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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

RETHINKING CLASSICAL BALLET PEDAGOGY:
EXAMINING ADVANCEMENTS THAT
INTEGRATE A MODERN
APPROACH

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Erika Lindblom

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Theatre Arts and Dance
Dance Education

December 2020

This Thesis by: Erika Lindblom

Entitled: *Rethinking Classical Ballet Pedagogy: Examining Advancements that Integrate a Modern Approach*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Program of Dance Education

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ABSTRACT

Lindblom, Erika. *Rethinking Classical Ballet Pedagogy: Examining Advancements that Integrate a Modern Approach*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2020.

The purpose of this research was to explore how recent advancements in technology and medical science have or have not pushed ballet pedagogy to evolve. Also examined were the principles of classical ballet that continue to be included despite current knowledge that these practices are outdated and may be unsafe. The 180-degree turn-out, dancing en pointe, and the grand pli  were the specific areas of interest for this study. The following essential questions guided the research:

- Q1 What impact have advancements in anatomy and physiology had on ballet and ballet training?
- Q2 What are the origins of ballet principles such as 180-degree turn-out?
- Q3 What strategies have been most successful in training ballet dancers with non-ideal anatomy?
- Q4 Why have ballet educators resisted change to the ballet aesthetic and traditional forms of instruction?

The research instruments used were an electronic survey of thirty questions, and follow-up interviews guided by sixteen open-ended questions. The participants of this study were former and current ballet teachers who were asked to share their experiences, beliefs, and practices both as ballet students, and as ballet educators.

The limitations to the study included the small participant sample size, the online educator survey, and the participant demographics. There were thirteen participants in the study. Though the researcher intended for the primary research instrument to be unbiased, the online educator survey was not tested for validity or reliability. Due to the small participant sample size, many of the participants taught in overlapping years and shared common backgrounds which created a lack of diversity in their demographics.

The outcome of this research suggested that ballet teachers are now more cognizant of their students' mental health and well-being, and have begun the elimination of certain training exercises and stretches that are now considered outdated and potentially harmful, based on newer understandings drawn from research in the fields of science, medicine, and technology. This study implied the principles of classical ballet, including the 180-degree turn-out, dancing en pointe, the grand plié, and the adherence to strict ballet class etiquette, are still actively practiced and expected of all ballet dancers. Anecdotal evidence from participants suggested that ballet pedagogy has not evolved at the same rate as changes in the other artforms, nor does it reflect the increasingly socially-aware society in which it resides. It appeared adaptations to content or teaching methods, in an effort to accommodate differences amongst students, was done on an individual, case-by-case basis, and was not necessarily adopted into ballet pedagogy for the benefit of all students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Goal of Thesis

Ballet, which has had an indomitable presence in the dance world for hundreds of years, is often romanticized, revered, and its foundational precepts and pedagogy considered a pure body of unchanging knowledge that is obsequiously passed down from generation to generation. This passing down of ballet as a legacy to be respected and preserved has perpetuated its practice but also effectively rendered it stagnant in an era of increasing social awareness, and advancements in technology and medical science.

Despite such advancements, the traditions of classical ballet training remain much the same as they were hundreds of years ago. Jessica Zeller asserted that “. . . ballet’s institutional resistance to pedagogic change is not surprising; teaching practices that subordinate the student have long been considered not just inextricable form, but necessary for professional quality ballet training” (99). The assumption that authoritarian teaching practices are compulsory in quality ballet training demonstrates the inherent bias of pedagogues and purists, seeing themselves as the sole purveyors of the sacred knowledge of ballet. This kind of thinking has bolstered a refusal to adopt more progressive methods of instruction.

In her article, “A New Dialogue in Ballet Pedagogy: Improving Learner Self-Sufficiency Through Reflective Methodology,” Chelsea Weidmann presented research that suggested applying John Dewey’s reflective pedagogy to ballet education could “. . . enhance the results of sound, tradition-based teaching . . . without diluting the already established decorum, culture, and

pedagogical lineage” (55). This might be possible on a smaller scale, but effecting fundamental change universally across all of ballet is ambitious and unlikely. Going against the accepted pedagogical standards was and still is considered sacrosanct in many circles. More alarmingly, questioning the safety of certain practices and concepts within ballet is akin to betrayal to the art itself.

As a result, ballet’s aesthetic has remained mostly unchanged. The ideal, perfect body in ballet is one with long limbs and neck, narrow hips, and which is both flexible and strong. A dancer with an ideal ballet body also has the coveted arched feet. This look is still revered and yet it is becoming increasingly more apparent that this is an unrealistic ideal body that very few people possess. One outcome is that body image issues run rampant in ballet. The pressure to have the perfect ballet body is compounded by the “. . . perspective that only those students whose bodies easily accommodate the ideal are worth ballet instruction” (Zeller). The self-doubt of a young dancer, expounded by the constant prodding and poking of ballet teachers attempting to re-sculpt a body into the accepted aesthetic, has the potential to lead to both psychological and physical damage.

Many of the essential characteristics of classical ballet can now be recognized as unsafe given recent advancements in medical science and our expanding knowledge of the human body, its capabilities, and physical limits. Thus, 180-degree turn-out of the legs in classical ballet is especially problematic given its position as a main staple of the pure lines that hold dominion over the ballet aesthetic. In fact, Adrian Stokes considered turn-out the essence of ballet (Morris 244). The acceptance of the turn-out aesthetic is pervasive and reflected throughout the common positions and steps in ballet. Being turned out in fifth position of the feet, in particular, is functionally problematic yet the position is still universally used to train ballet dancers.

There is plenty of evidence pointing to the potential danger in many aspects of ballet pedagogy. If practitioners hold hard and fast to archaic and dangerous practices in the name of tradition, there could be long-term consequences not only for dancers but for ballet itself. More research is warranted to establish where the aesthetic principles originated, what was the reasoning for their use, and how ballet teachers have typically approached teaching those principles. If the way we teach ballet needs to evolve, it is essential that we establish which principles are potentially harmful. Rethinking how we teach ballet may be our only hope for its continued existence.

The focus of this study was to examine advancements that integrate a modern approach to ballet pedagogy. As described above, the notion of ballerinas as carbon copies of the idealized aesthetic poses numerous problems for both teacher and student in ballet. Injuries occur when teachers, lacking anatomical knowledge, are singularly focused on the student's attainment of prescribed lines and positions. Zeller stated that “. . . ballet's pedagogic literature lacks strategies for helping students work with their unique bodies when the ideal is not the reality” (100). The quest of this aesthetic seems to be true in the majority of cases. The ideal ballet body is quite rare but many dancers with different body types still participate in ballet training. The lack of strategies to work with students who do not possess the ideal ballet body effectively renders ballet educators bereft in their own craft.

A primary goal of this study was to identify strategies that have been successfully employed by experienced ballet teachers to work with students who have less than ideal anatomy for ballet, and to question how a ballet teacher can rectify the fact that despite a strong commitment to preserving the established classical lines of the body, only a select few of her students will ever attain the aesthetic so worshipped in ballet. The researcher also wondered whether the plain fact that some students will never be able to match this desirable aesthetic

means a student is unworthy of training in ballet? In light of these questions, it was no stretch of the imagination to think that some ballet teachers would say that there are students unworthy of ballet training.

The essential questions addressed in this project were:

- Q1 What impact have advancements in anatomy and physiology had on ballet and ballet training?
- Q2 What are the origins of ballet principles such as 180-degree turn-out?
- Q3 What strategies have been most successful in training ballet dancers with non-ideal anatomy?
- Q4 Why have ballet educators resisted change to the ballet aesthetic and traditional forms of instruction?

Purpose of Study

Ballet training and pedagogy have a palpable reputation outside of the dance community. Considering the very structured and rigid nature of the typical ballet class, many wonder why anyone would put themselves through the tortures associated with training in this genre. The problematic aesthetics of ballet are best exemplified by the fifth position, a de facto culmination of the principle of 180-degree turn-out. For the purpose of this study turn-out was defined as the “. . . physical ability to ‘open’ the body and rotate the legs [outward] in the hip sockets” (Jackson 27) until the feet are equally turned out away from each other creating a straight, 180-degree angle. This line is the foundation from which all the positions and the steps were generated. Morris compared the concept of turn-out in ballet to Chinese foot-binding and Victorian corsets, and added that “. . . the 180 [degree] turn-out in the ballet aesthetic has incurred innumerable problematic injury concerns, as dancers have tried to accommodate their bodies into such a form” (251).

Unfortunately, 180-degree turn-out is commonly used in ballet training and many dancers spend years fighting their own anatomy instead of actually dancing. It is not likely that purists will immediately accept change within the ballet aesthetic and its pedagogy, but opening up a dialog about some of the more unsettling or physically dangerous aspects of the ballet aesthetic and training will at least contribute to furthering the conversation about rethinking classical ballet pedagogy.

There exists plenty of evidence that ballet dancers, not unlike other athletes, frequently sustain injuries, yet few studies have examined any proposed adjustments to ballet pedagogy that might reduce these statistics. This statement is perhaps evidence of the pervasive assumption that ballet exists as a solid body of knowledge that remains unchanged. However, it would be remiss as educators in a physical art to refrain from recognizing our increasing knowledge of body mechanics and somatics as they relate to teaching ballet.

Tanya Berg described this inquiry into the use of the recent research as “. . . the use of somatics to combat traditional pedagogy” (156). In Berg’s description, traditional pedagogy was characterized as a force that one must fight against. With this line of thought in mind, it was implied that ballet dancers and other dancers must free themselves from the heavy chains of traditional ballet pedagogy. One of the methods Berg suggested to combat traditional ballet pedagogy was by incorporating somatics in the ballet curriculum.

Berg stated:

The integration of somatic practices in ballet training has the potential to use the dancers’ internal awareness of kinesthetic sensation as a tool to allow them physical longevity, internal authority, and autonomy in a system of training that traditionally has not fostered those specific goals. (156)

Traditional ballet teaching favors silence, compliance, and uniformity among the dancers in the class, and a teacher with complete and total authority. Many ballet training facilities have a

designated uniform that the dancers must wear in order to participate in the program. The ballet school defines how the dancers are to enter and exit the studio, the uniform dictates how they must look, and the code of conduct directs their behavior both inside and outside of the studio. There is a real sense of external authority, however, these conditions are not conducive to a student's developing autonomy and an internal authority over their own bodies.

According to Morris, “. . . multiple educators and scholars have also questioned the authoritative practices of the ballet pedagogy in general, addressing the non-acceptance of bodily difference, and the unquestioned aesthetics of the form's tradition” (248). It is becoming more obvious that ballet indeed possesses many outdated beliefs and methods that have now fallen out of favor for a number of reasons, but practitioners and purists continue to insist that the divine aesthetic of ballet and its widely-used training methods must remain untouched.

Rethinking classical ballet pedagogy first requires separating ourselves from our personal feelings about ballet, and our preconceived notions of what ballet is and stands for. This does not mean investigating why people tend to think of ballet unfavorably, but includes focusing on how advancements in science and medicine could push the evolution of classical ballet instruction. Furthermore, rethinking classical ballet pedagogy is not an attempt to discard the cherished traditions of ballet, but an invitation to question in a way that will help shape ballet into a practice more in harmony with 21st century knowledge and progressive thinking. Rethinking classical ballet pedagogy also involves doing meaningful research into the genesis of ballet's aesthetic principles, and contemplating their relevance in relation to a more informed generation of artists seeking a holistic dance education.

The researcher believed that if ballet educators and scholars joined the conversation and were encouraged to speak openly about these issues, then any eventual changes or evolution of the aesthetics and pedagogy would have been thoroughly examined and debated by its own

practitioners. Morris noted, when speaking of her own experience, “I became more aware of dance medicine/science literature coupled with a desire to employ healthful dance training practices” (246).

This notion of putting the health and well-being of students as equal in importance to the physical training is not an easy sell in classical ballet where the dancer’s attainment of beautiful lines is more important than how comfortable the position or steps feel to the dancer performing them. It is, however, in the best interest of ballet to re-examine some of the long-held beliefs and bodily expectations, especially those shown to be potentially harmful.

Significance of Study

Rethinking classical ballet pedagogy has the potential to create healthier dancers, both in mind and body, by embracing different body types along with a more generous and subsequently safer aesthetic. We must address the concept in ballet that the body creates beauty by conforming to the prescribed body lines regardless of any consideration for the dancer’s physical pain. It could be argued that ballet dancers, even more so than other athletes, are systemically conditioned to tolerate pain without revealing any visible signs. “Consider the validity of describing the fifth position as comfortable. A quick survey of virtually any group of dance students will quickly contradict this strange assumption of comfort” (Morris 252).

Ballet students are being told in no uncertain terms that the way their body experiences these often extreme positions and movements is of no relevance to their dance education. Students are also told that the pain and discomfort they experience in ballet class are part of the process of training and must be accepted. However, the major concern is not just being uncomfortable but experiencing chronic pain that does not go away as a student gains strength and flexibility. Often these students are told their discomfort is part of the learning process and they are expected to push beyond the pain and continue training as normal. It is this mindset, that

masquerades as one of ballet pedagogy's strengths, that could ultimately contribute to its downfall.

One of the most revered aspects of classical ballet is being able to dance up on the toes wearing pointe shoes, or "en pointe." A ballet dancer trains for many years to someday be able to get her first pair of pointe shoes, but studies show that this facet of ballet training is associated with increased foot and ankle injuries. According to Stephen J. Pearson and Alison F. Whitaker, "Adolescent dancers account for the majority of injuries in ballet . . . These injuries tend to occur after the onset of pointe work" (51).

In classical ballet, ". . . ballerinas have to support their body weight on the tips of fully extended feet within pointe shoes" (Salzano et al. 2). The stability of dancing on flat, or performing the majority of the movement going between flat feet to relevé in soft ballet shoes, is removed when the dancer rises up to dance on the platforms of pointe shoes. The platforms or tips of the pointe shoes are relatively small for carrying a dancer's entire body weight and this can cause injuries to the lower extremities (Salzano et al. 2). It is clear that in rethinking ballet pedagogy, we must seek out the most effective methods of preparing ballet dancers for pointe work while taking into account the increased potential for injuries, especially during adolescence. The approach needs to be proactive and not just a series of physical therapy exercises in reaction to injuries already sustained. Improvements in preparing students for pointe work based on current medical research will help to ensure the longevity of this artform.

Looking specifically at 180-degree turn-out, its presence stems from the two-dimensional depictions of the five positions, and the rise of the proscenium arch. The proscenium arch structure effectively separated the dancers on the stage from the audience in the house, and reinforced the ". . . shift into a more mechanized, more virtuosic two-dimensional usage of the feet and legs" (Morris 254). The inclusion of 180-degree turn-out was a contortion that further

separated the dancers from the audience, but some believe that “. . . turnout functions to facilitate ease and a wide range of movement in both legs and arms.” Lincoln Kirstein commented “. . . that the root of ballet-training in the five academic foot-positions . . . determine[s] the greatest frontal legibility and launch of the upper body as a silhouette framed in a proscenium” (Jackson 27). Knowing the source of these aesthetic principles provides a context for their origin and acceptance, yet it is still important to note that “. . . this preferred practice of turn-out likely implies that an aesthetic choice was made, which particularly pleased or suited the powers of the time” (Morris 250). In effect, the beloved and revered classical lines of ballet were simply someone’s choice.

The genesis of turn-out as an aesthetic principle was merely a chosen construct but one would be hard-pressed to find a ballet school that permitted its students to refrain from it. It seems its acceptance is not up for debate, but its implications must be examined.

Zeller indicated:

It is important to acknowledge that what the literature refers to as “ideal bodies” affects not only ballet’s pedagogic practices, but its capacity for inclusion (Risner 2009). The upholding of the ideal as central to the ballet aesthetic has allowed . . . ‘the visual tyranny of ballet,’ which refers to its historic emphasis on whiteness. It pushes dancers of color to the margins of the profession; it makes the dancing secondary to the body. (100)

The “visual tyranny” that Zeller refers to can also be seen quite clearly in the movement known as grand plié. Essentially, the grand plié is a movement where the dancer bends into a very deep, turned out squatting position. The dancer descends to the position by bending the knees while attempting to outwardly rotate the legs so the knees are in line with the pelvis and create a straight line through the dancer’s frontal plane. The grand plié movement is repeated in several ballet positions including first, second, fourth, and fifth, and is often executed during the first combination at the barre before dancers are adequately warmed up.

The extreme acute angle of the knee joints in combination with holding up the weight of the entire body make the grand pli   potentially problematic and seems unnecessarily risky considering the grand pli   it is not typically used beyond the first exercise at the barre. In the center portion of class, there are no turns, jumps, or parts of petit and grand allegro that include a grand pli   in any position. Furthermore, a dancer naturally possessing the 180-degree turn-out required to execute the grand pli   properly is statistically rare and yet pedagogues still insist on including this movement at the beginning of every classical ballet class.

It is not just the physical well-being of dancers that we must attend to. The implications of these arbitrary aesthetic choices, whether inadvertent or otherwise, serve as a means of discrimination, especially for marginalized dancers of color. When the issues we face reach beyond just physical injuries, it is a clear justification that we must begin to question traditional ballet pedagogy and seek to integrate more modern, safe, and equitable approaches.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ballet's Traditional Practices

The authority of the ballet teacher over the class is a well-established norm that is accepted by serious ballet students as they begin formal instruction in classical ballet. The dissemination of information from a single exalted source shapes the very nature of the relationship between teacher and student in ballet. The individual experiences, feelings, and preferences of a ballet student are inconsequential and unimportant; it is only the pursuit of the ballet aesthetic that is of any concern.

One widely accepted rule of etiquette is that students are not permitted to talk during ballet class and all questions must be addressed to the teacher and not to other students. At the end of ballet class, the dancers clap and then curtsy while thanking the teacher for class. The respect for the teacher's authority in ballet is well-established and built into the formula of a typical ballet class typically consisting of a set of exercises at the barre, exercises in the center floor, and combinations in which the students move across the floor. In Agrippina Vaganova's manual, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, the author explained the impetus behind the formulaic nature of ballet class.

There is nothing bad about the about the exercises being tedious in their monotony. . . In these classes a foundation is laid for the development of the muscles, the elasticity of the ligaments; a basis is instilled for the elementary movements. All this is accomplished by systematic repetitions of the same movement a great number of times in succession. (9)

The teacher leads the class through each segment while providing constructive feedback on the spot. The instances of feedback are typically called corrections. Only the teacher may give corrections and each student is expected to immediately fix what the teacher just pointed out. A correction provides useful information to the student but often comes in the form of a negative comment about what the student is doing incorrectly. The teacher is the sole authority over the content ballet dancers will practice and what constitutes as being an acceptable execution of those movements and skills.

Zeller argued that ballet teachers take on this authority role based on the fear “. . . of being perceived as less knowledgeable if teachers are not dictatorial in their methods” (101). This authoritarian form of instruction is not only widely accepted but expected in many cases as one of the criterion for being an accomplished ballet teacher.

Zeller explained:

Perhaps teachers fear that without authoritarian practices, they would no longer be teaching ballet in a rigorous enough manner for students to reach a professional level—that students must learn to capitulate and fear authority to attain the degree of artistic and technical prowess necessary for a professional career. (101)

This cycle of fear has effectively rendered ballet pedagogy stagnant. This mode of instruction has become a replayed loop of teaching practices in which ballet teachers assert their authority in fear of losing it, and ballet dancers accept this authority in fear of disrupting their connection to exemplary instruction (Zeller 101).

The tradition of the all-knowing, strict ballet teacher and the upheld code of discipline in ballet class essentially perpetuates the authoritarian practices. A ballet dancer would find little success in straying from the conformity of ballet traditions by challenging the authority of a ballet teacher in class. Likewise, the ballet teacher fears “. . . losing the kind of adulation that has

historically been associated with ‘master’ ballet teachers” (Zeller 101), and thus plays into the connotation that a strict ballet teacher is equated with high caliber instruction.

As detailed in *The Ballet Companion: A Dancer’s Guide to the Technique, Traditions, and Joys of Ballet* by Eliza Gaynor Minden, the expected etiquette in ballet class is taught systematically by having the student progress through each level of instruction. Younger students learn to copy positions and movements, follow directions, and perhaps most importantly, how to remain silent during class, in deference to the teacher. Dancers are expected to wear no jewelry, have their hair neatly and securely in a bun, chignon, or french twist, and wear the prescribed uniform which normally includes a leotard, pink tights, and pink ballet shoes for females, or a white shirt and black tights or pants with white or black ballet shoes for males (11).

Older female students may also have pointe shoes and the various accessories they use to customize these shoes. Thus, all ballet and pointe shoes must have properly sewn elastics and ribbons, and leotards and tights must be clean and free from holes. When a ballet student enters the studio, he or she is not permitted to hang on the barres, sit during class, converse with other students, or partake in any other behavior deemed counterproductive to the ballet class. The etiquette of ballet class is almost universally accepted and practiced— for example, dancers are also expected to finish every combination even when they have made a mistake as described in the following quotation:

Always finish every combination. Even if you flub it completely, the discipline of ballet requires that you finish it, and finish it with as much poise as you can. Sighing, making faces, or otherwise showing your frustration or other emotions is inappropriate. (Gaynor Minden 13)

Classical ballet is physically rigorous and requires dancers to begin learning how to perform the basic fundamental positions and movements slowly over time. In “Footwear in Classical Ballet:

A Study of Pressure Distribution and Related Foot Injury in the Adolescent Dancer,” Pearson and Whitaker described, “. . . that the anatomical structures involved [in ballet] can be gradually strengthened in preparation for the greater loading demands of pointe work” (51). Because of the repetitive nature of ballet pedagogy, if a dancer is not taught how to execute the foundational positions and movements properly, “. . . tissue breakdown may occur, with a resultant predisposition to overuse injury, if the feet are exposed to repetitive loads without adequate preparation and sufficient recovery time” (51). The risk of injuries are ever-present, further legitimizing the perceived need for a systematic approach to ballet pedagogy through strict disciplinarian teachers.

The ballet aesthetic and the ideal ballet body can be described as one and the same. Anatomical differences render the ballet aesthetic one of coveted rarity. Many dancers do not possess the ideal long and lean body type so admired in ballet, making it that much more coveted. The ballet student compares his or her body to the desired thin and waif-like body image and often only sees the areas of the body which they find lacking. This is the venerated physique and dancers who are anatomically different are often seen as deviating from this established norm.

This corporeal perfection is usually defined as. . . the slender ideal. There is a growing aesthetic among ballet audiences, companies and therefore institutions for almost skeletal, hyper-flexible, ephemeral bodies that may be more prone to injury. . . The field of ballet and the schools then will produce and reproduce a particular bodily aesthetic according to demand. (Pickard 7)

The concept of the ideal body is critically tied to the perception of the ballet aesthetic, specifically “. . . the allegiance to the extremism of turn-out of the legs, which the balletic code held as its ideal of perfection” (Morris 248). Thus, if a dancer is unable to achieve the 180-degree turn-out aesthetic, they are often perceived as being less technically advanced.

Morris claimed:

The ability for a dancer at the outset to conform to a visual “rule” — a visual picture of perfect— is prescribed as a top priority for success; otherwise, the alternative to not contorting the body in this manner is failure. The message is, in essence, if this standard of 180 [degrees] is not met, you are a failure as a dancer. (247)

A ballet student may feel like a failure not because of a lack of work ethic or commitment to ballet, but simply because of the dancer’s anatomy. The ideal ballet body becomes a means for discrimination when dancers with less valued physical attributes are overlooked despite having the same training and the ability to perform the steps.

Potentially Dangerous Physical Skills

One of the most alarming physical principles universally accepted in classical ballet is the use of 180-degree turn-out of the legs from the top of the legs inside the hip sockets. Agrippina Vaganova felt that turn-out was one of the most important concepts in ballet:

The turn-out is an anatomical necessity for every theatrical dance, which embraces the entire volume of movements conceivable for the legs. . . The turn-out is the faculty of turning out the knee to a much greater extent than is made possible by nature. . . The aim of the turn-out is to turn out the upper part of the leg, the hip bone. The result of the turnout is freedom of movement in the hip joint. (19)

According to Vaganova, turn-out was essential to achieve the maximum freedom of the legs, allowing for the full expression of movement in ballet.

Vaganova specifically mentioned that turn-out is necessary for theatrical dancing. Dancing on a stage that is set apart from the audience and framed by a proscenium arch changed the dynamics between performer and audience and altered the perspective upon which new dance works would be created. The advent of the proscenium arch contributed to the adoption of 180-degree turn-out by dancers.

Morris noted:

The proscenium arch, introduced throughout Europe by 1650, caused notable changes in the viewing and performance of dance. Its emergence may explain, in part, the practical utilization of turn-out, which enables the body to travel side to side rather easily and maintain a frontal facing. (254)

While there seems to be a somewhat reasonable explanation for having theatrical dancers turn their legs out while facing the audience, legitimate concerns regarding the teaching of these principles remain. According to Merry Lynn Morris “. . . the dance medicine/science literature has increasingly brought attention to the injury issues surrounding the 180 [degree] turn-out aesthetic [in ballet]” (249). The concept of turning the legs out somewhat is not necessarily potentially damaging but becomes so when the explicit directive is to turn the legs fully out to the prescribed 180-degrees.

The ethereal image of a dancer en pointe is perhaps the most common image, outside of the dance community, that comes to mind when thinking of classical ballet. Getting the first pair of pointe shoes is a momentous occasion for a ballet student. However, the idealized image of a ballerina en pointe hides the less glamorous reality that dancing en pointe is uncomfortable or sometimes downright painful, and there are certain risks inherent in learning how to dance en pointe.

Pointe shoes allow a dancer to dance on the tips of the toes and are constructed differently than a soft ballet shoe. Annamaria Salzano et al. explained that “Pointe movement is performing using pointe shoes, which help to strengthen the toe/ankle structure and distribute the dancer’s weight throughout the foot. Pointe shoes help in sufficiently decreasing the load on toes. . .” (2) and thus allow ballet dancers to sustain positions and movements while the feet are in full plantar flexion. The pointe shoe is constructed to provide support without ruining the lines of the lower legs. Jessica Aquino et al. explained:

The two main components of the pointe shoe are the toe box and shank. The toe box, on which the ballet dancers rest all their weight when standing 'en pointe', is the part tightly covering the toes and is constructed from layers of paper, glue and fabric. The shank is the insole and is made of cardboard, leather or a combination of the two. The shank supports the foot while 'en pointe' by providing some stiffness. (2)

The demands of ballet technique did not adjust because of the new footwear once a dancer graduated to wearing pointe shoes for the majority of her classes. Furthermore, “. . . unlike running shoes, which provide both shock absorption and support, ballet pointe shoes have little support or shock absorption properties” (Aquino et al. 2). More complex and advanced movements are incorporated into ballet classes. “This often entails placing a well-trained ballet dancer’s body in positions that require excessive stress on the foot, contributing to the presentation of bunions or metatarsal fractures” (Salzano et al. 2). The combination of increasingly advanced movement sequences in ballet class with the onset of taking class in pointe shoes has the potential to increase lower extremity injuries. Salzano et al. remarked:

. . . training with pointe shoes has been demonstrated to increase peak pressure on the foot compared with being barefoot. In addition, moving to a vertical position from a footed one has been shown to increase peak pressure. . . A dancer’s body is sustained by the toes’ tips, which can augment pressure on the first toe, forcing it into valgus [or moved outward], thereby possibly contributing to hallux valgus deformity. (2)

The risk of injury is present when dancing en pointe and yet there has been little to no science-based examinations of ballet pedagogy to address these findings.

Another area of concern lies in the extreme pressure put on the knee joint when dancers perform the grand plié, or the deep squatting position in any of the five foot positions. Kaanda Nabilla Souza Gontijo et al. indicated that even the demi-plié is regarded as potentially harmful. “The lower extremities are the most commonly injured region of the body in dancers. Specifically, when the demi-plié is. . . repeated innumerable times during a class or performance, [it] may lead to problems in the spine, knees, ankles, and feet” (70).

The grand plié movement is a progression that involves having the dancer move beyond the demi-plié into an extreme position where the full body weight of the dancer is supported on the balls of the feet and the knee joints bent at an acute angle. Concerns about the grand plié include the “. . . hyperpronation or pronation of the foot, maintain[ing] knee aligned with the ipsilateral foot, and avoid[ing] the adoption of angular misalignments that may cause damage to the pelvis” (Gontijo et al. 70).

Modern Concerns

Ballet, though perceived as soft and ethereal, is a physically rigorous activity. “If your ambition is to become a professional dancer, your training will follow a certain exceptionally rigorous track” (Gaynor Minden 6). Inherent in an exceptionally rigorous activity is the potential for students to experience different forms of pressure.

Evdoxia Kosmidou et al. found that “Athletes, competing in sports or physical activities in which low body fat and low body weight are required for reasons of performance or appearance, may be under intense pressure in this regard” (25). The pressure to remain thin and to match the ideal ballet body runs rampant. Josep Toro et al. discovered in their study that “Approximately one-third of the girls. . . felt highly pressurized by coaches in their choice of food, their physical appearance and weight control” (47). These pressures can have detrimental effects as Klaus-Jurgen Neumäker described:

In females, body and self-image dissatisfaction is associated with weight and dieting concerns, and further with depressed mood, symptomatic distress, lower self-esteem, and worse self-evaluation of social competence . . . excessive concern with dieting, preoccupation with weight and entrenchment in an extreme pursuit of thinness was. . . higher for female dancers than for non-dancing girls. (140)

The pressure connected to one’s appearance is especially evident in ballet which is considered an aesthetic sport. The purpose of utilizing high-intensity athletic training in ballet is to develop the

ability to create aesthetically pleasing lines, positions, and movements (Kosmidou et al. 23).

While other athletes do train rigorously, ballet dancers are unique in that they train to shape their body into what has been deemed the ballet aesthetic. Other athletes such as basketball players do not intentionally train to match a prescribed aesthetic. Because of this element, dance studios are typically equipped with mirrors so that students may observe the lines and shapes they are making with their bodies.

This heavy focus on how the body looks has the potential for contributing to low body image. “In ballet, it was found that the use of mirrors during teaching might be an element which contributed to low body-image” in female ballet dancers (Kosmidou et al. 24). Changes to the body during adolescence on top of the heightened focus on how the body looks can put undue stress and pressure on ballet students. However, Kosmidou et al. points out that “The pressure to be thin is intense for all girls since [a] very young age, before adolescence” (24). The combination of being a female, a student of ballet, and in the midst of adolescence compounds the potential for poor body image.

Female ballet students, in particular, are susceptible to medical disorders and illnesses as “Negative body image is related to unhealthy behaviors, [such] as eating disorders” (Kosmidou et al. 24). It is not merely the student’s perception of the imperfections of their body, but also the intense pressure to maintain the required physical aesthetic of ballet. Josep Toro et al. posited that “. . . in a group of dancers aged approximately 26, 83% were found to meet lifetime criteria for eating disorders” (41). This prevalence of eating disorders among female ballet students is alarming but not the only problematic issue ballet students face.

The rigorous physical requirements in ballet make intensive training a necessity and there has been a rising trend in the increase of students exiting traditional public school districts to be homeschooled: “According to National Center for Education Statistics, in 2004 about 1.1 million

children were home schooled, a jump of almost 30 percent from 1999” (White 44). Ballet students are included in this number as their intensive training schedule is not always compatible with the hours required to attend public school. Though students have more hours to devote to ballet, homeschooling is not without its own set of challenges.

Karen White’s article, “Home Schooling: A Personal Decision” in *Pointe Magazine*, detailed the concerns with foregoing a public education:

[Homeschooling is] frowned upon by the National Parent Teacher Association and the National Education Association. Many educators fear home schooled children miss out on social interaction with their peers, can become isolated or suffer academically from a lack of professional instructors. (44)

Sharon Dante, the artistic director of the Nutmeg Conservatory with 40 years of experience as a dance educator, explained that her students who attended public school were more well-adjusted and benefitted from having a life outside of ballet. Dante encouraged her students to remain in public school, saying “. . . students need to be in a structured academic environment where they can benefit from the knowledge, nurturing and guidance of the entire school faculty” (White 44). Dante characterized a life centered only around ballet as incomplete, and touted public education as the more holistic and valuable experience for ballet students in order to become well-rounded human beings in addition to being strong ballet dancers (White 44).

Another notion persists that ballet’s exclusivity and enduring aesthetic has precluded it from evolving and in doing so, from accepting dancers with different body types from a variety of backgrounds.

Many factors contribute to ballet’s lack of diversity; economic inequality-- ballet training is notoriously expensive; a lack of role models for aspiring dancers to emulate; a failure on the part of schools and companies to provide support for young dancers of color on the uphill road to professional success. And another factor looms large in the discussion. Many believe a thread of racism still runs through the ballet world. (Carman and Diana 36)

The iconic “ballet blanc” scene, with an ensemble all costumed in white, can be seen in many of the most popular and recognizable ballets such as the willis in *Giselle*, the swans in *Swan Lake*, the sylphs in *La Sylphide*, and the shades in *La Bayadere* (Carman and Diana 33). The strict adherence to the unchanging aesthetic principles in ballet have inevitably led to a lack of growth and diversity when it comes to expanding its definition of the ballet aesthetic.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Preparation

To assess the degree to which ballet pedagogy has or has not changed, establishing a baseline of how ballet has been taught traditionally was essential. In the Literature Review, the demanding teaching style, aggressive rigor, and various biases of classical ballet instruction serves as the basis for comparison with current practices. According to the research brought to light, the mindset of the ballet teacher and the methods through which ballet is taught has remained relatively stagnant for many decades. Seeking out the experiences of a wide variety of teachers, especially relatively newer and often younger ballet teachers, provides insight into the evolution, or lack thereof, of ballet pedagogy.

Beyond establishing the baseline for comparison, a narrowing down of the specific tenets of ballet to use as guideposts provided more focus for the research. The use of 180-degree turnout was selected because of its importance to the classical ballet aesthetic and its potential for physical damage to dancers not anatomically gifted with this ideal body type.

The ever-present ethereal quality and image of a female ballerina appearing weightless, dancing on the tips of her toes, or en pointe, was selected due to its popularity as a celebrated image of the ballerina, and because of pointework being universally required for advanced female ballet dancers. The abundance of injuries that could potentially follow the commencement of dancing en pointe makes it a tenet of classical ballet that warrants review.

The grand pli  movement traditionally practiced within the first few minutes of a ballet class continues to be incorporated into the first barre combination and because of this, it is one of the first steps that a beginning ballet dancer learns. More so than other introductory steps, the grand pli  has little purpose beyond the initial phases of warming up at the barre. This tenet was included because rarely do ballet dancers perform a grand pli  in any capacity onstage, yet it is perpetually ingrained in dancers' muscle memory through constant repetition in each class.

Prior to the commencement of the research, a formal narrative of the study along with the research instruments were sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The narrative included a detailed description of the goals, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures, participant risks or discomforts, and the potential benefits of the study. The consent form was also submitted for IRB approval. Upon approval, the study was able to begin.

Research Instruments

In the following section, the researcher described the research instruments that were used in this study.

Online Educator Survey

A survey consisting of 30 questions was developed to gather facts about the teaching of classical ballet. Within the survey, teachers were asked to consider their teaching practices in relation to the tenets being researched. The survey questions prompted teachers to provide information on the way in which they approach teaching the 180-degree turn-out required for ballet, how they evaluate their students for pointe, and in what ways they utilize the grand pli  during ballet class.

The online educator survey was created using SurveyMonkey and was broken up into three sections. Participants were permitted to skip questions that did not pertain to them. The three sections of the survey included: general dance and teaching background of the participant,

the typical profile and history of the participant's students, and reflections on principles of ballet and the teaching practice.

Follow-up Interviews

Upon completion of the online surveys, participants were given the option of having a telephone interview to expand upon the answers they provided, and to have extra time to freely speak about their experiences. The phone interview script included sixteen open-ended questions focusing on the participant's experiences from being a young ballet student to a beginning ballet teacher. Additionally, several questions asked about safety and first aid procedures in the studio when a dance student falls or has an acute injury.

Participants

In the following section, the researcher described the two categories of participants surveyed and interviewed in this study.

Former Dance Teachers

One subset of participants in this study previously taught ballet and no longer actively work as ballet teachers. The information they provided drew on their experiences teaching ballet in the previous decades.

Current Dance Teachers

The second group of participants presently teach ballet, and work in private studios, conservatories, or dance departments in public or private schools and universities. The participants provided information on current teaching styles and practices in the field of ballet pedagogy.

Data Analysis

In the following section, the researcher described the methods used to analyze data in this study.

Qualitative Analysis

The descriptive or qualitative data in this study were derived from both the online educator survey and the follow-up interviews.

The survey platform on SurveyMonkey allowed the data from the online educator survey to be categorized by question, section, or by individual. Sorting the data by question allowed the researcher to view all the submitted responses for a particular question. The responses could be copied and pasted into a new word processing document for ease of review. Trends in responses were highlighted using a yellow highlight feature in the word processing document. The researcher also made handwritten annotations in a notebook to capture thoughts and ideas for interpretations of the qualitative data.

The follow-up interview was recorded on the researcher's smart phone and transcribed into a blank word processing document. Responses were reviewed and reorganized by using the copy and paste feature. The interview script contained more open-ended questions to allow participants to freely share their experiences and philosophies. The researcher used a qualitative analysis to categorize interview responses.

Quantitative Analysis

The answers participants provided on the online educator survey were stored by SurveyMonkey and categorized by question. Numeric results were automatically converted into bar graphs on SurveyMonkey. The researcher also read through the participant responses for non-numeric questions. Several questions had the potential for quantitative analysis when considering the frequency of the participants' responses. To convert the responses to these questions into quantitative data, the researcher created categories to sort the answers, and tallied the rate of specific answers by hand. The researcher calculated the respective percentages of

certain common answers and responses among the participants. Pie charts were constructed using this quantitative data.

Summary

This chapter detailed the process of designing the study, the research instruments developed, and how data was collected and analyzed. The subsequent chapter presents the outcome of the research.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Introduction to Data Analysis

The central focus of this research was to examine how recent advancements have, or have not, pushed ballet pedagogy to evolve. In particular, the ballet principles of requiring 180-degree turn-out, dancing en pointe, and including the grand pli  in class exercises were examined. These principles were identified as being among the essential tenets of classical ballet despite their potential to harm a dancer's body.

By use of an online survey, ballet teachers provided information on their experiences teaching and assessing ballet students. Follow-up phone and email interviews allowed time for the ballet educators to provide additional information from personal recollections. The survey data and interview contents were compiled into pie charts and tables to illustrate the outcome of the research.

Outcome of Analysis

In the following section, the researcher discussed the outcome of the data analysis including the participating teachers' backgrounds and a profile of their students.

Online Educator Survey

The thirty-question survey was distributed to the ballet teachers after they provided their consent to participate in the research. A hyperlink was provided for participants to access the survey. The outcomes of the survey are described in the following categorized sections.

Participating Teachers' Background and Class Content

The participants were asked to describe the nature of the ballet classes they taught or currently teach in terms of the students' skill level, duration of the classes, and years in which these classes were taught. The data presented in Table 1 below indicates the number of ballet classes commonly taught at each skill level by the participating teachers. According to this analysis, it appeared the teachers taught more beginning ballet classes than intermediate or advanced level classes.

Table 1

Percentage of Each Ballet Skill Level Taught by Participating Teachers

Beginning %	Intermediate %	Advanced %
80	50	30

The data in Figure 1 establishes the duration of the ballet classes taught by participants in this study. This data analysis demonstrated that the participants taught more 60-minute classes than those that lasted for 45 or 90 minutes. In fact, the percentage of 60-minute classes was almost twice that of the other two time periods.

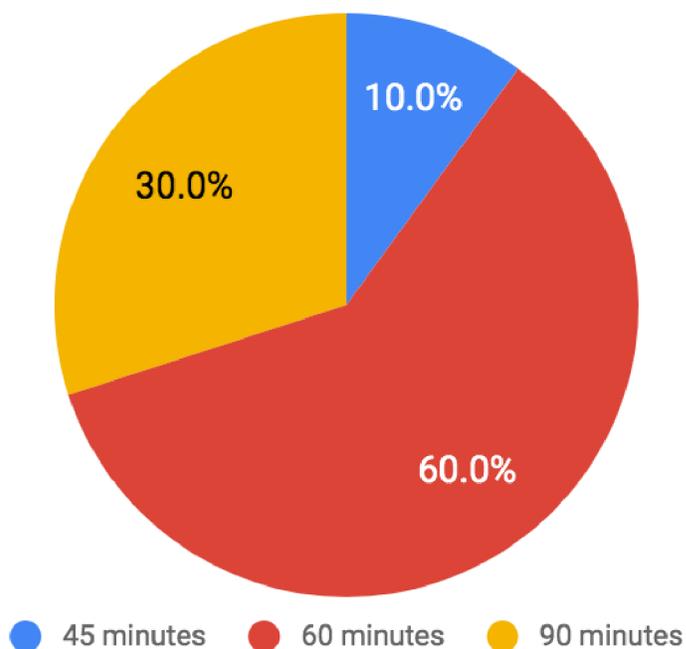


Figure 1: Respective percentages of participating ballet teachers who teach 45, 60, or 90-minute ballet classes

Somewhat surprisingly, when the ballet teachers were asked if they taught pointe as a separate class or included it in their regular ballet class, over half responded that they did not teach pointe at all. However, approximately a quarter of the teachers taught pointe as a separate class while an estimated 18% taught pointe within the regular ballet class. When also considering the percent of levels taught, it may be surmised that this group of ballet teachers were more familiar with teaching beginning and intermediate level students who did not perform on pointe.

According to the data, the years the participants began teaching ballet ranged from 1993 to 2017 with the majority of participants having commenced teaching between the years of 2012 and 2017. The participants also shared their own experiences as ballet students indicating they studied dance in the 1960s through the 1990s. This provided a baseline from which to juxtapose the modern version of ballet pedagogy since the researcher did not receive enough surveys back from ballet teachers who taught prior to 1990.

The ballet teachers were also asked if they participated in ongoing professional development. The outcome of this analysis can be found in Figure 2 below. This analysis demonstrated that the majority of ballet teachers participating in this research did not or do not regularly participate in professional development. This same group of teachers who did not participate in professional development were also the majority of the teachers who taught only beginning and intermediate level ballet classes.

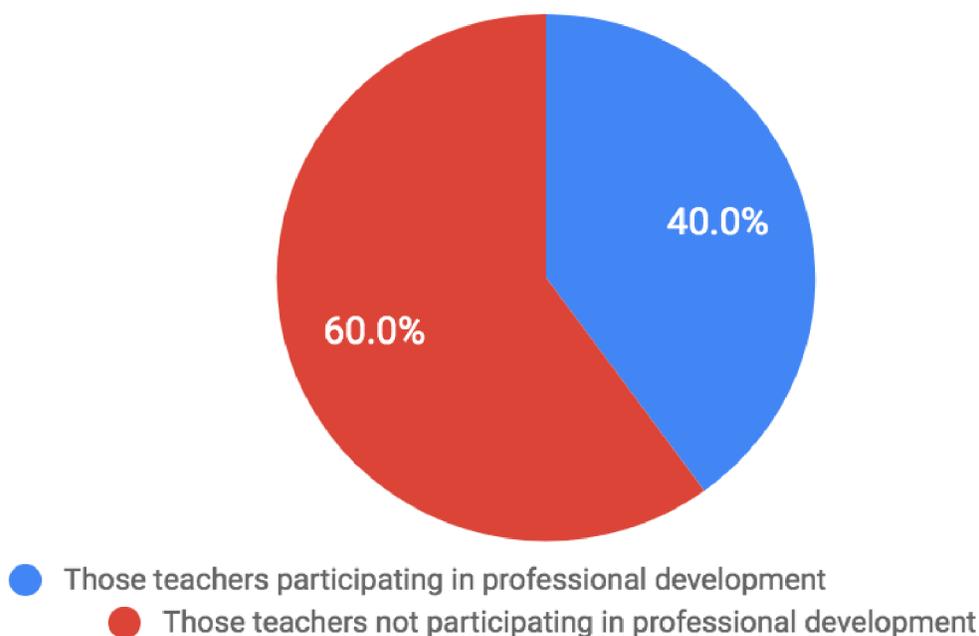


Figure 2: Respective percentages of participants who attended dance conferences or other types of professional development and those who did not.

The data indicated that the participants did not exclusively teach ballet, because they also taught jazz, musical theatre dance, modern, tap, lyrical, contemporary, and conditioning. Jazz dance was the most common dance genre taught in addition to ballet, followed by tap and then modern dance. According to the data, all but one participant has taken college courses in dance. The researcher had hoped to compare the dance styles taught by current teachers to those taught by former teachers, but did not receive enough completed surveys from the former teachers.

As indicated in Figure 3 below, the types of facilities where the ballet teachers taught included the following: YMCA, competitive studio, recreational studio, ballet school, pre-school, and summer camp.

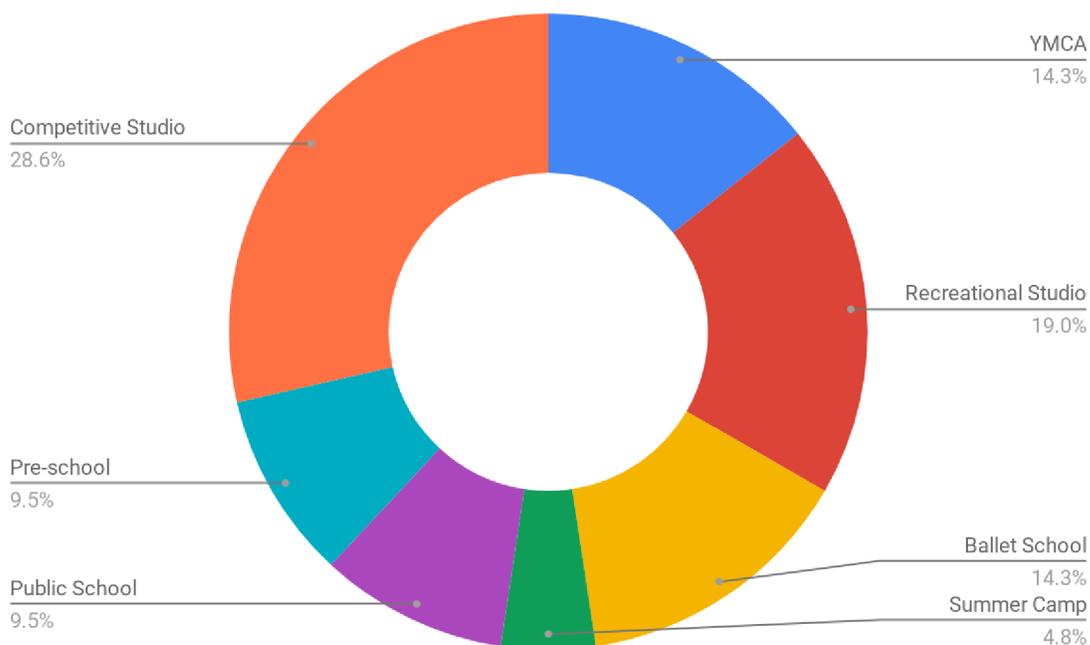


Figure 3: Respective percentages of type of facility or school in which the participating ballet teachers commonly taught.

The data revealed that the participants taught at a diverse list of facilities, with the most common facility being competitive studios. The next most common facility where the ballet teachers taught were recreational studios, followed by the YMCA and ballet schools. These last two totals were tied, comprising 14.3% each. The least common type of facility in which the participants taught were pre-schools, public schools, and summer camps. Summer camps were the least common facility out of all of those mentioned in the study. This type of facility garnered a mere 4.8% in the responses.

This data analysis also indicated that about half of the ballet teachers in this study taught at privately-owned dance studios. If the ballet schools were also privately-owned, that percentage

would increase to approximately 62%, which was more than half of the facility types. The YMCA was the most common non-profit facility where the participants taught, followed by public schools. It was not known whether pre-schools and summer camps described in the survey were privately-owned, non-profits, or public facilities.

When the ballet teachers were asked to describe which classical ballet principles were most important, the 180-degree turn-out was cited most often. Technique, etiquette, class structure, and standing correctly were tied for the second most common responses from the ballet teachers. Several ballet teachers went into detail, describing the elements of ballet technique such as Participant A who wrote:

Correct alignment - stacking [p]resentation - whether you're in class or on the stage [p]roper turnout - not forcing turnout from the knees or ankles[.] Basics first - progressions/ for example doing 45 degree rond de jambe en l'air, then try for 90 [degrees], then above 90 [degrees].

When it came to the physical components in ballet, as evidenced by Participant A's answer above, a detailed array of physical concepts were considered essential in ballet training and were willingly supplied as part of the teachers' responses. The specific concepts named were: 180-degree turn-out, positions, port de bras, articulate feet, standing correctly, core strength, lengthening the spine, lifting elbows, lengthening out through the fingertips, body lines, flexibility, control, and precision, as well as the broader answer of technique.

There were three ballet teachers who answered that a non-physical principle was the most essential in ballet. The discipline required to dance ballet, or the particular structure of ballet class are examples of a non-physical ballet principle. This outcome contrasted with the majority of the teachers who described physical principles as the most important principles for teaching ballet. It is important to note that 'standing correctly' could fall under the technique category, leaving just etiquette and class structure as the remaining second-most-cited concepts, both of

which are non-physical principles. For some ballet teachers, the level of respect a ballet student shows to the teacher and to the art itself is the most important principle, even more so than 180-degree turn-out or another physical component tied to technique.

The concepts of etiquette and class structure were described by the ballet teachers in the following ways: “[having] respect, [and good] attendance,” “the routine, the homage to the history, the respect for teachers and no talking,” and “etiquette, and the structure of class.” The data indicated that several teachers considered the formal set of manners associated with taking a classical ballet class as most integral to the art. Although the physical and technique-based concepts were cited most commonly by the ballet teachers, etiquette and the structure of classical training were a close second. One teacher even praised the tradition of students not talking during ballet class. Her description of the most important principles of classical ballet were all related to preserving the longstanding, orderly regulations and traditions, passed down for centuries, that remain mostly unchanged and were created for arbitrary reasons. In fact, as discussed previously, many of these regulations masquerading as tradition serve no purpose other than pleasing the whim of someone who lived hundreds of years ago.

Interestingly, only a single ballet teacher referred to a concept other than a physical/technical or etiquette-related principle. This ballet teacher considered artistry to be an essential tenet of ballet, combining it with body lines and flexibility which both fall under the technique category. No other teacher referred to the artistic nature of dance performance.

The ballet teachers were also asked if they danced professionally before beginning their careers as instructors. Close to sixty percent of the teachers had not danced professionally before becoming a teacher, with only one participant having danced professionally after becoming a teacher. Approximately forty percent of the teachers had danced in a pre-professional capacity whether in local and youth ballet companies, or during their time as dance majors in college.

Around eighty percent of the ballet teachers had taken undergraduate courses in dance, while only approximately eighteen percent had not taken any college dance courses. During the analysis, it became clear that the teachers who had not taken college dance courses were also the teachers with the most teaching experience out of the group.

Student Profiles

This analysis indicated that the participants' students attend either a public or private school. There was only one participant who taught a single homeschooled student. As cited by participants, the most common criteria used to place new students into the most appropriate ballet skill level class was the students' technical level and their age or maturity.

More Detailed Analysis of Ballet Training

In the following sections, the researcher will describe a more detailed analysis of the participants' responses on the survey based on the components of a typical ballet class, which were targeted in this research. These components include the 180-degree turn-out, dancing en pointe and the grand plié.

180-Degree Turn-Out

The concept of the 180-degree turn-out is certainly one of the most recognized and revered principles in classical ballet instruction. When the participants were asked how they approached teaching their students to turn out their legs to 180-degrees, as is the accepted aesthetic, several teachers mentioned the hips in their responses. For instance, Participant B said that 180-degree turn-out is taught “. . . gradually, gently, practicing every day, from the hip, at the barre, during stretches.” Another teacher commented “. . . don't have to teach it. . . but preach it instead,” as she did not teach beginning students but older dancers.

Several teachers described a process of telling the students to sit or lay on the ground in an effort to demonstrate how to properly engage 180-degree turn-out from the hips. Two teachers who primarily worked with beginning dancers, described a simplified version of teaching 180-degree turn-out by having their students stand in parallel, and then turn their feet out by lifting the toes and opening the feet to create a “pizza slice” or “big slice of cake” between their feet. These teachers utilized such simple imagery for younger dancers to help them better comprehend this principle.

When surveyed, only one teacher had worked with a student who had abnormal anatomy affecting the 180-degree turn-out. This teacher explained the extent of the abnormality as having “unbalanced turnout [in which] one side is more turned out than the other.” She went on to explain that she had to alter the way she taught this student on the less turned-out leg by encouraging the student to stretch and strengthen her weaker side.

When asked if the teachers had any students who were unable to attain some amount of 180-degree turn-out despite a lack of abnormal anatomy, four teachers identified students who were unable to attain this aesthetic. According to Participant F: “What I see in students who are not able to work in turn out, is a lack of neuromuscular understanding. They cant [sic] make it happen from the command center, rather than it being about their physical make up.” Another response from Participant A read:

Many students are unable to attain turnout either due to structural differences or genetics. Some do not work at it, and that is their loss. As a teacher, you can only do so much. Again, repetition is key, as well as consistency. If you instill hard work and dedication, you will get hard-working, dedicated students. But, they won't all be that way.

Other teachers relayed that their students were able to attain 180-degree turn-out somewhat, but that the students achieved this end in different stages and at a varied rate. Three

teachers noted that if a student started ballet late, which would normally be considered starting at or after age 13, it took longer to attain the 180-degree turn-out.

Dancing En Pointe

As discussed previously, a little over half of the ballet teachers participating in the study have not regularly taught pointe to their students. The data analysis included here reflected this small sample who did teach pointe.

When asked how they assessed students for pointe readiness, all four teachers who have taught pointe included ankle strength as one of the important considerations. Other answers included ballet knowledge, a good grasp of technique and terminology, the ability to balance on flat, a passion for ballet, confidence in barre work, maturity in class, leg strength, and the ability to focus.

One of the four teachers had a student who was unable to go on pointe due to abnormal anatomy. She indicated that the student had a bone spur between the talus and calcaneus which prevented her from going up on pointe and required surgery. The teacher explained how she modified her instruction by having the student use demi pointe instead of going up to full pointe, and by starting a regimen of TheraBand work to augment regular classes. The student did require surgical intervention and was able to attain going on pointe two years after healing from surgery. No other teachers had worked with students with abnormal anatomy affecting the ability to dance en pointe.

Only one teacher had a student unable to go en pointe despite the lack of abnormal anatomy. She explained that the dancer's foot muscles were not strong enough to support pointe work.

Grand Plié

The use of the movement known as grand plié or a large knee bend somewhat like a squatting position of the legs, has become a controversial topic of sorts in ballet pedagogy. Its use is well established but it flies in the face of more modern understandings that the grand plié requires dancers to overly bend their knees, exerting potentially harmful pressure on their knee joints.

The ballet teachers discussed how they approach teaching this movement, typically performed at the beginning of the ballet class as part of the barre work. All of the ballet teachers referred to the demi plié as being a crucial movement used on the way down and the way back up from the grand plié. Participant A explained her process for teaching this movement in great detail:

[Keep the] Heels down as long as possible, and keep reaching down with your heels. Engage your core muscles, and even though you are descending, you still need to lift up. Do not tip your pelvis forward. Knees kept to the side, in your turnout. Lift up on your core and start squeezing your legs together, while always reaching your heels to the floor, as you ascend to a standing position, keeping knees right over your toes, in alignment.

Several other teachers mentioned the placement of the heels while the dancer was descending and ascending during the grand plié as well. Only two of the teachers specifically referred to maintaining the 180-degree turn-out during the grand plié. There were no teachers who had students with abnormal anatomy affecting their ability to perform a grand plié. Out of all the teachers, only one had a student who was unable to perform a grand plié despite the absence of abnormal anatomy. She noted that only “. . . students who were lacking in the correct muscle[s] to perform the movement” were unable to perform a grand plié. In practice, these students probably lacked the required muscular strength or flexibility to perform this movement.

Follow-up Interviews

The open-ended follow-up interviews were offered to all participating ballet teachers after they completed the online survey. A telephone call or email served as the primary means for communication. There were sixteen guiding questions that the researcher provided to each participant via email before the interview. Each ballet teacher chose which questions they wished to respond to. Several teachers chose to add more details to their answers from the online educator survey. The results of the conversations are described in the following sections.

Participants' Self-Reflections

The bulk of the questions the ballet teachers chose to answer were geared toward their own self-reflections on how they have or have not changed and evolved as a ballet educator over time. According to Participant A:

I've definitely changed how I teach and am just as cognizant now as I was when I started about the physical health of my dancers. I have also grown to understand the mental strain dancers of today face as they struggle to fit into a world that isn't always forgiving to the arts. I incorporate many different teaching techniques within my classes to expose young students to the benefits of floor barre, deep breathing exercises, partner massage, along with our regular technique class. I was very methodical when I began, and I've come to realize that I need to listen to my dancers and be flexible to change my class plans to accommodate their physical and mental needs. Sometimes those are the most rewarding classes.

As noted above, Participant A clarified that she was cognizant of her dancers' health and well-being from the start of her career as a ballet teacher, but also that she was too meticulous as a beginning teacher. Eventually, she described how she learned to be flexible with her students to foster a more productive class environment. She also discussed several ways that she augmented her students' traditional technical ballet training by incorporating floor barre, breathing exercises, and massage.

Another ballet teacher communicated the same sentiment of paying more attention to the students' physical and mental health. This ballet teacher explained that despite only having taught in the 2010s, she was able to compare the dance education she received to the way she teaches now:

Considering I've only taught in the 2010s, but growing up dancing, today's studios place a lot heavier amount of time focusing on the dancer as a whole rather than just their technical ability. We are also concerned about their eating habits, physical activity outside of dance classes, how school is going for them, doing mental health checks and talking about building each other up and how to grow our own self confidence. We are starting to take class time - either snippets throughout or having a section at the beginning or end to learn about one of these topics.

The above teacher explained that at the dance studio where she teaches, they try to provide a more holistic education for their students with more than just the traditional elements of physical training and enforcing ballet etiquette. This means they consider the social and emotional learning of their students to be a more important facet of a ballet education than it has previously been considered in earlier decades.

Participant E also described her concerns about how physically and mentally challenging it can be to study classical ballet when she said:

Mental health is a very unacknowledged part of dance. We put so much emphasis on the physical and forget just how challenging ballet can be on the psyche. I try and have open conversations with my students with how they are feeling, how they are doing, and having a judge-free, open class.

Participant H agreed that there are more people today interested and working in dance medicine and science, but felt that the push for dancers to be better is growing and that dancers are learning how to do what she termed "crazier things." These are namely feats of extreme contortion and more gymnastic movements. In her opinion, being a ballet student is more mentally stressful now than it was previously. She cited social media as being one of the main

ways that dance students view other dancers while they are performing extreme positions and steps in an effort to gain attention.

There has been the increase of people interested and working in dance medicine and science. Mental health-there is a push for dancers to not be confined to one body type, however, it seems the push to be better and greater etc. is growing and dancers are doing crazier things. I think it's become more stressful mentally for many.

Another teacher also echoed the negative effects that modern technology such as social media has had on teaching ballet, commenting that “. . . students come in wanting to achieve tricks they see on Instagram.”

When asked if there were any exercises or stretches that they no longer used, one teacher noted that she no longer had her dancers bounce while stretching. She indicated that the reason she had included this method of stretching previously was because it was what she was taught to do by her own teachers in the 1980s. She explained that she now has her students “breathe into the stretch” and focus on relaxation instead of on bouncing.

Participant C conveyed that she no longer used the position known as the “frog” or “frog stretch” where the dancer lays face down and opens the knees out to each side while the knees are bent, and the bottoms of the feet are together. According to Participant C:

I used this for more advanced dancers during stretches. I stopped using it because at a workshop I heard that this stretch is actually more damaging than it is beneficial, and we should be lying on [our] backs with hips open instead to use gravity this way rather than applying so much pressure laying stomach down.

Professional development classes educated this teacher on how the stretch that she had learned as a student was no longer considered safe or effective. As a result, she decided to amend the stretch so it would be less dangerous for her students.

The follow-up interviewees also spoke at length about how their point of view on what is most important in ballet has or has not changed. When asked if her point of view had changed,

Participant A responded “Absolutely. There are more intricacies to pay attention to and focus on. When I was younger, it was all about the steps, the terminology, the timing, the turn-out. Always the turn-out, but no one ever tried to explain how.”

Some dissatisfaction with the teachers’ own training was reported by several participants during this study. For example, participant G noted that “. . . instilling passion and acting as much as you do technique [were the] elements [that] usually get lost in all of the grueling hours at the barre.” In her experience, these were the areas in which she had not received enough instruction or guidance when she was a student.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher discussed the findings from the respondents’ answers on both research instruments. The information from the online educator survey was presented in the following sections: participant background and class content, student profiles, and the three components of ballet pedagogy. The technical ballet components of interest in this study were 180-degree turn-out, dancing en pointe, and the grand pli  . The analysis of the follow-up interviews and the participants’ self-reflections were also presented. The subsequent chapter provides the conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

With advancements in the fields of exercise science and sports medicine, technology, and a growing concern for students' mental health, this research was conducted to explore how ballet pedagogy has evolved, or been resistant to evolve, over the last several decades. The following essential questions guided the study:

- Q1 What impact have advancements in anatomy and physiology had on ballet and ballet training?
- Q2 What are the origins of ballet principles such as 180-degree turn-out?
- Q3 What strategies have been most successful in training ballet dancers with non-ideal anatomy?
- Q4 Why have ballet educators resisted change to the ballet aesthetic and traditional forms of instruction?

The research instruments used in this study were an online educator survey that consisted of thirty questions, and a follow-up interview, either over the phone or by an electronic exchange, with sixteen open-ended, guiding questions from which participants could choose to answer. The thirteen participants were all former or current ballet teachers. Information gleaned from the responses to the research instruments was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to provide succinct statistical data, along with more specific and detailed exposition.

Research Findings

In this study the researcher found that the advancements in our understanding of the human body have made an impact on the way ballet teachers approach stretching. Several

participants spoke at length about the discontinuation of ill-conceived but widely repeated stretches, such as the “frog stretch,” as well as the act of bouncing during stretching. Participants cited information they received during professional development sessions from physical therapists, orthopedic practitioners, chiropractors, and exercise scientists who alerted them to the potential harm of stretching practices such as these.

Although the participants recalled a few students who struggled to achieve the 180-degree turn-out, dance en pointe, or execute the grand pli  , they reported no major changes to the way they taught these components of ballet. The 180-degree turn-out, dancing en pointe, and grand pli   continue to be included as essential elements in classical ballet training despite indications that they could potentially lead to physical injury for some students. Several participants spoke of adaptations and modifications for the few students who struggled with these components, but did not indicate that they had done away with teaching these elements altogether. The research revealed that adjustments to instruction were done more on a case-by-case basis, as opposed to systematic changes in the teachers’ ballet pedagogy.

The study indicated that many participants still found the respect, discipline, and etiquette of ballet to be crucial to the art form, and advantageous to the students. This did not, however, indicate that there were no changes when it came to acknowledging the difficulties and pressures involved in ballet training. Many participants talked about how their own experiences as a young ballet student differed from the experiences of the students that they teach. The research indicated that ballet teachers are now more concerned with the overall health and well-being of their students, and take the time to do check-ins, incorporate stress reducing practices such as meditation and massage, and encourage students to have a life outside of dance.

Relationship to Prior Research

Previous studies such as those completed by Morris in 2015 and Salzano in 2019 concluded that various aspects of classical ballet pedagogy are inherently risky for young dance students, especially students who are going through growth spurts and other bodily changes during adolescence. Studies looking at mitigating these potential hazards support the notion that ballet students are in need of additional support in the form of strengthening and conditioning exercises, position and movement adjustments to account for anatomical differences, and guidance in regard to healthy eating habits and stress management (Berg 147; Weidmann 55; Zeller 99). The findings of previous studies show that classical ballet pedagogy alone may not be enough to develop healthy, employable ballet dancers.

The present study confirmed these findings and drew attention to the disconnect between the perceived success of a student who is able to attain the body lines and overall aesthetic of ballet, but who may be suffering under the intense pressure to conform to these ideals. The participants were aware of the need for updating methods of teaching the principles of ballet, such as 180-degree turn-out and stretching exercises, to reflect our increased knowledge of anatomy and physiology, however the inclusion of these principles as a whole were not under dispute. The dedication to the institution of ballet, with all its formal prescriptions and highly specific statutes, still remains ever-present.

Limitations of Research

Although the findings of the present study yielded much acknowledgement from ballet teachers of a need for ballet pedagogy to evolve, there were several limitations to this study.

The primary limitation was the participant sample size. A lack of many participants, especially from ballet teachers who were actively teaching prior to 1990, created a narrowed pool

of responses. Many of the participants had less than fifteen years of teaching experience and thus were unable to compare changes in their own teaching over the course of several full decades.

The online educator survey itself presented a limitation to the study as it was not tested for validity or reliability. The sheer number of questions on the survey imposed a hefty time commitment which also complicated the process of collecting detailed information from each participant. As this research was conducted, the advent of an unprecedented global pandemic made it particularly difficult for participants to commit to finishing all thirty questions on the online educator survey. Several surveys were returned incomplete and some were not returned at all. Due to the extenuating circumstances, follow-up interviews were also difficult to procure, limiting the responses received.

A secondary limitation was the difficulty in locating ballet teachers who primarily or solely taught classical ballet, and who taught all levels of ballet, including advanced and pre-professional students. Over half of the participants in the present study did not teach pointe to their students. As dancing en pointe was one of the main tenets of ballet being examined, having only four participants who taught pointe was a significant limiting factor on the reliability of that analysis.

Recommendations for Further Research

The data analyzed showed that participants in the study were more aware of their students' mental health and the social pressures they face than their own ballet teachers had been in decades past. What beckons further research is how time spent on these modern concerns affect the quality of ballet instruction received. Do ballet dancers receive less physical training when teachers focus on the students' social and emotional well-being as part of class? Does a more holistic approach to teaching ballet result in dancers with weaker technique? This is not

meant as a criticism but a genuine inquiry into what the implications are for serious ballet students.

Some ballet teachers in the study were aware that relentlessly drilling ballet technique could be detrimental to a student's well-being, however there was little criticism for the unflinching rules of etiquette, such as no talking, and the enforcement of potentially harmful physical positions and movements like 180-degree turn-out and grand plié. More research on how to modify instruction for students with or without abnormal anatomy, and how to teach alternatives to these possibly harmful positions and steps is needed.

As noted in previous chapters, many participants felt that honoring the traditions of ballet such as respect for the teacher and maintaining a high level of in-class discipline were the most important principles of classical ballet. These non-physical components were cited by almost all the participants. More research is warranted on why ballet teachers perceive respect and discipline as so important, even to the point of being more crucial than the physical principles of ballet technique. Likewise, are the teacher-centric, lecture style forms of instruction commonly used in classical training really the most effective methods for teaching ballet?

What must be explored further are the implications, both positive and negative, for how integrating a modern approach enriches or dilutes the art of classical ballet. Practitioners may need to decide what is most important: the attainment of the ideal ballet body and prescribed aesthetic whether or not it makes the dancer unwell, or the development of healthy, well-rounded dancers who may or may not fully fit the ideal ballet aesthetic. Another question is whether ballet can continue to exist in its present form, or will it need to evolve to remain relevant in an increasingly aware society?

Summary

In conclusion, the data indicated that ballet pedagogy is being pushed to evolve, albeit somewhat slowly. Nevertheless, the outcome of this research has produced more questions. Advancements in medicine and science have begun to seep into the way ballet teachers teach their students to stretch. The researcher believes that in order for ballet to survive, it must evolve, and in doing so, become more accepting and inclusive of different body types to represent the increasing diversity of the society it reflects, and the increased variety found among its audiences.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 29, 2020

TO: Erika Lindblom

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1521220-2] Rethinking Classical Ballet Pedagogy: Examining Advancements that Integrate a Modern Approach

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 29, 2020

EXPIRATION DATE: January 29, 2024

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Rethinking Classical Ballet Pedagogy: Examining Advancements that Integrate a Modern Approach

Researcher: Erika Lindblom, candidate in the Dance Education MA program, School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Division of Extended Studies

Phone: E-mail:

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to examine the evolution of ballet pedagogy by considering recent advancements in kinesiology and biomechanics. Methods of instruction used to teach the concept of 180-degree turnout, the grand pli , and dancing en pointe are of primary significance in this study. Your experiences as a ballet educator have the potential to provide insight into how students are trained to attain 180-degree turnout, perform a grand pli , and dance en pointe, and how these methods of instruction have evolved.

The first part of your participation in this study is an online survey. You will receive an initial email containing a link to the survey of 30 questions. You can save the survey if you are not able to complete it in one sitting and return to complete it at a later time. All answers will be strictly confidential. Data from the survey will be electronically stored in a private, locked folder on the researcher's Google Drive, as well as printed and filed in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. In the study, participants will be referred to using a code letter to ensure confidentiality. All data will be destroyed within three years after the completion of the study.

Second, you will participate in an interview either over the phone, on Skype or FaceTime, in person, or via email with the researcher. This interview will be more open-ended than the initial survey and will be guided by an interview script that contains 16 questions. Your responses will be recorded based on the interview method. If you participate in a phone, Skype, FaceTime, or in person interview, the audio from the session will be recorded. If you participate in an email interview, the email document will serve as the interview transcript. All responses will be strictly confidential.

I will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. You will be given a code letter assigned only to you, which you will use to identify yourself in the initial survey. Only the researcher will know the name connected with a code. Your name will not be used in any oral or written report based on the data from this study. All your responses and this consent form will be locked in the researcher's filing cabinet in her home or in the case of digital data, will be stored

on a password protected computer. The researcher will bring the completed consent forms to the University of Northern Colorado campus where they will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Crabbe Hall, room 308, the office of Christy O'Connell-Black, one of the advisors from the Dance Education master's program.

Potential risks in the study are minimal. Participants may encounter challenges to their beliefs and methods of ballet instruction which may potentially cause discomfort. Participants may face discomfort associated with the length time for completing the survey and interview, and the nature of the questions which require some participants to recall former methods and instructional procedures in detail from many years ago.

Upon completion of the study, the researcher will provide an educational debriefing of the findings. The researcher will also provide a copy of all your responses at your request.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Subject's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Instrument 1: Survey

Please enter your answers in the spaces provided. You can save your comments on this form if you are unable to answer all the questions in one sitting. All answers will be strictly confidential.

Code Name: _____ Date Started: _____

Date Completed: _____

1. What years were you active as a ballet teacher?
2. What levels of ballet did you teach?
3. What was the average length of the ballet classes you taught?
4. Did you teach pointe as a separate class or within the regular class?
5. Have you taught any other dance genres? If so, please note those genres below.
6. At which types of public or private schools, dance studios, or other types of educational/training institutions and facilities have you taught? Please list all the types of facilities where you have taught. (Ex. conservatory, competitive studio, ballet school etc.)
7. In your opinion, which classical ballet principles are the most important? The following is an example of a ballet principle: 180-degree turn-out.
8. Did you dance professionally prior to becoming a ballet teacher? Please describe your previous experiences before you became a ballet teacher.
9. Have you taken any undergraduate or graduate coursework in dance, dance education, sports medicine, and/or anatomy and kinesiology? Please describe any of the courses in these categories which you have taken.
10. Do you regularly attend conferences, workshops, and other professional development opportunities in the field of ballet and/or dance? Please describe the professional development opportunities you have attended.
11. Do the majority of your students attend public or private school during the day, or are they homeschooled?
12. Describe the ballet courses in the class schedule followed by your typical student.

13. How do you assess your students in order to place them in appropriate level classes, and on what criteria are your assessments based?
14. How did you or do you approach the concept of teaching turn-out?
15. Have you had any students with abnormal anatomy affecting turn-out? Please put an X before your answer. ___ Yes ___ No
16. In answering the questions below, use only a code or pseudonym to identify each student.
 - a. Describe the nature of the student's abnormality and describe specifically how it impeded turn-out.
 - b. Did you change the way you taught the student because of the condition? If so, please describe how you altered or modified your instruction.
 - c. What supports, if any, were provided to the student?
 - d. Was the student able to achieve the turn-out required for performing ballet after using the modifications you provided?
 - e. Please complete questions 16 a-d for EACH student you taught with anatomy issues affecting their turn-out.
17. Did you have any students unable to attain turn-out despite the absence of abnormal anatomy? Please describe.
18. How do you teach students to execute a grand pli e?
19. Have you had any students with abnormal anatomy affecting ability to perform a grand pli e? Please use a pseudonym when describing the students and their issues to protect student confidentiality.
 - a. Describe the nature of the abnormality and specifically how it impeded being able to do grand pli e.
 - b. Did you change the way you taught the grand pli e because of the condition? If so, please describe how you altered or modified your instruction.
 - c. What supports, if any, were provided to the student?
 - d. Was the student able to achieve a full grand pli e?
 - e. Please complete questions 19 a-d for EACH student you taught with anatomy affecting their ability to perform a grand pli e.
20. Did you have any students unable to perform grand pli e despite the absence of abnormal anatomy? Please describe.
21. How do you assess student-readiness for going en pointe?

22. Have you had any students with abnormal anatomy affecting their ability to dance en pointe? Please use a pseudonym when discussing the students to protect their confidentiality.
 - a. Describe the nature of abnormality and describe specifically how it impeded being able to dance en pointe.
 - b. Did you change or modify the way you taught the student because of the condition? If so, please describe how you altered instruction.
 - c. What supports, if any, were provided to the student?
 - d. Was the student able to achieve dancing en pointe?
 - e. Please complete questions 22 a-d for EACH student you taught with anatomy affecting their ability to dance en pointe.
23. Did you have any students unable to attain dancing en pointe despite the absence of abnormal anatomy? Please describe.
24. Are there any exercises or stretches that you used previously in class but no longer use?
 - a. What were they?
 - b. Why did you use them?
 - c. When did you use them?
 - d. What made you stop using them?
25. Do you or have you ever consulted a physical therapist, kinesiologist, or other medical doctor in regard to a student's health in your work as a ballet teacher? Describe your reasons and the outcomes.
26. In the decades you taught, what pedagogical changes did you notice in regard to preserving a dancer's physical health?
27. What have been the most important classical ballet principles you instilled or continue to instill in your students?
28. Has your point of view changed on what is most important when learning classical ballet? Why and how has your point of view changed?
29. If you could tell the younger you how to be a more effective ballet teacher, what would you say?
30. What do you consider to be the most important concern facing classical ballet pedagogy today?

Instrument 2: Ballet Educators Second Interview Script

1. Please state your profession and how long you have been working or did work in that capacity. In what decades were you actively teaching ballet?
2. In what type of facility were you trained?
3. Talk about your ballet teachers. Describe their approach to teaching ballet. Has it influenced the way you teach?
4. How did you get your start as a ballet teacher?
5. What types of facilities have you taught in? In which types do you prefer teaching and why?
6. Describe your first few years of teaching. Did you have any mentors? If so, please describe in detail the nature of your mentor-mentee relationship.
7. Describe your last years of teaching (or if still teaching, describe the most recent 3 years). Please talk about the level of students taught, your particular approach, and the type of ballet curriculum you used.
8. Have you changed the way you teach ballet from the first years of your career to the last or most recent years of your teaching career? How so? Why?
9. Describe what you consider to be your most successful moment as a ballet teacher. Why is this moment significant for you?
10. If you could tell the younger you how to be a more effective ballet teacher, what would you say?
11. Do you feel like you were given support as a beginning ballet teacher, whether from your employer or a mentor in the field?
12. How did or do you assess your students and on what did or do you base your assessments?
13. How did or do you handle your dance students' injuries? Was or is there a procedure in place for when dancers fell or experienced an acute injury in your classroom?
14. Describe your approach to training ballet dancers. Specifically how do you approach teaching 180-degree turn-out, grand pliés, and dancing en pointe. Did you experience students who were unable to attain 180-degree turn-out, perform grand pliés, or dance en pointe? How did you handle these issues?
15. Do you or have you ever consulted a physical therapist, kinesiologist, or other medical doctor in regard to your work as a ballet teacher? Describe your reasons for consulting the specialist and the outcomes.
16. What types of bodily injuries were most common among the ballet students you taught?