

TEACHING WITH ARTISTRY AND AWARENESS: ELEVATING
TECHNIQUE AND WELLBEING IN DANCE PEDAGOGICAL
APPROACHES

by

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A THESIS

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This study aims to identify which teaching methods create a balance between technique and wellbeing within dance technique classes as well as how these methods create this balance. This research aims to bridge the gap between old teaching styles and new emerging teaching styles. In current literature this hasn't been addressed, but rather which teaching styles are typically used in technique-focused classes versus wellbeing-focused classes.

Through the use of two surveys, one for students and one for professors, this study is able to identify certain teaching methods that help create this balance. With the guidance of 50 responses from students and 5 responses from professors, the main themes that help promote this balance are positivity and encouragement, acknowledgement, and student autonomy. Each of these themes provides examples and the reasoning for these methods creating a balance between technique and wellbeing that can be implemented immediately in dance technique classes.

Keywords: teaching dance, wellbeing, dance technique, dance pedagogy, teaching methods

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Introduction

Dance teachers have a huge impact on their students' love of dance, and the way a teacher goes about teaching their class can have a significant effect on this. Some teachers focus more on technique and the mastery of choreography, while others may focus more on how the movement feels in their students' bodies. Some teachers may have a more authoritarian teaching method while others may have a more student-centered method. The way a teacher teaches can have a huge impact on a student's technical ability, their choice to continuing dancing, and their mental and physical health.

My thesis research will be a look into what teaching methods help strike a balance between technique and wellbeing when it comes to teaching dance. I will be conducting research via a survey that is sent to dance students in order to gain insight into what teaching methods and styles have helped their technique and wellbeing. Additionally, a different survey will be sent to professors of dance to gather information on why they teach with the methods they do and how they have seen those methods at work with their own teaching goals in mind.

The findings of this work will be presented to the University of Oregon dance department in a conversation about what the professors (and the students) can do to create a learning environment that promotes both technique and wellbeing. As the department is currently in a transitional period, my thesis research will serve as a way to start a conversation on how to best serve the students and their needs.

This thesis and the discoveries made will serve the dance community and the discussion on dance pedagogy at large as there is currently a lack of research in what ways students want to be taught that specifically focuses on both technique and wellbeing. Currently most of the research done only focuses on the benefits of student-centered teaching, why authoritarian

teaching methods can be detrimental to mental health, and how each of these teaching methods approach technique. This research will help push forward the conversation in how wellbeing needs to be considered when going about teaching and how to teach in a way that works towards the students' needs (which can be done in a teacher-centered or student-centered way). Ultimately, this project will open up a new way to approach dance pedagogy in a manner that helps dancers with both technique and wellbeing.

Literature Review

Dance Pedagogy

Much of the research on dance teaching pedagogy centers around the idea of teaching methods. Teaching methods vary based on the skill level of the class one is teaching, and, in higher education, the degree track a student is on. In terms of skill level, “a teacher’s goals should match the natural flow of the learning cycle” (Erkert 29). A beginning level should be gentle but tough, an intermediate level will have lots of repetition and set skills to do, an advanced level is more about establishing precision and style, and the professional level is about honing your skills and the simplicity of them (Erkert 28). Each of these skills level require different kinds of teaching methods. In terms of the degree track a student is on, there is a lot of variation in skill. BFA degree tracks as well as some BA/BS tracks are on a pre-professional level with the dancers approaching an advanced level in their junior and senior years. However, there are many different reasons students choose to major in dance including becoming a professional company dancer, choreographer, or teacher, meaning each dancer brings a different skill level to different aspects of their degree. This also depends on the type of school a student is getting their degree from. A conservatory will provide a very dance-focused curriculum, while in a public research university only a portion of students’ classes are in their major. Skill levels, degree tracks, and types of universities each have different sets of expectation, which is another reason why teaching methods vary so much. For example, beginners have to be open to learning and moving their body, intermediate dancers have to be ready to repeat the same thing many times, advanced dancers have to be able to pick up choreography fast and have a sense of their own style, and professionals have to be ready for pretty much anything including rigorous schedules and tough artistic directors. Some skill levels need more of a push, while others need a

gentler touch. The expectations of a school and the environment a teacher is in will change the way they approach their students and classes. When a teacher is teaching different levels the way they approach their teaching can get complicated. This is because they have to be able to find a balance for themselves in their own teaching values and methods, while also trying to set the expectation for the particular level they're teaching.

There are many teaching methods out there to serve all levels and students, but there are two that have been highlighted throughout the years. "One is student-centred, and mostly connected to dance as education, with a focus on holistic development through a discovery process. The other, teacher-centred, has often been used in training of dance artists, with an emphasis on skill acquisition in dance technique" (Rothmund "Student-centred" 1). These two styles can be boiled down to authoritarian teaching and student-centered teaching. "The question here is: what knowledge base should teachers possess in order to teach dance effectively?" (Côté 26)

There hasn't been much research regarding the best teaching method for dance students as there isn't necessarily only one best way to teach as everyone learns differently. "Awareness of the varied needs of the range of young adult dancers requires dance professors, and dance departments to be highly sensitive to their course offerings, times of courses, and support systems when designing their programs" (Frederiksen 14). The goal of my thesis is to figure out what components of these teaching methods help students gain better technique and promote dancer wellbeing.

Authoritarian Teaching vs. Student Centered Teaching in Dance

In dance the authoritarian teaching method is when the teacher is the one leading, and the students are following. “A common trait in the material regarding the teacher as expert is an expectation that the teacher will make most of the choices about content, goals, methods, and evaluations, and that the student should reproduce the material after an ideal set by the teacher” (Rothmund 10). Many dancers start their learning of dance through this teaching method, and as they move through school and reach higher education, there is an expectation as a dance student to continue to look to the teacher as the expert. “However, this approach communicates to dancers that the teacher holds the bulk of knowledge in his or her head and body” (Purvis 35). Much of the research on authoritarian teaching in dance points to this idea that “the teacher’s role was to transmit and cause learning to occur. The student was viewed as a passive receptor” (Lakes 9). Through this method students are learning many great technical skills, but they aren’t being challenged to think about their own bodies or be creative through this teaching style. Additionally, “sometimes, authoritarian teaching behavior substitutes for authoritativeness about the subject matter. Dance studio, K-12, and university educators do not learn to teach in a vacuum. When the master teachers in the field set the tone, the less experienced teacher may (consciously or unconsciously) adopt the tone as part of the lesson he or she takes away. If the adopted tone is malevolent or destructive, the cycle continues” (Lakes 17).

While it may seem like there is a correlation between authoritarian teaching and authoritative teaching, these are actually quite different. “The authoritarian teaching style refers to a teacher who has complete control over their classroom. Authoritarian teachers create a highly-structured learning environment with a strong emphasis on the rules” (“4 Different Types of Classroom Management Styles”). On the other hand, “authoritative teachers are firm, yet fair.

They set up rules and consistently enforce them, but they also value their students' input. If a student has feedback regarding class rules or ideas to improve the learning environment, the teacher will graciously accept the suggestions and make changes as they see fit" ("4 Different Types of Classroom Management Styles"). This means that authoritative teachers are most likely not teaching with an authoritarian teaching method, but rather a different teaching method.

This is where the debate about authoritarian teaching versus student-centered teaching begins to progress. "It is crucial for dance education scholars to examine the current state of dance education, determine the state dance education should be in, and then create the means to reach that state" (Sims & Erwin 140). In the current state of dance education, it seems that the traditional way of teaching (authoritarian) still stands, but this method of student-centered teaching is starting to be embraced by some. In his research, Jamison Dryburgh states that "As a teacher, I feel that the more I can do to diminish the significance of my role the better... I want the students to understand that they have the right to contribute to the learning process and to raise their expectations of themselves to do so" (Dryburgh 95). This is starting to set the precedent that the teacher is there to help guide and facilitate the students, but the students are also able to make their own choices. "The reason for altering dance technique classes to be more student-centered is not primarily because it has been found that student-centered learning is the better way of teaching, rather that it may enhance our students' ability to actively think about movement, its quality, the meaning behind it, and many other higher order thinking skills that do not rely on the teacher simply passing information on to the student" (Brown 144). This concept feeds into the idea of somatic practices and body-centered teaching. Instead of having a student repeat a movement in the way the teacher just demonstrated, students are invited to take the movement and see how it feels in their own body. They are also encouraged to be aware of their

sensations in the body. In this practice and other student-centered methods, the student is seen as more than just a sponge for knowledge. The research is arguing that teachers need to see the students as leaders in their own dance education. Some teachers may be hesitant to hand over the reins as “fear of change often stifles creativity and growth, but if we hope for dance pedagogy to become less authoritarian and more humane, then generations of dance teachers need to model student-centered pedagogies” (Shilcutt et al 111).

Dance Technique

There are many ways to define dance technique, so it's hard to pinpoint exactly what it is. Simply put technique is “the physical skills of a dancer that enable clean execution of steps and movements required in choreography” (Frederiksen 23). This is the definition that many people use, however there are other ways to define technique. Technique can also be seen as a system, as knowledge or practical skills, as something set, as goal-oriented work, or as ‘only technique’ (Rothmund “Dance Technique” 13). The reason the word is hard to define is because each person has a different view on what it means to be a technical dancer. This is due in part to the type of teaching method that one learned under. For example, someone who was taught with an authoritarian method might see technique “as something pre-determined or set. There is a norm for what is right or wrong and there is little freedom for the dancer’s own contributions” (Rothmund “Dance Technique”17). On the other hand, someone who was taught with a student-centered method might see technique as “a means to improve students’ performance skills within their own physical capabilities, rather than having all students execute only one version of the skill. The view contrasts with the traditional technique approach promoted historically” (Côté 27). Sometimes teachers also place the idea of artistry within the scope of technique, and they

will try to emphasize this within their technique classes. This allows for more opportunity for students to reflect on their own individuality and wellbeing within the technical work. It seems that it's really up to the teacher at the front of the class to determine what technique is to them and what it will be to their students.

Dancer Wellbeing

Dancer wellbeing isn't something that has been researched a lot thus far. In what could be found it seems that the wellbeing of a dancer isn't really considered too much from an authoritarian teaching view. "In fact, the merit of one's dance training could be tacitly measured by the number of stories of struggles and/or abuse-battle wounds that any former student or professional had for the telling. Lacking empowerment, particularly in a traditional teacher-centered instructional context, students have had little agency to enact change within this frame" (Gose & Siemietkowski 31). Additionally, "the most immediately concerning consequence of authoritarian teaching methods is the potential to create harm in learning environments. This, in turn, can be detrimental to the physical and mental health of students" (Alterowitz cited Richmond & Bird 133). When looking at dancer wellbeing from a less traditional teaching method point of view (i.e.. student-centered or another form), one teacher said, "I began to explore the notion of dancing for wellbeing, dancing so that it felt good and forgetting about what it looked like" (Richmond & Bird 135). This idea promotes wellbeing as something to be valued in the classroom. It seems that there is this idea that proper "technique" and dancer wellbeing can't exist at the same time because if you have one the other one is being forfeited.

Research Questions

What teaching method(s) can a teacher use in order to create a balance between technique and well-being?

How do these teaching method(s) create a balance between technique and well-being?

Methods

Overview

The primary research method used in this thesis were two anonymous surveys. One survey was for dance students, and the other survey was for professors of dance. Both of these surveys were distributed through Qualtrics in order to keep all information safe. Because there was the possibility of collecting personal anecdotes through these surveys, I had to go through the IRB process. For this research, the IRB Exemption process was the most fitting as the surveys were anonymous. The process involved filling out some forms explaining the research of my surveys and creating guidelines for participants. The IRB exemption was approved on August 1st, 2024, and became effective on September 17th, 2024.

The surveys were developed from late September 2024 through early October 2024. Each survey consisted of seven questions, and the questions were designed to be unbiased, open ended, yet focused. The surveys went live on October 31st, 2024, and closed on February 10th, 2025.

Student Survey

Content and Parameters

The goal of the student survey was to get an idea of how students interpret dance classes through the lens of wellbeing and technique. This was done through a seven-question survey. There were two multiple choice questions and five open response questions. The survey was designed to be taken in 10-15 minutes.

There were two parameters for this survey. First, the participants had to be 18 years of age or older. Second, the participants had to identify as dancers for the sake of this research. The

term “dancer” can have many different definitions, so for the sake of this research a dancer is someone who has taken at least one dance class per week over the course of at least ten weeks within the last three years. I chose this definition as a term at University of Oregon is ten weeks meaning anyone who has taken a technique class at the university within the last three years could participate in this research. This parameter was stated in the consent for research participation document that all respondents had to read and agree to before taking the survey.

In order to make sure everyone had a general understanding of key words and phrases I used within the questions I provided definitions to certain words and phrases. The definition included in the survey are below in the order they appear in the survey.

Technique: Focus on gaining a foundational set of skills

Wellbeing: Focus of taking care of one’s mental, physical, and emotional health

Authoritarian Teaching: A class in which the teacher is this “master” and knows all; little to no student input

Student-Centered Teaching: A class in which the teacher acts as more of a facilitator and gives students autonomy over themselves and what they learn or focus on

There were a lot of themes I wanted to touch on in the survey, so when designing the questions I had to take a step back and determine what ideas would help me the most with my research. The main ideas that took shape were regarding personal experiences in specific dance classes, if wellbeing is something that is currently tied into technique class, and what qualifies as an “achievement” within technique classes. The questions included in the survey are below in the order they appear in the survey.

1. How strongly do you disagree or agree with the following statement: The environment in a dance studio during a technique class is challenging, inviting, and supportive.
 - a. Strongly Disagree

- b. Slightly Disagree
 - c. Neutral or No Opinion
 - d. Slightly Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
2. In your experience, do you think the concept of wellbeing influences the teaching approach in technique classes?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 3. Please elaborate on your response to question #2.
 4. How do your dance teachers measure achievement in a dance technique class?
 5. Describe a specific moment in a dance technique class where you felt seen by the teacher.
 6. Describe an experience in a dance technique class where the teacher put heavy emphasis on **technique**. How did you feel about this class? What did you like and/or dislike about this class?
 7. Describe an experience in a dance technique class where the teacher put heavy emphasis on **wellbeing**. How did you feel about this class? What did you like and/or dislike about this class?

Design

When it came to the actual design of the survey, the goal was to have the survey flow in a way that introduced participants to the concepts of the survey, then slowly led them into being able to reflect on their own experiences with dance in more depth. This was done by breaking the survey into different pages in Qualtrics. The first page started with a statement of consent to abide with IRB Exemption policy. This section of the survey included a link to a document regarding consent for research participation. From there the participants had to check a box stating they read the document and agreed to proceed.

After the statement of consent, the survey continued to a new page that consisted of the two multiple-choice questions. I decided to start with the multiple-choice questions in order to have participants slowly get their mind into the content of the survey. I felt that it would also give context to the short answer questions that were to follow.

Finally, the last page of the survey consisted of the five short answer questions. The order of these questions was very important to the design of the survey. My advisor and I determined that it would be best to ask the follow up to the multiple-choice questions first. From there we wanted to ask an open-ended questions that didn't require a specific memory. Lastly we ended with the three questions that intended to probe a memory or personal anecdote. We felt it was best to end with these questions as at this point in the survey as the participants would have been thinking about the dance classes they have participated in and would have more thoughts about their own stories than earlier in the survey.

Distribution

My goal for this research was to get at least 50 responses. With this in mind, I used a few different platforms to spread my survey. The first method was utilizing email. I was able to get an email sent to the entire University of Oregon dance department regarding my thesis research and the survey. I managed to do this by contacting Patty Delaney, the dance department head, and Dana Gorman, the dance department administrator; the two of them were able to send emails to the dance majors and minor email lists. Additionally, I sent emails to the dance department professors asking them to share this survey with their classes. I also asked the board members of the student-led dance organization Dance Oregon to share the survey with their general members as this organization's purpose is to bring dance classes and events to the entire student body. The final email I sent was to Diane Bedford who is a Clinical Associate Professor and Section Chair

of Dance, Music, and Theatre Performance at Texas A&M University. I had initially reached out to Diane as her research and interests has ties to this thesis research, and we were able to meet and talk at the National Dance Education Organization conference. A few months after the conference I contacted her again to see if she was willing to share the survey with her students, which she so willingly did. Another way I went about spreading my survey was by texting in group chats as well as individually texting friends to take my survey.

In addition to emails and texts, I also used Instagram and newsletters to help share the survey. For Instagram, I posted about the survey on my personal Instagram account a few times, and I was able to get Angela Cole (Instagram username @fulltimedanceteacher) to share my survey link on her story. This was extremely exciting as she is known for working as a dance teacher full time and helping other dance teachers. Additionally, she has around 90,000 followers on Instagram. When it came to newsletters, I was able to get my survey posted in one of the Gibney Dance newsletters through a contact of mine, Amy Miller, who I also met at the National Dance Education Organization conference. This was a very big opportunity as Gibney Dance is a very well-known dance company and institution in New York City that offers shows, dance classes, and community programs. I feel really fortunate to have had access to all these resources when distributing my survey.

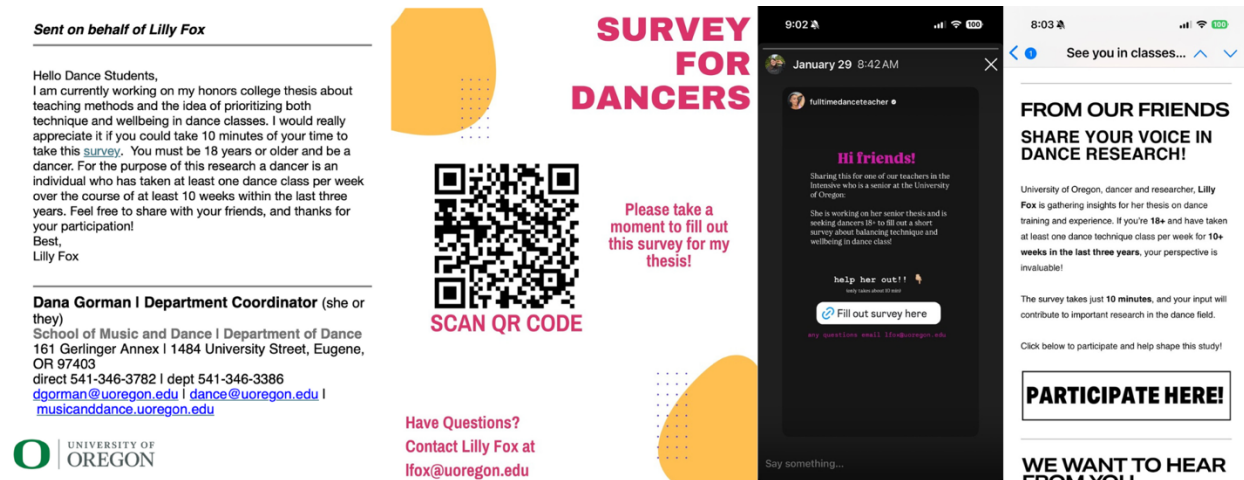


Figure 1: Student Survey Distribution Methods

These are different methods I used to share my student survey. From left to right: Email sent from Dana Gorman to dance majors and minors sent on behalf of myself; Instagram story I made and shared on my personal Instagram; Instagram story from Angela Cole (username: @fulltimedanceteacher) promoting my survey that I then reposted; newsletter sent from Gibney Dance to their email subscribers.

Professor Survey

Content and Parameters

The goal of the professor survey was to have an additional form of gathering information that pertains to my research from a different viewpoint. I was interested in seeing how professors input wellbeing into their curriculum and why they choose to go about it the way they do. This survey was designed to be as closely related to the student survey as possible. For this reason, the survey consisted of seven questions— two multiple choice questions and five open response questions. This survey was also designed to be taken in 10-15 minutes.

There were two parameters for this survey. First, the participants had to be 18 years of age or older. Second, the participants had to be professors of dance. For the purpose of this

research a professor of dance could be on a tenure track, a senior instructor, or an adjunct professor within a higher education dance department. Additionally, a higher education setting is any 2-year or 4-year college. Graduate students were excluded from this definition and were asked to contact the primary researcher on a case-by-case basis. These parameters were stated in the consent for research participation document that all respondents had to read and agree to before taking the survey.

In order to make sure everyone had a general understanding of key words and phrases I used within the questions I provided definitions to certain words and phrases the way I did with the student survey. The definition included in the survey are below in the order they appear in the survey.

Technique: Focus on gaining a foundational set of skills

Wellbeing: Focus of taking care of one's mental, physical, and emotional health

Authoritarian Teaching: A class in which the teacher is this "master" and knows all; little to no student input

Student-Centered Teaching: A class in which the teacher acts as more of a facilitator and gives students autonomy over themselves and what they learn or focus on

As I stated earlier I wanted to make the questions as closely related to the student survey as possible. To do this, I took the questions from the student surveys and reworded them to apply to professors. I did this so that I could take the responses from both surveys and see if there was correlation between what students were enjoying or needing and what professors were currently doing. The questions included in the survey are below in the order they appear in the survey.

1. How strongly do you disagree or agree with the following statement: The environment I create in a dance studio during a technique class is challenging, inviting, and supportive.
 - a. Strongly Disagree

- b. Slightly Disagree
 - c. Neutral or No Opinion
 - d. Slightly Agree
 - e. Strongly Agree
2. In your experience, do you think the concept of wellbeing influences your teaching approach in technique classes?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 3. Please elaborate on your response to question #2.
 4. How do you measure achievement in a dance technique class?
 5. Describe a specific moment in a dance technique class where you made a student feel seen.
 6. Describe an experience in a dance technique class where you put heavy emphasis on **technique**. How did you feel about how this class went? What did you like and/or dislike about this class? Why did you choose to emphasize technique for this class?
 7. Describe an experience in a dance technique class where you put heavy emphasis on **wellbeing**. How did you feel about how this class went? What did you like and/or dislike about this class? Why did you choose to emphasize technique for this class?

Design

See “Design” in the Student Survey section.

Distribution

My goal for this survey was to get as many responses as possible. Because this survey was used in a supplemental way, I wasn’t as concerned with the exact number of responses. My method for distributing this survey was exclusively through email. I sent a group email to the professors and adjunct faculty within the dance department at the University of Oregon.

Additionally, I sent another email to Diane Bedford asking her if she along with her colleagues

would be willing to fill out my survey. Due to the fact that I was mainly focused on getting responses for the student survey I didn't push the distribution of the professor survey as much as the student survey.

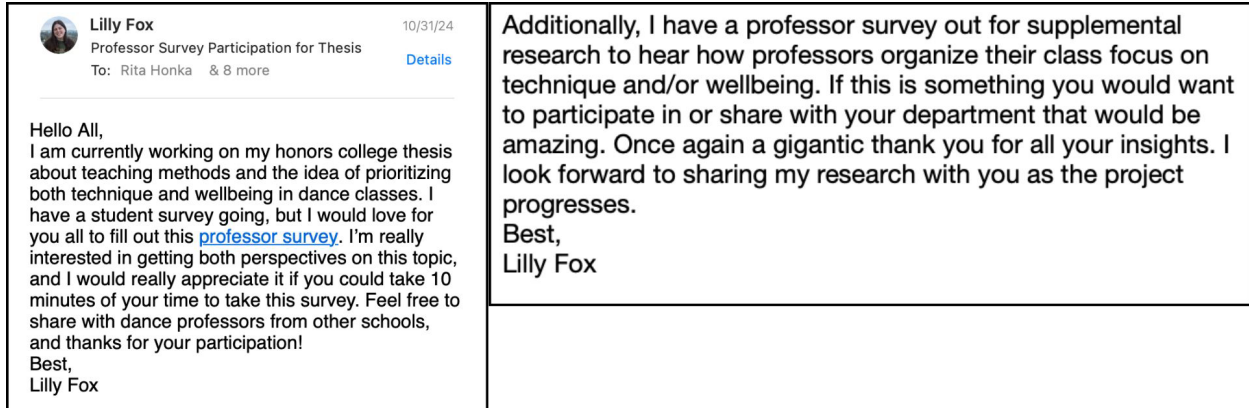


Figure 2: Professor Survey Distribution Methods

These are the two emails I sent out for my professor survey. On the left is the email I sent to the dance professors and adjunct faculty at the University of Oregon. On the right is a portion of the email I sent to Diane Bedford.

Results

Overview

After having the surveys live for three and half months, I received 51 responses from the student survey and 5 responses from the professor survey. One of the student survey responses had only random letters inputted so I was only able to use 50 of the responses. Additionally, some respondents left certain questions blank so for the open response questions the number of responses range from 38 to 47 responses depending on the specific question.

Two methods were used to go through the data. The first method involved me reading through the raw data and noting down themes, words, and quotes that either encapsulated many of the responses or that stood out on their own. The second method involved me coding the raw data. I did this by looking at the notes I had taken on the raw data and pulling out certain themes that came up specifically for each question. From there I went back through the raw data and categorized each response to fit into one of the themes of that question. If I felt a response truly did not fit into a category it was classified as “other or uncategorized.” Because each question was prompting for different kinds of responses majority of the questions had their own categorizations.

Question 3 (only of those who said yes to question 2) (out of 38)	Question 4 (out of 47)	Question 5 (out of 47)	Question 6 (out of 46)	Question 7 (out of 46)
Autonomy: 3	Mastery of Skill: 11	Advice and Feedback: 13	Leaning Positive: 19	Leaning Positive: 30
Physical Health/Listening to Body: 12	Growth/Progress: 18	Compliment or Asking to Demonstrate: 21	Felt Mixed: 18	Felt Mixed: 6
Positive Environment: 9	Combination of Mastery of Skill and Progress: 7	Understanding and Consideration of Student: 7	Leaning Negative: 9	Leaning Negative: 7
Consideration of Students when Planning: 5	Other/Uncategorized: 11	Other/Uncategorized: 6		No Wellbeing Focused Class Experienced: 4
Other/Uncategorized: 14				

Figure 3: Screenshot of Coded Data Table for Open Response Questions of Student Survey

This table represents the themes identified in the open response question (questions 3-7) of the student survey.

Student Survey

Questions 1 and 2: The Existence of Wellbeing in Technique Class

Going through the results of the first two question was quite simple as both of these questions were multiple choice. The data seen in Figure 4 shows the breakdown of these two questions.

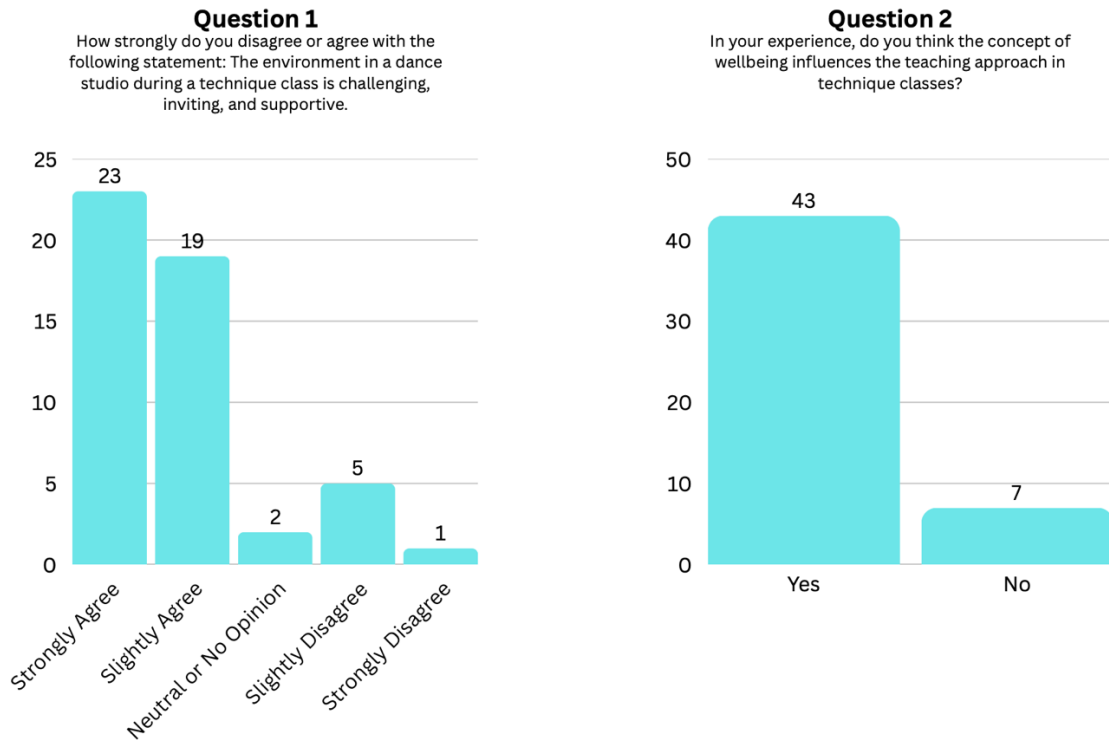


Figure 4: Student Survey Questions 1 and 2 Bar Graph Distribution

Question 3: Elaboration on the Existence of Wellbeing in Technique Class

In question 3 the respondents were asked to explain their response to question 2 (see Methods subsection “Student Survey: Content and Parameters” for the survey questions). Out of those who responded yes to question 2 the following themes emerged: autonomy; physical health and listening to the body; positive environment; consideration of students when planning; and other or uncategorized. These ideas were demonstrated with real life examples of being encouraged to make accommodations to protect their bodies, not doing something if it hurts, creating an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, and feeling considered in the planning of the class. The two quotes below encapsulate many of the themes from this question.

“I think the concept of wellbeing influences teaching approaches in technique classes for sure, and I’ve definitely noticed this more at the college level. When teachers prioritize wellbeing, the energy in the room kind of shifts almost? It feels as though a collective tension is released. I feel like often I’m these classes teachers tend to be more open to dancers modifying movements based on their physical and mental state, This creates a more flexible and understanding atmosphere, which I’ve more noticed in college compared to my earlier training.”

“Yes, the concept of wellbeing significantly influences the teaching approach in technique classes because it shifts the focus from purely physical execution to a more holistic approach that considers the dancer’s mental, emotional, and physical health.”

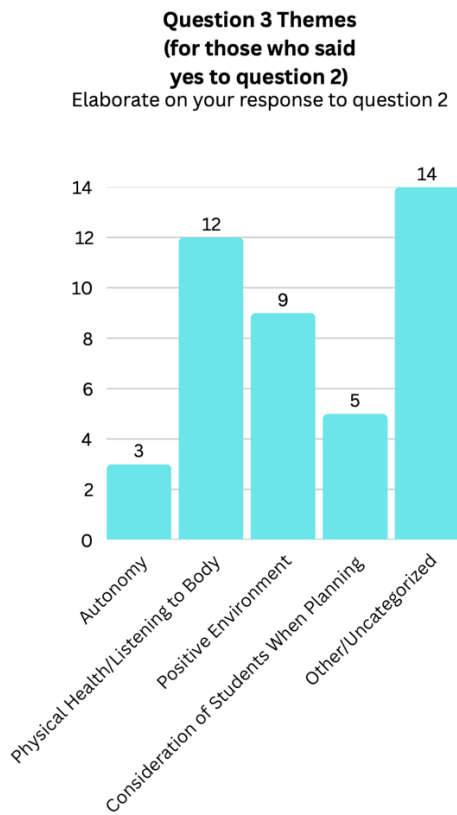


Figure 5: Student Survey Question 3 Bar Graph Distribution

While many of the responses to this question focused on how wellbeing does in fact affect the teaching approach in technique classes, there were a few responses that contrasted this. In the seven responses that had answered no to question 2, their responses to question 3 indicated that some people feel that technique classes are purely physical, focus on the product much more than

the process, and create an atmosphere where you don't acknowledge what is happening beyond the studio walls— personally or globally.

Question 4: Achievement in Technique Class

In question 4 respondents were asked how their teachers measure achievement in technique class. There were two main themes to the responses of this question: mastery of a skill and personal growth or progress. Some of the responses were a combination of the two. There were also quite a few responses that were uncategorized. Some of these responses focused on moving up into a more advanced class, awards at competitions, etc. Some quotes that encapsulate these categories are below.

“In my technique classes, a teacher measures achievement in class by the amount of turns a dancer can do and extensions of the leg a dancer can achieve. They also measure achievement by students knowing anatomically why/how their body is able to perform the movement and what strengthening exercises can be done to do the movement more efficiently.”

“In general, achievement is measured by the dancer's own perception of their improvement. We are often asked to submit self reflections and personal statements which are taken for grades, rather than solely being judged by the instructor on how 'good' we dance.”

“I have had a few different approaches that depend on the teacher. Some definitely judge success by technical proficiency and how naturally capable you are as a dancer. More recently though, I feel some professors I have had at the collegiate level are more focused on achievement in the way of improvement from class to class.”

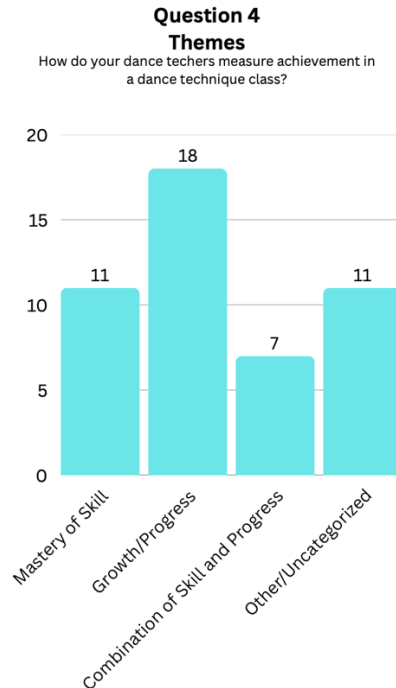


Figure 6: Student Survey Question 4 Bar Graph Distribution

Question 5: Feeling Seen in Technique Class

In question 5, respondents were asked to describe a time they felt seen in a technique class. The main themes found in the responses to this question were advice and feedback; compliment or asking to demonstrate for class; understanding and consideration of student as a whole; and other or uncategorized. This specific question also showed a trend of an appreciation of being singled out in a positive manner. Some quotes that encapsulate these categories are below.

“In a university level contemporary class a couple years ago, I was trying to get a deeper plie but was gripping my shins. My professor stopped me and straight up told me, "your body can't do that", but also gave me tools and ways to work around gripping my shins. Ever since then, I have been much more aware of times when I accidentally work against my body instead of with it. It was probably the first time somebody told me that I shouldn't go against my biology to achieve a movement.”

“I feel most seen when I apply a correction and receive a confirmation from the teacher. For example, we explored various ways to hold our weight in a pirouette prep and when I was able to apply the correction my teacher congratulated me by name.”

“One moment I felt seen by a teacher in a technique class had honestly less to do with technique and more to do with challenging our mentality behind dance. One of my teachers asked me why I made a face when I messed up in class. I responded by saying it was because I did something badly, and she said that as dancers we need to learn to congratulate ourselves as much as we criticize ourselves. This has been an idea I have struggled with often in dance, so her saying that made me reconsider the mindset I come to class with.”

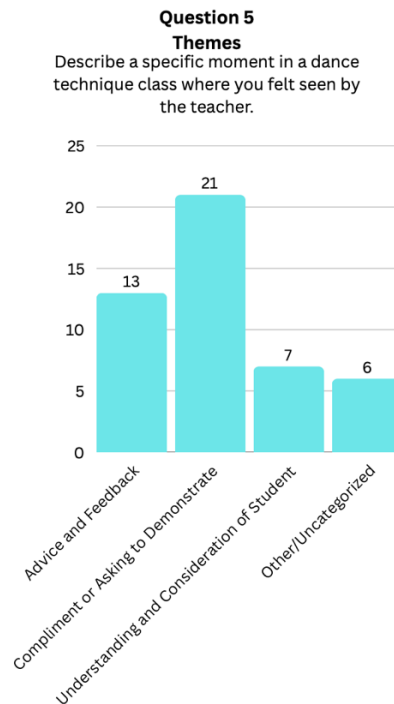


Figure 7: Student Survey Question 5 Bar Graph Distribution

Questions 6 and 7: Experience of Technique-Focused Class and Wellbeing-Focused Class

In questions 6 and 7, respondents were asked to explain a time they experienced both a technique-focused class and a wellbeing-focused class. They were asked to explain a bit about the class itself and their personal experience in said class. Based on the responses the best way to

measure trends was by seeing how the responses interpreted the classes they were describing. In turn, each response was separated into either a leaning positive, mixed, or leaning negative category. The quotes below demonstrate a leaning positive and a leaning negative response for each question.

“I loved when I had a teacher who really focused on technique. The class moved slow but it was really helpful to get all of these corrections and ways to improve my dancing. They also gave compliments and positive feedback instead of harsh comments.” [Technique; Positive Leaning]

“In a lot of my previous studio training, it was about meeting the mark as I described earlier. One of my teachers would barely take us through a warmup and more so thought of it as conditioning, and then we would do progressions across the floor. Instead of just focusing on an actual progression, he would teach these combinations that were very difficult. If you couldn't meet all the marks on the combination, he would make you do it over and over again. Sometimes he would kick students out if you couldn't do it. I obviously disliked all of these practices because of its toxic nature and idea that dance is about being told to meet a standard that isn't universal to everyone” [Technique; Negative Leaning]

“It felt very relieving and nonjudgemental. No pressure to wear or be anything specific other than yourself.” [Wellbeing; Positive Leaning]

“I personally can get annoyed when there's too much focus on this. Yes it is extremely important, but it also differs from person to person so if the day is spent doing less because someone doesn't feel good then that's gonna happen every day and then you're wasting everyone's time” [Wellbeing; Negative Leaning]

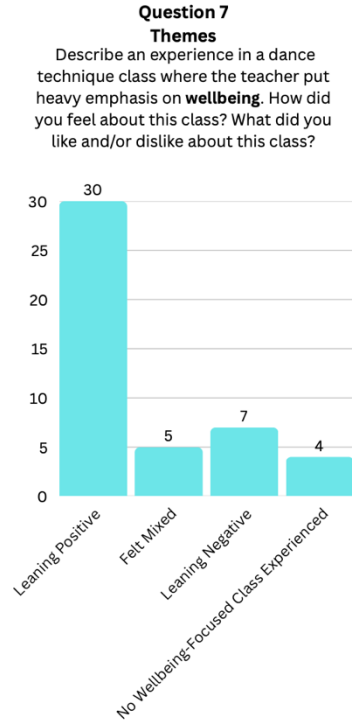
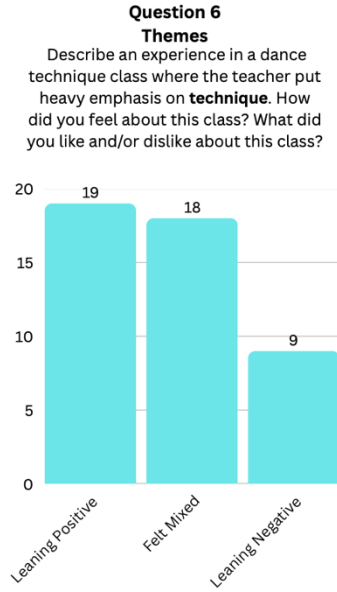


Figure 8: Student Survey Questions 6 and 7 Bar Graph Distribution

In addition to identifying respondents' interpretation of the class in each question, the two questions were also looked at in relationship to each other. The goal of this was to get a better sense of how many respondents preferred one class over another or liked them both the same.

Category	Number of Responses
Mixed, Positive	15
Negative, Positive	6
Positive, Positive	9
Positive, Negative	6
Positive, Mixed	3
Negative, Mixed	1
Mixed, Uncategorized	1
Mixed, Negative	1
Negative, Uncategorized	2
Positive, Uncategorized	1
Mixed, Mixed	1

Figure 9: Screenshot of Table of Question 6 and 7 Side by Side Interpretations

The following table shows the combination of answers to both question 6 and 7. The first word describes the interpretation of the class in question 6 and the second word describes the interpretation of the class in question 7.

As shown in Figure 9 respondents had a mixed response to technique-focused classes, but a positive response to wellbeing-focused classes. Additionally, 6 respondents had a negative response to technique-focused classes, but a positive response to wellbeing-focused classes. And that is true for the reverse where 6 respondents had a positive response to technique-focused classes, but a negative response to wellbeing-focused classes.

Professor Survey

Questions 1-5: Existence of Wellbeing in Technique Class, Achievement, and Making Students Feel Seen

Due to the small sample size for the professor survey, there isn't too much variation in the responses to the multiple-choice questions. For question 1, one respondent answered strongly

disagree, while the other four answered strongly agree. For question 2, all respondents answered yes.

When it came to questions 3-5 I categorized each response in the same themes as the student survey counterparts. For question 3, there was a response for each category— autonomy, physical health and listening to the body, positive environment, consideration of students when planning, and other or uncategorized (the response disbursement includes the other or uncategorized category). For question 4, the responses fell into only two of the categories. There were three responses that fell into the growth and progress category and two responses that fell into the combination of skill and growth category. For question 5, there was one response in advice and feedback, one response in compliment or asking a student to demonstrate, one response for consideration and understanding of student, and two responses for other or uncategorized. The responses in the other or uncategorized category were combinations of the others three themes with none sticking out significantly enough to categorize it just one way.

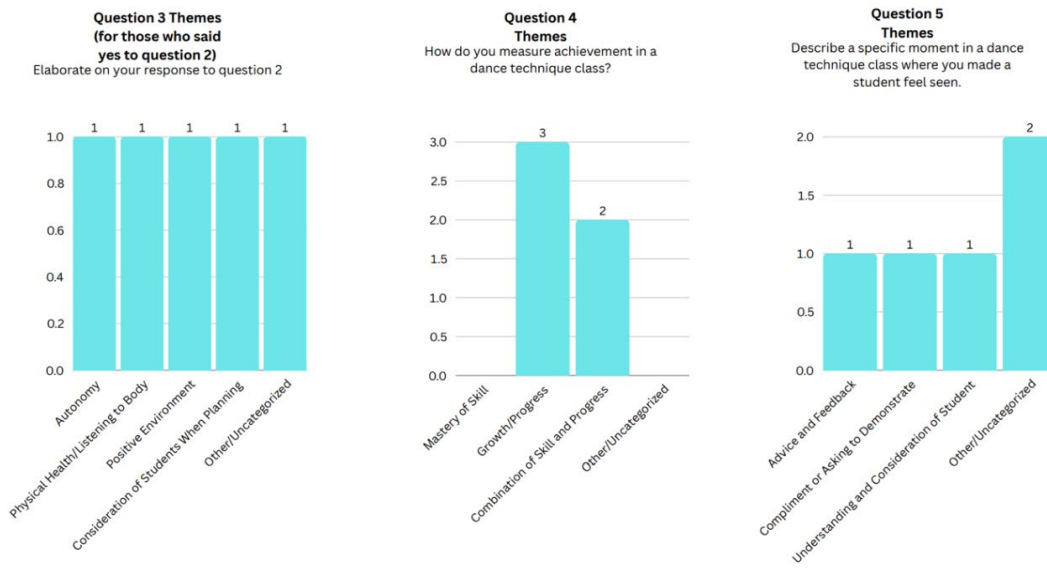


Figure 10: Professor Survey Questions 3, 4, and 5 Bar Graph Distribution

Questions 6 and 7: Thought Process Behind Technique-Focused Classes and Wellbeing-Focused Classes

Unlike the student survey, there wasn't an easy way to categorize the responses for questions 6 and 7. In the responses, the professors discuss how they go about teaching technique-focused classes and wellbeing-focused classes, due to the nature of their version of this question there is less of a reaction and more of an explanation response. This makes it harder to classify the responses as positive or negative. However, despite the fact that there isn't a categorization for these questions there seems to be a trend of professors discussing how there is much overlap between technique and wellbeing in the way they teach their classes. While there may be more of an emphasis on technique or wellbeing on a day-to-day basis, all of the professors' responses indicated that they aren't separated in their classes. Additionally, the idea of wellbeing also being a tool to push and encourage students in a safe way came up in more than one response. As well as the focus of personal agency and autonomy for the professors' students.

Discussion

Overview

Through this research I was aiming to find a teaching method (or methods) that teachers can use to create a balance between technique and wellbeing in dance technique classes, as well as how these teaching methods would create this balance. According to the survey results, it seems that majority of both students and professors feel that dance technique classes are challenging but still supportive for a myriad of reasons. Additionally, it seems that both students and professors feel achievement is mainly broken down into the categories of mastery of skill and growth or progress (some are even a combination of the two). In terms of feeling seen in class, students tend to feel seen the most when they are highlighted, feel special, and/or feel supported by their teachers. Lastly, students had varying views on technique-focused classes and wellbeing-focused classes. It seems there is a pattern of having positive attitudes towards one class focus and more mixed or negative attitudes towards the other focus. On the professor side, there seems to be a trend of professors feeling their teaching approaches already combine technique and wellbeing into one cohesive class. With both the research questions and these results in mind, three themes have emerged in creating a balance between technique and wellbeing: positivity and encouragement, acknowledgement, and student autonomy.

Interpretation of Findings

Positivity and Encouragement

Based on the survey responses, many students appreciated classes where they were given encouragement and positive remarks regarding their dancing. While this may seem like an obvious teaching method, sometimes dance teachers can overlook how effective this is. Instead

of giving critiques with no solutions, teachers can instead give suggestions on how to improve along with a positive note about something the dancer is doing correctly. In addition to more positive remarks, dance teachers can create an overall more positive environment. This doesn't mean the class isn't challenging but there is encouragement from peers and more ways for the teachers to make students feel seen when they accomplish something new or have grown in a certain aspect of class. Additionally, remembering that the students are people as well as dancers. Something as simple as using their name instead of just pointing at them creates a safer, more enjoyable environment.

This creates a balance between technique and wellbeing as learning and developing skills is still an important factor in class, but there is an attitude about the class that is more upbeat and encouraging for students. This doesn't mean creating a space where no negative feelings are allowed, because that may come up sometimes, but rather a space where a student feels supported rather than beat down. Students tend to feel the most supported when their teachers are uplifting them and that starts with the attitude they bring into the room themselves and the environment they create around them.

Acknowledgement

The theme of acknowledgement as a teaching method can be utilized in multiple ways in the dance studio. One method is to take a moment at the beginning of each class to have students acknowledge how they are feeling and what they need or want to take away from the class they are about to take. This can look like a minute of meditation, a deep breath, or walking around the room to get into your body and the space. Another way a teacher can bring in this idea of acknowledgment is to have a survey at the beginning of the year where they ask students about their goals, how they learn best, how they feel seen, how they receive feedback best, etc. This

allows the teacher to have a better sense of their students right away and allows the student to know that their teacher is acknowledging the fact that each student's needs are different things in class. This can also be followed up by a mid-year survey and an end of year survey.

Acknowledgement in the dance studio can also be reminders that both teacher and students need to hear more often. These reminders could include dance is hard and it needs to be acknowledged that dancers are asking their bodies to do intense movement which takes time to get used to and grasp onto; teachers bring a lot of knowledge into the room but they don't know everything as they are also constantly learning; and part of dance technique is learning how to take care of oneself physically, mentally, and emotionally. These acknowledgements can also include the teacher acknowledging when certain material is more difficult than others. This will allow students to physically and mentally prepare for the class that day.

These methods help to create this balance between technique and wellbeing as it allows both student and teachers to have a common understanding of both the student's needs and the class expectations. Sometimes going into a class and jumping right in can make students feel like they don't matter as people but just as movers. Allowing a minute or two for everyone to acknowledge where they are at in their body and mind, gives everyone a chance to approach the class best for themselves. Additionally having this time, gives everyone the opportunity to acknowledge each other and begin to create a positive environment at the start of class. Having a survey at the beginning of the year shows students that their teachers are aware that not everyone learns in the same way and they want to learn more in order to create a class that serves everyone best. Lastly, the reminders give everyone a chance to realize that dance and taking class, while a normal occurrence, is harder than most dancers realize and that they need to give themselves more grace in class. Because there are instances where the pressure that is put on dancers is what

causes their wellbeing to falter, these acknowledgements give everyone a chance to take a little bit of pressure off themselves.

Student Autonomy

Students should always have choices about their own body and what they push themselves to do. And while teachers do take this into account, it's not always prioritized. One thing teachers can do is give students options and modifications within choreography. For example, if there is floor work, but someone has a knee injury, then the teacher can create a version of the floor work that doesn't affect that person's knee or create a version of the floorwork not on the floor. Another method that takes student autonomy into account is guided warmup that allow the student to have structure but choice over how they warm up their body. Additionally, teachers can give students different goals to focus on within class. Rather than having everyone focus on one way of doing something, teachers can provide different approaches to the same combination of skills. Whether that's breath, lines, shape or something else it allows the teacher to still have students focus on something that is important to them while also giving students more say.

These approaches help create a balance between technique and wellbeing by giving students more choice in their learning experience. When a student feels forced to do movement or a combination in a certain way that hurts physically or isn't connecting with their learning style, they aren't getting as much out of class as they could be and they're sacrificing part of their wellbeing in that process. By giving students more autonomy over themselves, they feel both heard and seen in class. Additionally, it allows students to do what they need for themselves in a certain moment. While this isn't always feasible in every circumstance, the more

opportunities teachers give to their students to make choices for themselves the more empowered the students will feel.

Implications of Findings

The significance of my findings demonstrates that there are in fact ways to balance technique and wellbeing in a dance technique class. In most of the existing literature I found, there wasn't a focus on both of these attributes but rather a focus on one or the other. Additionally, my findings not only address both technique and wellbeing, but also goes more in-depth on specific methods teachers can use without restricting it to only one teaching style. While much of the existing literature discussed the differences between authoritarian, authoritative, and student-centered teaching as well as which method is used in technique-focused classes versus a wellbeing-focused class, my research doesn't stick to just one teaching method but it combines the authoritative and student-centered teaching styles. Lastly, my research categorized these teaching methods into the three themes of positivity and encouragement, acknowledgement and autonomy of students. These themes help to identify different features in dance technique class that can be expanded upon in order to create a balance between technique and wellbeing.

Limitations of Findings

The research that was done gave a lot of insight into students and professors' views on technique and wellbeing in the dance studio, and like most research it was not perfect. There were two main limitations to this research. The first was sample size. While I did get a fair number of responses to the student survey, I wish that I could have gotten more responses to both the student survey and professor survey. I think getting more people to take the survey would have allowed for more perspectives to be shared on the topic, which is always helpful when

doing research based on persona anecdotes. The second limitation was deciding not to ask for respondents' dance history in the survey. At this time, I feel that this could have given more context as to whether these experiences were happening at a studio, in school, or some other environment. Throughout the course of this research I have learned that these environments have very different expectations and methods to teaching, and I think it would have been an interesting factor to have addressed. With that said, the research I was able to do still gave a lot of insight into the subject matter and still allowed me to come to conclusions that I foresee being helpful in dance technique classes.

Conclusion

Throughout this research I've been given the opportunity to delve deeper into the topic of balancing technique and wellbeing in a dance technique class. I started with two research questions: What teaching method(s) can a teacher use in order to create a balance between technique and well-being? How do these teaching method(s) create a balance between technique and well-being?

After months of research and analyzing data, I've been able to identify three themes that help create this balance — positivity and encouragement, acknowledgement, and student autonomy. Within these three themes I have identified methods that teachers can start using immediately in their dance classes, as well as how these methods can effectively create a balance between technique and wellbeing. Overall, I've found that students appreciate being able to make choices for themselves and positive, encouraging feedback, while still being challenged and pushed in a way that makes them feel seen for who they are as they come into the space.

In terms of what is next, I suggest that teachers take the time to implement some of these methods in their own classes as they see fit. Whether that starts with one method or all of them, by starting to add them into class I believe that both students and teachers will feel a difference within the studio. Additionally, I would recommend doing further research on this topic with minors as the primary respondents as so many dance students are children and young adults. This research has impacted the dance pedagogy research previously done as it touches on current issues of physical health and mental health being prioritized more with new generations. If the dance world doesn't keep up with these trends, it's possible that it will drive future students away. My research allows for teachers to plan accordingly in order to make technique classes a fair, holistic learning experience.

Personally, this research has felt very healing for my childhood self. Growing up I always prioritized my wellbeing in dance, but I didn't necessarily feel like my teachers did. As someone who wants to be a dance teacher full time, I aspire to be the dance teacher I wanted growing up. This research has not only allowed me to learn about dance pedagogy and the desires of dance students, but it has also allowed me to put out into the dance field that this is an important topic that should be addressed rather than ignored. I'm excited and hopeful to see how the dance world progresses knowing that my research is now a part of that progress.

Appendix



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

September 17, 2024

Lilly Fox

lfox@uoregon.edu

Dear Lilly Fox:

The following research was reviewed and determined to qualify for exemption.

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Study Title:	Teaching with Artistry and Awareness: Elevating Technique and Wellbeing in Dance Pedagogical Approaches
Principal Investigator:	Lilly Fox
Parent Study ID:	STUDY00001408
Transaction ID:	STUDY00001408
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LFox Consent for Research Participation (Professors).pdf, Category: Consent Form;• LFox IRB Exemption Category 2 Form.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• LFox IRB Exemption Form.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• LFox IRB Research Plan.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• Lilly Fox Informed Consent Document (Student).pdf, Category: Consent Form;
Approval Date:	8/1/2024
Effective Date:	9/17/2024
Expiration Date:	7/31/2025

For this research, the following determinations have been made:

- This study has been reviewed under **the 2018 Common Rule** and determined to qualify for exemption under **Title 45 CFR 46.104(d) ((2)(i) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (non-identifiable))**.

The research is approved to be conducted as described in the approved protocol using the approved materials. Approved materials can be accessed in the protocol workspace in the IRB module of the research administration portal (RAP).

All changes to this research must be assessed to ensure the study continues to qualify for exemption. Research Compliance Services has developed [specific guidance](#) to help you understand when a modification is required before a change can be implemented. It is your responsibility to ensure modifications are submitted when required and approval secured before implementing changes to the protocol

Continuing Review is not required for this study. **An institutional approval period has been established based on your application materials.** If you anticipate the research will continue beyond the approval period, you must submit a **Continuing Review Application** at least 45 days prior to the expiration date. A closure report must be submitted once human subject research activities are complete. Failure to maintain current approval or properly close the protocol constitutes non-compliance.

With the submission of your request, you agreed to uphold the responsibilities of the Principal Investigator and have agreed to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB module of the RAP.

If you have any questions regarding your protocol or the review process, please contact Research Compliance Services at ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu or (541)346-2510. The University of Oregon and Research Compliance Services appreciate your commitment to the ethical and responsible conduct of research with human subjects.

Please consider completing our [user satisfaction survey](#). It only takes a few minutes, and we would like to hear about your experience working with our office!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Pedraza
Research Compliance Services
on behalf of the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects

cc: Walter Kennedy

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