

# TRINITY LABAN CONSERVATOIRE OF MUSIC & DANCE

## Research Online at Trinity Laban

Location of possibilities: Exploring dance technique pedagogy through transformation and care.

Dryburgh, J.

Journal of Dance Education

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2018.1451647>

Document version: Accepted Manuscript

Acceptance date: 2017-09-18

Published date: 2018-12-14

Deposit date of initial version: 2019-01-25 13:20:44

Deposit date of this version: 2019-01-25

This article had previously been accepted on Trinity Laban's former Open Access repository.

**Location of possibilities: Exploring dance technique pedagogy  
through transformation and care.**

**ABSTRACT**

Learning through dance technique has the potential to transform the students, both in terms of their bodily capabilities and their sense of self in the world. By exploring the ‘how’ of dance pedagogy, this research study investigates dance technique learning through the accounts of undergraduate students and teacher/researcher reflexivity at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London. The multi-layered experiences of seven participant students are centralized, bringing insight to the complex ways that transformation may be enabled in dance technique pedagogy. The theoretical perspectives of engaged pedagogy (hooks 1994) and care ethics (Noddings 2013) provide a framework through which participant student data are organized. Active participation, demonstration of care, and stimulating environments are discussed in terms of the nuance of experience for individual students. An interpretive phenomenological approach is used in this longitudinal study within which the teacher/researcher locates himself as subject and co-participant.

**INTRODUCTION**

Consideration of the dance student as a person involved in education rather than simply a body to be trained is imperative in transformative dance technique pedagogies. Teaching can enable learning environments in the dance studio that are conducive to changes for the student in respect of both bodily skill proficiency and how they perceive

themselves and their place in the world (Stinson 1998). This investigation is concerned with the dance studio as a “location of possibility” (hooks 1994, 207). It explores the ‘how’ of dance pedagogy; dealing with the complexities of learning contemporary dance technique through the experiences of undergraduate students in a UK conservatoire setting. In this setting, the focus on technical excellence is core for many undergraduate students who aspire to be professional dancers. Increased proficiency in dance technique is not only about the enhancement of bodily skills but also about the enrichment of the student as a person (Stinson 1998, Collen 2002, Dryburgh and Jackson 2016). Bodily understanding and capabilities cannot, in my opinion, be separated from the personhood of the individual.

Dance technique teaching practices are influenced by many factors such as the particular stylistic or philosophic demands, the teaching context, the perceived expectation of the students and requirements of the dance sector (Bales and Nettle-Foil 2008). These factors affect the ways in which individual dance technique teachers think about, and subsequently go about establishing the learning environment in the dance studio. Students also have expectations of a dance technique class (Barr 2009). These will have been developed through, among other things, previous experiences of learning and their preferred ways of being as a learner (Schupp 2010). Undergraduate dance students often need to be able to shift between different studio practices during the course of a single day as well as across the duration of their studies. The dance studio can become its own distinct microcosm with its own implicit rules and expectations of appropriate behaviors. Examples of differing expectations of the student from one class to another can be whether or not asking questions is encouraged or whether taught movement sequences are to be replicated or interpreted. In my own

pedagogical practice of release-based contemporary dance, I aim to uphold the rigor of developing bodily technique skills through an approach that is built on trust and is reciprocal in nature. Stylistically, students are encouraged to develop particularity of movement responses through bodily exploration. The focus is on drawing out movement authenticity rather than replication of an idealized standard. The ideas presented in this paper, however, are driven by pedagogical values that are translatable to other styles of dance technique.

Dance education research has underscored the importance of teaching approaches that recognize the needs of the student as an individual. Such student-centered pedagogical approaches have endorsed dance education as empowering (Shapiro 1998, Răman 2009). An important and persuasive argument has developed in dance academia that utilizes critical feminist pedagogical perspectives to envision such empowerment (Shapiro 1998, Stinson 1998, Kerr-Berry et. al. 2008, Anttila 2010, Barbour 2011, Morris 2012, Barr and Risner 2014, Barr 2015). In dance, critical feminist pedagogical approaches work to realize ‘just’ educational and socio-cultural outcomes (Risner 2008). Extending from this comprehensive aim these approaches have been discussed as generative of environments that empower communities (Barr 2013), encourage risk taking (Cheesman 2016), develop relatedness and democratic values (Morris 2012), and enhance an individual’s sense of self and their place in the world (Kahlich 2001, Dyer 2014, Leonard 2014).

Dance academia, then, has already staked a claim for pedagogical practices that progress beyond the reductive development of physical virtuosity as somehow separated from the person. This study further explores the ways that empowerment may

be enabled in the dance technique studio by considering the student experience of learning during the course of their program. The insights provided by the students' lived understanding of dance technique pedagogy opens up what it means for the studio to be a location of possibilities. The term "location of possibility" was coined by bell hooks (1994) to describe the potential of the classroom to enable emancipatory change (207). Through the experiences of participant undergraduate students and teacher/researcher reflexivity the complexities of learning dance technique are considered in this paper and framed by the theoretical lenses of transformation and care.

### **Transformation and Care**

The theoretical perspectives of engaged pedagogy (hooks 1994) and care ethics (Noddings 2013) provide a framework through which participant student data are organized. Learning in higher education is often articulated as a site of transformation. According to Stephen Brookfield (2003a), transformation is a shift in the student's world view and sense of self as a consequence of the re-examining of personal assumptions and value systems. This paradigmatic shift is achieved through critical reflective practices (Mezirow 1991). John Dirkx (1998) describes transformative learning as a way of being that emphasizes how the student encounters and engages with learning experiences. Teaching is approached with the intention to realize actualization of the student and their society. Coercive and constraining factors of education, such as authoritarian teaching, are actively resisted (Dirkx 1998, Danowitz and Tuitt 2011). Transformative learning is important in dance education because it centralizes the consideration of a dance student as a person who is able to actively contribute to learning through shared responsibility. Of particular significance in the

discourse of transformative learning has been the teaching and philosophical work of bell hooks (Brookfield 2003b). Her approach, 'engaged pedagogy,' privileges liberation and empowerment. hooks (1994) states that learning 'at its most powerful' (4) can liberate by creating a pedagogical environment that is resistant to principles of obedience and authority.

Respect and care are central to engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) as they establish relationships of trust in the learning situation. Care is an area of ethics theory that has developed through feminist perspectives that problematize the isolating impact of detachment in a patriarchal society. Carol Gilligan (1982) instigated this work by drawing attention to the omission of the female voice in research (Owen and Ennis 2005, Belenky et al. 2006, Engelmann 2009). The ethics of care, as a moral paradigm, has been realized in education most notably by Nel Noddings (2013, Johannesen 2000, McGregor 2004, Alexander 2013, Bozalek et al. 2014, Zembylas et al. 2014). Noddings considers the maintenance and enhancement of caring as the primary aim of every educational effort (Noddings 2013, 172). The pedagogical relationship in education is one of ethical care between the teacher (one-caring) and the student (cared-for). Noddings (2013) asserts that care ethics is "concerned with how, in general, we should meet and treat one another-with how to establish, maintain, and enhance caring relations" (xiv).

Transformative learning and care ethics have been examined in dance research in various ways. Most instructive of this study has been the consideration of transformative learning which: (a) weaves together critical, creative, and moral dimensions of pedagogy (Shapiro 1998), (b) uses the student's context as a starting

point of dance content (Marques 1998), (c) leads to changes in identity and ways of being in the world through a constructive process of shared learning (Dyer 2010), (d) is initially disconcerting (Barr and Risner 2014), and (e) involves an embodied seeing beyond what we already know (Østern and Øyen 2015). Care has similarly been discussed in dance research as (a) encouraging students to find and develop their own capacities (Stinson 1998), (b) enhancing meta-dance practice (Collen 2002), (c) feeling emotionally safe to take movement risks (Warburton 2004), (d) being able to deal with conflict and ambiguity (Dyer and Loytonen 2012), and (e) motivating and energizing extended learning (Enghauser 2012). Engaged pedagogy and care ethics, as theoretical constructions, will be given substance in this paper through the articulation of the participant students' voices and teacher/researcher reflexivity (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, Green 2015). In so doing, insights from particular experiences of the individual students enable a deeper understanding of the affordances of dance technique pedagogy.

This study contributes to pedagogical dance research in several ways. It is developed from a practitioner's viewpoint and therefore comes from the lived pedagogical act in the studio and focuses on the student perspectives. By bringing together ethical care and engaged pedagogy as mutually supporting theoretical frameworks, dance technique learning is explored with specificity to the training purposes of a UK conservatoire. As a longitudinal study, the data are reflective of multiple student-teacher experiences and therefore continues an ongoing critical dialogue and provokes thought about best practices in dance technique teaching.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

For this practitioner research, I conducted qualitative data gathering with a group of seven participant students at two distinct stages of their program. The initial data were gathered with the participants at the end of their first year of undergraduate study (level 4) in contemporary dance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. I had been their release-based contemporary dance technique teacher during the second half of the year. The students had considerable, but diverse, previous dance training and many aspired to be professional dancers. The participants were comprised of five females and two males, international and UK students in their late teens and early twenties. The pseudonym names I give these participants are Cathy, Sean, Jacob, Louise, Georgia, Zareen and Kayla.

Following ethical approval and advice from mentors I conducted two focus groups with these participant students. Participation in the research was undertaken on a voluntary basis. Informed consent was given by each participant at each stage of the process. While this small sample group is not representative of the complete group experiences (twenty-five students in total) the consequent reflective dialogue was rich and conducive to sharing individual experiences imbued with personal meaning and narrative features. I was interested in hearing from the students about their experiences of the roles of teacher and student and what was enabling them to learn in contemporary dance technique. The research was orientated so that it placed student perspectives at the center, as is consistent with critical feminist values with which I align my research perspective (Shapiro 1998, Barr 2009, Engelmann 2009, Albright 2011). Through this research process the importance of ‘relational ethics’ (Ellis 2007, Barbour 2011), which

requires the researcher to act in acknowledgement of the interpersonal bonds with participants and other stakeholders, has been privileged. In order to ensure 'process consent' (Ellis 2007, 23) every effort was made so that the participants felt that their involvement was not coerced, that it did not impact negatively on their experience of learning and that they were well represented through the ideas that were developed in this paper. They have also seen various drafts as the manuscript has progressed.

The second round of data gathering occurred towards the end of the participants' third and final year (level 6). I had not taught any of them in the intervening time since their first year. At this stage, I conducted focus groups and individual interviews as was convenient to their schedule. Through the semi-structured processes, the participants were encouraged to discuss their ongoing experiences of learning in contemporary dance technique. In the intervening time, between the two stages of data gathering, my learning journey continued, to some extent, parallel to and entwined with that of the participant students. During the research period, I commenced study as a PhD candidate after twenty years as a dance artist and teacher. I was involved with exploration of critical frameworks, refining research focus, and building confidence in navigating conflicting arguments in dance pedagogy consistent with PhD study (Lovitts 2005, Gardner 2008). Through the interpretative process of research, the teacher/researcher is acknowledged as imbued in the development of ideas presented in this study. I am situated as an 'additional subject' (Stinson 2016, 201) and my own biases and preferences are reflected here (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). However, in thinking through the issues raised by the participants and trying to get under the skin of their particular experiences I have attempted to open out my own appreciation of the phenomenon of dance technique pedagogy. I have chosen to quote the students directly

in the following discussion because I am persuaded that the participants' own words "expand our own language for thinking about what dance can be for those who do it" (Stinson 2016, 205).

Along with Sue Stinson (2016) I believe that meaning is ascribed to personal experiences in ways that are unique to each individual and culturally constructed. In order for me to interpret meaning in this project I needed to appreciate and value each participant's perception, insight, and understanding—as noted by Fiona Bannan (2004). This longitudinal study and phenomenological approach gave me the opportunity to reflect on the participants' perspectives and to observe emergent patterns over time (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 270). I have identified emergent themes through an abductive process that simultaneously utilized data interpretation and theoretical construction. Researcher reflexivity has been vital to the task of interpreting multiple layers of perception that "rests with the researcher's ability to see and show what is there, uncovering themes and clusters of ideas" (Bannan 2004, 33, Guillemin and Gillam 2004, Green 2015). The small case study results do not provide conclusive or quantifiable results; however, the qualitative data offers perspectives which stimulate important discussion and further inquiry.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The following discussion is organized through three core conceptions of engaged pedagogy: active participation in learning by the student, demonstration of the value teachers place in the student, and stimulating learning environments among peers. The

student voices particularly ‘speak to’ each of these conceptions allowing for the data to be intertwined with theory. The students’ stories reveal their experiences of transformation and care as they have encountered them in the learning cultures of the studio. Understanding of these pedagogical conceptions is afforded nuance through the confluences and variances of the students’ learning processes. Finally, the discussion reflects on the importance for the teacher to model vulnerability and self-care as integral to their demonstrable practice.

### **Active participation in learning by the students**

Active participation in learning by students is central to engaged pedagogy. As hooks states, teaching serves as a “catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning” (1994, 11). It is important to consider what is meant by this conception and how it might be encouraged in the dance technique studio. The participant students each had an understanding of the importance of contributing to the learning process. The complexity with which this is experienced is given greater nuance through the layering of their particular reflections. The following quotes are the participant student responses to considering the role of the learner in contemporary dance technique:

I feel it’s more like a partnership between the student and the teacher. Rather than a teacher saying things and the student regurgitating...The student needs to be an active participant in both giving to learning. You’re not just absorbing but outputting. (Louise, year 1)

Being kind of a selective sponge, I think it is important to be willing and receptive. If you're not, as a student, willing to take on board what the person in front of you is trying to get across to you then you might as well not be going. But equally accepting what doesn't work for you and what does to then filter it. (Zareen, year 1)

How can I apply? I know exactly what it is [the teacher's] trying to get across... I'm having to transfer the information, filter it, not change it but process it into something that I can understand quickly... It's all trial and error. (Cathy, year 3)

The reciprocal role of the student that involves responsibility beyond regurgitating teacher-led instructions appears to be well understood. While willingness as a learner is important, the notion of 'taking on board' by Zareen appears to lack assertiveness. The metaphor of sponge is troubling for me as a teacher when considering its passivity and the potential for over-saturation. She does suggest, however, that the role of the student is a two-fold process of absorbing and filtering information that works for the individual. Learning as absorption is also considered above as an explorative process involving 'trial and error.' Inquiry-oriented learning as it is commented on here recognizes the possibility of moving beyond the limited conception of learning in dance technique as being either right or wrong (Råman 2009).

Being actively engaged in learning is also discussed as involving making sense of dance technique for oneself through its application.

I've obviously got to the point where, even if I don't stylistically like the technique, I still really appreciate it for the information it gives me... So, you're finding, you're still taking all that information [the teacher's] giving you and you're applying it yourself in a way that makes sense for you. (Louise, year 3)

This comment reflects an understanding of active participation that involves appreciating the learning experience for what might be found on an individual basis. Participation in dance technique classes that are not the preferred style of this student is appreciated as learning through applying information and making sense of it for herself. Teaching that explicitly encourages such approaches facilitates an active appreciation by the student of what is available and the possibility to apply it in ways that are personally meaningful. It is important to remember, though, that students can be reluctant, at least initially to assume learner responsibility and the centralization of their active participation (hooks 1994, Dyer 2010, Barr and Risner 2014, Dryburgh and Jackson 2016). Active participation of students in learning, while intended to promote liberation, however, can be experienced as burdensome, irrelevant or obstructive. Criticism of this pedagogical approach recognizes that it may exclude some learners who are not able or willing to contribute in the way that is expected (Shor and Freire 1987).

As a dance technique teacher, I am concerned to foster a love of a curiosity about moving. My role is, in part, to ground the student's appreciation of the stylistic preferences and philosophical approach of release-based technique. It is however, more important to enable a way of engaging with movement ideas that will enhance the students' own personal ongoing interest and enjoyment of dancing. I want my students

to become less reliant on me to facilitate their engagement with technique and to develop increasingly active personal participation. To teach care-fully is to recognize that the journey towards this objective will be different for each student. The studio is inhabited by learners of diverse and changing readiness for assuming shared responsibility and therefore I, as teacher, must adapt, be responsive and respect this diversity.

In my teaching practice, I endeavor to build bodily-learning confidence among the students by asking them to reflect on what they are aware of while they are dancing, if they notice changes within their body, and how they might want to develop the details of their dancing. This reflective work is intended to prevent understanding from evaporating and needs time in the studio to be realized. By bringing attention to particularity of bodily experience the learners are supported to recognize their ability to feed-forward their own process. It is important that I refrain from leading at these moments by making statements that might inhibit the students from examining their own embodied ways of coming-to-know. Instead I can encourage the students to make connections for themselves between what they are noticing as they are moving and what they have heard myself and others say about the movement and thereby generate further curiosity.

### **Demonstration of the value teachers place in the student**

Teachers need to demonstrate the value they place in the student on a continual basis (hooks 1994, Owen and Ennis 2005). Edward Warburton (2004) emphasizes being

responsive to learners' needs in order to create a safe environment in which the "dancers feel physically prepared to attempt difficult movements and emotionally safe to take intellectual and creative risks" (93). In care ethics, emotionally engaged relationships are 'built on trust' (McGregor 2004, 100). It is imperative that trust is established so that the student is able to access learning by feeling valued (Barr 2009). In order to illustrate this conception of care in the dance studio I will focus on two particularly different experiences of learning that Zareen shared. These experiences generated significantly different perceptions of the value placed in her by two different teachers.

I wasn't very good at attendance at the beginning of that year and so pre-decisions were made about what sort of person I am... It was such a fast-paced class that you felt bad to say "Wait a sec. What is it that they're doing that I'm not?" Just because of the way she runs the class it felt as if you were ruining it... I assumed that if I wasn't the most incorrect or the best then I was probably OK... There were people whom she had selected to be involved in a project that became a clan. She had already not picked me. (Zareen, year 3)

Zareen felt excluded from learning through this experience in several ways. She experienced prejudice, rejection, feeling like an outsider and feeling unable to ask questions. Consequently, Zareen was not able to build an understanding of or evaluate her progress. She later stated, though, that she was still able to learn and improved 'massively.' However, this appears to be in spite of her experience of the learning context rather than because of it. It is important to differentiate this experience from that of Louise (described earlier). Louise was able to find ways to learn although the technique style did not suit her. Zareen, despite finding ways to learn, had experienced

a lack of ethical care. This account, among others discussed by the participant students, raises concerns for me as a teacher about how to prevent exclusion from learning. I am left wondering what demonstrations of value might have been extended to influence change in these negative experiences. Similarly, how might it be possible to enable students, like Zareen to assume respect from their teachers?

The second illustrative experience of Zareen does not immediately appear to be consistent with an ethics of care. However, it illustrates how context dependent and emotionally responsive understanding of the demonstration of care can be in dance technique pedagogy.

[The teacher] would have a go at you, be a bit harsh... her saying “you could do it better” was enough for me to say Ok it’s not like you’re doing it wrong. It was like she was thinking about me as a person... It was about my dancing rather than having a go at me... She took me aside at the end of the class... She had seen that it affected me and dealt with it... It was about her investing.

I have immediate concerns about the teacher’s behavior, described as a ‘bit harsh.’ However, Zareen identifies the constructive aspect of the teacher’s intentions by differentiating her ‘investing’ from that of ‘having a go at her.’ The teacher’s actions are understood in the context of giving constructive criticism. The teacher demonstrated this by taking time to discuss the incident personally with the student outside of class. In this particular situation, the teacher was felt to be attentive to the needs of the student (Engelmann 2009). As Zareen’s experiences reveal, care can be demonstrated by the teacher while also being exacting about expectations of the learner (Cheesman 2016).

Pedagogical relationships require profound respect and care. The aim of our pedagogical efforts as teachers is to enable “the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks 1994, 13). How this is expressed and what it looks like is less important, perhaps, than how it feels and how it is experienced by those involved. Teachers need to receive the student with openness as “each choice tends to maintain, enhance, or diminish us as ones-caring” (Noddings 2013, 175). In care ethics, the one-caring teacher “starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other” (176). Warburton (2004) describes this inclination to care as “a readiness to engage” (91) and this is understood on an emotional level as the following participant comment accounts:

When a teacher doesn't seem that bothered then the students withdraw too because you don't want to give as much. When a teacher really like is there and you can see they are present with you then that has a different effect on the students. (Kayla, year 3)

Being ‘bothered’ and ‘present’ as a teacher is sensed by the student and consequently impacts how they feel about learning. It is essential that at some level the teacher is able to communicate their genuine interest in their involvement in the pedagogical act. Importantly, though, Stinson (1998) states “that the concept of caring can be easily sentimentalized and can provide an excuse for making students overly dependent and denying them the opportunity to set and meet challenges” (34). She cautions against the possibility of inhibiting the students’ potential independence in realizing greater objectives through caring in ways that are restrictive. As teachers, then, being attentive

to the student requires deliberate care that is balanced by generating excitement to actively pursue challenges in the studio.

In my teaching practice, I make explicit to the students that what we are doing together is important to me and I make sure that I reinforce this in the way that I behave. I ensure that I am able to be responsive to each student by listening to their concerns and interests. I rely on my intuitive sense of where the group is 'at' to guide the pacing of the session. I believe that the most important ways in which I am able to demonstrate care is in the way I make myself approachable to the student. I want students to feel able to come directly to me with concerns, not in an overly nurturing way, but as adults who respect each other. This is manifest in myriad small ways, for example how I face the individual with whom I am talking, how I ask for permission to demonstrate movement with a student, how I encourage students to reflect on how they feel while they are dancing, and how I sometimes require them to find their own answers to the questions they raise.

### **Stimulating learning environment among peers**

The classroom should be exciting (hooks 1994, 7). How excitement is generated, sustained and developed through time in the dance technique class was discussed by the students in various ways. They each spoke about how impactful the energy of the teacher can be in generating excitement in the classroom.

When you can see that a teacher is passionate about what they want to do and they enjoy what they do it makes you want to find it as well. (Cathy, year 3)

[The teacher] is really passionate about what she does and so I became really passionate about what she does. (Jacob, year 3)

I think that having teachers that you can see that they put in effort or energy in the group then the group wants to match that. (Kayla, year 3)

These comments suggest that the students had been stimulated to engage with learning in a very direct response to the energy and passion of the teacher. It is clear that teacher passion can be a compelling invitation to learn, especially with regard to the effort required in dance techniques. At the same time, though, I question to what extent this might reinforce a reliance on teacher activity rather than enabling student autonomy. Jacob (year, 3) develops the idea of being stimulated to engage in learning with the following statement about shared responsibility.

It's not the teacher's sole responsibility to motivate everyone. Every being in that room motivates the room. So why should the teacher be the sole person to then have the responsibility for it? It's everyone's responsibility... The teacher can set sparks off. But it's not the teacher's responsibility to be a spark always.

Here Jacob is emphasizing the shared responsibility for motivation of learning that hooks terms "collective effort" (hooks 1994, 8). The learning environment should facilitate "an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes" (8). The ignition of learning is not the privilege or burden of the dance teacher alone. In dance technique classes, usually taught in relatively small groups, students might also stimulate learning for themselves and among their peers

(Stinson 1998, Råman 2009, Dyer 2014). The role that peers played in the experience of learning was very significant for the participants of this study. The ways in which learning with each other had impacted and influenced them, though, was varied. The participant dance students had, largely, consistently learned alongside each other in dance technique throughout the three years resulting in very significant relationships being formed. From a student's perspective, these relationships may be more significant and have considerably more influence on their learning experiences than a teacher.

We know each other's habits pretty well because we are literally in class with each other all the time... It's important to value and acknowledge that knowledge we have of each other. (Georgie, year 1)

I always feel that when you see your friends do really well that really motivates you so much... When you go back to technique class and you see how well your class have developed I feel that always brings you back to the reason why you're here and watching people. Yeah, peers do inspire you quite a lot, I think. (Sean year, 3)

By knowing their peers well, the students were able to recognize each other's learning achievements and this had a motivating impact on work in the studio. hooks (1994) states that "as a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (8). Being attentive to each other acknowledges the importance of the contribution of peers in the collective transformative learning experience. Teaching based on care "is centered in relationship, community, and complete, engaged

forms of recognition. It is when this connective engagement occurs that there is the possibility of transforming personal and collective thinking” (McGregor 2004, 101, Morris 2012, Barr 2013). Relying on each other in a dance technique class, then, can support the students’ recognition of meaning beyond the dance content. Becky Dyer (2010) states that “transformative learning is a process of changing one’s identity and ways of seeing and being in the world, and thus transformative learning communities engage in collective processes of changing the worlds in which we live” (128).

In my teaching practice, I encourage group discussion, reflection and active observation to promote positive peer relationships. I find this is particularly helpful following exploration of a movement exercise or sequence as it diverts the expectation that I, the teacher, will make some sort of ultimate judgement about what has been done. By facilitating the sharing of ideas, the group is able to utilize each other’s understanding and appreciate diverse responses among peers. This collaborative process model’s ways in which different perspectives can enhance learning by expanding an individual’s considerations.

The impact of intense peer relationships is not necessarily always positive. Detrimental experiences of learning among fellow learners in the dance technique studio context are discussed in the following comment:

I think that your peers can be very inspiring too but depending on who they are and what place they’re in. It can also be to your detriment if there’s bad energy. Where the responsibility lies on how to shape that, not that everybody needs to be happy and best friends, not that at all. But how to approach that or when you

are faced with it especially for a long period of time. I don't know. That's always a sticky place. (Georgia, year 3)

This highlights that not all peer relations generate excitement and it prompts challenging questions around how positive group dynamics may be supported. Georgia asks, importantly, where the responsibility lies for shaping this group environment and how to approach it. Dyer and Teija Löytönen (2012) discuss care ethics through collaborative inquiry in dance as being “about how to deal with conflict, disagreement and ambivalence rather than attempting to eliminate it” (139). Dissonance has value in that it can facilitate “making sense of the professional practice” (Dyer and Löytönen 2012, 139). Experiences of dissonance can be uncomfortable and are not always immediately conducive to maintaining a learning environment that facilitates feeling safe and taking risks (Anttila 2010, Leonard 2014). Georgia's solution to the experience of learning among people from whom she experienced ‘bad energy’ was to self-exclude and not come to class.

It is important that students do not become isolated in resolving troubling scenarios. There is a balance to be sensitively managed in supporting positive encounters with dissonance. Nurturing environments that build each learner's confidence to assert their individuality are dependent upon developing trust and collaboration among the group. The establishing of such environments, says Catherine McGregor (2004), is not a question of “how can we as the adult educator engage in pedagogical practices that create conditions for dialogue and shared understandings but rather how we can create a collaborative culture that will permit personal and collective critical engagement” (102). Critical engagement is not dependent on the teacher instigating a correct strategy

of activities but relies on establishing an enabling environment by ‘decentering’ the teacher (Engelmann 2009, 68).

As a teacher, I feel that the more I can do to diminish the significance of my role the better. For this reason, I will often ask the students before a movement exercise or sequence what they think is important to focus on rather than tell them what I want them to be doing. 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. One way to go about doing this is to present movement activities as a basis from which the students might expand bodily understanding by asking their own questions about what they are doing.

### **Modelling vulnerability and self-care by the teacher**

Having considered the complexity of students’ experiences of learning I turn now to consider a final implication of engaged pedagogy for the teacher. hooks (1994) asserts that teachers may only be effective in enabling transformation with students by being involved in an ongoing process of their own self-actualization. In doing so the teacher “will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply” (22). The focus of engaged pedagogy shifts from being concerned only with what the students are experiencing (Dyer 2014). Michalinos Zembylas and colleagues (2014) highlight the importance for the teacher of caring for their own well-being and how this can easily be undermined by focusing on the role of ‘one-caring’ teacher. The teacher is obligated to evaluate his/her emotional responses in the caring encounter (Warburton 2004,

Enghauser 2012). Through the ensuing understanding the teacher will gain insight “to clarify the learner's intentions and guide our responses” (Warburton 2004, 91).

The teacher should similarly allow themselves to be recognized as vulnerable and not-all-knowing (Engelmann 2009). According to Mary Belenky et al. (2006) the teacher should “do all they can to avoid the appearance of omniscience” (126) because students “need models of thinking as a human, imperfect, and attainable activity” (127). Such openness by the teacher about their fallibility requires a practice that demonstrates the possibility to learn through taking risks by relinquishing power and relishing uncertainty. Transformation, then, “cannot happen if (teachers) refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (hooks 1994, 21). It is this transformative process, modelled through teacher vulnerability, that can be shared with students. McGregor (2004) states that “our goal becomes not to transform the other but to transform ourselves and then share this transformational process with others” (102). As a teacher, I am encouraged by this to have greater confidence in being explicit with my students about my own not-yet-knowing. I recognize that by not disguising my own vulnerability in the act of teaching I might increasingly cultivate a climate of trust in the dance studio. Through acknowledging the importance of my own well-being in my teaching practice I will be able to respond to the student’s needs with greater clarity and effectiveness.

In my teaching practice, I have become increasingly less concerned with needing to prove my expertise to the students. By allowing my own fallibility to be present and unhidden in the studio I can encourage the students to trust being unsure. There are numerous times while teaching that I might forget how movements connect in a

combination, or when I demonstrate movements poorly, or change my mind about something we did last session, or I don't have a clear sense of where to take the group next. At these times, I am open about my not-knowing and ask the students for guidance. Rather than seeing these moments as failings I appreciate them as part of being human with other humans and potential moments for us all to learn. Through such moments I allow the students to demonstrate their care for me.

## **CONCLUSION**

The experience of learning dance technique has been explored through the reflections and narratives of participant undergraduate students in a UK conservatoire setting. The dance studio has consequently been considered as a location of possibilities for transformation and care. Active participation in learning by the student, demonstration of the value teachers place in the student, and stimulating learning environments among peers have each been discussed in terms of the nuance of experiences for individuals. In reflecting on my initial interest for this study with respect to the 'how' of dance technique pedagogy, it is clear that the quality of the student's relationships with the teacher and his/her peers is vital. Teaching that aspires to enable emancipatory experiences of learning must harness the possibilities afforded by learning with each other through attentive caring. The student must be able to feel that the teacher is invested in the learning process. It may then become possible through the reciprocal contributions to-and sparks within-the learning culture to take risks, delight in each other's successes, and navigate difficulties.

In my teaching practice, I increasingly privilege the development of relationships in the studio. Informal dialogue is vital in terms of learning from each other about what we are involved in doing together. Diversity of experiences and perspectives inform, reinforce and challenge movement understanding. Peer relationships are enhanced through diverse activities that enable both verbal and embodied interaction, the intention of which is to stimulate empathic ways of being with each other through movement. My involvement as a teacher is instrumental to the group's learning and while I believe it is important that the students do not become reliant upon me to motivate their effort, I appreciate that my connection to the work is vital. I feed my own movement curiosity in the pedagogical act by drawing from what the students bring to the session and what we make happen between us. In ensuring that each student knows that their individual learning is important to me, emphasis is placed on the possibilities they each have to contribute and shape the learning process. I think about the dance session I may have prepared as an invitation to involvement that opens up possible ways forward. By paying deliberate and care-full attention to the responses of the group, I am able to adapt intuitively. One of my greatest pleasures in being a teacher is witnessing the change and growth of a student in ways that they might not have anticipated. My pedagogical focus as a teacher of dance technique is to enable learning environments that foster such student transformations.

## **REFERENCES**

- Anttila, E. 2010. Dialogical pedagogy, embodied knowledge, and meaningful learning. In *Dance in a world of change: Reflections on globalization and cultural difference*, ed. S. Shapiro, 159–179. Leeds: Human Kinetics.
- Albright, A. C. 2011. Situated dancing: Notes from three decades in contact with phenomenology. *Dance Research Journal* 43(2):7–18.
- Alexander, H. 2013. Caring and agency: Noddings on happiness in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45(5):488–493.
- Bales, M., and R. Nettle-Fiol, eds. 2008. *The body eclectic: Evolving practices in dance training*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Bannon, F. 2004. Towards creative practice in research in dance education. *Research in Dance Education* 5(1):25–43.
- Barbour, K. 2011. *Dancing across the page: Narrative and embodied ways of knowing*. Bristol, UK: Intellect.
- Barr, S. 2009. Examining the technique class: Re-examining feedback. *Research in Dance Education* 10(1):33–45.
- . 2013. Learning to learn: A hidden dimension within community dance practice. *Journal of Dance Education* 13(4):115–121.
- . 2015. Collaborative practices in dance research: Unpacking the process. *Research in Dance Education* 16(1):51–66.
- Barr, S., and D. Risner. 2014. Weaving social foundations through dance pedagogy: A pedagogy of uncovering. *Journal of Dance Education* 14(4):136–145.
- Belenky, M. F., B. M. Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger, and J. M. Tarule. 2006. Connected teaching. In *The institution of education*, eds. H. S. Shapiro, K. Latham, and S. N. Ross, fifth edition, 125–135. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.

- Bozalek, V., W. McMillan, D. E. Marshall, M. November, A. Daniels, and T. Sylvester. 2014. Analysing the professional development of teaching and learning from a political ethics of care perspective. *Teaching in Higher Education* 19(5):447–458.
- Brookfield, S. 2003a. Putting the critical back into critical pedagogy: A commentary on the path of dissent. *Journal of Transformative Education* 1(2):141–149.
- . 2003b. The praxis of transformative education: African American feminist conceptualizations. *Journal of Transformative Education* 1(3):212–226.
- Cheesman, S. 2016. Empowerment through risk. *Journal of Dance Education* 16(1):12–19.
- Collen, R. L. 2002. *Handle with care: A pedagogical theory of touch in teaching dance technique based on four case studies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman's University.
- Danowitz, M. A., and F. Tuitt. 2011. Enacting inclusivity through engaged pedagogy: A higher education perspective. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 44(1):40–56.
- Dirkx, J. M. 1998. Transformative learning theory in the practice of adult education: An overview. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning* 7:1–14.
- Dryburgh, J., and L. H. Jackson. 2016. Building a practice of learning together: Expanding the functions of feedback with the use of the flipchart in contemporary dance technique. *Research in Dance Education* 17(2): 130-144.
- Dyer, B. 2010. The perils, privileges and pleasures of seeking right from wrong: Reflecting upon student perspectives of social processes, value systems, agency and the becoming of identity in the dance technique classroom. *Research in Dance Education* 11(2):109–129.
- . 2014. Exploring social and moral learning frameworks through collaborative inquiry. *Journal of Dance Education* 14(2):45–51.

- Dyer, B., and T. Löytönen. 2012. Engaging dialogue: Co-creating communities of collaborative inquiry. *Research in Dance Education* 13(1):121–147.
- Ellis, C. 2007. Telling stories, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13(1):3–29.
- Engelmann, D. 2009. Another look at a feminist ethics of teaching. *Atlantis* 33(2):62–71.
- Enghauser, R.G. 2012. Tracing lines of meaning: A course redesign for dance pedagogy. *Journal of Dance Education* 12(2):54–61.
- Freire, P. 1993. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, UK: Penguin.
- Gardner, S. K. 2008. “What’s too much and what’s too little?”: The process of becoming an independent researcher in doctoral education. *The Journal of Higher Education* 79(3):326–350.
- Gilligan, C. 1982. *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women’s moral development*. Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.
- Green, J. 2015. Somatic sensitivity and reflexivity as validity tools in qualitative research. *Research in Dance Education* 16(1):67–79.
- Guillemin, M., and L. Gillam. 2004. Ethics, reflexivity, and “ethically important moments” in research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10(2):261–280.
- hooks, b. 1994. *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Johannesen, R. L. 2000. Nel Noddings’s uses of Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue. *Southern Communication Journal* 65(2–3):151–160.
- Kahlich L. C. 2001. Dance education and democracy. *Journal of Dance Education* 1(3):93–95.
- Kerr-Berry, J., K. Clemente, and D. Risner. 2008. The politics of personal pedagogy: Examining teacher identities. *Journal of Dance Education* 8(3):94–101.

- Leonard A. E. 2014. Democratic bodies: Exemplary practice and democratic education in a K–5 dance residency. *Journal of Dance Education* 14(1):1–7.
- Lovitts B. E. 2005. Being a good course-taker is not enough: A theoretical perspective on the transition to independent research. *Studies in Higher Education* 30(2):137–154.
- Marquez, I. 1998 Dance education in/and the postmodern. In *Dance, power, and difference: Critical and feminist perspectives on dance education*, ed. S. Shapiro, 171–185. Leeds, UK: Human Kinetics.
- Mezirow, J. 1991. *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- McGregor, C. 2004. Care(full) deliberation: A pedagogy for citizenship. *Journal of Transformative Education* 2(2):90–106.
- Morris, A. 2012. Seeking new ways of living community in the classroom and the world: An action research study. *Research in Dance Education* 13(2):235–251.
- Noddings, N. 2013. *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Second edition. London, UK: University of California Press.
- Owen, L. M., and C. D. Ennis. 2005. The ethic of care in teaching: An overview of supportive literature. *Quest* 57(4):392–425.
- Østern, T. P., and E. Øyen. 2015. Moving through change. *Choreographic Practices* 6(1):125–144.
- Råman, T. 2009. Collaborative learning in the dance technique class. *Research in Dance Education* 10(1):75–87.
- Risner, D. 2008. The politics of gender in dance pedagogy. *Journal of Dance Education* 8(3):94–97.
- Savin-Baden, M., and C. Howell Major. 2013. *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Schupp, K. 2010. Bridging the gap: Helping students from competitive dance training backgrounds become successful dance majors. *Journal of Dance Education* 10(1):25-28.
- Shapiro, S. B. 1998. Toward transformative teachers: Critical and feminist perspectives in dance education. In *Dance, power, and difference: Critical and feminist perspectives on dance education*, ed. S. Shapiro, 7–22. Leeds, UK: Human Kinetics.
- Shor, I., and P. Freire. 1987. *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. London: Bergin and Garvey Publishers.
- Stinson, S. W. 1998. Seeking a feminist pedagogy for children's dance. In *Dance, power, and difference: Critical and feminist perspectives on dance education*, ed. S. Shapiro, 23–47. Leeds, UK: Human Kinetics.
- Stinson, S.W. 2016. *Embodied curriculum theory and research in arts education: A dance scholar's search for meaning*. Aargau, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Warburton, E. C. 2004. Who cares? Teaching and learning care in dance. *Journal of Dance Education* 4(3):88–96.
- Zembylas, M., V. Bozalek, and T. Shefer. 2014. Tronto's notion of privileged irresponsibility and the reconceptualization of care: Implications for critical pedagogies of emotion in higher education. *Gender and Education* 26(3):200–214.