse of the method as a whole as it was conceived and taught by Cecchetti” (132). These quotations bring up one of the most important and difficult questions about syllabus—how much of it is meant to stay constant and how much should change with the times? We saw Vaganova address this challenge in her desire to incorporate new movement based on
contemporary choreography, and we can also see this challenge in the Bournonville schools’ struggle to figure out how much of the traditional Bournonville training to keep and how much to prepare the dancers for other styles while still using the principles of the Bournonville technique. It seems that both Vaganova and Cecchetti were committed to preparing dancers for the work of their time.

I had 23 students who had studied Cecchetti in my survey, of which 35% reported also having studied Balanchine, 39% had also studied Vaganova, and 22% had also studied RAD. Interestingly, while 19% of my respondents overall reported that they had learned a lot about the history of the syllabus they were studying and/or about the various syllabi, none of my respondents in the Cecchetti group agreed. Cecchetti students were significantly more likely to report that they always knew all the translations of French steps, with 59% saying that as opposed to 37% overall. They were less likely to report that their combinations were not at all choreographic (0 as opposed to 6% overall), but also less likely to report that they had very choreographic combinations (13% as opposed to 24% overall). They had a 17% higher rate of set classes, and they were less likely to report that they were either unprepared or very unprepared (0 as opposed to 6% overall) to take class in other styles, with 61% (as opposed to 50% overall) reporting that they were prepared. It is interesting to note that there were some students who took Cecchetti exams (which are in many ways similar to RAD exams), while many did not. It seems that in the RAD system, exams are much more important while in the Cecchetti system they are considered less essential.

Paris Opéra Ballet/French School
As with the Bournonville style, there are not that many students in the U.S. trained in the French school, and not as much information available about it as there is for the Cecchetti or Vaganova methods. However, it is a major pedagogical method and style that has been responsible for training generations of dancers in France and outside. Indeed, founded in 1713 by Louis XIV (largely considered the father of classical ballet), it is the oldest and one of the most venerated ballet schools in the world. The students of the Paris Opéra Ballet School, like those at the Vaganova Academy or Bolshoi Ballet, are selected through a rigorous audition process (about three hundred audition of which about 10% are accepted and only a third of those make it to the second year) (Riding). They are taught by teachers who come directly through the lineage of the school and continue the tradition of the training style—according to Karyn Bauer, “Although the POBS doesn’t have a written curriculum, the school’s classical teachers, all former POB dancers, are expected to communicate their skills” (63). The students live on the campus of the school and have academic classes as well as dance classes there, which allows the school to control their entire curriculum and as a result, for example, they all study dance history and music (Bauer 62).

The French style has several hallmarks—according to Bauer, it is known for “clarity of the épaulement and port de bras…Elegance and strength are emphasized, as is the precision of the footwork…petite batterie is indisputably the POBS’s signature” (60). Like Vaganova, Cecchetti, and Bournonville, musicality is also emphasized in the French style—Patricia Daly writes, for example, that “Francesca Zumba [of the Paris Opera School] feels that through musicality you can solve most technical problems, and explained some of the ways in which musicality in dance was developed, such as getting
the dancers to sing adage… Students are reminded that slow movements have accents as well as fast, and they are taught to execute movements at extremes of tempi and to listen for differences of time and emphasis…” (65).

It is to some extent difficult to talk about the French style in terms of syllabus because it is so dominated by the Paris Opéra Ballet School. However, there are many teachers who come out of the Paris Opéra Ballet tradition who do not teach at the POBS, and thus the style has proliferated outside of Paris as well as being preserved within it. I had 4 students who had studied in the French school, of these 1 had also studied in Balanchine and 1 had also studied Vaganova. Because of this small sample, it is not as useful to generalize from their responses, although it is interesting to note where there seemed to be consensus—for example, three of four reported that musicality was emphasized “a lot” in their training, and three of four also reported that speed was “somewhat” emphasized in their training. All of them said that they did not have set classes.

**RAD**

The Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) technique was developed in Britain in 1920 by ballet teachers who felt that the quality of ballet training in their country was disorganized and generally poor, and thus “created a uniform examination syllabus to be taught across dance schools in Britain” (Loizou). The RAD method has spread widely outside of Britain and is now used worldwide—indeed, according to Kate Mattingly Moran, it now has about 17,600 members in 84 countries with 185,000 students being assessed each year (75). Additionally, the RAD has 5,700 teachers in 65 countries licensed to teach the method (Moran 75). Students training in the RAD method are taught
set classes developed for their particular level of training and also specific to their track—the method has both a vocational track and a non-vocational track (Loizou). Each grade has clear criteria set for the students to achieve, and at the end of each year outside examiners conduct exams on the material the students were to have perfected. Students who pass the exams move onto the next level in the syllabus. The RAD is often noted for the clean, precise technique its students to develop, and prides itself on creating unmannered dancers who can “adapt to a wide range of styles” (Loizou). According to Stephanie Loizou, the method also allows for an “expansive and generous” use of the upper body, which allows “freedom of expression in an otherwise strict form.” However, some of the students I surveyed disagreed with the assertion that there was room for artistry and freedom of expression within the RAD system—for example, one wrote, “we are very focused on clean movements and our teacher is convinced artistry is for more advanced dancers…barely any room for style and artistry.” Similarly, another student wrote that the technique “emphasizes positions and poses” and “creates a corps de ballet dancer, not an artist.” On the other hand, however, one student who studied the RAD syllabus wrote that “Artistry was a main focus of my training. The use of épaulement was extensively taught and emphasized.” Thus, we see that within a particular syllabus there can be a great deal of variation in the way technique and artistry is taught.

The Royal Academy of Dance takes a very methodical approach not only to training students but also to licensing teachers and preparing examiners. They have teacher training courses that, according to Sarah Pulley, the U.S. Administrator for the RAD, aim to provide prospective teachers “with a comprehensive education in teaching classical technique, as well as an understanding of anatomy and psychology…[it] shows
them how to introduce dance steps…while it gives them insight into creating a safe environment for children to learn. It also provides them with an understanding of the relationship between music and dance…” (Moran 75). This represents the syllabus with perhaps the most structured and specific method of teacher training, and also ensures a level of “quality control” in teaching through sending in outside examiners to various RAD schools. This teacher training seems to be expressed in the way the students are taught, too—for example, one of the students in my survey who had studied RAD wrote, “I also feel the RAD’s inclusion of music theory and French vocabulary in their training gave me an edge.” The examiners, too, are trained comprehensively before they begin conducting examinations (Slayford 43). While there are varying opinions about the pedagogical utility of these very structured examinations, RAD examiners interviewed in the article “Put to the Test” defended them, saying for example “They give the student an opportunity to see where they are in the learning process; they are a measure of achievement and help to boost self-esteem…when well taught and supported by the teacher, both psychologically and physically, examinations give a student a focus to challenge him/herself, and a sequential assessable objective in his or her dance activities” and that it teaches discipline and how to “cope with what could be a stressful situation” (44).

I had 19 students who had studied RAD, of which 26% had studied Balanchine, 47% had studied Vaganova, and 26% had studied Cecchetti. These students were more likely to report that their training followed the syllabus fairly precisely (58% compared to 41% overall), which is not surprising given that in order to take exams in the RAD system they must follow the syllabus pretty specifically. RAD students were significantly
more likely than average to report that musicality was “extensively” emphasized in their training (53% as opposed to 39% overall).

**Balanchine**

I feel that Balanchine’s style merits particular discussion as it is the newest of all the syllabi I have discussed and is also unique in that it originated in the U.S. and remains centrally an American phenomenon. George Balanchine, the founder of the famed New York City Ballet and perhaps the most influential ballet choreographer of the 20th century, is known not only for his choreographic genius but also for his emphasis on a new style of training, one that emphasized speed, agility, and a particular way of moving suited to his neoclassical choreography. Since Balanchine’s death, many schools have sprung up around the country claiming to teach “Balanchine technique,” although Balanchine never codified a technique or syllabus akin to the Vaganova or Bournonville syllabi. I want to argue, though, that Balanchine did not create a teaching style that can be safely or accurately generalized to define a dancer’s entire technical development. Instead, he taught his classes in the way that he believed would best prepare his company dancers to perform his ballets. His ballets were fast, energetic, incredibly specific, and musically complicated, so that is how his classes were. Because he started from scratch in the United States, he had to quickly bring a somewhat motley crew of dancers into looking like a company that could comfortably perform his ballets, and he organically developed a teaching style that allowed him to do that. Supporting this hypothesis, Barbara Walczak, one of Balanchine’s original dancers, writes, “It seems to me that the earliest classes were crash courses in getting this group…to look like a company…” (Walczak and Kai 13). Because he was starting with dancers who were already trained to
a certain extent, he did not systematically construct a syllabus to train dancers from the
ground up.

When the School of American Ballet was established, he handpicked teachers he
believed could teach the values of his choreography, but did not require them to teach
school classes the way his company classes were taught. So, the idea of “Balanchine
technique” is somewhat of a misnomer. In general, Balanchine’s method of teaching
focused specifically on preparing already technically advanced dancers to perform his
ballets. Thus, while certain elements of it may be valuable to incorporate in training
younger dancers, his class should not be used as a model for students. Elements that may
be useful to include in teaching students include the use of imagery, the focus on
musicality, the high expectations, and the ability to move quickly. However, it is
probably not safe or helpful to emulate his lightning fast warm-ups, not well-rounded
class, or willingness to accept shortcuts. Balanchine was a teacher because he was a
choreographer, and not the other way around. While many authors emphasize that
Balanchine seemed to derive great joy from teaching, he taught in order to mold ordinary
ballet dancers into “Balanchine dancers,” not to develop a holistic system of training.

In the case of Balanchine’s teaching style, there are clear threads throughout
almost every report about some of the aspects of his teaching. Almost all of the sources
discuss his short barres, classes that would focus on certain steps instead of following the
traditional trajectory of a ballet class, and emphasis on the importance of battement tendu
as the fundamental step of ballet. However, there is dissension among the sources about
the efficacy of his demands—some people claim that his methods cause injuries, while
others swear that they never saw more injuries than average among his dancers.
Additionally, depending on the lens of the particular writer, some sources paint Balanchine as kind and fundamentally loving, while others describe his methods as cruel, cold, and often humiliating. Further, there seems to be dissension about Balanchine’s opinion on expression or emotion in dance. Some sources say that he did not want to see personality displayed—for example, Suki Schorer, a famous Balanchine ballerina, writes that “Mr. B taught clarity, musicality, purity of form, and simplicity. Any overt display of personality was superfluous; there was no place for any play-acting or hard sell. ‘Don’t pretend to dance,’ he would say. He wanted the dance to speak for itself, guided by the music” (21). On the other hand, some sources argue that he searched for individuality and unique expression in his dancers. This complicates the ability to have an easily defined argument about the “Balanchine method” and forces the historian to tolerate uncertainty about certain aspects of Balanchine’s teaching style. Despite the challenges with the available sources, though, it is possible to put together a fairly clear sense of who Balanchine was as a teacher.

Fundamentally, Balanchine taught in order to prepare his dancers to dance his choreography precisely as he wanted it performed. Because of this, his class was truly structured as a “company class”—he did not have time to go into minute technical or mechanical details and had to achieve his objectives as quickly as possible. This is important to recognize because he was not necessarily suggesting that his teaching style be transferred to students. In fact, Walczak argues, “I firmly believe that these classes can only be beneficial to dancers who are thoroughly trained in the entire syllabus” (15). This point is important because while Balanchine’s ballets certainly surpass the limits of traditional ballet technique, they require highly developed ballet technique to perform. If
a student does not have that basis, they will not be able to live up to the demands of a class that focuses on going to the extremes of ballet technique without much explanation of how to get there. Daniel Duell, in Francis Mason’s volume “I Remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those who Knew Him,” writes that “[Balanchine’s] approach to training was guided more by his choreography than by a way to train the body” (Duell qtd. in Mason 578-9), suggesting that Balanchine’s training method did not fit into the structured construction of ballet technique through methodical development.

Many former dancers point out the extent to which Balanchine’s classes were geared towards his ballets. Violette Verdy, one of Balanchine’s famous ballerinas, writes,

Balanchine’s classes were a workshop to prepare his dancers with an absolutely clear sense of the values he wanted them to have, so that when he would prepare a ballet you had received already in the class the elements of some of the choreography. He worked like a sculptor, preparing, little preliminary studies, and then you got the sculpture… The more specific aim at the time for what he was going to choreograph was made clear in the class. It was a choreographer-director’s class, not just a teacher’s class. (Verdy qtd. in Mason 427)

This description paints the dancers as the raw clay for Balanchine’s ballets. His classes were essentially structured to prepare that material in a very specific way so that he could easily create it into his ideal sculpture later, as opposed to traditional ballet classes, which are supposed to warm up the clay so that it can be sculpted in a large variety of ways.

Schorer supports Verdy’s recollection, writing,

Mr. Balanchine’s classes had only one purpose: to prepare us to dance his ballets better and more in keeping with his aesthetic. Balanchine was the one who said, ‘I don’t teach health.’ Class was not a generalized warm-up or conditioning, not even the barre…We were expected to start class ready to work full-out on the technique of classical ballet, meaning that some of us had to warm up before class began. The purpose of class-work was to give our movement the qualities required for a beautiful and interesting performance. (21-22)
Even a more objective observer, Joseph H. Mazo, who spent a season embedded with the company, agrees with this assessment, writing, “Mr. B. teaches company class nearly every morning because it is his company; its purpose is to dance his ballets and to dance them his way” (26). In general, it seems clear that Balanchine was not concerned with a methodical build up of technical elements, but instead with teaching his dancers his own aesthetic.

Because of this focus, Balanchine was not wedded to the idea of giving the traditional class, with center exercises progressing from battement tendus to a slow adagio to pirouettes, waltz, petit allegro, and finally grand allegro. Instead, he would often choose a particular step to focus on or jump between types of movement. According to Mindy Aloff in her article “Paging George Balanchine,” Tanaquil LeClercq, Balanchine’s fourth wife and one of his most iconic muses, said about Balanchine’s class, “It wasn’t a well rounded class.” Todd Bolender, a Balanchine dancer, writes in “I Remember Balanchine” that “what seemed unique to me was that apparently each class he taught had a theme, in which Balanchine would concentrate on only a few movement ideas. When I first watched, his class was about port de bras, subsequent ones were about jumping and turning, and one I admired greatly was teaching dancers how to run” (Bolender qtd. in Mason178-9). Similarly, Mary Ellen Moylan, another Balanchine dancer, writes, “Balanchine didn’t teach the way the others did. He didn’t give a general type class. He’d give a barre and then center work, but it wasn’t a division of, say, adagio steps, turns, little jumps, big jumps. He would often focus on a particular step. It might be a tendu, it might be a glissade, whatever it was that he wished to stress. I think he felt that the other teachers could do the general, well-rounded class,
but he would rather impart some specific point to us” (Moylan qtd. in Mason 217). It seems clear here that Balanchine treated his classes, instead of as an overall training mechanism, as focused opportunities to push his dancers towards a specific aesthetic or technical goal. Because ballet students need to develop their technique in every aspect of the form, it would be damaging to regularly structure classes in this way.

According to several sources, Balanchine also encouraged his dancers to take technical “short-cuts” in order to achieve his aesthetic goals. For example, in the article “Balanchine’s Teaching Legacy,” Joseph Carman writes, “Robert Weiss, artistic director of the Carolina Ballet…[says] ‘I don’t think [Balanchine] was a very good ballet teacher.’ Weiss thinks that in Balanchine's rush to establish a ballet company in a country where the training was spotty or nonexistent, he eschewed an organic system of training for a more superficial approach. ‘He wanted it yesterday, tie forced people to turn out and he gave them a way of doing it that was fake….’ says Weiss.” Similarly, Robert Lindgren writes in “I Remember Balanchine,” “Mr. Balanchine said, ‘Just do it.’ He said, ‘Everybody wants something different. For my ballets I like to see legs high. You can’t tell if their hip is up or not but anyway it doesn’t matter. I want to see the leg go up quickly.’ ‘But, Mr. Balanchine, what about their placement?’ teachers asked at the Ford Foundation seminars. ‘Well, when I say ‘placement,’ if you fall over you have no placement,’” (Lindgren qtd. in Mason 229). Here, we can see that Balanchine was not particularly concerned with the slow, methodical training it takes to allow students to understand and assimilate the way their bodies must stand and the way the technique functions in order to allow them to perform movements safely and efficiently. In encouraging “cheating” to get a leg up high, Balanchine changed the traditional structure
of ballet training by allowing dancers to distort their hip placement to achieve an aesthetic ideal. This was what Balanchine wanted in his choreography, and so it was what he taught in his classes. However, this is a dangerous thing to teach because it can easily cause injury to ignore the anatomical limitations of the body and allow it to work out of alignment. If dancers start off with a strong technical foundation, they may have the knowledge to use those “short-cuts” without sacrificing the essential elements of technique that keep the body safe. However, this seems a risky thing to teach to students and even professionals—if dancers are willing to sacrifice all of the elements of their placement in order to achieve something like a high leg, they will be vulnerable to injury. However, as some sources pointed out, Balanchine was concerned mainly with his creative vision. If that vision included extremes of technique, such as forced turnout or extremely high legs, in his classes he figured out a way to get his dancers to achieve that. He did not seem to be particularly concerned about the physical health of his dancers, and as previous quotes have shown, was not interested in his classes being comfortable or painless for the body—he espoused a “no pain, no gain” philosophy within which an allowance of short cuts easily fits.

In keeping with his idea that ballet class should not be comfortable or painless, Balanchine was famous for giving extremely short warm-ups in his classes. According to Barbara Walczak, for example, “Balanchine was not concerned with warming up the muscles gradually…or using combinations that slowly prepared the body for more difficult movements. His classes were often experiments, studies in how slowly or quickly a movement could be done;” (7). Similarly, Violette Verdy writes, “Balanchine did not give a long barre or a long warm-up, and all of us knew it. Dancers like me who
needed to prepare because of injuries would come early and warm up and try to guess what kind of class he would give so that we would be ready ahead of time,” (Verdy qtd. in Mason 427). While it may have been possible for professional dancers to warm themselves up before class, this is risky because it is dangerous to execute extremely difficult ballet exercises if the body is not properly warmed up. This does not seem to be an approach that ought to be used with students—they may not know how to properly warm up their bodies before class and they may not be aware that they need to do so or have the discipline to do so. Part of developing students into professionals is teaching them how to safely warm their muscles up before executing strenuous technical work, and it sets a bad example for students if their teachers do not seem to place any value on this.

Balanchine’s classes definitely seem to have had a “no pain, no gain” philosophy, and it is interesting to see different dancers’ perspectives on this. Dancers who regularly took his class and believed in his efficacy seemed to agree with this philosophy and saw dancers who avoided his class as lazy. For example, Una Kai, a former Balanchine ballerina, writes,

The classes were hard on the body. We did twenty different versions of the same kind of step, without the chance to relax a bit by using other muscles. I think we suffered great pain during this period; in later years a lot of dancers refused to take his class because of this. They didn’t realize that if you stuck with it you could overcome this. You had to live through the pain; a lot of dancers didn’t want to do that. (Walczak and Kai 297)

Balanchine himself used to say “The body is lazy,” suggesting that it must be forced to perform and that the pain of his class was part of that training (Walczak and Kai 232). On the other hand, though, many dancers who stopped going to Balanchine’s said that it only made their bodies disintegrate. For example, according to Carman, “Edward Villella,
artistic director of Miami City Ballet, had to retire from Balanchine's class for a long period owing to muscle spasms.” This is a good example of the difficulty of working with memoir—people’s own perceptions and desire to glorify the path they took can lead to dissent about certain elements of events.

Despite my belief that many elements of Balanchine’s class, which was aimed at pushing his dancers towards his choreographic aesthetic, are not appropriate for students (or perhaps even professionals), there remain elements of his teaching style, particularly imagery and musicality, which are highly valuable. These two aspects were clearly central to his teaching style: Walczak writes, “Balanchine rarely spoke of muscles and placement. His voice, imagery, and musicality were the essence of the movement,” (33). Many sources recalled Balanchine’s use of imagery in his teaching, far before recent research supporting the efficacy of imagery and visualization. This is definitely an element of Balanchine’s style that should be replicated in current ballet classes. In addition, Balanchine’s classes (as well as his choreography) were famed for their focus on musicality. For example, in the article “Balanchine—The Choreographer who Shaped the Future of American Ballet,” Francia Russell, a former Balanchine ballerina, says, “I think the thing that thrilled me the most from the very beginning, learning the ballets and taking Mr. Balanchine's classes was the musicality, which was so much integrated into all the movements. It was something I hadn't experienced in that way before," (Russell qtd. in Krastev). Similarly, Carman writes, “Balanchine laid down principles of musicality in his class that had far-reaching effects. In the center exercises, he liked extremes in tempos--molto allegro or super-slow adagio. He often used unique phrasing--counts of fives or sevens--and even played them on the piano himself.” This was also suggested by
some of the students in my survey, who noted that musicality, along with speed and precision, were perhaps the most characteristic elements of the Balanchine technique. Clearly, it is extremely important for ballet students and professionals to be pushed in their musicality—this is one of the main elements of ballet, particularly neo-classical ballet, that is so interesting and beautiful, and it is an aspect that Balanchine stressed highly. He is known for the musicality of his choreography, and he clearly understood that this was something he had to begin in class.

In my survey, I had 30 students who had studied Balanchine style, of which 43% had also studied Vaganova, 17% had also studied RAD, and 27% had also studied Cecchetti. Unsurprisingly, these students were more likely than average to report that speed was emphasized in their training either “a lot” or “extensively” (66% vs. 40% overall). They were less likely than average to report that they were either very unprepared or unprepared to adapt to other styles (0 as opposed to 6% overall), and were more likely than average to report that they were very prepared to adapt (27% as opposed to 21% overall).

It is clear that Balanchine’s technical style has been extremely influential on the way ballet is taught in many schools today, but it is important to understand the background and reasons why Balanchine taught the way he did instead of blindly accepting it. Balanchine was first a choreographer, and his pedagogical methods were meant to serve that—he taught in order to create dancers who could most perfectly fulfill his aesthetic vision. For this reason, his classes did not focus on laying or reinforcing technical foundation or carefully warming up the body for a day of rehearsals. For this reason, I do not believe that the structure of his classes is appropriate for students without
an extremely strong technical foundation, and perhaps shouldn’t be replicated exactly with anyone. While it’s clearly important to challenge the limits of the body and push for greater speed, accuracy, and virtuosity, it is also important to work the body in a way that is safe and productive. On the other hand, though, I believe that all ballet teachers can learn from Balanchine’s emphasis on musicality and imagery. Balanchine’s choreographic genius lives on, and ballet teachers today have to prepare their students to perform his works, but they must at the same time be conscious of the emotional and physical safety of their students and take advantage of the increased knowledge we now have about athletic safety.

**Mixed/No Syllabus**

It is important to also look at the responses of students studying mixed/no syllabi. I had 36 respondents who said they had studied that way. These students were more likely to report that they had studied either nothing or just the basics in terms of history (69% as opposed to 50% overall). They were also somewhat less likely to report that musicality was emphasized either a lot or extensively in their training (75% as opposed to 85% overall). They were somewhat more likely to report that they either often or always knew all the translations of French terms (81% as opposed to 75% overall). Students in this group often commented that the lack of a specific syllabus made them more versatile, although some expressed a wish that they had had more stylistic unity in their training.

Interestingly, students who reported that their schools were either strict about sticking to the syllabus or fell somewhere in between were no more likely than average to report that they were unprepared to adapt to other styles, and students who reported that
their schools were not strict about sticking to the syllabus were not much more likely to be prepared to adapt.

**Conclusions**

Ultimately, it doesn’t make sense to judge one of these syllabi as the “best” one—I’ve raised questions about each and also discussed what each are known for doing effectively, but it’s hard to make generalizations about these syllabi especially in a country such as this in which ballet training is so varied and unregulated. Particularly for Vaganova and Cecchetti, there are probably as many styles of the “true” version of the syllabus as there are teachers. While the School of American Ballet tends to hold the title of the most “authentic” Balanchine school, there are plenty of people who would argue that the School of American Ballet is not teaching to Balanchine’s true intention. In the Bournonville technique there is debate about Bournonville’s true intentions with the set classes and how precisely they must be emulated. Perhaps RAD is the most consistent due to its examination procedures and licensing practices, but even among those students I saw a great deal of variation in their experiences and their interpretation of the technique. While the French technique seems to have a great deal of consistency in the Paris Opéra Ballet School, when its teachers leave and start their own training programs, there is nothing to say that they do not teach a different version of the technique.

Ultimately, then, I would argue is that what matters most is the individual teachers and the philosophy of the school, not the particular syllabus that is taught. One of the survey respondents put it well when she wrote, “I was so afraid of being critiqued all the time…syllabus is nothing without the environment…every aspect of the syllabus and the teachers treatment of the students affects the dancers’ body language so much.” Teachers
can choose to emphasize various aspect of the syllabus or the works of the founder, and that can change the students’ experiences drastically.

It is interesting to note the difference in the way the syllabi were founded—on one hand, the Vaganova, Cecchetti, and RAD syllabi were created with a very specific pedagogical aim in mind. On the other hand, Bournonville and Balanchine created their styles of teaching in order to serve their choreographic aims and prepare students to dance their choreography. Thus, those styles are not methodical and progressive in the same way, which can be seen in Bournonville’s use of the same set classes for all age groups and Balanchine’s extremely fast warm-up and barre work and emphasis on extreme movement. Further, Bournonville and Balanchine’s methods emphasized a particular style, and were created to do so, while the others intended (whether they are successful or not is another debate) to create a “pure” or “unmannered” technique that would allow the dancers to adapt to many different styles. It seems that while it is extremely useful for students who will dance in Balanchine or Bournonville companies to learn that style, but I wonder how useful it will be for dancers who pursue other avenues? On the other hand, there are certain advantages to that faster moving, more stylized approach. Ultimately, I would think that it’s best for students to have at least some variety in their training—not so much that it is confusing, but enough (and perhaps progressively more as they got older and could handle the increased complexity) so that they are prepared for a variety of things. Especially in today’s world in which dancers are expected to be able to do everything from Petipa to Tharp to Cunningham, it seems that having been trained in several styles would be an asset.
Furthermore, it is important for teachers not to take the syllabus on “blind faith” in the wisdom of its founder—while there are many extremely valuable aspects of each syllabus, it is also important to take into account the time period in which the syllabus was created and the particular values (both aesthetic and cultural) of that society. Further, it seems that many of the founders of these syllabi would not have wanted them to remain static in a changing world—on the contrary, Vaganova, for example, took aspects of contemporary choreography into her teaching work. Similarly, as I will discuss in more depth later, the RAD recently completely revamped its pre-primary curriculum, basing it largely on innovations in understanding of child development. These are just a few examples of a more wide-ranging point: that just because a syllabus was left a certain way when its founder died or moved on does not mean that it has to be taught exactly that way. There may be pros in using a syllabus, particularly one created for pedagogical reasons, in that students will have teaching that is consistent across teachers and across their years of study and in that students will be taught in a methodical way that builds upon itself. On the other hand, there can be an argument made for the versatility created when dancers have teachers from many different styles. Overall, it seems that teachers can choose from a variety of syllabi, or use none, but above all teachers and administrators must be prepared to think seriously and critically about the content and methodology of whichever they choose and ensure that it aligns with their pedagogical and institutional goals.
Part II: The Now

Chapter 3: What Have We Accomplished, and Case Studies

“Teachers are [sometimes] engaged in teaching practices that replicate and reproduce in the dance studio the very power relationships they are often critiquing as unjust and inhumane in their artwork onstage” (Lakes 1)

What have we accomplished?

It would be untrue to say that no improvements have already been made to the traditional structure of ballet training. For one thing, there is clearly an increased interest in studying these kinds of issues. Some schools are trying to move in a progressive direction; for example, in stark contrast to the Vaganova Ballet School as described in Rumyatseva’s article, Canada’s National Ballet School has embraced a less traditional method of teaching. According to the article “Training Dancers who are Healthy in Mind and Body (Canada’s National Ballet School),” this school is working to educate healthy dancers by teaching through “positive reinforcement,” offering psychiatric support to all dancers, helping students “find a balance between life and career,” offering nutritional counseling to help students stay “respectful of their bodies,” and employing physiotherapists to help dancers “deal with and prevent injuries” (MacFarland). Betty Tate-Pineau, the Conditioning Coordinator of the National Ballet School, says, “Fortunately, we do have a program here at the National Ballet School where we look at the physical aptitudes, motor aptitudes, and the dancer as athlete, trying not to compromise artistic expression. Our entire endeavor is to enhance ballet training so dancers can have a long, healthy career” (Jowitt et al. 85). This type of support for students represents a very progressive step in ballet training. Further, in my own
experience, I have noticed that many summer intensive programs, even those that teach in a highly traditional manner, now offer nutrition and injury prevention workshops, indicative of an interest in keeping dancers healthy. Additionally, there is now increased acceptance of students studying other kinds of dance to supplement ballet training, as well as mainstream use of somatic techniques such as Pilates and Gyrotonic® to strengthen the body. There is also growing tolerance of college-educated dancers, although this is still relatively uncommon in ballet dancers. However, this is a trend that seems to be gaining some ground. It seems, too, that the best teachers already know or intuit some of the progressive arguments that I will be making, so there are undoubtedly teachers who already teach in this way. It seems, though, that such teachers are still the exception rather than the rule.

**Case Studies**

As part of my research, I visited two pre-professional schools where I observed class, surveyed students, and interviewed at least one teacher. While I wish I had had the ability to get to know these schools, their students, and their teachers in a more in-depth way, I do feel that I gleaned valuable insight through my experiences at both schools. The first school I visited, which I’ll call Ballet School, is a small school with an intensive professional program. It is loosely affiliated with a company but does not share space with the company. It also has its own student performing company. Students must audition to get into the professional program, and the school also offers recreational classes. The other school I visited, which I’ll call Conservatory, is a much larger operation. It has both high school and college programs (I observed high school class) and offers not only dance but other arts forms as well. The majority of students are
residential, and all of their academic classes as well as their dance classes, rehearsals, and performances are on-site. Students are admitted into the Conservatory by audition only. The youngest full time students are in eighth grade, but they also offer a preparatory program for younger students.

**The Ballet School**

At the Ballet School, I observed a Saturday morning ballet class. Most of the students got to the studio at least half an hour early to warm up, so while they stretched and warmed up I handed out questionnaires to students who were willing to fill them out. They answered the questions individually but demonstrated some degree of uncertainty about them, asking each other what they wrote for certain questions and exclaiming to me, “these questions are hard!” This suggested to me that it may have been the first time many of them were asked to think critically about their training. I observed a class in the professional division in the level second from the top, taught by the director of the school. The students were in impeccable dress code, all in the same color and style leotards with perfect buns. When I asked them how they felt about dress code, many of them said they appreciated that it put them all on equal footing and looked neat, but many also mentioned the negative consequences it could have on body image. Indeed, when asked about ballet’s effect on their self-esteem, many said that it had a positive effect in giving confidence, etc, but a negative effect in terms of body image.

The teacher gave mostly specific technical corrections, both specific ones such as “keep the rotation when lowering your heels” and more general cues such as “shape arms.” She also gave corrections to individual dancers, many of which involved physical “fixing.” These physical corrections were often done without explanation or verbal
interaction, so I wasn’t sure if the meaning of the correction was understood by the student. The teacher also asked the students to remember what they had discussed in a particular exercise the day before, and one student raised her hand and responded accurately to the question. She gave positive feedback cues (“yes,” “good”) when students fixed a correction. She also explained to one student that she had done a good job fixing a correction in \textit{tendus} and that it was understandable to lose the feeling as the leg got higher. I only observed one or two instances of positive feedback that did not follow fixing a specific correction. The students constantly self-checked in the mirror, and generally used very little upper body and head movement.

In response to my questions, many of the students cited strict technical training and improvement, individual attention, and professional atmosphere as the best part of their training. Their reports of the worst part of their training had themes of dealing with body issues (such as not being tall enough, lacking flexibility, etc) and time management/handling the many hours they are expected to spend in class and rehearsal. When asked to give three adjectives describing their teacher, many of them chose one that had to do with a nice personality (kind, encouraging, loving) and/or one that had to do with experience and qualification (smart, knowledgeable) and/or one that had to do with challenge (challenging, pressing, exacting). Interestingly, most of the adjectives chosen fell into one of those three categories.

A lot of the students laughed with each other upon seeing the question asking if they were encouraged to have a life outside of ballet, and many of their responses reflected that, saying that they didn’t have enough time or really had to work to have an outside life. Several students said that while teachers gave lip-service to having a life
outside of ballet, it was very difficult to actually achieve. Most students felt that the school had prepared them for a professional career, citing casting disappointments, professional atmosphere, demanding expectations, and interpersonal drama as factors they felt had prepared them. Most students said that they were extremely close with the other people in their class, although a few cited competition and jealousy as factors that prevented close friendships from forming.

I gave the teacher a questionnaire that included questions about her own training and her teaching philosophy. She seemed to take a fairly traditional view of ballet education, saying that there was nothing she could think of that she had experienced in her own training that she would change at the moment. Indeed, when asked if there were things in the ballet tradition that should be changed, she wrote, “Some things have slightly evolved with time, but most should be as it has been for many years.” She also cited some of the benefits of her particular teachers—for example, she wrote that one teacher “was not over effusive so her compliments meant a lot,” that one “had wonderful expression,” and that one had “wonderful attack and timing.” When asked whether her style has changed over the years she has been teaching, she wrote, “I have been teaching 20 years and my style has not changed a lot but perhaps has gotten more thoughtful. I try to implement educational values and overall ideas that affect the student as a person as well as a dancer.”

The Ballet School seemed like a fairly traditional ballet training institution to me. Anecdotally, I have heard their students speak about “traditional” problems with ballet training occurring there, particularly with respect to demands for weight loss and also the expectation that students will dance with injuries. Additionally, when I interviewed a
Caroline Griswold

former student from the school about competition and cohesion in her experience, she discussed the teachers setting up rivalries and competition between students, which was a source of stress for her.

**The Conservatory**

At the Conservatory, I observed a class made up of mostly ninth graders. It was taught by a teacher who has these students most days of the week, which allows for consistency in teaching style. The students, like those at the Ballet School, mostly arrived about half an hour before class in neat dress code (here, they had a color requirement but could wear different styles) and commenced routines of stretching, Pilates, etc. These students had a ballet class first thing in the morning and then would go off to academic subjects before returning for another dance class and rehearsals in the afternoon and evening. The studios at the Conservatory were spacious and all had the schools “initiatives” posted in large letters above the mirrors. The initiatives were as follows:

1. We will respect our teachers, peers, and all people in life
2. We will maintain our studios and theatres, as they are the places we practice and honor our art form
3. We will commit to reaching our full potential, while helping those around us reach theirs
4. We will develop both our mind and body equally, as they are interconnected
5. We will seek inspiration not only from dance and the arts, but also from all things in life
6. We will grow with pride and confidence, yet never forget the value of humility
7. We will embrace any challenge put before us, because we see it not as an obstacle but as an opportunity to progress
8. We will work towards becoming great dancers, while understanding that being a good person is the true goal

These initiatives clearly represented the kinds of progressive forces that have started to come out in dance training, and I was happy to see them at least visually present in such a serious conservatory. To what extent they actually infiltrate the day-to-day activity of the
Conservatory is another question (which I don’t feel qualified to answer, as I only spent one day there), but at least having initiatives that do emphasize intellect, having a larger life than just dance, etc, is a step in the right direction.

The teacher in the class I observed used a lot of anatomical corrections (i.e. “pull up through abdominal wall,” “lifted pelvis,” “relax hip joint,” “squeeze rotator cuffs,” etc). She also gave “pure technique” corrections (i.e. “present your heel”), as well as more abstract/concept-focused corrections (i.e. “plié is a verb,” “energy through hands and fingertips,” “it’s not alive, vibrant, turned on,” “it’s not just a gym exercise”). She gave both individual and group corrections, and talked fairly constantly throughout the exercises at the barre. She gave immediate responses to corrections fixed, and also gave compliments to the group, commending them, for example, on fixing a correction from the previous class or going further with something (i.e. “Yes, that was so connected, physically organic…the first time it was a little fluffy, skimmy”). I found it interesting that she told a story about a famous artist (Gelsey Kirkland), in which she explained how Gelsey had been so organized and yet free, saying “I think a lot of students think that the classical ballet is restraining, and that’s true in a way, but can also be very free…appendages can move because of internal strength.” When a student began to get frustrated in not being able to achieve something, she reassured her, saying that sometimes “it takes a long time, for most of use as physical beings, for the neurological patterns to get reconstructed…” At the end of the class, she thanked each student individually, taking the time to ask one girl who had been sick how she was feeling and speaking to several other students.
Several of the aspects of this teacher's style definitely came through in the way the students I surveyed described her—the words excited, lively, and energetic all came up several times. Interestingly, this was something that she emphasized very much when I spoke to her and asked how she motivated students, saying, “I’ve noticed, it takes a lot of my own personal energy to affect their energy, I think a teacher’s energy in the class that sets the classroom energy, I feel like a battery and I’m plugged into and they get a charge from that, and that has to resonate through out the day—constantly bringing your battery of energy, by the end of the day I am spent, but I like that…my classes I feel are energetic.” Students also used positive personality adjectives to describe her, such as understanding, caring, happy, helpful, etc. Finally, they described her as a challenging teacher, using words such as disciplinary, specific, judgmental, demanding, etc.

When I spoke personally to this teacher, it was clear that she was very much interested in thinking about her training and her teaching style. When asked about her teaching history, she said, “I always loved to teach, I was always a good communicator, I liked teaching even when I was very young, I gravitated toward that…whenever I had an opportunity to teach, I would do it and use it as a learning, learning through experience not by reading a book, so I was teaching all the way through my dancing life… very satisfying for me; started going to teacher trainings, went to David Howard weekend seminars, classical character dance (Vaganova) seminar Classical Dance Alliance; I like learning more and more about teaching, and I’ve taken a Feldenkrais workshop…” Throughout my discussion with her, it was clear that while she felt she was very experienced and was confident in her teaching, she was also excited about learning more about teaching. For example, when I asked her how she encouraged artistry in her
students, she gave a few examples but said, “maybe I should more,” suggesting a desire for growth in teaching. She also spoke about wanting to appreciate her students as individuals without crossing the line of professionalism or trying to be their friend, saying,

“I make a point of learning the names of all of my students, even if I only see that class once a week—it’s important to me that they know that I know their names, because they are people to me not just bodies in the room… I relate to them, and I hope they relate to me, as someone who knows, I understand, I’m very understanding and sympathetic and tolerant of what they’re going through because I went through it…I’m still a dancer, I’m just in another aspect of my dancing life, I don’t pretend that I know things better than they do, I just happen to have experienced more than they, and I know from experience a lot of what I’m saying to them is true, but they still teach me.”

In speaking about discipline, she said that she was not a big disciplinarian but expected a high level of focus in her class. She said, “I like to keep humor in my teaching, I like them to dialogue with me if there’s a question; there has to be a disciplined, a state of focus within the class, yes, but if there’s a question please ask, don’t set yourself on a path…after class, more than willing to dialogue with the students.” She also said that the teacher needed to be a model, explaining that she always made the effort to look nice and be prepared for class in order to encourage the same thing in her students.

Many of the students I interviewed seemed to appreciate those things in her teaching and in the teaching of other teachers at the Conservatory. They also seemed to like the variety of teachers they had, as many of them cited that as the best aspect of their training. Many also named the individual attention and caring they received from teachers as one of the best things about their training. They noted similar things when asked about the best aspects of their favorite teachers, saying things like “While they push us, there isn’t an angry attitude when we mess up,” “They all care about their
students,” “Caring; artistic; nice; good combinations,” “not egocentric,” and “Their excitement to share their love of dancing with us every day.” Students also seemed like they were more encouraged to have a life outside of ballet than were the students at the Ballet School. However, I would hypothesize that this is partially because of the fact that they are living in a residential situation—their outside lives are very easily controlled and regulated, so it is easy for the institution to encourage them to have that.

However, while the students appreciated many aspects of the Conservatory, it was clear that there were also challenging aspects. Many students cited body image concerns as the worst aspect of their training and a factor that decreased their self-esteem, saying that the most challenging part is “learning how to change the shape of my legs,” “The environment,” “Being told I needed to lose five pounds in two weeks, my body isn’t toned, I’m puffy, not fit, I should eat less, etc,” “learning to develop my body in the right way,” “Being able to maintain the right body image,” and “overcoming physical challenges (natural turnout and flexibility).” In terms of self-esteem, students said things like “the pressure to lose weight has worsened it” “made it worse because of body issues,” etc. This does not seem to be a pressure that the students perceive out of nowhere. When I asked their teacher about potential and seeing potential, it seemed that the school had quite a cutthroat policy for being allowed to continue in the ballet program, and a lot of students were kicked out because of body-related issues. We had a long discussion about the issue, which I think is worth quoting at length here. She said,

For classical ballet you have to give a certain amount of consideration to the body type and its ability to achieve classical form… all sorts of body types could sort of do ballet, but there’s a point where with classical ballet, the proportions of the body matter when it comes to ideally framing those perfect positions…has to be expressed in the physical body in an aesthetically pleasing way…there’s a point of recognition and even though a young student may not want to admit it, we as
teachers conference with them try to make it understood, and they, through tears, will finally submit to the idea that they may not be destined for classical ballet careers and that they still have the potential for many other things, it will take a student aback at first because they’ve only had a clear minded vision of the ballerina…we have to tell them that they are probably not “they may not be able to manage a long term, sustainable consistency in the classical ballet program”…not “characteristically classical” don’t have “muscular refinement/definition” don’t have “anatomical structure, propensity, integral strength, internal physical awareness…athleticism”…because we’re teaching to the profession…

This philosophy is also made quite clear in the schools’ general guidelines, which state that, among other things, “A student must be able to maintain a healthy, toned and energized physique, one conducive to achieving the aesthetics necessary to express the art form through his/her body.” The guidelines list many standards for dance students, and then state that if the faculty feels those standards have not been met or sufficient improvement is not occurring, the student may be dismissed. This seemed to be a source of stress for some of the students, for example one student wrote, “The teachers don’t [encourage competition] but the school does. I felt I had to compete to be asked back and I have to compete to get good roles.” While I understand that the Conservatory’s goal is to turn out professional ballet dancers, I question the emphasis on body type in this—it seems to be a blind acceptance of a restrictive existing aesthetic that may not only cause serious harm to students who don’t fit it but also deprives the ballet world of students who may be extremely talented but not have the “right” body type.

I also spoke to a teacher who was the head of the preparatory program, which enrolls students ages eight and above with the ultimate possibility of them going into the high school program. Their first year in the program they do almost exclusively floor and core stabilization work, which I thought was an interestingly progressive introduction to classical ballet alignment and posture. She emphasized the importance of structural
understanding in this age group, saying, “I focus a lot on structure, anatomy, alignment, making sure that everything is aligned properly, layering that with use of rotation, upper body movement, aesthetics (classical aesthetics).” She also spoke about her propensity for teaching pre-teens and early teenage kids and demonstrated a clear understanding of the special needs of that age group, saying, “[I] think I’m well suited for [this age group]...not just teaching them what they need to know but knowing where they are in their lives and having a sensitivity to that, getting into their psyche, understand thirteen year olds and where they are: [you] look at them the wrong way they get tears in their eyes—balance between expectation of what you want and being sensitive to what they need at the same time, they want to work and have focus and self-discipline even in the prep program.” Finally, she spoke about the challenges of teaching students to be self-motivated and learn to work extremely hard without constantly being pushed by the teacher, saying, “it’s such a wonderful thing that you don’t have to ride the student any more, they’ve accepted the responsibility of the work ethic.” Ultimately, she believed that students needed to move on from ballet or dance when it wasn’t “in their heart” or when you could see it had become a “chore.” I thought this was an interesting difference between her and the other teacher, who had spoken more about aesthetics. This teacher said that since the students had already auditioned and been selected based both on talent and aesthetic considerations, she did not have to deal much with students who did not have potential, and ultimately it was about looking for passion and work ethic. However, this could be partially because she is teaching younger students who are generally pre-pubescent and thus may later develop the aesthetic concerns the first teacher spoke about.

Conclusions
Ultimately, it is difficult for me to make generalizations about these schools based on what I saw, because I was not able to spend extended periods of time in either and was only able to watch class with one teacher at each. Further, it is important to consider that the teachers’ style might have changed given my presence. In order for a researcher to do a really effective case study in a ballet school, it would probably be necessary for her to be there for an extended period of time such that her presence is barely noticed and she can understand more about the subculture of the school. However, my case studies are useful in that they give information about two different school models and the stressors that the students faced in each, as well as the positives of each. Further, they offer insights from students and teachers at both schools and can help give more understanding about the experiences of students as well as the intentions and experiences of teachers.
Chapter 4: The Nature of the Teaching Profession, and Docile Bodies

“Student dancers’ bodies are docile bodies created to produce efficiency, not only of movement, but also a normalization and standardization of behavior in dance class...” (Oliver 4)

Evidence suggests that several of the problems with the way ballet is currently taught spring from the fact that for many professional dancers, most of whom have not been to college and thus are not trained for much other than ballet, teaching is a default career choice once their (often short) performing careers are over (Lakes 25). Further, there is not much teacher training in place for professional dancers, because it is assumed that if someone is a good dancer they will be a good teacher as well. Because of a lack of training to become a teacher, most ballet teachers teach as they themselves were taught, thus perpetuating both the good and bad aspects of the tradition. Sylvie Fortin, in her article “Somatics: A Tool for Empowering Modern Dance Teachers” in Dance, Power, and Difference, points out the problem of the “apprenticeship of observation” in the dance world: students spend so much time in ballet class, often with one teacher or teachers who all teach similarly, that it is extremely difficult for a student turned teacher to teach in any way but the one in which she was taught (Shapiro (ed), Fortin 52). This is particularly true for students who succeeded in the ballet world. Students who were able to succeed generally assume that even the negative things made them stronger and allowed them to succeed and so those aspects should be replicated as well. Some particularly successful teachers, such as Gabriela Darvash, one of the teachers profiled in The Art of Teaching Ballet: Ten Twentieth Century Masters, do attempt to change the way they were taught (Darvash, for example, believes that the way her teacher taught was
too uninvolved and unspecific (Warren 82-83)), but most people teach generally in the style of their teachers. This is a problem because it makes it very difficult to achieve change or alter the tradition, even if such modifications would be beneficial.

In order to improve the tradition, we need to give new teachers the tools they need in order to teach differently than their teachers did. In general, the only situation in which a dancer would receive pedagogy training would be in a college or conservatory, but most dancers do not go to college and simply become teachers because it seems like the next logical step in their careers. Thus, most ballet teachers are going into the classroom with no real knowledge of pedagogy or educational theory. It is important here to understand the difference between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Former professional dancers have plenty of content knowledge: they themselves have had years of ballet training and possess a trained eye to see what ballet technique should look like. Content knowledge is essential and teachers must have it in order to be effective. In addition, though, teachers should have pedagogical knowledge, or understanding of how to teach. Sylvie Fortin and Daryl Siedentop, in their article “The Interplay of Knowledge and Practice in Dance Teaching…” put forward the idea of a “knowledge base paradigm,” in which good teaching is connected “not so much to what that teacher knows per se, but how the teacher uses this knowledge in class instruction.” This idea assumes that the teacher has content knowledge but puts emphasis on how the teacher portrays that knowledge. Similarly, Doddington and Hilton argue that “in order to make good professional judgments for the children they know, it is vitally important for teachers to be aware of and committed to the ideas and values that inform why a teacher should teach something, and why they should then choose to teach in a particular way, rather than
simply the *what* they should teach or the *how*” (110). Additionally, while people who have had long professional careers certainly have content knowledge in terms of technique and repertory, they may lack information that has become important for today’s dancer to have. In *Fit to Dance*, we’re told, “Many dancers were taught very little during training about good nutrition, safe use of the body, the need for scheduled rest and ways to prevent injury. Some dancers then become teachers without any formal training at all, but are supposed to be inherently good teachers solely by virtue of being top performers…” (112). Here, we see that it is not just that people coming off of careers may have no pedagogical knowledge to speak of, but that they may not have been exposed to the kind of health, fitness, and injury prevention information that it is important for teachers to be able to pass on to students. How can we expect things to improve, and teachers to be more anatomically sensitive, for example, if we do not give them resources to understand that themselves?

It is absurd to assume that just because someone is a good dancer they will be a good teacher—those two things do not necessarily go hand in hand. Even if a teacher has a wealth of knowledge about ballet, this means nothing if she cannot convey it. Toby Hankin, in his article “Facilitating discovery: Student-centered Teaching Strategies in the Technique Class,” puts it well when he says, “the fact that I have many words of wisdom to share does not ensure that my students will learn anything of value…my job is to facilitate their own discoveries.” Further, it is important to note that ballet teachers can be highly influential forces in the lives of their students. Ballet teachers are often much more involved in the lives of serious students than those students’ academic teachers. Given that this is true, why are dance teachers given so much less pedagogical training than
schoolteachers? It really comes down to the fact that ballet teaching in this country is not regulated the way that academic teaching is. However, in order to be responsible educators who are positive influences in the lives of their students, ballet teachers ought to be given the same information about educational psychology, child development, etc that academic teachers are. Thus, I propose that as part of a transition phase for dancers close to retirement or dancers choosing to go into teaching, ballet companies or organizations such as “Career Transition for Dancers”\(^1\) could offer pedagogy workshops. These workshops would not have to be exhaustive, but I suspect that even a basic understanding of pedagogical theory would give perspective teachers the tools they need to teach in ways other than that in which they were taught and thus move ballet training forward.

A basic understanding of pedagogical knowledge would also allow teachers to move away from the vocational education model of training in which only the product matters, not the process. In the product-oriented model, it doesn’t matter how many students fall through the cracks along the way, as long as a select few “succeed” in the ballet world. Indicating this philosophy, famous dancer Melissa Hayden once said, “The only real basis for judging a teacher is the product he or she turns out: great dancers” (Hayden qtd. in Lakes 10). This seems to be twisted logic—don’t we have an imperative to care about what happens to the students who do not make it that far, the ones who were ignored for lack of facility or “talent”? Pedagogical training will give teachers the tools to

\(^1\) \text{www.careertransition.org}: “Career Transition For Dancers is a not-for-profit organization that enables dancers to define their career possibilities and develop the skills necessary to excel in a variety of disciplines.”
Caroline Griswold

both nurture students with a great deal of natural talent and also respect and work with students who may appear to be less naturally skilled.

In order for any of this to happen, teaching must become a respected career within the dance world. According to Fortin and Siedentop, “In the dance community dance teaching has considerably less status than performance and choreography and is seen as offering less gratification.” This is a highly damaging perception because it means that teachers may feel bitter or embarrassed about being relegated to the teaching profession, rather than invigorated and excited by the prospect. For example, in the article “Voices of Young Women Dance Students: An Interpretive Study of Meaning in Dance” Susan W. Stinson, Donald Blumenfield-Jones and Jan van Dyke, one student said, “I can’t settle for teaching. It’s like stepping down from what I wanted” (19). If this student were to go into teaching because she felt that she had no other options, it would be a major problem. Teachers who are not truly committed to what they do will not be good teachers. This attitude also encourages teaching that is based on the ego of the teacher rather than the welfare of the students: if teachers feel they must “prove” something by “producing” dancers, the good of the students themselves is forgotten. One of the teachers profiled in The Art of Teaching Ballet says bluntly that teaching cannot be about ego, it has to be about the student, not the teacher: if one cannot do that, one should not be a teacher (Warren 224). Similarly, one contributor in Fit to Dance, writes “[dance teachers] must be on their guard against criticizing out of resentment or envy of the dancer’s youth or future career” (78). This kind of criticism will undoubtedly be harsher and less useful than that born out of a genuine desire to help the student succeed.
Furthermore, evidence shows that choosing teaching (and sticking to it) autonomously is very important—in other words, if dancers feel that they have no other choice but to teach, or that they are not choosing it entirely out of their own volition, both they and their students will suffer. According to Guy Roth and his co-authors in the article “Autonomous Motivation for Teaching: How Self-Determined Teaching may lead to Self-Determined Learning,” “As expected, autonomous motivation for teaching was associated positively with teachers’ sense of personal accomplishment and negatively with teachers’ feelings of exhaustion. Also as predicted, autonomous motivation for teaching was positively related to students perceptions of teachers as autonomy supportive and to students’ autonomous motivations for learning” (Roth et al. 769). They also point out, “Because autonomously motivated teachers have developed a deep understanding of the merits of the subjects they teach and of the methods they use, they can provide their students with convincing explanations and examples for the value and relevance of those subjects and their methods of teaching…” (Roth et al. 764). Why would we want teachers who don’t exhibit these qualities, and why would we want to force people into teaching when it will lead to their exhaustion and frustration? Part of dealing with this issue means providing other opportunities for dancers. While this is not the purpose of my project here, organizations such as “Career Transitions for Dancers” are very important because they allow dancers to find post-performance careers that will be autonomously chosen and fulfilling and in doing so, help students end up with better teachers.

**Docile Bodies?**
In 1975, Michael Foucault published his groundbreaking work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* in which he described, among other things, modern institutions designed to discipline and create “docile bodies”: bodies that are able to be transformed, used, and disposed of. His model was created to describe the prisons, military institutions, and schools that developed in the 19th century, but it fits remarkably well with the system of training in many ballet schools today. He writes, “Discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)…disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination (138)” (Foucault qtd. in Haas and Okstad). Similarly, he discusses the development of the disciplined soldier, writing “By the late 18th century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed…a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it…” (Foucault 135).

This idea of the physical power of bodies being transformed into a method of discipline certainly suits ballet training. Inasmuch as this model applies to traditional ballet training, it suggests a certain disregard for the inherent value of the body itself—until it is molded and disciplined, it is merely “formless clay.”

Foucault also talks about disciplining through spatial distribution, arguing that for a space to serve a disciplinary function it must use the following techniques (Haas and Okstad)—I have noted how they fit into ballet training as well:

1. Enclosure (“heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself”—the dance studio
2. Partitioning (a place for each individual)—spots at the barre and placement in center
3. Functionality (“a space that allowed supervision, disabled communication between individuals, and was useful”)—the studio certainly does this with its mirrors and insistence on quiet
4. Rank (place in a hierarchy)—level placement

The idea of rank is very much relevant to my discussion—the kind of hierarchal structure exhibited in Foucault’s description (for example, he discusses how in schools students were ranked to the minutest detail, with their ranks exhibited by small changes in uniform), is very much evidenced in ballet schools, for example in how students are afforded visible dress code privileges based on level. Foucault also discusses control of activity as a disciplinary framework, using a timetable (schedule of classes), “collective and obligatory rhythm” (technique set to music), very specific actions for each body part (technique), and “exhaustive use” (repetition) (Haas and Okstad). He notes three mechanisms of disciplinary power over docile bodies: “hierarchical observation,” “normalizing judgment” and “the examination” (Foucault qtd. in Haas and Okstad). All of these techniques are used in ballet classes: levels create hierarchy, each person is expected to conform as closely as possible to a norm, and students are constantly examined.

One of the central tenants of Foucault’s understanding of docile bodies and the institutions that create them is surveillance. He writes, “The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (Foucault 179). Ultimately, discipline in these types of institutions is created and enforced not only through spatial, temporal, and physical control, but also centrally through the observing gaze. One way that schools impose surveillance is through examinations—Foucault describes it as “a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility
through which one differentiates them and judges them” (184). For ballet students, this kind of surveillance is not present only at examination or evaluation time, on the contrary, it is constantly being exercised by the teacher, by the other students and the self (through the mirror), and by the higher-ups in a school or company who can come into a class or rehearsal unannounced at any time. Indeed, one student respondent to my survey reported that “We were evaluated, but not in a very clear way…It was pretty vague, but we knew we were always being watched.”

Foucault also discusses the social function of different types of punishments and how they serve to reiterate and reinforce existing power structures. He writes, “The term ‘penal torture’ does not cover any corporal punishment: it is a differentiated production of pain, an organized ritual for the marking of victims and the expression of the power that punishes…” (Foucault 34). We can see this type of public “marking” of transgressors in, for example, the fact that some ballet schools allow students to wear colored leotards but require them to wear only black if they miss a single class. Foucault writes on the purpose of “modern” punishment that it becomes less representative and more a way to “restore the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him” (128). This quotation is interesting because it suggests that extent to which disciplinary structures are intending to ultimately create the self as the enforcer of discipline. This is applicable to ballet training inasmuch as teachers act cruelly to their students with the intention of having a message that will “stick,” making it impossible for the student ever perform the transgressive behavior again, regardless of who is present. Indeed, Foucault states that one of the qualifications for this type of
punishment is to “reduce the desire that makes the crime attractive” (106). Ultimately, these disciplinarians and punishers are trying to become a part of the students’ psychological makeup, as ultimately “the submission of bodies [is] through the control of ideas…” (102). This is present in ballet training as well: Helena Wulff writes, “As I grew…my body was being disciplined—sometimes with aching muscles—by and into the steps of classical ballet, and so was my world-view” (2). Here, not only is the body being molded by ballet training, but the mind is as well: students will ultimately impose that discipline upon themselves.

It is disturbing to me that our method for training artists fits so neatly into a model created to describe prisons and military institutions. How do we expect to nurture creative, joyful movers under a system designed to produce docile, malleable, submissive bodies? Further, Foucault argues that this system of training and education is ultimately supposed to exercise “over [the students’] a constant pressure to conform to the same model, so that they might all be subjected to ‘subordination, docility, attention in studies and exercises, and to the correct practice of duties and all the parts of discipline.’ So that they all might be like one another” (182). While I suppose that this might be useful in terms of creating a perfect corps de ballet, that is not the way to nurture innovators, artists, and creators. Despite the cognitive dissonance of this idea, this traditional system still dominates. Lakes points out that ballet training is often administered via militaristic training methods (20), and Clyde Smith, who explicitly references Foucault in his article “On Authoritarianism in the Dance Classroom” (in Dance, Power, and Difference), argues that the explicit and implicit goal of most classical dance training is to create a body that may be “subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Shapiro (ed), Smith
131). This paradigm of creating docile bodies is harmful, again, because it completely ignores the need to foster creativity, independent thinking, and personal growth alongside discipline and physical strength.
Chapter 5: Authoritarian Teaching Styles and Autonomy Support

One of the Foucalvian aspects of traditional ballet training is the authoritarian nature of teaching. There are many different ways to describe or characterize authoritarian teaching methods. Smith suggests that the “situation of authoritarianism in the dance classroom as one in which teachers hold absolute power over students and through abusive means disempower students, breaking them down and then building them back up in the teacher’s own image” (Shapiro (ed), Smith 130). We can see this kind of ultimate authority in sports as well: according to Ashley E. Stirling and Gretchen A. Kerr in the article “Abused Athletes’ Perception of the Coach-Athlete Relationship,”

…Brackenridge likened the power of the coach to that of a priest whose absolute knowledge is not questions or challenged. Brackenridge further explained that this power is sustained and reinforced because of the coach’s abilities to develop and maintain success in athletes… Tomlinson and Yorganci, for example, describe the coach’s influence extending from training regimes to food and nutrition, weight, sleep requirements and interpersonal relationships. Coaches often play the roles of dietician, physiologist, medical expert, counselor or psychologist, and present themselves as knowledgeable in these areas. (Stirling and Kerr 228)

This kind of ultimate authority is part of the model of authoritarian teaching in which “the coach is viewed as a knowledge giver and athletes as receivers who need that knowledge to better their performances” (Jones, Glintmeyer and McKenzie 378). Lakes offers several other characteristics that might be present in authoritarian teaching styles (3). They include:

1. Rote imitation of exercises or skills over time with no new prompts;
2. Humiliation, bullying, sarcasm, etc on the part of the teacher;
3. Demeaning attitude towards questions or questioners;
4. Arbitrary behavior control;
5. Comparison to other students or encouraging rivalries between students;
6. Infantilizing/patronizing attitudes towards students;
7. Shaming comments about weight, build, or body type;
8. Withholding of feedback or ignoring students;
9. Physical abuse

These behaviors, while some are much more extreme than others, all comprise various forms of authoritarian teaching behavior. Authoritarianism is common in ballet classes for several reasons. First of all, Lakes points out the tendency for teachers and choreographers to “view dancers as the raw material in dance, similar to inanimate paint” (5). This attitude denies the fundamental humanity of students as sentient, feeling, thinking beings, and thus makes it easy for teachers to indulge in authoritarian teaching styles. Secondly, Smith argues that the structure of a ballet class lends itself to authoritarian behavior. He says, “The student has already consented to being in a situation in which he or she is usually attempting to replicate as perfectly as possible the example and the demands of the teacher. Because most choreography involves a process in which dancers become the material for the choreographer’s work, this form of training is often appropriate” (Shapiro (ed), Smith 128). It is important to note that “appropriate” cannot here be interpreted to mean “good,” but rather that this method does work to create docile bodies that can be molded to a particular choreographer’s whims. While it is clearly important for dancers to be able to adapt to different styles and choreographers, are authoritarian teaching styles the right way to prepare students for this?

It is important to note that although I am about to explain various reasons for which authoritarianism may not be the best teaching method, I am not suggesting that ballet teachers should abdicate their authority in the classroom. There is a big difference between authority and authoritarianism, and that distinction is the difference between a nurturing but firm teacher and an abusive or overly controlling one. Indeed, Esther Ngan-Ling Chow and her coauthors in the article “Exploring Critical Feminist Pedagogy:
Infusing Dialogue, Participation, and Experience in Teaching and Learning,” write that “a teacher’s power and authority are often critical in creating positive environments for student learning in the classroom…authority is sometimes needed to embody nurturance and community” (271). Similarly, Eeva Anttila, in her article “Searching for Dialogue in Dance Education: A Teacher’s Story,” suggests that while authoritarian teaching is harmful, discipline can still be accomplished and that it can often be accomplished most successfully when both students and teacher agree on a plan for it in the classroom (53). Further, Alexander Ursuliak, one of the teachers profiled in The Art of Teaching Ballet, points out that students need to learn to be self-disciplined in order to succeed as professionals, and if the teacher is constantly enforcing discipline, students will not learn that skill (Warren 210). Similarly, Jeanna Bryner in the article “Rewards Not Working?” writes, “it really is possible to have a successful classroom without focusing on discipline…Using rigid techniques to make kids behave properly rarely succeeds in creating an environment that fosters learning…” Ultimately, Smith makes an astute point when he notes that consent matters: a student can (and must, in order to learn) make an educated decision to follow the lead and trust the opinion of a skilled teacher, but just because the student is doing what the teacher says does not make the teaching authoritarian or abusive (126). The nature of authoritarianism implies an abdication of the agency to choose on the part of the student or coercion on the part of the teacher, not an abdication of the teachers’ authority.

I also wish to make a distinction between authoritarianism and abuse. The line can be blurry between these two things, but I do not believe that all authoritarian teaching is abusive—I will talk about abuse and the ease with which authoritarianism can tip into
abuse later in the paper. However, just because not all authoritarianism is abuse does not mean that it is good, and in the following section I will talk specifically about the problems of, for lack of a better term, non-abusive authoritarianism.

First of all, Lakes argument is compelling when she writes, “the method is the message…how a subject matter is conveyed can be more powerful than its…content” (3). Authoritarian teaching can foster a situation in which students are so nervous in class that the actual content is lost. Authoritarian teaching shifts the focus of class work from acquiring skills and improving artistry to avoiding punishment by the teacher.

Authoritarian teaching also requires that students abdicate their own involvement in their learning: with an authoritarian teacher, students do not have the right to make decisions about their training, think critically about their progress, or come to discoveries on their own. This is problematic not only because it discourages creativity but also because it ignores the way that the brain learns best. Brain research tells us that people learn best when they are involved in their own learning (Gilbert 13)—students need autonomy in order to learn successfully. Authoritarianism takes away autonomy and thus makes learning less effective. Hankin suggests that instead of delivering knowledge in an authoritarian model, teachers might engage students in “student centered learning” activities that require students to problem solve and take an active role in their learning so that it will be less easily forgotten. Lakes sums up this point well in arguing that authoritarian teaching styles do not foster “deep higher-order thinking…[they] ignore[es] the way that the human mind constructs knowledge” (26). It is clear that autonomy support matters—for example, John Marshall Reeve writes that “The findings from virtually every one of these (44) empirical studies point to the same conclusion—namely,
that students relatively benefit from autonomy support and relatively suffer from being controlled...children and adolescences alike benefit from autonomy support...” (162). This has been shown time and again in sports and educational psychology.

Marylene Gagne, Richard M. Ryan and Kelly Bargmann argue that autonomous motivation to participate in an activity exists on a continuum from external regulation (“when a person performs activities either to obtain rewards, or to avoid punishments or sanctions”) to introjections (“performance motivated by self-esteem related contingencies”) to identified motivation (“the person experiences an activity as personally valuable or important to the self”) and finally to intrinsic motivation “in which an activity is engaged because of its inherent satisfaction” (373). Of all these types of motivation, the final one will lead to the best learning; they write that “Numerous studies have indicated that the more autonomous the person’s motivation, the greater his or her persistence, performance, and well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2000)” (Gagne, Ryan and Bargmann 373). Those three aspects are clearly essential to success in ballet, and provide a compelling reason to encourage autonomy support in ballet teachers.

Further, in educational psychology, all available evidence suggests that autonomy-supportive styles will be most effective. For example, John Marshall Reeve and his colleagues in the article “Autonomy Supportive Teachers: How They Teach and Motivate Students” write that “In particular, students in classrooms with autonomy-supportive teachers, as compared with students in classrooms with controlling teachers, are more likely to stay in school...and are more likely to show greater perceived academic competence...enhanced creativity...a preference for optimal challenge...greater conceptual understanding...more positive emotionality...higher academic intrinsic
motivation…better academic performance…and higher academic achievement…” (537). Similarly, Richard M. Ryan and Cynthia L. Powell found that “children in the classrooms of autonomy-oriented teachers reported more curiosity for learning, more desire for challenge, and more independent mastery attempts. In addition, these children experienced greater perceived competence in school and reported greater general self-worth” (54-55). Clearly, curiosity, desire for challenge, and mastery attempts are characteristics that we want to foster in ballet students.

Brain scientists are not the only ones who have realized the need to incorporate autonomy in learning. Sports psychologists and coaching professionals have also begun to embrace a more autonomy-centered model of coaching. Given studies that showed, for example, a drop in attrition rate from 36% to 5% in swimmers whose coaches participated in workshops on autonomy support (Mageau and Vallerand 895), it is clear why coaches would be interested in adopting more athlete-centered approaches. Adriano De Souza and Judy Oslin, in their report “A player-centered approach to coaching…” put forward a model of “player-centered coaching,” writing that this strategy “emphasize[s] the need to give players autonomy to make their own choices both within the game and outside of the game.” Applied to ballet training, this could mean allowing students to have some choice in setting their training schedule, selecting teachers, or engaging in outside of class cross-training.

While choice is one of the major aspects of autonomy-supportive teaching and coaching, there is some evidence that the type of choice matters. According to Idit Katz and Avi Assor, “…several recent studies suggest that what students perceive as being highly valuable is probably not the mere act of choosing, but mostly the value of the
options to the participants’ self and personal goals… The results of the above studies demonstrate that when choice is separated from other aspects of autonomy support and self-realization (e.g. interest, values, volition, and goals), the act of choosing is not the major motivating property of choice” (432). This author distinguishes between “picking” and “choosing,” suggesting that while essentially meaningless choices about things that don’t matter much to students (for example, what poster will be on the wall) may confer some of the benefits of autonomy support, choices in which the student has some stake (for example, what ballet to learn or what aspect of technique to focus on as a class for a certain day or week) have much more of an effect of self-realization.

Additionally, autonomy supportive teachers and coaches often give rationales and explanations for their various instructions (for example, why an athlete is instructed to do a certain kind of training or why a ballet student is instructed to perform a small part) (Mageau and Vallerand 888). This allows a task to seem meaningful to the athlete and a decision to seem unarbitrary, and thus “its underlying values are more easily integrated and accepted (Mageau and Vallerand 888). Many other sources also cite providing rationale (for example, Reeve 162) as an important part of autonomy supportive leadership, and it is easy to see why this would be helpful to students, as it helps reduce the perception that the teacher is simply an all-powerful being assigning arbitrary tasks. One way ballet teachers might incorporate this idea is by emphasizing (as many already do) the connection between barre work and center work. For example, many teachers will point out that frappés, which may seem unrelated to any center step, actually prepare the feet and legs for petit allegro, which gives students a clear understanding of why it is important to do frappé exercises and what the ultimate goal of doing them is.
Importantly, Nicholas T. Gallucci, in his book Sport Psychology: Performance Enhancement, Performance Inhibition, Individuals, and Teams, points out that increased autonomy leads to higher intrinsic motivation, meaning that given greater autonomy, students will actually be more internally motivated to work hard and succeed and thus will actually need less monitoring or disciplining (39). John Marshall Reeve writes, “An autonomy-supportive approach rests on the assumption that students possess inner motivational resources that are fully capable of energizing and directing their classroom activity in productive ways” (162). Thus, the task of the teacher becomes less about creating motivation through (for example) fear or intimidation, but about nurturing the inner motivational resources that the student already possesses. This makes a lot of intuitive sense—if a teacher is constantly disciplining a student or infringing on a student’s ability to make decisions for herself, ballet would naturally start to feel like a chore.

**What is a controlling strategy, and why do people adopt them?**

If it is so clear that an autonomy supportive teaching style is so greatly preferable to an authoritarian one, why don’t all teachers and coaches immediately shift to that style? In reality, it is more complicated than that. First, sometimes it is not obvious that certain styles are controlling, so it is important to define what a controlling style is. Second, sometimes the controlling strategy can seem easier or like a more “legitimate” or “competent” teaching style. Thus, giving teachers information and resources about what a controlling strategy is and why it is ineffective, as well as strategies for adopting a more autonomy-supportive style, will be very important if one is to institute any significant change.
According to Reeve, on the simplest level, “Three conditions make any approach to motivating students a controlling one: (a) adopt only the teacher’s perspective; (b) intrude into students thoughts, feelings, or actions; and (c) pressure students to think, feel, or behave in particular ways” (160). We could see this kind of style manifested in various ways in a ballet class. For example, the first condition could be demonstrated if a teacher ridiculed a student who had been trained in a different method for putting her arms or head a certain way, saying that it was “wrong” or “ugly.” The second aspect is often evident in the ways in which teachers instruct students on how to manage every aspect of their lives (notably their eating behaviors) or make judgments about a student’s moral makeup based on their ability to stick to a diet or exercise regimen. The third aspect can also be seen in the insistence that students disengage from high school activities in order to devote themselves to ballet, for example, or perhaps in the stringent dress codes that go beyond the functional requirements of ballet wear to require a particular style leotard, for example. Reeve also discusses the motivational strategies of controlling teachers, saying that “teachers tend to rely on outer sources of motivation (e.g., directives, deadlines, incentives, consequences, threats or punishment), neglect to provide explanatory rationales… rely on pressuring-inducing language (utter ‘should’s, ‘have to’s, ‘got to’s, and guilt-inducing criticisms…” (161). Here, we see that the motivational style is part and parcel of the instructional style of each teacher. Ballet teachers might exhibit this kind of behavior in telling a student they will “never get a job with turns like that,” they need to “stop being so lazy and suck it up,” asking “do you want to be in the back line? If not, get this right” or telling students they won’t get a part in the show if they don’t lose five pounds. It important to note that psychological control can be extremely powerful—
Mageau and Vallerand write, “Psychological control in the form of guilt-inducing criticisms and controlling statements is also quite controlling. Psychological control makes love and acceptance contingent on athletes’ thoughts and behaviors” (890). This kind of controlling style may be easier to miss or overlook, so it is important for teachers to be particularly vigilant against it.

Reeve is careful to point out that simply giving clear instructional feedback (he uses the example of instruction to regrip a pencil, but it could be applied to ballet in myriad ways, for example the instruction to point one’s feet) does not in and of itself imply a controlling strategy. On the contrary, he writes, “The teacher’s style becomes controlling only with the neglect of the students’ perspective…the introduction of intrusion…and the application of pressure…to think, feel, or behave in a specific way…” (Reeve 161). Obviously, in ballet there is a fairly large amount of black and white instructional information—it is a very specific technique that does have rights and wrongs embedded within it. Giving that instructional information and telling students where to place their feet, for example, does not in and of itself constitute a controlling style—rather, it is the way in which these messages are given that determines whether a teacher is being controlling or autonomy-supportive. The teacher could walk over, grab a student’s leg and put it in the right place while saying “you should know better than that, if I catch you doing it like that again you have to do 100 of them after class,” or he or she could guide a student’s leg to the right place while explaining why it is important (for example), “If your leg is not behind you in arabesque, you won’t be able to balance in an arabesque turn”) and checking for comprehension (“Can you feel the difference?” “Can
you do it again and show me that you understand?”). While both of those things get the same content message across, the teaching style is obviously extremely different.

It is important to recognize why teachers adopt a controlling style, especially given that, as I mentioned before, the evidence so strongly supports the opposite. Reeve points out several reasons teachers may adopt this style, including that “teachers harbor the dual burdens of responsibility and accountability…for student behaviors and outcomes,” “teachers are aware that controlling is culturally valued—the U.S. culture generally evaluates teachers who use controlling instructional strategies as more competent than teachers who use autonomy-supportive strategies,” and “teachers sometimes equate control with structure—controlling strategies are often inappropriately associated with a structured learning environment, whereas autonomy-supportive strategies are often inappropriately associated with a chaotic or laissez-faire one” (164-166). It does seem to be true that despite evidence to the contrary, people believe that controlling teachers are more competent—Mageau and Vallerand write, “In fact, Boggiano et al. (1993) found that controlling teachers were perceived by participants to be more competent than autonomy-supportive teachers. This was true in spite of the fact that students who were taught by autonomy-supportive teachers performed better than students who were taught by controlling teachers” (895). Further, it appears that in using controlling strategies (the use of which suggests that athletes cannot or will not motivate themselves), coaches create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Mageau and Vallerand write,

Coaches’ expectations about their athletes are often confirmed because coaches act differently and according to their expectations towards athletes...For example, if coaches believe certain athletes will perform poorly, they are likely to send messages of mistrust, emphasize mistakes and ignore the successes of these athletes. These behaviors, in turn, will weaken athletes’ confidence in their ability, thwarting their need for competence and, in turn, their motivation.
Furthermore, athletes might become so preoccupied with their coaches’ opinion that they will be distracted from the task…A vicious circle is thus observed where, on the one hand, coaches use controlling strategies that paradoxically lower the very motivation they wish to increase and, on the other hand, athletes emit behaviors that generate the very controlling strategies they wish to counter. (897)

These two quotes suggest that one of the most important ways to encourage teachers to be autonomy supportive will be through education. Teachers need to have a very clear understanding of why autonomy-supportive strategies are preferable and the benefits they can confer, an understanding that will help them avoid the temptation of a controlling strategy. Further, it might behoove school directors to educate parents about the benefits of autonomy-supportive styles—because people often believe that controlling teachers are more competent, parents might be skeptical of a move towards autonomy-supportive styles. Thus, it would likely be very helpful for school directors to get parents on board when trying to enact this kind of change. Given the evidence, however, it seems that it is well worth it for directors and teachers to work towards increasingly autonomy supportive styles, as their students’ learning and improvement will likely improve dramatically as a result. Further, they will then be supporting their students in their psychological needs for autonomy and competence.

Another problem with authoritarian teaching styles is that they often do not leave any room for mistakes in class. Common sense tells us that mistakes have to be explicitly ok in class: how else can students learn what does and does not work? If a student is afraid to make a mistake, she will never take a risk and thus never grow as a technician or an artist. Lakes points out that authoritarian teachers often imply or explicitly say that mistakes are not allowed in class (4), and that a dynamic is sometimes created wherein “when students make errors, they are seen as insulting the abstract ideal of ballet and
therefore also the teacher, who perceives herself as one with the subject matter” (24).
This dynamic goes against not only common sense but also the research of sports psychologists (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Smith and Smoll 78).

Authoritarianism is not only a problem in and of itself but also because it can easily turn into abuse. An authoritarian attitude tends to allow a teacher to believe that whatever he or she does is for the good of the students, to toughen up the students, etc, and it is difficult for someone in that mindset to draw the line for where their behavior becomes abusive. Further, teachers often justify abusive behaviors as necessary toughening up for students entering a competitive world, with an “if you can survive here, you can survive anywhere” attitude (Shapiro (ed), Smith 135). Interestingly, students seemed to be a bit ambivalent about this question—for example, one student said, “it’s a preparation for a very very bitter and tough competitive world, the professional world, and like I said, rationally speaking they had my best interests, my best professional interests at hand, and they weren’t just telling me ‘you’re too short,’” I mean they told my parents that, but when they talked with me of course they were much more supportive and constructive, but nevertheless it’s still very taxing.” Here, we see her struggling with the belief that the teachers had her “best interests at heart,” but then qualifying that to “best professional interests,” suggesting an acknowledgement that what she experienced may have ultimately been damaging. Yes, the ballet world is competitive: no responsible teacher will tell his or her students otherwise. Yes, the ballet world can be cruel and unforgiving. But the fact that those things are true does not justify abusive behavior. Isn’t it absurd suggest that by destroying a students’ self-confidence, you will somehow prepare her to go into a competitive world confidently? A students’
self confidence should be built up so that she is prepared to go into the world, believing in her ability to succeed, not crushed so that she is even more easily brought down by failure.

Lakes also points out that in the ballet world, “it is as though there is a correlation between being able to withstand cruel and unusual punishment and artistic excellence. On the contrary, by desensitizing himself…the student may become a lesser artist” (19). Evidence and research strongly suggests that the commonly held perception that the best way to prepare a student for the harshness of the ballet world is by abusing them in class could not be more wrong. Certainly, a teacher must be honest about the realities of the dance world and not “coddle” students, but that by no means justifies the abusive behaviors that are often indulged in by authoritarian teachers.

One abusive behavior that can flow from an authoritarian mindset is implicitly or explicitly giving messages of humiliation or degradation. Some teachers give explicit messages of humiliation in class: for example, one student wrote that the worst part of her training was “teachers who’d embarrass me (and others) in from of the class as a means of ‘giving corrections.’” Similarly, Wulff writes that at the Royal Ballet, “There was a definite consensus that those few who were fortunate to have been favorites of the teachers were doing fine, while others had often been deeply hurt by the traditional ballet pedagogy, with its characteristic elements of humiliation. ‘They break them down in order to build the kind of dancer they want here,’ a coach at from the Royal Ballet Company told me” (165). It is much easier, however, to avoid giving explicit messages of degradation than implicit ones, and thus teachers must also be vigilant about the implicit messages they are sending in their teaching. We see this kind of abuse occurring, for
example, in a student’s observation that at her school, “Oh yah, I mean, you were given the same amount of compassion and respect that correlates with how good you were. So dancers who weren’t very good weren’t treated nicely.” This kind of attitude, that students only deserved to be treated well if they are talented, is humiliating and degrading and holds an implicit message that is obviously not lost on the students.

Further, silence, or the withholding of feedback, is often used as a manipulative or punitive tool of “power and authority” (Lakes 6). Comparing students to one another, making shaming comments or using humiliating discipline, giving tasks that are unclear or intentionally oblique, or threatening harsh discipline against students is not only painful for students but also induces a stress response in the brain that actually impairs learning by downshifting attention from learning centers to emotional centers of the brain (Hardiman 30-31).

Abusive teaching behaviors such as humiliation and degradation impair learning because they send the body into “fight or flight” response. When a stimulus (anything that is perceived by a student) is processed by the brain, it reaches the emotional processing centers first (Hardiman 29). A threatening stimulus (even if the threat is only perceived) induces a “fight or flight” response in the brain, which then impairs learning (Hardiman 29). This is one reason why it is so important for teachers to be aware of the messages that their teaching styles send: even a perceived threat can activate this response, so it doesn’t have to be actual physical or verbal abuse to be harmful. Once the response is activated and the hormones are released into the bloodstream, they can remain for hours, directing blood to prepare muscles to respond quickly to an attack rather than directing blood to the learning centers of the brain (Hardiman 30). Additionally,
“Feedback with a positive slant not only feels better to students but helps them remember corrections. She explains that brain research has indicated that emotions are the ‘anchors of memory,’ and concepts learned in a positive emotional state will be retained better than those learned under stress” (Brewer 63). Even if the person realizes that the threat is only perceived or that the threat can be avoided, it is very difficult to relax once the “fight or flight” response has been activated: the emotional centers of the brain can easily affect the “logical” centers, but it does not work effectively the other way around (Hardiman 30). This may sound crazy, but it is something that everyone experiences: for example, even if we know that there is a fence around the tenth story balcony on which we are standing, looking over the edge still induces a racing heart and panicky feeling.

Not only can real or perceived threats (such as humiliation, degrading discipline, or punitive silence) induce an immediate hormonal response in the brain that impairs learning, but chronic stress of this kind can actually permanently disrupt the brain’s ability to function intellectually and retain information, a phenomenon referred to as “downshifting” (Hardiman 30). According to Hardiman, “under chronic stress, the brain not only elevates levels of cortisol, adrenaline, and vasopressin but also inhibits the production of serotonin, a chemical associated with pleasant emotions” (31). This is a dangerous proposition, particularly for students who are going to be entering a professional ballet world in which they are under a great deal of stress, need to be able to learn and retain choreography very quickly, and must stay energetic even under demanding conditions. Under the best of biological circumstances, this is difficult, but if a students’ brain has “downshifted” due to chronic stress, it could become nearly impossible. On the other hand, the frequent presence of positive emotions and enjoyment
actually improves the brain’s ability to function and retain information (Hardiman 33)—
not only is it good in the short term to make ballet class an empowering and fun
experience, but it will help students succeed in the long run much more so than any kind
of “toughening up” could do.
Chapter 6: The Coach-Athlete Relationship and Effective Feedback

In both athletics and ballet, the relationship between the student and the teacher/coach is extremely important. The relationship can be a complicated one: the coach and the athlete rely on one another (the coach needs the athlete in order to succeed as a coach, and the athlete needs the coach to provide information and feedback), and yet there is a major (and often overemphasized) power differential between the two parties. Research suggests that these relationships are often not as productive as they could be: according to Ashley E. Stirling and Gretchen A. Kerr, “While previous literature has highlighted many positive developmental effects that coaches can have on young athletes, including enhancement of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, emerging literature also reveals problems of abuse…Survey analysis of 210 American female student-athlete experiences of sexual harassment in sport reported over 18% of respondents had experienced derogatory remarks or sexist jokes from their coach…Additionally, 25% reported being insulted, ridiculed, slapped, hit, or made to feel like a bad person by authority figures in sport” (227-228). While this is a study in athletics, not dance, it indicates the types of serious problems that can arise. Additionally, Stirling and Kerr point out that it is particularly important for us to pay attention to these relationships because the athletes themselves may feel powerless within them: they write, “It may be that the coach’s power advantage over athletes during their careers precludes them from thinking more broadly about their relationships. Furthermore, young athletes may lack the psychological maturity necessary to think critically about these relationships…” (234). It is essential to think seriously and critically about these relationships: when they
do not function optimally it is very difficult for the athlete to reach his or her full potential and they can even harm the athlete beyond just the realm of sport.

In general, Sophia Jowett, in her chapter in *Social Psychology in Sport*, suggests that there are three “C’s” to an effective coach-athlete relationship: closeness (trust, respect, and like), commitment (long term orientation towards the relationship, intention to stay attached), and complementarity (actions of cooperation between athlete and coach) (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), 17). This first tenet in particular applies to autonomy supportive, non-authoritarian teaching styles: in order to have a successful relationship, not only must the student trust the teacher to give good advice and sound technical information, but the teacher also must trust the student to be disciplined, work hard, and make good decisions for him or herself. The student and teacher must also respect each other, one of the major things that an authoritarian teacher does not do. This again does not mean that there cannot be a differentiation, but that teachers can be kind—we see the problems when this does not happen in a quote from Aurélie Dupont, an étoile at the Paris Opéra Ballet, who says of the school, “’What upset me more than the pain of exercising during six years at the school was the nastiness…The adults were so cold. We were children all alone at a boarding school. A little kindness and sweetness wouldn’t have made us worse dancers’” (Webster). This quote sums up the harm that can be caused if teachers are tough but not kind.

Joan L. Duda and Isabel Balaguer, in their article “Coach-Created Motivational Climate” (in *Social Psychology in Sport*) provide several characteristics of “credible coaches” (those that athletes are likely to trust, respect, and want to work hard for). Many of these characteristics are tied to giving students autonomy and avoiding authoritarian
teaching methods. They include, “set[ting] the stage for athletes to rebound quickly and effectively following a loss,” “encourage[ing] athletes to become more self-determined and self-regulated rather than blindly or controlled by their coaches,” and “contribut[ing] to the development of athletes who are intrinsically motivated, committed, and confident” (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Duda and Balaguér 118). These characteristics emphasize the importance of helping athletes develop their own tools for success, rather than encouraging them to constantly rely on their coaches for instruction and discipline.

Andrea J. Becker in her article “It’s Not What They Do, It’s How They Do It: Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching,” discusses several of the characteristics of great coaches that came up in their interviews with elite athletes. For example, she writes, “…passion emerged as a key characteristic…The passion that these great coaches exuded was not only for the game, but also for the people…it was always about ‘making sure that you were okay as a person before addressing [sport]…In addition to being passionate, athletes viewed their coaches as inspirational and enthusiastic. These qualities were particularly important when the athletes experienced performance lulls or fatigue” (99).

Additional qualities she found that were common to many experiences of great coaching included being genuine, honest, loyal (all of which “helped the athletes believe and trust in them,” as well as being patient, non-judgmental, and professional (Becker 100). These qualities all suggest how important it is for athletes to be able to rely on the good intentions of their coaches and their coach’s desire to being working with them. Recall, as well, the importance of intrinsic motivation for teaching—it seems that teachers who are intrinsically motivated would naturally have some of these qualities, particularly passion, enthusiasm, and patience.
Another aspect that came up in Becker’s work is the importance of consistency. Athletes need to be able to count on their coaches’ standards and expectations being stable so that they are not constantly worried about and distracted by the possibility of an unpredictable outburst or change of values. This issue came up in some of my conversations with dancers, as well, with one, for example, talking about how her teachers would have a “flavor of the month” favorite student, and the stress of not knowing who it would be or why you would be favored one moment and not the next. This lack of consistency acts as a distraction from the task at hand as well as privileging ego-orientation (i.e. “does my coach like me?” “why isn’t she paying attention to me today?” “I need to improve so my coach will like me again”) as opposed to task orientation (focusing on improving skills).

A final important characteristic that came up in this article about great coaching is the ability for coaches and athletes to talk openly with one another. This does not mean they have to be best friends—in fact, since professionalism is another one of the qualities emphasized by Becker, it seems that there does need to be a clear role differentiation—but rather that the athlete feels that the coach cares about him or her as a person rather than just a body and is available to address questions and concerns. Indeed, the confidence that the coach sees the athlete as a whole person seems to be very important: Jowett and Cockerill write, “Moreover Balague (1000) explained that the identity of elite female athletes in gymnastics was often misunderstood by coaches and one such athlete reported ‘People see me as a pair of legs and thing that is all that I am. I need a coach who will see me as a whole person’” (314). Becker writes, “Athletes discussed how their coaches made themselves accessible, but also approachable….In fact, many athletes
shared how they could talk to their coaches about anything…These athletes experienced coaches who were not only open to conversation, but who were also good listeners…These findings parallel previous research on Olympic athletes…” (103). Peter J. Schroeder in his article “Changing Team Culture: The Perspectives of Ten Successful Head Coaches,” also emphasized the importance of frequent communication between coach and athletes, explaining that “Coaches communicated through a number of mediums to give athletes the sense that, ‘we really do care about them as a person as opposed to just an [athlete].’ The men’s volleyball coach held four individual meetings a year with his 24 players… (72). These findings very much influenced my recommendation that rather than only having conferences once a year, at pressure-filled, teacher-controlled evaluation times, teachers have a permanent appointment sign-up sheet on their office door so that students feel encouraged to come to them with concerns or questions as they come up throughout training.

Successful coach-athlete (or ballet teacher-student) relationships are characterized in large part by the ability to have both discipline and autonomy and positive and effective modes of communication. These relationships are essential: without them, knowledge cannot be transmitted. No matter how much content knowledge a teacher has, the relationship between teacher and student must function effectively in order for learning to occur. Robert W. Roeser, Stephen C. Peck and Nailah Suad Nasir, in an article in the Handbook of Educational Psychology, sum it up nicely, saying “Supportive relationships between teachers and students are the crucible in which values, information, and feedback are transmitted and, thereby, the internalization of healthy images of self and principled forms of knowledge are facilitated” (414). These supportive relationships,
as we have seen, must work to foster autonomy in the student and to avoid authoritarianism in teachers. Authoritarian teaching behaviors interfere with these relationships because they encourage negative rather than positive control of the coach over the athlete. Gallucci defines positive control as “reinforcement for good performance, encouragement after mistakes, providing correction in a supportive manner, and technical instruction in the mechanics…of sport” and negative control as “nonreinforcement or failure to respond to good performance or effort, verbal or non-verbal punishment, and providing instruction in a sarcastic and punitive manner…[where the] motivating factor…is fear” (429). The aspects of positive control correspond closely to aspects of autonomy supportive coaching, while the aspects of negative control are also elements of authoritarian teaching styles.

Feedback

Clearly, the coach’s central job is to transmit knowledge to the athlete, and thus the type of feedback the coach gives is very important. In the article “What a Coach can teach a Teacher,” Gallimore and Tharp discuss the feedback strategies of incredibly successful and lauded college basketball coach John Wooden, writing

The majority of Wooden’s scolds are embedded with instructions, in a form of…combination, complex statements in which the Coach simultaneously scolds and then specifically reinstru...
Caroline Griswold

working (giving her the agency to begin to self-correct rather than just saying “you’re wrong” and moving on), and emphasizes the correct way to execute a particular skill. Wooden’s ability to give a very short yet very effective demonstrations is also a skill that would be beneficial for all ballet teachers—they have such a limited amount of time with students that it is essential to be able to get a message across effectively without indulging in drawn out demonstrations. Further, Wooden as described in this article exemplifies the qualities of clarity, consistency, and honesty that Gagne, Ryan, and Bargmann suggest are so important, writing, “Rather than telling players what they wanted to hear, they would tell them the truth... In addition, they didn’t send mixed messages” (109).

Gagne, Ryan, and Bargmann also emphasize the importance of providing regular feedback. Athletes want to know that their coaches are invested in their progress and are paying attention to what they do. While we hope that athletes are intrinsically motivated and are thus not acting for the approval of an authority figures, athletes depend on feedback from coaches in order to improve their skills, so the withdrawal of that resource becomes (either intentionally or not) perceived as a punishment. Gagne, Ryan, and Bargmann support this, writing, “Participants discussed how their coaches responded to effort, mistakes, emotions, and performance outcomes. Regardless of whether it was positive or negative, the athletes appreciated getting a response from their coaches...” (110). Further, some research suggests that the most successful coaches do not only give feedback to their star players; on the contrary, they give attention to “bench” players (analogous to the students in a ballet class who the teacher might not think have potential as well. For example, Gagne, Ryan, and Bargmann write, “in recent studies, highly
successful coaches (e.g., Pat Summitt) have been found to provide an equitable
distribution of feedback to both the starters and the non-starters on their
teams…Therefore, it could be assumed that the provision of fair and equitable treatment
is one major factor that separates the great coach from the average coach” (105).
Similarly, Olympia, Jowett, and Duda suggest that a perception of inequity in the
treatment of athletes is related to perceptions of a lacking coach-athlete relationship (434-435).
This suggests that it is not only a part of good teaching to pay attention to students
who may not be the stars of the class, but it also helps the group as a whole succeed.

Research also suggests that it is important that feedback be either purely
informational (i.e. “You didn’t cross your fifth in that landing”) or self-referenced (i.e. “I
notice you’re applying the correction I gave you yesterday”) as opposed to social
comparison or norm-referenced (i.e. “most students your age are able to do this” or even
“you’re better than most of the people in the class”). Indeed, Susan Black sees social
comparison praise as “a teacher openly manipulating students. I hear a teacher setting
kids up to care more about competition than learning” (38). According to Joanne C. Y.
Chan and Shui-fong Lam, “Formative and self-referenced feedback encouraged students
to adopts a learning goal that emphasized incremental self-improvement; on the contrary,
summative and norm-referenced feedback pointed towards a performance goal that
defined success as outperforming others” (52). Similarly, Jennifer Henderlong and Mark R. Lepper suggest that although it may seem nice to tell someone they are better than
others, it does a disservice to the student in the long run because they “may not be well
equipped to deal with later situations in which others show superior performance” (785).
Obviously, in sports and ballet, those situations will inevitably arise, and we want
students to be able to approach them from a place of inner strength and self-confidence as opposed to fear of not being the best.

Praise

The discussion of feedback leads into an important discussion of praise. While it is often assumed (and in certain cases true) that praise is good for self-esteem and helps learning, that is not unequivocally the case. While praise can be a great confidence enhancer, it also can have negative effects in terms of encouraging extrinsic motivation and reliance on ego-enhancing feedback. It seems that, according to the literature on the subject, the type of praise is very important. According to Gallimore and Tharp, “The positive approach in Coach [Wooden]’s practice was to focus players’ attention on specific, fine points of how to properly play basketball…Praise that is specific and informative is better than general noninformative praise; praise that is perceived to be manipulative is not as good as praise perceived to be genuine; praise has the most effect when focused on effort and mastery (Stipek, 1993)” (128). This challenges the assumption that any and all praise is helpful. Similarly, Suzanne R. Pollack and her colleagues did a study with college students in which he found that praise “enhanced the intrinsic motivation…if it simply conveyed positive competence feedback (e.g. ‘You did really well’). In contrast, when the experimenter appeared to be giving positive feedback as a way of controlling…(e.g. ‘you did really well. I’ll be able to use your data’), intrinsic motivation was not enhanced” (1388). Thus, we see that when praise is used as part of a controlling style, it can undermine motivation. It is easy to see how praise could increase extrinsic motivation, since it focuses the student on wanting to achieve the public approbation of the teacher, distracting them from the task at hand and undermining the
benefits of autonomy-supportive teaching. Interestingly, Henderlong and Lepper write that “In classroom observations, praise has been positively correlated with shorter task persistence, more eye-checking with the teacher, and inflected speech such that answers have the intonation of questions (Roe, 1974)” (776). This points to the danger that praise can pose, and is something we can definitely see in any ballet class as students’ eyes, even while dancing, frequently scan the room to check where the teacher is, whether he or she is looking, and whether or not approval is being gained. This kind of distraction means that students are not focusing on the task at hand and instead worrying about whether they are “right” or liked.

It is also important to consider not just the type of praise given, but also the way that praise is interpreted on the other end. For example, David E. Conroy, Miranda P. Kaye and Angela M. Fifer found that “Praise can lead to an attribution of low ability if another student is not praised for an identical achievement” (276). However, the question of ability vs. effort praise becomes tricky because Henderlong and Lepper argue that, similar to social comparison praise, ability praise “sent a subtle message that one should give up trying when things become difficult” (781) and indeed found “low levels of posttest persistence” in the children in his study who had been praised on ability as opposed to on effort. Similarly, Black writes, “With co-researcher Claudia Mueller, Dweck discovered that students who were praised for being intelligent went on to choose tasks that were simply and would allow them to keep looking smart.... by contrast, fifth-graders who were praised for effort and persistence rather than for their natural intelligence wanted to proceed to more challenging tasks. Even when they missed some problems, the students said they liked the more challenging work” (39). Since resilience
and toughness is obviously a very important quality in a successful dancer or athlete, it is important that teachers praise effort at least to the extent that students are aware of the importance of working through difficulties.

All of this is merely to say that teachers need to be more careful in using praise than they may instinctively want to be, even though the impulse to praise may come out of the best intentions. However, research suggests that there are indeed ways for praise to be used effectively. For example, Henderlong and Lepper write that “Brophy (1981) has drawn on the work of O’Leary and O’Leary (1977), who indicated that praise must be contingent, specific, and sincere if it is to function as a reinforcer…Five common organizing themes emerged from the literature that seemed to capture the factors underlying the positive versus negative effects of praise: perceived sincerity, performance attributions, autonomy, competence and self-efficacy, and standards and expectations” (777). They also point out that praise must be believable, even for small children, who will be able to tell when praise simply cannot be true (i.e. “you’re perfect!”) (Henderlong and Lepper 777). The author suggests that this finding points to the importance of specificity in praise. Another author gives a perception on when praise is effective, writing, “Thompson traces the development of this self-worth protection to certain types of teacher praise, such as neglecting to tell students what has contributed to their success or failing to help them diagnose the reasons for failure. Other types of praise—overpraising easy or trivial learning, or example, or showing surprise when students learn new concepts quickly—may be seen as an indication that the teacher has little confidence in the students’ intellect and ability” (Black 40). One of my purposes in writing this section is to anticipate criticism that my ideas for teaching ballet force teachers to “sugar-
coat” reality or baby students unnecessarily. In fact, I’m advocating against that.

Effective feedback is kind and respectful, but crucially must be honest! It acknowledges a job well done or a good try, and it gives detailed information after a failure, or a success, so that students understand what caused that outcome.
Chapter 7: Body Image and Eating Disorders

One thing that is ubiquitous in the ballet world is the pressure to be thin. Obviously, ballet is an aesthetic and athletic art form, so it is necessary for dancers to be highly fit and generally slender. However, the presence of eating disorders is currently endemic in the ballet world—high school ballet dancers are seven times more likely to develop anorexia, the deadliest mental disorder, than their non-dancing peers (Anshel 1-2). Students in serious schools are also more likely to report that body type is important at their schools for who gets parts: in the results from my survey, only 25% of students from recreational schools said that they agreed or strongly agreed to this, while 62% of students from company affiliated schools agreed or strongly agreed. Many survey respondents cited body-image issues and the pressure to be thin as the worst aspect of their ballet training. For example, one student wrote, “The only negative aspect of my training was the physical requirement. I was often asked to lose weight in small time frames and it was, quite frankly, unhealthy and destructive.” Indeed, students at some schools are screened for low weight even coming in—for example, at the Paris Opéra Ballet School, students cannot enter if they are over 55lbs at age 8, 59lbs at age 9, 64lbs at age 10, 75lbs at age 11, or 88lbs at age 12 (Paris Opéra Ballet website). Often times, abusive teaching practices make this problem even worse by shaming students for their natural builds or healthy weights, encouraging students to lose unhealthy amounts of weight, or sending implicit or explicit messages that a student must be unhealthily thin to be successful. For example, another student told me, “well we were all told that if we lost weight we could move up levels...so [my friend] lost like 20 pounds one summer and moved up another level...I think that what the teachers fostered was the competitiveness
with weight.” In the article “Little ‘rats’ of the Paris Opéra Ballet School suffer for their ballet fame,” Paul Webster quotes a senior female dancer (quoted anonymously—as one student said, “I’d be out on my neck in a minute if I was seen as a moaner’) saying, “The favourite insult is to tell you that you’re too fat.”

Regardless of teaching style, ballet dancers are at risk for eating disorders. Ballet tends to attract students who are already at risk due to their personality traits: ballet dancers tend to be highly perfectionistic, motivated, and goal oriented. The risks increase due to the nature of the profession: students are highly driven to succeed, aware of the slim chances for success, sensitive to criticism, and controlling around their bodies and the actions, appearance, and discipline of their bodies (Anshel 3). Further, the culture of the ballet world can often encourage disordered behaviors. Wendy Oliver makes the astute point that “Assigning a moral value to a physical characteristic is one way that this ideal takes root in the individuals that make up a society… ‘If one is fat, it is read as a symbol of laziness and an undisciplined nature. If one is thin, one is ‘in control.’…” Simultaneously, female ballet dancers are also asked to take up less space and to become (or stay) child-like” (40-41). In short, dance students “practice exercises ritualistically to stop thinking, feeling, to reduce their bodies to the barest minimum of bone and muscle and to deny themselves all other pleasures in order to achieve that goal” (Anshel 3). Piran sums up the tragedy of eating disorders in the ballet world poignantly, saying “The disempowered body of a dancer has to perform demanding physical tasks without being given the freedom to be as strong, muscular, or as powerful as it can be. The silent body suppresses and restricts its wisdom, knowledge, appetite, emotions, and joy or pain through self-denial and self-constraint” (Piran qtd. in Jowitt et al. 125). How
can we expect dancers to become full, rich artists with a range of emotions from which to
draw if they are expected to constantly engage in self-denial and to see their bodies as an
evil being to be tamed?

It is interesting to note that this issue seems to apply not just to ballet (although
ballet certainly has major problems in this area) but also to aesthetic sports/activities in
general. For example, Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wissinger in the article “Keeping
Up Appearances: aesthetic labour in the fashion modeling industries of London and New
York,” discuss how difficult it is to be in an industry in which one’s body is one’s
product, because a dancer (or in this case, a model) “cannot walk away from her
‘product’—in this case her face—having it measured, assessed, criticized and rejected
produces a clash between the body objectified by her work and her body as the
environment of her ‘self’…” (785). This question of objectification as almost part of the
job description is also raised by Oliver when she writes, “The ballerina’s job description
is also troublesome to many feminists…job skill alone is nowhere near enough to
succeed. Success in these careers relies strongly on physical appearance and also requires
adherence to an interpretation of femininity which includes a potentially dangerous
degree of thinness” (44).

The emphasis on thinness is present in participants in other aesthetic sports as
well, and it seems that the perception of thinness as a major value starts early—in a study
on girls ages five and seven who participated in either aesthetic or non-aesthetic sports
(aesthetic sports being those focused on appearance such as gymnastics, ice-skating, or
dance), Davison et al found that “At ages 5 and 7 years, girls in the aesthetic sport group
reported significantly higher weight concerns in comparison to girls in the nonaesthetic
and no sports groups…” (315). Sadly, according to this study, these concerns only seem to get worse the longer a student participates. Aesthetic sports’ emphasis on thinness is pervasive and encourages people to go to extreme lengths to control their size and shape.

It is clear that these cultural norms have a strong effect on ballet students. For example, according to Brena R. Price and Terry F. Pettijohn II in their article “The Effect of Ballet Dance Attire on Body and Self-Perceptions of Female Dancers,” numerous studies have shown that “adolescent ballet dancers view themselves as less desirable, less attractive, less confident, less loveable, and more sensitive than age-matched non-dancers” (992). Teachers who emphasize thinness, favor students who are the thinnest, or humiliate students who do not fit into the desired body type only exacerbate this high risk for eating disorders. Susan Stinson, in her article “Seeking a Feminist Pedagogy for Children’s Dance” in Dance, Power and Difference, says that the common negative “feelings about the body are enhanced by a pedagogy in which the goal is an unattainable ideal and every attempt is met with corrections—indications of how one does not measure up—all the while dressed in clothing that reveals every flaw and looking in a mirror…[the] body is regarded as an enemy to be overcome or an object to be judged” (Shapiro (ed), Stinson 29). Teachers need to be highly cognizant of the already existing risks to which their students are exposed and their power to either help ameliorate the problem or make it worse.

It is important to realize that for many students who are studying ballet intensively, their entire identity is constructed around the art form. Jones, Glintmeyer, and McKenzie point out the danger of this phenomenon in athletes, writing, “…individuals who develop a relatively exclusive athletic identity are more prone to
depression and emotional disturbance following disruption to that identity. This is particularly the case when that disruption is unexpected, sudden, and enforced” (382). Similarly, in the article “Epiphanies of embodiment: injury, identity, and the balletic body,” Steven P. Wainwright writes, “the vocational calling to dance is so overwhelming that [the dancer’s] balletic body is their identity” (316). While I believe that we should try to encourage students to develop all different parts of their identities (a belief upon which I will elaborate later), for many students at present, ballet is not only what they do, it is who they are. While this dedication and love for the art form is a good thing, it is frightening to think of the consequences that even an offhand comment about a students’ weight, for example, could have on a student with this kind of identity. If a student feels that weight gain or a supposedly inappropriate body type is challenging this identity, she may go to any lengths to avoid that kind of identity disruption. We see this happening in, for example, Sorrela Englund’s story. Englund was a highly successful ballerina whose career was cut short due to consequences from her long-term eating disorder. She writes, “I felt that, even at a young age, the only place where I could survive was dance…when…I was told ‘you can’t dance until you lose so-and-so many kilos,’ for me, this was catastrophic…I had nowhere to go. No future. So, I stopped eating and couldn’t control it. I felt very ambivalent: I had this tremendous professional success but I was nearly dying” (Englund qtd. in Jowitt 123). Paradoxically, although Englund’s eating disorder started to avoid the identity disruption that would have come from being forced out of dance, it ultimately caused that very outcome many years later. Her story demonstrates that teachers must be aware of the larger psychological consequences of telling a student she must lose weight in order to continue, for example.
Teachers should also be aware of the consequences that injury can have on a student who has formulated her identity around ballet. Wainwright writes of critical injuries, for example, that they “threaten to terminate a dancer’s career and so endanger their embodied sense of self” (317). Wainwright points out that even non-critical injuries can have a major effect, particularly inasmuch as they disrupt the dancer’s daily routine of class, rehearsal, and performance and thereby disrupt their identity as a ballet dancer. In general, teachers should try to be aware of and sensitive to the psychological costs that this kind of identity disruption, or similarly the kind caused by body problems, can have on a young dancer.

It should go without saying that the consequences of developing an eating disorder are dire, especially for an athlete. A few of the effects of anorexia are a loss of menstrual periods (which leads to a loss of bone density), weakness and fatigue, chronic feeling of being cold, dizziness and fainting, headaches, growth of fine hair all over the body and face, fuzzy thinking/inability to concentrate, osteoporosis, and heart palpitations, among others (Smith et al). The effects of bulimia include loss of menstruation (and bone density), dizziness and weakness, depression, dehydration, excessive anxiety, weight gain or dramatic weight fluctuation, heart failure, and ulcers (Barston, Smith, and Segal). Clearly, a person suffering from even a few of these symptoms cannot dance to her highest potential. While this might seem obvious, many people in the ballet world seem to believe that eating disorders are a necessary evil. However, I believe that the ballet world must come together to quell the high rates of eating disorders among students and professionals, and one of the first ways to do this is to be conscious of the messages that we send as teachers.
Chapter 8: Learned Helplessness and Self Handicapping

Another negative consequence of abusive authoritarian teaching behaviors are the dual phenomena of learned helplessness and self-handicapping. Both of these behaviors fundamentally arise from a person’s belief that he or she has no control over what happens in his or her life. While they are similar and related, they are not equivalent. Learned helplessness can be defined as the “conviction that one has little or no control over events in one’s life…debilitating consequences of uncontrollable events” (Gallucci 255). It has been well documented among animals as well as humans: studies have shown that “when an organism does not have control over what happens to it, and learns that it has no control, it becomes unresponsive and passive, learns poorly, and fails to display normal social behavior” (Howe 116). This affliction generally arises from situations in which a person is unable to produce a desired outcome regardless of effort level, and it is “associated with a belief that current or future success is not contingent on effort” (Gallucci 256). In other words, if a ballet student, for example, is constantly denied parts because of her natural build, or does not receive any positive feedback regardless of her effort level, she may begin to exhibit learned helplessness, which can in turn lead to low achievement, low effort levels, low confidence, attribution of outcomes to outside forces, and the inability to persevere (Gallucci 262). The best way to avoid having students fall into this situation is to allow them control over their learning processes and outcomes: Howe argues that internal control, “when events or outcomes depend on [person’s] own behavior or personal characteristics, such as ability” is the best environment for learning and the best way to prevent learned helplessness from occurring (116).
Self-handicapping is similar to learned helplessness, but there are a few key differences. Self-handicapping is defined as “proactively avoiding threats to one’s self-esteem via ‘any action or choice of performance setting that enhances the opportunity to externalize (excuse) failure and to internalize (reasonably accept credit for) success’” (Berglas and Jones qtd. in Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Maddison and Prapavessis 210). This is different from learned helplessness because it arises from low self-esteem and is not necessarily caused by a lack of internal control. Typically, it is a mechanism “used by threatened individuals as a way of coping with situations in which the outcome is uncertain” (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Maddison and Prapavessis 215). While self-handicapping does not necessarily arise from a belief that one cannot control the outcome of a situation or the events that happen in one’s life, it is similar to learned helplessness because it can both arise from and contribute to low self-esteem and can be ameliorated by providing a person with situations in which they can experience success and control over their outcomes. Both of these conditions can be exacerbated by an authoritarian or especially by an abusive teacher and ameliorated by a teacher who is autonomy-supportive and teaches in a student-centered manner.
Part III: What’s Next?

“If the audience comes only to see my students’ feet, then I’m missing the boat. I want them to see what my students have to offer as far as what they have to say about this world they’re living in. I want to produce dancers who use ballet as a means, not an end!” (Ursuliak qtd. in Warren 207)

So far, I have discussed aspects of current ballet training that research suggests should be changed or fixed. However, that is only the beginning. Now, I want to discuss the next steps: where do we go beyond simply fixing the problems we have inherited? How can we bring ballet training into the twenty-first century and do justice to the innovations going on in educational theory, sports psychology, brain science, modern dance pedagogy, and contemporary choreography? I believe that there is much more that could be done to improve ballet training, ranging from small suggestions to major changes in the way that we do things, and that is what I will to address in the following pages.
Chapter 9: Mirrors and Dress Code

Dress Code

Two of the most ubiquitous aspects of a serious ballet class are wall-to-wall mirrors and a strict uniform (generally a specific color leotard and pink tights). While this may seem like sacrilege in a professional ballet training environment, I believe that both of these conventions ought to be challenged.

First, I will discuss the question of dress code. All of the evidence supports my assertion that there should never be a graded system of leotard colors used to distinguish class levels from one another. This is a common practice in many ballet schools, especially large ones, but there don’t to be any good reasons for why this is so. The reasons I have received all seem to be weak justifications for a system that no one even remembers deciding was a good idea. For example, some people say that it gives students something to aspire to. But if the only reason a student is working hard in class is to progress to the next leotard color, should that student even be dancing? It is interesting to note Foucault’s description of a similar system being used in a military academy—he writes, “At the école Militaire, a complex system of ‘honorary’ classification was developed; this classification was visible to all in the form of slight variations in uniform and more or less ignoble punishments…” (180). Here, we see this method used as a mechanism of disciplining and punishment, as well as motivation to appear higher on the hierarchy. However, if that is the biggest motivation to work hard, then either a student is really in the wrong field or a teacher/mode of teaching has sucked all the joy and intrinsic motivation out of dancing.
Others argue that this system is good for discipline. Again, evidence suggests that this is an extremely weak argument. For discipline to be effective, first of all, it should be self-discipline. Standards of discipline can be decided upon by the faculty, hopefully with input from students, and it should not require a system of leotard colors to enforce them. This system is entirely arbitrary and seems to me to be merely a degrading way to separate the “wheat from the chaff,” as it were—to create a hierarchy and competitive atmosphere among students and allow the higher up students to feel superior while the lower level students are, and acutely feel themselves to be, at the bottom of the pecking order. Given the politics and favoritism at many ballet schools, the idea that this system is a visual representation of a meritocracy or of who has worked the hardest is merely wishful thinking. Amazingly, in “Discipline and Punish,” Foucault “exposes ranking and grading as means of punishment and reward” through the example of a military organization that “visually registered” its levels of achievement (hierarchy) through a graded system of epaulette colors (Haas and Okstad). In their discussion of this, Gretchen Haas and Brian Okstad say, “The reasoning was, apparently, that the lowest, most shamed, ranks ‘existed only to disappear’ (182), that is, to work their way up the…hierarchy.” This is completely analogous to the way that I see graded leotard colors functioning in ballet schools. Foucault argues that this functions as a punitive method for those low on the hierarchy because it compares each member of a group to one another, creates a value-based hierarchy based on “the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of individuals,” and pushes people towards a normalizing hierarchy (Foucault qtd. in Haas and Okstad). I don’t believe that this punitive hierarchizing has any place in a school aimed at producing artists. Furthermore, it encourages extrinsic motivation and ego-
oriented goals—if a student’s motivation to move up is based on the desire to show their ability through a different color leotard, that motivation is not one that will encourage good learning. Is there a single redeeming factor for this system? I could not find one.

Beyond the question of color-coded leotards, the spirit of having a dress code makes sense—teachers need to be able to see a student’s body in order to correct her and make sure that she is learning good, anatomically sound technique. Ballet teacher M’Liss Dorrance writes on dress code, “I don’t think a severe dress code is necessary…but when expressing individuality becomes more important than enabling the teacher the ability to see what a student is doing it should be nixed. If students don’t wear appropriate dancewear to class it signals rebellion or disrespect.” I fully agree with this, however, it leaves a pretty wide range of latitude for appropriate attire. I know that the argument is frequently made that dress code is necessary for discipline. However, I strongly believe that if students are given the responsibility to discipline themselves, and the expectation is placed upon them to do so, they will. Expectations for discipline need to be clear and enforced, and if this is so then I don’t think that having everyone look identical will make much of a difference. Becker’s article also discusses how athletes described their coaches as disregarding anything irrelevant, writing “The athletes described their coaches as being able to see the big picture and as a result, they ‘would let the little things go sometimes’; ‘He didn’t care one iota about how you dressed, whether you were shaven or unshaven, if you had long hair or short hair, or if you wore a bandana. Nothing mattered to him, but how you played the game’” (111). Certainly, because dance is an aesthetic form, this disregard of appearance described would not be fully applicable, and I can understand the argument that it is necessary to teach students the importance of a neat appearance.
However, it seems that if teachers do not overly focus on the miniscule details of dress and appearance that are really irrelevant to a students’ dancing, they will gain more authority in the things they do make a big deal out of.

Further, there may be benefits to loosening or eliminating dress code that make it worth losing appearance of uniformity. One study done at a major college dance program in which one class of students had to wear dress code and another did not showed that students filling out body image surveys had significantly lower body images on days they were required to wear dress code than on the days they were not (Oliver 3). Further, multiple studies done on non-dancers have shown that that wearing tight fitting clothes (like swim suits) can actually decrease performance in other areas (Price and Pettijohn 992), presumably due to the distraction of self-consciousness or body anxiety. Additionally, another study showed that when dancers were given the option to wear whatever they wanted, most chose less revealing clothes and had higher self-perceptions and body image than when they were required to be in dress code (Price and Pettijohn 994). I think that it is possible to find a happy median between the pedagogical and possible disciplinary benefits of a dress code and the psychological benefits of not having one. For example, students could be required to wear a leotard and tights, but the color and style would be up to them. This seems like a completely reasonable solution in which students would be given the freedom to choose clothing that they felt comfortable in and express their individuality through their clothing choices while still ensuring that teachers could teach effectively. As students get older, particularly as they go through puberty, it may be useful for schools to make allowances for the anxieties that can come along with changing bodies. In general, while it seems clear that a dress code is a necessary element
of ballet training, I do not think that the strict uniform imposed by most ballet schools is necessary. Students’ self-esteem, body confidence, and sense of autonomy would be heightened if they were given more freedom in terms of dress code.

**Reward**

The question of dress code, and particularly the question of dress code that is based on one’s level (and thus creates visual hierarchy in the school) leads into an important discussion of reward. The issue of the utility of reward is definitely related to the praise question, and rewards can have some of the same consequences in terms of decreasing intrinsic motivation, particularly when it is perceived as being used to control behavior (Pallack et al. 1382). Pallack et al. point out, though, that as with praise, the type and intent of the reward matters in terms of consequences: they explain that when the reward is desired as an end in itself, then the activity becomes merely a way to achieve that end, which means that the motivation for doing the activity is extrinsic, with all of the issues that type of motivation entails (1383). On the other hand, in some situations a reward is used to mark a certain level of achievement and expected by the student (for example, allowing a student to perform in a concert when a certain level of technique has been attained). In that situation, the consequences of the reward can be different—according to Pallack et al., in that case “achieving the reward may provide feedback not only that one is competent at the activity, but also that the effort one expended was successful” (1389). This suggests that rewards that acknowledge a certain level of achievement may be useful insofar as they do not become the primary motivating force for engaging in the activity.

**Mirrors**
The use of mirrors is a similarly entrenched custom in traditional ballet training. Almost every dance studio is equipped with full length, wall-to-wall mirrors on at least one side, and almost every exercise in a ballet class is frontally oriented—if a student chooses to, she can basically observe herself at every moment, and students are often encouraged to do just that. There is no doubt that the mirror is a useful tool in ballet training. Mirrors allow students to self-correct and provide a tool for students to use as they try to achieve the aesthetic standards of ballet. They also allow teachers to visually show a student a correction on the students’ own body, rather than just telling them. The problem with mirrors, though, is that while the general orientation of most ballet exercises is to the front, there is a huge amount of three-dimensionality that could be explored if a student was willing to move away from constantly looking in the mirror. For that reason, the constant use of mirrors can impede the growth of artistry. Also, the regular use of mirrors can send the implicit message that the only element of technique that matters is the aesthetic shapes that are created, rather than the energy or intention of the movement, an attitude that severely limits the possibilities for artistic and technical growth. Further, as I discussed previously, the most effective type of practice for the brain’s ability to retain information is that which most closely simulates the real-world context for that knowledge (Alexander and Winne (eds), Schraw 257). Obviously, there are no mirrors onstage, so it seems that teachers do students a disservice by not giving them the opportunity to practice with that aspect of real-world context.

Finally, mirrors can be extremely distracting—Laura L. Shue and Christina S. Beck discuss this aspect in their case study of a studio, writing, “The mirror, which covers the entire west side of the room, plays a crucial role as a silent and controlling
audience member, constantly and critically asking dancers what the audience sees, thereby governing the creativity of the dancers…The students, particularly those in advanced classes—exhibit the same performances as do Leigh and Judy, constantly adjusting their costumes and glancing surreptitiously in the mirror during warm-ups and rehearsals to examine their faces, buttocks, and side silhouettes” (136). This quote is particularly salient because it suggests both the potentially distracting nature of the mirror and the aesthetic “cooperation” it seems to demand. This demand can lead to increasing self-objectification, which is ultimately damaging—A. P. De Bruin et al are writing on fitness centers in the following quote, but much of what they say applies to ballet schools as well. They write, “Moreover, fitness centers can be seen as environments containing a large number of objectifying features such as mirrors and revealing clothing…According to Objectification Theory (Frederickson and Roberts 1997), being exposed to these kinds of body objectification will result in self-objectification, as women and girls gradually internalize this observer’s perspective and see themselves as ‘an object’ for others to view and evaluate on the basis of their appearance” (de Bruin et al. 629). Given that ballet is already a sphere in which it is easy for people to see themselves or be seen merely as a body or an object, this is a dangerous proposition.

There has also been research that suggests that mirrors can negatively affect self-esteem and actually impede learning. One study found that in two classes, one of which used mirrors and one of which did not, body-area satisfaction increased for the non-mirror class and decreased for the mirror class (Oliver 3). Similarly, another study looking at one class which used mirrors and one which did not found that body satisfaction went down for the mirror class and that weight loss actually increased for the
mirror class, suggesting that mirrors had a strong enough impact on body confidence to cause students to take action (Price and Pettijohn 992). Interestingly, this study also found that the non-mirror class improved significantly in adagio skills, while the non-mirror class did not (Price and Pettijohn 992). All of these studies suggest that mirrors may actually do more harm than good in a ballet classroom.

A final problem with the constant use of mirrors in the ballet class is that it privileges the visual over the kinesthetic. When students always use mirrors, they learn that the only legitimate way to self-correct or learn is through the visual feedback of the mirrors. However, there is no visual feedback onstage, so if a student never learns to feel the way things should feel, this will work against them when they go onstage. Many modern dance teachers espouse the idea of educating “conscious bodies,” or teaching students to feel all of the kinesthetic feedback that their bodies give them rather than relying on looking at their bodies or being told what they should change or do. Revered teacher Maggie Black, for example, rarely uses mirrors for this reason—Jessica Zeller writes, “An important part of Black’s philosophy is related to the feeling of movement in the body, in contrast to the look of movement in the mirror. In my interview with her, she conceded that the mirror could be practical, but only as a teaching tool when a dancer is unable to absorb a concept physically” (65). Anttila also points to the danger of a purely visual approach, writing, “I suggest that educating a ‘conscious body’ means, first, supporting awareness of subtle bodily sensations that can be depicted as dialogue within our bodies” (50). This kind of awareness is useful not only in terms of technique but also because it can help students respond to pain in their bodies, bodily needs (such as hunger or thirst), or specific areas of their bodies that need to be stretched, strengthened, etc. It
seems that kinesthetic awareness of the body is not taught enough in ballet classes, and one of the contributors to this problem is the ubiquitous use of mirrors.

Despite the problems with the use of mirrors, I do understand that they can serve a useful function in ballet class. Thus, I propose a mitigation of the current system of constantly using mirrors. I think that, first of all, mirrors should not be introduced until students are old enough to have already developed some kinesthetic awareness and also to have a sophisticated enough understanding of ballet technique that they know how to use a mirror to their advantage rather than harm. If mirrors are introduced too young, students grow up thinking only about the shapes that they create, which leaves them not only with a very limited perception of what ballet technique is but also vulnerable to injury, because they may try to emulate shapes (like perfect turnout) that their bodies are not yet able to do safely.

Further, if young students were in classrooms without mirrors, this might help to at least postpone the beginning of the body image anxiety with which most dancers struggle because they would start off being kinesthetically aware of their bodies rather than constantly examining their bodies visually. It would make sense for mirrors to be introduced when students are about eleven or twelve, but only used about half of the time (for example, if students take class six days a week, being in a classroom with mirrors only three days). This system would allow students to use the mirrors as a corrective tool but would also teach them to be able to dance without mirrors and continue to develop their kinesthetic awareness and three-dimensional use of space in ballet technique. Finally, this would hopefully limit some of the body-image stress placed on young dancers, especially during especially difficult times such as puberty when it can be
particularly painful to be constantly examining a continually changing and developing body.
Chapter 10: Making Dance a Large Part of a Larger Life

Since ballet is not only a highly challenging and competitive but also time-sensitive career, ballet students are often encouraged to have dance be their entire lives, with the justification that they will have plenty of time after their careers are over to explore other aspects of life. However, I feel passionately that we should be trying to nurture educated dancers, not narrow ones. Thinking dancers, instead of blindly submissive, “tunnel-visioned,” dancers will be better equipped to make healthy choices for themselves, understand art and life beyond just ballet, and generally be more mature artists. Ultimately, ballet teacher Tyler Walters could not be more right when he says simply, “thinking should be a part of learning.” Further, dancers who are educated will have other options when they retire from dancing, decide they no longer want to dance, or get injured. Phillipe Braunschweig puts it well when he writes, “Schools for the professional dancer must face the challenge of educating people for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. They not only have an obligation to produce excellent dancers, but must also be committed to providing students with a rigorous modern academic education…Nothing should stand in the way of university studies or higher professional training” (Braunschweig qtd. in Jowitt et al. 40-41). Increased education and educational opportunities will also help ameliorate the problem of teaching as a default career for former professional dancers: if students are educated in a broad range of areas and encouraged to explore interests outside of just ballet, they will not be forced to become teachers when their performing careers end. Instead, only the dancers who truly want to become teachers will go into that field, and the rest will be qualified and able to pursue something that they actually want to do.
While it is true that since ballet is an extremely competitive and temporally limited profession, a certain amount of tunnel vision is necessary, I don’t believe that training needs to be all consuming. In fact, an attitude of complete tunnel vision is actually harmful to training, for a few reasons. First of all, this attitude can lead to “neurotic” rather than healthy perfectionism. Clearly, it is necessary for ballet students to strive for their perfection, but there is a difference between healthy and unhealthy perfectionism, and unhealthy perfectionism can be encouraged by narrow-minded attitudes towards training. Neurotic perfectionists are, according to Haase, Prapavessis and Owens, “‘unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never seem to do things good enough…’, focusing on the perceived inadequacy and failure of their efforts” (210). Neurotic perfectionism has various symptoms and effects: neurotic perfectionists are obsessed with detecting flaws and avoiding mistakes, they are self-focused and end up inhibiting performance because of excessive attention to flawlessness, they are prone to “end-state” day dreaming about the consequences of achieving goals rather than actually working on achieving them, they strive towards perfection in all domains of their lives, they tend to think in binary terms of being either perfect or a failure, and they are extremely hard on themselves, often leading to depression (Gallucci 242-243). Koivula and his colleagues support this assertion, suggesting that “individuals who are characterized by frequent cognitions about the attainment of ideal, perfectionistic standards, are more likely to experience negative emotions and heightened levels of anxiety and depression symptomatology, due to the existing discrepancy between ideal and current self/situation” (866). In other words, because unhealthy perfectionists can never live up to their own standards, and are frequently distracted in thinking about those
standards, they are likely to be anxious and depressed. Indeed, Koivula et al. found that “One of the few studies on perfectionism performed so far in the context of sport revealed that athletes who scored high in concern over mistakes, also reported more anxiety and negative thinking before competition, less self-confidence in sports, greater difficulty in concentrating, as well as negative reactions to mistakes” (866). Further, according to Lung Hung Chen, Ying Hwa Kee, and Ying-Mei Tsai, “…perfectionism was related to lower social support, poorer social interactions, and avoidance coping, which led to depressive symptoms” (190). Unhealthy perfectionism can result partially from overly specific and focused training which does not acknowledge the importance of a balanced life (Gallucci 242-243).

Gallucci points out that unhealthy perfectionism not only leaves the student vulnerable to depression but also actually inhibits progress and performance (242-243). Avi Besser, Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt support this assertion, writing, “perfectionists, relative to nonperfectionists, reported higher levels of negative affect when the evaluative aspects of the performance task were made highly salient” (304). Ballet teachers should take this finding very seriously because ballet students need to be able to succeed in situations in which they are being evaluated and judged (i.e. auditions). While it may seem that giving a neurotic perfectionist positive performance feedback would help them avoid the consequences of unhealthy perfectionism, in fact, Besser et al. found that perfectionists will feel bad about their ability and their performance regardless of how well they actually did or of what kind of feedback they received. Because of this, it seems that teachers should be aware of how students’ standards and expectations are developing and try to shape them in a healthy manner—while it is certainly expected, and
indeed essential, that ballet students set high standards for themselves, they must not be
couraged to set impossible standards or to be fundamentally dissatisfied with their
performance if there are any mistakes. In ballet technique, there will always be mistakes
and it will never be entirely perfect. This doesn’t mean that students shouldn’t strive for
perfection, but they must not be taught that they are fundamentally flawed if (and when)
they fail to achieve it. To instill that attitude in students is merely inviting neurotic
perfectionism. Instead, teachers should have high standards but also acknowledge effort
and improvement and encourage students to accept the inevitability of mistakes and
setbacks and be able to learn from them without having their self-concept shaken.

Neurotic perfectionism is also related to fear of failure. According to Möller, “In
the achievement motivation literature, fear of failure (FF) represents an avoidance motive
based on anticipatory shame and humiliation associated with failure (Atkinson, 1957).
More recent work has conceptualized fear of failure as a tendency to appraise threat and
feel anxious during situations that involve the possibility of failing” (239). This quality
can often be precipitated by the fear or belief that important others will lose interest or
affection if a mistake is made, and according to Möller, these beliefs have been “linked to
increased levels of self-neglect (e.g. giving up on themselves) and decreased levels of
self-affirmation (e.g. encouraging themselves), respectively” (248). Further, Black points
out that “Individuals who fear failure…effectively live their lives with a conditional or
deficient sense of self…accordingly, FF in children and youth should be strongly
associated with low self-esteem” (302). Thus, we can see that much like neurotic
perfection, fear of failure could have an extremely deleterious effect on a students’ ability
to flourish in ballet both as a technician and an artist. Because failure at some point along
the line is pretty much inevitable in ballet (almost no one is accepted at every single
audition or is good at every new step immediately), students who fear failure will be
constantly battling their ability to accept mistakes as part of the learning process. It is
easy to see how this could lead to self-handicapping as well—if you fear failure but are
engaged in a pursuit in which some degree of failure is basically inevitable, you might be
likely to simply stop trying in order not to have to deal with the possibility of failing.

While teachers cannot control the personality traits of their students, they can control how
they themselves respond to student setbacks and mistakes. If they are extremely critical
of or sarcastic about mistakes, or if they either implicitly or explicitly express that their
affection for or investment in the student is contingent upon the student not having
failures, students are probably more likely to fall into this kind of psychological trap.
Thus, once again this provides a lesson about the importance of teachers being aware of
the implicit and explicit messages they send, and the need for all parties (notably
teachers, students and parents) to accept mistakes as part of the learning process. Without
this acceptance, it will be very difficult for genuine learning (not to mention artistic
growth) to take place.

**Burnout**

Too much “tunnel vision” in training, as well as a highly perfectionistic mindset,
can also lead to burnout, a condition defined as “a malady of those with high levels of
achievement motivation, conscientiousness, and idealism, especially if their hard work is
devoted to pursuits that are unrewarding” resulting from “too much work for too long a
time with too little rest” (Gallucci 326). Indeed, Chen et al. suggest that perfectionism is
related to burnout, writing, “In conditions where athletes are expected to have a flawless
performance, it is likely to create stress for the athletes. Research has indicated that constant pressure from athletic participation may lead to physical/emotional exhaustion, lower self-efficacy, and uncaring attitude toward sport events” (190). Burnout is extremely deleterious to training, as it leads the sufferer to either drop out, stop working hard, or become depressed. If students are not allowed or encouraged to have a life outside of their ballet training, they become increasingly prone to this condition. Clearly, ballet is a field in which high levels of effort can be unrewarding (it is not a pursuit of those who need instant gratification!) and so teachers need to be especially aware of this problem in their students. Gallucci points out that burnout increases in athletes whose “coaches lacked empathy and were autocratic, critical, and preoccupied with winning” (332-333)—yet another reason why it is best if teachers try to avoid teaching in authoritarian, autocratic ways.

Gallucci also offers a good list of some of the causes of burnout. They include an imbalance between internal coping resources and environmental challenges, fatigue, anxiety, and depression, alienation from sources of social support, participation in activity because of perceived social pressure, coercive and authoritarian coaching practices, training for twelve months of the year, and boring practices (337). Further, Gustafsson and colleagues suggest that individual (as opposed to team) sports may carry a higher risk of burnout because athletes do not have the social support of teammates upon which to draw (21-22). A few of these issues may be of particular concern to ballet teachers. First of all, students who are attending boarding schools for dance are separated from their parents and friends outside of ballet, and that alienation from social support is a risk factor. Also, it is important that students only participate in training because they
want to, not because their parents, friends, or teachers are pressuring them to do so. Third, since ballet is not seasonal like many sports, many students do train twelve months of the year, which can be a source of burnout—it is important for teachers to allow students to take some time off throughout the year. Fourth, the idea that boring practices can lead to burnout suggests that it is important that the sometimes-monotonous routine of ballet class could benefit from variation from time to time. Finally, although ballet is taught in groups, it does ultimately come down to the individual, so teachers should be aware that the stresses may be compounded by a lack of social support. Jim and Ceci Taylor, in their book *The Psychology of Dance*, support most of these conjectures, adding a few more tips for preventing burnout. They include being sensitive to dancers’ physical and emotional condition, avoiding overtraining, making training fun, scheduling regular days off, providing consistent encouragement and positive reinforcement, opening lines of communication with parents and other significant people, allowing dancers to be involved in decision making, and seeking out professional help when needed (119).

The issue of overtraining should be of particular concern to teachers who work with young people because, according to Joel S. Brenner, “The risks of overuse are more serious in the pediatric/adolescent athlete for several reasons. The growing bones of the young athlete cannot handle as much stress as the mature bones of adults” (1243). Deborah Jowitt challenges teachers and training institutions to take into consideration the research on healthy training levels and burnout that has become so widely used and acknowledged in sports, demanding, “Is there dance training brave enough to strike the balance between promoting the intensity and volume of work statistically shown to achieve peak performance and avoiding injury?” (38). Implicit in her question is the
suggestion that perhaps dancers need not take ballet class six to seven days a week, twelve months a year, which brings up the questions of scheduling and cross-training that will be addressed later. Further, in the book *Fit to Dance*, we read, “Dance is sadly lagging behind sport in its appreciation of the importance of scheduling rest and relaxation…in order to prevent injury, burn out, and depression of the immune system” (155). It is heartening to see other voices in the dance community looking to sports psychology and physiology research to inform healthy, safe ballet training, as this is one of my major projects here.

It is interesting to note the effect that a culture of normalizing injury can have. According to Timothy Jon Curry in his article “A Little Pain Never Hurt Anyone: Athletic Career Socialization and the Normalization of Sports Injury,” this was very much a part of athletic culture when he wrote it in 1993. He profiles a high school and college wrestler in order to show the extent to which injury is considered a normal part of life and thus not worth considering. Curry points out that in many situations, it is the athletes who are considered to have the most potential who suffer from this the most—he writes, “On one occasion, Sam maintained the wrestler’s crouch position for several hours, normally an impossible task for a pre-adolescent…on another occasion, Sam was forced to run five miles with bags of sand in a knapsack…Such techniques were not used with all the boys, but mostly with those the coach believed had special talent…at this young age, then, the experience of pain became associated with motivation to achieve excellence in sports and with special treatment as a favored athlete” (279). We can see this kind of thing happening in ballet, as well, as teachers pressure young, talented students to take increasingly heavy loads of classes and to ignore nagging injuries or pain
that might get in the way of their ability to maintain that schedule. Students are also sometimes punished if they do not keep quiet about their injuries. For example, a male dancer from the Paris Opéra Ballet School says that “pupils as young as eight had been sent home for good after complaining of persistent pain, even though outside consultants later found stress fractures” (Webster). This kind of culture is one that leads to not only injury but also burnout and short careers. This all is to suggest that it is important for teachers to be very aware of the culture they are creating, and realize that from a young age children will internalize that culture and may put themselves at risk later if they have not grown up with an understanding of when it is necessary to pay attention to injury.

Teachers should be cognizant of all of these factors that go into burnout and preventing it, and allow students the freedom to have full lives that are less conducive to burnout. In my survey, only 35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were encouraged to have a life outside of ballet. Further, whether or not students were encouraged to have a life outside of ballet was strongly correlated with school type (p=.0004): only 26% students in non-recreational schools (serious students) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, meaning that 74% of students in serious schools in my survey were discouraged from living full lives. However, in the long run encouraging students to have interests other than ballet will allow them to continue to work at their top potential and progress the most.

**Harmonious vs. Obsessive Passion**

Training with “tunnel vision” can also lead to problems because it encourages the development of ballet as an “obsessive passion” rather than a “harmonious passion.” Passion itself can be defined as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like,
that they find importance, and in which they invest time and energy…becomes a central feature of a person’s identity and serves to define the person” (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Vallerand and Miquelon 259). Harmonious passion, on one hand, is “a motivational force that leads a person to engage in that activity willingly and engenders a sense of volition and personal endorsement about pursuing the activity” and is characterized by a sense of choice in pursuing the activity, a feeling that the activity reflects things that a person likes about him or herself, harmony between the activity and other aspects of a person’s life, and the ability to drop out of the activity if it is no longer fulfilling (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Vallerand and Miquelon 251). Obsessive passion, in contrast, is defined as “a motivational force that pushes a person toward an activity” and is characterized by the inability to imagine one’s life without the activity and emotional dependence upon it, the understanding of one’s identity as completely defined by the activity, and conflicts between the activity and other aspects of life (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Vallerand and Miquelon 251). This kind of passion is damaging not only because it makes it extremely difficult for the dancer to drop out of ballet even if it becomes a negative aspect of her life, but also because it can lead to higher levels of chronic injury (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Vallerand and Miquelon 260-261), perhaps because obsessively passionate dancers refuse to take care of injuries the way they need to (particularly in terms of resting the injury). Obsessive passion can be avoided to a certain extent, however: for example, students are less likely to develop obsessive passion if they are taught by an autonomy supportive teacher and if they understand that they always have a choice in regards to engaging in the activity (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Vallerand and Miquelon 259). Further, students can develop harmonious passion by remaining involved in aspects of
their lives outside of ballet and ensuring that ballet training works in concert with those other aspects of their lives.

All of these aspects that can make “tunnel-vision” training a problem suggest that it is essential for teachers and schools to support students in their endeavors outside of ballet and encourage them to remain involved in other aspects of their lives. This does not mean that schools can’t require of their students the amount of time necessary to become a successful dancer, but rather that schools could make reasonable accommodations for having a life outside of ballet (for example, encouraging students to a week or two off during the summer when they do things unrelated to ballet). Further, teachers and schools should be explicit about encouraging (and expecting) students to continue to be successful in school and emphasize the importance of developing intellectual capacities. Having this kind of environment will help to avoid neurotic perfectionism, obsessive passion, and burnout and will thus produce happier, healthier, and ultimately more skilled dancers.
Chapter 11: Intellectual Growth, Mental Skills Training, and Mental Toughness

Since ballet has traditionally been taught similarly to vocational training (Lakes 21), with a product, efficiency oriented value system, there has typically been an anti-intellectual atmosphere in the dance classroom. Students have been asked to be quiet, passive vessels for information rather than active participants in their own learning. However, some teachers point out the importance of developing intelligent dancers who are not afraid to ask questions (Warren 269). These teachers suggest that intelligent dancers will not only progress faster because they can engage in their own learning but they will also be able to learn from other students and self-correct (Warren 56). Further, it is very important that coaches and teachers help students develop their minds as much as their bodies: students need to learn how to control their anxiety and arousal, develop individual pre-performance routines, engage in constructive self-talk, and learn how to mentally prepare themselves for performance (Gallucci 67). It seems that dancers are often deprived of the kinds of psychological resources athletes receive—for example, Young-Eun Noh, Tony Morris, and Mark Andersen, in their study of stress and coping in Korean ballet dancers, write, “Comparison of Korean dancers and athletes is of interest. Park found that only 5% of the coping of Korean national athletes related to dysfunctional behavior, whereas 65% of dancers in this study used a range of dysfunctional behaviors to cope with stress….Korean athletes used mental training (e.g. imagery training, meditation, self-talk, positive thoughts, goal setting) for some of their main coping strategies. Only two of the dancers in this study (10%) mentioned mental training techniques for stress management” (132). This void in training could be
remedied to allow dancers to more healthily and effectively cope with the inevitable pressures and setbacks of their chosen careers. This has been suggested by some writers in the dance field—Wulff, for example, writes that dancers must especially have skills that help them manage self-esteem issues, concentrate better, and handle stage fright, setbacks, negative reviews, and more (164).

In sports, it has become increasingly common for athletes to be trained in mental skills, and I wonder why this trend has not been embraced in the dance world. James E. Loehr wrote the book “Mental Toughness Training for Sports” in 1986, when sports may have been more at the point dance is now in terms of training athletes to be psychologically strong. He expresses frustration with the lack of training in that area at the time, asking, “If the mental skills, by their own admission, represent at least 50% of the process, why do coaches and athletes spend only 5-10% of their time working on these skills?” (8). He suggests that athletes must find and learn to trigger their “ideal performance state,” in which they are “physically relaxed, mentally calm, low anxiety, energized, optimistic, enjoyment, effortless, automatic, alert, mentally focused, self-confident, in control” (Loehr 27), a process which he believes requires the athletes to engage in mental training just as they would participate in physical training to learn a new physical skill.

One of the aspects that Loehr finds particularly important is the way a person views pressure and challenges. He argues that it is essential to have the ability to view every difficult situation as a challenge rather than a threat, because feeling threatened leads to mental and physiological responses (such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, trembling, heightened fear/anger, braced and tight muscles) that are antithetical to
optimum athletic response (39-40), a phenomenon I also discussed earlier in regards to the “fight or flight” response to stress. He argues that athletes must learn to reframe situations and deal productively with pressure, and outlines a plan for identifying one’s ideal performance state, refocusing negative energy into positive energy, learning to thrive in challenging situations and reduce pressure-inducing thought patterns (i.e. “my career is on the line today”), and set short term, intermediate, and long term goals for oneself. Loehr also discusses goal setting in the context of mental skills, writing “Much of star athletes’ ability to rebound from defeat comes from an intense focus on long-term goals and aspirations. At the same time, both sports stars and their coaches are keenly aware that the road to long-term success is paved with small achievements” (132). These suggestions and anecdotes suggest that teachers and students could work together to establish goals that allow them to keep an eye on the big picture while also having small victories along the way.

Loehr also offers words of advice and encouragement for learning to deal with setbacks, writing “You will, and probably already have, experienced considerable frustration, disappointment, and doubt. The key is to know and understand that it’s coming and that it’s a necessary part of the process. So don’t run from it” (77). Ultimately, he argues that “the benchmark of all great competitors is how they respond emotionally to problems and crisis: they become challenged, inspired, and more determined” (Loehr 103), and aims to create a program of mental skills training that allows athletes to be consistent in their psychological skills. While it is out of the scope of my research to argue that his program of mental skills training is or is not the best or most effective one, the intent of it, and his understanding of the importance of training
mentally as well as physically, are essential. Often, dance students have technique classes ad infinitum, but are never taught how to handle the inevitable rejections, injuries, or other setbacks that they face, and it seems that this is a major oversight in the traditional training model. Mental skills must be taught and developed just as physical skills are—although some people are likely born with extraordinary resilience and optimism, most of us have to practice those skills, and that is something that ballet training can and should give its students.

**Mental Toughness/Hardiness**

The ultimate goal of mental skills training is to develop an individual who is “mentally tough” or has the quality of “hardiness.” This quality is extremely important if an athlete is to perform well: indeed, Hanton et al. write, “…mental toughness has been reported to be the most important psychological characteristic in achieving performance excellence” (489). For the purposes of this discussion, I will use mental toughness and hardiness interchangeably, although some authors do make conceptual distinctions between the two. In the article “Hardiness and the Competitive Trait Anxiety Response,” Hanton, Neil, and Evans generally describe hardiness as,

composed of …commitment, control, and challenge…Commitment is the ability to be able to persist at whatever one is doing; believing that one is capable of achieving the goal, even when stresses rise to precarious levels. Control is the ability to feel and act as if one is influential…challenge is the belief that change rather than stability is normal in life and that the anticipation of changes represent interesting incentives in growth rather than threats to security (Kobasa et al., 1982). Therefore, when confronted with stressful changes, disruptions, or failures, “hardy” individuals react not only with a renewed attempt to control the situation, but also appraise the experience as interesting and worthwhile (commitment), and concentrate on the growth in knowledge and wisdom that is taking place (challenge). (168)
This provides a useful construct for the kinds of qualities we would want to develop in dancers in terms of mental skills. It is important to note that most if not all of the descriptions of mental toughness include confidence and self-efficacy as fundamental traits of a mentally tough competitor. For example, Crust and Azadi write, “According to Clough et al. … With a high sense of self-belief and an unshakeable faith that they can control their own destiny, these individuals can remain relatively unaffected by competition or adversity (p. 38)” (44). The necessity for students to have self-confidence and belief in their ability to achieve their goals directly contradicts the breaking down strategy of much traditional ballet training.

Mentally tough athletes exhibit many different types of skills and personality traits. Loehr reports, for example, that these athletes are self motivated and self directed (i.e. intrinsically motivated), positive but realistic, in control of their emotions, calm and relaxed under fire, determined, mentally alert and focused, doggedly self-confident, and fully responsible (he is “aware that his destiny as an athlete is in his own hands”) (11-12). In a ballet student, these qualities could take different forms. Clearly, intrinsic motivation is important and means that the student is dancing out of a love for dance, not out of a desire to please a parent or teacher or prove herself better than others. Further, being positive but realistic means that students (and the teachers who influence them) can be realistic about their prospects (for example, a student with flat feet should not expect to get into a major ballet company), but still positive and encouraging. Ballet students are frequently “under fire” in assessment situations such as auditions, so learning to be calm and relaxed in those situations is extremely important in order to allow them to perform their best. The suggestion that the athlete must be “aware that his destiny as an athlete is
in his own hands” is interesting because it counteracts the traditional sense that the teacher controls the students’ training and holds the key to a career. Loehr’s assertion of the importance of this responsibility and sense of agency suggests, however, that students should be given a certain degree of responsibility for their training and improvement and also supports the importance of autonomy-supportive training.

One significant skill of mentally tough performers seems to be the ability to interpret mental and physical symptoms of anxiety and nervousness as facilitative rather than debilitative. For example, Mellalieu et al. (in the article “Self-Confidence as a Mediator of the Relationship between Competitive Anxiety Intensity and Interpretation”) write, “Specifically, within the elite group, it was observed that negative thoughts and feelings would activate learned strategies, such as rationalization and relaxation, which block out negative thoughts and images, replacing them with positive ones. This would result in the elite athlete’s perception that felt symptoms would be under his or her control, allowing for a facilitative interpretation, which in turn would increase self-confidence” (264). Since self-confidence is such an essential part of mental toughness, it seems that the skill to interpret these kinds of symptoms as facilitative would be very important as a part of mental skills training.

Above all else, the goal of mental toughness is consistency: Loehr writes, “The mentally tough competitor is consistent in his performance precisely because he is consistent psychologically” (10). This psychological consistency comes from self-confidence in the face of setbacks, tools for dealing with stress and pressure, a sense of long term and short term goals, unshakeable focus, and more, and will allow the dancer to count on her performance being consistent regardless of the situation, an assurance any
dancer (especially anyone who has ever “choked” in a high-pressure situation) would love to have.

**Intellectual Content in the Ballet Class**

Beyond training the mind to help with ballet technique itself, could we not only encourage dancers to explore other intellectual avenues outside of ballet class but also understand that ballet class itself need not be anti-intellectual? One critic of traditional education writes, “We need to acknowledge that we are first and foremost embodied, and furthermore that mind pervades our corporeal existence” (Doddington and Hilton 61). Just as traditional schooling has neglected the body, traditional ballet education has neglected the mind, and this is just as grievous an error. There is no reason that ballet teachers cannot incorporate dance history, anatomy, art history, music theory, and other intellectual disciplines into ballet class so that ballet does not become isolated from, or worse, placed in opposition to, other aspects of a students’ life. In fact, incorporating other disciplines into ballet class could be highly beneficial to ballet training itself. Jessica Wilson, a ballet teacher, agrees, saying, “I am aware that many students in the U.S.A. are not typically exposed to much more than technique when it comes to dance training. But it is a well-rounded education in dance - not just dance technique - that leads to a special passion and intimacy with the art form.” Moreover, physics professor Kenneth Laws has written several books on the physics of ballet, adding a new dimension to the possibilities for intellectual activity within ballet. He writes, “Dancers are increasingly recognizing that they can benefit by understanding the framework in which human body movement must exist—a framework based on universal physical principles that apply to all moving objects” (Laws 6). Further, he explains that traditional ballet
training has relied upon three central ways of learning: watching the teacher, watching others, and trial and error, but that a useful fourth tool is understanding the way that movement works (Laws 11-12). Larry Long, one of the teachers profiled in The Art of Teaching Ballet, seems to agree with this view, saying, “The most talented are not always those with the most physical facility. They’re the ones who want to know how and why something is done, rather than just dancing blindly, aimlessly” (Long qtd. in Warren 155).

Indeed, most of the master teachers profiled in The Art of Teaching Ballet seem to agree on the importance of integrating other fields into ballet training. For instance, Darvash “prides herself on cultivating thinking students, ones who use their bodies in an intelligent way” (Warren 81), while Sklyanskaya emphasizes the importance of dancers being educated in all types of art, art history, and more (Warren 189). Almost every single teacher profiled emphasized the crucial importance of musicality and the need to teach that within ballet class. Further, the teachers emphasized the importance of incorporating an understanding of human anatomy into the classroom. In all, it is certainly possible and definitely beneficial for teachers to try to incorporate other types of intellectual stimulation into ballet class so that we nurture educated, thinking dancers.
Chapter 12: Training Efficiently, Imagery, Somatics

As I have just discussed, it seems that students need to have a life outside of ballet in order to become mature artists and fulfilled people. However, the fact remains that ballet is extremely challenging and competitive. Therefore, in order to both train highly technically proficient dancers and also allow them to have lives outside of ballet, we need to train dancers efficiently. One of the ways teachers can increase the efficiency of training is through the use of imagery and conceptual teaching styles: ballet teacher Tyler Walters, for example, believes that ballet must be taught as “movement and concept based – not position and rule based.” The idea of concept and image-focused training is fairly new, but nonetheless it is exciting territory for teachers to explore.

The effectiveness of imagery in improving performance has been shown not only anecdotally but also scientifically: “in a controlled study of dancers, imagery resulted in a significant improvement in technique...[and] has been shown to enhance performance of both ballistic movement (e.g. battement) and sustained movement (e.g. arabesque)” (Anderson (ed), Hanrahan 121). Many other studies, as well as anecdotal evidence, have shown that imagery can be an extremely effective and efficient tool in athletic and dance training. Kim Vaccaro, in her article “Teaching Strategies: The application of found images in dance and sport,” offers a good list of the benefits of using imagery in ballet training, including:

- Correcting alignment,
- Increasing kinesthetic awareness and movement creativity,
- Making it easier for the body to do many things at once by encapsulating the instructions into one metaphor,
- Saving energy for the “real work of training”
Further, Vaccaro points out that “imagined events produce innervation in muscles that is similar to that produced by the actual execution” and argues that “alone, relaxation and/or abdominal strength did not improve posture; rather…it was the interaction of these with ideokinetic imagery and kinesthetic awareness exercises that caused postural change.” This suggests that imagery can be a highly useful tool in the ballet teacher’s arsenal.

However, not all images are equally effective. Vaccaro offers some helpful tips for creating strong images. First, images need to have an understanding of the intention of movement and utilize characteristics of the movement such as the direction of energy flow. They should be precise and specific and encourage correct execution of the movement. Vaccaro also gives an eight-step process for creating an effective image:

1. Determine what parts of the body are moving,
2. Determine which directions different parts of the body are moving,
3. Identify a positive and specific goal for the image,
4. Identify desired movement quality and dynamics,
5. Find an existing form of energy appropriate to the desired movement dynamics,
6. Determine where the image is located in relationship to the body (within the body, viewed from above, behind, etc),
7. Determine desired direction of energy flow,
8. Create image with energy directed towards a specific image.

These steps can help teachers to create the best images to speed up their students’ progress.

While it is good for teachers to be able to create images for their students, it is equally important to teach students how to use imagery on their own: Taylor argues that the individual use of mental visualization can improve self-confidence, help control intensity, increase concentration, and facilitate skill acquisition (90). Teachers can lead by example in terms of using imagery and encourage students to develop their own imagery. Teachers also can give students some tools for using imagery effectively,
including helping them to develop imagery control (not imagining mistakes and
immediately replacing negative images with positive ones) and encouraging them to
imagine themselves in as close to realistic situations as possible (Taylor 90-91).

Ideokinesis, a somatic technique, is basically this process: it places participants in
positions of “constructive rest” in which they visualize themselves performing various
activities. Loehr also suggests the utility of meditative practice, which “improves one’s
ability to relax and to focus, and …[is] a powerful source of positive energy” (130).

Another tool to help make training as efficient as possible is the use of somatics,
which, in the broadest sense of the word, can be described as the “‘art and science of the
inner-relational process between awareness, biological function, and environment’ all
understood as being part of a synergistic whole” (Vaccaro). Leonard Cruz, a modern
dance teacher and somatic practitioner, argues that, “Somatics for any kind of movement
training is important because it gives the student dancer the possibility to find his or
herself both body, mind, and center-wise.” There are many different types of somatic
techniques, far too numerous to name here, but I will discuss a few that seem particularly
applicable to ballet training and useful for students and/or teachers. More research would
be needed to discern whether it is enough to have teachers use ideas from these
techniques to give benefits, or whether students must study them individually, but I
suspect that both of these are useful in different degrees or in different ways.

One somatic technique that could be helpful for dancers is the Alexander
Technique. The Alexander Technique is basically a method of retraining the body out of
habitual patterns and into a situation of increased awareness and better use of the body.
The Alexander Technique teaches that the self is a psychophysical unity that habituates
itself to certain movement patterns that cannot be changed through feeling because of “unreliable sensory appreciation” (Bates and Nettl-Fiol (eds) 104). Thus, the Alexander Technique teaches that a person must learn to inhibit automatic reactions to stimuli in order to direct their movement in a healthier way (Bates and Nettl-Fiol (eds) 104). The emphasis on working with a process rather than towards an immediate goal (which Alexander Technique practitioners believe leads to misuse) could be particularly useful for dancers, who tend to be highly goal oriented. Rebecca Nettl-Fiol points out the difficulty for some dancers in learning to use the Alexander Technique because, she says, “In dance, we are in the business of doing, and Alexander Technique is hosted in the idea of non-doing” (102). However, she believes that the principles of the Alexander Technique can be very useful in helping dancers to release unnecessary tension (119) and increasing awareness of movement (110). While the Alexander Technique is best taught one-on-one (and one-on-one training could be very beneficial for dancers with significant postural problems), she says its principles can be useful in ballet class as well (106).

Another somatic technique that could potentially be useful for dancers is the Feldenkrais technique, which “uses simple movements and verbal cues from the instructor to help participants gain awareness of their bodies” and emphasizes “grace and coordination” (Holmes et al). This technique could be particularly helpful for dancers struggling to increase their kinesthetic awareness and the fluidity of their movements. Cruz, who has worked extensively with Laban Movement Analysis, says that the study of techniques like this helps dancers “to analyze your thoughts, how you’re doing the movement, other people’s approach to the movement, [and] how you can find other images in the movement to make it richer.”
There are many somatic techniques, and more research is needed to determine which are the most beneficial for ballet dancers and where potential lies for incorporating somatic techniques into dance training. Generally speaking, W. Oliver, in his article “Body Image in the Dance Class…” argues that for dancers, somatics can increase kinesthetic (as opposed to visual) awareness, help dancers learn to better communicate movement, and help students to become more internally centered (5). Cruz also says that somatic training can provide “ways of efficiently warming up and strengthening the body to be able to do what you need to do on pointe, for your core, for your extension, and alignment.” Further, through the idea that the body is intelligent and the teaching of kinesthetic awareness, somatic techniques can help students become more effective at self-correction (Shapiro (ed), Fortin 57). In general, it seems that the field of somatics is fertile ground for ballet teachers and merits further exploration. This is something that might be particularly useful to incorporate into teacher training programs in order to give prospective teachers some information about the somatic options available and allow them to concentrate on one or two.

Ballet teachers can also explore various cross-training options with their students. Cross-training can not only prevent injury by strengthening muscles that may not be used in ballet class and thus balancing the body, but it can also improve training efficiency by strengthening the core and thus better preparing students’ bodies to progress. Further, cardiovascular cross-training is important for dancers because a traditional ballet class does not really build up cardiovascular endurance due to its intermittent nature. Because a student in a ballet class would only be dancing continuously for a minute at the most, they are not cardiovascularly prepared to get through a several minute long variation and
are then less able to dance those variations both well and safely. It is interesting that ballet is a form that has not picked up on this, while most sports have long incorporated cross-training—indeed, Betty Tate-Pineau writes, “In gymnastics, it is a given that you do two hours of conditioning and then you go work on your technical” (Betty Tate-Pineau qtd. in Jowitt et al. 88). There are many methods of cross training which may be effective, and I will touch on a few of them here.

The Pilates method has become commonly used among dancers. Developed by Joseph Pilates in the early 20th century, it focuses on increasing core strength and generally strengthening and stretching the entire body. One of the things that make Pilates particularly attractive for dancers is that it creates strength without developing bulky muscles. Further, it can help dancers learn to move in the most efficient way possible (Holmes et al). It also emphasizes kinesthetic awareness and the mind-body connection. Pilates is an especially useful method because it bridges the line between being a somatic technique and a strength-building one: it both strengthens the body and provides athletic cross training and also increases the mind-body connection, taking a holistic view of the body.

Another system that is similar to Pilates in some ways is Gyrotonics/Gyrokinesis, which was developed by Juliu Horvath, a Romanian former ballet dancer who created the system while recovering major injuries. At first, he called his method “Yoga for Dancers,” and then created the standalone Gyrotonic Expansion System®, which uses equipment that makes us of weights and pulleys (Van Patten). He also kept an element of the original “Yoga for Dancers” in the creation of Gyrokinesis®, which does not use the equipment (Van Patten). Gyrotonic® exercises emphasize the natural bend and spiral of
the body, and, like Pilates, can be very useful both in terms of mind-body centering and awareness and in terms of stretching and strengthening. However, it is different, according to Van Patten, in its emphasis on circular movement, as well as de-emphasis on muscular effort. While Gyrotonic® is fairly new and still relatively obscure, many ballet dancers swear by it and some ballet schools, notably the LINES Ballet School in San Francisco, have made it a major part of their curriculum. On the LINES Ballet School website, there is an explanation of the benefits of the system, saying, “As detailed on their website, the trainers at San Francisco GYROTONIC® focus on circular movement that can endlessly recycle energy. This creates a consistent and fluid flow of energy that aids in nurturing and strengthening all the systems of the body. By pairing this understanding of movement with the trainers’ knowledge of dance, students are given the tools to completely transform their bodies and their dance careers.”

Dancers can also benefit from engaging in low-impact cardiovascular activity: since ballet class is so stop and start, it does not develop the kind of cardiovascular endurance that, say, running does and thus does not necessarily prepare students to do some of the highly athletic choreography that is being developed today. Thus, it is useful for students to engage in cardiovascular cross training, as long as it does not become excessive and does not put additional strain on the joints (which is why an activity like running could be harmful for dancers). Some dance schools have begun to also incorporate cardiovascular training into their ballet classes. For example, Karen Van Ulzen, in her article on the Australian Ballet School, explains, “The ABS now includes what it calls an ‘active warm-up’ as part of the daily class, partly as a way of teaching pupils how to warm-up safely, partly to increase their aerobic fitness. The first 10 to 15
minutes consist of light cardiovascular exercises, which build in intensity until the pupils’ heart rates are similar to that when performing *petit allegro*. This is followed by movements to mobilize the joints and a few exercises to help switch on the mind and muscles” (23). Another study looked at the effects of having dancers participate in a modified ballet class (with longer phrases and shorter breaks) and found, unsurprisingly, that they did better in terms of heart rate and blood lactate levels with a three and a half minute piece of choreography after undertaking this training. Because the literature on effective practice suggests that practice is most effective when it emulates real world conditions, incorporating cardiovascular training into the framework of ballet class and vocabulary provides a promising avenue for teachers to explore. It wouldn’t necessarily require teachers creating a whole system for training, but could start simply with choreographing a two to three minute grand allegro that students would do at the end of class. Cardiovascular conditioning could also be a benefit of using set classes as part of training—if all of the students know the combinations, there will be much less stopping and starting: indeed, one of the students in my survey reported, “one of my teachers used set classes and it was wonderful for strength building and stamina. It was…an endurance class.” While I wouldn’t advocate always using set classes, having them as part of a curriculum could be useful for this reason. Overall, incorporating various kinds of cross-training into a students’ regimen will allow them to “tire less, concentrate better, and be less likely to get injured” (Brinson and Dick 145), which is a compelling reason to try to do so.

Additionally, a strong working knowledge of anatomy can not only prevent injury by teaching students to use their bodies responsibly, but also allow students to progress
faster because they are not trying to force their bodies into painful or unsound positions. Laws sums this point up nicely when he writes, “For all in the dance world, a knowledge of anatomical limitations and constraints on human body movement can help prevent the kinds of injuries that interrupt or end many promising dance careers” (14). It was particularly noteworthy that almost every teacher profiled in The Art of Teaching Ballet pointed out the importance of teaching anatomy and teaching in anatomically sound ways. Darvash, for example, is critical of the Russian teaching method with which she grew up because it forces turnout and thus impedes movement (Warren 82-83). Further, she believes that anatomically sound teaching can allow students to succeed who otherwise might not: she is “extremely proud of the fact that, with her method, which stresses careful, anatomically correct use of the body, she has helped many students with less than ideal physiques overcome their problems and become professional dancers” (Warren 85). Thus, this focus on anatomy is not only a responsible way of teaching (because it can prevent injury) but it also can allow passionate students to succeed even if they do not have the “ballet body type,” an achievement to which all ballet teachers should aspire.

It would be great if teachers were not only cognizant of anatomy in their teaching styles but also made a point of teaching students about anatomy. If students understand the way that their bodies work, they will be able to take autonomy in making physically sound decisions for themselves: they won’t be wedded to an aesthetic ideal but rather to an anatomical understanding of how ballet technique functions. Further, students will be able to learn more efficiently because they will be able to visualize the ways in which their bodies work. Ballet teacher Julie Walters cites “Empower[ing] dancers with
knowledge of anatomy and how to effectively use motor skills (muscle movement skills) to hone and improve their technique” as one of her top three principles of teaching—this is a goal that should have a major role in progressive pedagogical styles. Every ballet classroom should have in it a skeleton and a picture of the muscles and bones (Warren 30)—this will allow teachers an easy way to illustrate anatomical concepts. It can also help teachers demonstrate technical ideas: for example, if a teacher has a skeleton handy, she can show the importance of keeping the hip down and the leg turned out in a side développé because of the anatomical impossibility of lifting a turned-in leg high à la seconde.
Chapter 13: Recognizing each student as an individual, Competition, and Cohesion

“Look at dancers holistically and as more of human beings than human bodies” (student)

In order to support students in optimum psychological, technical, and artistic growth, it is of paramount importance that teachers attend to the individuality of each student. Obviously, in a big school it is impossible for a teacher to be simultaneously teaching towards the individual needs and goals of each student. However, there are ways in which teachers can feasibly acknowledge the unique needs of individuals while still teaching efficiently. First, teachers can recognize that while all students may not have the same goals, they all deserve equal attention: just because a student wants to go into modern dance, or doesn’t want to go into dance at all, or wants to go to college for dance does not mean that they should be treated any differently in class from a student aiming for a professional ballet career. Indeed, when asked what advice they would give to their high school ballet teacher, many students said that they would ask the teachers not to ignore students who wanted to go to college or did not want to dance professionally and to become aware of the options other than professional ballet. One student, when asked what advice she would give her high school ballet teacher, wrote, “Treat those who want to dance for the fun of it with just as much respect as you treat those who dance because they want to make a career out of it.” Another wrote that the worst aspect of her training was that “when my teacher found out that I was leaving [for college], she didn’t pay as much attention to me in class. She did not think a university was an option if I wanted to be a professional dancer.” Students reported that teachers did not respect those goals and did not know what the options were. Demonstrating a contrary philosophy, ballet teacher Katie Wakeford cites “Recognizing and respecting
each student’s individual strengths and personalizing my pedagogy to meet her/his needs” as one of her top three principles of teaching. Teachers who try to be aware of students’ goals can most effectively advise students on how many classes to take, what kinds of classes to take, etc. This will allow each student to use her ballet training to her advantage rather than being funneled into a mechanical, factory-like system that assumes all students want the same thing.

Evidence also does not support the systems of tracking that exist at many professional ballet schools. The problem is not with having separate tracks, but rather with the way that students are funneled into them: students who some teacher decides (often at age seven or eight) have potential are put into an “intensive” track where they receive attention, more classes, and training with an eye towards a professional career (along with the increased pressure and time commitment that comes from that), while students who a teacher deems to have the wrong body type, not enough talent, etc., are pushed into a “recreational” track, in which they are offered fewer classes, little to no career guidance or encouragement towards a professional dance career, and less personalized attention. While it makes sense for there to be options for recreational students to take fewer or less serious classes, I believe that tracking decisions should always be made by the students themselves. Ballet teacher M’Liss Dorrance cites “feeling that I was not valued enough as a potential dancer to receive attention or corrections from a teacher” as the worst aspect of her dance training, and it seems that a lot of students feel that way. A teacher cannot infallibly judge which students have passion, which students want it the most, who will work hard, or who will shine onstage. As Darvash says, “[ballet schools] have absolutely no humanity sometimes...How can
you have a student—a girl with faith, dreams, and artistry—and just throw her out because she grew too tall or didn’t grow tall enough? There are no centimeters that can measure talent!” (Warren 29-30). This is an inspiring quote demonstrating the kind of attitude that advocates seeing students as individuals with feelings and possibilities, not just “good” or “bad” bodies.

It is a common misconception that teachers have to tell students early, and in no uncertain terms, whether or not they have the potential to succeed in the ballet world. The idea behind this is that it is kinder to be honest with a student early on than allow them to continue to believe that they have a chance. However, it is possible to be both honest and kind. It would be unkind to allow a student with flat feet to believe that she could be in a major ballet company. But it would also be unkind to tell that student to quit, or relegate her to a recreational track, or ignore her in class because she does not have “potential.” In doing so, a teacher is not only hurtful to the student but also does a disservice to the dance world by implicitly or explicitly telling a student that just because she will not be in a major ballet company, there is no place for her in dance. Instead, teachers need to educate themselves about the options available to students and present them not as “cop-out” options, but as legitimate choices. By giving students many options and not writing them off just because they may not have the ideal feet or body, teachers can open the door for these students, if they are dedicated and passionate, to find a niche in which they can succeed. By writing those students off, teachers can not only deprive them of an empowering and dignified dance experience, but also deny the art form a person who could end up being a ground-breaking performer or choreographer, despite her lack of “perfect” feet.
Competition and Cohesion in the Ballet School

The issue of competition within the ballet school is one that has not been widely addressed by dance scholars; yet it is essential to any discussion of dance pedagogy. Ultimately, while competition might indeed motivate students to work hard, there are compelling reasons why cohesion should be encouraged and cultivated. Further, the potential benefits of increased group cohesion and decreased competition among ballet students outweigh the motivating effects of competition and rivalry.

There has not been much written on this topic in the field of dance and dance pedagogy research, with the exception of two texts: Emotionally Intelligent Ballet Training: Facilitating Emotional Intelligence in Vocational Dance Training, by Thom Hecht, and The Student Dancer: Emotional Aspects of the Teaching and Learning of Dance, by Julia Buckroyd. While both of these books do touch upon the issue of competition and cohesion, neither focuses on it specifically. The nature of traditional ballet education may help to explain why not much has been written about cohesion in ballet. Historically, ballet teachers have been focused on reproducing skills rather than concerning themselves with the emotional needs of their students, and students are expected to be “silent and obedient conformist[s]” (Buckroyd 116). One teacher quoted in Hecht’s book says, “When I was a ballet student, I had a lot of times when I was unhappy. You weren’t expected to feel, and you weren’t expected to do anything other than what you were told to do” (97). This quote poignantly sums up my definition of traditional ballet education and pedagogy. Hecht writes about the effect of this type of training (drawing on his experience in ballet schools in the UK), saying, “this impersonal approach does reflect the common pedagogical master-apprentice relationship model in
ballet education, which suppresses the emotional needs of students; these are stigmatized as unwanted by-products in the education of developing dance artists, who should be devoted to a pedagogy of ‘drill and skill’” (37). In this model of ballet training, competition is generally viewed as a positive force for motivation. We can see this historically looking at Sondra Forsyth’s 1966 study of relationships within a ballet company. She writes,

> Each class, rehearsal, and performance can be viewed as a competition between the dancers for praise and recognition by the teacher and other dancers… Classes, rehearsals, and performances, as competitions, function also to establish rankings within the company hierarchy… in the ballet company, it is important that friendships not undermine the competition for excellence… So in the ballet, norms against friendship may be explicit… various devises are used to discourage friendships. Talking is not permitted in class, except when it is absolutely necessary to facilitate the group practice.

Here, we see the historical precedent for discouraging friendship and encouraging rivalry in the ballet company or classroom. Teachers and dancers themselves traditionally see competition as a way to push people to work harder and achieve more.

> I don’t want to suggest that competition cannot play a role in encouraging people to work harder. In fact, my interviews with female ballet students suggest that competition was a motivating force in their experiences, although they seemed ambivalent as to whether the strain of competition was worth it. One dancer said, “[the school] loved cultivating [rivalry], I think, because it makes better dancers in the end I think, or they think it does, because, I mean, you push yourself a lot,” while another student said, “I constantly had to uphold my position… so I always had to make sure I was doing more than the other person.” Another dancer spoke about the competition in terms of the pain and injury the dancers would push through in order to not lose status in the school hierarchy. She seems ambivalent about the utility of this, saying “One girl
has…in her foot the bones are deteriorating because she’s danced through so many injuries, I mean, it’s just, what price are you going to pay to get on top?” Ultimately, through these quotes it is obvious that competition does function to push some students to work harder (although other students said that it was so stressful they ended up burning out). Generally speaking, I want to argue that while it is true that students may work hard in a competitive environment, that is not necessarily the best way to motivate students. On the contrary, couldn’t teachers create a collaborative learning environment will allow students to push themselves both technically and artistically?

There has been some recent growth in the field of ballet pedagogy that has taken into account psychological research. Buckroyd points out that in some sectors, there has been a shift from seeing teacher merely as “a former dancer whose sole concern is with transmitting the aesthetic heritage that she embodies…” as evidenced by the growth in anatomy/physiology training as well as psychological training for teachers (71). This is a positive shift that is likely helping dance students have better experiences in their ballet training.

Before discussing the studies on sports psychology in the field of cohesion, it is important to define what cohesion is. Generally speaking, cohesion is the degree to which a group stays together and functions as a harmonious whole (Silva and Stevens (eds), Stevens 291). Cohesion can be split into two dimensions—task cohesion, which is an individual’s adherence to a group task or the “degree to which team members and individuals reach their stated performance goals,” and social cohesion, which is social involvement with the group, or the “degree of interpersonal attraction among group members” (Leith 47). There are several factors that Larry Leith, in his book The
**Psychology of Coaching Team Sports: A Self-Help Guide**, suggests will decrease group cohesion, including frequent changes in team membership, disagreement about team goals, poor communication among team members and coaching staff, and public and ongoing criticism of team members by the coach (57).

In sports psychology literature, a great deal of research has been done on the relationship between cohesion and performance, and, according to Paul D. Turman in his article “Coaches and cohesion: The impact of coaching techniques on team cohesion in the small group sport setting,” 83% of them “indicate a positive relationship between cohesion and performance” (88). Leith points out that the direction of causality between cohesion in performance is difficult to measure and suggests that causality may run both ways (53-54). Much of this literature distinguishes between cohesion in interacting sports such as basketball, football, etc, and that in coacting sports, or sports in which athletes are performing individually for individual scores and overall team scores. Clearly, ballet is more analogous to a coacting sport in that each dancer is competing individually. While early research tended to suggest that there did not exist a positive relationship between cohesion and performance (many of them suggested the motivating effects of rivalry to explain for this), recent research has criticized those studies and found that, indeed, there is a positive relationship between cohesion and performance in coacting teams as well. For example, Cindra S. Kamphoff, Diane L. Gill, and Sharon Huddleston, in their article “Jealousy in Sport: Exploring Jealousy’s Relationship to Cohesion,” write, “Cohesion research indicates that coacting teams exhibit a lower level of cohesion than interacting teams…The difference between cohesion levels is due in part to intragroup rivalry and within team competition among coacting teams…However… cohesion is still essential in
coacting sports” (292). This source also suggests that jealousy and cohesion are highly negatively correlated, and thus the competition that leads to jealousy can also lead to dissatisfaction and decreased cohesion (Kamphoff et al. 301). Similarly, Hilary Matheson, Sharon Mathes, and Mimi Murray, in their article “Group cohesion of female intercollegiate coacting and interacting team across a competitive season,” write,

Recently, however, Williams and Widmeyer (1991) found in a study of female intercollegiate golfers (coactive) that task cohesion significantly predicted outcome…It may be that input from team members regarding technique, strategy, and being collectively committed to team goals, increases individual performance levels and results in a concomitant rise in levels of perceived cohesion…being cohesive was associated with better intra-team communication and higher member motivation. (39)

Here, the authors illuminate some of the potential reasons why cohesion might be important in coacting sports despite the fact that it forces the team to let go of the rivalry that coaches may have used as a motivator—in particular, athletes on more cohesive teams are likely to help one another and thus the team’s performance improves individually and as a whole.

In the recent research on cohesion in coacting sports, several authors have suggested that cohesion, and working to improve cohesion, is particularly important for women’s teams. First of all, the coach’s efforts to improve cohesion may need to be heightened on a women’s team because, according to Kamphoff et al., “females on an individual sport were higher on jealousy scores and lower on cohesion scores than males on a team sport, males on an individual sport, and females on a team sport” (302)—in other words, women on individual sports are the most likely to exhibit jealous behaviors and thus decrease cohesion. Despite this challenge, authors suggest that it is particularly important for women’s teams to be cohesive: Matheson et al. suggest that “Women may
meet competitive demands on coacting teams without sacrificing feelings of togetherness and shared concern for one another. In fact, encouraging such feelings might enhance performance…” (47), and Kamphoff et al. write, “females place more emphasis on the coach/athlete relationship than do males…perhaps females experience more jealousy if another athlete has a better relationship with their coach or if another receives more of the coach’s attention” (302). Thus, it is particularly important for coaches of women to take into account these unique needs for social cohesion and strong relationships and act accordingly to help improve cohesion.

The body of sports psychology literature on this topic also addresses coaching behaviors that can improve cohesion, many of which could be applicable to ballet teachers as well. First of all, a lot of the literature suggests that the coaches’ leadership/decision making style has a large effect on team cohesion. Specifically, an authoritarian leadership style in which the athletes have no say in decisions made and are expected to be quiet and obedient is negatively associated with cohesion, while a more democratic decision making style is positively associated with cohesion (Leith 56; Silva and Stevens (eds), Stevens 298; Horn (ed), Widmeyer et al. 297). It should be noted that this does not mean the coach is not the leader or that the coach and the athletes are on the same level, but rather it means that the athletes have some ownership of their learning and improvement and are encouraged to form educated opinions about their training. In this same vein, Paul Turman suggests that light-hearted teasing and humor can contribute to cohesion by drawing athletes together (94-95), while Diane E. Stevens addresses the question of rivalries as motivators, saying that “Where there is too much intrateam competition, it is unlikely that a supportive environment will exist. Supportive rivalries
need to be developed so that athletes are challenged to make each other better…” (Silva and Stevens (eds), Stevens 321). Generally, these sources suggest that when coaches involve the athletes in the learning process of the team and give opportunities for the athletes to challenge themselves and each other in a positive, supportive climate, cohesion is improved.

The coaching literature also suggests that team-building activities can have a strong positive effect, particularly on coacting teams, which by definition “have fewer opportunities for team cohesion to develop; therefore, having these types of teams involved in team-building activities, such as team goal setting, may have a substantial impact on cohesion” (Sénécal et al. 197). The types of team-building activities can vary widely and be customized for the needs of each individual team, but they generally provide opportunities for interaction, the growth of group trust and identification, and discussion of goals. For example, in Turman’s study, coaches found that the most effective team-building activities included setting team goals, establishing a unity council, and having athletes spend time together off the field (97). The suggestion to work together to set team goals may be particularly effective because it is both a team building activity and also an element of a democratic leadership style in which the coach allows the athletes some say in what the team will work on or attempt to achieve.

Many authors also point out the importance of recognizing the contributions of each athlete. For example, Leith writes, “Group social cohesion can be significantly improved by providing positive feedback on some aspect of the team members’ performance. Every athlete has a need for recognition within the team. By publicly acknowledging an athlete’s effort, positive attitude, or work ethic, the coach will make
important strides in improving member satisfaction” (56). Satisfaction is highly correlated with cohesion—as Leith points out, “more secure and satisfied athletes tend to be better prepared to support their teammates” (37). This does not mean that coaches need to coddle athletes, stop correcting them, or stop pushing them. Instead, it simply means that rather than only noticing when an athlete does something wrong, coaches should also acknowledge when they do something right, even if it is simply effort or having a positive attitude. When each athlete feels recognized, they won’t need to compete for the coach’s approval, thus improving cohesion. Another element of this point is the suggestion that coaches avoid making negative comparisons between athletes. According to Leith, “An athlete’s feelings of self-competence are greatly diminished when a coach compares athletes in a negative way…[it] sends the unspoken message that you, as a coach, don’t value this individual as highly as someone else” (158). These sources suggest that coaches attempt to avoid the perception of playing favorites and compare athletes on their own merits and their own improvement rather than in relation to other team members. This will improve cohesion because the coach will not be setting up competition among the athletes he or she is comparing.

Although ballet is not a coacting sport, it seems that this research is in many ways applicable to ballet training. First of all, ballet students are mostly women (and female ballet students are the focus of this discussion), and thus it may be very useful for ballet teachers to be aware of gender discrepancies in the ability to deal with competition and the need for social support. Additionally, while ballet students are not a “team” that will eventually get a group score, dancers need to be able to perform in a corps de ballet, a group that requires a huge amount of coordination and cooperation to function
effectively. Additionally, ballet students are under similar physical stress as athletes on team sports and ballet teachers have a similar project to coaches in terms of improving technique and performance, although ballet teachers have the additional burden of working with artistry as well as task performance. Overall, I think that the literature on cohesion in sports is quite applicable to teaching practices in ballet.

While, as I mentioned previously, there has not been a great deal of literature written on this topic in the field of dance, the two texts I previously cited, as well as a study on the relationship between social support and injury, do touch upon this topic and identify several ways in which competition can affect ballet training. Overall, they identify competition as a negative aspect of training—Buckroyd, for example, writes, “In my view the most difficult and damaging dynamic within the dance class can be that created by the inevitable competition between classmates…and the envy created in less gifted students by the talents of the most accomplished” (77). More specifically, they discuss several dimensions in which competition is a problem in ballet training.

First of all, these authors point out the importance of social support and a sense of community to keep students continuing in ballet and protect them from unnecessary injury and stress. Patterson et al.’s study on life stress, social support, and injury was particularly interesting in this regard—they found that “Among dancers who reported high levels of social support, negative life events were unrelated to injury, whereas stressful life events accounted for nearly 50% of the injury variance in dancers who reported low levels of social support in their lives.” In summarizing their study, they say,

In this study of life stress and its impact on well being, social support (the subjective believe that there exist sources of support, help, and caring within one’s social network) has emerged as a significant moderator variable in a number
of studies. It appears that high social support is capable of buffering the impact of stressful life events, whereas low social support may exacerbate their impact. This is extremely significant because it suggests a reason why schools might want to invest in the cohesion among their dancers—dancers will be more likely to withstand stress (much of which is endemic in ballet training) and avoid injury if they have strong networks of social support. This study also indicates the relationship between mental and physical well-being, calling into question the idea that ballet teachers can effectively worry only about their students’ technical development—if physical and mental health are so intricately connected, it becomes in the best interest of the teacher and the institution to protect both, and it seems that one way to do this is by encouraging social cohesion.

Buckroyd also discusses the potential benefits of encouraging students to learn from one another. She suggests that collaborative learning would be helpful both emotionally and technically to dance students (107-108), pointing out that very little collaborative work is generally undertaken in ballet class (45) and arguing that it would also help dance trainees grow and mature as people (64-65). Buckroyd, coming from a psychology background, also makes the argument that schools have a responsibility to help/allow students to develop strong peer groups, as after age twelve it becomes developmentally essential for students to form and learn to function in these types of groups, lest they remain in a state of social childhood (63). Further, Buckroyd points out, as I have mentioned before, that in order to function as an effective corps de ballet, students need to learn to work in a group, arguing that “A dance performance is likely to be a highly collaborative venture where there is a great deal of interdependence and teamwork” (109). Generally speaking, Buckroyd’s work as well as the study on social
support and injury suggests several compelling motivations to improve cohesion and reduce competition within the dance school.

The dancers (all female Duke University students) who were kind enough to share their insights with me in interviews had much to say on the topic of competition and rivalry, and several themes emerged in my discussions with them. First of all, many of the dancers I interviewed spoke about the psychological and social effects of teacher favoritism. It seems that favoritism is ubiquitous in the pre-professional schools these students attended, and it definitely seems to have had a negative effect on cohesion, a finding which is in line with the sports psychology literature that suggests coaches should avoid favoritism in order to increase cohesion. One dancer spoke about the competition that arose through practices of favoritism, saying “[my teacher] would kind of play favorites, she’d give some girls like special privates after class, and it was like if you weren’t one of the privileged girls, you know, it got more competitive so you could be one.” Another dancer talked about the sense of inequity that arose through favoritism, where dancers who weren’t favored were even given less worth as people. It’s easy to see how competition, jealousy, and rivalry could arise through this kind of favoritism. While I have only shown the stories of a few dancers here, most of the dancers I interviewed from serious schools said that there was clear favoritism practiced by their teachers and that that favoritism caused competition, awkwardness, rivalry, and dissatisfaction among the dancers.

One of the questions that come up regarding favoritism is whether it is inevitable, given that there are only a limited number of positions available at the top of the ballet world, and therefore it may be in the school’s best interest to focus on their best dancers.
I would argue that there is a difference between being realistic about each student’s potential and focusing on students who are particularly dedicated to a professional career, and being disrespectful to and dismissive of those seen as having less potential. Furthermore, I would argue that schools should work collaboratively with students to figure out which students are aiming at a professional career and have the potential to achieve that—teachers can give insight on physical potential, but the students themselves must possess the passion and drive to achieve it. The kind of favoritism I heard about in these interviews was very opaque choices made by the teachers to favor certain students they saw as having a lot of potential and ignoring those who they did not see as talented, regardless of whether or not the students had passion or were aiming for a professional career.

Several of the students I interviewed also talked about the intense stress of competition and the diminishing effect it can have on the ability to grow, work, and achieve technically and artistically. For example, one student said, “I think it definitely relaxes you if you’re friends with the people around you, in that sense you’re probably able to really focus on what you need to improve on, if you’re around people you’re uncomfortable with and very stressed out by you’re not going to want to focus on the things you should be focusing on, you’re going to focus on the things that are already good enough.” Another student agreed with the idea that competition led people to focus on the wrong things, saying, “It’s so competitive that you can’t even work on your faults in the classroom.” Here, we see clear evidence that very intense competition can actually lead to decreased performance in terms of the ability to improve and work correctly in class.
Similarly, several students talked about the effect of rivalries that teachers would set up and the difficulty of constantly competing for parts. For example, one dancer said about casting, “usually for the lead parts, the variations, the principals, they would take girls and say ok you two are going to learn this part, we’ll tell you later who gets it, you know, so every rehearsal we’d run it twice it’d be like ok I have to do this variation better than her.” Another dancer talked about the negative artistic effects of these types of rivalries and casting practices, saying, “everyone works on the role and everyone’s like vying for it up until the end when they put casting up…and so the entire rehearsal process is really stressful… every rehearsal was like an audition, versus like if you already have the part you can experiment with it, and push it a little farther one day, but you can’t do that in dance if you’re always in an audition, so that was really stressful.” Here, we see that this dancer was frustrated not only by the stress of the constant competition but also by her inability to grow artistically and technically through taking risks because every rehearsal was treated as an audition.

Finally, many of the dancers with whom I spoke discussed the intense competition, pressure, and comparison around weight and body type. For example, one student said, “this girl Kim got really skinny like really fast, and then they started giving her parts, and they used to be really mean to her in class and they started being really nice to her in class…anyone who lost weight was rewarded in the sense of like corrections, or parts, or just being treated nicer in general.” This student said that, especially living in a dorm setting with the other dancers, eating together became a source of great stress because she was “always looking at what everyone was eating, like are they eating less or more than me, should I be eating less…” Clearly, this type of competition decreased her
ability to focus on her own health and her own technical and artistic abilities. Similarly, another student said, with some degree of bitterness, “if you could do the part better but this girl’s skinnier, the skinnier girl’s going to get it, like if you see our show, the main person is all anorexic girls.” In these quotes, we see the negative effect that the pressure to compete for the lowest weight has on students’ relationships and individual psyches. Furthermore, when the distribution of parts and rewards is based on body shape, it can lead to decreased cohesion because it increases jealousy of people whose bodies are naturally “acceptable” as well as anger about being judged on factors it is very difficult to control.

Overall, my interviews support the suggestions of much of the sports psychology literature as well as the literature on emotionally intelligent ballet training. The voices of students who have been affected by the negative competition present in their ballet training provide a particularly poignant reminder of the human lives and emotions that are in the balance with this issue.

**Elements of Ballet/Dance that make cohesion particularly important/challenging**

While I have argued that ballet is analogous or connected enough to coacting sports to make the research relevant, there are also significant differences in dance, and ballet in particular, that can make achieving cohesion more challenging but also can offer significant additional benefits to increased cohesion. The first of these elements is the fact that dancers are not just trying to achieve physical tasks but are also trying to grow as artists, and while competition may push people to achieve greater things physically, they will not be able to grow artistically in a cutthroat environment because artistic growth requires risk taking. It is a rare student who will be willing to take artistic risks in an
environment in which they are constantly threatened with ridicule, demotion, or embarrassment, and thus in a highly competitive environment it will be difficult for students to achieve their artistic potential.

Further, because of the stress and challenge of ballet, social support becomes extremely important. This is obviously true for sports as well, but ballet has been shown to be one of the most challenging forms—for example, according to Hecht, “…past research shows that classical ballet training exceeds even the mental and physical demands of professional football players” (31). As a result, in order to continue and succeed, students need support, and thus even if institutions only care about turning out as many professional dancers as possible it is still in their best interests to provide this support in order to lower their attrition rates. Further, as I discussed before, increased social support may also decrease the incidence of injury (Patterson et al.). According to these authors, “High levels of perceived social support appeared to serve as a protective factor against the impact of life stress, resulting in nonsignificant relations between negative life events and subsequent injuries. In contrast, dancers who perceived their environment as low in social support appeared highly vulnerable to the impact of stress on physical well-being…the results thus affirm the potential stress-buffering effects of social support in this population” (Patterson et al.). Here, we see that social support is important not only for students’ mental health, but also for their physical health. According to Buckroyd, institutions need to encourage their students to seek support. She writes, “The vast majority of students will use both staff and their peers to help them in difficult moments if the institution makes it plain that such interdependence is welcomed and encouraged. Dance training is arduous; it will be less so if individuals feel held and
supported in their struggles rather than isolated or abandoned” (46-47). My interviews supported the significance of social support as well, with students discussing the importance of friendship to help them survive the stressors of ballet. All of these sources suggest that social support and encouragement of strong relationships may be more important in ballet than previously thought, and indeed the technical, artistic, and physical benefit of this support may outweigh the potential technical growth caused by competition.

Group cohesion is also important because it allows students to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from one another not just technically but creatively as well. As Buckroyd points out, there are many students and only one teacher, but the attitude is often as if the students are each having a private lesson (45). In other words, students ignore (and are taught to ignore) the information they could gain from those around them. By not drawing upon the resources of all the students around them, dance students miss out on a wealth of potential growth. This does not mean that class becomes anarchy with everyone correcting everyone else, but rather that students could be given opportunities to trouble-shoot technical problems with one another or be encouraged to ask each other for technical advice (this issue is particularly relevant to older students who actually have knowledge that would help another student and have developed strong eyes for the technique and expression). Furthermore, if students are encouraged to learn from one another they will begin to learn just by watching—most ballet classes are structured so that in the center, the class is split into two or more groups and thus each student has the opportunity to watch the others. This opportunity is often wasted either because students simply don’t pay attention or because their thought process is competitive or self-
disparaging and thus only contributes to the negative atmosphere in the classroom. Instead, students could gain a great deal if they were encouraged to intelligently analyze the performance of classmates, learning from what they are doing that is working or not working. If collaborative learning is encouraged in this way, there could be huge potential benefits for technical and artistic growth.

Additionally, because ballet students are often so young and are either actually or virtually living at the studio, ballet schools have a unique responsibility to encourage them to form the strong peer groups and social relationships that are so necessary for normal psychological development. In some situations, schools are practically acting as *in loco parentis* for students and in all cases have a huge influence on their lives, so it is essential that schools allow them to gain the tools they need to grow into functioning adults. It is true, certainly, that students may not be as docile if not kept in a state of perpetual childhood, but they will ultimately be more creative and more mature artists as a result. Because there are few opportunities for relationships to develop due to the nature of ballet class and rehearsal, it may be uniquely necessary for opportunities to be created that would increase productive interaction and the growth of social support networks.

In general, it seems clear that in ballet in particular (and concert dance in general), it does teachers, training institutions, and students a disservice to discourage interaction and the formation of cohesive networks of support and collaboration. While it may be true that there are certain motivating benefits associated with rivalry, and that may be the reason why this type of system has survived so long and been continually reproduced, I would argue that there are even more motivating benefits for growth when working within a group that is challenging yet supportive. Further, cohesion in the ballet class may
lead to increased student satisfaction, decreased injury levels, and the development of more healthy young adults. In the next section I will illuminate some suggestions that may help teachers and schools achieve this cohesion and the associated benefits.

**Suggestions for Institutional/Pedagogical Improvement**

There are several specific steps that teachers and institutions could take that might make a big difference in improving cohesion in their schools and thus accruing the benefits mentioned above. First of all, it would clearly improve cohesion if teachers used a more democratic/participatory leadership style instead of an authoritarian one. This could be accomplished in several different ways that have to do with giving students some say in and ownership over their education. Traditionally, teachers decide on the exercises, the progression of learning, and the choreography that is performed. Obviously, teachers have the knowledge to do this and the understanding of the technique that allows them to lead students through a syllabus. However, I have known some teachers who will occasionally, in an advanced level, assign different students to make up one of the exercises in the class. This exercise has benefits beyond just making the leadership style more democratic (and thus increasing cohesion)—it forces students to think about the steps they are learning and how to link them together, it pushes students to think musically and figure out how their exercises fit with the music, and it gives students experience that they might use if they become teachers. This is obviously something that wouldn’t be done particularly frequently, but it might be an easy way for teachers to achieve a less authoritarian leadership style.

Similarly, teachers might allow students to participate in group goal setting. This was one of the activities that were frequently cited in the sports psychology research as a
way to improve cohesion, both because it uses a more democratic leadership style and because it causes students to talk and interact with each other, as well as take some ownership over their learning. Although ballet students can’t set “team” goals in the same way that a sports team could, teachers could hold meetings at the beginning of the semester in which each student shares her goals for the semester and then the group might identify themes that would become group goals. Buckroyd suggests that there should be “frequent times when the teacher shares with the students her goals for the medium and short term and where students are invited to discuss these goals and their personal understanding of them” (105). I think that group goal setting could be, again, a relatively easy and yet effective way for teachers to encourage cohesion.

A second major suggestion for teachers would be to avoid setting up rivalries or encourage competition between students. This means that teachers should not negatively compare students to one another or put students in a situation of being in a constant audition. Buckroyd suggests that it would be useful for teachers to make use of “criterion-based marking” in which students are given clear, transparent criteria on which they will be judged, because then students will not be judged in terms of other students but rather on their own progress (90). Some syllabi, such as the Royal Academy of Dance, already do this through their highly structured series of exams, but it might be useful for more teachers to institute this, not necessarily through exams but perhaps by giving students rubrics at the beginning of the semester and then meeting throughout the semester to discuss progress. One of the Vaganova-trained students in my survey said that her teachers used rubrics addressing “facility, technical mastery and artistry, as well as a written exam.” Teachers can also discourage rivalry and competition by making a
point of recognizing the value or worth of each student, as was discussed in the sport psychology literature. This does not mean that teachers need to coddle students or lie to them, but rather that teachers can recognize the unique gifts that different students bring and appreciate them, even if it is as simple as complimenting a student’s work ethic or attitude. Teachers who do this will have more satisfied students who will be less inclined to be competitive and will also set a good example for their students about appreciating individuals and working as a group.

A third suggestion, this one pertaining more to the institution than to the individual teacher, would be to increase opportunities for interaction among the dancers. Since student ballet dancers are expected not to talk in class or rehearsal and are generally extremely busy outside of class with schoolwork, etc, there may not often be opportunities for interaction. Furthermore, in a very competitive school environment interaction may be discouraged, implicitly or explicitly, as we saw in Forsyth’s study (which did take place in 1966 so it may not be as relevant today, but it is likely that some of those norms still exist). All of this is simply to say that there are not that many naturally occurring opportunities for interaction among dance students, and thus it may be necessary for institutions to create those opportunities by setting up social events for classes as a whole, perhaps modeled on the team building activities discussed in sports psychology. For example, in an intervention with gymnasts, Karen D. Cogan and Trent A. Petrie found that helpful team-building activities included campouts, meetings/discussions scheduled throughout the season, and a leadership workshop (293). Opportunities for interaction can also be created within class, using the collaborative learning techniques discussed earlier.
Furthermore, institutions and teachers can seize opportunities for creating a sense of group solidarity through open discussion and the development of a multi-faceted support system for students. For example, Buckroyd suggests that schools could create a mentorship system, in which a faculty or staff member (not necessarily the students’ primary teacher) would mentor a small group of students, providing opportunities for them to discuss challenges they are facing or celebrate successes, providing an opportunity for small groups of students to get to know each other better and also establishing a support network for each student (148). It might also be very useful to structure into the schedule monthly or weekly class meetings for the group to discuss major changes/stressors or deal with problems. Buckroyd suggests that

Weekly class meetings of half an hour or so could rapidly develop a sense of solidarity and cohesion between students and their teacher and provide a setting within which potentially difficult issues could be dealt with quickly before they become entrenched…In general, issues which create tensions within the class, such as assessment, auditions, endings, and beginnings, will benefit from a semi-structured opportunity to discuss them. (106)

I think she makes a great point here in recognizing the strong emotional effect these kinds of events can have on dancers and the benefit of having a forum to discuss them. Hecht seems to agree with this, pointing out “Recognition of emotion can be an important enhancer of student learning, thus recognizing emotions represents a crucial element to promote better quality of teacher-student and student-student relationships” (134-135). These types of meetings could represent great opportunity to foster this kind of emotional intelligence, teaching students how to productively deal with the complex and intense emotions that may come up within their ballet training, as well as helping create cohesion and solidarity within the class.
It may also be useful for the school to create a “buddy system” pairing older and younger dancers. Creating this kind of system could be quite beneficial for a few reasons. First of all, it would create cohesion within the entire school rather than limiting it to each class, which has been the focus of most of these suggestions. It would also discourage competition that might come from the older students’ fear of younger students coming up and replacing them in their position of prominence within the school. Furthermore, it provides the older student an opportunity to feel confident about being able to benefit someone else with the knowledge and experience she has accrued throughout her ballet education, while it provides the younger student with access to a huge wealth of insight and experience, making it a win-win situation that would be relatively easy for the school to institute. In general, I feel that these suggestions could make a big different in the atmosphere of a ballet class and a ballet school, and it would be well worth the teacher and the institution’s time and effort to work towards achieving this improved environment.

Instituting these changes will also require investment on the part of the school in more than just their students’ technical development but also in their growth as people. While I don’t anticipate that these changes would require any kind of major institutional restructuring, they will require some effort on the part of the administration in order to facilitate bonding activities, the development of a mentoring system, etc. Furthermore, the schools would need to have teacher/staff training sessions to explain why this issue is important and why it matters enough to make the effort to accomplish. I believe that it would be absolutely essential for the administration and faculty to be on board in order for this kind of intervention to be effective. If there is a hint of cynicism or sarcasm about
the utility of these efforts, students will pick up on it and go back to old ways of interacting and functioning. Ultimately, not only the teachers but also the students have to be convinced to invest in this kind of intervention, but the change has to start from the teachers and the administration. Rather than feeling discouraged or overwhelmed by these suggestions, though, teachers and administrators should feel excited about their possibility—creating a more cohesive, supportive atmosphere within the ballet school means the growth of more creative, passionate, and happy artists and dancers.
Chapter 14: Developmentally Appropriate Training

Incredible amounts of research have been done in the past fifty years in the field of developmental psychology and yet little of it has been incorporated into classical ballet training. I think that teachers could benefit a great deal from having increased understanding and knowledge of developmental milestones and phases (for a comprehensive list of developmental ages and dance exercises/tasks that are particularly appropriate for each group, see Appendix B). There are two phases of development to which dance educators could pay particular attention: early childhood and adolescence.

Anecdotally, I have noticed that dance schools often put their least experienced teachers in charge of the youngest classes, usually called “creative movement” or “pre-ballet.” The thinking behind this is probably that at this point the content is very simple, so teachers do not have to be very experienced or thoroughly trained to handle it. However, this philosophy ignores the fact that teaching the youngest children has unique pedagogical challenges that hopefully require some thinking on the part of the school and the individual teachers. To unpack this issue a bit, I will outline three different early-childhood syllabi, and then talk about what they have in common and what they can teach us about the earliest dance classes.

In her article “Teaching Tots,” Rachel Straus profiles Beverly Spell, who has created a syllabus called “Leap N’ Learn,” which “teaches [children] to move in pairs, encourages them to watch others, and it fosters their creativity through improvisational dance” (4). She describes how Spell worked with an existing early childhood syllabus, adding information on the psychological development of three to six year olds in order to develop a structure that would best suit their learning styles. Interestingly, Spell found
that her “experience that children learn best by absorbing material sequentially through simple exercises that are taught orally, visually, and viscerally...was consistent with developmental learning theory” (Straus 6). One of her strategies is to use imagery along with ballet terms, such as “flamingo passé” or “butterfly port de bras” (Straus 6). She also takes into account how difficult it can be for young kids to only “talk with their bodies” for the entire class, so she gives them each an opportunity to speak at the beginning of class (Straus 4).

Lisa Garick developed a somewhat similar syllabus for young children, called “Tempo, Level, Energy, and Shapes” (TLE&S). Tamara Beech describes Garick’s refusal to categorize the syllabus as a precursor to a specific kind of dance: “TLE&S is not a ballet syllabus any more than it is a jazz or tap syllabus. It is a specific preschool syllabus, meeting the needs of little dancers ages three to six. All the prescribed movements and concepts can be applied equally to any style of dance, making it easy for a dancer coming out of the program to proceed in ballet, modern, jazz, or tap” (90). The syllabus, as its name implies, focuses on the concepts of tempo, level, energy, and shapes, teaching these ideas through games, locomotor activities, and more. Garick’s basic principle is that “Teaching the concepts and theories of dance first does help students adapt themselves to any movement style and make them more versatile. If a student has been taught to move by rote, through sheer memorization of steps and routines, then that student will have to break down the barriers of his or her own muscle memory to learn anything new” (Beech 92). Thus, she aims to provide students with a solid foundation of rhythmic understanding, ability to move in different ways, and enjoyment of movement that will allow them to continue on in any kind of dance.
The famous RAD school recently came out with a new preschool syllabus that is quite ideologically in line with those of Spell and Garick. Geared towards children ages two to five (with one level for two and three year olds, and the other level for the older children), the syllabus gives “general guidance as to class planning and structure” (Daly, RAD Pre-school 73), but does not enforce any set sequences or items that must be learned (contrary to the other levels in the RAD syllabus). According to Patricia Daly, with this new syllabus “it is hoped that children will not only expand their movement vocabulary, developing control and skill of fundamental movements, but can develop self-confidence and self-esteem as well as social skills” (73). Rather than focusing entirely on ballet specific movements, the syllabus teaches “fundamental movements common to all dance genres such as walking, skipping, and jumping” as well as focusing a great deal on musicality (using rhythmic music), as well as “fun and enjoyment of learning” (Rittner). Further, it focuses on teaching weight transfer above, for example, turnout and pointed toes. While this philosophy is based on the newest research (and the new syllabus replaces one over twenty years old) its announcement engendered surprising controversy in the form of letters to the editor of the Dancing Times. For example, one writer complains of the new primary syllabus, “they are required to place their feet in first position just once. There is no ballet technique as such; without even the necessity to point/stretch her feet...People who bring their children to me expect me to teach them ballet” (Redgrave). However, as evidenced by the positive letters about the syllabus, many people are embracing the concept of a true pre-ballet syllabus that prepares students for a lifetime love of dance and movement without causing any damage
to them (physically or emotionally) or expecting them to master physical positions their bodies are not yet ready to achieve.

All three of these pre-school syllabi have elements in common. First of all, they all emphasize concepts over steps, recognizing that while children are unlikely to retain specific steps they are taught, they (and their muscles) will remember the actions of moving to music, shifting weight, etc. Further, they all emphasize the importance of fostering creativity, fun, and a sense of play so that students are excited about dancing and want to continue on to technique classes. Further, all of them encourage an understanding of rhythm and music. Finally, they all focus on being safe for young bodies, avoiding asking them to turn out too early, for example. This type of preschool syllabus make sense because it will allow students to become excited about dance, helping them to become lifelong audience members even if they do not continue in their dance training. Further, these psychologically and developmentally sound syllabi will hopefully help to avoid, for example, the body image consequences that participation in aesthetic sports had on five to seven year old girls in Davison et al’s study.

It seems that in the early years ballet training just after students move on from pre-ballet, many teachers are eager to get across the fundamental positions and steps and generally neglect conceptual teaching and idea-based movement. However, research (and anecdotal evidence) suggests that images can effectively be introduced early to students. In contrast to the widely disseminated theories of Jean Piaget, an influential developmental psychologists who believed that children develop in fixed, sequential stages that cannot be mixed or surpassed (Howe 20), current research suggests that those stages are much more pliable than Piaget suggested and that children can achieve
thinking beyond their “stage” if the instructions are explicit and the child perceives the
task as meaningful (Howe 21). Images used for young children should be more concrete
and specific than for older students, but well-chosen imagery can be a highly effective
way to instill fundamentals like good alignment early without having to explain nitty-gritty technical details.

As I discussed earlier, I believe that mirrors should not be used in the classroom
Faults in Young Dancers and their Training, seems to support this idea by emphasizing
the importance of making sure that children learn how to feel, rather than see, correct
alignment early on (13). She also highlights the need to resist pushing turnout in young
children before they are completely secure in correct alignment (26). Working without
mirrors could help with this problem as well, as it will prevent or lessen a sense of
competition between students and decrease the emphasis on the aesthetic at a time when
creating the ideal ballet lines is less important than teaching the fundamental building
blocks of technique.

The first few years of ballet training is also the time at which the culture of a
school or teacher begins to be ingrained in the student. If the teacher fosters an anti-
intellectual atmosphere, over-emphasizes body shape in the classroom, or discourages
students from having other activities, those impressions of what ballet training is will
stick. At these early stages of development, it is particularly crucial that teachers try to
foster harmonious rather than obsessive passion for ballet in their students. Teachers can
do this by encouraging students to stay involved in other activities, expressing interest in
other aspects of a student’s life, and having clear and reasonable expectations for the amount of class attended.

Finally, it is incredibly important to include a sense of fun and play in the ballet class. It seems that after the designated “creative movement” period of dance classes (generally ages 3-6 or so), ballet class becomes very serious and often high pressure, and the sense of the importance of fun can be lost. It seems that teachers need to actively encourage children to continue to find joy and creativity in dance. Paul Reeve, the director of Education at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, discusses in the article “Playing at the Tipping Point” the sad truth that children often lose their ability to be uninhibited and creative around age eight or nine. He says that around that age, “They start to try to give the right answers, the right response, rather than just letting their own imaginations run free… I think so much of this is down to the way that they’re encouraged… If they’re encouraged to express themselves, then actually, you can keep them open for longer” (Reeve qtd. in Z. Anderson 20-21). Here, Reeve argues that teachers can work to preserve creativity and natural artistry starting young, and thus allow children to remain less inhibited movers and thinkers for longer. He suggests that it is essential that adult leaders play alongside children, arguing that “When children see that our leaders are using their imaginations, and are prepared to throw themselves into things, that helps… It makes them feel that they have permission” (Reeve qtd. in Z. Anderson 22). I believe that creativity can and should continue into formal ballet training. When you are training bodies for a very specific aesthetic and/or artistic goal, it is easy to lost sight of the fact that you are still teaching children. However, even budding ballerinas deserve a childhood. As thinkers as early as John Locke and Jean-Jacques
Rousseau have asserted, childhood is an important time in and of itself, not just a preparation for adulthood: a child must be “allowed space, opportunity, and time to develop his or her own pattern of consciousness” (Doddington and Hilton 55). This is why that period of creative movement classes is so important, and why the creative and fun atmosphere of those classes shouldn’t end just because formal ballet training begins. Many developmental psychologists have pointed out the importance of the “instinct to play” and opportunity for those working with children to foster natural curiosity and desire to learn (Doddington and Hilton 55). If treated with an attitude open to fun and play integrated with serious learning, early childhood can be a highly fertile time for learning and laying the foundation for later dance training.

The other developmental stage of which dance educators could benefit from greater understanding is adolescence. While this may seem obvious, ballet teachers need to respect that this is a time of huge physical change. Not only are there often changes in alignment and posture that have to be made to accommodate a differently shaped body (Lawson 10), but also it can be a time of huge body insecurity. Indeed, Sara L. Crawley, Jennifer E. Lewis, and Maralee Mayberry write, “Feminist research, Williams and Ferber argue, has identified adolescence as a difficult time in which girls are often ‘plagued by low self-esteem, eating disorders, high rates of depression, and a feeling of lack of control over their own lives’” (5). Teachers could be aware of students’ emotional needs at this time perhaps by beginning to loosen dress code restrictions and certainly by avoiding comments about students’ weight or shape. When asked what advice she would give to her high school ballet teacher, one student wrote, “High schooler’s bodies are changing, and just because they do not have the ideal physique between the ages of 14-17
doesn’t mean that they won’t slim down (before it’s too late for a career).” This is certainly true, and it is too bad that this student saw students’ insecurities during puberty magnified by comments from the teacher. Teachers might also want to be cognizant of the fact that puberty starts earlier in this time and particularly in the U.S. than it might have when they were growing up: it is important to be sensitive to this issue starting younger than might seem obvious (Alexander and Winne (eds), Wigfield, Byrnes, and Eccles 88).

Adolescence is also a time of huge mental and emotional development. Adolescents are by nature more emotional than adults: they process more information in the emotional processing centers of the brain than adults do (Hardiman 31). Further, teenagers are constantly trying to organize and solidify their senses of self by trying on new identities, experimenting with different behaviors, and trying to discover their passions and interests (Nakkula and Toshalis 20). This presents a challenge for ballet training because adolescence is the time when ballet students have to become extremely serious about dance if they wish to be successful. While acknowledging that reality, it would behoove dance educators to be aware of the identity formation going on in these crucial years and continue to encourage students, even as they commit more and more time to dance, to stay involved in other aspects of their lives. It is well known that adolescents can have trouble with authority: because they are accumulating “tested knowledge” (knowledge they have discovered for themselves), they are likely to test the limits of authority (Nakkula and Toshalis 3). While I am by no means suggesting that teachers give up leadership over students, it might help to be aware that these changes are going on and try
to adjust disciplinary style to be more democratic and less confrontational when teaching this age group.

The teenage years, despite their challenges, also bring with them huge possibilities. It is in adolescence that people first learn to think abstractly and understand complicated conceptual ideas. Allan Wigfield, James P. Byrnes, and Jacquelynne S. Eccles, in their article “Development During Early and Middle Adolescence” (in the Handbook of Educational Psychology), write that the cognitive changes in adolescence include the “increasing ability to think abstractly, consider the hypothetical as well as the real, engage in more sophisticated and elaborate information processing strategies, consider multiple dimensions of a problem at once, and reflect on oneself and on complicated problems” (89). These new abilities present exciting opportunities for teachers to challenge students to understand dance and movement in new ways as well as continuing to incorporate intellectual ideas and conceptual teaching into the classroom. This is a period in which students can experience huge growth artistically, and teachers can take advantage of that.
Chapter 15: Preserving Creativity and Fostering Artistry

“Creativity, like any other human attribute, exists in everyone; it needs only to be recognized, released, and reinforced” (Schneer 30)

“Perhaps ‘wonder bread’ provides the appropriate analogy for this scenario. Grain rich in vitamins and nutriments is stripped of them but, once it is bleached and sterilized, its makers are compelled to reintroduce some of those nutriments back into the recipe. Accordingly, vitamins are artificially added...by analogy, with the invention of institutionalized schooling, learning and development are removed from rich natural contexts and, in order to build healthy minds, educators have to reintroduce some of the relational elements that provided nutriment for learning in the first place.” (Ryan and Powelson 64)

Many of the students I spoke to, when asked about artistry in their ballet classes, said either that technique overshadowed any discussion of artistry, that it was expected but not spoken about or not explained (i.e. “They’d tell us to do it more, that we needed more, but didn’t explain very well how”), that it was not mentioned until late in training, or that it was only discussed in the context of rehearsals and performance. I believe that all four of these approaches are sorely lacking. In regards to teachers/schools who do not discuss artistry, in my opinion they are not really teaching ballet, they are just teaching exercises. Ballet is an art form, and thus artistry has to be a part of training. It also cannot be simply expected that students will develop artistry on their own. Many ballet students do not get many performing opportunities (or only have opportunities to perform very traditional corps de ballet roles) and focus solely on technique in class. How can those students be expected to magically develop artistry? Certainly, there are innate qualities that help students become artists, but artistry also must be discussed and taught if it is to develop and flourish. Further, students cannot be taught technique in a vacuum until a certain age and then be expected to infuse all of the ballet that they have been taught merely as exercises with innate artistry—that is also simply an implausible solution.
Finally, discussing artistry only in the context of performance is inefficient and also could be very confusing. It is inefficient because it means that students basically have to be retaught how to dance when they get to rehearsal, rather than allowing rehearsal to build upon ideas and concepts discussed in technique class. Further, it is inefficient because students spend much more time in class than in rehearsal—they could grow much faster as artists if artistry permeated all of their dance activities. Finally, it could be confusing because it would force dancers to dance differently in class and rehearsal, focusing only on rote technique in class and then trying to have an artistic sensibility in rehearsal.

As has likely become clear through my critiques of the traditional ways of teaching artistry, I think that artistry must be a part of technique class from the very beginning, in developmentally appropriate ways. One of the things that some of the traditional syllabi do well is teach a strong musical ear, but ballet training could go much further in terms of teaching musicality—could students be encouraged to find their own accents within the constructs of the movement? Could teachers lucky enough to have live music ask the pianist to play in different ways and discuss with students how that affects their dancing? It would be fantastic if students grew up with an understanding of musicality, not only just dancing with the music but playing with and interpreting the music.

Teaching artistry, though, goes beyond musicality. Dance is at its core a communicative art form, and yet the communicative nature of ballet is often divorced from technical training. I do not mean this to say that every dance step must have some deep meaning attached to it, but rather that class exercises, even at barre, must be treated as more than merely “calisthenics.” I have had ballet teachers (notably Tyler Walters)
who frequently demand of us to consider what the movement is saying and what, in terms of energy and dynamics, we are attempting to show or tell the audience. Thinking in this way forces students to move beyond a conception of ballet as merely steps or tricks, and thus helps them to become much more artistically rich dancers. If students were encouraged to think this way from the very beginning, I can only imagine what kind of dancers they would become! Certainly they would not fall victim to the common ballet trap of simply being “correct”—while technical skill is obviously extremely important, it is not nearly enough to create a true artist. Ballet dancers must be taught not only to dance with technical skill but also to dance with artistic individuality and authority.

Since traditional ballet training is so focused on reproduction-based teaching, the opportunity for creative growth is often limited. It strikes me as odd that just as serious ballet training begins, creative movement ends. I do not think that it has to be this way; in fact, creative movement may become even more important as ballet training begins in earnest. Creative movement allows students to express themselves emotionally and physically and express their bodies in ways different from those that are traditionally allowed in ballet class, although there are certainly ballet teachers who emphasize creativity in ballet class: Julie Walters gives “Encourag[ing] dancers to always develop and feed their artistic side” as one of her top teaching principles, saying “I use imagery to capture creativity and try to show dancers that there is more to a step or combination given in a classroom setting and hope that they learn to fully express themselves.” While it is definitely ideal for creativity to be nurtured in ballet class, creative movement should continue alongside ballet training, eventually morphing into more structured modern technique classes. Every ballet student should always be taking a creative movement or
modern dance class—this exposure to different styles of dance as well as this outlet for creativity would be both useful artistically and technically as well as emotionally freeing for ballet students.

There are many different techniques of modern dance that could be highly useful for ballet dancers, and I don’t wish to prescribe a specific one. However, I believe that whatever style of modern ballet students take, classes should include improvisation. Improvisation is an incredibly effective way to foster creativity and movement variety in students, as well as allowing them to stay in touch with the inherent joy of movement. The use of contact in improvisation can also be a valuable tool for increasing kinesthetic awareness. Anttila writes, “becoming bodily involved with other bodies through touch and contact work helped the children to reach a focused, intensified bodily state” (49). I think that contact improvisation can be both therapeutic and highly creatively stimulating and should be used as part of improvisation work for ballet dancers.

Georgette Schneer has a wonderfully holistic discussion of the teaching of improvisation in her book *Movement Improvisation: In the Words of a Teacher and Her Students*. She writes passionately about the benefits of improvisation training, saying that improvisation can take a dancer “From shame of body to appreciation for body…From dislike of one body part to appreciation for it…From shyness in exposing ‘fat’ to throwing off the concealing oversize shirt…From fear of touching or being touched to natural and easy touching…From fear of ‘taking up everybody’s time’ to taking one’s own time…From fear of competition to learning we are all on a creative par” (Schneer 45). It makes sense that the emphasis here on comfort with one’s body, non-competitive relationships with other dancers, and appreciation for the abilities of the body could all be
extremely useful for ballet dancers. Schneer also includes what she calls the

“improvisation credo,” which is long but worth including here, I think. She writes,

Improvisation is not a product; it does not have crucial acclaim; or any kind of
criticism. Our pact is, here, in this place, in this time, you can move as you will,
as your emotions and spirits design, as your body wants to; we’re not going to be
drawn into any comparisons; nor will I, the teacher, be drawn into being an
authority on whether what is done meets with my approval or not; we’re all just
going to accept what’s done; we open up our senses; your freedom will come not
from us but from yourself, from what you did—from what you did not even know
you were going to be doing. Your security comes from the knowledge that
‘everything goes.’ Imagination and movement are encouraged to stretch ever
further. When it is our turn to watch, we regard with interest what the body is
doing; not whether what it is doing is likeable or not. As these experiences accrue,
freedom grows. (7)

Being in this kind of environment, particularly if it is included in training throughout a
dancer’s life, could be tremendously liberating for ballet dancers and help them not only
be more interesting movers but also freer and healthier people. According to Schneer,
other benefits of improvisation training include increased trust in movement instincts,
higher self-confidence, greater body awareness, and a relief from pressure, especially for
ambitious students or those in competitive situations (13). All of these benefits would be
particularly useful for ballet dancers, who often do not trust their movement instincts
because they have been told for so long what the “right” way is to move, often have low
body confidence and awareness, and are almost universally in high pressure, competitive
situations.

Schneer also offers helpful tips for running improvisation sessions or classes. She
emphasizes the crucial importance of working without mirrors so that the emphasis is not
on the aesthetic (69). Further, she offers several principles for teaching improvisation,
from creating a good atmosphere to developing effective prompts (see Appendix C).
I think it would also be very useful for ballet schools to offer choreography
classes or at least give their students the opportunity to experiment with choreography.
This would have several benefits. First of all, as Benjamin Harkarvy points out in *Not
Just Any Body*, choreography training will make ballet dancers better for choreographers
to work with in the long run because they will have a much clearer understanding of the
choreographic process in particular and the creative process in general (32). Further,
offering choreographic opportunities demonstrates a respect for students’ individual
artistic talent and creative vision that shows students that they are seen as full human
beings with ideas and talents that are valued, not just as technique machines. This will
help with self-confidence as well as with encouraging artistry and creativity. Further, it
will allow students agency and ownership over their learning and learning process, which
will help them to be more invested and successful in their learning. Moreover, it will give
students the chance to explore what kind of movement feels best for their bodies (helping
to steer them towards their ideal company or choreographer) and what their bodies and
minds are capable of (again, helping with self-confidence). Finally, it could help students
who might not shine in technique feel good about achieving something in ballet that they
can feel proud of. Overall, offering choreography classes or opportunities for students to
choreograph has many possible benefits and would be a fruitful avenue for ballet schools
to explore.
Chapter 16: The Role of the Teacher

“The role of the teacher, in the view of feminist and somatic educators, is to facilitate students’ process of becoming an expert of their own bodies and lives by interrogating and analyzing their own experiences” (Shapiro (ed), Fortin 65)

Different theories of education have widely diverse ideas about the appropriate role of the teacher in the classroom. Proponents of “child-centered” education suggest that “in moving to more indirect forms of discipline [child-centered education] tries to keep an idea in place of a rational republic where children can grow and flourish as individuals and at the same time develop a sense of community” (Doddington and Hilton 46). This author emphasizes, though, “that child-centered teaching does not abdicate from explicit adult control over children” (Doddington and Hilton 46). This model suggests a kind of median between teacher simply as mentor or guide and teacher as dictator. In a child-centered educational paradigm, “Senses and perceptions would be cherished and strengthened through experience, beliefs would be taken seriously and explored, [and] expression of genuine concerns, things that matter, would be encouraged” (Doddington and Hilton 66). Essentially, in this model, the opinions and beliefs of children are given legitimacy, even as the teacher remains the authority in the classroom.

Feminist pedagogical theory seems to trend towards seeing the teacher as co-discoverer and mentor: for instance Sherry B. Shapiro writes that feminist pedagogy “requires us as teachers to explore with our students our individual biographies, historical events, and the power relations that have shaped and constrained our lives” (9). This approach of emphasizing elements of joint exploration between student and teacher emphatically de-emphasizes the role of the teacher as disciplinarian. As we have seen, in a traditional ballet class the teacher is seen as the ultimate authority, one that is not
generally attempting to establish dialogue with the students. It should be noted that many ballet teachers will ask students a question such as “what was the correction for this combination yesterday?” However, in most circumstances that question, while it allows students to talk, does not actually open what could be called a “dialogue” because it has one right answer that is supplied by a student, and then the class moves on. Wooten summarizes this in saying, “A third condition of silence, that it is not safe to speak, seems to dominate the protocol of dance training: the good student is mute. Student respondents are sensitized to the belief that they will disrupt ballet class by speaking out. Personal experience informs me that discussion in ballet class takes place under very tightly teacher-controlled circumstances” (Wooten 14). While it can certainly be helpful in terms of recall, etc, for students to be asked those kinds of very black and white questions, it is important for ballet teachers to also think about the possibility of creating true dialogue in their classes.

It is also useful to look at the way that modern dance teachers typically relate to their students. While a ballet class certainly has different needs than a modern dance class, there are elements of the more liberal modern dance pedagogy from which ballet teachers could learn. In particular, while the teacher needs to be the authority in the classroom, the idea of the teacher also as a guide or facilitator for students’ discoveries is a useful one for ballet teachers to consider (Shapiro 9). In general, modern dance pedagogy seems to encourage a more democratic approach for the teacher rather than a dictatorial approach. This is certainly not true for all modern dance teachers and choreographers, though: an outsider evaluator once advised against funding the Graham
company because he found her methods to be “in direct opposition to his strongly held convictions concerning democracy, women’s rights, and human dignity” (Lakes 1).

In reading *The Art of Teaching Ballet*, I noticed that the teachers almost uniformly emphasized frequently talking with and to their students, to ensure that students have understood corrections and lessons, that they are behaving correctly, and to give advice. For example, Ursuliak holds weekly meetings with senior students to discuss behavior, issues of anatomy, physical therapy, dance history, diet, etc (Warren 213) and Besobrasova holds similar meetings with her students (Warren 37). I think this type of communication is very important—frequently giving students forums in which they can talk to their teachers will help avoid confusion and technical problems and can help to alleviate emotional stressors on students. Further, it’s an opportunity for teachers to give more personalized feedback then they might be able to in class.

Teachers have to step carefully in regards to their involvement in students’ lives, though, because it can easily become too much. Especially in a residential situation, teachers have the ability and often the authority to be involved in practically every aspect of their students’ lives, which could easily create a dynamic that infantilizes students and in which students never learn to take care of themselves. For example in *The Art of Teaching Ballet*, Besobrasova is quoted saying proudly, “As a master, I have the right to examine the way a student lives—if, for instance, he is not taking rest at the right moment, or not concentrating insofar as reviewing his day or properly planning for the next. As a master, I have the right to say anything to my pupils” (15). While it is certainly important for teachers to take interest in their students’ lives and give advice, it strips students of their autonomy to believe you have the “right” to say anything to them and
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examine every aspect of their lives. Students need to have the right to make decisions for themselves in order to develop autonomy. Orders are different from advice—teachers (master teachers in particular) have an incredible wealth of knowledge and students should seek out their advice and take it seriously. However, students are not going to be constantly monitored like that when they are professionals, so they need to learn how to take care of themselves. It is best if teachers can give them the tools to do that rather than giving them orders about what to do.
Chapter 17: Brain Compatible/Psychologically Sound Pedagogy

“Students must feel safe inside the classroom” (Jessica Wilson)

Since the beginning of ballet training, there have been huge advances in our understanding of how the brain works, how it achieves learning, and the psychology of learning. However, not much of this has been incorporated into dance education. Essentially, psychologically sound education requires an appropriate physical and emotional environment and a thematic approach to teaching. Not much research has been done into how these can be accomplished in a ballet class specifically, so I will try to show how these principles can be applied to ballet training.

In the book Brain-Compatible Dance Education, Anne Green Gilbert gives her top ten principles of brain-compatible dance teaching (11-14). The book is really aimed towards people teaching public school dance classes, not serious ballet classes, but I think that these principles can be applied to a serious ballet setting. Here, I will list her top ten principles and then give an example for how I think each could be used in a ballet class.

1. Present meaningful curriculum: “conceptual content is more meaningful than random facts”
   In a ballet class, this could mean explaining how each exercise at the barre will be applied in the center and then reminding students in the center that they have prepared for these specific movements at the barre.
2. Provide an enriched environment for brain development: give a “challenging multi-sensory curriculum involving problem solving, relevant projects, complex activities, critical thinking, and meaningful feedback”
   In a ballet class, this could involve using teaching tools other than just repetition. For example, teachers could offer weekly movie nights for students to watch many different types of performances, require students to give presentations on or write papers about different choreographers, ask students to choreograph themselves, or require students to attend and evaluate ballet performances.
3. Give meaningful feedback: positive, timely, frequent, and descriptive
   In ballet, this suggests that teachers should be cognizant of paying attention to each student in the class and giving not only group corrections but also individual ones. Based on this principle, teachers should try to spread corrections equally among students and
make sure that students understand exactly what the corrections mean. This could also mean having individual meetings with each student a few times a year to discuss individual goals and progress.

4. Include opportunities for emotional engagement that is positive and joyful as well as meaningful and challenging—emotional engagement leads to better learning and memory

There are a few ways that this could be applied in a ballet class. For example, a teacher could ask students to watch videos of various pieces dealing with similar emotional content and have them discuss which one most moved them and why. Teachers could also sometimes allow students to request exercises that they particularly like.

5. Allow for social interaction: “students learn best through collaboration and peer coaching”

Students could coach each other on steps or combinations, or even choreograph short solos and teach them to other students. Teachers can also try to create outlets for students to be social with one another, such as cast parties.

6. Present developmentally appropriate curriculum: “young dancers are capable of learning more complex ideas than we think possible…an appropriate curriculum must be genuinely challenging to get the brain’s attention but achievable so students are not frustrated”

In the “developmentally appropriate training” section, I discussed ways to make ballet training developmentally appropriate, including giving specific images to younger children, utilizing play in the classroom, and avoiding starting ballet training too early.

7. Allow students to take charge of their learning: “best way to learn is to work out solutions or teach another students…approaches that alternate between directed teaching and student exploration/creation lead to greater student involvement and learning”

Ballet teachers could incorporate this by having dancers coach each other on variations, or work one on one with each other to try to master a difficult step. Teachers could also have certain days when each student makes up an exercise and teaches it to the class (I have seen this done by various teachers and it has always been both successful and fun).

8. Provide both novel and repetitious experiences: “synaptic connections in the brain are created through novelty. These new connections are then hardwired through repetition. Too much novelty leads to confusion and frustration. Too much repetition leads to boredom”

This principle suggests that the idea of having a set class (as some syllabi do) is not ideal for learning. Instead, teachers can try to be thematic in the overarching material they are teaching but vary the exercises and elements they are emphasizing in each class. Teachers can also introduce small elements of novelty by having students start with the left side, changing their orientation in the studio, or introducing different steps, for example.

9. Offer a curriculum that is holistic and sequential: “Students learn better through studying whole ideas in context than through studying isolated parts”

In a ballet class, this means making sure that students understand how preparatory steps lead to other steps: for example, how a grand rond de jambe prepares them for a renversé. Also, teachers can spend some time focusing on one area of corrections, rather
than giving all the corrections they can think of, which may seem random and unfocused to students.

10. Provide information about proper nutrition—importance of balanced diet for brain function

First of all, this reinforces the importance of trying to avoid creating an atmosphere in which eating disorders can thrive. Also, this suggests the importance of offering nutrition seminars for ballet students and encouraging them to follow that advice.

These are just a few examples of how these principles can be employed even in a fairly traditional ballet setting. There are many other ways in which ballet teachers can use these ideas. I think that regardless of how teachers use them it is important for teachers to be very aware of how the brain works.

Hardiman points out that since 90% of the brain’s sensory input is visual, the physical environment matters more than one might expect (40). She suggests the importance of using order, structure, and beauty in the physical environment, which can facilitate ease of learning and also improve attitude and morale (40). Further, she says that it is important to provide changing visual stimulation in the classroom because novelty makes the brain more alert and interested (40-41). In a ballet class, this could imply putting up different posters of dancers, pictures of skeletons and muscle structure, or other decorations that would change regularly. She also points out that natural lighting helps the brain to focus and learn, suggesting that for schools building or buying new space, studios with windows are preferable (42-43).

While the physical environment of a classroom is important for learning, the emotional environment is even more so. Hardiman offers strategies for creating a good emotional environment in the classroom. Since these are written for academic teachers and some of these are not directly applicable to ballet class, I will again offer examples of
how some of these ideas could be applied to a ballet context. She suggests the following strategies:

1. Predictability in expectations and rules
   Ballet teachers can achieve this by providing students with a handbook that clearly lays out expectations such as dress code, attendance, and level placement.

2. Making positive, personal connection with each student
   This could be accomplished first of all by respecting each student’s individual goals and treating students with dignity regardless of their “potential” or career goals.

3. Promote self-expression and risk-taking
   This emphasizes the importance of creating an atmosphere in which mistakes and learning through trial and error are accepted. Also, this could be accomplished by ensuring that students are always in supplementary modern dance classes that include improvisation, and by giving students opportunities to choreograph.

4. Treat students with fairly and with respect
   Again, this emphasizes the importance of avoiding favoritism and teaching each student equally in terms of attention and corrections, regardless of what the teacher sees as their facility or potential.

5. Teach peer acceptance
   Ballet teachers could do a lot to prevent the cattiness and competition that is often rampant at ballet schools. First of all, teachers can make it clear that denigrating other students, overtly judging students based on their body types, facility, or progress, and other unkind behavior will not be tolerated. Teachers can also set a good example by treating all students equally and giving opportunities for all students to perform and succeed.

6. Establish multi-level systems of discipline
   This idea mainly suggests that teachers be willing to work with students who are having problems. There are generally not many disciplinary problems in ballet classes, so this is not as much of an issue, but it does warn against teachers overreacting to perceived or actual offenses.

7. Empower students with some decisions in class
   As I suggested before, this could be accomplished by allowing students to occasionally make up their own combinations or request exercises. This idea could also be applied by allowing some freedom in dress code or in how many/which classes to take.

8. Provide suggestion box

9. Allow students to set their own goals
   This suggestion emphasizes the importance of allowing students autonomy in learning. I would suggest that ballet teachers meet individually with each student at the beginning of the term and help him or her come up with some goals for the term.

10. Give clear directions

11. Use humor to foster a light-hearted environment
   Ballet teacher Tyler Walters agrees with this, saying that making classes “both fun and serious” is one of his top principles as a teacher.
Although this should go without saying, it is essential that humor never be at the expense of a student. Not only is this unkind, it also sets a terrible example for how the students should interact with each other.

12. Celebrate successes
Teachers can do this by not withholding positive feedback and recognizing when students have achieved something difficult or applied a correction. This could also involve having end of term parties or other venues in which students and teachers can celebrate a term of hard work and progress.

There are many other aspects that are important to establishing a positive emotional environment in which students can learn. Following, I will discuss some of what seem to be the most important ones: establishing environments conducive to self-efficacy and self-confidence, helping students learn to deal with failure, establishing an environment conducive to creating effective goals, using positive tools to motivate students, and making learning relevant.

Chapter 18: Establishing an Environment Conducive to Self-Efficacy and Self-Confidence

“Let’s ‘make as many students as we can,’ not ‘….break as many as we can’” (M’liss Dorrance)
While the concepts of self-efficacy and self-confidence are related, they are not
the same, so I will discuss each of them individually. I will talk first about self-efficacy,
defined as “a person’s belief in having the power to succeed” (Howe 120). Self-efficacy
is highly correlated to performance: people with low self-efficacy avoid challenges, miss
opportunities, and cannot reach their full athletic potential (Gallucci 169; Howe 120). It is
important to note that self-efficacy differs from self-esteem: according to Gallucci, “Self-
estee m refers to self-worth or how people value themselves. Self-efficacy relates to
convictions that one can initiate and sustain sufficiently skilled actions to realize a range
of goals in domains of functionality” (178). In other words, a person’s self-esteem is their
overall opinion of themselves, while their self-efficacy is their belief in their ability to
accomplish their goals.

Self-efficacy is vitally important for dancers because it allows them to perform at
their maximum potential and be able to take risks artistically and technically. According
to Gallucci, “Efficacy beliefs allow people to make optimal use of their acquired
skills…and more quickly acquire new skills and knowledge. With high self-efficacy,
skills can be applied flexibly and in various combinations and performance is more
consistently excellent” (174). Additionally, “people with optimistic self-efficacy beliefs
are more willing to take [necessary] risks because they have a sturdy belief in their ability
to prevail in advance of proof that they will be successful” (Gallucci 171). Further,
Angela Pickard and Richard Bailey in the article “Crystallising experiences among young
dancers” suggest, “…those people with a strong sense of self-efficacy ‘view
challenging problems as tasks to be mastered, develop deeper interest in the activities in
which they participate, form a strong sense of commitment to their interests and activities
and recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments’ (Wagner, 2007, p.1)” (167). These statements describe exactly what teachers should be hoping to develop in their dancers. Further, strong efficacy beliefs allow people to bounce back more quickly from failures and rejections, a skill that is invaluable in the highly competitive world of ballet. Finally, high self-efficacy in relation to a valued outcome leads to high motivation to work towards that outcome (Alexander and Winne (eds), Schunk and Zimmerman 352). On the other hand, low efficacy beliefs can lead to low motivation and poor performance, especially if there is an evaluative threat involved in the situation (an audition, for example) (Gallucci 314).

Self-efficacy is most effectively strengthened through experiences of success (Gallucci 187). It is important, then, to give students manageable challenges so that they can have the experience of success. According to Hardiman, if past experiences “produced failure in learning, for example, we will then resist accumulating more of this unwanted experience” (28). In other words, if we never give students opportunities to succeed, they will no longer want to even try. However, successes must come through persistence and challenge in order to contribute to efficacy beliefs: students need to see themselves overcome challenges in order to believe in their abilities (Gallucci 187). If there is no challenge involved, the successes don’t mean anything.

Many factors can be involved in low efficacy beliefs, some of which teachers can contribute to. For example, harsh judgments or meanness from teachers can cause lingering self-doubt, more so than the teacher might have anticipated (Lakes 1). Further, if teachers always give students exercises that they cannot achieve, or constantly criticize their efforts, students will not develop high efficacy beliefs. Further, if students
experience successes, their aspirations and goals will be elevated, while failures tend to lower ambitions (Alexander and Winne (eds), Schunk and Zimmerman 352).

Gallucci offers some strategies (from a sports psychology perspective) for developing efficacy in athletes. They include diagnosing skills that need development and developing practice to improve them, modeling correct execution of skills as well as confidence in abilities, using praise liberally (when it is true), recognizing when skills are misused, and providing feedback based on attainments rather than deficits (183). While some of these may seem intuitive, it seems that many teachers feel that they must withhold praise in order to be “tough.” However, while teachers should not give empty or untrue praise, or give praise out so liberally that it loses meaning, they ought not shy away from complimenting achievements: how else will students know that they are improving and avoid frustration? M’Liss Dorrance argues, “students need to know when they have improved and when their efforts have been good, but not falsely stroked if they haven’t reached or nearly reached the goals set before them,” which I think is a great way to approach the use of praise. Further, this advice for increasing efficacy beliefs reinforces the need for personal attention to each dancer: students would benefit from meeting individually with teachers to diagnose specific aspects of their dancing that need work and develop strategies to improve them. This will give students confidence that they can overcome obstacles and help them feel less overwhelmed by the incredible demands of ballet technique by allowing them to focus on something specific.

As I said before, it is essential for teachers to establish an atmosphere that nurtures self-confidence as well as self-efficacy. Indeed, Marion Woodman in Not Just Any Body writes, “The stronger we are as individuals, the stronger we are as dancers. It
is the responsibility of teachers to give young dancers self-esteem to know themselves and whatever their ability is or not. The totality of the individual: body, mind, soul, and spirit—is involved” (Woodman qtd. in Jowitt et al. 39). Self-confidence (which I will use interchangeably with self-esteem) can be understood as a person’s entire idea of his or her value. It is affected by many factors, but for a student who is extremely dedicated to ballet, self-confidence can be affected enormously by what happens in ballet class. Because ballet is so hard, rejection is frequent, teachers can be extremely harsh, and eating disorders/body image problems are so common, it is easy to see why many dancers have low self-esteem. However, this can be extremely damaging for several reasons. First of all, low self-confidence often incorporates or leads to negative self-talk, which many studies have shown can seriously undermine performance. According to Gallucci, “Negative self-talk diverts attention from the skills and strategies necessary for optimal performance” (93). It is important for teachers to help students train themselves mentally to practice positive self-talk. Self-talk is highly important because it can be either a positive feedback loop or a downward spiral: low self-esteem leads to negative self-talk, which lowers performance, which lowers self-esteem, which encourages negative self-talk, etc. On the other hand, positive self-talk leads to higher self-esteem and performance, which encourages more positive self-talk, and so on.

Low self-confidence also makes dancers more sensitive to criticism and perceived criticism. According to Gallucci, “Children with low self-esteem are especially sensitive to the reactions of coaches…more likely to interpret the responses of coaches to be punitive…. [and] more dependent on support from coaches” (428). In other words, contrary to popular ideas of the need to “toughen up” students, they will actually be
stronger, more independent, and less in need of “coddling” (and therefore more prepared to go into the professional world) if they have sturdy self-confidence. Further, high self-esteem not only makes students more independent and resilient, but also better artists. Ursuliak believes that students’ self-esteem must be kept intact in order to foster dancers who are creative rather than mechanical (Warren 207). This makes intuitive sense: how can a dancer who hates him or herself create something beautiful or be able to go into the full depths of his or her emotional range to embody a character? We see the importance of working towards improving this issue in the quote, “If we start teaching children in a less abusive way, giving them more joy and more responsibility, then, when they go into companies, they will have learned that they have a right to be more active. If we are going to end up with a better situation in twenty years, we must change our teaching now” (Jowitt et al. 97).

The need for self-confidence again underscores the importance of individual feedback from teachers. Because ballet (unlike sports) is so subjective, it is easy for dancers to become obsessive about their flaws and never feel successful. According to Kate F. Hays, in her article in Sport Psychology in Practice, says “one of the most challenging aspects of this subjectivity is frequent lack of feedback. Particularly with intrinsically motivated, perfectionistic dancers, it becomes nearly impossible to create a mental or emotional space devoid of self-blame and self-criticism” (Anderson (ed), Hays 130). Teachers can alleviate this problem by giving frequent feedback, eliminating the mystery of what they are thinking and their opinions. In my own experience, the most stressful situations being a student are not when the teacher gives negative feedback but when they give no feedback at all! This seems to be a fairly common phenomenon in
ballet—for example, one of the students in my survey group reported, “Unless you
specifically asked for feedback or if the student was lacking, they did not tell you
anything about your evaluation.” This seems like a very stressful situation because you
have no way of knowing why you are being moved up or not. Further, you are deprived
of valuable information on your progress and advice about how to improve. Similarly,
Webster writes that at the Paris Opéra Ballet School, students “were expelled without
explanation in notices pinned outside the school after annual examinations.” It seems that
the more teachers can demystify what they are thinking, the better for students: this gives
them valuable information on their improvement and also conveys a sense of respect by
showing students that they have the right to know about their evaluations.

It is also important that feedback be distributed as equitably as possible. Jessica
Wilson points out the damaging effects of favoritism in terms of feedback in her own
training, writing, “Looking back, the pecking order certainly was supported by many of
the teachers’ actions. Always picking the same student to correct can alienate this
student. And selecting the same four or five girls to be in the first line of the first group
certainly draws a line between them and their peers. As a teacher, I believe students must
be able to learn from the corrections their peers receive, but I also believe if they are
willing to commit their time to the class they deserve individual attention. I also feel a
false sense of security may come to the students that are always selected. Students must
be challenged to set personal goals. Satisfaction must come not only from praise but from
personal achievement. It is a shame to be taught to measure yourself by your placement
in the room.” This quotation is very insightful because it as well as acknowledging the
importance of respecting each student and her goals and abilities, it intuits the importance
of intrinsic motivation as well as self-referenced (as opposed to social-comparison) feedback. As I discussed before, teachers need not be cruel to be honest. According to Taylor, self-confidence partly comes from teachers helping students to think rationally and objectively about problem areas, possibilities for success, and ability to achieve goals (45): it is not empty praise but rather honest, respectful feedback that helps to develop self-esteem. One student, when asked what the worst part of her training was, wrote, “While corrections are wonderful, an excess of personal criticism is not –a dancer with shattered self-esteem does not dance as well as a confident one.” This is definitely true, and teachers who understand the difference between corrections and personal criticism can help to avoid ending up with dancers who have damagingly low self-confidence.

**Helping Students Learn to Deal with Failure**

Unfortunately, failure and rejection are inevitable parts of being in the dance world: almost no dancer goes through his or her entire career getting every job, every audition, and every part she wants. Therefore, one of the best gifts a teacher can give her students is the ability to bounce back from failure and rejection. One of the ways teachers can do this is what I have already discussed, through developing self-efficacy: according to Gallucci, “people who have high levels of confidence in their abilities appear to interpret successes and failures in a manner that is most beneficial to the preservation of their confidence” (35). Teachers can also help students to reframe failures as learning experiences, which is really the only productive way to look at them (Taylor 47). I think that another way teachers can help students accept and learn from failure is by divulging their own stories of rejection or failure. That way, students can see a real-life, respected role model who has dealt with challenges and still managed to succeed. Oftentimes,
perspective is the best way to help someone manage failure, and that is something teachers, most of whom who have performing careers that doubtless included rejection, can give to their students.

Students who do not handle failure well tend to fear it. These fears break down into several different categories of feared outcomes, including “fears of experiencing shame/embarrassment…fears of devaluing one’s self-estimate….fears of having an uncertain future…fears of important others losing interest…[and] fear of upsetting important others” (Gallucci 198). Teachers can help alleviate the fear of failure by helping students overcome these individual fears. For example, by creating a classroom environment in which it is ok to make mistakes, teachers can alleviate the fear of upsetting important others (read: the teacher) and the fear of shame and embarrassment. By sharing personal stories of failure and overcoming it to succeed, teachers can help to ease the fear of an uncertain future. Finally, by making a point of continuing to encourage and maintain interest in students after they experience failure, teachers can help assuage students’ fear of important figures losing interest in them. It is important for teachers to help alleviate these fears because if students continue to have them, they can lead to distraction, negative self-talk, and low self-esteem (Gallucci 198). By helping students learn to accept, learn from, and move past failure, teachers can give them an incredibly important tool for success in their later lives and careers.

**Motivation and Goal Orientation**

As previously mentioned, motivation can be characterized as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from within a person—they want to engage in an
activity for reasons originating from themselves. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation comes from outside of a person—they engage in an activity because they are scared of the consequences of not engaging in it (for example, a student who goes to ballet class because they will be yelled at if they do not or because their parents will ground them if they do not) or because they are offered positive external consequences for engaging in it (for example, students who want to succeed in school because their parents give them rewards for good grades). Dale H. Schunk and Barry J. Zimmerman, in their article “Competence and Control Beliefs: Distinguishing the Means and Ends” (in the Handbook of Educational Psychology) define intrinsic motivation as the desire to fulfill three essential psychological needs: competence (mastering environment), autonomy (control, agency), and relatedness (belonging to a group) (359). It is common for parents, teachers, coaches, and other authority figures to encourage people to do things using extrinsic motivation—indeed, according to Adam Lefstein in the article “Thinking Power and Pedagogy Apart—Coping with Discipline in Progressivist School Reform,” Extrinsic motivation—the desire for rewards or fear of punishment—is typical of school learning…Meaningful learning is the result of intrinsic motivation…Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation contradict each other” (1634). Ballet can be structured to encourage intrinsic motivation by allowing students opportunities in which they can succeed and thus demonstrate competence, allowing students some autonomy over their own training and learning, and establishing a supportive environment in which students can feel comfortable belonging to their peer group. It is interesting to note that intrinsic motivation actually decreases when students are offered rewards for achieving or threatened with punishments for not achieving, especially when a “reward is interpreted
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as an attempt to coerce and control behavior” (Gallucci 37). This highlights the importance of allowing students to rely on their own intrinsic motivation to dance, rather than forcing them to do so. Further, this supports the position that I took earlier against level coded dress code systems: if this is interpreted as a reward for improving, it can actually decrease intrinsic motivation.

According to research on the subject, there are two types of extrinsic motivation: self-determined or non-self-determined. According to Mageau and Vallerand, who cite work by Deci and Ryan, “To the extent that the extrinsic reasons for doing the activity are internalized and accepted by the person, extrinsic motivation will be self-determined. In such circumstances, the person fully endorses the values underlying his or her sport and volitionally engages in the activity. Conversely, non-self-determined extrinsic motivation occurs when the person feels pressured and obligated to engage in the activity be either external (e.g. one’s coach) or internal (e.g. one’s feelings of guilt) forces)” (883). While research has traditionally suggested that only intrinsic motivation leads to optimal benefits, they argue that “…because being involved in sports entails much training and discipline that are not always enjoyable, athletes cannot rely solely on intrinsic motivation and must, at times, turn to extrinsic forms of motivation to pursue their training. It is thus important for athletes to endorse the value and importance of their training for skill development. In fact, research shows that self-determined extrinsic motivation, as opposed to non-self-determined extrinsic motivation, is related to positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences very similar to the ones associate with intrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 1997)” (Mageau and Vallerand 886). Ultimately, it is extremely important for an athlete or students’ optimum learning and growth that
intrinsic and/or self-determined extrinsic forces motivate him or her. This means that teachers should be cognizant of using rewards or punishments in order to compel students to do certain things. Further, autonomy-supportive teaching styles become important in this regard as well, because students taught in autonomy-supportive ways are better equipped to identify self-determined motivation for doing things and gravitate towards those activities for which they feel motivational affinity.

Ballet teachers should be particularly aware of the question of motivation, because it seems that extrinsic motivation is fairly common among ballet students. For example, in the article “Voices of Young Women Dance Students: An Interpretive Study of Meaning in Dance,” the authors report the students expressing extrinsic motivations in dance class, which will not serve the students well in the long run. They write: “The focus in technique class is on doing a movement and getting it right. When asked what she was thinking about during class, Lily responded, ‘I’m basically thinking about the step and how you do it…I think about what I would look like to someone if they were watching me right now.’ Ellen stated her thoughts as ‘I gotta get it. Oh god I did that wrong...’ Jane said, ‘There’s so much pressure to get everything right. I want them [teachers] to think I can do things. I want to impress them, for them to see my progress’” (16). Further, the authors suggest that “Satisfaction comes from…getting recognition from the teacher or choreographer. The recognition need not be in the form of approval; just being recognized validates their existence and effort” (17). My interviews and surveys also suggest that extrinsic motivation is a large factor for dance students, many of whom identified achieving beyond their classmates, impressing teachers, etc as motivating forces.
In a related area, goal orientation is an important factor in allowing maximum learning. There are different types of goals, and research suggests that the type of goal a student sets greatly affects their ability to achieve it and the learning benefits they get from pursuing it. According to Duda and Balaguer, types of goals can be summarized into four main categories: positive intrapersonal goals (also known as task approach goals) focus on a personal task, such as improving one’s personal best or mastering a skill. Negative intrapersonal goals (also called task avoidance goals) involve trying to avoid doing worse than before on a task or skill. Positive normative goals (also known as ego approach goals) involve proving oneself to be the best among competitors or being better than others. Negative normative goals (a.k.a. ego-avoidance goals) focus on avoiding doing worse than others or lowering one’s status in a group (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Duda and Balaguer 127). The most useful of these types of goals are positive intrapersonal goals. Negative or avoidance goals tend to decrease performance because they are often unrealistically high, distract the goal-setter with excessive fear of failure, and often lead to low effort and ineffective problem solving because of that fear (Gallucci 164-165). Further, they can “result in less persistence in the face of failure, less task involvement, less intrinsic motivation…[the] focus on oneself directs attention away from the specific activities necessary to achieve goals” (Gallucci 33). Ego, or normative-oriented goals also lead to increased fear of failure because it demonstrates incompetence among competitors. Further, people who tend towards ego-orientation tend to have high levels of anxiety and low self-efficacy, and their self-confidence “fluctuates greatly depending on the strength of the competition” (Gallucci 165). On the other hand, task-oriented goals, which focus on “self-referenced mastery or improvement in relation to
one’s personal standards” (Gallucci 152), can lead to higher self-confidence and motivation to achieve. Positive, or success-oriented goals are also effective because they often lead people to “demonstrate persistence in the face of adversity, have less anxiety about the prospects of failure, set difficult goals, and demonstrate self confidence” (Gallucci 164). In general, according to Dada and Balaguer, climates conducive to task goals can lead to fewer instances of self-handicapping, greater enjoyment of and satisfaction in the activity, higher belief in the correlation of effort and success (leading to fewer instances of learned helplessness), better use of adaptive coping strategies and thus fewer instances of burn-out, more positive perceptions of the coach/teacher as helpful and supportive, higher perceived competence, and more positive moral function and reason, leading to respect for others (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Duda and Balaguer 121-123).

Sports literature suggests that the climate the coach creates is very important—for example, Sarrazin et al write of the snowballing negative effects of ego-involving climates, saying, “In particular, the more ego-involving the coach’s behavior, the less positive females handball perceptions….In turn, the less positive athletes’ perceptions of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, the lower their levels of self-determined motivation” (409). Similarly, Olympiou, Jowett, and Duda write, “Findings highlighted that the perceived task-involving coach climate (i.e., important role, co-operative learning, and effort improvement) was associated with athletes’ perceptions of feeling close, being committed, and interacting in a complementary fashion with their coach…” (434). Teachers do have the power to avoid the pitfalls of an ego-involving climate and help students learn to make task achievement goals, rather than ego or avoidance-oriented
goals. First of all, Gallucci suggests that coaches (or teachers, in this case) emphasize mastery of skills and enjoyment of the activity, as well as effort instead of innate talent, to create a climate conducive to these types of goals (158). Gallucci offers a useful acronym for positive goal setting: SMARTS (148). SMARTS goals have Specific, precise performance goals, Measurable or quantifiable standards, are Action oriented (emphasizing what should be done rather than what should not be done), are Realistic and Reachable, Timely (reached in a reasonable period of time) and Self-determined (decided upon with input from the participant) (Gallucci 148). Teachers could help students set these types of goals at the beginning of each semester and then help them evaluate progress. An example of a useful goal under this model could be, for example, becoming consistently able to perform double pirouettes on the right side: this is specific, measurable, action oriented (as opposed to a goal such as not sickling feet, for example), realistic (depending on the student, of course), timely (if the goal is set for a student who has the potential to achieve it in a short amount of time, perhaps over the course of a term), and can be self-determined.

Dada and Balaguer also provide a useful schematic for teachers to help students become involved in their goals and task-achievement, the acronym “TARGET” (Jowett and Lavallee (eds), Duda and Balaguer 129). This strategy includes the following elements for the goal-setter to consider (I have editorialized within these to give examples for how these strategies could be used in a ballet class).

**Task**: what the student is expected to learn or accomplish: it is best to provide moderately challenging, individual tasks and teach students to self-monitor (such as outside of class exercises, etc) and eventually be able to establish their own goals.
Authority: athletes will become the most involved in their tasks and goals if teachers encourage athlete’s participation in decision making (allowing students to choose which goals they see as important, for example), consider the perspective of the athlete when setting goals, and help athletes take responsibility for their own development by teaching self-management (allowing students to have more control over their schedules, for example)

Recognition: procedures used to motivate and reward athletes: teachers can hold private meetings to focus on individual progress, recognize individual progress, effort, and improvement, and offer equal opportunities for rewards for all students (for example, by attempting to award coveted roles to a variety of students)

Grouping: how athletes are grouped together or kept apart in training and competition: teachers who use flexible and cooperative grouping arrangements (for example, by loosening level structures or mixing up groups in performances) and emphasize creative solutions to training problems (such as cross-training methods or effective imagery) inspire students to become more involved in their tasks

Evaluation: standards set for learning and performance and procedures for evaluation of standards: it is most effective for teachers to develop evaluation criteria based on effort, improvement, persistence, and progress towards individual goals (rather than, for example, body type or natural facility), self-evaluation (having students write short journals discussing what they believe they have accomplished), make evaluation meaningful and consistent (rather than random, surface level, or so general as to be meaningless)

Timing: appropriateness of time demands placed on learning and performance: coaches can recognize that even elite athletes do not train, learn, or develop at the same rate: provide time before moving on to new skills (by allowing students to add batterie or multiple pirouettes, for example), try to spend equal time with all athletes (by spending time in the studio after classes to assist students with particularly challenging steps, for example), assist athletes in establishing training and competition schedules (by offering flexibility in scheduling based on the students’ individual goals and abilities, for example).

This “TARGET” strategy for enhancing task involvement in students could potentially be quite useful for ballet teachers to think about. It offers a fairly comprehensive yet easy to understand schematic for teachers to use as a tool when setting expectations, giving feedback, and structuring levels for their students. Further, following these strategies, teachers can help their students learn to set positive, task-oriented goals for themselves.
**Increasing Motivation in Students**

There are different types of motivation, which are effective to varying degrees, and there are tools that teachers can use to increase positive motivation in students. Motivation is both affected by and affects performance, effort, and psychological health, so this is an important topic of which teachers can be aware. It is related to but distinct from the ability of students to set and reach goals.

People are born with different inborn levels of achievement motivation or need for accomplishments (Gallucci 27). This is important because, according to Gallucci, “tendencies to put forth optimal efforts and achieve success were determined by achievement motivation, the likelihood of being successful at the task, and the importance of the task” (27). Thus, it is helpful for teachers to recognize that while the latter two traits are controllable, the first is inborn and stable, and so motivation will differ among students regardless of how well developed goals are. However, there are also elements of motivation that are not inborn: Howe writes that the main components of motivation to achieve a specific task include cognitive drive, or interest in the task, ego-enhancing, or the learner’s desire to have success, be adequate, and have increased status, and affiliative, or the learner’s desire to gain the approval of others through achieving the task (114-115). Teachers can help to motivate students by varying tasks to keep them interesting. Further, teachers can increase motivation by ensuring that students’ ability is roughly equal to the demands placed upon them: according to Taylor, if “demands are greater than ability, there will be anxiety and motivation goes down, if ability is greater than demands there will be boredom and motivation goes down, if demand equals ability, there will be challenge and motivation will stay high” (32). Through establishing
environments conducive to task-oriented achievement goals, teachers can also help to encourage motivation with a promotion focus ("focus on approaching opportunities, advancement, and accomplishment and a relative lack of attention to potential risks and losses"), which is more effective than a prevention focus ("motive to avoid failure") for the same reasons than positive goals are more effective than avoidance goals (Gallucci 29-30).
Although it might be tempting to teach various technical concepts in isolation from one another, students learn best and retain the most information when learning is relevant and thematic: according to Hardiman, “Concepts and skills taught in isolation are meaningless to students” (49). In order for students to remember information, it must relate to what they already know. If teachers can present students with overall learning objectives (Hardiman 49) and explain how different exercises or steps relate to one another, students will be more likely to both be motivated to work on the task at hand and also to retain information long-term. In general, Hardiman writes that “brain-targeted teaching supports providing students with ‘big picture’ ideas, then breaking these ideas into connected ‘concept chunks’ that relate students’ prior knowledge and understanding to new information to be processed, integrated, applied, and retained” (47). It is a universal frustration for teachers when students seem to forget corrections the day after they were given: one way that teachers can help alleviate this problem is by connecting corrections to how they will affect the students’ dancing on a larger scale, or explaining where else that correction is relevant outside of the specific exercise in which it was given. Teachers can also explain how current corrections build off of previous improvements, or show students the progression of one exercise to a more challenging one. These tools, and others, can all help students to improve faster because they will retain information better.

Organizing class thematically can also help students to learn better: generally, information is retained best when it is offered in an organized, structured, and thematic way (Howe 37). Teachers can structure class thematically by, for example, giving exercises at the barre that translate into the day’s center exercises and helping students
transfer corrections given at the barre to the center. Teachers can also focus on specific technical elements for a number of classes in a row so that students have several opportunities to learn thematic information.

Students also learn information faster and more effectively if it requires higher order mental processing when it is learned. According to Howe, “of all the many factors that influence what a person learns, none has a larger influence than the kinds of mental processing activities that are carried out by the learner, deliberately or otherwise, at the time the person is attending to the material or information that is to be learned” (33). Ballet teachers could employ this concept, for example, by “problem posing” in the classroom (Ottey): asking students how they might solve a technical or artistic problem and therefore getting students to think about it themselves and thus imprint the information more firmly. This is also a useful tool because, according to Ottey, it “access[es] and value[s] student knowledge and experience in relation to the content,” which makes students feel valued in the context of the classroom and encourages them to continue thinking in a deep way about their learning. In general, learning happens most efficiently when the information is portrayed in a way that makes it meaningful to the learner (Howe 25-26). This efficiency makes it possible for students to progress faster and thus allows teachers to give students more leeway in training schedules so that students can continue to have a satisfying life outside of ballet.

**Class Structure: More than one option!**

Although ballet classes are almost universally structured in the same way and involve almost exclusively reproductive teaching (the teacher shows a movement and the students attempt to replicate it), that does not have to be true. The general structure of a
ballet class makes sense: barre work warms up the body progressively and works on technical skills that allow students to dance in the center. However, more specific structural elements do not have to be set in stone. For example, Darvash believes that it is good to alternate strenuous and less strenuous exercises in order to allow recovery time and will change the traditional order of exercises in order to accomplish that (Warren 103). Howard points out the utility of a highly structured syllabus such as the Royal Academy of Dancing method for ensuring that students have consistent training, but points out that there are gaps in that syllabus (Warren 114). He also says that as a teacher, he attempts to create exercises that both allow students to acquire needed skills and also foster enjoyment in movement (Warren 120). Other ballet teachers have undoubtedly developed different approaches to class structure, but the vast majority stick to reproduction-oriented tasks.

Elizabeth Gibbons, in her book *Teaching Dance: The Spectrum of Styles*, argues that teachers should attempt to move beyond just reproduction to utilize other teaching styles as well. She argues that students learn best when a variety of modes of learning are offered and suggests that teachers try to incorporate various styles of teaching into their lessons. While her book is not written specifically for ballet, it is possible for teachers to use a variety of the styles she discusses even in a serious ballet class. She describes eleven different styles of teaching (divided into two groups, production and reproduction), and I will offer an example of how each could be (or already is) used in ballet training.

1. Cued Response: this is the method used in most dance classes, focusing on accurate replication of movement and class unity (79). This includes almost any exercise given in a ballet class.
2. Practice: “time is provided for the learner to rehearse the task individually; [teacher] provide[s] feedback…to each student” (81). This style is sometimes used in ballet classes when teachers will go around to each student and help them with a specific step.

3. Reciprocal: students “receive immediate feedback from a peer who has a prepared criteria while the other student is practicing the task” (83). Teachers could easily incorporate this into ballet class by splitting students into pairs and giving having one student practice a skill, such as a pirouette, and giving the other student specific elements to look for.

4. Self check—students practice task individually, provide feedback to themselves (85). This is sometimes used in ballet classes, when students will practice specific elements of a combination. However, teachers could use this more by giving time in between exercises and allowing students to figure out for themselves the best way to accomplish a task. This will also improve learning because it allows the student autonomy in her learning and also requires higher order thinking that will better imprint information.

5. Inclusion: “task or activity is designed to provide different degrees of difficulty” (86). This is used in ballet classes when a teacher might give students the option to perform batterie or multiple pirouettes, for example.

6. Guided discovery: “students are guided along a path of discovery to a single correct answer” (90). This is the first style in the production cluster, in which students are designing their own learning. It could be used in a ballet class, for example, if a teacher gives hints towards corrections about a certain step but asks the students to discover for themselves the best ways to incorporate those ideas. This style could also be incorporated through “problem-posing” in the classroom.

7. Convergent discovery: “learners, independent of the guiding comments by the teacher…discover the solution to a problem using logic, intuition, trial and error” (90-91). In a ballet class, for example, this could be accomplished if the teacher gave students a particularly difficult combination and then assigned them to come into the studio on their own and figure out how to perform it correctly.

8. Divergent production: “producing multiple discovered responses to a single question, problem, or task” (90-91). This could be used in a ballet class if, for example, the teacher told the students to create an across the floor exercise that included a turn, a jump, and some kind of footwork. Each student would then come up with a different combination but they would accomplish the same general goal.

9. Individual program, learner’s design: “learner designs, develops, and performs an organized personal problem” (92). This could be accomplished by giving students the opportunity to choreograph a solo and perform it for the class at the end of the term, for example.

10. Learner initiated: “learner to initiate a learning experience, design it, perform it, and assess it, based on agreed-upon criteria” (93-94). This could involve a student developing her own cross-training program to improve upon a student-identified technical issue—the student could decide what types of cross-training to engage in, who to go to for advice, and how much to do, and then assess her progress at the end of a certain time frame, with input from the teacher.
11. Self-teaching: “learner initiates a learning experience, designs it, performs it, and evaluates it” (94). The teacher cannot really incorporate this into teaching because it is entirely learner executed. However, by fostering independence and individual thinking in students, teachers can prepare students to engage in this kind of learning.

Clearly, there are more options than just cued response, and adding this kind of variety could potentially stimulate students’ minds and bodies in new, fruitful ways. I think that it would be useful for teachers to consider incorporating many of these teaching styles in their own teaching and see which seem to be effective for their students and goals. It seems that class structure, in general, should be plastic and dynamic, based on the goals of the teacher, the students’ individual needs, the most physically and emotionally sound teaching methods, and other extenuating circumstances.

Chapter 20: The “Ideal” Conservatory Program, Conclusion, and Implications for Future Research
As I have said throughout this paper, there are as many varieties of good teaching as there are teachers and there are probably many different models of conservatories that would achieve goals similar to the ones I have described here. However, I want to outline my model for the “ideal” conservatory program that I feel embodies the principles I have outlined. I want to explicitly recognize that this is an ideal, and it would require a large investment of financial resources to attain. However, it is worth understanding what the ideal might look like in order to make steps in that direction. First, I will give general principles for the school (many of which reiterate the principles I stated at the beginning of this text). Next, I will outline a rough training program for the different age groups. This section is not a syllabus—as I said before, I don’t think that any of the traditional syllabi is unequivocally the best, or that it is necessary for students to be taught according to one of them. In this, I am assuming that teachers have the necessary content knowledge and am centrally focusing on pedagogical strategy and the elements of the training program. Finally, I will offer some additional notes on the structure and function of the school.

General principles:
The school will have a strong focus on and respect for academic achievement, including requiring that all students be enrolled in rigorous academic programs (in other words, the conservatory will not allow students to essentially drop out of school in order to study ballet)

It will require that teachers have training in psychology/child development/education. However, it will not discount teachers for not having had the opportunity to achieve that knowledge, rather, it will provide professional development opportunities to allow teachers and prospective teachers to gain an understanding of those fields

The dress code will be simply that students wear tight-fitting clothes in which the body can be seen. Teachers will talk to students on an individual basis if they feel that students are not wearing appropriate clothing (either because the body can be seen or because the student is so focused on individuality in dress that it is a distraction).

The school will create an institutionalized mentorship system between teachers and students and between older/younger students, creating opportunities for cross-level cohesion as well as improved teacher-student relationships.
Students will have performing opportunities about two times a year that include structured opportunities for students to choreograph. Further, the school will outreach performances in order to instill a sense of social responsibility in students.

The school will have a well-stocked dance/art library that includes books on dance history, art history, technique/theory, and career advice as well as a collection of dance videos.

The school will have available for students (either on site or through referrals) a psychologist, a nutritionist, and a physical therapist. Further, it will provide required yearly training seminars for the faculty dealing with topics such as recognizing/preventing eating disorders, injury prevention, etc.

Half of the studios in the school will have mirrors and half will not. The youngest children will never work with mirrors, beginning ballet students will use mirrors about half the time, and advanced ballet students will work with them about two thirds of the time. Modern and improvisation classes will never use mirrors.

Older dance students have the opportunity to serve on an advisory council to the faculty

Syllabus/training details
Ages 3-6: creative movement
Emphasis on musicality, rhythm, fun
Learning concepts including weight transfer, skipping, hopping, jumping, locomotor movement
Classes will use imagery and improvisational activities
Only informal in-studio performance opportunities
Early ballet technique age 7-9 (all ages are approximate—students will progress based on age, ability, and interest in pursuing ballet at increasingly high commitment and time)
  Ballet class 75 minutes, 2x a week
  Modern/improvisation class (extension of creative movement) 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Students will have (required) seminars twice a month in dance history, music theory, etc.

Some structured performance activities such as the opportunity to perform in a “Nutcracker” production
Ages 10-12
  Ballet class 75 minutes, 3-4x/week
  Pre-pointe class 30 minutes, 2x/week
  Modern/improvisation class, 75 minutes, 1x/week—this class would start to introduce more technical elements of modern dance
  These students will participate fully in performance opportunities
  Students will have (required) seminars twice a month in dance history, music, anatomy, meditation, and/or character dance. These seminars could include opportunities for students to give presentations on topics in dance history or music topics
  * Ages 12-14
    * Ballet class 90 minutes, 4-5x/week;
    * Pointe class 30 minutes, 3-4x/week
    * Modern/improvisation class 75 minutes, 2x/week
Conditioning class (introduction to Pilates, cardio cross-training, and other conditioning methods) 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Full participation in performance opportunities
  Required seminars in music, anatomy, nutrition, mental skills 60 minutes, 1x/week
  These could also include seminars in yoga, meditation, etc
  Students will have the opportunity to do presentations on dance history/music topics
Ages 14-16
  Ballet class 90 minutes, 5-6x/week
  Pointe/variations class 30 minutes, 3x/week
  Modern class 90 minutes, 1x/week
  Choreography class 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Conditioning class 60 minutes, 2x/week
  Jazz class 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Full participation in performance opportunities
  Required seminars in nutrition, mental skills 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Could also include yoga, meditation
Ages 16-18
  Ballet class 90 minutes, 6x/week
  Variations class 30 minutes, 2x/week
  Modern class 90 minutes, 2x/week
  Choreography class 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Jazz class 90 minutes, 1x/week
  Full participation in performance opportunities
  Required seminars in nutrition, mental skills, college/career counseling and preparation, meditation 60 minutes, 1x/week
  Optional teacher training seminars
Recreational track:
  Recognizing that they ask a large time commitment of students training on the professional track, the school will offer a recreational track as well
  On the recreational level, students will have more choice in what they study
  All will be encouraged to attend seminars
  The system will be entirely self-tracking (no student will be forced into the recreational track) and teachers will treat recreational classes with same amount of respect and rigor
  In-studio performing opportunities
  Physical environment of the school
  Physical safety of the dancers is of paramount importance—all studios will have sprung floors with appropriate surfaces
  The dance library will also have comfortable spaces for students to study, which highlights the emphasis on academic engagement and integration of the artistic and the academic
  There will be a conditioning room with workout machines, balls, therabands, etc and detailed instructions on how to use them
  All teacher offices will have a permanent sign-up sheet for conferences/meetings
  There will be a kitchen with a small café or vending machine where students can buy healthy snacks
There will be dance/art history information posted on the walls along with pictures of dancers in a variety of styles, body types, race, gender, etc, encouraging both intellectual knowledge about the art form and inclusivity of various types of dancers.

There will be information available about all arts happenings in the area and students will be encouraged to attend.

There will be skeletons in all studios for anatomical reference.

This vision embodies many of the ideals and principles I have illuminated in this project. I know that it cannot include everything, and is not the definitive answer to all of ballet’s problems, but I think it functions quite well as a model. I have deliberately *not* created a model for a ballet school that provides academic education or has a residential component. I have chosen this not only because it is outside of the scope of my research to design a residential program and/or an academic program, but also because I feel ballet students will benefit most from living at home (or in a boarding situation that is not strictly ballet) and from pursuing their academic educations at least somewhat separately from their ballet educations. I think that it is a dangerous prospect to have ballet students spend time only with other ballet students, as this could likely lead to the kind of tunnel-vision and competitiveness that could be damaging. Having a relatively “normal” school experience will allow students to interact with many different kinds of people, keep open other options outside of ballet, and have friends who are not in the ballet world and can help keep things in perspective. Further, ballet schools that do offer academic programs often accept a watered down version of academics, which I think is the opposite of what ballet students should have. Ultimately, it seems that whenever possible ballet students should remain in academic schools not run by their ballet programs.

While I’m sure there exist several programs who place a premium on these kinds of principles, I think it is worth highlighting on in particular, the Alonzo King LINES
Ballet School. LINES Ballet is known for King's innovative choreography that stretches the traditional boundaries of classical ballet, and its school does the same thing in terms of changing the way ballet training usually functions. I admit a bias here—I spent a summer at the LINES Pre-professional summer program and can speak first hand to the efficacy of their teaching. At LINES, students are constantly challenged to explore the edges of their comfort zone intellectually (through encouragement to experiment with musicality and interpretation) and physically (through challenges to go to the extremes of classical ballet technique and also the requirement that students study in other disciplines such as modern dance, jazz, and improvisation). The stated philosophy of the school embodies much of this: “LINES Ballet School offers a unified philosophy of guiding participants on a collaborative journey that values artistic risk-taking and independent thinking. Students are encouraged to problem solve through exploration and a tenacious work ethic. Emphasis is placed on cultivating the dancers’ abilities to recognize their individual gifts, realize their full potentials and express themselves with fluency, while developing a strong technical base. Our aim is to supply a solid technical underpinning, based in classical training, and to provide an environment for the unfolding of the students’ own creative powers.” Mr. King himself frequently emphasizes his belief that each dancer has unique gifts to offer the dance world, and his conviction that with risk taking and extremely hard work, each student can achieve something meaningful in her art. According to King himself (as quoted on the school website), "The cornerstone that shapes the training philosophy at LINES Ballet School is that art is within the artist. Creative intelligence is a part of mankind's makeup as are heart, brain and lungs. We believe that each individual has a singularly unique voice. Our aim is to strengthen and
honed the interior voice, while establishing a deep-seated dance foundation. LBS teaches movement as a science that extracts the best attributes of all dance forms with ballet (western classical dance) as our mainstay.” LINES teachers view ballet technique as a means to the end of expression, rather than an end in itself. Competition is unequivocally discouraged, and students are constantly reminded of the importance of taking care of their bodies—indeed, the guidelines for the summer program include the instruction that this is not the time or place to diet. Further, students are told never to hide injuries—the website states, “At first sign of injury, no matter how minor, students should report directly to their mentor (assigned upon arrival). We do not advocate hiding injuries. There is no stigma attached to being injured and the sooner we are aware of an injury, the sooner we are able to be pro-active in treating it.” The site goes on to refer students to the in-house physical therapist. Finally, there is no dress code, except the suggestion that students wear “clean, form-fitting dance clothes…in order to better correct your alignment and help you stay injury-free.” All of these aspects of the LINES School philosophy are very much in keeping with what I have been suggesting throughout, and I found this program particularly compelling because, at least in my experience, every single member of the school’s faculty and administration wholeheartedly buys into these ideals. Interestingly, the LINES ballet school does not offer a year round program for anyone under the age of seventeen, other than open classes and some outreach programs. They have a five-week summer program that starts at age 11, but their year-round program is almost entirely composed of students who have already graduated high school. It would be interesting to see how this school would handle early childhood and adolescent dance education. In general, though, the LINES Ballet School progressive
teaching model is inspirational and very much in keeping with the research I have discussed in this paper.

**Implications for Future Research**

This project highlights several areas that were outside of the scope of my research but might prove to be fruitful avenues for future researchers to explore. One of these, which I touched upon in the last section, is the effects of dorm vs. non-dorm living on ballet students—how do the experiences of students in residential programs differ from those in non-residential programs, and is there a way to create a residential program that still embodies the principles I have discussed? It seems that there is definitely a difference in experience between the residential and non-residential students I spoke to, notably that the relationships the residential students experienced were more intense both in terms of competition and also in terms of friendships. This makes sense because residential students are obviously spending a lot of time together. I would be interested to know what the long-term implications of these two types of programs are, though. Is there an aggregate difference between self-esteem and self-efficacy for either group? Is one group better prepared for the professional world? Do the relationships last longer in one? Is there a higher incidence of eating disorders in one type of program? Any of these questions would be interesting ones to explore.

I would also like to see more comprehensive discussion and analysis of teachers’ opinions on pedagogy and their principles for teaching. Do most of them believe that they should teach the way they were taught? How do they feel about and treat students with less obvious potential? What aspects of the ballet tradition do they believe are particularly important to keep? Do their students pick up on the principles they are trying
to teach or embody? Does their teaching style change over time? Research on these kinds of questions would allow us to see more clearly how effective teachers tend to be in embodying their stated ideals, what kinds of ideals teachers are striving for, and what they feel are the resources they would need to improve their teaching.

One aspect of ballet training that I didn’t touch much on in this work is the actual teaching of content in ballet—how and when should certain steps, concepts, etc be introduced? This question was beyond the scope and purpose of this project, as I was focusing more on method than on content, but I would love to see another researcher take up that question. What do the traditional syllabi do right in terms of the order of steps they teach, how much repetition they use, and whether combinations are very simple or more choreographic? What are the benefits and downfalls to having set classes? When are students physiologically prepared to start pointe work? When is the best time to focus on flexibility vs. strength vs. speed? How can students both learn correct technique but also learn more complex combinations that force them to really move? Is it better for students to have one primary teacher or many teachers? It could be very useful for someone with both ballet knowledge and also anatomical and physiological knowledge to take up these questions so that we could design a syllabus of learning the content of ballet technique that both pushes students and is safe for their bodies and optimizes learning.

Finally, some of what I have written here begs the question of why the ballet tradition has lasted so long. Clearly changes have been made in sports, for example, whereas in ballet there seems to be a particularly forceful resistance to change. There are a few plausible explanations for this. First, sports has a tangible outcome (winning) that will justify any new training techniques—if a coach tries an innovative technique and has
successful athletes, that technique will spread. On the other hand, because ballet is so subjective, it is very difficult for any new method to “prove” its worth (Tyler Walters). Further, whereas in education or in other art forms, people who disliked the tradition created new movements and ideas within the form that eventually caused large scale change, in ballet people who didn’t like the tradition created modern dance, and today many people who feel stifled by ballet tradition simply cross to modern dance. This limits the number of voices in ballet that are trying to make change. Further, ballet was founded in the courts, in an extremely hierarchal tradition. Traditional training is very invested in that hierarchy and authority, and thus it is extremely difficult for anyone not at the top to raise their voices in support of change. This silencing of dissent in favor of respect for hierarchy and authority means that tradition tends to stay entrenched. Finally, there may not be much motivation for change because in a certain sense, the traditional method works: it produces more than enough technically proficient dancers to fill the ranks of companies that hire them. Since this is true, there is not much motivation in the highest levels to make changes to the training system. Of course, this begs one of the central questions in this work: at what cost? What happens to the people who don’t make it through the system? What are we losing in terms of artistry? What are we costing dancers in terms of mental health? However, if people do not look at these big picture issues, they may not see any need to make big changes in ballet training. I would be very interested to see future researchers look more deeply into this issue and into the reasons for it I have proposed here. In order to change something, you must understand it, and I believe that the critical discussion of ballet pedagogy would benefit from a more thorough understanding of why the tradition has remained relatively static for some time.
Conclusion

In this project, I have attempted to both propose my own opinions of how teachers can be effective, positive, and empowering influences on their students, and offer many tools for teachers to use. Again, there exists huge variety under the umbrella of “good teaching,” and each teacher can find his or her own unique style within the constructs of psychologically sound, physically sensitive, and pedagogically logical teaching. Of course, this paper is not exhaustive, and I believe that we must constantly engage in serious critical thinking about the way we teach ballet. Obviously, not all of the changes that I have suggested will happen at once, but I believe that it is essential to create change in ballet schools in order to effect positive change in the professional world. The training system fuels the professional world and allows it to continue the way it is. We must create bottom up change so that we have healthy, happy, highly skilled and fascinating dancers. These dancers will create companies and works that are progressive and can also change the culture within their companies. Eventually, these dancers may become company leaders or other people with serious influence within the professional world. Today’s students will become tomorrow’s dancers and eventually teachers, and if they are taught in healthy ways, they will be likely to teach their students that way as well and then run their companies or schools in healthy ways also.

Further, the dance world is missing out on a lot of passion and talent because students are shut out or emotionally crushed and no longer want to be a part of it—why are we silencing these voices? Just because these students may present a challenge to the system does not mean that it is good for the art form to silence them. How do you expect to nurture the next William Forsythe (I use that example because he is someone who is
classical but progressive in style) if students aren’t allowed to express their creativity and are constantly told to conform or else? We have both a moral and artistic imperative to improve our training mechanisms for ballet dancers. I believe that we can do that even while staying within the framework of a traditional ballet class, and even while preserving the aesthetic values of ballet technique. If every teacher seriously and critically thought about his or her teaching methods and their implicit and explicit messages, not only would every ballet student benefit but ballet as an art form would as well.

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Caroline Griswold


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Notes:
While this work is intended to be inclusive of all genders, for the sake of simplicity and ease of writing, I have generally used female pronouns. That is not meant to exclude men from these questions; I simply chose to use female pronouns because the vast majority of ballet students are, indeed, female.

When citing from articles from an edited volume within this text, I have formatted it as follows: (editor’s name (ed), author’s name, page number).

**Appendix A—Survey Information**

In the fall of 2008, I conducted a survey of 69 intermediate/advanced dance students, the majority of whom are Duke University students but also some students from other schools. This constrains the applicability of the survey results somewhat, because it means that the subject pool consists mostly of highly educated, college attending dancers. I asked them the following questions regarding their high school ballet training experience:

Age: Year in School (if applicable):

What kind of school did you primarily attend? (circle one)
- Recreational Studio
- Pre-Professional School (not company affiliated)
- Company-Affiliated School
- Performing Arts High School
- Residential Pre-Professional School
- Other (please specify)

Did you want to dance professionally in high school? Yes/No
Do you now/have you/are you? Yes/No
If the answer changed, list the top two reasons for the change:

Did you/do you study other kinds of dance? Yes/No
If so, what age did you start and how many years did you study:
- Jazz:
- Modern:
- Other:

Did your studio have a strict dress code? Yes/No
What was the best aspect of your dance training?

What was the worst?

If you could give your high school ballet teachers one piece of advice, what would it be?
Circle 1-5 for the following statements with 1=disagree strongly, 2 =disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=agree strongly

1. My ballet training improved my self-esteem 1 2 3 4 5
2. Body type was important at my school for who got parts 1 2 3 4 5
3. Even if I’m not dancing professionally, I’m glad I studied ballet seriously 1 2 3 4 5
4. My ballet teachers used humiliation as a teaching tool 1 2 3 4 5
5. My ballet teachers wanted to see me succeed 1 2 3 4 5
6. My ballet teachers were unnecessarily mean 1 2 3 4 5
7. I was encouraged to have a life outside ballet 1 2 3 4 5
8. I felt supported by my dance teachers 1 2 3 4 5
9. I enjoyed ballet class 1 2 3 4 5

Any other comments about your ballet training experience?

Is it ok for me to anonymously quote you in my paper? Yes/No

Thank you! All your responses will be kept confidential

A few of the results included:

Did your studio have a strict dress code? 78% yes, 22% no

Did you want to dance professionally in high school? 47% yes, 53% no

Do you want to dance professionally now? 31% yes, 69% no

Agree/Disagree: (1=disagree strongly, 2 =disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=agree strongly)

My ballet training improved my self-esteem:
1-13%, 2-22%, 3-22%, 4-27%, 5=16%

Body type was important at my school for who got parts:
1-12%, 2-23%, 3-23%, 4-22%, 5-20%

Even if I’m not dancing professionally, I’m glad I studied ballet seriously:
1-0%, 2-0%, 3-6%, 4-17%, 5-77%

My ballet teachers used humiliation as a teaching tool:
1-37%, 2-28%, 3-13%, 4-18%, 5-4%

My ballet teachers were unnecessarily mean:
1-35%, 2-41%, 3-13%, 4-9%, 5-3%

I was encouraged to have a life outside of ballet:
1-26%, 2-17%, 3-22%, 4-16%, 5-19%

I enjoyed ballet class:
1-0%, 2-2%, 3-19%, 4-42%, 5-38%

I also administered a survey to several dance teachers. Several of these teachers are professors in the Duke University Dance Program, but others are Durham, NC area teachers or Boston, MA area teachers. It is from these surveys that most of my quotations from teachers are taken. I asked them the following questions about their ballet training experience and teaching philosophy:

Name:

What type of school do you primarily teach in? (Choose one)
Recreational Studio  Pre-Professional Studio (not company affiliated)
Company Affiliated School  Performing Arts High School  Other (please specify)

How long have you been teaching?

What are your top three principles as a teacher?

Do you subscribe to a specific syllabus? If so, why? If not, why not?

How did you become a teacher? Why?

What do you believe is the ideal atmosphere in a dance classroom?

What is the primary style of dance that you teach?

What was the best aspect of your dance training?

What was the worst?

Please circle 1-5 for the following statements, with 1=disagree strongly, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=agree strongly

1. Students should be told early on if they don’t have potential/facility. 1 2 3 4 5
2. When I was a student, teachers were unnecessarily harsh. 1 2 3 4 5
3. My teacher was intimidating. 1 2 3 4 5
4. If a student wants to be a professional, dance should be their whole lives. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The teacher should be very clearly the authority in a classroom. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Dress code is important in a serious school. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Lots of repetition of exercises is important. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Students should be exposed to other types of dance than their primary style. 1 2 3 4 5
9. Students need to be toughened up in class so that they can make it in the dance world. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Students should be encouraged to have and express their own opinions about ballet and ballet training. 1 2 3 4 5
11. The way ballet has always been taught works/should be adhered to. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I mostly teach the way that my teacher taught me. 1 2 3 4 5

Any other comments?

Is it ok for me to quote you in my paper? Yes/No/Only anonymously

When I visited the Ballet School and Conservatory, I also administered surveys to those students, the text of which follows.

1. What has been the best part of your training generally? What has been the best part of your training at this school?

2. What has been the most challenging/worst part of your training generally? What has been the most challenging aspect of your time at this school?

3. How well do you know your teachers personally? Would you feel comfortable coming to them with a problem that had to do with ballet technique? What about a problem with your career? With the ballet world in general? Outside of ballet?

4. How well do you feel that your teachers know you as a person? What are the aspects of you that you feel you can show to them?

5. What are three adjectives you would use to describe your primary teacher?

6. Do you feel that you are encouraged to have a life outside of ballet? If so, how? If not, how does that manifest itself?

7. How well prepared do you feel to face the challenges of the ballet world? How did your teachers/this institution prepare you? Do you think there’s a way it could have better prepared you?

8. What are your relationships like with the other girls in your classes?

9. Do you feel that your teachers encourage competition? If so, how so?

10. What are your primary motivating forces to work hard and improve in dance?
11. On a scale of 1-5, how much do you enjoy class on a daily basis?
12. To what extent do you feel that you have agency in controlling your career path and making choices about your training?

13. How much do your teachers discuss artistry, and in what context? Do you feel that more attention is paid to your technical, artistic, or personal development?

14. Do you feel that dance has improved your self-esteem, made it worse, or had no effect? Can you point to specific factors that have improved/decreased your self-esteem?

15. How do you feel about dress code?

16. What are the best aspects of the teaching style/personality of your favorite teachers?

17. Do you believe that you can reach the goals you have for success in dance? How has the advice, commentary, or teaching style of your instructors contributed to that belief?

Thank you! All your answers are anonymous, so please be honest!
I also conducted separate interviews with students for the competition/cohesion section of the paper. Those questions follow.

What school did you attend for the bulk of your training? What type of school was it (i.e. pre-professional, company affiliated, recreational, residential)?

Were you with the same group of students for most of your training? Were they mostly girls?

What were your relationships like with the other students in your school?

Did you develop any close relationships? If so, how did those relationships deal with the competition in the school? If not, why don't you think those relationships developed?

Were your closest friends inside or outside of ballet?

Do you feel that your teachers encouraged competition or rivalries? If so, how did they do this? If not, do you feel that they did anything to prevent it?

Did your teachers have clear favorite students? If so, how did they demonstrate this?

Was your relationship with the "favorites" of the class different than your relationships with others? If you were a favorite, do you feel that other students treated you differently?

What do you think your teachers could have done to improve the relationships between students?

What percentage of students would you say wanted to dance professionally/did go on to dance professionally? Did teachers treat those students differently?

Was there a high incidence of eating disorders at your school? Did you feel that there was competition around weight? Do you think that teachers encouraged this kind of behavior?
How often did you perform at your school? How do you think casting was determined--did you feel that it was equitable/fair?

Do you think that the relationships between students matters? Do you think a competitive environment affects training negatively or positively?

Overall, how would you characterize your experience with the social environment at your school, and how do you think it affected your training?

Any other comments?

Finally, I administered an online survey of questions about syllabus. The text of that survey follows.

1. What syllabus/style did you predominantly study in your ballet training? (Select more than one only if you had substantial training in both)
   a. Balanchine
   b. Bouronville
   c. Vaganova
   d. RAD
   e. French
   f. Cecchetti
   g. Mixed/none
   h. Other, please specify

2. How many years did you study in this particular syllabus? (give for each if you studied two syllabi)

3. Was your entire school structured around this syllabus, or just one/a few teachers?
   a. Entire school
   b. One/a few teachers

4. How stringent was the school/teacher about sticking to the syllabus?
   a. Not very strict about sticking to the syllabus
   b. Somewhere in between
c. Followed syllabus fairly precisely

5. How much were you taught about the history of the syllabus you were learning? If you were learning a more mixed style, how much did you learn about the various syllabi?
   a. Nothing
   b. Just the basics
   c. Pretty in depth
   d. A lot
   e. Other, please specify

6. To what extent was musicality emphasized in your training? (not at all, a bit, somewhat, a lot, extensively)

7. To what extent was speed emphasized in your training? (not at all, a bit, somewhat, a lot, extensively)

8. How often did teachers give you translations of French terms for steps? (never, occasionally, sometimes, often, always—I know all the translations)

9. How did your teachers address artistry? Was it discussed? If so, how, in what context, and how often?

10. How did the selection process work at your school? Were children auditioned/screened coming in? Were you evaluated each year as you progressed? How did those evaluations work?

11. To what extent did you feel that the combinations you did in class were choreographic (as opposed to a lot of repetition, very simple combinations, etc) (not at all, somewhat, about half and half, very “dance-y” combinations)

12. Did your school use set classes?

13. What characteristic of your training do you think was most characteristic of the syllabus you used? What part/parts of the syllabus were most emphasized in your training?

14. When you took classes outside of your “home” syllabus, how prepared did you feel to do other styles? (very unprepared—I felt completely like a fish out of water, unprepared—I was thrown off by the other style and had trouble adapting, somewhat prepared—I adapted ok but felt uncomfortable with it, prepared—I adapted pretty easily, very prepared—it felt natural to switch between styles)
15. Do you have any other comments on the syllabus you studied/your experiences studying that syllabus/its effect on your dancing?

## Appendix B—Developmental Milestones (with approximate ages) and Aspects Dance Training for each group (written for dance teaching of non-specific genre)

Adapted from *Brain-Compatible Dance Education* by Anne Green Gilbert, pp. 241-246

- **Lower Brain development: 0-18 mos.**
  - Motor activities—crawling, creeping, etc
  - Vestibular activities while being held by an adult—rocking, swinging, spinning, etc
  - Sensory activities—props, variety of musical meters and styles, etc
- **Mid Brain development: 15 mos.-5 yrs.**
  - Partner work, connecting with others
  - Expression of feelings through movement
  - Verbalization of dance vocabulary; singing songs and repeating rhymes and chants
  - Practice with basic locomotor and non-locomotor skills
  - Child-developed imagery, story dances, exploration of concepts
  - Props and tactile stimulation
  - Music with clear pulse, variety of meters and styles
- **Upper Brain development: 4-7 yrs.**
  - Partner work
  - Expression of feelings through movement
  - Opportunities to embody concepts with verbalizations and movement
  - Child-developed imagery, dance stories, dance games
  - Rhythmic activities exploring pulse and pattern
  - Advanced skills such as hopping, skipping, balancing, lunging, etc.
  - Repetition of patterns and phrases including stillness
  - Composing simple dances (with teacher ages 4-5, in pairs ages 6-7)
  - Sharing with half of the class performing and the other half watching
  - Positive and descriptive feedback from teacher
  - Related visual art activities
  - Improvisation using props
  - Energetic activities
- **Development of Upper Brain (Logic Hemisphere): 7-9 yrs, and Frontal Lobe Elaboration (8 yrs)**
Collaborative activities
Expressing feelings through movement and words
Complex dance “games” and structures
Embody concepts with verbalization, movements, and reflection
Rhythmic activities using voice, body, and instruments to explore pulse, pattern, grouping
Advanced skills such as grape vine, contractions, etc
Repetition of longer phrases and patterns with rhythmic variation
Creating and sharing dances with reflection
Notation of dances with visual aids
Positive and detailed feedback from teacher
Simple feedback from peers
Variety of music styles and meters
Occasional exploration with props
⇒ Increased Corpus Collosum Elaboration and Myelination: 9-12 yrs.
Collaborative activities
Opportunities for students to choose partners and groups
Expression of feelings through movement and words
Activities alternating high and low energy
Further complexities of dance concepts, focus on alignment
Student invented “games”
Rhythmic activities including pulse, pattern, grouping, breath
Skills such as polka, leap turns, falls, spirals
Learning about cultural, folk, and historic dances
Composing dances in a variety of forms based on meaningful themes
Independent practicing, rehearsing, and revising dances
More sophisticated notation
Sharing dances with detailed reflection
Variety of instrumental music
Positive and detailed feedback
Use of peer coaching
Journaling about dance experiences
⇒ Hormonal Emphasis: 12-16 yrs.
Collaborative activities
Choosing own partners and groups
Expressing deep and meaningful feelings about life issues through movement, discussion, and writing
Discussions about healthy living, career opportunities, and connections between dance and brain function
Simple lessons in anatomy and kinesiology
Clear improvisational structures and support through cuing concepts
Complex patterns and ensemble work
Opportunities for independent practicing and rehearsing
Composing, critiquing, and revising dances
Sharing small group dances with personal and peer reflection
Notation through motif, Labanotation, mapping, etc
Positive and detailed feedback from teacher
Peer coaching
Journaling

Fun and meaningful content (dance concepts, skills, and forms)
Collaborative activities
Choosing own groups (encouraged to work with opposite sex)
Expressing meaningful feelings through movement and writing
Analyze concepts, research career opportunities, make connections between dance and brain function
Complex rhythmic structures in improvisation and composition
Hands-on experiences with anatomy and kinesiology, information about nutrition
Collaboration with musicians
Learning and practicing different techniques, such as contact improvisation
Challenging and complex phrases in different styles
Experiences with dance history and production
Composing in a variety of forms
Exploring use of multimedia in choreography
Performing, critiquing, and revising dances
Independent practicing and rehearsing
Sophisticated notation
Positive and detailed feedback
Peer coaching
Journalism

⇒ Elaboration and Refinement of the Frontal Lobe: 21+ yrs.
All of the above, plus:
Exploration of solo work
Information about proper alignment, exercise, and nutrition
Structured group “folk” dances focusing on community and flow of movement
Combination of improvisation and choreography
Occasional exploration with props
Appendix C: Improvisation Principles

Adapted from Movement Improvisation: In the Words of a Teacher and Her Students by Georgette Schneer pp. 53-59

Overriding principle: ensure physical and emotional safety for all involved

1. Provide a stimulus: don’t tell, just do!
   a. Real: how many ways can you do this?
   b. Imaginary: imagine you are a giant, you have a ribbon, etc
   c. Emotional: how does your body move/feel when you are happy, sad, etc
2. Ensure privacy and make sure that everyone in the classroom respects it
3. Instill trust of student to herself, classmates, and teacher: teacher is a “creator of an atmosphere of self-discovery and as a protector of each individual from any kind of attack” (54)
4. Focus attention physically and mentally
   a. Quiet the body and mind
   b. Focus and concentrate to observe closely
5. Improve physical skills: teachers can use stimuli to help students practice specific skills