

**DANCE EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES OF DEVELOPING SKILL IN PRE-  
PROFESSIONAL ADOLESCENT BALLET DANCERS**

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

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## **Abstract**

The path to becoming a professional dancer requires many years of dedicated training, typically in specialized dance programs. With the considerable amount of time, effort, and money required to develop skill in dance, factors that affect dance talent development have gained increasing interest in the dance medicine and science field. Dance educators are responsible for the day-to-day development of pre-professional ballet dancers and play an important role in influencing talent development. To date, little research has investigated dance educators' experiences. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology to frame the study, the main research question was, "What is it like to experience teaching adolescent pre-professional ballet dancers with the goal of developing skill?". Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six dance educators teaching in pre-professional ballet programs. Using thematic analysis in line with the work of van Manen (2016) the experiences of participants were captured by five core themes: 1) Teaching is experienced through interactions with students; 2) Teaching is not "one-size-fits-all"; 3) There is more than one type of education; 4) Teaching is experienced through planning classes and teaching across time; and 5) Teaching is influenced by the environment. Participants discussed aspects of their teaching approach that fit within a student-centered paradigm. The results of this study contribute to dance pedagogy literature by highlighting some of the complexities of teaching adolescent dancers within the sociocultural context of classical ballet. The expectations of the dance studio, social media, and student expectations all play a role in shaping dance educators experiences. When discussing their approach to developing skill participants suggested a wholistic view of their students and dance

education. This research offers a glimpse into the experiences of dance educators and provides insight into areas for future research in dance education.

## **Lay Summary**

The path to becoming a professional dancer requires many years of dedicated training, typically in specialized dance programs. Dance teachers play an important role in the talent development process. This study explored the experiences of dance teachers in pre-professional ballet programs. These experiences were characterized by five themes: 1) Teaching is experienced through interactions with students; 2) Teaching is not “one-size-fits-all”; 3) There is more than one type of education; 4) Teaching is experienced through planning classes and teaching across time; and 5) Teaching is influenced by the environment. The results of this study suggest that teaching adolescent ballet students is complex. Dance teachers in this study discuss student-centered teaching approaches while teaching within the context of classical ballet. Dance teachers in this study also had a wholistic view of teaching with an emphasis on student health and well-being.

## **Preface**

This research was conceptualized and carried out by Jamie Hawke with guidance from the supervisory committee composed of Dr. Shannon Bredin, Dr. Sandra Mathison, and Dr. Nicola Hodges. Jamie Hawke was responsible for data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the thesis document. This research was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H20-01971) under the title "Dance educator perceptions of skill and development in pre-professional adolescent ballet dancers".

# Table of Contents

|                                                                                              |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Abstract.....</b>                                                                         | <b>iii</b>  |
| <b>Lay Summary .....</b>                                                                     | <b>v</b>    |
| <b>Preface.....</b>                                                                          | <b>vi</b>   |
| <b>Table of Contents .....</b>                                                               | <b>vii</b>  |
| <b>List of Figures.....</b>                                                                  | <b>xii</b>  |
| <b>Glossary .....</b>                                                                        | <b>xiii</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgements .....</b>                                                                | <b>xv</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>                                                         | <b>1</b>    |
| 1.1    Dance participation .....                                                             | 1           |
| 1.2    Dancer health and well-being .....                                                    | 1           |
| 1.3    Purpose.....                                                                          | 2           |
| 1.4    Implications.....                                                                     | 3           |
| 1.5    Overview of the document.....                                                         | 3           |
| <b>Chapter 2: Skill Development in Dance.....</b>                                            | <b>5</b>    |
| 2.1    Introduction.....                                                                     | 5           |
| 2.2    Measuring Expert Skill in Dance and Ballet.....                                       | 5           |
| 2.3    Talent Development Theories.....                                                      | 7           |
| 2.4    Talent Development in Dance .....                                                     | 9           |
| 2.5    Methodology and Measurement Considerations .....                                      | 10          |
| 2.6    Summary .....                                                                         | 12          |
| <b>Chapter 3: Narrative Review of Literature Related to Talent Development in Dance.....</b> | <b>13</b>   |

|         |                                                           |    |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 3.1     | Factors Contributing to Talent Development in Dance ..... | 13 |
| 3.2     | Individual Factors .....                                  | 14 |
| 3.2.1   | Physical Factors .....                                    | 14 |
| 3.2.1.1 | Anthropometry and body composition .....                  | 15 |
| 3.2.1.2 | Flexibility and hypermobility .....                       | 16 |
| 3.2.1.3 | Physical fitness.....                                     | 18 |
| 3.2.1.4 | Injury.....                                               | 21 |
| 3.2.2   | Psychological factors .....                               | 23 |
| 3.2.2.1 | Perfectionism .....                                       | 24 |
| 3.2.2.2 | Passion .....                                             | 26 |
| 3.2.2.3 | Personality traits.....                                   | 28 |
| 3.2.2.4 | Motivation and commitment.....                            | 30 |
| 3.2.2.5 | Perceptions of self.....                                  | 33 |
| 3.2.2.6 | Psychological skills.....                                 | 35 |
| 3.2.3   | Other individual factors .....                            | 36 |
| 3.2.3.1 | Rhythm and musicality .....                               | 37 |
| 3.2.3.2 | Memory and cognitive structures.....                      | 37 |
| 3.2.3.3 | Creativity and artistry .....                             | 38 |
| 3.2.3.4 | Maturation.....                                           | 42 |
| 3.3     | Interpersonal factors.....                                | 44 |
| 3.3.1   | Significant others .....                                  | 45 |
| 3.3.1.1 | Parents.....                                              | 45 |
| 3.3.1.2 | Peers.....                                                | 46 |

|                                                |                                                                                                                             |           |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 3.3.1.3                                        | Teachers .....                                                                                                              | 47        |
| 3.4                                            | What does this tell us? .....                                                                                               | 50        |
| <b>Chapter 4: Research Investigation .....</b> |                                                                                                                             | <b>53</b> |
| 4.1                                            | Introduction.....                                                                                                           | 53        |
| 4.2                                            | Hermeneutic phenomenology .....                                                                                             | 53        |
| 4.3                                            | The research approach .....                                                                                                 | 54        |
| 4.4                                            | Data collection .....                                                                                                       | 56        |
| 4.5                                            | Recruitment.....                                                                                                            | 58        |
| 4.6                                            | Data analysis .....                                                                                                         | 59        |
| 4.7                                            | Researcher role and positionality.....                                                                                      | 60        |
| 4.8                                            | Limitations .....                                                                                                           | 61        |
| <b>Chapter 5: Results.....</b>                 |                                                                                                                             | <b>63</b> |
| 5.1                                            | Participant characteristics .....                                                                                           | 63        |
| 5.2                                            | Summary of themes .....                                                                                                     | 63        |
| 5.3                                            | Theme 1: “They’re not just your little puppets”: Teaching is experienced through interactions with students.....            | 64        |
| 5.3.1                                          | “‘That relationship comes first’”: The relationship between student and teacher...                                          | 65        |
| 5.3.2                                          | “‘It’s a fine line’”: Giving corrections and feedback .....                                                                 | 68        |
| 5.3.3                                          | “‘We’re trying to make it feel like a safe place where they’re seen and they belong’”: The classroom atmosphere.....        | 72        |
| 5.3.4                                          | “‘The more I can be in your head and understand why you’re thinking that’”: Guiding students towards an understanding ..... | 78        |
| 5.3.5                                          | “‘I don’t have a magic wand’”: The student role in learning .....                                                           | 81        |

|                                    |                                                                                                                     |            |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 5.4                                | Theme 2: “I would say that it’s variable”: Teaching is not “one-size-fits-all” .....                                | 84         |
| 5.4.1                              | “What I see in front of myself”: The students in the class.....                                                     | 85         |
| 5.4.2                              | “Some of them would really flourish and some of them would flounder”:<br>Teaching to the individual .....           | 86         |
| 5.4.3                              | “Helping each kid have the same opportunity”: Teaching all students .....                                           | 92         |
| 5.5                                | Theme 3: “It doesn’t have to be <i>pliés</i> and <i>tendus</i> ”: There is more than one type of<br>education.....  | 95         |
| 5.6                                | Theme 4: “What is my end goal?”: Teaching is experienced through planning classes<br>and teaching across time ..... | 99         |
| 5.7                                | Theme 5: “Oh so many things”: Teaching is influenced by the environment .....                                       | 109        |
| 5.7.1                              | “The parents are the investor”: Parental support .....                                                              | 109        |
| 5.7.2                              | “I just have to follow the way that they do things a little bit more”: The dance<br>studio environment.....         | 111        |
| 5.7.3                              | “This era of teaching is looking more and more to outside help”: Resources and<br>support outside the studio .....  | 117        |
| 5.7.4                              | “I know that this is a stereotype that I try to break”: Societal trends in ballet....                               | 118        |
| <b>Chapter 6: Discussion .....</b> |                                                                                                                     | <b>123</b> |
| 6.1                                | Introduction.....                                                                                                   | 123        |
| 6.2                                | Student-Centered Pedagogy.....                                                                                      | 123        |
| 6.3                                | Sociocultural Context.....                                                                                          | 132        |
| 6.4                                | Wholistic Education.....                                                                                            | 137        |
| 6.5                                | Limitations and future research directions.....                                                                     | 140        |
| 6.6                                | Conclusion .....                                                                                                    | 142        |

|                                                          |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>                                | <b>143</b> |
| <b>Appendices.....</b>                                   | <b>169</b> |
| Appendix A Phenomenography .....                         | 169        |
| A.1 Methodology .....                                    | 169        |
| A.2 Phenomenography.....                                 | 169        |
| A.3 Ontology and epistemology .....                      | 170        |
| A.4 Categories of description .....                      | 172        |
| A.5 Data Collection .....                                | 174        |
| A.6 Data Analysis .....                                  | 175        |
| Appendix B Perfectionism.....                            | 178        |
| Appendix C Information for third party recruitment ..... | 181        |
| Appendix D Informed consent.....                         | 182        |
| Appendix E Initial contact email .....                   | 190        |
| Appendix F Interview transcript.....                     | 191        |
| Appendix G Pre-Interview email.....                      | 193        |

## List of Figures

|                                                                                |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1: Talent development trajectory (adapted from Subotnik et al. (2011)). | 9  |
| Figure 2: Visualization of factors related to talent development in dance      | 52 |
| Figure 3: Core themes                                                          | 64 |

## Glossary

Adapted from Grant (1982).

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>À la seconde</b>    | To the second. Where the foot is placed in second position. Held on the floor or in the air to the side of the body. Referred to in this manuscript as “second”                                                                                                       |
| <b>Adage</b>           | At ease or leisure. A series of exercises consisting of a succession of slow and graceful movements which may be simple or of the most complex character, performed with fluidity and apparent ease.                                                                  |
| <b>Arabesque</b>       | One of the basic poses in ballet. A position of the body, in profile, supported on one leg with the other leg extended behind and at right angle to it, and the arms held in various harmonious positions creating the longest line possible from fingertips to toes. |
| <b>Assemblé</b>        | Assembled or join together. A jump in which the working foot slides out before pushing into the air and both feet land at the same time.                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Ballon</b>          | Bounce. The light, elastic quality in jumping in which the dancer bounds up from the floor, pauses a moment in the air and descends lightly and softly, only to rebound in the air like the smooth bouncing of a ball.                                                |
| <b>Battement Tendu</b> | Battement stretched. The knee is kept straight while one foot slides out to reach a fully stretched position with a pointed foot and ankle. Referred to in this manuscript as “tendu”.                                                                                |
| <b>Batterie</b>        | A collective term meaning the entire vocabulary of beaten steps. Any jumping movement in which both legs beat together or one leg beats against the other.                                                                                                            |
| <b>Demi-pointe</b>     | On the half-points. Standing high on the balls of the feet. Also refers to a series of steps that are executed on the balls of the feet.                                                                                                                              |
| <b>En pointe</b>       | On the points. Supporting the body on the tips of the toes using specialized shoes. Also referred to in this manuscript as “pointe”.                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Enchaînement</b>    | Linking. A combination of two or more steps arranged to fit a phrase of music.                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Glissade</b>       | Glide. A travelling step executed by gliding the working foot from the fifth position in the required direction, the other foot closing to it. May be done close to the ground or as a jump. |
| <b>Grande allegro</b> | A section of class or a series of large jumping actions.                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Grande jeté</b>    | Big throw. A large jump in which the dancer executes a split position with their legs.                                                                                                       |
| <b>Penché</b>         | Leaning, inclining. Standing on one leg while executing a leaning arabesque position.                                                                                                        |
| <b>Pirouette</b>      | Whirl or spin. A complete turn of the body on one foot.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Plié</b>           | Bent, bending. A bend of the knees.                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Variation</b>      | A solo dance in classical ballet.                                                                                                                                                            |

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the participants of this study. In what was an extremely hard year for dance educators around the world you took the time to participate and for that I will always be grateful.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Dance participation**

Dance and ballet are amongst the most popular recreational activities for Canadian youth. Dance is reported as the second most popular organized physical activity while ballet ranks fourth amongst Canadian girls ages three to seventeen (Solutions Research Group Consultants Inc., 2014). In 1998, 27% of Canadian children ages four to seven participated in weekly lessons in organized physical activities such as dance, gymnastics, or martial arts; in 2008, this number had increased to 38% (Hill, 2011).

The path to becoming a professional dancer requires many years of dedicated training typically in specialized dance programs. In a survey conducted by the Canada Council for the Arts (2014), professional dancers indicated an average of ten years of training prior to employment; while eight in 10 professional dancers indicated that they received training through a dance school or program. With the considerable amount of time, effort, and money required to develop skill in dance, factors that affect dance talent development have gained increasing interest in the dance medicine and science field (Chua, 2014b; Walker, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2010).

### **1.2 Dancer health and well-being**

Dance medicine and science is a growing field of research that focuses on the health and well-being of dancers. Research is conducted in many areas of health including, but not limited to physiology, psychology, motor learning, and biomechanics with a focus on improving dance education, medical treatment, and dancer health outcomes. There are also several organizations

committed to education and dissemination of information about dancer health and wellness ([www.healthydancercanada.org](http://www.healthydancercanada.org), [www.safeindance.com](http://www.safeindance.com)).

The needs of dancers as both artists and athletes have become important issues within dance medicine and science (Koutedakis & Jamurtas, 2004). Evidence of high injury rates in dancers, especially ballet dancers, has increased interest in the development of training programs to optimize physical fitness and the creation of screening programs to identify dancers at risk of injury (Clark, Gupta, & Ho, 2014; Redding & Queded, 2006). Performing artists also face a range of psychological challenges including performance anxiety, perfectionism, disordered eating, burnout, and depression (Mainwaring & Mor, 2019). Research addressing the psychological needs of dancers contributes to dancer well-being in both training and performing contexts. Research suggests that the developmental trajectory towards a professional career in dance is influenced by a number of factors that contribute to dancer health and well-being, both from a physical and a psychological perspective (Araújo, Cruz, & Almeida, 2009; Chua, 2014b; Walker et al., 2010). A comprehensive understanding of all aspects of talent development is important both in terms of the positive and negative outcomes for young dancers.

### **1.3 Purpose**

Dance educators are responsible for the day-to-day development of pre-professional ballet dancers and play an important role in influencing talent development. Dance educators' experiences of teaching to develop skill with adolescent ballet dancers have important implications in the talent development process, but little systematic research has been conducted to explore the ways in which dance educators experience teaching or developing skill in pre-professional ballet dancers. Using the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology, the purpose of this

study was to explore the experiences of dance educators teaching adolescent ballet dancers with the goal of developing skill.

#### **1.4 Implications**

The results of this study will contribute to the overall literature surrounding talent development in dance and dance education, more specifically in pre-professional ballet programs. The design and impact of health and wellness programs for dancers relies on collaboration between multiple sectors including researchers, educators, healthcare professionals, and dancers (Redding & Queded, 2006). The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of dance educators teaching pre-professional ballet with the goal of developing skill. Insight into these perspectives will provide direction for further discussion into the long-term development and health and well-being of dancers in addition to contributing to the literature surrounding dance pedagogy.

#### **1.5 Overview of the document**

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Following an introduction in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 highlights talent development trajectories in dance and measurement and methodological considerations for researching dance skill and talent. Chapter 3 presents a narrative review of current research related to the individual and interpersonal factors contributing to talent development in dance. Chapter 4 addresses the research investigation, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology, data collection, data analysis, and researcher role and positionality. Chapter 5 presents the results of the data analysis as core themes. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes this thesis with a discussion of the participant experiences in relation to current

literature in dance education. The appendices provide background information of methodology relevant to the design of this study. The appendices also provide documents approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics.

## **Chapter 2: Skill Development in Dance**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss talent development in dance and present an overview of notable theories of talent development that are currently used in dance research. Methodological considerations for dance research in pre-professional settings and this thesis are also highlighted.

### **2.2 Measuring Expert Skill in Dance and Ballet**

Research investigations in talent and skill development must first have a definition of what constitutes talent and defines skill in ballet. Unlike some domains of sport science, measuring ballet performance objectively is difficult when ballet is performed in artistic venues rather than sport competition arenas. A research-based definition of expertise is not agreed upon in the domain of ballet or the larger domain of dance. Bläsing et al. (2012) suggest that although movement expertise can be described through biomechanical measures, physical skill should not be regarded as separate from the “cognitive functions and strategies that enable dancers to make use of them in a way that makes dance an art form” (p. 302).

Hutchinson, Sachs-Ericsson, and Ericsson (2013) suggest a hierarchy similar to those in sporting contexts where the athlete’s relative performance is based on the highest level of competition the athlete is currently involved in. The authors suggest that this hierarchy is related to the level of quality of a ballet company and is based on the reputation of a ballet company and invitations to perform either regionally, nationally, or internationally. An international company will have a higher reputation than a regional company. The authors propose that a dancer’s rank within a company further suggests a hierarchy of objectively measured skill. As the authors state “a ‘principal’ dancer is more capable and valued than the members of the ‘corps’ in a given

dance company” (p. 27). Therefore, combining the level of quality of a ballet company and the dancer’s rank will produce a structure with which to assign levels of expertise. This categorization suggests that a ‘corps’ member of an international ballet company has attained a higher level of achievement than a ‘principal’ dancer in a national or regional company (Hutchinson et al., 2013). This hierarchy does not consider, however, a multitude of factors including dancer preferences for the type of company they audition for, external influences, or unexplainable chance.

Chua, (2019) notes that the developmental process towards becoming a professional dancer may be, in part, due to an aspect of chance. Decision makers in the field of professional ballet and contemporary dance mention that personal taste, ‘fit’ within the company, and administrative choices that are beyond the decision maker’s control are all factors of chance and that attempts to explain why “some dancers did not ‘make it’ are futile” (Chua, 2019, p. 277). Gagné (2010) suggests that chance is a crucial factor in talent development, representing the degree of control a person has over the causal influences mentioned above and plays a prominent role in creating individual differences in natural abilities and intrapersonal catalysts. For example, dancers may attribute long successful careers to their luck in not sustaining a career threatening injury, although they also contribute this to other factors such as adequate warm up techniques (Chua, 2014a). While some professional dancers do cite luck and chance as playing a role in their career trajectory others reflect on how they actively pursued teachers or choreographers and sought opportunities (Chua, 2014a). Any definition of skill or expertise in ballet should be used cautiously and with the recognition that there are potentially unmeasurable factors that have contributed to a dancer’s professional trajectory.

### 2.3 Talent Development Theories

Talent identification is “the process of identifying and/or selecting individuals who possess a quality (or qualities) that predicts some form of future attainment” (Baker, Cobley, Schorer, & Wattie, 2017, p. 2). Through this process candidates are either selected or deselected based on their potential to excel. Talent development is “formally defined as the systematic pursuit by talentees, over a significant and continuous period of time, of a structured program of activities leading to a specific excellence goal.” (Gagné, 2010, p. 84). Talent development includes initial access, through identification or selection, into activities that include domain-specific content delivered in a specific learning environment or format. Talent development also includes a component of investment in terms of time, money, and psychological energy. Talent development is a progression that can be broken down into stages as discussed below.

Although several talent development theories exist, there are a few notable models that are currently cited in dance research. This section will briefly describe these models to provide an overview of the theory used to frame current talent development research in dance. While not dance specific, these theories were formed through research with eminent individuals in a variety of domains including sport, science, and the arts. Therefore, they offer a theoretical overview of the talent development process that may be applied to a variety of settings.

Bloom (1985) and his research team investigated artists, athletes, and scientists who had reached the highest level of achievement within their respective fields. Across domains, the authors found that the talent development process was split into three distinct phases of learning: the early years, the middle years, and the later years. The early years are characterized by a playful feeling and enjoyment of discovering the domain. Activities were pursued out of curiosity or fun and were challenging but rewarding. Parents and teachers in the early years offer

positive support and an introduction to foundational knowledge. The second phase of learning, the middle years, is marked by systematic practice and attention to detail. Instruction in the middle years is more formal, focusing on technical skills and vocabulary. The third phase of learning, the later years, denotes a movement from “technical precision to personal expression” (p. 420). Bloom (1985) notes, however, that amongst their research participants the ages at which they moved through these phases and the relative timing of each phase varied greatly, yet the characteristics of the phases remained similar. The phases are not predetermined but are interactions between the learner, the subject matter, and the instructor.

Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) propose a mega-model of talent development created through a synthesis of current research that is intended to apply to all domains (see Figure 1 **Error! Reference source not found.**). Five principles are at the foundation of the model:

- abilities, both general and special, matter and can be developed;
- domains of talent have varying developmental trajectories;
- opportunities need to be provided to young people and taken by them;
- psychosocial variables are determining factors in the successful development of talents; and
- eminence is the intended outcome of gifted education

(p. 30).

Regardless of the domain, Subotnik et al., (2011) suggest that talent development follows a trajectory from start phase, to peak phase, to end phase. In agreement with Bloom (1985), the authors also suggest that the ages at which individuals move through this trajectory can vary and

are dependent on the domain. In addition, the intervals between each phase are domain dependent.

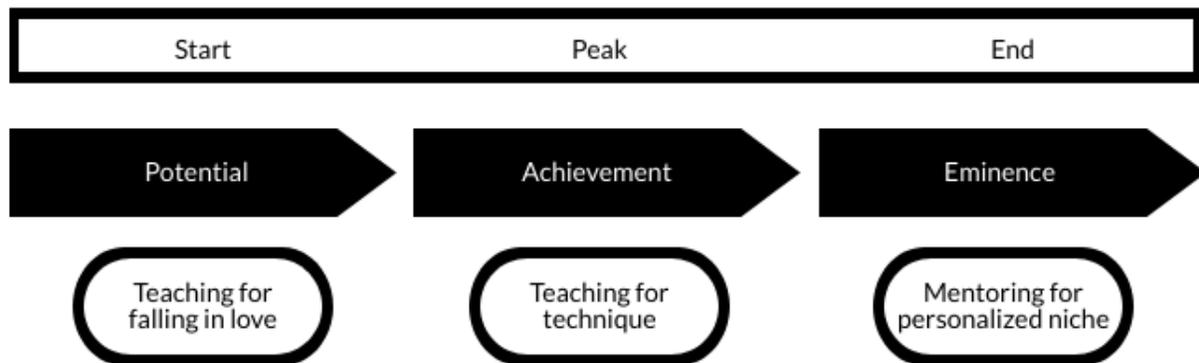


Figure 1: Talent development trajectory (adapted from Subotnik et al. (2011)).

## 2.4 Talent Development in Dance

The achievement of success in a dance talent trajectory is not the result of one singular factor but is a complex interaction of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Kogan, 2002). Interviews with professional dancers reveal that success in the field of dance is perceived to be the result of a combination of personal and contextual factors that exert influence at different points in the career trajectory (Araújo et al., 2009; Chua, 2014a). A two-year longitudinal research project conducted with the UK Centres for Advanced Training, a talent development scheme in England, provides insight into some factors associated with talent development (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, Redding, & Jobbins, 2014). This study resulted in a number of publications that provide description of the complex interactions between variables, both individual and interpersonal, related to the study of dance (Redding, Nordin-Bates, & Walker, 2012). In a recent study with ‘gatekeepers’ in the dance domain, Chua (2019) provides insight into the factors that go into the

making of a professional dancer such as motivation, creativity, mind-set, social skills, and chance. Taken together this research provides evidence of a complex process with numerous factors that can affect both the positive and negative outcomes of talent development.

To date, there have been two published notable reviews of talent identification and development in dance (Chua, 2014b; Walker et al., 2010). These reviews provide a starting point for a discussion of the factors that contribute to achieving excellence in dance. Continued exploration of the experiences of adolescent dance students, professional dancers, and other influential individuals such as parents, teachers, and artistic directors provide a complex description of the factors that contribute to or impede the achievement of excellence in dance.

## **2.5 Methodology and Measurement Considerations**

While there is a large amount research focused on dance there are a number of important methodological considerations that should be taken into account when reviewing the literature. The first consideration is how to define the terms, ‘elite’ and ‘talented’. Definitions of talented dancers can vary widely amongst studies. Chua (2019) defines an exceptionally talented dancer in reference to their preprofessional training at leading national or state-level institutions. Similarly, studies recruit pre-professional dancers from conservatories or vocational schools (Angioi, Metsios, Twitchett, Koutedakis, & Wyon, 2012; Côté-Laurence, 2000; Nordin-Bates, Raedeke, & Madigan, 2017) and tertiary training programs (Blevins, Erskine, Moyle, & Hopper, 2020). Aujla, Nordin-Bates, and Redding (2015) qualify students in their study as talented based on their membership to a training centre that requires two auditions for entry. Some studies base their criteria on the number of hours per week a dancer is in training; however, as Chua (2019)

notes, measuring talent based on the number of hours danced per week does not necessarily denote gifted or talented students.

Criteria used to classify professional dancers includes belonging to a professional company (Akehurst & Oliver, 2014; Bläsing & Schack, 2012) or through nomination by other experts in the field (Araújo et al., 2009). Hutchinson, Sachs-Ericsson, and Ericsson (2013) objectively quantify the success of a professional dancer based on the international reputation of their dance company and their rank within that company. Chua (2019) extends this definition of success to include recognition through national and international awards, performance of lead roles, or the attainment of the rank of principle dancer.

As Carman (2013) points out, variability in the methods used to classify or define giftedness in educational research results in the lack of a common consensus amongst researchers. As a result, many of the findings in gifted research in education are difficult to generalize to other populations and lack external validity (Carman, 2013). A constantly shifting definition of talent in dance presents the same problems. Would participants identified as talented in one study meet the criteria for talent in a different study? How does this affect the interpretation or generalization of studies in dance talent identification or development? In the following literature review, the terms used to classify the level of training were clarified whenever possible. This narrative review of the literature also includes research with participants from educational and recreational dance settings. These studies are included because they provide a more robust description of the factors contributing to the development of skill in dance.

Variance in styles of dance also affects the relevance and interpretation of many of the studies referenced in this review. Often research includes student and professional dancers from a range of styles within the same study. Whenever studies have included students or

professionals whose primary study or career is in classical ballet, participants were referred to as ballet students or ballet dancers. Whenever studies have included ballet students and professionals amongst other styles of dance, participants were referred to as dancers or professional dancers. Any studies in genres that do not include ballet but are relevant to the topic were specified as such.

## **2.6 Summary**

While the definition of skill in dance is not standardized, an understanding of the ways in which skill is described and assessed within dance research can aid in the interpretation of research findings. In the following chapter, the studies cited are often conducted with more than one population and more than one style of dance. When necessary, a distinction will be made between the population and the style of dance to frame the evidence and interpretation. Research across a number of domains has produced theories about the trajectory of talent development from potential to eminence. These theories recognize that achievement in a domain does not rely on individual characteristics alone but on a complex interaction between the individual, the environment, and the opportunities afforded to the individual.

## **Chapter 3: Narrative Review of Literature Related to Talent Development in Dance**

### **3.1 Factors Contributing to Talent Development in Dance**

This chapter presents a narrative review of factors that relate to talent development and current literature that covers these topics. The framework for this review was based on definitions from Gagné (2010) who suggests two types of catalysts that can facilitate or hinder the talent development process, intrapersonal and environmental. This review considers discipline-specific factors in dance and ballet. Intrapersonal catalysts include physical and mental traits as well as goal management processes such as self-awareness, motivation, and volition. Environmental catalysts interact with the intrapersonal catalysts throughout the talent development process. Environmental catalysts can include a variety of subcomponents from environmental, social, or cultural influences. This can range from significant individuals in the immediate environment, to specialized services and programs. Abbott and Collins (2004) also stress the importance of talent identification and development models that consider the interplay between determinants of performance, the environment, and the determinants of the capacity to successfully utilize the opportunities available within a given domain.

Past reviews of talent development in dance include both individual factors and interpersonal factors that act and interact in complex ways to either facilitate or inhibit the development of talent in young dancers (Chua, 2014b; Walker et al., 2010). The purpose of this review is to provide an updated overview of the current research related to factors that may contribute to talent development in dance.

## **3.2 Individual Factors**

Individual factors are within-person factors that relate to both the physical and psychological traits of an individual. Physical factors are related to structural traits that are, to some extent, genetic but may also vary with level of training and age. Psychological factors are related to the personality, behaviours, and affect of the individual. Other individual factors include rhythm and musicality, memory and cognitive structures, creativity and artistry, chronological age, and maturation.

### **3.2.1 Physical Factors**

Individual physical factors include quantitatively measured characteristics such as anthropometry, body composition, flexibility, hypermobility, physical fitness, and injury. Some of these factors are inherited and fairly stable, while other factors can be affected by maturation or training. Knowledge of the physiological and aesthetic demands of classical ballet can provide information that is useful for training and performance enhancement (Twitchett, Koutedakis, & Wyon, 2009). In addition, this information can provide insight into risk factors for injury that should be taken into consideration in an overall talent development framework.

McCormack, Bird, de Medici, Haddad, and Simmonds (2019) conducted a study to provide insight into the physical attributes of potentially successful classical ballet dancers. A sample of professional company directors, senior teachers, school directors, choreographers, principal dancers, and health practitioners listed ten physical attributes that they believed would make a great classical ballet dancer. Flexibility, strength, physical proportions, and aesthetics were frequently recommended attributes. Flexibility was the most commonly mentioned attribute either in the form of overall flexibility, hip turnout flexibility, or foot and ankle flexibility,

specifically plantarflexion. Overall muscular strength was also commonly mentioned with an emphasis on spinal/core strength (McCormack et al., 2019).

Mitchell, Haase, Malina, and Cumming (2016) found that dance teachers viewed the ideal body as a requisite for the functional demands of ballet that meets the cultural expectations embedded in ballet. Pickard (2013) argues that a strong connection exists between the “size, shape, and aesthetic of the ballet body and identity as a ballet dancer” (p. 15). Maintaining a particular body shape and size is accepted as becoming and embodying the identity of a ballet dancer. The ideal ballet body is socially constructed within the field of ballet and young dancers position themselves within what they perceive to be the ideal body. This is particularly relevant to talent development as young dancers express that if they do not fit the social expectations, they will not be able to claim identity as a ballet dancer (Pickard, 2013).

### **3.2.1.1 Anthropometry and body composition**

Although there are a range of methods for measuring body composition it has been shown that dancers, in particular ballet dancers, maintain a leaner body type than the general population (Beck, Mitchell, Foskett, Conlon, & Von Hurst, 2015; Frasson, Diefenthaler, & Vaz, 2009; Wilmerding, McKinnon, & Mermier, 2005). Ballet students display relatively lower body fat percentages when compared to Polish national percentile ranks (Grochowska-Niedworok et al., 2018), age matched controls (Kadel, Donaldson-Fletcher, Gerberg, & Micheli, 2005), or students who auditioned for, but were not accepted into, an elite ballet school (Kabakçı, Yücel, & Ayvazoğlu, 2017). Kadel et al. (2005) found that female adolescent pre-professional ballet students had significantly lower BMI than age-matched controls although they were not significantly different in height. In a small study with students auditioning for an elite ballet

academy, Kabakcı et al. (2017) found that the students who were accepted into the school were thinner than those not accepted based on BMI. A study with adolescents participating in an international ballet competition found that only 42.5% of the dancers had a normal BMI for their age while the majority of the dancers were categorized as underweight (Burckhardt, Wynn, Krieg, Bagutti, & Faouzi, 2011). Similar results have been found in adult ballet dancers. When compared to female contemporary and Dancesport dancers, female professional ballet dancers had lower body fat percentage, body mass, and BMI (Liiv et al., 2013). The aesthetic physical characteristics perceived as necessary to reach elite levels in ballet (McCormack et al., 2019) demand a lean body type and these findings support this perspective of female adolescent ballet dancers.

The demand for a lean body type in ballet may also affect dietary intake and poses potential health risks for student and professional ballet dancers alike. Adolescent ballet dancers were shown to have inadequate dietary intake for the athletic demands of ballet (Burckhardt et al., 2011) and may be at risk of iron deficiency (Beck et al., 2015). Characteristics of the female athlete triad, particularly menstrual irregularities and low energy availability were found to be more prevalent in female professional ballet dancers than age and weight matched controls (Doyle-Lucas, Akers, & Davy, 2010). These findings indicate that the socially constructed ideal body type may influence talent selection processes (Kabakcı et al., 2017) but also play an important role in understanding the health and wellness needs of young ballet dancers.

### **3.2.1.2 Flexibility and hypermobility**

To meet the physical and technical demands of ballet, a dancer must display flexibility beyond what is typically required for most physical activity. Han, Kim, Harris, and Noble (2019)

found that classical ballet requires a greater range of motion within the hip joint than is found in many activities of daily living or other sporting activities. The clinical definition of generalized joint hypermobility is not standardized; however it can be described as a condition where joints are able to move beyond a typical range of motion (Beighton, Grahame, & Bird, 2012).

In a review of literature in classical ballet, Twitchett, Koutedakis, and Wyon (2009) found that professional ballet dancers have greater ankle plantarflexion, passive hip external rotation, hip flexion, hip abduction, and knee extension, but have less range of motion in passive hip adduction and hip internal rotation than nondancers. Pre-adolescent and adolescent ballet students were significantly more flexible in most range of motion tests than age-matched controls (Kadel et al., 2005; Reid, Burnham, Saboe, & Kushner, 1987; Steinberg et al., 2006).

Phan and colleagues (2020) found that both pre-professional and professional ballet dancers were significantly more hypermobile in the right lower limb than the left. This finding may reflect the common choreographic preference for the right leg in ballet. The authors also found that hypermobility presented in three distinct patterns on the left leg and four patterns on the right leg. These findings indicate that the flexibility demands and contribution of hypermobility to a ballet dancer's physical profile contain important information for technical development and injury risk.

Within a talent development framework, changes in flexibility due to growth and maturation are important considerations for training. There are conflicting results in studies of range of motion in dancers. Steinberg et al. (2006) found that range of motion decreases with age in nondancers however, older adolescent dancers had similar range of motion when compared to younger adolescent dancers. The authors conclude that the extensive stretching exercises inherent in training preserve range of motion and prevent diminishments due to maturation but

may not increase range of motion. In contrast, Reid et al. (1987) found that measures of flexibility increased with experience suggesting that flexibility could be a trainable factor in talent development.

Despite the evidence that range of motion can be maintained or increased through adolescence, Reid et al. (1987) and Steinberg et al. (2006) did not discuss the possibility that the participants in the dancer cohorts may have been identified or self-selected because of their inherent flexibility, while less flexible dancers may drop out or nondancers may not participate because of a lack of flexibility. Similarly, Frasson et al. (2009) suggest that specific training demands resulted in greater plantarflexion in ballet dancers when compared to volleyball players, but did not discuss the possibility that elite classical ballet dancers were chosen because they already had greater plantarflexion range of motion. Indeed, Kabakcı et al. (2017) found that students accepted to an elite ballet school had greater range of motion in the ankle and hip than those not accepted. Therefore, more research is warranted to determine the role of flexibility in talent identification and continuing talent development through adolescence and maturation.

### **3.2.1.3 Physical fitness**

The term physical fitness encompasses a range of physiological measures including cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and balance. Physical conditioning is important for reducing the risk of injury and ensuring an individual is prepared for the performance demands of their activity (Lloyd et al., 2016). The physiological and fitness demands of dance include balance, flexibility, aerobic and anaerobic fitness, and muscular power, strength, and endurance (Rodrigues-Krause, Krause, & Reischak-Oliveira, 2015; Twitchett et al., 2009). Physical demands and resulting physical fitness in dancers; however, can

vary between genre, repertoire, performance demands, and performance or competition schedule (Bronner et al., 2014; Liiv et al., 2013).

A regular working day for a professional ballet dancer consists of low intensity exercise with a few short durations of high intensity exercise and short rest periods of less than 60 minutes and in some cases less than 20 minutes (Twitchett, Angioi, Koutedakis, & Wyon, 2010). The demands of a regular working day, however, do not provide a complete profile of the physiological demands for ballet dancers as cardiorespiratory responses in dance performance have been shown to be more demanding than in class (Rodrigues-Krause et al., 2015). Rehearsals are performed at a greater intensity and produce higher blood lactate concentrations than daily class for advanced ballet students (Rodrigues-Krause et al., 2014). These differences in demands are important considerations for physical fitness training and injury prevention for dancers of all genres and levels.

Balance, both static and dynamic, are important aspects of physical fitness that relate to dance performance (Rein, Fabian, Zwipp, Rammelt, & Weindel, 2011). Dancers outperform nondancers in a number of different tasks related to balance (Bläsing et al., 2012). In a review of literature, Rangel et al. (2020) found that balance control is greater in more experienced ballet dancers when compared to less experienced ballet dancers. The same review also found evidence that dancers rely on their visual system for balance, performing better on eyes-open balance tasks than nondancers but did not differ from nondancers in eyes-closed balance tasks. Dance specific eyes-closed balance training may improve a dancer's ability to use proprioceptive feedback and decrease reliance on visual information (Hutt & Redding, 2014). Munzert, Müller, Joch, and Reiser (2019) found that expert ballet dancers outperformed intermediate ballet dancers on dance-specific balance tasks but found no differences between expert and intermediate dancers

for everyday static balance tasks suggesting that dance-specific balance is enhanced with experience and training.

It has been suggested that aspects of ballet training that require attention to bodily signals and the use of these signals for the expression of states and emotion may contribute to improved interoceptive accuracy or a sense of the body from within (Christensen, Gaigg, & Calvo-Merino, 2018). Christensen et al. (2018) suggest, however, that increased interoceptive accuracy could also contribute to the selection process in which dancers with higher interoceptive accuracy respond better to dance training while those with lower interoceptive capabilities may decide not to continue with training. Skilled dancers have also been shown to have a more accurate limb position sense based on proprioceptive feedback rather than visual input (Jola, Davis, & Haggard, 2011).

Given the physical demands of dance training and performance, physical fitness and conditioning are as important as technical development in classical ballet (Koutedakis & Jamurtas, 2004; Twitchett et al., 2009). Koutedakis et al. (2007) suggest that a dance-only approach is not sufficient to increase physical fitness parameters such as VO<sub>2</sub>max, flexibility, and leg strength and that supplemental aerobic and strength training is recommended. Participation in supplemental training may benefit both physical fitness parameters and aesthetic performance in contemporary dancers (Angioi, Metsios, Twitchett, Koutedakis, & Wyon, 2009; Angioi et al., 2012) and ballet dancers (Twitchett, Angioi, Koutedakis, & Wyon, 2011).

Physical fitness is an important consideration in the overall health and well-being of dance students. Pre-season cardiorespiratory fitness testing can identify dancers who could benefit from additional aerobic conditioning in preparation for rehearsal and performance demands (Bronner et al., 2014). As Chua (2014) notes, in a study by Richardson, Liederbach,

and Sandow (2010), students that were classified as ready for pointe work had more training and were older. Therefore, Chua (2014) suggests that training and physical maturation are essential to enhancing muscular strength in preparation for a transition to pointework. Aujla, Nordin-Bates, Redding, and Jobbins (2014) suggest that talent identification based on physical or physiological measures may be detrimental in dance. Indeed, assessing physical fitness measures in adolescents may not be appropriate for talent identification as biological maturity has a significant influence on measures of physical fitness (Jones, Hitchen, & Stratton, 2000). However, physical fitness during training and in preparation for performance demands is an important factor to consider during ongoing talent development (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, Redding, et al., 2014).

#### **3.2.1.4 Injury**

While injury status may not play a role in identifying potential talent, injury and the potential for injury are important considerations for talent development. Kogan (2002) suggests that physical injury is an extrinsic factor that plays a role in the career development of performing artists and that a severe injury can seriously disrupt or even end a dance career.

As ballet and contemporary dancers transition into full-time training or into a professional position there is evidence that the increase in duration and intensity of training load leads to an increase in rates of injuries (Fuller, Moyle, Hunt, & Minett, 2019). Ekegren, Quested, & Broderick (2014) found that pre-professional ballet dancers sustain the majority of injuries to their lower extremity. The authors found that 72% of injuries were caused by overuse while the remaining 28% were the result of traumatic incidents. Injury rates were higher in the more advanced levels of pre-professional ballet students although there were no differences between

sexes. These findings suggest that as students advance, the physical demands of rehearsals and performances increase and training becomes similar to the demands of a professional career subsequently increasing rates of injury (Ekegren et al., 2014). Fuller et al. (2019) suggest that dancers may benefit from supplemental fitness training and the provision of injury management services while undergoing transitions into full-time training or professional careers. As an example, improvements in lower extremity alignment across a six month period during adolescence was associated with a small to moderate decrease in lower extremity overuse injuries (Bowerman, Whatman, Harris, Bradshaw, & Karin, 2014).

While it is evident that injury poses a risk to the adolescent dancer and that injury prevention is essential to the physical and mental well-being of pre-professional dancers, research surrounding risk factors is inconclusive (Kenny, Whittaker, & Emery, 2016). Heterogeneity of the factors investigated, including definitions of injury and measurement constructs, makes the synthesis of existing research difficult (Kenny et al., 2016). A robust understanding of the risk factors associated with injury in adolescent pre-professional ballet dancers will facilitate evidence-based injury prevention in this population (Bowerman, Whatman, Harris, & Bradshaw, 2015).

Although limited evidence exists that explains the risk factors for injury in adolescent pre-professional ballet and modern dancers, a review by Kenny et al. (2016) suggests that previous injury, psychological factors, anthropometrics, poor aerobic capacity, lower extremity alignment, and jump landing technique may have some associations with increased risk of injury. Growth and maturation (Bowerman et al., 2014), age of onset of menarche, changes in range of motion (Storm, Wolman, Bakker, & Wyon, 2018), and lower extremity alignment (Bowerman et al., 2014; Murphy, Connolly, & Beynnon, 2003) have also been proposed as potential risk

factors for lower extremity overuse injury. More research however, is needed to determine risk factors for all types of injuries (Bowerman et al., 2015).

There is some evidence that previous injury and insufficient psychological coping skills are risk factors for injury in preprofessional dancers (Kenny et al., 2016). It has been suggested that fear and avoidance may result in few pre-professional dancers seeking medical attention resulting in insufficient recovery from previous injuries (Kenny et al., 2016). Kenny et al. (2016) suggest that “while having a previous injury may not be modifiable, the importance of rehabilitation from an incurred injury, prior to returning to full dance training may be a key ingredient in the education and subsequent injury prevention of young dancers” (p. 4).

Injury has been linked to a number of psychological outcomes including stress, psychological distress, disordered eating, passion, and coping (Mainwaring & Finney, 2017). Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) found that injury did not appear to have an impact on self-esteem however, most of the dancers surveyed reported mild to moderate injury while few dancers reported severe injury. Mild to moderate injury would lead to minor disruptions to training while severe injury would greatly impact or inhibit training. A full picture of the psychological risk factors for injury as well as the psychological outcomes after dance injury is not yet possible due to the differences in injury definition and psychological measurement scales used in studies to date (Mainwaring & Finney, 2017). Taken together, these findings suggest that injury prevention and rehabilitation are important factors to consider throughout talent development.

### **3.2.2 Psychological factors**

Several interpretive studies have explored perceptions of the traits required to succeed in training and as a professional dancer. In a case study, two female Portuguese contemporary

dancers identified the characteristics of “curiosity, perseverance, open-ness to new experiences, adaptability, and passion as central in nurturing and sustaining their motivation” (Araújo et al., 2009). Ballet teachers encouraged young developing dancers to embody resilience, determination, self-control, coolness, emotional discipline, and self-belief (Pickard, 2012). Gatekeepers in the domain of professional ballet and contemporary dance expressed that motivation, a growth mindset, and social skills were common traits amongst people that had become successful in their field (Chua, 2019). Abbott and Collins (2004) suggest that talent development programs should place early and continual emphasis on psycho-behavioural strategies that will play a key role in transitioning through developmental stages. Aujla, Nordin-Bates, and Redding (2015) suggest that psychological factors may be the greatest contributor to adherence amongst young dancers.

### **3.2.2.1 Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality disposition characterized by a tendency to strive for flawlessness, set exceedingly high standards of performance, and to evaluate the self in a critical manner (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Stoeber, 2017). Professional athletes, performing artists, and adolescent ballet dancers describe the main features of being a perfectionist as drive, sometimes to the point of obsession, and as always striving to become better while never being satisfied with the results (Hill, Witcher, Gotwals, & Leyland, 2015; Pickard, 2012). In a study by Hill et al. (2015), self-labeled perfectionists described their attitudes towards performance in a way that was “both rigid and dichotomous” (p. 243), where mistakes were not acceptable and there was no leeway in terms of effort. Professional athletes and performing artists cite

perfectionism as necessary to reach one's full potential but also cite it as a source of strain, creating anxiety and constant pressure (Hill et al., 2015).

Perfectionism is often cited as a personality trait in dancers and, although complex, is a topic of interest for many dance science researchers. Adolescent modern dancers were found to show greater perfectionism than adolescent gymnasts (de Bruin, Bakker, & Oudejans, 2009). When compared to healthy active controls, elite dancers exhibited significantly higher self-oriented perfectionism (Eusanio, Thomson, & Jaque, 2014).

Even at the highest level, there are dancers that fit the profile for every dimension of the 2x2 model of dispositional perfectionism (see Appendix B). Both Cumming and Duda (2012) and Nordin-Bates et al. (2017) found students at advanced levels of training that fit into the non-perfectionist category suggesting that while perfectionism may not be a predictor of talent, it may be an important aspect of talent development. As ballet students often seek approval from dance educators to confirm their abilities (Barr, 2009; Pickard, 2012) dance educators may benefit from the awareness that some proportion of their class may be experiencing elevated evaluative concerns, such as worries over mistakes (Cumming & Duda, 2012; Nordin-Bates et al., 2017).

Eusanio et al. (2014) found that socially prescribed perfectionism, where unrealistic standards are set by others, was negatively correlated to self-concept in both elite dancers and healthy, active controls. Socially prescribed perfectionism was found to be positively correlated with measures of shame in elite dancers but not in healthy, active controls (Eusanio et al., 2014). Although internalized shame did not mediate the effects of socially prescribed perfectionism on self-concept in healthy active controls, internalized shame fully mediated the effects of socially

prescribed perfectionism on self-concept in elite dancers although a small sample size may limit the generalizability of these findings (Eusanio et al., 2014).

### **3.2.2.2 Passion**

Professional ballet is often portrayed in the media as an all-consuming commitment to the detriment of other life activities and relationships however, interpretive research with professional and retired dancers shows variation in the interpretation of the idea that in professional ballet “dance is life” (Aalten, 2005). Vallerand et al. (2003) suggest that “representations of activities that people like and engage in on a regular basis will be incorporated into a person’s identity to the extent that they are highly valued, thereby leading to passions toward these activities” (p. 757). Passion becomes a fundamental feature of an individual’s identity and serves to define the person. For example, dancers often feel as though their personal identity is tied to their profession (Warnick, Wilt, & McAdams, 2016). Pickard (2012) found that passion was a salient theme amongst pre-professional students and their teachers. In fact, dancers and teachers believed that a negative experience could be turned into a positive one through ‘passion’ (Pickard, 2012).

Vallerand et al. (2003) propose two distinct types of passion based on how they are internalized: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion is the result of autonomous internalization of the activity into an individual’s identity and occurs when an individual identifies that the activity is important without feeling that self-esteem or social approval are dependent on continued participation. With harmonious passion, the activity has a significant place in an individual’s life but is not overwhelming, the activity is highly valued but not to the detriment of other life pursuits and domains. When an individual possesses

harmonious passion, they feel as though involvement in the activity is fully volitional and flexible. Harmonious passion is hypothesized to lead to flexible persistence so that when conditions of the activity become detrimental, involvement should either decline or stop.

Harmonious passion can promote healthy adaptation to the demands of dance. Rip, Fortin, and Vallerand (2006) found that harmonious passion was associated with facilitating health-promoting coping responses, spending less time suffering from acute injuries, flexible involvement in dance activities, and involvement in self-initiated injury prevention regimes. Padham and Aujla (2014) found that the majority of professional dancers in their study had harmonious passion for dance and there was a positive correlation between harmonious passion and self-esteem. Harmonious passion in young students has been found to predict greater adherence to training (Aujla et al., 2015). Assessing passion across age groups, Walker, Nordin-Bates and Redding (2011) did not find group differences in passion measures between early, mid, and late adolescent dancers.

In contrast, obsessive passion is the result of a controlled internalization of the activity into an individual's identity and involvement is linked to contingencies such as feelings of self-esteem or social acceptance. Obsessive passion is characterized by over-identification, where an individual will value the activity above all other life domains and pursuits. When an individual possesses obsessive passion, involvement in the activity is driven by external pressures rather than volition. Obsessive passion is thought to lead to rigid persistence in which engagement in the activity will continue despite negative outcomes.

Obsessive passion was found to increase the risk of dancers engaging in counterproductive behaviours when injured, such as not visiting the doctor and not following treatment (Akehurst & Oliver, 2014). Similarly, obsessive passion was related to spending less

time in dance activities that promoted healing, spending more time suffering as a result of chronic injury, and reporting that personal pride is a major factor that prevents obtaining adequate treatment for injuries (Rip et al., 2006). Padham and Aujla (2014) found a positive correlation between obsessive passion and variables on the eating attitudes test and suggested that this relationship could be due to the development of a rigid perseverance to meet the aesthetic demands of professional dance.

Passion is often cited as a necessary antecedent to involvement in and continuation of advanced dance training. Passion as a construct, however, is more complex than the notion of having or not having passion for an activity. The effect of different types of passion on variables such as injury treatment and prevention denote it as an important factor to consider during talent development.

### **3.2.2.3 Personality traits**

Personality can be defined as psychological qualities that contribute to distinctive patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving (Allen, Greenlees, & Jones, 2013). The most common theory of personality used in sport research is the big five personality dimensions (Allen et al., 2013). These personality traits include neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Although there is little research directly assessing personality in dance these big five traits have been used in dance research to explore their relationship to variables such as creativity and motivation.

Evidence suggests that there are complex interactions between aspects of personality and factors such as creativity (Fink & Woschnjak, 2011), self-regulation of eating attitudes (Scoffier-Mériaux, Falzon, Lewton-Brain, Filaire, & D'arripe-Longueville, 2015) and imagery ability

(Budnik-Przybylska, Kaźmierczak, Przybylski, & Bertollo, 2019). Feist (1998) proposes that there are certain personality traits that separate creative artists from non-artists. As an extension to this claim, Fink and Woschnjak (2011) proposed that within the umbrella art form of dance different genres will have unique creative demands and would show differences in personality traits amongst dancers. Modern and contemporary dancers may be required to improvise movement during performance while classical ballet dancers are required to adhere to technical and choreographic structure. Using psychometric measurements, Fink and Woschnjak (2011) found that professional contemporary and jazz/musical dancers could be characterized as being somewhat more open to experiences than ballet dancers. Contemporary dancers also displayed lower scores on the conscientiousness scale than jazz/musical and ballet dancers. High neuroticism was found to be directly and negatively associated with the self-regulation of eating attitudes in dance students and is potentially mediated by internalization of thinness norms (Scoffier-Mériaux et al., 2015). Agreeableness, on the other hand, tended to be directly and positively associated with the self-regulation of eating attitudes (Scoffier-Mériaux et al., 2015).

Relationships between personality and imagery ability in dance have also been investigated. In a study of ballet dancers, dancers in other styles, and a control group of non-dancers, both groups of dancers exhibited higher imagery ability than non-dancers (Budnik-Przybylska et al., 2019). Emerging evidence suggests that personality traits can be predictors of imagery ability while openness to experience may be the most important predictor of imagery ability. Conscientiousness was a significant predictor of general imagery ability for both groups of dancers but was a significant predictor of situational imagery only for ballet dancers.

### 3.2.2.4 Motivation and commitment

Motivation has largely been studied in dance in association with variables such as perfectionism (Nordin-Bates et al., 2017), burnout (Nordin-Bates et al., 2017; Quested & Duda, 2011a), self-concept (Quested & Duda, 2011b), and motivational climate. Young contemporary dancers cite a number of different motivating sources of inspiration including watching professional dancers, teachers, and watching peers perform (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014). Talented students in the arts, including dancers, described a sense of accomplishment and joy when performing (Garces-Bacsal, Cohen, & Tan, 2011). New and challenging experiences, such as working with creative and demanding choreographers, appear to increase motivation in ballet and contemporary dancers (Chua, 2014a).

Motivation in dance is typically studied through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theory posits that intrinsic motivation will be enhanced when the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness have been met. Although autonomy, competence, and relatedness are all important basic needs the salience of each is dependent on the environmental setting (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Quested and Duda (2009) suggest that “in a dance context, where one’s ability is frequently on public display, the functional significance of competence is likely to be higher than that of the needs for autonomy and relatedness” (p. 17). In dance research, satisfaction of the basic need for competence was found to positively predict positive affect and negatively predict negative affect in hip hop dancers (Quested & Duda, 2009). Affective support and encouragement from teachers was viewed as helpful in clarifying goals and instrumental for improvement in young arts students, while direct feedback was also cited as important to improvement (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011).

Based on the intrinsic motivation theory of creativity, an individual must be intrinsically motivated to be creative (Amabile, 1982). Nordin-Bates (2020) investigated pre-professional ballet and contemporary student and teacher experiences related to the antecedents of creativity. The author found that within the theme of autonomy support freedom within boundaries, valuing each individual, variety and flexibility, and when it was “not about the teacher” positively impacted creativity. Within the theme of competence, a process focus and the recognition of many ways of doing things positively impacted creativity. Collaboration, under the theme of relatedness support, was also suggested to positively impact creativity.

Bond and Stinson (2007) in a summary of qualitative research with preschool to adolescent aged students in a variety of dance education settings, found a number of common themes related to commitment to the hard work required to succeed in dance. The first theme suggests that emotional connection, personal interest, or positive affect are commonly experienced by students committed to dance. The second theme suggests commitment exists where there is appropriate challenge matched by skill and a belief that effort matters. The authors found that an obstacle to hard work existed where students perceived dance as either too hard or too easy. However, most students displaying high levels of engagement in dance reported a positive self-assessment and confidence in their ability to perform. The third theme is that students have a sense of autonomy and personal control where meeting personal standards continues to motivate them to engage and work in dance. Bond and Stinson (2007) note, however, that these themes demonstrate a complex interaction rather than dichotomous ideas and that they should not be oversimplified. For example, one student suggested that they enjoyed dance because it was easy and they did not have to work, while others found it enjoyable even though they perceived themselves to be less skilled.

Many dancers recall choosing dance as a profession at a relatively young age (Warnick et al., 2016). Hutchinson, Sachs-Ericsson, and Ericsson (2013) found an association between the age at which a dancer made the decision to become a professional dancer and the level of expertise attained at age 18, the younger the dancer was when they made the decision the higher the level attained. The authors suggest that this early career decision may be evidence of a long-term commitment that could impact the quality of practice such as the degree of concentration and effort during training (Hutchinson et al., 2013).

In an interpretive study, Aujla, Nordin-Bates, and Redding (2014) found that enjoyment and intrinsic motivation are factors that can contribute to participation and sustained commitment to dance training. Adolescent contemporary dancers felt that general dance enjoyment as well as dance performance enjoyment were the most important factors associated with commitment to dance. Social relationships with peers and teachers and support from family are also viewed as factors that facilitate commitment in adolescent contemporary dancers. Worries and concerns about injuries, perceived competence, aesthetics, lack of support, external commitments and the effects on family and friends are potential barriers to commitment. External commitments such as relationships, academics, and non-dance activities are seen as a potential barrier to training for some students. While in some cases students find that these commitments leave them unable to continue dance training other students recognize them as a barrier yet continue to remain committed to their training (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014).

Adolescent contemporary dancers cited conflicting demands, change in aspirations, lost passion, difficulty making friends, and low-perceived competence as reasons for dropping out of pre-professional training (Walker, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2012). These dancers also cited reasons specific to their training centre such as course content, social environment, teacher

behaviour, and travel demands. The majority of these dancers did not drop out of dance completely but rather continued their studies within other institutions that may have better met these needs and concerns (Walker et al., 2012).

In a sample of students from an elite ballet school, Hamilton, Hamilton, Warren, Keller, and Molnar (1997) found that a normal age of menarche, eating problems, musculoskeletal injuries, and an inability to master the required dance positions due to anatomical limitations were factors associated with dropping out of ballet. Aujla et al. (2015) however, found that physical factors such as hand-grip strength, hamstring flexibility, external hip rotation, and vertical jump height were not strong predictors of adherence in adolescent dancers. These conflicting results may be, in part, due to the different styles of dance studied. Hamilton et al. (1997) researched ballet specifically while students in the study by Aujla et al. (2015) studied a variety of dance styles.

### **3.2.2.5 Perceptions of self**

Both professional and retired dancers express that their profession as a dancer is intertwined with their identity (Warnick et al., 2016). Self-esteem and self-confidence are relevant to talent development as learning environments and external influences can have a positive or negative impact on these factors (Chua, 2014b; Walker et al., 2010). Significant differences in self-esteem have been observed amongst age groups in which early and mid-adolescent dancers studying in a pre-professional setting had higher self-esteem than the late adolescent group suggesting that self-esteem is not a stable factor (Walker et al., 2011). Professional and retired dancers recall moments of being recognized by a teacher or director for excellence as a high point in their career (Warnick et al., 2016). Warnick et al., (2016) found that

“these moments were associated with increases in self-esteem and joyful emotions, while also encouraging the dancers to continue along their career trajectories” (p. 37). In contrast, low points in their careers were characterized by being recognized in negative ways or not receiving recognition at all. These experiences, negative and positive, allowed dancers to develop a unique sense of self (Warnick et al., 2016).

Research in dance typically explores self-esteem as it relates to other factors of well-being, in some cases, these lead to negative outcomes. Amotivation in student dancers has been shown to negatively predict self-esteem suggesting that a lack of intentionality towards participation may compromise feelings of self-worth (Quested & Duda, 2011b). Contextual factors such as the use of a mirror and the required uniform are found to be risk factors for body dissatisfaction amongst dance students (Dantas, Alonso, Sánchez-Miguel, & del Río Sánchez, 2018). Appearance-based critical comments and lower self-esteem are associated with heightened eating psychopathology (Goodwin, Arcelus, Marshall, Wicks, & Meyer, 2014). Van Rossum (2001) found that 91.5% of students surveyed had been told they had a talent for dance. Being labeled as a talented dancer can be related to commitment as it can provide information about competence therefore supporting self-confidence and motivation (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014). Self-efficacy and a growth mind-set are considered desirable qualities in professional and aspiring professional dancers (Chua, 2014a, 2019). Perseverance in the face of adversity and believing that one can improve over time and with hard work is cited as an important factor to success especially during transitions such as to an elite school or into the professional world (Chua, 2014a).

### 3.2.2.6 Psychological skills

Psychological skills, also called mental skills, can include imagery, self-talk, and goal setting but may refer to a variety of methods and techniques aimed at improving performance (Andersen, 2009). Psychological skills can develop both intuitively and through training and should be considered as part of dance talent development (Walker et al., 2010). Dance teachers report using psychological skills techniques such as goal setting, imagery, and performance strategies for the desired outcomes of group cohesion, self-confidence, anxiety management, and mental preparation (Klockare, Gustafsson, & Nordin-Bates, 2011). Professional dancers feel that having a particular intention or goal while performing on stage allows them to be fully engaged with the work and performance (Critien & Ollis, 2006).

In addition to using technical terms and ballet-specific vocabulary, teachers have been observed using metaphors and imagery as instructional tools within the classroom (Klockare et al., 2011; Pickard, 2012). The modality of imagery used, kinesthetic or visual, depends on the dancer's familiarity with the movement (Paris-Aleman, La Touche, Gadea-Mateos, Cuenca-Martínez, & Suso-Martí, 2019). If movements are unfamiliar "dancers predominantly use a visual motor imagery modality, which leads to longer execution time as well as a longer time for kinesthetic mental motor imagery" (Paris-Aleman et al., 2019). Implicit learning tools such as sensori-kinetic imagery have been shown to increase self-reported creativity in the ballet class context (Karin & Nordin-Bates, 2019). Focusing on implicit learning through sensory-kinetic imagery, rather than explicit technical instructions may also reduce ballet dancers' perfectionistic thoughts during class (Karin & Nordin-Bates, 2019). In contrast to previous research that suggests injured athletes engaged in less imagery, Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) found that injured and non-injured dancers did not differ in either imagery frequencies or self-esteem. The authors

found, however, that age was negatively correlated with debilitating imagery meaning older dancers used less debilitating imagery than younger dancers (Nordin-Bates et al., 2011).

Pre-professional dancers experience stressors from a number of different sources including personal, interpersonal, situational, and cultural factors (Blevins et al., 2020). Responses to stressors, however, can vary amongst individuals and in the same situation a factor that is seen as a positive motivator for one student may be a source of stress for another (Blevins et al., 2020). Management of these demands and resulting adaptations require coping strategies. Nordin-Bates et al. (2011) found that most dancers reported telling someone about an injury while continuing to dance carefully, some dancers, however, continued to dance normally, and fewer than sixty percent of dancers sought professional help. While Blevins et al. (2020) found that students and dance educators recognized the importance of reporting early warning signs of injury these attitudes may not translate into behaviours. Within talent development, attitudes and behaviours towards recovery are important factors to consider as they are influenced by dance educators and the dance education and societal context. Recognizing diversity in attitudes and behaviours is an important consideration within the dance training context.

### **3.2.3 Other individual factors**

A number of other factors have been identified in the literature as playing a role in skill or talent development in dance. While these factors are unique to the individual, they are neither solely physical nor psychological. These factors represent biological, cognitive, and behavioural components both individually and in combination.

### **3.2.3.1 Rhythm and musicality**

Rhythm and musicality are linked to the quality and dynamics of movement in classical ballet (Côté-Laurence, 2000). The synchronization of movements with other dancers or to the beat of accompanying music is an essential component of dance performance (Bläsing et al., 2012). Côté-Laurence (2000) found that ballet educators used the term musicality as an umbrella term to define a general sensitivity to music that also included rhythm. The verbal instructions used by ballet educators typically include information about the rhythm, timing, and accents of the exercise. Ballet educators considered faster-paced movements to be more rhythmically accurate in class than slower paced movements that require muscular strength and stamina (Côté-Laurence, 2000; Krasnow & Wilmerding, 2015). Ballet educators note that students are often late to begin exercises if they are unable to anticipate and prepare the movement (Côté-Laurence, 2000). Movements in ballet where the arms and legs move at different tempos or polyrhythms require complex coordination (Côté-Laurence, 2000; Krasnow & Wilmerding, 2015). Krasnow and Wilmerding (2015) suggest that aspects of motor behaviour related to speed, accuracy, synchronization, and timing can be improved through instructional strategies and practice. While a natural ability for rhythm and musicality may be an important trait for talent identification (Baum, Owen, & Oreck, 1996), it is also important to consider throughout talent development.

### **3.2.3.2 Memory and cognitive structures**

Kogan (2002) believes that an important distinguishing factor between athletes and performing artists is memory. Recalling long sequences of movements is unnecessary for most athletes, whereas dancers are required to memorize and reproduce complex choreographed sequences (Kogan, 2002). Dancers are also better able to synchronize movements with other

individuals than nondancers (Washburn et al., 2014). Through training, dancers develop experience-based embodied representations of movements (Bläsing & Schack, 2012). Skilled dancers use a variety of cognitive strategies and techniques to encode movement sequences (Bläsing et al., 2012; Bläsing, Tenenbaum, & Schack, 2009). Structured movement sequences appear to be easier for trained dancers to recall than unstructured sequences suggesting that cognitive structures develop through experience (Starkes, Deakin, Lindley, & Crisp, 1987). There may, however, be differences in sequence recall between ballet and contemporary dancers. Contemporary dancers performed similarly for both structured and unstructured sequences suggesting that differences may be due to the choreographic structure and availability of verbal labels in ballet (Starkes, Caicco, Boutilier, & Sevsek, 1990).

Research reveals that mental representations of ballet skills differ between professional, amateur, and novice dancers (Bläsing et al., 2009). Compared to novice and amateur dancers, expert dancers have distinct embodied representations of specific ballet movements. These representation structures, which include information about spatial parameters from an egocentric frame of reference, can be clearly differentiated between levels of expertise (Bläsing & Schack, 2012). Bläsing and Schack (2012) suggest that expert training in dance results in mental representations of embodied tasks that can be empirically differentiated from novices and amateurs. These findings suggest that training and experience influence cognitive structures and will affect performer development over time.

### **3.2.3.3 Creativity and artistry**

Creativity, interpretation, expressivity, artistry, and aesthetics are all relevant terms in the discussion of dance as an art form. While these terms may seem distinct, there is some ambiguity

in the literature about their application and meaning (Best, 2006). The debate surrounding these definitions is beyond the scope of this review. They are worth, however, exploring in the context of dance as terms used to describe the desirable traits and qualities of performers.

In a review of arts literature, Haroutounian (1995) identifies artistic thinking skills that underpin talent across many domains. Perceptual discrimination describes the ability to differentiate, discern, and recognize the qualities of the world around us which, for a dancer, means becoming “increasingly aware of intricate movements of the body as they move through space” (p. 4). Metaperception, an aesthetic knowing, refers to the “inner manipulation and monitoring of senses and emotions” (p. 5). Haroutounian (1995) suggests that “each encounter with an interpretive problem requires expressive manipulation of perceptions through the art medium” (p 5) leading to the term creative interpretation. A combination of these elements contributes to the dynamics of performance which reflect a shared interpretive process between the performer and the audience. This is particularly relevant to the performance ability of ballet dancers as they interpret and convey meaning through choreographed movements.

The term creativity includes the distinction between little-c creativity and big-C creativity. Little-c creativity is exhibited in narrower contexts and accomplishments are unique to the setting. Big-c creativity, on the other hand, refers to innovative products or knowledge that occur in a broader social context (Subotnik et al., 2011). The narratives of important decision makers within professional dance clearly distinguish between little-c creativity and Big-C creativity amongst genres (Chua, 2019). Little-c creativity was suggested as a desirable quality by decision makers in ballet. Using little-c creativity a ballet dancer provides an interpretation of the choreographer’s intention and may work alongside the choreographer in the creation process. In contrast, Big-C creativity was expressed in descriptions of contemporary dance where there is

no defined genre protocol and dancers do not try to match their bodies to stylized specifications. Indeed, Fink and Woschnjak (2011) found that professional contemporary dancers were characterized as more creative than professional jazz/musical and ballet dancers, as measured by psychometric creativity tests.

Creativity should not be viewed however, as a fixed phenomenon but as an interaction between the individual, culture, and society. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) proposes a systems model for viewing and studying creativity. Original thought “must operate on a set of already existing objects, rules, representations, or notations” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 315). Performance is evaluated with reference to traditions of the domain (culture). The social organization of the domain is responsible for deciding what constitutes new creative ideas. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) states that “in the arts, creativity is as much the result of changing standards and new criteria of assessment, as it is of novel individual achievements” (p. 321). The incidence of creativity is affected by how much the society values and encourages it or values tradition. While individual qualities such as openness to experience, divergent thinking, curiosity, flexibility, and intrinsic motivation may contribute to creativity they cannot be viewed separate from the culture and society.

Artistry in ballet has been described as the ability to express one’s feelings and to move an audience (Morris, 2008). However, as Morris (2008) states, “a dancer does not have to feel sadness or happiness in order to express either, so the dancer’s feelings are irrelevant to dance performances” (p. 46). In an expert commentary, Morris (2008) provides informal evidence of a disconnect between aesthetic and artistic movement in ballet competitions. Upon interviewing notable competition judges, Morris (2008) sensed that many of the judgements were made based on personal aesthetic preferences rather than artistic ability. Sirridge and Armelagos (1977)

argue that in classical ballet, vocabulary is learned as movements and not as gesture for articulating emotion. Morris (2008) describes a process through which dancers are restricted to performing only certain works and must learn a piece of choreography from a recording to perform in a competition. The author laments that the practice of restricting the dancers to performing specific works learned from a video promotes imitation rather than interpretation and understanding (Morris, 2008). As virtuosity in ballet technique continues to demand exceptional physical abilities the requirements for and development of artistry remains an important consideration.

The question remains, then, of how the desired creativity and artistic abilities of dancers are developed through training. Pre-professional students, teachers, and choreographers all recognize that personal qualities such as openness, confidence, courage, flexibility and resilience contributed to creative development (Watson, Nordin-Bates, & Chappell, 2012). Motivation was also cited as a personal characteristic that could facilitate and nurture creativity. Inspiration and imagery play an important role in enhancing the creative process in a pre-professional school setting (Nordin-Bates, 2020). Inspiration for the creative process was found through accessing new ideas and reusing ideas or experiences (Watson et al., 2012). Communal and collaborative approaches are suggested to stimulate creative learning but are challenging and take time to build. Teaching styles that provide a safe environment, encourage dancers to have their own voice, recognize every dancer as an individual, incorporate a flexible teaching methodology, and promote a family atmosphere were viewed as essential to facilitating and nurturing creativity in addition to being delivered by a teacher or choreographer particularly suited to working creatively with young people (Watson et al., 2012). While perfectionism is understood to be a prominent disposition in ballet, the interaction with creativity may impact talent development as

dancers are increasingly required to perform and contribute to works from a wide variety of dance genres. Literature on the relationship between perfectionism and creativity has yielded contradictory results and suggests a complex interaction (Nordin-Bates, 2020). Nordin-Bates (2020) observed that “creativity and perfectionism could be complementary, although almost exclusively in relation to perfectionistic strivings” (p. 28) as opposed to perfectionistic concerns such as doubts and worries. On the other hand, perfectionism and creativity could be contradictory. Nordin-Bates (2020) suggests that perfectionism may lead individuals to struggle with creative practices such as improvisation.

There is some conflict between the idea of emotional expression that construes life experiences and early specialization in ballet where young dancers commit fully to the study of dance at the expense of other activities that may give them a wider range of life experiences (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991; Krasnow, Mainwaring, & Kerr, 1999). Walker, Nordin-Bates, and Redding (2010) also believe that expressive ability should be taken into account in talent development for all ages but may only be suitable for talent identification in older dancers because of its reliance on technical skill and life experience. Despite this, Pickard (2012) observed that young dancers navigated a wide range of life experiences and emotions in the form of winning or losing, self-punishment, regret, ambition, and jealousy by engaging in the social world of ballet.

#### **3.2.3.4 Maturation**

While the term *growth* refers to quantitatively measurable changes in body structure, such as height, the term *maturation* indicates qualitative changes that occur with age. Maturation refers to organizational changes in the function of body systems (Payne & Isaacs, 2016). The

timing, tempo, and magnitude of change during maturation varies widely across body systems. The rate of maturation also varies widely across adolescent individuals. Maturation is shown to influence injury risk in youth sports (Lloyd et al., 2016). The effects of maturation on talent development in dance are not well evidenced in the literature.

Mitchell, Haase, Cumming, and Malina, (2017) suggest a biocultural approach to studying maturation in ballet dancers, taking into account biological factors, sociocultural factors, and environmental factors that can have positive or negative effects in the context of classical ballet. Biological factors, the processes and timing of puberty, not only impact physical and physiological changes in young dancers but also behavioural changes. Sociocultural factors include the extent to which the physical changes resulting from puberty conform to what is expected in a particular style of dance and the psychosocial factors of self-esteem and body satisfaction. Environmental factors relate to the teachers and peers as well as the training environment (Mitchell et al., 2017).

During interviews with dance educators it was recognized that puberty coincides with a stage where important career and training decisions are made (Mitchell et al., 2016). In many cases, teachers suggested that those dancers “for whom puberty was less ‘conducive’ to ballet were more likely to be discouraged from pursuing a professional career” (p. 86). There were other teachers, however, that believed the decision to de-select these dancers was made too early in the career path (Mitchell et al., 2016). Mitchell et al. (2016) suggest that dance teachers play an important role in moderating individual and external expectations surrounding puberty and during the pubertal transition. Chua (2014a) proposes that dance teachers should also “explicitly address, with parents and students, the false assumptions of how talented dancers look or behave (i.e. implicit theories) because empirical research has yet to yield conclusive results about

whether the physical abilities and traits typically displayed by talented dancers are innate, trainable, or an interaction of both” (p. 260). As well, Chua (2014a) advises against “prejudging career potential for young students based on students’ innate abilities or lack thereof” (p. 260). Mitchell et al. (2016) suggest that “improvement of teacher awareness of the biological and behavioural dimensions of puberty can serve to reduce perceptions of puberty as a negative event for development of young dancers” (p. 88).

Walker, Nordin-Bates, and Redding (2011) suggest that factors that may change over time as a result of maturation or age should be taken into consideration in talent identification and development. Factors that can change due to maturation, such as vertical jump height in males, are important in shaping the expectations and demands placed on students in different phases of talent development in dance (Walker et al., 2011). Indeed, there is little evidence of the effects of growth and maturation on incidence of overuse injury in elite adolescent ballet students (Bowerman et al., 2015, 2014). Longitudinal research provides evidence of maturational effects where early or on-time maturation as measured by age of menarche was a factor contributing to attrition at a professional ballet school (Hamilton et al., 1997). The number of longitudinal studies however is low and more research in this area is required to understand the effects of maturation on talent development in dance.

### **3.3 Interpersonal factors**

Interpersonal factors interact with the individual but are external to the individual. In this chapter, factors related to social support through significant others will be focused on.

### **3.3.1 Significant others**

In a case study, two female Portuguese contemporary dancers identified a number of significant others that provided socio-emotional support or inspiration in their career choices (Araújo et al., 2009). Supportive social contacts can include parents, peers, and teachers (Sanchez, Aujla, & Nordin-Bates, 2013). Relationships with significant others such as parents and non-dance friends can provide both supportive and unsupportive conditions for dancers involved in serious dance training (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014). In the domain of sport, social support for high performance athletes comes in the form of emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible support (Rees & Hardy, 2000).

Researchers have cited romantic relationships as a factor that contributes both negatively and positively to commitment for adolescent dancers however more in-depth research in this area is needed (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014). School administrators and physiotherapists have also been mentioned as supportive social contacts however, little research has explored these connections (Sanchez et al., 2013).

#### **3.3.1.1 Parents**

Dancers often recall their parents as the reason they were introduced to dance and it is often the parents' decision to enroll and pay for their child's first dance classes (Warnick et al., 2016). Adolescent dancers in pre-professional training reported strong family integration and support (Sanchez et al., 2013). Young contemporary dancers have described parents as playing a supportive or facilitative role in training and to a lesser extent a motivational role (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014). Through interviews with both students and parents, Chua (2015) found that parental support was most crucial in the early phases of talent development. Chua (2015)

observed that parents played two roles throughout the stages of talent development: providers and cheerleaders. During the first two phases, parents provided tangible support through financial support, transportation, and practical advice. Parents also provided financial support during the third phase and played a role as cheerleaders in the form of providing reassurance, advice, attending performances and competitions, and encouragement to pursue ballet as a career choice (Chua, 2015).

### **3.3.1.2 Peers**

Van Rossum (2001) found that almost one in three students surveyed cited friends as important persons within their dance career. Young arts students attending a specialized arts school express a sense of connectedness amongst students in the school and the enjoyment of community (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011). In a training environment, peers can be a like-minded group of individuals who share a common perceived passion and commitment for ballet (Chua, 2015). Both professional dancers and adolescent pre-professional dancers have referred to their colleagues and peers as “family” (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991; Sanchez et al., 2013). Chua (2015) suggests that peers can play supportive roles during the third phase of talent development through emotional and informational support by sharing tips and advice. A good working relationship with other dancers is cited as an important factor during preparation for a performance as it allows for dancers to feel comfortable allowing their personality to emerge during the experimental phase (Critien & Ollis, 2006). Aujla et al. (2014) found that adolescent contemporary dance students cited friendship, social support, and the opportunity to cooperate with like-minded peers as factors related to commitment to training. Chua (2015) also found that students used comparison with their peers as a motivator to succeed. These results, however, do

not hold consistently across cultures, such as Finland and Singapore, suggesting that the role that peers play in talent development may be affected by other factors (Chua, 2015).

### **3.3.1.3 Teachers**

Professional dancers have indicated that dance educators played a key role in their training and career trajectory (Araújo, Cruz, & Almeida, 2011). Teachers provide informational support to develop technical and artistic abilities, provide emotional support to alleviate performance stress and aid in career planning for the future (Chua, 2015; Sanchez et al., 2013). Students viewed the role of their teacher in the first phase of talent development as crucial for laying foundational knowledge necessary for subsequent phases (Chua, 2015). Professional dancers highlight the importance of dance educators' expertise and knowledge on early skill acquisition and recognizing their potential to excel (Araújo et al., 2011). Students cite teachers as influential in their improvement despite holding high standards (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011). Dance educators are also viewed as a source of encouragement, motivation, and inspiration for professional dancers, and contribute "to developing a sense of 'specialness'" (Araújo et al., 2011). Positive relationships with teachers may also have an impact on commitment to training in adolescent contemporary dancers (Aujla, Nordin-Bates, & Redding, 2014).

Ballet teachers in particular are often characterized as being authoritarian in their teaching practices (Johnston, 2006; Lakes, 2005) however, Chua (2017) notes that, upon closer examination, these studies did not include any systematic observation of ballet classes. The perceived and ideal characteristics of dance teachers in advanced training settings have been documented through a number of studies and provide some evidence that the authoritarian style of teaching is less prevalent than suggested (Rafferty & Wyon, 2006; van Rossum, 2004). Both

dance students and teachers indicated that training and instruction and positive feedback were the most important dimensions of the ideal dance teacher (van Rossum, 2004). Rafferty and Wyon (2006) found that students preferred more positive feedback than they perceived teachers to be providing. Teachers, on the other hand, perceived themselves as providing more rewarding feedback than students reported. Teachers rated themselves higher in democratic behaviour and lower in autocratic behaviour than students while students indicated a preference for more democratic and less autocratic behaviour than they perceived (Rafferty & Wyon, 2006). Van Rossum (2004) found that teachers appeared to present a more positive sketch of their characteristic behaviour than students did and there were significant differences in scores for characteristics such as supportive, positive, passionate, geared toward measures such as future profession, and took an interest in me as a person. In contrast to Rafferty and Wyon (2006), very few students and none of the teachers characterized teacher behaviour as authoritarian (van Rossum, 2004). Van Rossum (2001) found that dancers retrospectively viewed their teachers in the early years of training as geared towards dancing for pleasure but that this quality disappeared as the dancers progressed to the later years of training where the teacher was more geared towards dance as a future profession. While Pickard (2012) found that students viewed their teachers as encouraging and warm, the author observed many occasions where teacher statements were in direct conflict with each other such as 'knowing their limits' but then encouraging students to 'push their limits' or 'push through'. These results, although sometimes contradictory, highlight the complexity of perceived and ideal dance teacher behaviours. It is possible that these results are confounded by different cultural and training settings. More research and observation in this area would contribute to understanding dance teacher behaviour and the impacts on talent development.

To contribute to this research, Chua (2017) suggests a conceptual framework for characterizing the practices of an exemplary ballet teacher using three dimensions: cognitive, social, and pedagogical. The cognitive dimension includes an in-depth understanding in a specific area of knowledge, lifelong learning, and a sense of humour. The social dimension includes the teacher's rapport with the students, showing respect and care for students exemplified by giving affective support and positive and explicit feedback. The pedagogical dimension includes how teachers operate in the classroom by setting high expectations and challenging activities, promoting autonomy in learning, and encouraging active engagement in problem-solving. Chua (2017) includes concrete examples of these dimensions through a case study of an exemplary Finnish ballet teacher and observations from a class for ballet students in the first stage of talent development.

Dance teachers are also cited as providing emotional and esteem support to dancers through development. Successful dancers cite their most influential teachers as not only providing technical knowledge but also providing emotional support and guidance (Chua, 2014a). Verbal persuasion by influential teachers is cited as increasing self-efficacy in talented dancers (Chua, 2014a). Young arts students express being inspired by teachers during their studies as well as feeling that the teachers created a personal connection with them (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011). There are also examples in the literature where teacher behaviours are detrimental to emotional and esteem support. Pickard (2012) describes ballet teachers as the holders of symbolic power who use this power against the young dancer in the form of approving or disapproving facial expressions, looks, or gestures. Comments made by the teacher were found to be the most prevalent risk factor for body dissatisfaction amongst dance students in conservatories (Dantas et

al., 2018). Nearly three quarters of vocational ballet students reported experiencing appearance-based critical comments which were reported to be mainly from teachers (Goodwin et al., 2014).

Although teachers are thought to be influential in talent identification by recognizing potential, it is clear that teachers play a large role in talent development. Teachers provide informational support through technical knowledge that becomes increasingly more precise and focused as students progress through the phases of talent development (Chua, 2015). Teachers also provide emotional and esteem support to students and provide motivation and guidance across the phases of talent development.

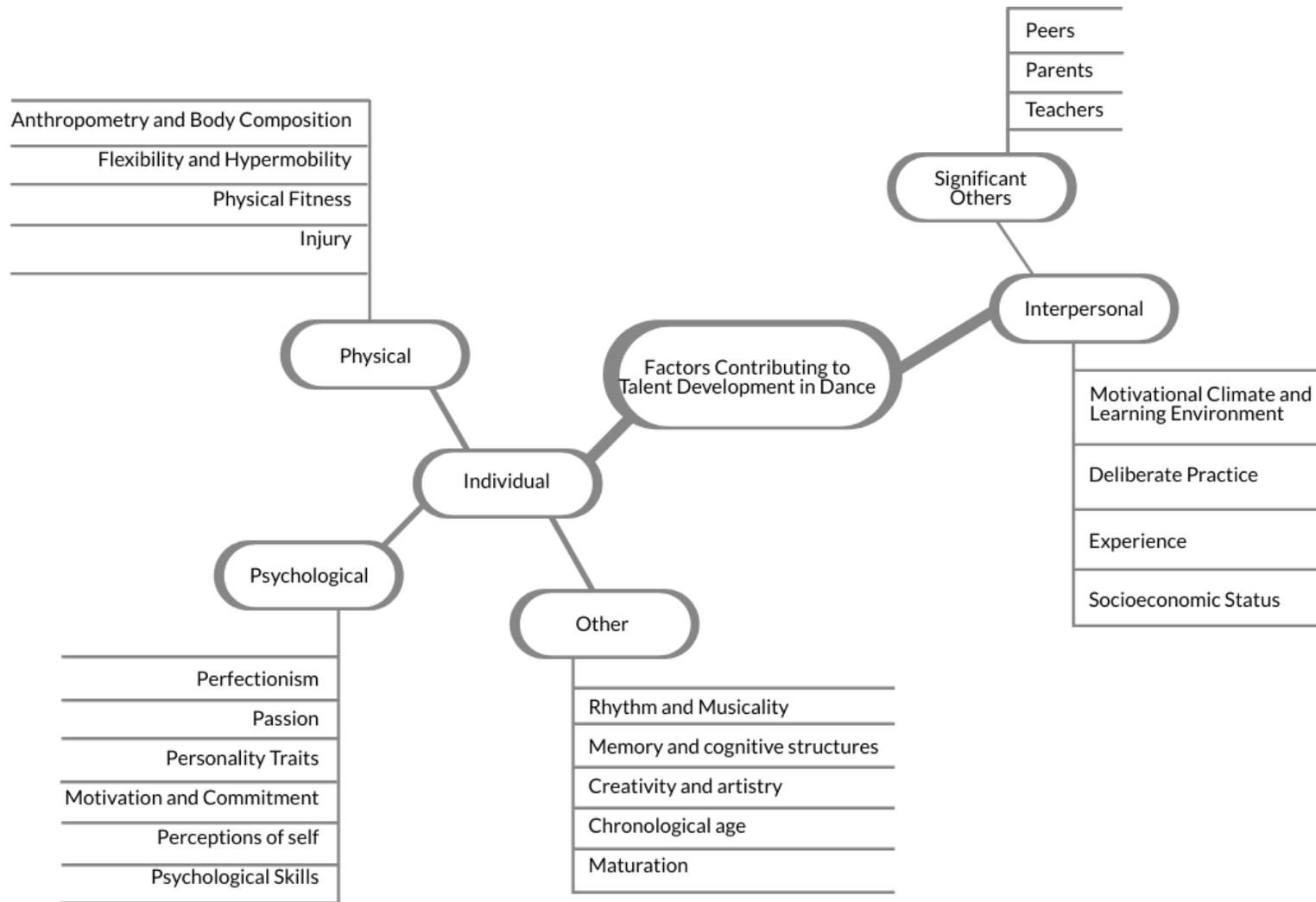
### **3.4 What does this tell us?**

The current research summarized in this chapter suggests that there are a wide range of factors with complex interactions affecting talent development in dance. Figure 2 provides a visualization of the factors related to talent development in dance discussed in this chapter. The broad scope of research questions in studies involving pre-professional and professional dancers support the talent development theories of Bloom (1985) and Subotnik et al. (2011) suggesting that the development of talent and the achievement of eminence cannot be attributed to one factor alone. In line with the theories of Bloom (1985) and Subotnik et al. (2011), the influence of each factor will depend on the individual, the environment, and the affordances provided to the individual.

Also prominent in the work of Bloom (1985) and Subotnik et al. (2011) is that these factors may vary in influence based on the timeline of the talent development trajectory. While this chapter provides a view of the complex interactions between factors many studies in the field of dance comparing age group or level of experience have typically been cross-sectional in

design. While cross-sectional studies can provide information about group differences, they do not explain development across time. Cross-sectional research provides a one-time snapshot of particular traits in dancers but does not take into account that at differing times dancers may experience a number of factors that could affect their responses. Further research examining the talent development trajectory as a dynamic process across time is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these factors and their outcomes.

The complexity of the interactions between factors suggests that multiple perspectives would be beneficial in building a broader picture of talent development in dance. Dance educators are positioned to provide unique insight into the talent development trajectory across time as they often work closely with students on a daily basis for many years. The perceptions and experiences of dance educators regarding the development of skill across time can contribute to a richer understanding of the dynamic processes involved in the talent development trajectory of ballet dancers.



**Figure 2: Visualization of factors related to talent development in dance**

## **Chapter 4: Research Investigation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

While literature exists that explores dance educator experiences and perceptions of select factors that contribute to talent development such as psychological skills training (Klockare et al., 2011) and puberty (Mitchell et al., 2016), little is known about dance educator experiences or perceptions of skill and the talent development process. Dance educators are responsible for the longitudinal development of dancers through instruction and the day-to-day delivery of technique classes and performance preparation. The direct involvement of dance educators places them in an advantageous position to describe talent development on both a micro and macro level. To my knowledge, there has not been any research investigating dance educators' perceptions of skill or the factors that they consider most important to talent development.

### **4.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology**

The objective of this study was to understand participant experiences therefore, an interpretive research paradigm was appropriate. An interpretive approach does not look to explain or predict objectively, but “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).

Phenomenology began as a philosophical movement credited to the work of Edmund Husserl and is the study of lived experience (Vagle, 2018). The aim of phenomenology is a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday experiences (van Manen, 2016). The central assumption of phenomenology is “that there is an essence to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 18).

Phenomenology in education is the “careful and systematic reflection on the lived experience of

educational (pedagogical, psychological, teaching, learning, and parenting) phenomena” (van Manen & Adams, 2010, p. 449).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as described by van Manen (1997, 2016), focuses on interpretation rather than description of phenomena. Van Manen (1997) describes phenomenological questions as questions of meaning asking *What does it mean to be in the world?* In hermeneutic phenomenology, reflection attempts to grasp the essential meaning of something (van Manen, 1997). In conducting hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher engages in self-reflection and recognizes that a researcher has assumptions and presuppositions that cannot be fully removed from interpretation (van Manen & Adams, 2010). In this sense, “phenomenological inquiry is continually open to questioning assumptions and preunderstanding” (van Manen & Adams, 2010, p. 453).

### **4.3 The research approach**

This study was conducted during the global pandemic of 2020 which had an impact on the research approach. In the following section I will outline the original research approach, the challenges with recruitment, and the changes to the research approach.

The main research question for this study was, “How do dance educators experience and conceptualize the development of skill across adolescence?” This question can be further divided into the following sub-questions:

1. How do dance educators conceptualize skill?
2. How do dance educators conceptualize differences in skill across time?
3. How do dance educators conceptualize/experience the development of skill across adolescence within daily ballet practice?

4. What are the most influential factors affecting dance talent development according to dance educators?

The original methodology chosen to investigate these questions was phenomenography. The data collection and original data analysis methods were designed through the lens of phenomenography. For an extended review of phenomenography see Appendix A. The original design of the research was to interview 20 participants, a number suggested to be appropriate for phenomenographic research (Bowden, 2005). Although recruitment emails were sent to 21 pre-professional ballet studios, eight professional contacts, and posted in a professional newsletter, recruitment between November 2020 and March 2021 was difficult. The global pandemic that started in 2020 was particularly hard on the dance industry. Dance studios faced daily uncertainties over their ability to offer in-person instruction. Further, dance educators experienced disruptions to their teaching methods as they were either required to teach dance in a virtual environment or in-person but following strict protocols. While it cannot be verified, these stresses may have impacted the decision for dance educators to participate in online interviews.

A total of six participants volunteered and were interviewed. This does not provide enough data or variation to be analyzed as a phenomenographic study. To complete this study within a reasonable timeline a new approach to the research question and analysis were required. As such, the data collected during these interviews was analyzed through the methodological lens of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Approaching the data from a hermeneutic phenomenological stance also changed the research question for this thesis. A research question designed through a hermeneutic phenomenology lens is interested in what it means to be in the world and what it means to experience a phenomenon. Had this study been approached from this lens at the start the research

question would be, “What is the experience of teaching adolescent pre-professional ballet dancers?”. The interview questions as designed, however, did not specifically ask this question and had a narrower view of dance educators’ approach to developing skill. The participants nevertheless spoke of their experiences in teaching ballet as they related to the topic of developing skill and although this study cannot be fully phenomenological in the sense that it will explore all aspects of the phenomenon it will approach this specific part of the experience.

The research question as posed through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens was “What is it like to experience teaching adolescent pre-professional ballet dancers with the goal of developing skill?”. Through this question the interview data were approached in a way that aimed to interpret the meanings in ballet teacher experiences of developing skill in adolescent pre-professional ballet dancers.

My hope is that examining this research question and using it to frame the analysis will provide insights into the process and experience of teaching ballet. This approach does not aim to “offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). Although I recognize that these will not be the only ways to experience teaching ballet, I submit that it will offer some insight into the lived experience of dance educators and provide a new perspective within the dance education literature.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

In keeping with phenomenographic tradition (see Appendix A), data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are common in

phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014). Interviews provide the researcher with several advantages in qualitative data collection. For example, interviews provide opportunities to describe complex interactions, uncover participant experiences, and allow for immediate follow-up for clarification (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The interviews in this study began with a series of warm-up questions to gather demographic data and allow participants to become comfortable with the interview format. Demographic data included number of years of teaching, as well as the number of years of teaching within their current program. Participants were asked to describe their journey to becoming a dance teacher and were specifically asked to provide information about their training.

Following the warm-up questions the interview was composed of ten questions directly related to the original research questions. These questions were open-ended in nature and asked the participants to describe the characteristics of highly skilled and less skilled students and their perceptions of the differences in skill amongst students. Participants were also asked to describe their approach to developing skill and their approach to developing skill based on differences. Participants were then asked to describe the factors that contribute to a student's successful development and how they, as dance educators, facilitate that development. Finally, participants were asked what challenges a student faces and how they approach those challenges during development. A full version of the interview transcript can be found in Appendix E. Interviews took thirty-five to sixty-one minutes to complete.

## 4.5 Recruitment

This study was approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The participants in this study were dance educators specializing in pre-professional ballet training. Dance educators are responsible for the day-to-day training of adolescent ballet dancers and can offer valuable insight into the research question. Participants met the criteria for this study if they were teaching within a pre-professional ballet program. Participants were responsible for planning and executing classes in ballet technique including pointe, repertoire, and partnering. Performance preparation is included in pre-professional training and, in some cases, dance educators were also responsible for individual coaching and rehearsal direction. Interviews were conducted in English; therefore, participants needed to be able to understand and communicate in English. Dance educators teaching within pre-professional programs typically have wide ranging experience and training but are generally recognized as experts in their field. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggest that interviewing ‘elites’ has the advantage of offering valuable information as a result of the position they hold within an organization and, in this case, their close interaction with adolescent ballet students. Dance educators at the pre-professional level are in a unique position to describe the development of talent as a day-by-day process in addition to describing it as a process across time and through maturation. Participants were not excluded based on age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or disability.

Participants were recruited by contacting pre-professional ballet schools and asking the school administration to send a letter of initial contact to their faculty. Emails were also sent to professional contacts of the Cognitive and Motor Learning Laboratory and recruitment information was also placed in a professional newsletter. A snowball sampling method was also

employed by asking participants to send the recruitment information to other dance educators they think may be interested in participating.

#### **4.6 Data analysis**

Interview data were analyzed through a hermeneutic phenomenology methodological lens. There are no step-by-step procedures outlined in hermeneutic phenomenology but van Manen (1997, 2016) has suggested a number of ways for researchers to carry out analysis. For this study, I chose the detailed reading approach described by van Manen (1997, 2016). In a detailed reading of the interview transcripts sentences or groups of sentences were approached by asking “What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (van Manen, 2016, p. 320). This results in a thematic analysis that allows themes to emerge from the data and be interpreted through writing and reflection.

Data analysis was carried out using NVivo 12 software. Interviews were first transcribed verbatim. The next step in analysis was a line-by-line reading of the transcripts. Each answer was read line-by-line and each line was coded for one or more of the meanings that could be interpreted in the sentence. All codes were grouped under the same parent node named after the participant. Line-by-line codes were then grouped into similar units of meaning for each participant.

As themes formed they were added to a concept map that allowed for organization and similar units of meaning to be connected. When forming themes and subthemes the original units of meaning for each participant were revisited. As these units of meaning began to show patterns across the transcripts they were added to the concept map. The concept map was continually updated and rearranged as new meanings were formed. Themes and potential themes were

recorded and grouped in an analysis journal that was continually revisited throughout the writing process. As questions arose they were added to the research journal and considered throughout.

During the writing process, reflective writing was used to engage with the data and the units of meaning. This writing was part of the analysis and helped to bring detail to the units of meaning as well as raise questions about the commonalities and differences that could be seen across participants. For van Manen (2016), “writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself” (p. 364). Van Manen (2016) also states: “true analysis occurs and is contained in the reflective writing and rewriting of the phenomenological text itself.” (p. 375). In writing the first draft, I engaged in experiential and thematic draft writing as defined by van Manen (2016). Experiential draft writing focuses on “preliminary anecdotes, examples, fragments, images, and stories that seem to be the concrete embodiments of the phenomenon being investigated” (van Manen, 2016, p. 377). The process of thematic draft writing involves converting themes into “narrative passages”. Using both methods the resulting themes were formed through the process of “expanding and editing” (p. 377).

#### **4.7 Researcher role and positionality**

A component of phenomenology that has implications for researcher role and positionality throughout the research process is bracketing. Bracketing involves setting aside the researcher’s presuppositions and minimizing the imposition of the researcher’s previous knowledge and constructions onto the data (Crotty, 1998). In phenomenology, reflecting on experiences should be free from “theoretical, polemical, suppositional, and emotional intoxications” (van Manen, 2016, p. 26).

In hermeneutic phenomenology it is important for the researcher to reflect on their

preunderstandings about the phenomenon but also to recognize that forgetting preunderstanding is not possible and assumptions and interests should be explicated (van Manen & Adams, 2010). Being aware of my position and preunderstandings allows me to be “continually open to questioning assumptions and preunderstanding” (van Manen & Adams, 2010, p. 453) throughout the research process.

My experience as a dance educator puts me in a unique position of familiarity with the context and the specific disciplinary language of the participants. As a researcher, however, I have been constantly reflexive in my role and my relationship to the context being studied. This was achieved through journaling during the initial process of writing a literature review and forming the research questions as well as reflection and journaling throughout the analysis. Through this process of reflection, I recognize that, as a dance educator, I am also a part of the group I am observing and that my own opinions and experiences may shape how I view the data. As Marshall and Rossman (2016) state, the disadvantages of conducting research in a familiar setting can “include researcher bias and subjectivity and the inability to separate oneself from the research” (p. 107). My role is to collect and analyze the data and not make judgements about the participants’ ideas or opinions. I also understand that I will be able to identify with some of the experiences of participants, yet I will need to be open to experiences that are unfamiliar to me.

#### **4.8 Limitations**

One limitation of this research is that although the interviews were analyzed through the methodological lens of hermeneutic phenomenology the initial research questions and interview questions were formed through a different methodology. As mentioned earlier this study could not be considered a fully phenomenological study and therefore may not provide insight into all

possible experiences of dance educators. Phenomenological research, however “is only concerned with possible human experiences—not with experiences that are presumed to be universal or shared by all humans irrespective of time, culture, gender, or other circumstance” (van Manen & Adams, 2010, p. 453). Although it may not be possible to investigate all aspects of the research question, the results of this study still contribute to the field of dance education by providing a glimpse into dance educator experiences and serve as a starting point for future studies.

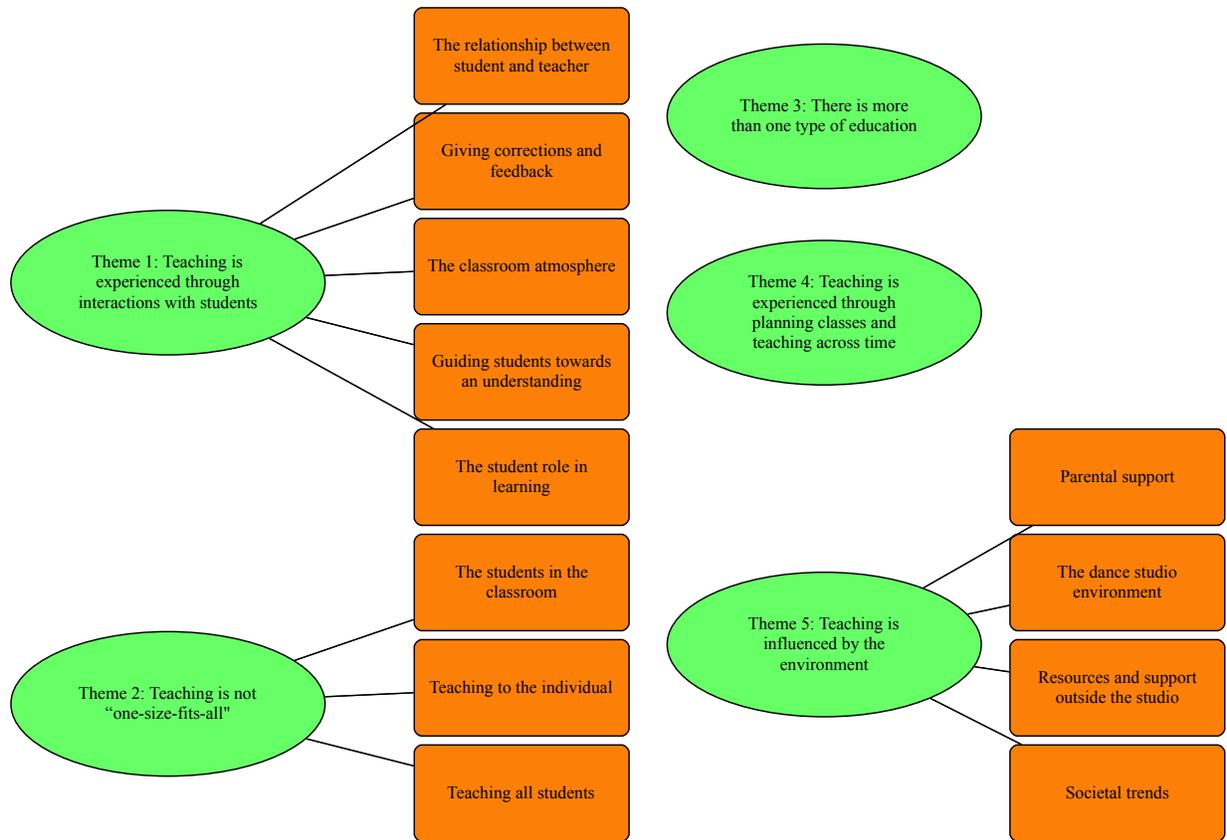
## **Chapter 5: Results**

### **5.1 Participant characteristics**

Six participants volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Participants all identified as female. Participants ranged in age from 32 to 68 years old ( $m=44.66$  y) and had 15 to 47 years of teaching experience ( $m=26.33$  y). Three participants held teaching qualifications for the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) Imperial Ballet syllabus, two participants held teaching qualifications for Cecchetti syllabus, and one participant held teaching qualifications for the Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD) syllabus. Participants chose their own pseudonyms for this study.

### **5.2 Summary of themes**

Analysis of the interview data led to five themes related to participant's experiences teaching adolescent ballet dancers with the goal of developing skill: 1) teaching is experienced through interactions with students, 2) teaching is not "one-size-fits-all", 3) there is more than one type of education, 4) teaching is experienced through planning and teaching classes across time, and 5) teaching is influenced by the environment. These themes also contained subthemes that provided more detail to the experiences. A visualization of the themes and associated subthemes is found in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Core themes**

### **5.3 Theme 1: “They’re not just your little puppets”: Teaching is experienced through interactions with students**

Teaching and the approach to developing skill was experienced by dance educators through their interactions with students. This included establishing or maintaining a relationship between the student and the teacher, giving corrections to students, establishing the classroom atmosphere, guiding students towards an understanding, and the role of the student in the learning process. Five sub-themes were further identified for Theme 1.

### 5.3.1 “That relationship comes first”: The relationship between student and teacher

Participants emphasized **the relationship** between the student and the teacher in connection to student learning and well-being. A student-teacher relationship included getting to know the students, the effect of the relationship on learning, the relationship within the classroom, and the relationship outside the immediate class experience.

There were many ways that dance educators established relationships within a classroom atmosphere. Knowing and using student names, facing the students while teaching, and making eye contact were suggested as ways of fostering relationships within the classroom environment. In addition, smaller class sizes allow the teacher to learn more about their students’ individual habits and provide more individualized instruction. Student-teacher relationships and the impact they have on how the student views the teacher contributes to successful skill development as mentioned by Jane:

*I would say that the teachers definitely play a role. Do students feel that teachers have their best interest at heart? Do students feel that their teachers are knowledgeable and able to guide them? Do they even understand, like, different teachers have different ways of saying things that connect with students in different ways so different types of imagery or different ways of explaining movements might speak more to particular students than others so that can also be part of it.*

Suzanne also suggests that establishing a student-teacher relationship shows respect for students as individuals by “...asking them about who they are, asking them for consent to touch them or to use them as a demonstration, letting them know that they have individual freedoms within the classroom and that they’re not just your little puppets”.

The student-teacher relationship was also discussed as it related to the learning process. **Communication** was seen as a key aspect of the student-teacher relationship. Communication

and a strong relationship can create an atmosphere where students feel they are able to trust their teachers and are more willing to try new things or make mistakes. When asked about challenges students face during development, Jane pointed out that lack of communication or miscommunication between teacher and student can have an impact on learning:

*It can be maybe not seeing eye to eye with a particular instructor or maybe...it doesn't have to necessarily be a direct conflict, but it can be just not quite meshing with or understanding that teacher's version of explaining things, can also be a potential barrier or challenge.*

Suzanne felt that the student-teacher relationship was the most important influence on the learning process and contributed to successful skill development:

*I personally feel that one of the biggest things that would achieve good skill development has nothing to do with the body. I think that a lot of it has to do with their mental approach and I think probably primarily their focus on that would be the relationship between the student and the teacher. I think if a student has a strong relationship with their teacher where they feel safe, they feel attached, and they know that they can take risks and make mistakes they're going to develop their skill faster than a student who's afraid to make mistakes and feel they have to be perfect to please their teacher. So my philosophy behind the way that I approach my teaching is that relationship comes first, that's the most important thing to be developing is attachment to the student and the teacher. Because then they will try just about anything, they'll push themselves, and they'll be willing, to know that they can fail in order to learn how to actually achieve their goals and the steps.*

The relationship between students and teachers can also impact the way students interpret corrections as Tamara describes:

*I think the stronger relationship you have with any one of your students the better they're going to be able to open and hear what you're trying to be able to get them better at doing and then you get less of the, of those challenges, that "this teacher is just picking on me".*

Participants felt that **getting to know their students** on a personal level was important to their teaching approach. This included getting to know student's interests both in and out of the dance classroom. Getting to know the students was also seen as a way of extending the relationship beyond that of a teacher imparting knowledge onto students without regard for their individuality. TS suggested finding elements within the class that students enjoyed and using those elements as a basis for building exercises:

*I've been doing the same exercise in one of my open classes for quite a number of weeks and we've been changing elements of it every week but it's the same, they just really enjoy it, so I continue to change the pieces of it. Like the first time I taught it, it was a demi-pointe exercise the next time I taught it, it was pirouette exercise and then it became a grande allegro exercise and we have played with the tempo of it, we've played with the music of it, so that they learn different qualities and they learn, again, adaptability.*

For TS, knowing that students enjoyed a particular exercise allowed her to use meaningful and relevant connections to continue to develop skill. Jane also suggested, *"It may be trying to connect with students on a more personal level meaning what drives them, what interests them, what is it that they find interesting about ballet and trying to connect with them, on that level with them"*.

Participants also recognized that their students have interests that extend beyond the dance environment and want to honour those interests within the dance classroom. Getting to know students allows dance educators to experiment with connecting dance technique to student interests as Suzanne suggests:

*Getting to know the things that the kids are interested in learning about them, like I don't really know much about Roblox, whatever that game is, but my kids love it, so I try to use that as an example in my classes. If I'm teaching boys, I find out like "Are you a fan of*

*Spiderman? Great I'm going to use Spiderman references in my classes so that we can connect over it"*

Participants also felt that it was important to extend the relationship beyond interactions in the classroom and create a relationship that allows students to be able to approach them outside of the classroom as well. Communication between the student and the teacher creates space for students to have a conversation about their challenges and allows them to start to overcome those struggles within the dance classroom. Creating an environment where students feel comfortable approaching the teacher is important for communication. Suzanne mentions this in the context of students struggling with the emotional challenges that happen during puberty:

*I think a lot of times those poor kids they just continue with "my teacher hates me" and then that's it. They never actually have an opportunity to talk with the teacher whereas I've, we've sort of fostered an environment where they know they can actually bring it up.*

Tamara had a similar view of supporting students:

*I'm also, you know, the person who has my door open, my office door is always open right, so and I check in on them especially these days [global pandemic], they need lots of checking in on these days, things are hard right now, and they need to know that they are they need to know that they're loved and supported I think that's really important.*

### **5.3.2 "It's a fine line": Giving corrections and feedback**

According to participants, corrections, also referred to as critiques, take the form of feedback or information used to guide the students through development of skill. Participants suggested that corrections might be given for physical, musical, or artistic aspects of skill. Corrections were described as being delivered verbally or through manipulation by physical touch. Participants discussed two types of corrections, general corrections, meant for every

student in class, or individualized corrections. Participants discussed giving individualized corrections as a method to ensure that every student received attention during class. Knowing **when and how to deliver corrections** was seen as important to dance educator interactions with students.

Participants suggested that general corrections are used in a class setting to address feedback meant for all students in the class. In some cases, it was hard to give general corrections that would benefit everyone in the class especially if one student was more skilled than the rest. General corrections may apply more to the less skilled students and were seen to work best when students were at the same ability level and have similar levels of drive. Participants discussed using individualized corrections to target specific areas for improvement with each individual student. Individualized feedback was also discussed as a way to address and make students aware of individual strengths.

Corrections were treated as a cognitive aspect of skill development as well as a physical one. According to participants, in order to apply a correction students must first understand what they are being asked to do. Dance educators perceived that students have applied corrections once the feedback has been embodied and a change in technique can be seen. Participants viewed less skilled students as students who come back to class without having applied or embodied corrections from the previous classes. Not being able to take corrections was seen as a challenge that slowed skilled progression. In contrast, skilled students learned and embodied their corrections quickly. Drive was also associated with applying corrections as TS describes:

*It's always easier to teach a student that is more driven because that dancer is usually always the one to come back with all of the information already in the body right? It's just, it's um, it's apparent from class to class to class that that person is putting effort*

*into the comments that you're making like putting attention into those comments, making the corrections.*

Participants considered different reasons why a student may or may not be able to apply corrections. In some cases, it was because they perceived the student as being uninterested in improving and in other cases it was because they might be physically unable to achieve the desired change or that the student may not understand what is being asked of them. Tamara speaks to this last point when discussing frustration as a challenge for students during skill development:

*You have these really keen people who want to work with you, and you give them a correction and comment and you say, "Alright you need to fix this" and then they're like "Yes, yes Ms. Yes I get it" and then they just throw themselves into it and keep doing it wrong because they don't stop to break it down or think or process what it is that you're asking for. And that is, that's like an age and development thing but I think that's a frustration for them because they think that you're picking on them or they think that, you know, "well I'm doing what you said", they think you're lying to them.*

Participants discussed their expectations for students when it came to taking and applying corrections. While individual corrections are meant to provide feedback, general corrections and the corrections given to others were seen as additional learning opportunities within the classroom. Students were expected to apply general corrections, their own individual corrections, as well as listening to and applying individualized corrections given to other students. As TS states, *"oftentimes if I give a general correction I say, "You know I'm giving this student one correction, steal that correction from the student make sure we're all learning from that student"*.

Although corrections are delivered with the intention of improving skill, participants suggested that how they are delivered and how they are perceived can have an impact on students. While a dance educator can frame a correction as either positive or negative feedback, participants discussed their awareness of how corrections might be received by their students. For example, Tamara acknowledged that upon receiving a correction a student may feel that “*this teacher is just picking on me*”. Jane also describes her thoughts about both the delivery of critique and being aware of how the corrections are being interpreted:

*I think that when it comes to taking critiques, that guidance, it's challenging because I think that it can sometimes when it's, I look at it as when it's not directed in a very positive light it can be taken very personally as dancers, if I'm even speaking from more personal experience. Yeah I think that taking critique can be challenging but also important as I do think I've taught some students who perhaps had, almost likely as a defense mechanism, built up a wall against any critiques when really that was limiting their growth as a student so it's kind of challenging because it's a fine line, I feel, like between being open to critique but also being able to set aside either excessively negative critique or just excessive critique in general.*

For participants an important aspect of corrections is that students know the purpose and why they are being given the corrections. Participants felt that corrections could be perceived by students as a personal attack rather than as a way to help the student improve. Understanding the purpose of corrections is one way that students may be able to reframe corrections. Tamara describes her views with regard to the challenge of giving corrections:

*I think that's a challenge for them too is to be able to take correction in a way that it's meant, which is to help them improve, and not a criticism of who they are or their talent or their overall sense of essence as a person right? As they do struggle with that too.*

Perceiving corrections in a negative way could also be part of the emotional changes that occur during puberty as Suzanne describes:

*I think a lot of times at that age they don't hear when you give them positive feedback, they only hear the negative. It's like they have this little filter in their brain that literally sucks out anything good you say and it only lets them hear the bad stuff so you kind of feel like a broken record I think. And that's just, part of it is letting them know "no you're actually really good at that turn, you're really good at that, you're doing a really good job of this".*

Getting to know the students is helpful in deciding when or how to deliver corrections. General corrections meant for the whole class might be perceived as less personal than individualized corrections. This was also considered an important aspect of student mental health in ballet training as Jane suggests:

*Yeah so it's kind of looking at that emotional health piece or mental health piece and what I believe that they could handle and that could be actually adapting whether or not I give personal critiques versus more general classroom critiques.*

### **5.3.3 “We’re trying to make it feel like a safe place where they’re seen and they belong”:**

#### **The classroom atmosphere**

Participants described a classroom atmosphere where they wanted students to feel valued and have a sense of belonging. **Establishing the atmosphere** in class involves setting expectations, following through with expectations, and introducing classroom etiquette. Nikole spoke about implementing these at an early age, “*so right from the little guys we start with expectations and etiquette because when you are consistent and a person, the human being, knows the expectation I find they typically rise towards it*”. Participants described a firm yet gentle approach to behaviour within the classroom and sought to create a place where students felt free to contribute. Typically, speaking up in class has been seen as inappropriate behaviour

in the dance classroom yet participants in this study described ways in which they integrated opportunities for students to speak. Suzanne describes her personal approach:

*I have a very fun, we like to laugh, we tell jokes, the kids get an opportunity to speak in my classes. I don't believe that they should just be silent dancers. I think that they have a voice, and obviously they have learned, some of them are still learning, to use that voice appropriately and at the right times, but I let them know that "there are opportunities for you to talk, and I want to hear from you, and I want you to answer these questions".*

Participants recognized that the classroom atmosphere included both the teacher and the students and spoke of ways to involve the students as part of the atmosphere. Allowing moments for students to watch each other and provide constructive criticism was a way of involving students in the classroom atmosphere. Allowing students structured time within class to speak was another way of involving students.

Participants also described an atmosphere where students felt comfortable taking risks. Nikole mentioned that setting the atmosphere for class was important to her approach to developing skill:

*So, as we're trying to also work on that technique and the proper alignment then we're trying to make it feel like a safe place where they're seen and they belong, and so I think that that combination is really important for student's development of skill.*

Fear was seen as something that would slow progression while being comfortable taking risks and being allowed to make mistakes were seen as important steps in the learning process. In a supportive classroom atmosphere mistakes were seen as part of the learning process. A classroom atmosphere where students felt they were able to make mistakes and were not afraid to fail was seen as beneficial to skill development. Participants mentioned shame or being

shamed for weaknesses as undesirable in their teaching philosophies. This was related to making students feel valued in class and focusing on strengths and individual improvement.

Participants discussed **creating a sense of belonging** and connection between students in class. In addition to making sure students felt valued, participants also wanted students to feel like they were part of a class, that they belonged there, and would be recognized as part of the group. Creating a sense of belonging was mentioned as a way to help students not feel alone through struggles associated with puberty. Nikole discussed the aspects of a dance class that can make a student feel vulnerable and why in her approach she wants to create a sense of belonging:

*There isn't always that sense of personal connection and so we talk about how at dance you're very vulnerable, you're in a bodysuit and tights you have all those social things you put on stripped away. Your hair is all back, you don't have that personal expression that you would have elsewhere. So you have to find ways of being present and comfortable with yourself and you do so in a group of people that are choosing to do the same thing...*

**Comparison** was also discussed as a challenge that students face within the classroom. While participants noted that students could compare themselves to other students in class or the studio they might also compare to individuals they observed on social media. Although participants suggested that students can become motivated and inspired by observing other students or performers, participants also recognized that comparisons could negatively affect students. Participants recognized that it might be hard to stop students from comparing themselves to others. TS also spoke about the responsibility of the teacher in avoiding comparisons amongst students: *"I do my best to be really conscious of the way I teach and teaching as an individual and not as a group you know even in a group setting not pulling out*

*comparisons amongst the dancers*". Participants described ways that they tried to approach comparison in class by facing students away from the mirror, discussing individual differences as strengths, or helping students stay connected to their own development. TS also noted that dancing in a virtual environment offered a unique circumstance to minimize comparisons:

*If I can go back to Zoom, I know that this is a sort of special time that we're in, but I did notice that many of my students excelled dancing at home because they were not in front of a mirror and they were not dancing with people. They were not in a class of people that they could compare themselves to. Some of them they didn't respond to Zoom at all and some of them excelled in Zoom for those very reasons.*

**Peer relationships** within the classroom were also seen to impact student development both in the immediate classroom atmosphere and long-term. As Nikole states "*we talk about how that support system is really important and those friends that you make might be your friends that you have forever no matter where you end up going because you've shared and bonded with that experience.*" Suzanne spoke of the how interactions between students in class can be associated with challenges during puberty and the impact it can have on class atmosphere:

*I see a lot of tears around that time [grade 7] and a lot of like peer issues. They start to struggle with their peers, they start to fight a little bit more about who's right when it comes to choreography, or they start correcting one another really worrying about what other people are doing in classes making sure that so and so has the right foot in front in fifth and it's like "it doesn't matter let her be her".*

According to participants, having discussions in class about dealing with challenges and finding ways to be present in class can offer support and provide connections for students. Participants felt that finding ways for students to encourage each other can foster positive relationships within

the classroom. Connections between peers can impact students in ways that a student-teacher relationship cannot as Nikole states:

*Bringing that as a discussion with the class. "How do you deal with your challenges? How do you make yourself present in class? Or how do you prepare yourself to be here?" and so helping it so it's not also just from me but it's from peers also makes a difference.*

Although most peer connections were discussed in the context of the dance class, TS also extended her observations to include connections between students during performance. TS discussed a connection to others not only through a spatial awareness of the other students in the group but through an emotional connection and a shared experience on stage:

*It heightens a performance to another level when all the dancers are on the same page energetically. And that does happen by having that connection like again that kind of like spiritual connection with the people on stage with you.*

TS also observed that these connections involved the teacher and developed over time:

*With my competitive students, especially of course my competitive groups, they've been dancing together for such a long time but I do feel they are most successful when right before we go on stage we like just connect and we breathe together and we really just kind of like, we just really take a moment to be with the people that we are going to share the stage with and we just set along the same energy level and you know I'm included in that circle because I feel like it's important to lead it. They don't do it if I don't do it for them which is super disappointing but at the same time I'm happy to, to be a part of it um they're always more successful whenever we do that.*

When asked what success in this case looked like for TS she responded that her definition of success was not winning first place but having a lived experience with the other dancers on stage:

*So I think that that's the successful part for me when they come on off stage and just be like "Yeah that felt really good" and they can all still come off stage and the emotion of having succeeded together as a group, just because emotionally, spiritually they're all on the same page that's really important. Those are the memories right? Those are the things you can't take back, it's not the first place, it's that you actually found connection with somebody on stage.*

Participants were also aware of how the **physical surroundings in the dance classroom** could impact student mental health and skill development. A typical dance classroom has mirrors across one or more walls. Although participants recognized the mirror as a teaching tool, they also discussed the impact it can have on student learning including self-esteem and comparison. Suzanne mentions the mirror as contributing to negative self-image during adolescence:

*I think there's a lot of that like self-esteem and self-deprecating that happens to begin with and then we put them in front of a mirror and then we start shouting a bunch of corrections at them and it's sort of just this perfect cocktail for kid's lack of self-esteem.*

TS touched on several reasons to not use the mirror including the development of spatial awareness, embodying corrections, and not amplifying perceived faults:

*So yes I don't use the mirror often. I like to turn away from the mirror and really like forget about it. Using it only when you need it. I try my hardest anyways to do that and to flip the room around as often as I can and that's been beneficial I think in trying to instill that like spatial awareness...if we're not looking at a mirror and we're not looking at all of our faults like "Oh my leg's not at 90". It's an element of feeling the corrections feeling all those things in the body you can't do if you're facing a mirror sometimes.*

### 5.3.4 “The more I can be in your head and understand why you’re thinking that”:

#### **Guiding students towards an understanding**

Participants discussed their approach to developing skill in terms of **guiding students towards an understanding** of the different components related to skill. Demonstrating skill was not seen as a case of going through the motions during a ballet class. Rather, skill takes a deeper level of understanding and a layered performance. Participants acknowledged that students are all unique and will have different capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Working within those individual differences, participants saw their role as guiding students towards improvement by involving the students in the learning process. Participants discussed working with students to help them understand how to work within their own physical capabilities, learn skills and vocabulary, find artistic quality within the movement, and understand why differences exist between dancers as a means of understanding their own unique capabilities. Guiding students towards an understanding, particularly how to work within their own physical limitations, was also approached from the point of view of safety for injury prevention from overtraining or changes associated with puberty. Participants felt that once students have an understanding of their unique physical attributes and capabilities, they will be able to accommodate and adjust their technique to avoid potential injury or achieve a desired outcome.

According to participants, just as there are many components of skill in ballet there are many ways to display understanding. **Understanding** was associated with both cognitive and physical domains. Participants suggested that each student has different physical structures and therefore different capabilities within the physical and aesthetic demands of classical ballet. When developing skill, there is a need for students to understand their own bodies and individual capabilities as described by Jane:

*If I'm just thinking more from a like physical ability point of view a dancer would be skilled when they show adequate understanding of their technique as well as their own facility. Do they understand how to work with the facility that they have in order to achieve the technique that is expected?*

Participants discussed displaying an understanding of movement and ballet technique that goes beyond the physical domain to include the cognitive and artistic domains. The domains combine to lead to skilled performance as Cha Cha Cha describes:

*When you're looking at a student there are different levels on the tier so there's the person that has "Ok this is a plié", basic comprehension, but they don't really facilitate the maximum of the movement, they know to bend the leg and stretch the leg, so the level of skill between that and somebody who is feeling the rotation as they go into the movement structuring it and then adding coordination of the arms, the head, the line, the look, the breath, the enrichment of how you're flavouring the movement, the emotion, the look, the line, the strength.*

Developing skill also involves body awareness and the ability for students to self-correct.

Students are not expected to self-correct automatically but rather are guided by the dance educator through different methods of instruction so that they can arrive at a place where they have the awareness to make changes to their technique based on internal feedback. Tamara describes the many ways in which a student can be guided and the ways that they may display an understanding:

*Well so if you're able to feel the difference, if you know what a sickled foot is, you know the foot is sickled and you understand what a sickled foot is, you know what it is, and you know how to fix it. You can look at it and you can fix it. Your teacher can manipulate you to fix it. So now you have an understanding of that but now if, can you fix it without looking at it? Can you make that adjustment in that ankle so that you're not sickling without having to look it or have someone do it for you? So that will be an example of the awareness that I'm talking about. Is your leg actually crossed behind you or are you*

*moving in, I call it secabesque, but you know that sort of place that's not really arabesque and you when you get to those stages where these are very abstract concepts and developmentally your brain can understand them but if your brain and body are not, if you can't feel it, then you can't fix it, and there's only so far your teacher can take you if you can't do some of that fixing on your own. So aware, are you, are you even aware that you're sickling are you aware that your leg is not crossed behind you?*

Guiding students to an understanding was not seen as a passive transfer of knowledge from teacher to student but as an interaction between the two. This meant a two-way communication with students to engage in an understanding of their own capabilities. Cha Cha Cha discussed what the process of helping students understand and accommodate limitations during development would look like:

*One on one nurturing through an awareness. Getting feedback from the students. I always say "The more I can be in your head and understand why you're thinking that. Or sometimes if we can just change the order in which you're thinking things so your proprioception will enable you to get a different energy or understanding and comprehension of how the muscles are working and how you're going to get the freedom of the movement.*

Participants discussed different ways that students could be involved in the learning process. Allowing time in class for reflection or open-ended questions and taking the time to discuss development were ways that participants involved students in the learning process. Suzanne suggested that asking questions and allowing for reflection was important to the process of guiding students towards an understanding:

*I do a lot of, sort of, open-ended questions or deep-thinking kind of questions with my students just sort of facilitating reflection because I think there's not enough reflection*

*done in dance at all and so just questions that will ask, make them think a little bit maybe they're a little bit more challenging or questions that are a little bit more than yes or no questions.*

Nikole spoke of discussing individual differences and recognizing that everyone needs to work within their own strengths and weaknesses:

*So we'll talk about the fact that not all seconds are the same or that some kids might never go en pointe but it doesn't mean that you have to stop dancing or this person might be able to do easily a grand jeté and over splits but you know this child might not or that the length of Achilles tendons can affect jump height, or you might get a nice long beautiful adage-y kind of plié and glissade whereas this child has like super good batterie and so talking to the children...I think it's really important that the students know what's coming next, what they're working towards and that we're not all created equal. But we, we all have that opportunity like we talked about so this like, "Amanda's flat turnout is because of the way of her hips like if we sit on the floor and do frog or butterfly you can see automatically her legs open more than let's say Lindsey's do, but so your second is going to be a little bit different than your second and your fifth is going to be a little bit different than your fifth but if I see that you're applying all your turnout I see your posture and placement is good there's no reason why you can't give me a beautiful second that's your second or you can't give me a beautiful arabesque that's your arabesque. You might not be able to have the hundred- and eighty-degree penché but you're going to have you're going to have something else that you excel at."*

### **5.3.5 “I don’t have a magic wand”: The student role in learning**

Developing skill in ballet was seen as challenging and as more than the passive transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. It was viewed as something students take an active role in doing rather than something that is done to them. Participants addressed how they experienced student learning in class and the active role expected from students. Student responsibilities for learning can take the form of a perceived drive and motivation to improve, an engagement in

class, or change in technique through the embodiment of corrections. Cha Cha Cha describes the role of the student in developing skill:

*A favourite expression of mine is, "I don't have a magic wand, I'm sorry, I can't tap you on the head and now you can do it. The only way you're going to get there is hard work and endeavour, repetition, building." But you have to feed your soul, you have to enrich what you're doing and love what you do.*

A **willingness to learn** and effort towards applying feedback were seen to contribute to skill development. Skill does not develop through participation in dance class alone but requires effort and active learning as Nikole suggests "So I think success isn't just coming to dance class and banging out a class, success develops". Critical thinking is important for skill development. Participants used words such as "mental engagement" and "thinking dancers" to describe how they expect students to work in class. Tamara describes what mental engagement would look like:

*"I don't want you to just do something just because you're told to do it. I want you to think about it. Why do you do it? Are you paying attention to your corrections, are you paying attention to the corrections of other people around you? Are you aware of yourself in space and are you aware of yourself in space compared to the people around you in space? Are you with us in the moment while you're dancing while you're learning? Are you both part of your own, like in your own mind, engaged in your own body but also engaged in the bigger picture, in the audience, in the story you're telling?" I think so much of it is, so much of it is your brain and being engaged.*

Dance educators also have specific expectations for how their students will engage with the lesson during class. Suzanne describes how she expects students to apply feedback:

*My students do a lot of work, sort of my expectation is if I give a correction, I stand back, and they go for it, they have to be working on it, and so they sort of have learned my, like,*

*I say, "If you're not practicing I can't give you corrections if I don't see you working I can't give you feedback".*

**Determination and drive** were often related to skill development and participants used terms such as “*perseverance*”, “*stick-to-it-ness*”, “*continually reaching for the next goal*”, and “*internal motivation*”. Participants spoke of drive or motivation to learn and improve as factors that distinguished skilled students from less skilled students. The way a student approaches their learning will have an effect on their skill development because, as Nikole suggested, “*you can't improve your skill if you don't have the will*”. Jane also noted that “*the physical facility, I guess, can come and go and without the grit and the determination you can't really see the success or the skill of the dancer*”. Students show their dedication to learning through preparation, attitude, motivation, and changes in technique from class to class. Cha Cha Cha describes what devotion to dance would look like:

*It would look like you arrive, and the students are already in the studio working and practicing and that they don't have to be continually reminded or motivated to endeavour to work those lines. For instance, trying to get the leg higher in a line or a position, you know you can talk about it you can go through it in class you come back next class it's the same old. So, it's finding ways to awaken that it can go so much further but it has to come from the initiative once it's been imparted from the teacher to build it up so the if student wants it, they will then apply it.*

Students that were seen as less motivated were more challenging to teach. Nikole describes this through the differences in students who want to be in class contrasted with students who may not want to be there:

*Also that idea of “Am I at dance because my mom has always wanted me to dance or she always wanted that and I’m here because that’s an after-school activity, am I here to socialize because I don’t have anywhere else where I feel like I belong, or am I just doing ballet because I’m in a competition program and I have to do technique in order to do my solo?” But then there’s other kids that just dream of having pointe shoes and they’re there because of their desire and I think truthfully all those different approaches affect the skill level because that will determine your mindset for class how you actually take on, I mean, I do have one student, she’s absolutely beautiful, she’s definitely a hyperextended kind of body, not just in the like in the knees... but ligament wise she is extremely flexy. And, she has gorgeous feet, she can do any line, she just looks so good, but she has no heart, she just kind of goes through the motions, there’s no like, magic to her performance. So skill wise she’s not that great at technique and she’s not that great at performance side...yeah then I think it also has to do with that personal motivation that personal drive.*

Participants also discussed ways that they, as teachers, encouraged students to be involved in learning during class time. This took the form of discussions, providing peer feedback, taking on the role of the teacher, engaging in reflection, researching their favourite dancers, asking and answering questions, and analysing personal movement and the movements of others.

#### **5.4 Theme 2: “I would say that it’s variable”: Teaching is not “one-size-fits-all”**

Under this theme participants discussed their approach to developing skill and how it was influenced by the students in the class, teaching students as individuals, and teaching all students within the class.

#### 5.4.1 “What I see in front of myself”: The students in the class

When asked about their approach to developing skill, participants noted that there was no singular way; rather, it was dependent on **the students in the class**. An approach to teaching can be informed by learning outcomes, gaps in knowledge, and student input. Participants discussed getting a feel for their students and adapting their teaching approach accordingly. Jane described this when asked how she approaches developing skill:

*My approach to developing skill. I think that it is variable uh depending on what I see in front of myself in the students in the classroom and depending on the maturity level...So yeah, I guess I approach development in many different ways I try to look at it from both “What do I feel the students need to learn?” but then also try to look and see where the gaps are, what is it that they are perhaps missing out on. And at times it might come from a place of just asking them “Where do you feel less confident, where do you feel you need to further develop and focus it?” So yeah, I would say that it’s variable the way that I approach skill development.*

Participants also acknowledged that their approach to teaching was influenced by the individual differences that they experienced amongst students. Skill in ballet has many different components and dance educators feel that the approach to developing skill can be different depending on the components they are trying to work on and the students in the class.

Developing physical strength, flexibility, or technical skill might take one approach while artistic skill, musicality, and the cognitive side of skill might take a different approach. Different aspects of skill require different teaching approaches as Suzanne describes:

*If I were to think of a student who is skilled artistically I would have a very different approach. So I think that somebody can be skilled in two different areas and I think that that physical literacy skill development is different than that sort of artistic skill development.*

Jane also provided a specific example of how the circumstances during online learning changed her approach based on student needs:

*I would say that I change based on what I feel my students can each individually handle...I guess if I'm thinking even of right now with the times as they are [global pandemic] I am adapting the way that I am teaching my classes because I can see that the teens in say the fourteen to sixteen age group are exceptionally challenged by the fact that they have to be at home and they can't be in the studio and so perhaps my critiques are less personal. It's less "Amanda do this, Lindsey do that" and more general while still trying to feed in because I don't feel that they are in the mental space right now to handle personal critiques versus another class that I teach they seem to be handling all of this a little bit better and I can say "So and so maybe correct your pelvic placement in order to achieve whatever" So I would say in that way I'm adapting it, I'm trying to feed off of what I feel the students are in need of.*

#### **5.4.1.1 "Some of them would really flourish and some of them would flounder":**

##### **Teaching to the individual**

During the interview, participants were asked about differences in skill amongst students and their approach to developing skill based on those differences. Participants recognized that there are always going to be differences amongst students not only in skill level but also in maturation rate, learning styles, personal experiences, environmental affordances, support from family, and their training background. Participants discussed some of the teaching strategies they used not only to accommodate differences but also to celebrate them. According to participants, **teaching students as individuals** is not only important for skill progression but also for student health and well-being.

**Differences amongst students** were viewed as a reality and a normal part of the ballet classroom. As Jane states "*I think it's impossible to have classroom settings that don't have*

*difference in skill*". Although participants noted that in an ideal class setting students would be grouped based on similar skill levels differences amongst students are still expected as Suzanne states:

*So I totally expect different skill levels. I expect them to pick things up at different rates and for some of them to be able to achieve things much more quickly than others and I think that's very good and normal in a classroom.*

Participants spoke about their responsibilities as a teacher to accommodate and adapt to the individual needs of students as TS states:

*This is a performing art form it's all based on individuality so if we can't recognize that as teachers, that we're not making robots, that each of them learns differently, each of them has their own style, each of them has their own lines, and that we're not, as teachers, really working towards their strengths... and helping them to recognize and improve their weaknesses then I don't think that we're doing them justice as performers.*

In addition, Suzanne discussed why she believed an individualized approach was important:

*They're all working at different paces, they're at different skill levels, I can't, I don't think I can teach them all the exact same because then some of them would really flourish and some of them would flounder and that's not really very fair to them. So I think it's important that each of them gets part of the class that's catered just to how they are learning and to how they'll actually develop that skill.*

Participants acknowledged that **students have different learning styles** and spoke of the importance of using teaching strategies that appreciated those differences. Strategies included reframing information by offering it through visual, verbal, auditory, and kinesthetic modes. TS described her approach to developing skill based on differences as "*very individual, I think that I approach each student, I try anyways, to approach each student with patience so that I am able*

to really learn their style”. Suzanne suggested that by getting to know her students’ different learning styles she would be able to adapt her teaching modalities to suit their needs:

*I’ve gotten to know pretty well how my students learning styles are, I know their different sort of needs, who needs a little bit more of this, who needs a little bit more of that, who needs something more visual, who needs more verbal, who needs to try it 500 times before they get it, that sort of thing.*

Different approaches to teaching are not only important for different learning styles they are also used to maximize the possibilities for learning as Tamara describes:

*When we’re learning, the more ways we can present a concept, in any kind of way, the more ways we can present a concept the more likely that the individual trying to learn is going to remember. If we can help them learn by watching, by listening, by reading, by doing, the more ways that we can get the information out to them the better.*

Ballet has physical and aesthetic demands and participants recognized that each student had **unique physical attributes** that contributed to their ability to meet those demands. Jane used the term “*facility*” when speaking of these attributes and suggested that these unique characteristics should be taken into consideration for training:

*Kind of speaking to each dancer’s unique build, physical build, so are they prone to hypermobility, or are they lacking in flexibility, do they have hyperextension are they, depending on the way that they’re built, are they tending to be weaker in certain muscles and maybe stronger in others? Yeah I would say that facility is really looking at unique body build and from a training perspective, taking that into consideration.*

**Growth and maturation** were seen as factors that influence skill development.

Participants recognized that the differences in growth and maturation rate influenced their

approach to teaching. Tamara describes some of the frustration that physical growth and development can cause during training:

*I don't know, every child is different and every individual is different. Some people just need more time. They can be the hardest working young people in the world but if their body isn't strong enough to manage it it's not strong enough to manage it and that just is. That's just development, that's just child development, physical development.*

Participants acknowledged that there is no singular factor that makes a student skilled rather, it is a combination of many different factors. These factors contribute to what makes each individual student different. Participants discussed **differentiation** in learning and planning as important teaching methods. Teaching strategies that support individual rates of skill progression involve differentiation and providing adaptation within the class setting. Tamara described her approach to class and why she uses differentiation in her teaching to help each student improve at their own rate:

*Well everybody is different, and everybody is at a different level and in a training program you would attempt to put kids in levels where their skills are comparable but even when you group kids at a comparable skill level there's a wide range often depending on the program and your school and how many kids you have in a class. And then as a teacher it's my job to attempt to allow everybody to grow in their skills...you know it's like differentiation and stuff so when you're teaching you need to differentiate so you're giving each kid what each child needs so that their skill levels grow and improve as individuals.*

Participants spoke about planning classes with different versions of exercises so that each student was working at an appropriate level of challenge. These different variations of exercises not only help less skilled students progress at an appropriate rate but also provide challenge for

students who are progressing more quickly. In this way, each student is experiencing optimal challenge in their learning environment. Tamara recognized *pointe* class as an area in ballet training where variability exists and provided examples of how differentiation could be implemented:

*When I teach pointe, I find that I have to be prepared for a huge differentiation in my class...I might have three or four or five variations of the same step or movement and different kids will do those different variations. So maybe a student or two will be doing something two hands to the barre, and then there's a variation that's one hand to the barre, and then there's a variation that's simple in the centre, and then there's a variation that's more complex in the centre and I could have students doing any one of those activities, any one of those versions depending on where their skill level is in the class. And that allows the ones who still need more strength or time to build that strength in a safe manner [and] those who need more challenge and are ready to try things at a more difficult level a chance to build things at that skill level as well.*

Individualized instruction outside of regular training was also discussed and took the form of private lessons, assisting with classes for younger students, or at-home exercises provided by the teacher or a healthcare professional. These methods were also approached with the goals of providing students with specialized instruction to improve areas of weakness, target specific aspects of technique unique to the individual, and provide more challenge for students that are progressing more quickly than their peers.

Participants discussed a teaching approach that focused on **individual improvement** and celebrating strengths. TS mentioned taking “*baby steps*” towards skill development and suggested “*if there is improvement in that dancer, I think that that is a success, it does not matter the level*”. Participants measured success by individual progress and not as an end point as TS

describes, “*I think the success of the dancer is defined by their individual progress as, you know, they might not reach that that ultimate level of artistry that we think is like the epitome of ballet right?*”

Each student has their own individual strengths and weaknesses and participants emphasized focusing on strengths in their teaching approach. Reminding students of their strengths was also discussed as a way to overcome negative feelings associated with puberty or slow progress. Nikole discussed the aspects inherent in classical ballet that celebrated different strengths and used the example of *variations*:

*I also like to speak about you know you look at soloists and the different variations the different qualities and everybody is chosen for one solo... and it's like each one has a different quality, and the same dancer isn't going to be able to do all three. So you pick one and you identify with it and you go for it. So that you can help those differences become something that becomes a strength as opposed to a weakness.*

Participants spoke about wanting students to feel good about their strengths and to not be shamed for their weaknesses. This was implemented into class by allowing students to have moments where they were recognized for their unique strengths. Nikole discussed this in terms of using students as demonstrators for specific skills during class:

*I'll use them for demonstration throughout the semester for different things, so we know if someone is a really great turner, someone has really great roll down from pointe, or a really great batterie, we'll use them as demonstrators so each kid has the feeling of "Yeah I know I have skill or value in this way".*

Individual improvement and strengths are acknowledged through celebrating successes and using positive praise. Celebrating successes and improvement took the form of verbally recognizing student achievements in training as seen in this example from TS:

*I get really, really excited if a student comes back to class the next day and shows improvement. I'm like "Aw you were paying attention and you made that correction". I get really excited I make a big deal out of it. I think it's important. They have to be encouraged. I think that it's really important that they know that we notice even the smallest level of improvement.*

Tamara also discussed using positive reinforcement as a way of approaching the challenges students face in their development:

*Most of the time I just try to continually help I guess, and remind them every day what the corrections are about and encourage them again and when they are starting to get it to make sure I'm rewarding those behaviours that are moving in the right direction both physically and emotionally.*

While treating every student as an individual was discussed in terms of skill development, participants also emphasized the importance of recognizing individual student needs for the overall health and well-being of the students. The use of positive praise, celebrating individual improvement, and recognizing strengths created an atmosphere where students felt they could achieve and were valued. Injury prevention was also discussed as an important reason for knowing individualized information about students, understanding where they are in their physical development, and providing tailored instruction. Cha Cha Cha described the importance of taking a proactive approach and “*understanding how intrinsic it is to that student being able to continue working and dancing*” rather than pausing their training due to injury.

#### **5.4.2 “Helping each kid have the same opportunity”: Teaching all students**

Participants discussed **teaching all students** in the class with the same attention regardless of whether or not a dance educator believed they had the potential to pursue a

professional career in dance or whether or not the student wanted to pursue a professional career. Wanting students to feel valued was a priority for participants. Participants wanted all students in the class to receive the same quality of education notwithstanding their current capability level or goals.

Although dance educators mentioned specific requirements and characteristics to describe students as skilled, they also suggested that students who do not immediately meet those requirements should not be ignored or discounted. Cha Cha Cha describes not limiting students based on preconceived notions about skill:

*But it's always hard when we say limitations because often it's the student that's had the biggest fight and the biggest obstacles to overcome that can absolutely blow you away with their incredible performance and achievements, so it can't be limited.*

Participants felt that students may still reach a high level in ballet despite physical limitations and although a dancer may not have the physique traditionally required by classical ballet that does not preclude them from other careers in dance. In Cha Cha Cha's words:

*I think we're seeing more and more understanding, comprehension through the different groups now that accept that there are limitations because you can now as you get to the higher levels in your ballet or otherwise take the analysis route so that your potential of performance may not be to the same degree or integrity because you don't have the physique but you can still gain now and go on to gain greater qualifications for teaching or otherwise.*

Nikole suggests that a teaching approach that values and provides opportunities to all students is important for any dance-related career path students may choose:

*You never know who's going to be the next physio, the next dance physio, the next dance scientist the next, who knows? Start their own contemporary company you know and who am I to tell them that goal is unreachable?*

Participants discussed **wanting students to know that they were valued** in class and especially had value as human beings in the eyes of their teacher. When speaking about corrections or giving attention to students, participants emphasized that each student should get their moment with the teacher in class. Nikole discussed many ways of treating learners as individuals and created a sense of belonging in class with the goal of *“helping each kid have the same opportunity, feel like they’re valued in class, and yeah, I think that gives them a chance to develop whatever skill level that they’ll be able to attain”*.

Participants recognized that not every child in the class would want to be there but still spoke to **giving students equal attention**. In some cases, participants spoke about students whose parents had enrolled them where it was not their choice or that they were at that particular studio because of location convenience. As Nikole states, *“those kids that don’t want to be there you don’t dwell on it, you just see them for who they are”*. In addition, TS underscored a philosophy that included teaching all students equally:

*Certainly I do really try my hardest to make sure that every single student regardless of ability and drive are all getting something out of my class rather than just being brushed aside and saying "I know that you don’t want to be here so don’t waste my time" which is still a stigma that is still something that I hear teachers say all the time "If you don’t want to be here I’m not going to put my effort into you" right?*

Participants felt, however, that all students in class were worthy of their attention and deserved the same level of instruction as the other students. TS describes treating all students as important:

*And I know sometimes it’s really, it’s painstaking to try and motivate that person who just really you know just doesn’t really want to, there’s no connection there as far as motivation maybe right we’re not connected as far as motivation is concerned but they’re still there, that dancer is still in class they showed up so that counts for something right? So they should have a moment also with the teacher and I try my hardest to really not put*

*drive into the equation if they have come to class then they are worthy of my time and my effort.*

### **5.5 Theme 3: “It doesn’t have to be *pliés* and *tendus*”: There is more than one type of education**

Throughout the interviews participants spoke of different experiences or strategies for teaching that went beyond developing technical or artistic skill. As Nikole realized during our conversation **there is more than one type of education** in ballet. Nikole states, *“I really believe in education, while, I mean, it sounds funny because we’re talking about teaching and education as separate...”*, while later in the interview Nikole speaks about education that goes beyond the physical act of dancing by saying *“truthfully I think that it can’t just be about you come to class, you perform your butt off every class, and you leave. It does have to be, there has to be education.”*

Participants discussed areas of education in the physical domain to give students the knowledge and skills to train effectively and safely. This included speaking about anatomy with students, incorporating cross-training, using warm-up techniques, and discussing aspects of injury prevention in class. Participants used this type of education in hopes that students would be able to train safely within the demands of classical ballet.

Participants suggested that being involved in dance during adolescence provided students with **skills that extended beyond the dance classroom** but that these skills would not develop passively rather, they needed to be integrated into teaching methods. Suzanne describes this in her words:

*And I think finding opportunities to work on confidence in ways that have nothing to do with dance like working on self-esteem exercises and peer building. I think that that’s an*

*important part of being in the dance classroom. It doesn't have to be pliés and tendus. I think we can find other opportunities to help these kids build their confidence and that's something that we do that's really important at that age group [academic grades 7 and 8].*

Participants felt that preparing for and taking part in performances, exams, and competitions could help students learn to manage performance anxiety and develop a presence and poise that would transfer to situations such as job interviews. Pre-professional training also takes many hours of commitment. Participants suggested that students learn to manage their time by balancing training with academic and social commitments. Nikole also suggested possible ways that pre-professional training could benefit students outside of the classroom:

*Especially for ballet you do pliés from the moment you're a primary all the way to when you're a prima ballerina and so realizing that it's the layering of the skill. But that skill, that technique, that vocabulary that you're doing will stay the same forever, so it teaches the child about patience in a society where we're like "I want it now" so those things that you're teaching in class transfer to life in a very real and usable way.*

Participants viewed the education that students were receiving as training them for the future regardless of whether that was a future in dance or a different occupation. In addition to transferable skills participants discussed the different outcomes for students beyond a career as a professional dancer. Participants recognized that some students may go on to careers teaching dance and that the education they provide potential professional dancers should be the same as the education they provide potential teachers. Other benefits to valuing the training of all students regardless of skill level were that they could become "active for life" or "patrons of the arts". Cha Cha Cha suggested that although not all students had the skill or understanding to pursue a professional career in dance they contribute to ballet and dance in different ways:

*But I wouldn't take the opportunity away from a person that just does "bend and stretch" because then it's still a potential to the future and perhaps an audience that we're developing or perhaps future generation of dance.*

While participants recognized that some skills were inherently developed through participating in dance, they also discussed ways that they specifically **addressed building different skills into their teaching practices**. Adolescence was seen as a time when students could gain skills that they would be able to use for the rest of their lives although they needed to be taught rather than allowed to emerge passively. Suzanne describes her approach to the challenges associated with puberty:

*I'm not going to treat them as these weird little teenagers who are going through this awful time and just survive them until they're better. We're going to start to really foster that because the more that we can teach their little brains while their brains are taking it in the more likely they're going to be able to hang on to those skills for the rest of their life. So we really try to nurture it and you know sit in that muck that they're going through with them a little bit. Let them know that they're gaining skills and teach them some of those emotional regulation skills and some of those things that we know that dance can give us that really bring some awareness to it while they're younger and keep coming back to it and not just you know "Ugh 13-year-olds are the worst". And like sort of lean into that "Yeah 13-year-olds think 13 is really, really hard" and so sitting with them in that and them thriving through it not just surviving it.*

Another skill set participants viewed as beneficial to students for skill development were psychological skills such as self-talk and resilience. Participants also discussed integrating psychological skills into class and recognized the effect that these skills could have on skill development as well as overall long-term development through adolescence. Participants

encouraged mindfulness in classes through breathing, meditation, and body scans. Psychological skills and coping strategies were seen as ways to build self-esteem in students and as a strategy to deal with the negative affect that participants felt could arise from the critical aspects of ballet training. Participants recognized that these feelings of value and self-worth could have either positive or negative effects on skill development. Nikole spoke about the importance of self-talk for development:

*Even when they're younger I start them at the end of all their barre exercises' after they go through their checklist, I get them to say out loud "I feel beautiful" and then, when they get older they think it's really fun and goofy so sometimes we'll let them pick their own words or do it out of a hat...and then for the older ones, those pre-professional kids, even if we don't say it out loud or if they're new to me we talk about it that "After you're finished what is the mantra that you are saying to yourself in your head when you are done?" Because if you're just beating yourself up about it then you're stopping your progression.*

Resilience was also seen as an important psychological skill for young dancers to develop. Experiences of success and failure were seen as part of the development process. Teachers experience this as part of the learning process when students show frustration at not being able to master technique quickly. Tamara spoke of developing resilience:

*I think that part of that development is recognizing that you're not always going to be the best and you're not always going to be perfect and perfect isn't the goal, the goal is to continue to grow, and the journey is an important part of it. And I do believe that we need to develop both the physical skills safely to do that and you need to develop the mental discipline in order to be able to do that and also an emotional fortitude that, you know, it's an important part of growing up I think for young people to recognize that sometimes things aren't always easy and that's ok, you can work hard and that's ok.*

## 5.6 Theme 4: “What is my end goal?”: Teaching is experienced through planning classes and teaching across time

Developing skill in dancers is a process that takes place across many years of training, practice, and experience. Participants discussed their approach to developing skill and the long-term development of dancers, working towards the goal of performing, planning classes, teaching students through puberty, and teaching strategies to progress skill. Participants defined skill from a technical point of view as well as from a qualitative point of view and discussed many aspects to skill development including physical, artistic, and musical. Ballet was described as “*precise*” and “*orderly*” with specific aesthetic demands. Participants discussed their approach to developing skill across time: building the foundations and then layering in different components of the skill. Cha Cha Cha described this layering:

*I always use the analogy that you know when we're young we learn words and then we start to string them together and it becomes more and more interesting in our conversation that's what happens with ballet. So you learn the basic concepts, you learn the basic movements for mobilisation and then it becomes more and more complex as it gets stranded together and you're doing longer more complicated measures of music and dance so you're building to performance.*

Participants discussed the importance of **building a strong foundation** of technical skill. Skills are broken down and taught as individual components before being combined with other skills or artistic elements. This process was referred to as “*scaffolding*”, “*build-ups*”, or “*building blocks*”. Tamara noted the importance of breaking down the steps in her statement “*people can't just do hard things unless they know how to do all the bits and pieces of the hard things.*”

Participants also recognized that repetition is important for the learning process. Introducing a new skill or concept can cause cognitive overload that is reduced through repetition. Although participants want their students to progress in skill they suggested a measured approach or as Tamara stated, “*definitely I’m a slow and steady kind of a person.*” Achieving mastery through repetition before progressing to more complex combinations of skills was also seen as a way to increase confidence in students.

Building strong foundational skill was also seen as a method to ensure that students were able to execute advanced movements safely. Participants spoke of the difference between knowing what a movement is and being able to execute that movement in a safe manner. Tamara discussed the conflict between student expectations and the responsibilities of the dance educator to keep students safe:

*Sometimes we have students who come to our studio and they are upset with us because they know how to do all these hard things but we won’t put them in a level that they think they should be in and we keep them in a level that’s a little bit lower cause we’re saying to them “Well yes so you’ve learned how to do this step, this difficult step, this difficult movement, but you’re not doing it right, you’re not doing it well, and that’s dangerous”.*

Artistic elements were viewed as the skills that allowed dancers to move with an intended quality and adapt to different moods, characters, or emotions that they are asked to portray. While participants described laying the foundations with technical skill, they also described **building artistry** on top of that technique. TS describes this in her approach to developing skill when she states, “*And then really after perfecting the technique of an exercise just really diving deep into the subtleties and the nuances and allowing them to explore their own kind of reflection of the work that they’re doing*”. TS also mentioned that “*it’s a bonus when they can get*

*past that technique and actually delve deeper into the art of it*". Cha Cha Cha suggests that *"just to go through the mechanical movement of expectation in a class is not enough. That wouldn't be the reward at the end of the day for a true performer"*. TS included *"fearlessness of artistry"* in her definition of skill and described it as *"the ability to think past the exercise and to trust the body's ability to move the way you trained it without having to think about it"*.

While participants discussed their strategies for developing skill, they also discussed developing skill for the specific **goal of performance**. In this case participants were not referring to performance as it relates to individual skills but performance as a culmination of skills in a choreographed sequence typically meant to be performed on stage. Participants discussed their role and responsibilities in preparing students for stage performances, exams, auditions, competitions, and to work with different choreographers. This included ensuring that students met the technical requirements to perform in these situations as well as the ability to adapt their performance to the demands of different roles or works of choreography. Performance was referred to as the eventual goal, the culmination of the different components of skill and the determination it takes to develop skill and as Cha Cha Cha states, *"your rewards are your moments to perform"*.

Another aspect of the goal of performance was preparing students to dance for an audience. Performance preparation played a role in the way participants approached skill development especially in the artistic domain. In her definition of *"fearlessness of artistry"* TS speaks about why the artistic element is important when thinking about performance for an audience:

*And I believe that the fearlessness comes in, you know, "I want to look like a serious ballerina" and so they put on a serious face rather than actually thinking that this is an*

*artform and there is a performance element that takes the technique next level and in fact is oftentimes more important than the technique itself to most audiences.*

Cha Cha Cha also described an artistic performance from the point of view of the audience as

“*Stunning*”:

*You would watch them; you would be spellbound from the moment they entered on stage and you wouldn't be sitting there thinking 'Did she stretch her foot? What's her technique like?' You would be taken on the magic of the journey.*

Performance was also described as a connection between the audience and the performer.

Connection to the audience and artistic performance were elements that participants directly addressed in class. Integrating artistry and performance into skill development within the classroom environment prepares students for the goal of performing. Connecting back to artistic expression, TS emphasizes allowing vulnerability in class to build emotional expression for performance and

*not just expect it to come up on stage when they want it to but to actually live every moment in their ballet class feeling those feelings and showing those emotions and being vulnerable in that way and thinking past the technique.*

Cha Cha Cha described that this connection should always be taken into consideration during class, even in the unique circumstances of dancing in a virtual environment:

*I'm finding right now because I'm teaching online that for the candidate who is at home looking out there's this nothingness that they're not engaging and I'm still saying, "Pretend you're on the [local theatre] stage, pretend that there is just a sea of a thousand faces out there and you're taking them on the journey. So you're not just walking and then off you go because you've broken that connection you need to have an awareness of what's happening in that time and space and invite your audience to come on the journey with you to build that presentation, build that strength to make it magical, to put your own stamp on it, to interpret it"*

Participants also spoke about preparing students for exams or choreography. Although exams are not typically performed on stage, students are expected to display artistic skill as well as technical skill. Students are required to recall, perform, and combine specific elements and vocabulary within an exam setting. Skill development was also discussed as preparing students to dance different roles or work within different choreographic demands. Jane discussed training students to learn vocabulary that “*they would need in order to execute particular movement or pieces of choreography*”. When asked why vocabulary was important Jane replied:

*I would say vocab is important partially because of the structural systems with which dancers move through [in] the ballet world. So for example, examinations and choreographic pieces. By having the vocabulary behind you, you are more likely to have success in those things. So for example, if a student doesn't know how to do an assemblé or doesn't even know what they're being asked to do when someone asks them to do an assemblé it's unlikely that someone will have success in an exam setting or when a choreographer comes in and is trying to set choreography on them and is asking them to do those things so I would say that the importance of the vocab comes from what events or what experiences they're being asked to participate in.*

In addition to learning the vocabulary required to work with different choreographers, participants felt that students also need to be prepared to adapt in the artistic domain to choreography and performance demands. An approach to developing skill includes training dancers to be multi-dimensional performers, to utilize different qualities in their performance, portray different characters, evoke different moods, and perform to different musical styles. The ability to perform and adapt to these factors was described by Jane as “*breadth*” of performance. Jane viewed adaptability as an important element of training to meet the wide range of artistic demands placed on performers.

Skill development was also viewed as a process that happens **across time** over, weeks and years. Participants discussed how they plan to develop skill across time including planning for individual classes and planning across years. Planning can be impacted by how often dance educators teach students. Suzanne mentioned keeping the same class plan for a number of classes in order to continue revisiting skills and concepts but that the number of times she saw her students a week would determine how long they would keep the same class.

In their approach to developing skill, participants discussed planning classes and **finding a balance** between the teaching methods that they used. Although repetition was discussed as a means of achieving mastery and allowing students to feel competent in a skill before progressing to the next level of difficulty, participants also recognized that too much repetition can become boring for their students. TS acknowledged that preparation for exams can become routine for students and suggested switching up the music to allow the “*end product to not look so stale*”. Balancing the preciseness and rigour of physical technique with the artistry of dance was also seen as a challenge in classes. TS discussed that the nature of ballet training could influence development of artistic expression, specifically facial expression:

*Again I think with ballet there's, maybe there's a stigma sometimes that because it's so precise and because it's so stiff, maybe like in initially in trying to achieve the technique, you've got to be so lifted that it can actually be stiff feeling that a lot of students can't get past the technique of it, in their face, so they're always thinking.*

Nikole also noted trying to find a balance between in-class discussion and movement time:

*You can't talk too much either because you lose them. You need to have that right balance between like breaking something down and pushing them and making them sweat because that endorphin that they get from you know the end of ballet class that's real and that stays with them and that shifts their mood and their perspective and so you know they want to come back.*

Tamara also mentioned a fine line between classes that were too easy or too hard. Classes that are too easy would lead students to become bored while classes that are too hard puts students at risk of injury. Participants also felt the need to challenge students in order to keep their interest while working to build the necessary foundational skills. Cha Cha Cha described this as “*keeping the energy alive*”. Participants also discussed finding a balance in repetition and recovery with an awareness of overuse injuries.

Participants approached the learning process in class by employing strategies related to the cognitive and affective domains. Especially at the younger levels, participants felt that learning a new skill can result in an overload of information and slow down cognitive processing. Allowing time for students to make mistakes and to work on corrections allows students to embody the skill rather than moving on too quickly. Repetition was an important part of overcoming cognitive overload as Suzanne describes:

*That repetition is really important. It's sort of the mastery because the way that the kids are learning at first they're really processing a lot and they're thinking so much while they're doing it, they're thinking of how they're going through the movements. If we move on too quickly before they felt like they've really danced it I don't think it sits in the body the same way.*

Creating time in class for reflection and asking open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking in students also address the cognitive aspects of skill.

Participants described teaching methods they employed during class to **encourage adaptability** such as improvisation, experimenting with different movement qualities, changing different elements of the exercise to evoke different qualities, or using different pieces of music to encourage students to experiment with tempo, meter, phrasing, and qualitative responses to musical styles. Participants often spoke of switching things up as a strategy to encourage

versatility as well as keep the students' interest in class. Jane suggested using music with different meters and tempos to encourage different movement responses:

*When I'm trying to encourage more ballon and slowing down the music or changing the rhythm of the music to try to develop a different rhythm. That'll change depending on the students that I have in front of me so some students might respond better to doing their batterie work to a 6/8 or a jig. So it can be things like that or even just slowing down the music if I have a student who has a little bit more spring in their grande allegro.*

Nikole also suggests, "*Choosing to do the same exercise but choosing to do it to two different pieces of music. So you have to be able to show the different qualities with that piece of music*".

Participants also discussed incorporating experimentation and improvisation into class.

Sometimes this experimentation was done by the teacher, trying to find different ways to deliver the information based on the student or through switching up music and quality, and sometimes the experimentation was performed by the students in the form of improvisation.

Participants also found ways to involve the students in the learning process with the goal of developing skill. This included finding different ways to engage the students in the class structure to help create a more wholistic approach to skill. Asking questions and encouraging discussion in class was also suggested as a jumping off point for learning a concept. Asking students to create their own exercises was seen to challenge students to use specific vocabulary, counting, and musical phrasing, and to articulate the quality of the movement. Analysing other performers, either professional performers or other students in the class, was also suggested to encourage a different type of thinking in ballet class. Participants felt that analysis helps students to recognize vocabulary and articulate the feelings and emotions brought about through the performance of others.

Participants suggested that different age groups may require a different use of language such as using imagery or specific anatomical terms. Participants discussed the **progression of skills** and how they build from work at the barre into the centre. While skills may first be learned in isolation they are then combined with other skills to provide different contexts. Suzanne describes this in the context of assemblés:

*I'm working on assemblés you know we're not just going to put them aside after five weeks. We're going to keep doing it, but I change the enchainment after a certain amount of weeks and then they continue to work on it but maybe we add in an arm or something. So it's just always sort of adding to the skill that they had achieved before.*

Participants acknowledged that it takes many years of regular training to refine skill in ballet. Tamara suggested that progress and changes can be observed across years of training but that progress at the early stages of training looks different from progress in the later years of training.

*...you can see that progress from year to year and at first that progress can be very substantial because so much is physical development in young bodies and then you get to a point where that growth is much less substantial and much smaller and minute little things that get better over a longer period of time because that experience, and that refinement, and that work happens over time, and it doesn't happen if you're not consistent with it.*

Suzanne described a process of looking forwards and backwards when considering skill progression.

*I think sort of, "What is my end goal? At what point do they want to achieve this?" and if I'm lucky to have had a student for a long time I will be building up certain steps for a very, very long period of time. So let's say that I'm working on building up assemblés. I'm already thinking, they learn assemblés in Cecchetti in grade 3, I'm already thinking*

*back in grade one, or even primary, “How can I already be teaching something that’s going to help them to get to those things later?” Sort of building it up through the grades.*

Participants also spoke about the experience of **teaching students through puberty**.

Participants recognized that students underwent changes during puberty in the physical, motor, and affective domains. Some changes were described as happening overnight while other changes were described as affecting students over a long period of time. Participants acknowledged the negative self-concept that students can experience during puberty and that these feelings are present in the ballet class. Participants acknowledged that students could be discouraged by the changes that happened during puberty and students may have to re-learn skills due to the changes to their bodies. Participants also noted that students underwent changes and struggles with their identity and their commitment to serious ballet training during puberty.

Participants described their role in ensuring the long-term development and safety of students through training and appropriate progression of skills. Practice and experience were seen as two long-term factors that contributed to the development of skill. The role of the teacher and instruction were also viewed as important factors in skill development. Participants spoke of the importance of ensuring a systematic skill progression and not advancing students too quickly. Consistency in training over a long period of time was seen as important for ensuring that students built the foundations of skills in a safe manner. Tamara spoke about the responsibility of teachers to ensure safe progression during skill development:

*If you simply move kids on because you want them to feel good you’re actually putting them at risk, and you are being an irresponsible educator, you have to be responsible for their growth and their future long term.*

Participants also recognized that holding students back for safety reasons did not always have a negative effect on progression. Students did not always understand the long-term repercussions of advancing too quickly or attempting to dance at a higher level without the necessary foundations.

## **5.7 Theme 5: “Oh so many things”: Teaching is influenced by the environment**

Participants discussed the environmental influences that both support and provide challenge for development. When asked what contributes to a student’s successful development Jane began with the exclamation “*Oh so many things*”. Environmental influences that were salient in this study were parental support, the dance studio environment, resources and support from outside the dance studio, and societal trends in ballet.

### **5.7.1 “The parents are the investor”: Parental support**

Parents can contribute to development and dance training in many ways. **Support from parents** includes financial support, ensuring they arrive on time to classes, securing medical support, and providing nutrition. From her experience Jane noted some of the many ways parents provided support:

*I would say their home life definitely contributes. Having had students that did not have the most stable or supportive homes you could really see how that impacted their training either from a financial perspective because it is not cheap to be training in ballet or also from a kind of emotional health perspective, whether or not they have the support from home to be able to dive in fully to their training I think is huge as well as simple like everyday things like having parents that provide adequate nourishment at times that work for their student’s training is yeah, is key to, success.*

Suzanne mentions that **parental expectations** may also play a role in student development, especially through puberty when neither the students nor the parents understand the underlying processes and how they affect skill development:

*And once they start getting into those later years, it's like the dendrite pruning and like they literally lose skills, and they lose things that they thought they knew overnight if they're not using them enough and I think that that's a real challenge because they don't understand that, and I think a lot of the adults in their life don't understand that.*

**The relationship** between the parents and either the teacher or the dance studio can also affect development of skill. A relationship where both parents and teachers were able to communicate concerns was seen as beneficial to development. Jane saw communication with parents as important for establishing this relationship in a way that will benefit students in their training and that even support in seemingly small ways benefits the student:

*And I guess communication between parents and the school slash the teachers so that any concerns can be brought up as well as even just the basic showing up for classes at the right time in the right attire and prepared in the right way so it could be anything as mundane as that.*

Participants also mentioned that parents may not see a career as a dancer or dance teacher as favourably as other types of careers for their children and may not be inclined to provide support for those options. For Nikole this took the form of,

*outside pressures. I mean let's face it not every parent wants their child to be a dancer. They want them to dance for fun and get the benefit from it but they want them to go on to be an actual teacher in education or you know an accountant or something else that they see as a more viable profession or a viable career. So that's also difficult because you have to help the parent see the value in what's being given to their child.*

Nikole felt justifying the benefits of dance education to parents was important “*because the child is the customer, but the parents are the investor*”. This includes convincing parents of the transferable skills that develop through dance participation but also teaching the parents about the dance specific skills to understand the effort it takes to become skilled. Cha Cha Cha also noted the importance of parental support in allowing the student to continue dancing and convincing them of the importance of dance in a student’s life, “*also getting the parents behind to give them that support and the medical support. And understanding how intrinsic it is to that student being able to continue dancing and working*”.

### **5.7.2 “I just have to follow the way that they do things a little bit more”: The dance studio environment**

Participants in this study taught at both pre-professional schools and in private dance studios. When speaking of the challenges students face during development or the factors that contribute to successful development participants suggested that the dance studio could impact students through communication between teachers, the availability of mentors, and the social environment within the dance studio. Participants also recognized that support from the studio for their teaching approach would have an impact not only on their teaching experience but also on skill development in students.

Participants recognized that **students will have many teachers** throughout their training and each teacher contributes differently to the development of skill. Cha Cha Cha spoke of the importance of having different teachers, “*there are certain teachers that are more analysis, there are teachers that are more performance based, so you need a selection to round off the dancer and bring out all aspects that a dancer can achieve*”. Jane recognized that giving opportunities

for students to work with other dance educators would allow students exposure to expertise outside of the teacher's specialties. Jane recognized the importance of communication and collaboration between teachers and for training:

*I try to have good communication with other teachers I think that that's a really important aspect of the student's well-rounded training is having instructors that that work together and collaborate and communicate because no one no one is trained by just one person. I think that it's important either for the teachers or for the studios or for the school directors to have a good relationship.*

Jane also reported communicating with other teachers to help create a better learning experience for students:

*When it comes to more the instructor piece say for example that I notice that I have a student who you get the feel that they're not quite meshing with your style of teaching it may be approaching their other teachers to see whether or not they're having success and how I can adapt my language or my imagery or my approach with that student to help them.*

While peer relationships within the same age group were seen as important, participants also recognized that there were beneficial **relationships between older and younger students** within the dance studio. Participants recognized that learning from other students and hearing about their personal struggles and how they overcame them can benefit students who are experiencing challenges during puberty.

Participants also spoke of using older students as demonstrators for technical skill as inspiration for younger students. When asked about the importance of modelling, Tamara not only spoke about demonstrations as a different way of receiving information but also as examples of achievement:

*So those models are there to help demonstrate, "Wow you know this is what it should look like" so that the students can work towards that, achieve what it should look like but also as a little bit of an inspiration and recognizing that your mentor or your model maybe it wasn't easy for them either, it's hard work and they're there for you to recognize that you know "When you work hard you can achieve these things". So there's also that sense of I think of, I think mentoring is the word I would use there and you see that kind of a "wow I'm going to work hard at this".*

TS spoke about students in more advanced levels as being a part of the studio environment in addition to students in the class,

*There are certain dancers that I think of that are very inspired to be in a professional program and they are inspired by watching other students in their class or um students that are higher up that have the like their ideal abilities.*

Suzanne recognized that these relationships within a dance studio can provide help and connection for students that supplements what the teacher can provide:

*We are lucky that in our studio we're really small, so we have the opportunity for some of the older students to be like "Yeah I went through that too like that part, that really sucked" and sort of foster the peer relationship piece of that. So that I think it's really empowering for a grade 7 or 8 student who's really struggling to hear from a grade 12 girls who's like "Yeah I went through that I felt the same way" and to be able to help them themselves like "this is what I did" you know, instead of it just coming from the teacher.*

Some of the participants in this study were teaching at more than one dance studio and noticed that **different studios required different approaches to teaching**. TS recognized that the studio atmosphere influenced motivation in students *"I do find that there's a different drive a different level of focus and effort with my professional division dancers because they are they are*

*trained that way right?"* In speaking of what contributes to successful development Jane mentions the training environment:

*Then I would also say the training environment, so whether or not the environment is excessively competitive whether or not there's a kind of family or team atmosphere versus more of a cutthroat atmosphere, whether or not the student truly feels cared for by their classmates.*

In some cases, participants did not feel as though the studio environment aligned with their teaching methods as Suzanne states *"I had to teach very differently when I was there but I think that you know like there are things that I brought with me the whole time that I think came out in my classes there"*. Although not always negative, TS recognized that her teaching style changed based on the environment, one a professional school and the other a family-oriented dance studio:

*From a teacher's standpoint you know I teach at, I have taught all over the city, and again I do always go back and forth between teaching styles between my studio and my professional division school*

TS describes the impact that different approaches have on the teaching environment:

*I think, and not to say that I don't enjoy, not to say that I don't enjoy one over the other but I do notice that the level of competition even though like we don't do [dance] competition per se like we do at the studio but the professional school amongst the teachers I do feel like the level, I don't know it's a very different teaching environment for me and I feel like I have to be on guard a little bit more at one and I can be a little bit more relaxed at the other...just because of the nature of the school right?*

Participants discussed a negotiation between how they would like to teach and what is expected of them. Participants mentioned that the overall approach of a dance studio may not match their personal approach to teaching. At the end of the interview Suzanne added that she had spoken mostly of her teaching practices within a smaller studio where she felt she was able to implement her teaching philosophy. She recognized that although this was her personal approach she was not as free to implement it in a professional studio environment:

*It definitely comes in to how I teach at professional institutions, but I have to be a little bit more, I just have to follow the way that they do things a little bit more. I can't take a mindfulness break and meditate at a professional school usually, that's not something that is generally considered appropriate teaching and so I have to be very careful how I sort of integrate that.*

Participants also spoke about diverging what would traditionally be expected in a ballet class. Suzanne spoke about implementing practices that other teachers may not agree with when she stated, *"I take the time, I know that some teachers disagree with this, but I take the time every class to ask them a question about their day"*.

Participants suggested that it was challenging to teach at a studio that did not align with their own teaching philosophy and leaving studio environments where they did not feel aligned with the expected teaching methods. Suzanne mentioned, *"I've been to some institutions where I've been told that we teach to the highest level and that's just what we do and I didn't last very long there because it didn't align with sort of what I believe in"*.

Participants recognized that in some cases studios changed their expectations based on the style of dance as Suzanne recalls her use of meditation breaks or mindfulness in the ballet class:

*When I was teaching modern at a professional school I was able to do a lot more of that. They allowed a ton of that stuff they just sort of let the modern teachers do that sort of thing but in the ballet program there is not a lot of room for anything other than ballet class. Which was a shame.*

Dance educators also need to feel their own sense of belonging within a dance studio environment. Past experiences in a dance environment can impact how a teacher feels about their role within a dance studio. TS acknowledged that the comparison she was present in her training carried over into comparison in her teaching practices:

*But deep down and I've really had to fight hard to kind of understand this in that, you know, getting back to the comparison of it all, "Am I really well suited to be at this studio because I was never a professional dancer?" you know "What can I bring to the studio?" I've really had to dig deep, intrinsically I think that I just have to really stay true to my objective as a teacher and hold true to what like my goals as a teacher is, that's something that I've really, really had to kind explore, get my brain out of that right? Going right back to being a student and comparing myself to everyone else who are now my co-teachers.*

Participants spoke of how the culture of the studio impacted them as teachers which could be in both positive and negative ways. Nikole spoke about leaving a studio that did not align with her values,

*The places that I've worked at we make a culture of support. I chose, I used to work at a place where it was not like that and I left because I didn't think it was healthy, healthy for me or the students and that kind of cutthroat "What are you doing in class compared to what am I doing in class? And you know my technique is better than your technique for teaching this and I know more", it just was unhealthy.*

### 5.7.3 “This era of teaching is looking more and more to outside help”: Resources and support outside the studio

Participants discussed a shift in ballet where more external resources are available while more people are willing to **seek and use outside support**. Dance educators may utilize available specialists to help students with aspects of their technique. Participants recognized that not all aspects of safe training could be addressed in a classroom setting and that student development could be supported by outside specialists. Nikole also mentions how this shift of support has informed day-to-day teaching practices:

*So in order to activate what's necessary in their technique for class we will actually sit and do muscle activation exercises that I've kind of designed and taken from different physios and that kind of stuff through the years of teaching.*

Jane recognized that practitioners outside of dance education not only contribute to the individual student's development but can also play a role in studio programming:

*I think that's it important to work with health professionals. I think that I feel fortunate that this era of teaching is looking more and more to outside help although I think that there is room for improvement. So being able to bring in in the professionals with expertise in say for example mental health or physiotherapists to help recover from injury to even work with people in those areas to develop programming that can help to foster mental health and injury prevention are ways that I would be trying to adapt or deal with, challenges.*

Participants suggested that students may sometimes need to hear corrections or advice from someone who is not their teacher. Cha Cha Cha also mentioned that although teachers have the practical knowledge students and parents may be more likely to respect the knowledge if it comes from a professional source:

*I now like to send students to a specialist to be evaluated for pointework because [the specialist] will have the professional knowledge. We may have it, but it's easier for a*

*parent to understand when they hear it from a professional doctor “I’m sorry your child is not ready for pointe”.*

#### **5.7.4 “I know that this is a stereotype that I try to break”: Societal trends in ballet**

Societal and historical trends in ballet and more broadly were seen to impact training and a dance educator’s approach to teaching. Participants discussed **the cultural context of ballet** and their approach to developing skill. A dance educator’s definition of skill was seen to be influenced by the aesthetic demands of ballet and the focus on physical attributes. Uniformity is also an ideal aesthetic within ballet, yet participants recognized that in many cases this was not realistic. Participants contrasted their desire to focus on individuality with the expected aesthetic demands of ballet and found that they did not always align. The ideal body type thought to meet the aesthetic demands of ballet was also discussed. Cha Cha Cha spoke about highly selective ballet schools *“we see the multitude of students that are coming in and they can just choose by the ideal physique and body and those are the ones that get the opportunity and if something breaks or doesn’t work then they go and a new one fills their space”*. Participants were realistic in recognizing that not everyone could be trained the same way but that everyone could be trained as Tamara states, *“I don’t believe that only that body type or that only the physique can build the skill necessary but there are definitely some bodies where ballet will, can hurt more than any, in an intense way.”* When discussing the journey towards becoming a dance educator Cha Cha Cha also described an attitude towards the perfect body for ballet:

*I always looked at the reasons why and the analysis and you know how different bodies worked and how to get the best out of a body and I would always say you know if you’re blessed to teach in a full time college where you have the pick of the crop and the most beautiful bodies and extensions and lines that it is a harder battle to build to bring*

*somebody who does not have that ease of movement to professional level but very doable and majority of us are that way.*

Tamara recognized that the ballet culture may be changing, but some challenges still exist for students:

*I think body dysmorphia is a huge challenge for young people especially in the ballet world, even in a world where today so many dancers that we see are strong and not just super skinny, you still see kids who are looking in the mirror every day and judging themselves and often harshly which then of course leads to other poor choices and challenges for them be it eating disorders or other ways of struggling with those mental health issues.*

When discussing their teaching methods participants contrasted their beliefs with what they perceived to be traditionally expected in ballet or what they had experienced in their own training. Sometimes participants saw their teaching approach in comparison to other teachers and what they viewed as outdated or maladaptive teaching practices in ballet. TS suggested that traditionally in ballet *“the ones that make it are the toughest ones, they have the thickest skin”*. Participants also face contrasting ideas about safe dance practice and methods of teaching that may be seen as harmful yet produce the desired results in skill development. Participants were realistic about the differences between students but spoke about spending more time with students on areas of improvement while still focusing on strengths as opposed to what they viewed as traditional shame-based teaching or ignoring students that had less skill. Suzanne reported using research evidence to support her strengths-based teaching approach:

*So I use a strengths-based teaching approach and I’m really trying to shift the focus in any studio that I go into from a sort of a, I call it a shame-based teaching approach towards a strength-based teaching approach because there’s a ton of research that shows*

*us that kids will take more risks and be willing to mess up more if they have a strengths-based teacher rather than a shame-based teacher.*

Participants recognized that not all ballet teachers will have the same philosophy around teaching methods or safety, and they will often come across teachers who do not approve of their teaching approach. TS spoke of what she felt was an outdated approach to teaching and how this has shaped her teaching philosophy:

*I know that this is a stereotype that I try to break you know I remember when I was training at [professional school] you know there's other places, there's an old-school, even [modern dance program], there's a mentality that if your instructor does not believe you'll ever make it as a professional dancer then you are ignored right? And I don't appreciate that at all especially when I was in [school] as a paid student I did not, like that's what I'm there for, I'm not there to be ignored, I'm there to get as much information as I can. I know that professional dancing is not my path, but you know I'd like to be the best teacher I can be and that's the same information.*

Participants hoped for an overall change in the system that allowed a more wholistic approach to teaching. Participants would also like other teachers to see the benefits of their approach.

Suzanne states in her words:

*I know that I kind of approach that a little bit differently than a lot of other teachers, but I also come from a mental health background so that's sort of the way that I'm trying to educate more ballet teachers is that we will get better skill development out of them if they trust us and if they are not afraid or feeling like they need to be ashamed in their classes.*

Participants also discussed **societal trends** that influenced skill development. One of the challenges mentioned by participants was that students and parents could have unrealistic expectations. In some cases, this was due to, as Nikole states, living in a society “*where we're like I want it now*” and in other cases it was due to a societal expectation that all children will

advance whether they are ready to or not. Participants spoke of the need for patience during the learning process. Participants noted that because of the societal expectations that everyone will always succeed students may quit when they experience setbacks and failure. Trying to manage student expectations around success was seen as difficult because students do not always understand the long-term repercussions of advancing before they are ready. Tamara speaks to this:

*Well I think that's a societal issue more than anything else right now we live in a world where...you know we don't want to hurt anyone's self-esteem, everyone moves on even if they fail in their academics, in a variety of things, everybody gets a trophy. It's lovely but as a dancer especially a dancer who is working at more advanced levels if you simply move kids on because you want them to feel good you're actually putting them at risk and you are being an irresponsible educator you have to be responsible for their growth and their future long term.*

To add to challenges presented by societal factors participants discussed the presence of social media in the lives of their students. Participants saw social media as setting unrealistic expectations for students that could have implications for their learning, mental health, and physical safety. Tamara describes the expectations that social media sets:

*And then there's also this constant social media barrage of young prodigies or people who are filming themselves doing the most incredible things at very young ages that all of our young people are seeing and wish to be able to do and if they do not understand how to do those things or when it is safe to do so they're putting them at risk so they need to understand that as well they need to understand that it's about their long term life as a dancer and their long term life as a healthy human being both physically and mentally as opposed to this need to be able to do whatever the latest trick is the fanciest trick of them all that everybody seems to want to see.*

Dance educators have little control over the social media content that their students are exposed to, yet it was reported to impact their teaching experience. Nikole discussed this challenge:

*The other challenge, especially in the last for sure five years, social media is a huge problem. Or even "So You Think You Can Dance". Fantastic show for inspiration in many ways, but there are kids who show up at dance class who start in a teen ballet class or I mean even the pre-professionals they think they should be able to do what those people are doing on screen or you know, "Well how come you won't let me do my fouettés in the centre of the room en pointe right now even though I'm unstable because I've seen a seven year old do it on Facebook or on YouTube or whatever" so I think the challenge is to help them stay connected to themselves and their own development in those instances.*

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Using hermeneutic phenomenology, this study explored the experiences of dance educators teaching pre-professional adolescent ballet dancers with the goal of developing skill. Participants in this study were asked to describe their approach to developing skill as well as their approach to developing skill based on differences in skill. They were also asked to speak to how they facilitated successful development and how they approached the challenges that students faced during development. Through describing their teaching approach, participants provide some of the possible experiences of dance educators. The five themes that are represented in the findings of this study draw attention to some of the complexities of dance educators' experiences. The core themes speak to experiences of interactions and pedagogy that take place within the broader context and expectations of classical ballet. These themes will be discussed as they relate to discourse surrounding teaching methods and pedagogy in dance education. Although there are commonalities between the themes presented here and the scholarship surrounding dance pedagogy, participants' experiences also offer insights into teaching adolescent ballet dancers, a combination of population and context less explored in the dance pedagogy literature. To conclude, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the study and suggest areas for future investigation.

### **6.2 Student-Centered Pedagogy**

Throughout the interviews participants emphasized that their teaching approach was driven by the students in the class. Participants believed that students were not “*puppets*” or “*robots*” and made their own individual contributions to developing skill and artistry. What

participants chose to work on and how they approached the work was guided by how they perceived their students' needs. Participants also acknowledged that each student had different learning styles and discussed attempting to teach in ways that would benefit each individual student. Participants discussed the importance of involving students in the learning process and creating a classroom atmosphere where students felt comfortable contributing. Critical thinking was emphasized as an important aspect of participants' teaching approaches. Corrections were seen as an important interaction between student and teacher, yet participants' experiences bring attention to the complexities of feedback when working with adolescent dancers.

The results of this study provide a contrast to what is typically described as authoritarian teaching practices in ballet education. Rafferty and Stanton (2017) acknowledge that a dance educator will approach their teaching with memories, an already 'embodied bibliography', and a training history. Dance scholars often remark that teachers carry forward the teaching methods that their own teachers had used (Burnidge, 2012; Lakes, 2005). Traditional practices are described as authoritarian and teacher-centered where knowledge is held by teachers and transferred to students who receive the knowledge silently and unquestioningly (Alterowitz, 2014). The teacher is placed in a position of power while the students must listen and conform to the expected ideals of ballet (Burnidge, 2012; Lakes, 2005). Demonstration by the teacher is considered the gold standard and students are tasked with replicating and repeating. These approaches are also described as commanding, and scholars voice concerns over the negative impact this teaching style can have on student well-being.

Participants in this study discussed aspects of their approach to teaching that are represented in the student-centered paradigm described by Dragon (2015). This paradigm includes beliefs that "individual perspectives are significant to learning" and "dance can offer

tools to navigate life” while teaching practices include “aspects of reflective practice” (Dragon, 2015, p. 29). In response to what are described as traditionally authoritarian teaching practices in dance, researchers have attempted to provide insight into teaching pedagogies that are considered democratic and equitable. Teaching practices built on critical pedagogies seek to create a democratic classroom and challenge traditional relationships between the teacher, learner, and peers. Studies attempt to describe and explore a shift in dynamics from a traditionally teacher-directed pedagogy in dance to a student-centered pedagogy. Among these studies researchers promote the use of democratic and feminist pedagogies (Barr & Risner, 2014; Burnidge, 2012; Shapiro, 1998), constructivist pedagogies (Dyer, 2010; Rimmer, 2017), critical thinking methodologies (Ambrosio, 2015), and activist approaches (Shilcutt, Oliver, & Aranda, 2020, 2021). Several dance educator-researchers have explored their own teaching practices using action research or practice-as-research methodologies that speak to a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogies. Many studies have taken place in post-secondary education settings (e.g., Akinleye & Payne, 2016). In these studies participants were undergraduate students and teachers in dance technique classes in modern and contemporary dance forms (Barr, 2009; Dryburgh, 2019, 2020; Dyer, 2010; Rimmer-Piekarczyk, 2018; Rimmer, 2017) and ballet (Alterowitz, 2014; Berg, 2017; Ritchie & Brooker, 2020). Other studies have also addressed these teaching practices with youth or recreational dancers (Anttila, 2007; Shilcutt et al., 2020, 2021; Stevens, 2017).

In this study, participants suggested that getting to know their students allowed them to make pedagogical decisions, for example when and how to deliver feedback, that supported not only student learning but also the mental and emotional health of students. Stevens (2017) echoes these thoughts by suggesting that the ability for dance artists in teaching roles to establish

and manage relationships allows the use of pedagogical methods that support the subjective well-being of students. The findings in this study indicate that participants placed value in their students as individuals and that forming a relationship both inside and outside of the classroom would help demonstrate and support that value. Participants suggested that student-teacher relationships support communication and trust in the skill development process. Participants also provided examples of how they confirmed student value by knowing student names and getting to know the students and their interests. These findings lend support to the work of Dryburgh (2019) who found that the quality of undergraduate student and teacher relationships is important for learning and the classroom environment and demonstration of the value that teachers place on the students impacts the students' experience.

Participants embraced students' differences and described their teaching style as one that encourages individual growth emphasizing a strengths-based approach rather than one that shamed students for their weaknesses. Positive reinforcement was used to remind students of their strengths. Participants discussed using students to demonstrate as a strategy to provide confirmation of their abilities. How participants measured success and their focus on individual growth and improvement also impacted the decisions they made about teaching methods. Participants were realistic about the demands of classical ballet however they also noted that they would teach students with the same attention regardless of their potential to reach a professional level. An atmosphere where students felt valued and not afraid to make mistakes was an important part of participants' teaching approach. Participants emphasized establishing and maintaining a classroom atmosphere where students could feel a sense of belonging, knew the areas where they excelled, and could contribute to the learning process in order to support students in both skill development and overall well-being. Although the dance studio can be a

place of discipline it can also be a place of safety, creativity, joy, and flexibility operating within a complex relationship between power and docility (Clark & Markula, 2017). Participant experiences in this study align with the ideas put forth by Warburton (2004) who reflects on the notion of care in dance teaching and suggests that “responsiveness to learners’ needs is embedded in studio classrooms where dancers feel physically prepared to attempt difficult movements and emotionally safe to take intellectual and creative risks” (p. 93).

In contrast to an environment where learning is a one-way transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, participants emphasized involving students in the learning process by encouraging them to ask and answer questions and by engaging in discussion. Participants also discussed the importance of informing students of their expectations for how students should take ownership for their learning. Alterowitz (2014) suggests a move away from a dualistic value system that places the teacher and student as separate and this was reflected in participants’ descriptions of their teaching practices. In a study with undergraduate students Dryburgh (2019) found that students felt that their contribution to the learning process was important. Shared learning in the classroom can also lead to changes in identity and ways of being in the world (Dyer, 2010).

Participants spoke of students’ responsibilities in learning and how students were guided by the instructor towards an understanding. In addition, participants’ teaching approaches included involving students in the learning process through dialogue or specific instructional activities. Participants expected that students would actively engage in the learning process in order to develop skill. Feedback and instruction were described as a two-way process that allowed for reflection and critical thinking. Critical thinking was also incorporated into class through discussion and qualitative analysis of movement. Ambrosio (2015) describes this as the

difference between *giving* a class and *teaching* a class. Warburton (2008) suggests that dance teachers need both content knowledge (the what) and pedagogical knowledge (the how) to become effective teachers. Participants in the current study also focused on the pedagogical aspects of their teaching approaches by suggesting an individualized approach to teaching that allowed students to work within their own capabilities. Participants also contrasted this experience to what they felt was an approach that only focused on the most capable students in class.

While determination and motivation were seen as a distinguishing factor between skilled students and less skilled students, participants also discussed the challenges of teaching students who did not have a perceived drive or motivation to improve. These students were seen as challenging to teach and guide towards the development of skill because they were not actively involved in the learning process. These experiences contribute to the discussion of how students are involved in the learning process and what might determine the extent to which students will take responsibility for their learning.

Participants were aware of peer interactions within the classroom environment or the dance studio. Encouraging support from peers and creating connections between the students were viewed as an important part of the learning and performing experience. Peer relationships also support learning in a dance classroom (Dryburgh, 2019). Learning with and from peers is beneficial within the dance classroom and “through attentive peer observation as embodied acts of recognition students can expand, provoke, and inspire embodied knowing with each other.” (Dryburgh, 2020, p. 15). Rimmer-Piekarczyk (2018) also suggests that learning with and from peers promotes an understanding of the self through discovering what makes each learner unique.

Dance pedagogy literature has explored student engagement in the classroom and the role of dialogue in the learning environment. Rimmer-Piekarczyk (2018) suggests that dialogic interactions in the classroom can support self-reflection and “through dialogue, students were able to reflect on their understanding of technical movement concepts both individually and in collaboration with others” (p. 103). Dialogue in dance can also celebrate individual differences (Rimmer-Piekarczyk, 2018), an important value for participants in this study. Anttila (2007) observed that curiosity and security were prerequisites for facilitating dialogue in a dance classroom with young dancers. Curiosity on behalf of the teacher meant getting to know the students while security was important for creating an atmosphere of trust and facilitating personal expression and ideas (Anttila, 2007). Although learning in group situations and creating dialogue within classrooms is in line with a student-centered pedagogy, participants also spoke of the difficulties associated with peers in the classroom especially during puberty. Participants observed that students became more concerned with their peers as they matured and that this could sometimes create tension within the classroom or dance studio. Although not fully addressed in this study, these two ideas highlight some of the complexities of adolescent peer interactions and their contribution to the learning environment.

Participants discussed giving corrections as part of the experience of interacting with students. Participants experienced giving corrections to adolescent dancers with an awareness of the impact critique can have on emotional health. Corrections were not only seen as a method for instruction but were viewed in a wider context of student and teacher interaction impacted by several factors. In the case of adolescent dancers, negative emotions related to puberty were suggested to impact the way corrections could be perceived. Although participants viewed taking corrections in a negative way as a factor that slowed skill progression they were also concerned

about the mental health of their students. Participants in this study suggested that trust, communication, and knowing their students' individual needs played a role in the delivery and reception of corrections. Communication and the relationship between the student and the teacher were thought to support students' ability to take corrections and possibly mitigate negative feelings that could be associated with critiques.

Giving and receiving feedback is integral to both student and teacher experiences of technique class (Akinleye & Payne, 2016; Ambrosio, 2015; Barr, 2009). Students' sense of self and individual uniqueness influences their experience of corrections (Barr, 2009). Trajkova, Cafaro, and Dombrowski (2019) observed that in ballet class feedback had a temporal feature and teachers delivered feedback before, during, and after exercises. In students' experiences, feedback "was closely linked to their feelings about the classroom environment and was integral to their expectations of what established an effective technique class" (Barr, 2009, p. 41).

Augmented feedback in the dance classroom can come in the form of knowledge of results or knowledge of performance (Krasnow & Wilmerding, 2015). While Barr (2009) views declarative feedback as important information, the author suggests feedback that uses procedural knowledge also encourages creative engagement from students. Declarative feedback was seen as frustrating while procedural feedback allowed students to be more active in their learning (Barr, 2009).

Akinleye and Payne (2016) suggest viewing feedback in dance classes as a transactional process between the body and the mind rather than a unidirectional, nontransactional transfer of information from the teacher to the student. As Akinleye and Payne (2016) state "the notion of feedback could be interpreted along a spectrum—from the separation of mind–body to an embodied approach" (p. 147). At one end of the spectrum a mind-body separation is

nontransactional where feedback takes “the form of information to explain why something “is,” such as why a step is not correct or to justify a grade” (p. 147). In an embodied approach feedback is transactional where there is dialogue and questioning. Critical thinking and attention to modes of communication within the dance classroom have been observed to support transactional feedback (Akinleye & Payne, 2016). While the nature of the feedback and corrections were not discussed in this study, the experiences of participants added a different layer of consideration to corrections in ballet classes for adolescent dancers taking into consideration the perceived impact that critique can have on a students’ emotional health.

The findings in this study add to the dance pedagogy literature by discussing student-centered approaches in the context of teaching adolescent ballet dancers. While in previous literature dance scholars have noted that authoritarian practices are common in ballet classes the participants in this study discussed teaching approaches that align with a student-centered paradigm. Dragon (2015) admits that teachers typically do not fall at one end or the other of a dichotomous scale of student-centered and teacher-centered paradigms but usually display a mix of practices that fit within each paradigm. Pickard (2012) observed teaching practices that were described as calm and patient while and Chua (2017) observed teaching practices that supported student autonomy, engagement in learning, and fostered critical thinking skills. Within the interviews participants noted that their teaching methods contrasted with what they observed in other teachers. While some teachers may have more authoritarian practices than others it is more likely that teachers fall on a scale somewhere between teacher-centered and student-centered. The current study did not utilize participant observation therefore it would be impossible to say how these methods are utilized in practice for each teacher. In future research it may be useful to

investigate teaching philosophies alongside classroom observation with the goal of understanding how teaching approaches are made tangible through interactions in the classroom.

Although participants discussed teaching practices that could be seen as moving away from authoritarian and towards democratic teaching practices, it is evident that teaching ballet is experienced within a larger context that includes not only the interactions between teacher and learner and the established learning environment, but also the expectations of the parents and dance studio, the aesthetics and performance goals of ballet, and societal influences. The results of the present study can be placed in relation to research surrounding student-centered teaching practices, yet also add to the complexity of the phenomenon of teaching dance through participant experiences teaching adolescent dancers within the context of ballet.

### **6.3 Sociocultural Context**

The results of this study have contributed to the literature surrounding student-centered pedagogy and some of the challenges associated with these methods and teaching adolescent dancers. While these student-centered ideas impact teaching methods, the experiences of participants also took place within the wider sociocultural context of classical ballet traditions and societal influence on students.

Participants spoke of the goal of preparing students to perform and what would be required for successful performance. Virtuosity and technical prowess are thought to be held to a higher esteem than artistry. In this study, participants suggested strategies for building physical skill through mastery as well as artistic skill through improvisation and musical exploration. Artistic performance was seen as the ultimate goal although participants recognized the technical foundations that were required to build up to artistic performance. These demands played a role

in the way participants planned their classes across time. Participants were required to look ahead to what would be expected of their students and employ teaching methods that would lead them towards these goals. These results provide a contrast to literature in which the discipline of ballet has been accused of being focused only on steps and physical mastery while ignoring the artistic elements (Morris, 2003). These results suggest that participants are experiencing their teaching approach through what they perceive will be expected of their students in the context of classical ballet which in this case is both the fulfillment of technical requirements as well as artistic ability and adaptability.

Participants also discussed the aesthetic requirements and performance goals of ballet. Skill in ballet was seen to have many different components, the technical, the artistic, and the musical. Participants agreed that there was not one singular factor that made a student more or less skilled, rather it was a combination of meeting the expectations of classical ballet combined with drive and determination. Although all teachers had expertise in a specific syllabus, they also reported using syllabus as only a guide and incorporating variety into their lessons. Morris (2003) asserts that stylistic requirements and a focus on only the technical aspects of ballet training does not allow dancers to adopt the versatility that is needed to work with many different choreographers. Participants in this study, however, spoke about the methods they used in their teaching approach to encourage adaptability as they recognized the ability to adapt as necessary for working with different choreographers or in different genres of ballet.

Participants noted that the values or culture of a dance studio can influence the way that they approach their teaching. Student learning could either be supported by the studio or present a challenge. In some cases, participants did not think that using different teaching approaches was negative. Different studios will offer different experiences and have different core values.

Students may be enrolled at different studios specifically for the experiences and type of training offered. In this respect, teachers would be adjusting their teaching methods to meet the needs of students at different institutions. These findings contribute to the conversation about teaching practices and highlight the importance of considering context within dance pedagogy research.

Participants in this study suggested that they have experienced challenges or constraints when implementing their teaching approach. Participants reported not being able to fully implement teaching methods they viewed as positive or leaving dance studios that did not align with their teaching values. Some participants also mentioned their teaching methods in contrast to the methods of other teachers or of what was typically expected in a ballet class. This points to a disconnect between the ability for teachers to implement teaching strategies that could be considered non-traditional and what is expected of them as teachers in a professional institution. Participants were aware that other teachers may not approve of their methods but also expressed interest in creating positive change by sharing their values with others. Participants spoke about integrating psychological skills and coping strategies in class yet were aware that these practices were not fully accepted by other teachers or dance studios. Participants did not always feel as though they had the freedom to implement these strategies into class as they were concerned about how it would be perceived. Participants also mentioned that these practices were much more common and accepted in modern or contemporary classes and that some studios would be accepting of the same practices in modern classes that they deemed unacceptable for ballet. These results lend support to the work of Fitzgerald (2017) who suggested that student expectations, assessments, ideas of power and authority, and institutional hierarchy can provide challenges to engaging in student-centered pedagogical practices. Rafferty and Stanton (2017) also note that dance educators in post-secondary institutions must work within the higher

education directive of achieving learning outcomes. The findings of this study contribute to the literature highlighting the complexities of the environment in which dance educators are implementing their teaching approaches. The role of the dance studio or institution warrants further investigation in dance pedagogy literature.

Participants also spoke of the influence parental expectations had on their teaching approach and the perceived effect on student development. Parents will also have expectations of what a dance class should look like and, when under surveillance, dance educators may not feel they can experiment with teaching style (Berg, 2015). In this study however, participants were concerned with the support students received especially if parents did not see the value in a career in the arts for their children. Participants viewed support from parents as important to student development supporting the research in talent development conducted by Bloom (1985). The results of this study suggest that parental support can also impact teaching practices with adolescent dancers where participants felt that communication between parents and teachers was important during development or that they needed to justify an education in dance to parents. These participant experiences suggest that further research could explore the interactions between teaching approaches and parental expectations or involvement with adolescent dancers.

Participants also discussed their teaching approaches operating within the influences of social media. There was concern for students comparing themselves to what were viewed as unrealistic standards set through social media. Participants recognized the importance of a methodical and safe approach to developing skill yet spoke of the challenges of this approach in a society where social media sets unrealistic and potentially harmful expectations of skill in ballet. Participants recognized the need for their students to be multi-dimensional and adaptable performers in contrast to how they perceived social media as being only about the latest and

greatest trick. Ritenburg (2010) suggests that the ideal dancer's body as white, young, able-bodied, and slim is perpetuated through discourses across different types of media such as photographs, magazine articles, and children's books. Participants in this study however showed concern for physical safety in addition to body image where they perceived that young dancers on social media were executing skills that were not age-appropriate. Harrington (2020) explores the role of consumer dance in competitions and social media in influencing young females to learn that their worth is based on the external and participants in this study held similar concerns.

Participants also touched on their students' expectations and the impact this had on their teaching approaches. Physical safety and the longevity of students' dance participation was important to participants. Providing optimal challenge was also important for maintaining student interest. Participants discussed the challenges in finding a balance between easy and hard so students would not get bored but would still be provided with enough challenge to improve. Participants also discussed class planning as it related to motivation. Classes that were too easy would cause students to become bored yet classes that were too hard were either unsafe or did not benefit skill development. Scholars who sought to implement student-centered pedagogies also found that student expectations did not always align with that of the teacher and the intended outcomes of their teaching approach (Akinleye & Payne, 2016; Alterowitz, 2014; Dyer, 2010; Rimmer, 2017). The concern for participants in this study was their students' expectations of what they should be able to achieve based on their perceptions of other dancers. The findings in this study suggest that teachers may have to negotiate between their teaching approach and the expectations of students that are set through external influences.

Participants in this study recognized that some teaching practices they have encountered either through their observation of other teachers or their own personal experiences may be

problematic. However, they also noted a shift in the ballet world where dance educators are looking to and able to utilize outside resources and evidence to help support dancers in their skill development and overall well-being. Participants in this study emphasized that they are challenging these older practices and incorporating new information and strategies into their teaching to support their students' needs.

#### **6.4 Wholistic Education**

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed a multi-dimensional approach to dance education and student health. Participants believed that skilled dancers required combined physical, artistic, affective, and cognitive abilities. Participants' concern for student well-being included not only physical health and safety but also mental and emotional health. Participants also believed that participating in dance classes would provide their students with skills that would transcend the domain of ballet and transfer to other aspects of their lives.

In their approach to developing skill participants recognized the importance of a strong foundation in physical skill and the components of physical fitness that contributed to skill. However, participants believed that skill could not be defined by physical parameters alone. Participants believed that artistic skill was built on top of physical skill and discussed artistic adaptability within their teaching approach. When asked to differentiate between skilled students and less skilled students one of the key distinguishing features for participants was determination. Participants also addressed the cognitive aspect of skill development demonstrated through the ability to understand corrections and apply them to their own body. The ability to self-correct or embody corrections was attributed to a mind-body connection and the use of critical thinking.

Choi and Kim (2015) suggest that a whole ballet education will include physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual content. In their study of ballet education in Korea, Choi and Kim (2015) found that explicit content, typically in the physical and cognitive domain, was delivered through direct teaching methods while implicit content, typically in the emotional and spiritual domains, was delivered through indirect teaching methods. Using observational methods framed by the idea of a whole ballet education the authors observed that direct teaching methods include hands-on correction, intensive practice, first-hand demonstration, question and answer explanation, and imagination stimulation using imagery. Indirect teaching methods included recommending experiences outside of the dance classroom, reflective stimulation, musical sensation, milieu creation, and character transference (Choi & Kim, 2015). Many parallels can be seen between the findings in this study and the observations of Choi and Kim (2015). The findings in this study suggest other possible teaching methods such as providing differentiation in learning, using students for demonstration, observing and analyzing the performance of other students or professional dancers, asking students to help with younger classes, and providing individualized programs of exercise to be performed outside of class that can also contribute to a wholistic ballet education that includes physical, artistic, affective, and cognitive domains.

Participants discussed their approach to teaching with a concern for the physical health and safety of students. Although participants acknowledged that ballet has a particular set of aesthetic and physical demands they emphasized the importance of working within the individual capabilities of each student. Participants recognized that students had unique physical differences and that learning how to work within those differences was important to avoiding injury.

Building up skills through a series of progressions was also seen as important for injury prevention.

The importance of student mental health was present throughout different aspects of participants' experiences. Mental health was discussed in this study as it related to injury prevention, the classroom atmosphere, a strengths-based approach, and adolescence. Participants discussed a teaching approach that sought to maintain physical health in a way that would keep students injury-free in order to support their ability to continue dancing. Participants discussed comparison within the classroom as well as through social media as a concern for students' mental health. Participants suggested that a strengths-based approach was important for mental health and that focusing on individual improvement would also help mitigate the comparison. Breaking down skills into smaller components and building up to more complicated skills was suggested as a way to foster a sense of accomplishment and build self-efficacy. Participants also described supporting student mental health through adolescence in their teaching approach. The relationship between student and teacher was one of the most salient features of this approach. Participants acknowledged that these challenges would occur throughout puberty but that helping students cope could be directly addressed in dance rather than something that occurs outside of dance. Wanting students to feel safe and valued in class and that class was a place where they could belong was also important to participants.

In a study with retired professional ballet dancers Kim, Tasker, and Shen (2020) found that looking after mental health and self-worth was important to perseverance in a performance career. The authors also found that retired professional dancers believed that training programs were responsible for "planting the seeds for perseverance in a performance career" (p. 20) and suggest that dance educators can help students in their professional careers by placing

importance on mental health. In line with these observations, participants in this study spoke of directly addressing skills related to life and specifically mental health within their teaching approach.

Participants not only believed that participating in dance classes would inherently build skills that would be used beyond the classroom but also discussed specifically targeting life skills within their teaching approach. Participants also discussed ways that their classes provided students with knowledge and skills that transcended the specific domain of ballet training and performance. Dragon (2015) includes the belief that “dance can offer tools to navigate life” as part of the philosophy of a student-centered paradigm. The findings in this study suggest that participants saw the education they provide beyond performance or achievement of skill and considered the whole dancer in their teaching approach.

## **6.5 Limitations and future research directions**

This study cannot be considered fully phenomenological as the original research questions were not formulated around dance educator experiences. Irrespective, participants in this study spoke of their experiences throughout the interviews and the results of this study can still bring us closer to the everyday lived experience of teaching adolescent pre-professional ballet dancers. What this study can do is offer a glimpse into the experiences of these participants and provide a starting point for future research directions.

Many of the approaches described by participants in this study align with the student-centered approach to teaching dance described by Dragon (2015). Although action research studies have begun to explore student and teacher experiences of student-centered pedagogy in the dance classroom many of these studies have been in post-secondary institutions. This

literature highlights the oftentimes conflicting experiences or beliefs of students engaged in classes that implement a student-centered pedagogy. Student expectations of the role of teacher and student in technique class are shaped by their prior learning experiences and while some students embrace a shift in pedagogy others resist (Akinleye & Payne, 2016; Alterowitz, 2014; Dyer, 2010; Rimmer, 2017). Dyer (2010) notes that the way a teacher facilitates a learning environment can lead to differing student experiences and perceptions of interactions. Students have their own identities as learners and they do not always align with the practices of teachers (Dyer, 2010). Students' expectations of their "own behaviour and that of the teacher are likely to be constructed by their prior learning experiences" (Rimmer, 2017, p. 229). Having trained in environments that followed a traditional Western pedagogy with student and teacher roles, students in higher education dance classes have preconceived ideas about what technique and dance classes should look like (Akinleye & Payne, 2016; Dyer, 2010; Rimmer, 2017). In a post-secondary setting activities that encourage critical thinking may not always be viewed by students as part of an authentic technique class or can be perceived as lack of knowledge on behalf of the teacher (Akinleye & Payne, 2016). A shift towards a student-centered pedagogy will require teachers to question their assumptions and may also require students to question their beliefs about the student and teacher roles within the classroom (Dyer, 2010). While participants in this study described teaching practices that could be considered student-centered in nature it is not possible to know how their students viewed these practices. Therefore further research using action research methodologies, practice-as-research, and reflective pedagogical practices in classrooms with adolescent students is an important direction of future research (Zeller, 2017). Further investigations that include adolescent dancers in private dance studio settings including

pre-professional training programs would also provide greater insight into the experiences that have been highlighted through this study.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Participants placed importance on approaching the students and learning environment from a wholistic viewpoint while acknowledging individual differences and showing concern for student well-being in the physical, emotional, and mental health domains. Many features of participants' teaching approaches described in the five core themes align with current literature surrounding student-centered pedagogy practices in dance. While these approaches are perceived to have positive implications for student learning and health, the experience of teaching ballet cannot be separated from the expectations imposed by the discipline of ballet and traditional practices. While this study may have brought us closer to understanding the experience of teaching ballet it also illuminated many of the complex interactions dance educators face in navigating their teaching approach in the context of classical ballet.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A Phenomenography**

#### **A.1 Methodology**

A review of the literature on talent development in dance reveals that there are many factors associated with talent in both pre-professional and professional populations, but the role that these factors play in ongoing talent development through adolescence are unclear. The most common types of research in dance use quantitative measures and while some qualitative studies exist there is a need for more research providing a voice to the experiences of all stakeholders involved in talent development. Further, there are a number of assessments designed to objectively measure skill in dance. These assessments are primarily based on concepts and vocabulary from modern or contemporary dance and are typically used to determine differences in skill level between dancers or to assess changes in skill as a result of an intervention. There are few studies that have explored talent development and variables related to skill from the perspective of dance educators. Many studies have employed measurements and constructs from sport science, psychology, and education but few have attempted to explore dance as a unique environment in itself. Talent development through adolescence in pre-professional ballet is a relatively understudied area. Phenomenography has been chosen as a methodology for this research because of its exploratory, discovery-based characteristics that define the approach.

#### **A.2 Phenomenography**

Phenomenography, often referred to as a process of discovery, is “a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (Marton, 1986, p.

31). The theories and methods associated with phenomenography originated in the 1970s with a group of education-based researchers led by Ference Marton at Göteborg University in Sweden. At this time, the group's work was grounded in empirical research on variations in learning outcomes and differences in conceptions of educational subjects with the goal of seeing the world from the students' perspective (Marton, 1981). The word phenomenography has etymological roots in the Greek words *phainomenon* (appearance) and *graphein* (description) "rendering phenomenography, a description of appearances" (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 192). Historically, the goal of phenomenography was not to describe knowledge quantitatively, in terms of the right or wrong answer, but to describe knowledge in terms of the meaning that something has to the individual (Svensson, 1997). The unit of description in phenomenography is 'a way of experiencing something', also referred to as 'conceptions', while the object of the research is variation (Marton & Booth, 1997). Data collection methods such as questionnaires and surveys are used to identify and verify a consensus of information. The purpose of this research is to provide a description of variation within dance educators' conceptions rather than coming to a general agreement.

### **A.3 Ontology and epistemology**

Phenomenography is situated in a non-dualist ontology in which does not separate "the inner and the outer" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 13). Säljö (1997) describes this as a "position in which the internal (thinking) and the external (the world out there) are not posited as isolated entities" (p. 173). Marton and Booth (1997) claim there is no dividing line between "the outer" and "the inner" suggesting "there are not two things, and one is not held to explain the other. There is not a real world "out there" and a subjective world "in here". The world is not

constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed on her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them. There is only one world, but it is a world that we experience, a world in which we live, a world that is ours” (p. 13).

The object of phenomenography is to describe “ways of experiencing” or “conceptions”, in other words, “an aspect of the world as it appears to the individual” (Marton, 1986, p. 33). Marton and Booth (1997) describe a ‘way of experiencing something’ as an “internal relationship between the experiencer and the experienced” (p. 113). Phenomenography is not concerned with a particular phenomenon or with the people experiencing the phenomenon, but with the relationship between the two (Dall’Alba et al., 1989). This assumption has been termed a relational approach where conceptions are dependent on the relationship between the subject, or the person experiencing something, and the object, the thing that is being experienced (Limberg, Limberg, & Studies, 2000; Svensson, 1997).

Marton (1981) distinguishes between two perspectives, first-order thinking and second-order thinking, suggesting that both perspectives are complementary within research. A first-order perspective makes statements about reality such as those found in ethnographical, anthropological, and observational studies (Uljens, 1992). In a first-order perspective researchers make statements about the world. In a second-order perspective researchers are interested in people’s ideas about the world (Marton, 1986). Research questions in phenomenographic research are formulated from a second-order perspective. Marton (1981) argues that the second-order perspective allows you to describe the qualitatively different ways in which people “experience, interpret, understand, apprehend, perceive, or conceptualize” (p. 178).

#### **A.4 Categories of description**

Categories of description are the primary outcome of phenomenographic research (Dall’Alba et al., 1989; Marton, 1986). In conducting research, Marton (1986) found that each phenomenon or concept could be understood in a limited number of qualitatively different ways. These qualitatively different ways are grouped into categories of description based on the distinct characteristics that appear in the data (Marton, 1986). The basis for the categories of description are the differences within and between experiences or conceptions (Limberg et al., 2000).

Categories of description are derived from the collective data rather than individual instances and are separate from the individual. Therefore, categories of description refer to the collective level of variation or the “pool of meaning” (Marton & Booth, 1997). As a consequence, individuals may be found to move between categories of description depending on the context while the distinct features of the category remain stable (Marton, 1981). These categories are part of a larger structure wherein each category is related to the other categories. This structural framework is referred to as the outcome space of that phenomenon (Marton, 1994). Marton and Booth (1997) describe the outcome space as a structure in which there are not only distinct groups but also relationships between the groups.

Categories are formed through the distinct characteristics and variations that appear in the data (Marton, 1986). Marton and Pong (2005) state that conceptions, or “ways of understanding” have two aspects, a referential aspect and a structural aspect. The referential aspect holds the overall meaning of the conception while the structural aspects are the elements of phenomena in the specific context that were discerned and focused on by the participants. Focusing on variation in the data brings awareness to the various dimensions of a phenomenon as it appears to different individuals (Limberg, 2012). As a tool for discerning variation in the data collection process,

Marton (1986) suggests using questions that are as open-ended as possible to allow participants to choose the dimensions of the question they want to answer which reveals an individual's relevance structure. This allows perspectives and experiences to emerge that may not have been illuminated through questionnaires or surveys. Svensson (1997) states that "in approaches starting with predefined categories or variables, generality of meaning is assumed. In phenomenography generality is something that is empirically explored" (p. 167).

Due to its explorative nature and process of discovery, phenomenography lends itself to areas where limited research exists. Researchers interested in the area of dance talent development have often used theories from sport science, psychology, or academics to frame their research questions and measurements. As Marton (1986) suggests, application of previously constructed categories to research findings limits the creation of new, previously undiscovered categories. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) claim that "an unforeseen (and welcome) outcome of phenomenographic research may be that it casts a new light on what constitutes a key concept and the nature of that concept" (p. 299). As an illustration of this philosophy, Marton (1986) describes two distinct ways of using categories in research. In behavioural science, the categories are known in advance and applied to the specific research settings. Marton (1986) compares this to a botanist studying previously unknown flora and fauna. In the case of the botanist, the pre-existing categories are of limited usefulness. A new species calls for the construction of new categories. Only after the construction of a new category can the botanist determine how these categories fit into the whole system of species classification.

While many phenomenographic studies claim a hierarchy to categories of description and attempt to prioritize categories based on a deeper or more complex understanding of a subject (Dall'Alba et al., 1989; Marton & Booth, 1997) there are other studies that do not attempt to

label categories as such. For examples, Lucas (2000) identifies the categories as broad themes. Ashworth and Lucas (1998) advise against prioritizing categories into a hierarchy claiming that in doing so an authorized conception is placed at the apex of the hierarchy while the other categories are fit into the structure based on their deviation from the ideal authorized conception. Phenomenographic studies that describe learning and student outcomes use this hierarchy to provide a framework for changing or modifying student conceptions to progress towards the authorized conception (Marton, 1981). Ashworth and Lucas (1998) contend that a hierarchy of conceptions does not necessarily represent the distinct life worlds of students. As an alternative, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) suggest tentatively identifying the broad objectives of a research study but allowing room for the meanings of the research participants to be different from these objectives. I will not be attempting to organize the categories of description into a hierarchy. Doing so would assume that some ways of experiencing are more valid or complex than others. Imposing a hierarchy onto the data may not fully describe the variation within dance educators' ways of experiencing.

#### **A.5 Data Collection**

Ashworth and Lucas (2000) suggest that researchers ask open-ended questions and make minimal use of pre-prepared questions. Open-ended questions allow participants to choose which dimensions of the question they want to answer. The aspects of the research question that participants attend to will reveal the variation in the collective conceptions of the participants. An open approach allows the interviewer to follow unexpected lines of reasoning that can lead to new reflections (Booth, 1997). The participant is given maximum opportunity to reflect. Brinkmann (2014) offers the advice that “the interviewer should make clear that, in general,

there are no right or wrong answers or examples...and that the interviewer is interested in anything the interviewee comes up with” (p. 283).

## **A.6 Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and uploaded into the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. This software is used to organize and complete the data analysis. There is no handbook of specific methods for phenomenographic analysis. Åkerlind (2005) highlights a common critique that there is a lack of concrete descriptions of practice within phenomenography literature. Many variations and commonalities can be found in analytic methods amongst phenomenographic research reports. Overall, phenomenographic data analysis can be described as a comparative and iterative process involving continual sorting and re-sorting of data. The process includes ongoing comparisons between the categories of description and the data as well as between the categories themselves. Although Marton (1986) states that there are no exact analysis techniques for phenomenographic research and that it is mainly a process of discovery, the author provides some suggestions for performing analysis of interview transcripts:

- The first is a selection procedure based on criteria of relevance. Utterances that are of interest to the question are selected and marked. These utterances are then interpreted in relation to the context.
- The phenomenon is narrowed down and interpreted with regards to select quotes from the interviews. These quotes are interpreted and classified within the context of the interview.

- The selected quotes form a data pool referred to as the “pool of meanings”. The interviews are no longer viewed as individual instances and attention is given to the overall meanings found within the collective data.
- Interpretation of the data becomes an interactive procedure in which quotes are interpreted in the context of the individual interview as well as in the context of the “pool of meanings”.
- Categories of description are then formed based on the similarities between these utterances. As Åkerlind (2005) notes, “a primary feature of the constitution of categories of description is the search for key qualitative similarities within and differences between the categories (p. 324).
- After these statements have been grouped into categories attention is shifted from the relation between statements to the relations between the groups (Marton, 1994).

Hasselgren and Beach (1997) recognize that the researcher will encounter variation of meaning in statements and expressions that will constantly conflict with each other and with the researcher understanding of the phenomenon. The consequences to analysis are that “whilst maintaining some kind of relationship to the whole...analysis rests on one accepting...that variation in meaning and interpretation of meaning can occur and can be logically inconsistent with some other meanings and interpretations”, thus continually revisiting the data from many viewpoints will allow the researcher to distinguish these variations (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 194). Phenomenographic analysis is a constant comparison of the similarities and differences in the structural and meaning aspects of the interview content (Limberg et al., 2000). Based on

descriptions provided by Bowden and Walsh (1994), Åkerlind (2005) describes the components of an iterative approach to data analysis found in phenomenography:

- focusing on the referential and structural components of the categories of description
- focusing on the 'how' or 'what' aspects of the phenomenon
- focusing on similarities and differences within and between categories and transcripts associated with particular categories
- attempting to resolve or understand mismatches or inconsistencies between the interpretations of different researchers involved in the project
- focusing on borderline transcripts and those transcripts in which there are aspects that do not fit the proposed categories of description
- looking for the implications for all of the categories of description of a change in any one category (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 328)

## **Appendix B Perfectionism**

There is some disagreement in the literature concerning the dimensions of perfectionism and whether perfectionism can be considered healthy (Flett & Hewitt, 2006). Flett and Hewitt (2005) argue that perfectionism is primarily maladaptive, particularly in combination with variables such as anxiety, failure orientation, goal orientation, self-esteem, concern over mistakes, performance failure, and self-presentation, which in combination, can lead to negative outcomes in sport and physical activity. Stoeber and Otto (2006) suggest that there are two dimensions to perfectionism: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns.

Perfectionistic strivings include high personal standards and self-oriented perfectionism.

Perfectionistic concerns include concerns over mistakes, doubts about actions, social-prescribed perfectionism, and a perceived discrepancy between actual achievements and high expectations.

Perfectionistic strivings are typically associated with positive characteristics while perfectionistic concerns are typically associated with negative characteristics (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Gaudreau and Thompson (2010) suggest that perfectionism can be grouped into two broad dimensions. Evaluative concerns perfectionism (ECP) is defined by a tendency to evaluate oneself harshly, to doubt one's capacity to reach elevated standards, and to perceive that others are exerting pressure to be perfect. Personal standards perfectionism (PSP) is characterized by a self-oriented tendency to set highly demanding standards and to conscientiously strive for their attainment. The authors propose that these two dimensions interact in a 2x2 model of dispositional perfectionism to produce non-perfectionism, pure personal standards perfectionism, pure evaluative concerns perfectionism, and mixed perfectionism.

Non-perfectionism is characterized by low ECP and low PSP. Pure personal standards perfectionism, characterized by low ECP and high PSP, represents internalized perfectionism

where the pursuit of perfection is more closely aligned with personal values, interests, and goals and, when compared to non-perfectionism, can be associated with higher levels of self-determination and general positive affect. Pure evaluative concerns perfectionism, characterized by high ECP and low PSP, represents a form of non-internalized and externally regulated perfectionism and can be associated with negative outcomes such as lower general affect, academic satisfaction, and academic achievement. Mixed perfectionism, representing partially internalized perfectionism and characterized by high ECP and high PSP, can be associated with lower general negative affect, higher self-determination, and higher general positive affect than pure evaluative concerns perfectionism. When compared to pure personal standards perfectionism, however, mixed perfectionism is associated with higher general negative affect, lower general positive affect, and lower self-determination (Gaudreau & Thompson, 2010).

Applying the 2x2 model of dispositional perfectionism, Cumming and Duda (2012) found that 30.9% of students demonstrated pure evaluative concerns perfectionism. In this study, dancers with either pure evaluative concerns perfectionism or mixed perfectionism reported higher social physique anxiety, negative affect, physical symptoms, and emotional and physical exhaustion than dancers with pure personal standards perfectionism (Cumming & Duda, 2012). While Nordin-Bates, Raedeke, and Madigan (2017) found a high proportion of non-perfectionism and pure personal standards perfectionism in their sample compared to Cumming and Duda (2012) and slightly lower numbers of pure evaluative concerns perfectionism (19.78%), more than a third of the participants experienced high evaluative concerns in the form of either evaluative concerns perfectionism or mixed perfectionism. Dancers with pure personal standards perfectionism reported more intrinsic motivation and were less amotivated than the dancers with pure evaluative concerns perfectionism. Dancers that exhibited elevated levels of

either personal standards perfectionism or evaluative concerns perfectionism reported feeling more exhausted from their dance participation, a symptom of burnout. Internalized motivation in the mixed perfectionism group when compared to the pure evaluative concerns perfectionism group did not appear to protect dancers from symptoms of burnout (Nordin-Bates et al., 2017). Although Hill et al. (2015) found that self-labeled perfectionists in sports and the performing arts described being a perfectionist in individual terms other literature suggests that a variety of interpersonal factors may also lead to perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Pre-professional students have expressed that perfectionistic teachers play a role in increasing perfectionism (Nordin-Bates, 2020). Interpersonal comparison, criticism and punishment, very high expectations, strictness, and dichotomous attitudes may play a role in increasing perfectionism. On the other hand, communication and understanding, building relationships, and positive group dynamics may play a role in inhibiting perfectionistic concerns (Nordin-Bates, 2020)

## Appendix C Information for third party recruitment



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**Title of Project:** Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD  
**Co-Investigators:** Jamie Hawke, MSc student; Dr. Nicola Hodges, PhD; and Dr. Sandra Mathison, PhD  
**Institution:** School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Shannon Bredin, [REDACTED] or Jamie Hawke, [REDACTED]

### Information for Circulation by Third Party (via e-mail)

**Subject: Interviews Looking at Dance Educators Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers**

### Are you a Dance Educator in a Pre-Professional Ballet Program?

Our research team at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) is interested in learning about the perceptions and experiences of dance educators teaching in pre-professional ballet programs. The focus of our study is on understanding skill and the development of skill in ballet from the perspective of the dance educator. To learn about this, we are looking for dance educators (19+ years of age) specializing in pre-professional ballet training and teaching within a pre-professional ballet school associated with a professional ballet company to participate in a 60 minute interview over zoom. Participation is voluntary. The information we collect will be summarized to inform the academic and dance community about the development of pre-professional adolescent ballet dancers. This study is part of graduate thesis for a Master of Arts degree (School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada) being conducted by Jamie Hawke, under the supervision of Dr. Shannon Bredin. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact Jamie Hawke, at [REDACTED]

## Appendix D Informed consent

# Interview Consent- Dance Educators

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

### Informed Consent

Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers

You are invited to participate in an interview examining the perceptions of dance educators for skill development in pre-professional ballet dancers. This study is part of a research programme dedicated to examining skill development and human performance in the Cognitive and Motor LEARNing Laboratory at the School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia. This interview is being conducted by Jamie Hawke as part of her MA graduate degree program under the direction of Dr. Shannon Bredin, Associate Professor and Director of the LEARN Laboratory.

You have been directed to this site to read more about the study and to provide your informed consent for your participation in this research study.

Please continue to the next page.

Ethics ID H20-01971

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**Title of Project:** Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD  
**Co-Investigators:** Jamie Hawke, MSc student; Dr. Nicola Hodges, PhD; and Dr. Sandra Mathison, PhD  
**Institution:** School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Shannon Bredin, [REDACTED] or Jamie Hawke, [REDACTED]

### Study Information

**What is the study about?** The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of dance educators teaching in pre-professional ballet programs. The focus of this study is on understanding skill and the development of skill in ballet. This study will also explore the factors that facilitate or present challenges in the process of skill development. Demographic information, including: age (using year and month of birth), ethnicity, gender, and years of teaching experience will be collected.

**What can participate in the study?** If you are a dance educator (19+ years of age) specializing in pre-professional ballet training and teaching within a pre-professional ballet school, you are eligible to participate in this research. In addition, dance educators will need to be comfortable holding a conversation in English.

**Who is doing the research?** This study is part of a research programme dedicated to examining skill development and human performance in the Cognitive and Motor LEARNING Laboratory at the School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia. This research is being conducted by Jamie Hawke as part of her Master of Arts degree program under the supervision of Dr. Shannon Bredin, Associate Professor and Director of the LEARN Laboratory. Contact information has been provided on this page and the research team invites you to ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding to participate in this research. Please feel free to print this page for your own reference.

**What is involved? What is the time commitment for this study?** If you consent to participate in this study, you will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview at a time that is convenient for you. Interviews will take approximately 1 hour to complete and will be conducted online using the video-conferencing platform Zoom. If there are any issues you do not wish to talk about that is fine (this includes providing demographic information) and if you wish to withdraw you may do so at any time without having to give any reason for doing so.

**What will be done with the information I provide?** Interview sessions will be video- and audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Any information you provide within this interview is confidential. You will be identified by a pseudonym (fake name) and all identifying

information will be removed. This means that any identifying information (including your name, your school's name, and student names) will never be published in any documents emerging from the completed study. If at any time the researchers are required to make data publicly available (e.g., funding agencies, academic journals), only grouped data is used to protect the privacy of participants. This means that individuals cannot be personally identified. Therefore, making data available to the public does not increase your risk for participating.

**What happens to the results of this study?** The results of this research will be analyzed and reported in a graduate thesis (public document) in the partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts degree in the School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, at the University of British Columbia. Further, this research may also be presented at an academic conference and may be published in an academic journal. Summary documents will be made freely available and located on the following website [www.healthandphysicalactivity.com](http://www.healthandphysicalactivity.com). All results are presented as summarized and anonymized to protect the privacy of participants.

**What do I need to know about Zoom?** Please know that this study is using a UBC-hosted version of Zoom and servers are located within Canada and are subject to Canadian law. You will receive a notification that your Zoom session is being recorded. To increase protection of personal information, you will be asked to not use your actual name on Zoom; rather, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (fake name) and use this name to sign in to Zoom. You may also choose to turn off your video camera for the interview.

**Will I be compensated for participating?** Participation is voluntary and there is no financial or other compensation provided for your participation.

**What are the benefits to participating?** This information from this research will be summarized and shared with both the academic and dance community. Therefore, there is a potential future benefit to the dance community as a whole because the information that we collect will provide information about the development of pre-professional adolescent ballet dancers.

**What are the potential risks of participating in the study?** We do not think that the questions that will be asked during the interview will be perceived as a risk to you; but please know, there are not right or wrong answers and you do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. Overall, we believe there is minimal risk to participating in this study as you will only be asked to share your expertise from your personal experiences teaching pre-professional ballet.

**What if I wish to withdraw from the study?** Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences. This also includes

withdrawing your responses; however, once the data is analyzed and submitted as a graduate thesis, you will no longer be able to withdraw your responses.

**How will the research be useful?** The aim of this study is to provide a voice to dance educators as important stakeholders in the talent development process. The insights gained from this study will be useful to other stakeholders in both the talent development process as well as those involved in supplemental programs related to dance health and well-being.

**Who can you contact about the study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact Jamie Hawke at [REDACTED] and/or Dr. Shannon Bredin at [REDACTED]

**Who can you contact if you have any complaints or concerns about the study?**

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

*\*Qualtrics:*

*Qualtrics is a websurvey company located in Toronto, ON and is subject to Canadian laws. Qualtrics is hosted in a secure data centre with several levels of physical access security, as well as 24-hour surveillance, and uses a firewall, intrusion detection system, and other advanced technologies to prevent access from unauthorized users. If you choose to participate in this research, please know that the informed consent form you are asked to sign on the next page and your information from the demographic questionnaire will be stored and accessed in Canada.*

**Ethics H20-01971**

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Start of Block: Block 1

**Title of Project:** Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD  
**Co-Investigators:** Jamie Hawke, MSc student; Dr. Nicola Hodges, PhD; and Dr. Sandra Mathison, PhD  
**Institution:** School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Shannon Bredin, [REDACTED] or Jamie Hawke, [REDACTED]

**Informed Consent**

I consent to take part in the study, titled, "*Dance educator perceptions of skill and development in pre-professional adolescent ballet dancers*". The study has been explained to me and I understand what is involved.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences. I understand that if I do not wish to answer any question or discuss any topic that is raised, I may decline to answer and the interviewer will go onto the next question. If I withdraw from the study, the information I have supplied (tapes, notes) will be destroyed.

I am willing to voluntarily take part in the interview and understand that this will last approximately 1 hour. I approve our conversation to be video- and audio-recorded; or I can choose not to use video on Zoom and the interview will be audio-recorded only.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records. I also understand that any identifying characteristics will be removed from the information I supply so that my anonymity is protected.

By signing this form you have consented to participate in this study.

-----  
Q15 Please sign below.

End of Block: Block 1

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Start of Block: Block 2

Q9 Thank you for providing consent to participate in the study. Please fill out the following demographic information.

-----

Q8 What is your year of birth?

\_\_\_\_\_

-----

Q10 What is your month of birth?

\_\_\_\_\_

-----

Q10 Choose one or more ethnicities that you consider yourself to be:

- Arab (24)
- Black or African American (20)
- Chinese (25)
- Filipino (26)
- Indigenous (21)
- Japanese (27)
- Korean (28)
- Latin American (22)
- South Asian (23)
- Southeast Asian (29)
- West Asian (30)
- White (19)
- Other (31)

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Q12 I identify my gender as?

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Q14 How many years of teaching experience do you have?

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End of Block: Block 2

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## Appendix E Initial contact email



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**Title of Project:** Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD  
**Co-Investigators:** Jamie Hawke, MSc student; Dr. Nicola Hodges, PhD; and Dr. Sandra Mathison, PhD  
**Institution:** School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Shannon Bredin, [REDACTED] or Jamie Hawke, [REDACTED]

### Text for Initial Contact (via e-mail)

**Subject: Interviews Looking at Dance Educators Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We are sending you this e-mail to ask for your assistance with a research project we are conducting with dance educators. We are conducting a research study, titled, ‘**Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers**’. This project is entirely conducted through one interview over zoom, which is anticipated to last approximately 60 minutes. In this interview we will be asking dance educators about their perceptions of skill development in adolescents in pre-professional ballet programs. Questions will focus on understanding what dance educator’s perception of skill is and how skill develops in ballet. Questions will also ask about factors that facilitate or present challenges in the development of pre-professional adolescent ballet dancers. We believe you can assist us by connecting us with your dance educators, who might be interested in taking part in this research. This study is being conducted by Jamie Hawke as part of her research for a MA in the School of Kinesiology at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) under the supervision of Dr. Shannon Bredin. To respect privacy, we will not be contacting dance educators directly. Therefore, we are asking if you would kindly distribute the information that follows to potential participants. Potential participants are also free to distribute the information amongst themselves, including social media. However, if people choose to post to social media, or “like” a page, or “follow” a page, they will be publicly identified with the study. If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact us further. Your consideration of our research is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Jamie Hawke, MA student  
School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia; [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Dr. Shannon S.D. Bredin  
Associate Professor, School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia;  
[REDACTED]

## Appendix F Interview transcript



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**Title of Project:** Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD  
**Co-Investigators:** Jamie Hawke, MSc student; Dr. Nicola Hodges, PhD; and Dr. Sandra Mathison, PhD  
**Institution:** School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Shannon Bredin, [REDACTED] or Jamie Hawke, [REDACTED]

### Interview Questions

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I want to remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences.

During the interview you may use the names of students or institutions, but those names will not be published in any documents and will be changed to protect everyone's privacy.

If at any time you would like me to repeat a question feel free to ask me to do so. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

#### Warm-up questions:

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching in your current program?
3. Can you describe your journey to becoming a dance teacher?
  - a. What style did you study growing up?
  - b. Did you do any teacher training in a specific style?

#### Main portion of the interview:

**Research Question 1:** How do dance educators conceptualize skill?

**Research Question 2:** How do dance educators conceptualize differences in skill?

1. How do you define skill in ballet?
2. Picture a student that you think is skilled. What do you think makes that student skilled?



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3. Picture a student that you think is less skilled. What do you think makes that student less skilled?
4. Not all students are at the same skill level. What do you think of the differences in skill among students?

**Research Question 3:** How do dance educators conceptualize/experience the development of skill?

5. What is your approach to developing skill?
6. What is your approach to developing skill based on the differences we discussed?

**Research Question 4:** What are the most influential factors affecting dance talent development according to dance educators?

7. What do you think contributes to a student's successful development?
8. How do you facilitate that development?
9. What challenges do you think students face during development?
10. How do you approach those challenges during development?

Prompts:

1. What would that look like?
2. Why do you think that is important?

## Appendix G Pre-Interview email



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**Title of Project:** Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers  
**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD  
**Co-Investigators:** Jamie Hawke, MSc student; Dr. Nicola Hodges, PhD; and Dr. Sandra Mathison, PhD  
**Institution:** School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Shannon Bredin, [REDACTED] or Jamie Hawke, [REDACTED]

### Pre-Interview Text (via e-mail)

**Subject: Interviews Looking at Dance Educators Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you agreeing to take part in the study *Dance Educator Perceptions of Skill and Development in Pre-Professional Adolescent Ballet Dancers*. Your interview will take place using Zoom on (DATE) at (TIME). At our agreed upon time, please use this link (MEETING LINK and MEETING ID and PASSWORD) to connect to Zoom. Meeting links are private, and the meeting room will be locked once the interview has started. Prior to the interview please read and complete the consent form. Please find the consent form here:

[REDACTED] Following the consent form there will be a short demographic questionnaire for you to complete.

Interviews will be video- and audio- recorded and transcribed for analysis. You can protect your identity and increase protection of personal information if you do not use your actual name in Zoom. Please choose a pseudonym (fake name) and use this name to sign in to Zoom. You may also choose to turn off your video camera for the interview.

Thank you for your participation in this study. I look forward to our interview. Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,  
Jamie Hawke  
[REDACTED]