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The Danger of Unqualified Dance Instruction in Private Studios and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

While dance classes have become a popular activity for children in the United States, most people are unaware as to what constitutes “quality” dance instruction. This idea has been addressed at a collegiate level yet the lack of standards for dance instruction at the studio level has been overlooked. This research draws attention to this issue and the need for a potential solution to the problem. The project strives to answer these questions: Is there a trend between the lack of standards for dance education and the prevalence of injuries in young dancers? If so, is there a way to address this and establish a detailed set of qualifications that instructors need to meet in order to teach dance? The hypothesis proposes that poor instruction leads to an increase in injuries in young dance students. Furthermore, ineffective instruction is a disservice to students hoping to seek careers in professional dance.

Keywords: dance, education, standards, injuries

To the vast majority of Americans, Western dance techniques such as ballet are seen as fun and active hobbies for children. However, what most people do not realize is that dance can be very dangerous if not taught properly. Unqualified teachers put students at great risk for injury. Because dance teachers do not have to meet any specific qualifications in order to hold a position, this ongoing problem in the dance world is relatively unnoticed (Brown). This is a pressing issue, because the injuries that can occur when a dancer attempts steps without the proper technique and education can be severe and hinder or even end careers in dance.

This project is focused on producing primary research in order to draw attention to the issue of unqualified dance instruction within private dance studios. In addition to a review of existing secondary literature, this

project draws upon participant observation and targeted data collection through interviews. As a first-hand consumer of the dance studio industry for over fifteen years, I received poor training at the foundation of my dance career. Like other children, my mother enrolled me in ballet lessons at a young age. At the time, she did not know that this activity would end up being what I wanted to pursue as my career. She never took into consideration the quality of the instruction or the credentials of the teachers. Because of this lack of information surrounding dance education, I received questionable training until I graduated high school, and I was not aware of it until I came to college to study dance. I was lucky to be accepted to the Kennesaw State University Department of Dance in spite of my lack of proper training. Kennesaw State University’s Bachelor of Arts in Dance program is an exemplary illustration of a qualified dance

education program, offering a well-rounded selection of classes. Only the highest caliber of teachers are selected, based on their qualifications via a national search, in order to teach classes in ballet, modern, jazz, musical theater, tap, African dance, pas de deux, dance history, dance pedagogy, kinesiology, analysis and criticism of dance, dance performance, dance production and more. Time in this program highlighted that the previous dance studio education I received was inadequate. Although the studio I attended advertised “pre-professional” ballet training, I was in no way prepared to enter the professional dance world. Gaps in my training continue to haunt me, limiting my ability and career opportunities. Poor training early on caused me to develop bad habits both physically and mentally. I personally experienced injuries and feel that I constantly have to “catch up” for my lack of foundational knowledge which is very frustrating and discouraging as a student.

There is a plethora of scholarly research on dance education as well as dance injuries; however, none of it attempts to connect the two. Some articles imply the association, but only as an afterthought, never investigating a strong connection between injuries sustained by students and the training they are receiving. For example, in 2013 the *Journal of Physical Activity & Health* published an article entitled “Dance-Related Injuries in Children and Adolescents Treated in US Emergency Departments in 1991-2007.” The article is an in-depth study on trends and causes of dance injuries; however, quality of instruction is not mentioned until the conclusion. In the concluding paragraph the author writes, “Injury prevention strategies may include educating the dancer and instructor on the importance of hydration, stretching, proper warm up and technique, and adequate rest and recovery,” but the link between injury

and instruction is not developed any further (Roberts 149). Additionally, while there is a considerable amount of research on dance education, most of it evaluates dance in college settings or K-12 public schools. Published research analyzing the practices of private dance studios is minimal. In her thesis, Temple University graduate student Erica Henn wrote, “The majority of current research focuses on professional dancers or pre-professional dancers in a conservatory training context. The research typically overlooks dancers in a university setting who pursue baccalaureate-level dance programs” (Henn 1). This author points out the lack of research at the university level, yet does not allude to the deficiency of data on dance in private studio settings. Seeing a need to draw attention to this area of research, I decided to conduct an original study of dance studios in the greater Atlanta/Metro-Atlanta area. The original purpose of this investigation was to try to establish a trend between the qualifications of dance instructors and the rate of injuries occurring among students at the respective institutions.

The initial design of this project involved contacting approximately ten local dance studios of different varieties and interviewing their directors or owners regarding their hiring process and the standards that they hold for their business. Injuries occurring at each of the studios would be tracked via weekly check-ins over the course of eight weeks. In theory, teachers would report all injuries and answer a list of questions concerning the nature of each injury and details of each student involved. (See Appendix A for an example tracking sheet created for this project.)

Ultimately, this version of the project was not successful because of the lack of private studios willing to participate in the study. In January of this year, I contacted

fifteen local dance studios requesting their participation. I presented it in a neutral and nonbiased manner, being careful not to make possible participants feel threatened by the nature of my hypothesis. However, my multiple attempts to contact studios for research were either blatantly ignored or firmly denied. Studio directors were especially deterred by the idea of participating in weekly check-ins for injuries, explaining that this was not feasible for their current organizational system. Directors felt that it would be too much to ask of all of their teachers to do such weekly reports, as there was no existing system for this.

After making several attempts to contact local studios, I realized that it would not be possible to accomplish my original goal or collect enough data to establish a reportable trend. Thus, I had to adapt my concept, adjust the scope of my research, and use my personal connections in the field to collect the qualitative data that I needed. The fact that most studio directors were not even willing to speak to me raises an important issue. Refusal by the directors to participate in this study suggests a lack of confidence in speaking about the integrity of their programs.

Unable to carry out my original research plan, I adapted my process and was able to interview three studio directors as well as one of their employees. No sweeping conclusions can be drawn from this small pool of information, but I did collect valuable and pertinent qualitative data from the interviews I conducted that reinforces the literature supporting my thesis. All of my interviews will remain anonymous to protect the privacy and integrity of the dance studios. The studios are located in the Southeast region of the United States near Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. This study was reviewed and approved by the

Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). For consistency, I conducted each interview exactly the same way and followed the same set of questions. The lists of questions can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C.

According to the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), the concept of dance education “quality” merits recognition because it impacts a large and growing group of people. Dance is continuing to become increasingly popular in America. There is a longstanding tendency to place young children, especially girls, into dance classes. According to the NDEO, about 43% of children in the United States receive some form of dance training at some point in their lives (“Statistics”). This growth is also evident in the increasing number of dance studios across the country. There are approximately 32,000 dance studios in America (“Statistics”). Parents place their children in ballet or creative movement lessons when they are as young as eighteen months old.

Teaching dance classes for young children (age four and younger) is not afforded the care and attention it deserves. In dance studios, the job of teaching so-called “baby ballet” class is habitually passed off to the teachers with the least amount of knowledge and experience. When dealing with children so young, this job is usually not seen as dance training, but rather as babysitting. A Royal Academy of Dance accredited teacher who asked to remain anonymous told Judith Burns, an education reporter for the BBC News, that these teachers require “absolutely no qualifications or dance experience.” Ultimately anyone could decide that they want to teach dance, and there are no standards or requirements prohibiting inexperienced teachers from teaching in private dance studios. Burns cites

Luke Ritter, the chief executive of the Royal Academy of Dance, who told *Times Magazine*, “Anybody could put up a notice on their front door announcing a school of dance. You could run a successful business without anybody knowing that you have absolutely no training or qualifications” (Burns). This article is from BBC News; however, it speaks to a broader context outside the UK. The Royal Academy of Dance is a UK-based examination board that specializes in classical ballet. They serve as one of the most significant dance education organizations in the world. Speaking about the United States in 2011, Gretchen McLaine wrote in her doctoral dissertation:

Millions of children receive the majority, if not all, of their dance education in private studios. This \$500 million-dollar industry has no certification or licensure standards and is dominated by dance teachers who have little if any formal pedagogical training. Because the number of both students and dance teachers is increasing and impacting a more diverse audience than ever before, it is essential to understand the contributions and limitations of the private dance studio system (McLaine 8).

There are many positive effects and health benefits of dance education for children. However, parents today often blindly sign their children up for classes without having any knowledge of dance, the quality of the studio they are sending them to, or the employee that serves as the instructor. This lack of awareness is most evident when the children are young. This is standard social practice in American society, and few parents think of the danger they could be placing their child in by sending them to low quality dance classes.

When conducting interviews with studio directors, individuals were first asked to define the kind of studio they oversee (i.e. focused on ballet, contemporary, tap, jazz, competitive dance) and whether they identified their studios as recreational or pre-professional sources of training. The answers were rather uncertain and ambiguous, but surprisingly similar. Respondents said that they were technique-based, but none of them could identify one particular genre that they focused on. Asked whether they considered their studios to be “recreational” or “pre-professional,” each director reported that they felt the answer was a little of both. They all identified a two-track system that consists of an open-studio or recreational division and a company or competition track. They were all significantly eager to talk about their “more serious” training track, but none of them spoke about the accolades of their open-studio program or lower-level classes, suggesting that these programs often get pushed aside and denied necessary time and attention. Most likely, these classes are taught by the more unqualified teachers. There was a definite bias as to which classes were given the most attention and resources, with young children given the least priority.

I inquired about each studio’s hiring process, asking what the lowest level of education was that they would accept, how much professional experience they expect applicants to have in the dance world, and whether they require past teaching experience. All of the directors said that while they prefer to hire teachers with degrees in dance, the lack of a degree would not stop them from hiring an applicant if they had “acceptable experience” in the field. For example, the owner of Studio A explained that she does not have any broad standards for hiring teachers. Rather, she evaluates each applicant on an individual basis. When I asked further questions about what exactly

she looks for on an individual's resume, she told me that she wants to see that the applicant had either received a degree in dance, is working on it currently, or has professional experience, and she prefers that they have prior teaching experience but did not specify how many years of said experience she looks for. Furthermore, she does not hold as high of a standard for open studio teachers or instructors of younger children (Director of Studio A). The interview inspired me to conduct a case study of an instructor who currently teaches at Studio A. An interview with the teacher revealed that the shaky and ambiguous standards claimed by the owner of the studio were not actually upheld. When this teacher was hired in 2014 at the age of eighteen, she had never taught a dance class. She was pursuing a business degree from Chattahoochee Technical College. When I asked her about her dance training and professional experience prior to teaching at this studio, her honest response revealed more than I expected:

I had trained at my home studio for thirteen years, but it was a very small, local studio where I never had consistent or serious training. I was naturally able to do most of the steps my teachers gave me so they saw me as being top of my class, but honestly I received very poor technical training. I was never pushed to my full potential, and just because I was physically able to do the steps didn't mean that I was doing them correctly. (Instructor of Studio A).

Her story not only shows that she was unqualified, hired immediately out of high school, but also serves as an example of a student who feels that she was a victim of improper training that held her back from reaching her full potential as a dancer. When

I asked if she felt that she was ready to teach, she said that looking back she was absolutely not qualified to teach children and was surprised that she was ever hired in the first place. She had begun teaching 5-7 year olds with only one week of mentorship as preparation before she was left to teach classes on her own. She also reported that she had no prior knowledge of kinesiology, anatomy, or injury prevention. She was also not informed about how fragile very young children's bodies are (Instructor of Studio A).

Typically, it is not until later in a child's dance education that the quality of their teacher and training is taken into consideration. When students become more serious and express a desire to pursue dance as a career, only then do parents begin to think about the quality of the child's training. However, putting young children into the hands of unqualified teachers has proven to be dangerous. In her BBC article, Burns quotes Royal Academy of Dance Director Ritter's assertion that the qualifications for teachers of the youngest age group of dancers are "perhaps more important than at any other stage, because at that point their bones are completely unformed.... They are unset and they are very, very flexible. Danger is apparent at that point" (Burns). At this stage, although dance may appear as merely recreation, young children are susceptible to injury. This age group needs to be handled with particular care, yet unfortunately it appears to be taught by the largest number of unqualified teachers. If complex concepts such as external rotation are introduced at such a young age, but not taught properly, children are not likely to use their muscles correctly which can impose lasting damage on their bodies.

Improper ballet training is not only dangerous, but it also does a disservice to the students. While most ballet technique is

developed later in a student's life, there are some fundamentals that even the youngest ballet students should learn from their teachers. The teacher from the Royal Ballet who chose not to be named in Burns' article said

I have many young children coming to my school who are three or four years old, who have had baby ballet training from eighteen months and simply cannot apply any ballet movement. The children cannot stretch or flex their feet or simply skip. These children have bad posture and no technique. (Burns).

While it is possible for these bad habits to be corrected later, there is no reason that a child should have to receive incorrect training from the start. Even though many children will not continue their training in dance, some do, and a strong foundation from the very first day is valuable. If parents are going to take the time to put their children in dance lessons, it should not be acceptable for improper training to be offered.

I asked the directors if their studios followed a specific curriculum or an existing syllabus. For example, some studios follow reputable syllabi from authoritative programs such as the Royal Ballet or American Ballet Theatre. Once again all three directors gave strikingly similar answers. None of them followed an existing curriculum. Rather, they all claimed to have developed original syllabi, in collaboration with their employees, that they expect their teachers to follow. The degree of freedom that they allowed their teachers to have in following the syllabus varied from one director to the next. While it was positive to hear that they all at least tried to establish some sort of standard for their teachers, the quality of these syllabi is still in question. These

directors are not being held to any standard and are not necessarily well-equipped to establish their own curriculum. And while all said that they had a curriculum, how strictly the syllabus was followed varied. The director of Studio C noted that when she started the program she created specific learning goals and lesson plans, but she has seen them diluted over time. When she watches her employees teaching classes now, the syllabus is no longer followed, and while she is not always happy with the quality of education being administered in her facility, she is too busy to change it (Director of Studio C).

Next, I asked if each studio had a mission statement, and inquired about key values that they felt were most important to convey to their students. Interestingly none of them could accurately articulate their mission statements, raising questions concerning the amount of pride each of these directors had in their missions, and potentially the overall level of professionalism in the larger dance world. Not only could they not recite their respective mission statements verbatim, they could not even broadly summarize them. Instead they each encouraged me to look at their websites. If the directors truly valued their mission statements, one would think that they would be able to speak intelligently about them whenever asked.

When asked about key values that were most important to convey, the director of Studio A responded that her main goal was to create not only good dancers, but well-rounded people. She said that she hopes her students are not only successful in their dance classes, but also at school and in their social and family lives (Director of Studio A). The director of Studio B said that she hopes to develop students' sense of artistry and creativity, not just their technical training

(Director of Studio B). At Studio C, the director said that her main goal was to prepare the students to teach and be able to hire her own students to teach after they graduate from high school (Director of Studio C). According to these three directors, hiring teachers from within the studio's own pool of students, directly after they graduate from high school, is common in the dance industry and often preferred by studio owners. In studios where there is already poor training, such a practice does not allow students to gain any outside experience or education and simply perpetuates poor training, creating a vicious cycle that does not allow the studio to improve or grow. The resumes of the instructors of Studio C clearly demonstrate such a cycle. One instructor's primary source of training came from her mother who also teaches at Studio C. This particular instructor had no professional experience with dance, no other teaching experience, and did not hold a degree in dance or any other art form. Coincidentally, this instructor's mother received all of her training from her mother who owned her own studio. She also had no professional performance experience.

While the pre-school age group is the largest and most fragile, and therefore at greatest risk, the danger certainly does not stop there. The physical wellbeing of older students, especially teens, is often put at risk from unqualified instruction. Many parents remain uneducated in dance even as their children get older, and pay very little attention to the credentials of dance studios. Typically, a studio is chosen out of convenience, or at random. Location and proximity to urban centers with larger schools, as well as families' income level, plays a role in the education students receive. Parents are often naive regarding what goes on in the classroom, and the students do not know any better. If a child grows up at one

studio with one group of teachers for his or her entire life, the student never knows anything different. What may seem obviously incorrect to someone properly trained in dance may seem standard for someone who has grown accustomed to improper technique.

One of the biggest risks that pre-teen and adolescent ballet students face is being introduced to pointe work when they are too young or not strong enough to safely execute the technique. Much too frequently, students are encouraged to purchase pointe shoes too early because unqualified teachers are lacking in knowledge of kinesiology and anatomy. Putting a student on pointe too early can lead to serious injuries that can destroy careers. It is important for students to be old enough before they attempt pointe work so that their bones are fully developed and ready to withstand the pressure that it takes to balance the body's full weight on just the ends of the toes. The average age considered acceptable is around twelve years old. However, not every student is ready at this age. There are several other factors that determine whether or not a student is ready for pointe work which a qualified teacher needs to be able to identify. In order to execute pointe technique efficiently, a student should have adequate core stability as well as strength and flexibility of the feet and ankles. The teacher also needs to take into account the dancer's duration and frequency of training (Weiss).



Fig. 1. Example of pointe aesthetic. *Dance Magazine*. DanceMedia, LLC. Web. 30 March 2017.

BBC News interviewed a twenty-three-year-old engineering student named Gina Raffaini regarding her personal experience with negative effects of improper dance instruction. She grew up dancing at a local ballet school, starting at the age of five, and was prematurely introduced to pointe training before the age of ten. By the time she was sixteen years old, she had developed severe bunions and had relentless pain in her feet. Consequently, Raffaini had to undergo an operation to correct the issue, including screws in her feet (Burns). This problem was directly initiated by her attempting pointe work before her body was ready and without proper training. This is just one example of the repercussions of dance teachers not having proper understanding of anatomy.



Fig. 2. X-ray of feet en pointe. *The Embodiment Project: Feildnotes*. Blogspot. Web. 30 March 2017.

As a recipient of ineffective training, I personally experience lasting physical damage and have also observed many injuries among my peers. For over fifteen years, I danced with poor technique on an unacceptable surface. In the studio where I received the majority of my training, I danced on an unlevelled, solid cement floor with a single layer of Marley flooring taped on top. As a result, I experienced shin splints throughout high school and still suffer from a stress fracture in the top of my left foot and a posterior ankle impingement in my right foot, making it nearly impossible to pursue a career in classical ballet.

Without adequate instruction on how to complete steps in a healthy way with the proper alignment, students may try to accomplish an ideal aesthetic incorrectly and compromise their technique. It is extremely important that dance teachers demonstrate steps or movements, but also explain *how* to properly execute those steps. Good teachers do not merely give their students goals; they give their students the tools they need and teach them how to achieve those goals. This is why excellent performers do not necessarily result in good teachers. In the making of a qualified dance teacher, communication skills are equally as

important as the knowledge of the art form. For example, many ballet students never fully understand turnout. They know the aesthetic that they are striving for, but they do not know how to properly access their turnout in a healthy way. Instead, they “fake” a 180-degree turnout by forcefully rotating their lower legs. Turnout is a highly complex position and should be taught in a careful manner; however, many uneducated instructors teach it as a static concept. Too often teachers focus on just standing turned out which allows the students to force their knees and grip their feet into the floor. This is one of the most commonly mistaught concepts that leads to chronic misalignment. Initiating rotation from the wrong joints and forcing one’s turnout past the body’s natural ability has many harmful results on the body. Over-rotating by torquing the knees and ankles can cause kneecap subluxation, strain ligaments, break down the arches (causing feet to roll in), and increase the risk of bunions (Brandt). Also, wearing the hip joint’s surface can cause arthritic damage and impingements. These injuries are very serious and can take many years away from a dancer’s career. In order to avoid this, it is imperative that teachers explain how to rotate from the hip sockets and use the deep rotator muscles to hold the turnout without gripping the gluteus muscles. It is also important for teachers to talk about how the alignment of the pelvis and lumbar spine affect turnout as well (Brandt). To teach turnout properly takes an instructor that is fully educated about it.

It is also important for teachers to understand that every student is different. They must know how to approach each individual and recognize their personal abilities. It takes an experienced eye to distinguish when a dancer is forcing their turnout. Teachers must always be looking for signs such as the feet gripping or rolling in.

Being able to spot misalignments or dancers “cheating” to achieve a desired aesthetic is a big part of preventing students from injuring themselves and a skill that many unqualified instructors lack.

In addition to inadequate training, children sometimes attempt to train themselves or learn on their own. This is an issue that has taken off with the current generation of students because of the role that the internet and social media plays in today’s society. While the internet can be a valuable resource for information and has greatly helped the dance industry enter the mainstream media in recent years, it also introduces a danger. An increasing number of young dancers have started trying to copy what they see on the internet (Francis). Social media and websites such as Instagram and YouTube are flooded with pictures and videos of extreme movements performed by dancers and gymnasts of all ages from all over the world.



Fig. 3. Example of extreme hyperextension pose. *Pinterest*. Web. 30 March 2017.

Excessive overstretching and contortion-like poses and tricks have become popular online. Some of the most common exercises seen on the internet include “the scorpion” pose, “the needle”, the side tilt, and the oversplit, all of which require an extreme amount of flexibility to accomplish. These shocking images catch the attention of young, aspiring dancers and encourage them to try to imitate these impressive poses. The problem is that children try these complicated feats without any formal instruction or professional supervision. Additionally, dancers frequently attempt these exercises in unsafe spaces or when they are not warmed up or sufficiently stretched. They are forcing their bodies to do things they are not prepared for and pushing themselves far beyond their physical limits. This creates an enormous risk of injury.

According to Marko Panzic, director of Dream Dance Company in Australia, social media is putting the focus on a “dangerous side of dance” (Robinson and Whyte). Social media has contributed to an obsession for overstretching and extreme hyperextension. As a result, healthcare professionals have seen a dramatic spike in the number of hip and lower back injuries for dancers between the age of eleven and fourteen. Of particular concern is that injuries are starting to occur earlier and earlier in dancers’ lives. According to Lisa Howell, a dance physiotherapist, labral tears (tear in the hip joint) and lower back problems are becoming common in dancers as young as eleven and twelve (Robinson and Whyte). Every dancer’s body is different, and many of the poses seen online are simply not possible for many people so it is not healthy to attempt them, especially unsupervised. Further, these young dancers see impressive photos online and do not realize the amount of time or training it may have taken the person shown to accomplish

the exercise. They often try to achieve these extreme positions instantly, rather than training and slowly working up to the desired pose (Francis). This is a dangerous and ineffective way to work.



Fig. 4. Extreme oversplit. *YouTube*. Web. 30 March 2017.

Lisa Howell described the irony of this situation. Dancers think that they are pushing themselves to achieve these exercises in order to be more competitive in the dance world, but in reality they are actually putting their whole career at risk. Howell observed that the recent spike in hip and back injuries is “very disconcerting because while they’re doing these moves to make themselves better dancers, they are often actually ruling themselves out of a professional career because they are getting injuries so young” (Robinson and Whyte). Most students attempting to replicate the moves they see online may be dreaming of professional dance careers; however, the reality is that few professional dance works actually require the type of tricks that trend on the internet. In the dance industry, many employers are looking for skills such as proper technique, not extreme flexibility. As Howell explains, just because a dancer can put her leg behind her head, does not necessarily make her a good dancer. While students may think that they are advancing their careers, they are actually putting themselves in jeopardy (Francis).

Two dancers in Australia spoke out about their personal experiences with this issue. Aaron Matheson is an eighteen-year-old aspiring dancer with a promising career ahead of him, but he suffered a serious injury at age eleven while trying to practice a pose known as the “scorpion.” He explained that he attempted it at home every day until he finally got it, but when he did he felt his back “twinge.” He remembers collapsing to the floor and not being able to move until some of the pain had subsided. He suffered a stress fracture. Fortunately, he was able to recover and is still dancing, but many dancers are not as lucky, and this incident could have ended his career. Matheson said in retrospect, “It can either make you or break you as a dancer. If you're going to push yourself so far while you're young, you're not going to have a future when you're older” (Robinson and Whyte). Another example is provided by a seventeen-year-old named Charlotte Connors who injured herself while trying to replicate a YouTube video at home. She was on a carpet on a hardwood floor, and the carpet slipped out from underneath her causing her to fall and dislocate her coccyx. She eventually recovered, but still suffers from complications due to the incident. Both dancers admit that they wish they had known about the long-term damage they could do to their bodies by attempting the things they saw on the internet, and feel that children need to be better informed about the risk of injury (Robinson and Whyte).

I asked all of the studio directors that I interviewed if they ever inquire about knowledge of kinesiology or injury prevention when hiring new employees, and across the board the answer to this question was an unwavering “no.” They seemed taken back by this question, surprised that it was being asked. Studio A’s owner then admitted that she had never thought to ask (Director of Studio A). The director of Studio C said that

she just assumed that everyone she interviewed would have that knowledge as she felt that it comes with being a dancer (Director of Studio C). The owner of Studio B argued that she never asked about kinesthetic knowledge because she felt that her staff did not need it. She felt that her knowledge in this area was sufficient to cover the studio as a whole (Director of Studio B). However, it is unlikely that her personal knowledge can ensure that every teacher at her studio is teaching safely and correctly, especially if the teachers are not closely following a strict syllabus.

Continuing with the theme of safety and injury prevention, the next question I asked was if the students are evaluated before they are allowed to progress in their training. I used pointe readiness as an example, asking if the students are screened or given some sort of test before getting their pointe shoes. On a positive note, they all said that they have a method of evaluating each individual and determining carefully if they are ready for pointe work. However, without observing this process, I cannot speak to the diligence or accuracy of this system.

The final question I asked in each interview with the studio directors/owners was whether they had any method of tracking or documenting injuries that may occur among their students. The answers to this question were not surprising considering that they were not willing to share such information for this project because it would be “too much work.” All three directors noted that they did not track injuries because there was not a high incident of injuries occurring at the studio. However, when I asked for an estimated figure of how many injuries they had noticed in the past season, the most specific answer any of them were able to tell me was “not many.” The owner of Studio B mentioned that often she does not

even know about the students' injuries, or if she does, she does not find out until weeks or months later (Director of Studio B). This points to another interesting question: why do dancers choose to hide their injuries or push through pain and continue to dance? The psychology of this is another angle to consider when thinking about injury prevention and the need to protect dancers in studio settings.

While the transcripts of my interviews are certainly important, the demeanor of the people that I interviewed was perhaps just as noteworthy. All of the directors I spoke with projected defensiveness that cannot be tangibly recorded. The purpose of this project was never to criminalize dance studios, their owners/directors, or the parents of the students. Generally, the mistreatment of dance students is not done out of malice or ill intention, but rather ignorance and necessity. At the studio where I trained as a child, the director knew that it was not healthy for us to be dancing on concrete every day in a condemned building, but she had no choice without closing the program, and she did not want to lose the relationship with the students. However, while the intention may have been good, the problem was still there and caused lasting damage in her students. The goal of this project is not to point fingers or find someone to blame, but to shed light on an area that is consistently overlooked and to provide useful information to improve the system that is undoubtedly broken.

Overall, dance students as well as their parents need to be better educated on the danger of practicing any dance form without the proper guidance and instruction. Although dance is a fun hobby for many children, it must be taken seriously even at the earliest stages to prevent lasting injuries. Young dancers, especially in their teens, need

to be taught how to safely accomplish their goals and understand the danger in pushing their bodies to the limits, especially without the proper instruction. Parents should be more aware of the physical risk that dance exposes students to and be more selective with whom they trust to train their children. Employers also need to be more selective. Dance teachers bear great responsibility and should be held to higher standards than they are now. This would not only protect dance students, but also add a level of professionalism lacking in the world of dance education.

This is a broad, preliminary examination of a complex and multi-faceted issue. Underqualified dance instruction poses a danger and the need for more research exists. Ultimately what I hope readers take away is that dance education is not something to be taken lightly and needs to be more critically considered. There is no simple fix and no perfect formula for teaching dance in studio settings, but we can do better, and we need to. I hope that this work is used as a springboard for further constructive examination to specifically address the problems resulting from unqualified dance instruction.

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Appendix A: Example Injury Tracking Sheet

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		Did any students display injuries this week?	If so, what type of injuries, and what body types were effected?	Were the injuries chronic or acute? (Meaning, were they ongoing or a result of an isolated tramatic event?)	Did the injury cause the student to sit out of class?	Did the student seek medical atention?	How old is the student who is suffering from an injury?	How long has that student been training at this studio?
2	Week 1							
3	Week 2							
4	Week 3							
5	Week 4							
6	Week 5							
7	Week 6							
8	Week 7							
9	Week 8							
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
16								
17								

Appendix B: Survey Questions for Dance Studio Directors

- What kind of studio do you consider yours to be (i.e. ballet, contemporary, competitive)? Does your studio identify as a recreational or a pre-professional source of training?
- Does your studio have a general curriculum or syllabus to be followed?
- Do you have a mission statement or main educational focus of your studio that you are trying to instill in the students? If so, what is it? What values are most important to convey?
- What is the lowest level of education needed to teach at your studio? Do you require your teachers to hold any type of degree or certification in dance? Is a high school education required?
- How much dance training and professional performance is needed?
- Do you require your instructors to have past teaching experience or knowledge of dance pedagogy?
- When hiring new employees do you ever ask about their knowledge of kinesiology or injury prevention?
- Are students evaluated before they are allowed to progress in their training? (Example: Are the students screened before they are allowed to start training en pointe?)
- Do teachers document injuries in any way? Is there any sort of system to track injuries occurring?

Appendix C: Survey Questions for Dance Instructors

- How long have you been teaching?
- How old were you when you started teaching?
- What age group did you start out teaching?
- Please explain your dance training prior to teaching.
- Had you ever taught children before?
- Did you have any knowledge of kinesiology, anatomy, or injury prevention?
- Do you feel you were qualified to teach children when you were hired?