Building a Case for Coaching: Informing an Innovative, Pedagogical Approach to Dancer Development.

Dennie, WILSON[a] and Pam RICHARDS[b],
[a]*Royal Academy of Dance and University of Central Lancashire*
[b]Institute of Coaching and Performance University of Central Lancashire

Dennie Wilson MA, B.A. (Hons), PGCert, AdvDip Coach, MAC.
Dennie has had a rich and diverse career working all over the world as professional dancer, choreographer, independent dance artist and directing her own company. Currently Programme Manager within the Faculty of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance, she has responsibility for Professional Dancers looking to become Professional Teachers. She has worked as a dance artist for the Birmingham Royal Ballet (department of learning), taught contemporary dance at Elmhurst Ballet School (2004 – 2012), was a Senior Lecturer Dance Practice and Performance University of Wolverhampton 2001 – 2012), and in 2012 was a Victory Ceremonies Producer for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Dennie has taken a non-traditional route into and through Higher Education. Current her research focuses on coaching practice and the role of the coach within vocational training and professional dance performance, to empower the dancer as independent decision maker.

ResearchGate - https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dennie_Wilson
Academia - https://radeducation.academia.edu/DennieWilson
ORCID – 0000-0003-3828-5681
Twitter - https://twitter.com/dennie_dnadance
Website**:** https://www.dna3d.co.uk

Dr Pamela Richards MSc., B.A., PGDip, PGCHE, CPsychol, AFBPsS, FHEA, FIH HPC, UKCC L4 Coach

Dr Pamela Richards has been actively involved in research and applied work relating to high pressurised team decision-making for 18 years and currently supervises PhD/DProf students worldwide in elite sport, military, fire service and paramedics contexts. Her research focuses on decision making and the design and development of shared mental models. Specifically, Pam focuses on the development and operationalisation of shared mental models in high pressurised naturalistic settings, exploring both the psychomotor and psychosocial aspects. Additionally, Pam's applied work/research considers cognitive agility and diversity within teams. Pam has five years' experience as a national team physiologist (included preparation for Commonwealth Games, 1998). Additionally, Pam has also held the position of National team coach and is world qualified (FIH High Performance Coach) in the sport of field hockey.

ResearchGate - https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pam_Richards2
Academia - https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/activity/institute-of-coaching-and-performance-icap
ORCID - 0000-0003-4242-981x

Abstract

Over the last two decades the growth and development of the fields of Dance Science and Pedagogy; as practice, research and area of study, has changed the landscape of 21st Century training and performance. The aim of this paper is to stimulate thinking, and initiate dialogue between practitioners and academics, in the exploration of new solutions to ongoing pedagogical tensions within the vocational training environment. In recognising the challenge which an interdisciplinary approach brings to dance (integrating the science of content and the art of delivery), this paper explores the integration of coaching pedagogical concepts and practices, to inform an innovative approach to dancer empowerment, placing the dancer central to the learning environment. The paper proposes, an empowered dancer focused framework for coaching with the emphasis being placed on the development of the dancer displaying the skills of self-determined, decision-making and are empowered across the life cycle of their career(s).

Key Words: Vocational, Training, Education, Empowerment, Ballet, Contemporary Dance

Introduction : The changing landscape of vocational dance training

The last two decades have seen the emerging fields of dance science and dance pedagogy produce research which has informed, and shifted, the landscape of vocational dance training, and the professional performance environment (Rafferty and Stanton 2017; Sôôt and Viskus, 2014; Zeller 2017). The Royal Ballet School (RBS) 'Healthy Dancer Programme' launched in 2019, can be seen as indicative of how, in response to the demands of a 21st Century career in dance, vocational institutions are approaching the training of students. In promoting The Healthy Dancer Programme, Kevin O'Hare, Artistic Director of the Royal Ballet company, talks about the prospect of having "wonderfully informed dancers coming across to join the company … [who] know from the beginning what it takes to become a professional dancer" (as of March 13. 2020, RBS website. Video. 2 min 55 secs). Inherent in O'Hare's expression 'wonderfully informed dancers' is reference to a profession he understands to have changed significantly since his days as Principal with the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Today's dancers need to be prepared for a multifariousness of work destinations, whereby there is an imperative for them to be 'considerably more versatile than those of two decades ago' (Greenway 2000 1). Repertoire is more diverse and requires "higher demands of physicality" (Calvert qtd in Bailey. 2018). In addition, rehearsal and performance schedules, demand dancers seamlessly move between the challenges of a Classical, Romantic or Neo-Classical work, to that of a 21st century Contemporary Ballet, where the technical and stylistic demands of each work varies greatly. Furthermore, the dancer is now more often required to be inventor; working creatively with the choreographer to generate the choreographic content of a piece (Butterworth 2012).

The Royal Ballet School Healthy Dancer Programme, and the manner in which dance science is integrated into a company like the Royal Ballet, is an excellent exemplar which appears to fuse art with science. Teams of sports scientists and health care experts, as integral to the staffing of companies and schools, have revolutionised how dancers are prepare for performance (Bailey 2018). Redding raises the prospect of getting "dancers' bodies and minds even stronger…or even extending their capacities" (Redding qtd in Bailey. 2018. "Raising the Barre." The Guardian, July 15). Intrinsic to such possibility is the interconnectivity between science and pedagogy, and how research in these fields influence the professional performance environment, and more fundamentally informs and shapes vocational training.

In the way dance science has been informed by the physiology of training, research in dance pedagogy has initiated theoretical frameworks to support the teaching and education of dance (Smith-Autard 2002; Gibbons 2007; Stanton and Rafferty 2017). As a result the 'emphasis in education and dance education has shifted from teaching, to learning and lifelong learning' (Zubovic 2001, 1) a more holistic approach to dance teacher education and training is advocated (Andrzejewski 2009), and engaging students in 'Higher Order Thinking' (Rafferty and Stanton 2017; Zeller 2017) is promoted. However, this body of work also acknowledges the traditional pedagogical approaches which have dominated vocational dance training (Zubovic 2014), and draws attention to the importance that traditional dance training needs to embrace an educational approach in considering the 'what', and the 'how', of the dancer's learning (Rafferty and Stanton 2017, 193).

The reflections which drive this paper, focus particularly on the need for a pedagogical approach which, combined with the strong traditions of vocational dance training and education, integrates a dancer's empowerment perspective. Notwithstanding the decades in which the growing body of critical pedagogical research has informed the practice of the teaching and training of dancers (Mainwaring and Krasnow 2010), ballet still has what Zeller

refers to as ‘an acknowledged pedagogy problem’ (Zeller 2017, 99). In the twenty first century Dance continues to promote regressive methods as essential to its pedagogy (Zeller 2017, 101). Similarly, the body of research concentrated on the physiology of dance overshadows that which addresses the psychological needs of the dancer (Nordin and McGill 2009; Mainwaring and Finney 2017). This mono-disciplinary system is indicative of a dualism whereby the training of the dancer is commonly understood as physical (Fraleigh 1987, 11). As a single uni-dimensional approach, this over-inflation of one focus to the detriment of others, emphasises the dancer as product not the dancer as process.

Mindful of the proposition made by Stanton (2011) for the ‘technique class [as] ‘laboratory’ (p.86), the backdrop for this positional paper is the premise that a tension exists between the pedagogical framework in which vocational training sits, and the precariousness of employment in the arts (Bennett 2009). Bennett, in drawing attention to the ‘fluidity of employment’ (28) discusses the wide range of skills dancers are required to have in order to navigate multiple and diverse employment-roles (27). Thus, this paper will consider the juxtaposition of the changing landscape of 21st century dance training and employment; and the empowerment of the dancer in vocational training as central to the practice of learning and teaching. Advocating for dancer empowerment, is informed by the research of Kidman (2001) and Richards *et al*. (2009). Both discuss empowerment in context of athlete-centred coaching, within the context of sport. Where the coach facilitates athletes to reflection and take responsibility for their own learning. Empowerment is seen as a corridor to individual learning, where the individual athlete develops a great level of self awareness, in context of the learning setting. Therefore the performer begins to contribute to, and shape their own learning. By instilling an approach which moves away from, a dictatorial type of delivery, to that of questioning and investigation (Richards 2009, 356) athletes ‘gain and take ownership of knowledge, development and decision making’ (11). As such, we will propose that

coaching practice aligns with traditional and current vocational dance training practice, whilst synchronously offering a fresh perspective from which to view, complement, and enhance that practice, and enrich the dancer's lifelong journey.

Acknowledging the effectiveness of the teacher as expert (Stanton 2011), discussion and reflections will explore the vocational training environment as one 'fit for modern purpose', to facilitate healthy debate on how practitioners and research can inform the 21st Century world of dance. Through the lens of perpetuating tradition and how this influences the vocational training environment, consideration of the pedagogical approaches applied within this environment, how individuals become teachers, and the influence these factors have on the dance student will be carefully examined. Furthermore the expanding demands being placed on vocational training schools to develop the next generation of dancers, and the challenges inherent in drivers of the performance setting, will inform this debate. The result of which the paper will propose a direction for research which embraces an innovative approach to dancer empowerment. Guided by the concept of holism, the dual aim of this propositional paper is to outline the development of the dance graduate as self-determined decision maker; with increased skills, knowledge and competencies to navigate a multifariousness of employment destinations, whilst contributing to the body of research which is psychologically focused.

We acknowledge this introduction discusses vocational dance training in relation to western dance traditions and, in places, directly references research specific to the genre of ballet. The paper takes the position that whichever genre; ballet, contemporary, jazz/musical theatre, is the focus of the vocational school or particular programme, classical ballet technique is perceived to be the most important, holding a somewhat sacrosanct place in the school curriculum. Furthermore, whether the repertoire of major dance companies 'contained any

classical ballet choreographies, they all started their working days with a ballet class' (Aalten 2014, 48). Correspondingly, the structure and form shaping the practice of teaching ballet pervades the teaching of contemporary, jazz and modern dance techniques. As such, practical and theoretical research pertaining to western dance traditions informs the paper. The paper, divided into four sections, addresses; the vocational employment context, the educational environment of vocational dance training, the evidence which informs the voice of change to that environment, and the potential for coaching practice to inform change within that environment.

The Vocational Environment : Purpose and Employment

This initial section of the paper looks to provide context from which to support the argument that dance education should be approached from an integrated, interdisciplinary empowerment perspective. This requires consideration of the purpose, function and qualification framework in which vocational dance training sits, alongside that of the changing landscape of employment the graduate dancer will be required to navigate.

Inherent in vocational training is the prerequisite for the trainee to develop the skills and knowledge for a specific job. As such vocational dance training is designed to prepare the student for a professional career in dance (as of February 12, 2021, the website of Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre). There is significant gravitas in a vocational school providing optimal training opportunities. One, and perhaps the most dominant measurement of the success of vocational training is graduate employment. This is quantified by the number of graduates awarded contracts with dance companies/productions across the world. Such statistics are publicised on school websites (as of February 12, 2021, the websites of Royal Ballet School, English National Ballet School, Central School of Ballet, Elmhurst

Ballet School). Indicative of the vocational training offered as being fit for purpose, these operate to attract future, gifted and talented students to the school.

With the objective of contextualising the pedagogical framework of the educational journey of the dancer, it is important to understand the educational context of the vocational environment. Whether the full-time training of the dance student begins at 16 or 18 years of age, the point of entry (UK) will align with the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) Framework or the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). These align vocational and academic achievement, and in recognition of careers in dance being notoriously short, provide graduates with options post-performance career, to access higher educational study or training. As formal recognition of the skills and subject knowledge achieved through such intense training, such qualifications acknowledge the intelligence of the dancer (Grebben 2002, 15). Traditionally, this intense period of training continues for three years, where increasingly the format of the third year is one which mirrors the profession. As a transitional year which looks to 'bridging student and professional life' (as of February 12, 2021, the website of Elmhurst Ballet School), the student becomes part of a graduate year performance company. Likewise, students who begin their training at 18 years of age, graduating with a recognised Batchelor of Arts Degree, often progress immediately onto a Master's programme which also operates the model of a professional company (as of December 12, 2020, the websites of Trinity Laban, London Contemporary Dance School, Northern School of Contemporary Dance).

Regardless of the form the culmination of vocational training takes, imperative to an ongoing career is a dancer's ability to navigate a multifactorial professional portfolio of work (Bennett 2009). Bennett (2009) foregrounds the dance environment being one of "employment and ongoing employability" (Bennett 2009, 28), where more often '…the majority become independent [dancers] by default rather than choice,' (28). This reality is

reinforced by a publication commissioned by the Arts Council which presents challenging statistics as to the number of dance contracts available, where most available contracts are no more than a year in length (Siddal, 2001, 31)

What this means for vocational dance training clearly relates to how, as highlighted in the introduction, research has informed a shift in curriculum content to what the RBS refer to as a 'fully integrated approach with … continued research and medical insight informing the Schools System of Training' (as of February 12, 2021, the website of RBS). Regardless of how progressive these changes are, researchers in dance education draw attention to significant attempts to advance student agency and autonomy in ballet, whilst observing a system which 'struggles to transcend its authoritarian history' and promotes student passivity (Zeller 2017, 99). Such a system, entrenched in tradition, and the engrained behaviours that inhabit this tradition, is encapsulated in an interview by Sandall (2018) with Edwaard Liang the artistic director of BalletMet. In the interview, Liang talks about being unsure as to whether dancers 'ever thought outside the box… [where] the scariest word to all of us is change' (Liang qtd in Sandell. 2018). The article written by Sandell in response to the interview, deduces that many ballet dancers have an almost superstitious need to practice the same steps in the same order every day. Embedded in the psychology of this superstition, is the pedagogy which accompanies the dancers daily practice.

This glimpse at how vocational dance training and employment operates in the 21st Century, is illustrative of the changing landscape of employment, whereby an incremental shift in the trajectory of vocational training is evident. However, as highlighted, this is predominantly through physiologically focused training programmes complementary to the traditional dance studio based teaching. Outside of this, programmes continue to draw on the traditional pedagogical approaches which dominate vocational dance training (Zubovic

2014), and this practice works to support the suggested tension between training and employment.

As such, in the shadow of established tradition, evolved superstition, and a world in which nothing is certain now, more than ever, it seems incumbent upon those charged with the responsibility for vocational dance training to examine to what extent tradition, as opposed to evidence is dictating practice, and consider how students are disadvantaged if progress is not achieved? For this reason it is important to observe the prevailing practice of the dance studio as a means of exploring the environment which shapes future dancers.

The Vocational Environment : Technique, Training, Teaching and Tradition

As previously stated, the educational framework in which vocational training sits is focused specifically on preparing dancers for the workplace. In the studio the teacher, as the expert, looks to 'create the dancer according to ballet's ideals – [where] students must submit themselves to achieving textbook standards' (Zeller 2017, 99). The goal is to gain mastery over the instrument; the body and mind, (Paskevska 2005). Historically traditional, authoritarian, command style teaching is considered the most appropriate, and efficient, method of achieving this outcome; whereby practice follows a typical pattern of demonstration and explanation (Zubovic 2014), with the emphasis to attempt, correct and perfect (Kimmerle and Côte-Laurence 2003, 53) the technical skills. As a process, this is not unique to the teacher-led technique classes. Observation of the vocational dance studio at the end of a day further endorses this very authorial led culture, where a common sight would be that of a handful of students engaged in deliberate self-directed training. Activity will be focused on perfecting technique, and whatever the student is attempting, correcting or looking to perfect, there will be a palpable determination to 'subdue or conquer her body' (Buckroyd 2000, 15). Often this involves forcing a unique body to fit an aesthetic, rather than physically exploring how to

embody the movement (Zeller 2017). In search of the illusive perfection this behaviour is evocative of what Alterowitz (2014) highlights as ballet as a Western dance form, where the 'aesthetics and belief system is grounded in Western Philosophes that enforce dualistic thinking, separating the mind from the body…' (Alterowitz 2014, 8).

Such western dance tradition, is founded on ballet technique (Alterowitz 2014) where 'a strict tradition governs the structure of a ballet class' (Paskevska 1992, 47). Beginning with barre work, it progresses through port de bras, centre practice, pirouettes, adage to allegro and pointework (Royal Academy of Dance, 2002). Underpinning this approach are the principles of classical dance, defined as stance, turn-out, placing, laws of balance, rules, transfer of weight and co-ordination (Lawson, Dowell, and Crickmay 1979). Daily classes are, as referred to by Paskevska (2002) a 'daily rediscovery in which each guided movement must be experienced as if for the first time while being guided by past knowledge' (5). The purpose of class is, as defined by Paskevska, firstly to warm up the muscles, secondly to shape muscular development alongside conditioning the mind, and thirdly to prepare the dancer to meet the challenges of choreography or the choreographer (48). Classes are often based on syllabi where training manuals, relating to a codified technique, focus on the developing and refining of technique and skills acquisition (Zeller 2017), where a correct way of executing the movements is required. The class provides the teacher with the conditions through which to get to know their students well; to understand the nuance of their talent, their physical build and capabilities. It is also a place where tradition nurtures habitual behaviours.

If we examine the dance studio, to observe students entering the space for their daily class, we will see them engage in a ritualised routine. Going to the same place in the studio, their preparation will involve an individual warm-up which is established and comfortable. This may be done wearing headphones and listening to music, chatting quietly to their peers, or in silent isolation. As the teacher arrives each will arrange themselves ready to take

instruction by removing warm-up clothing, taking a sip of water, doing one last stretch, fiddling with a hair pin, pushing through the metatarsals, cricking their neck, twisting their back to see if there is one last vertebral crunch to be had. When class begins the student is likely standing in the same place at the barre, or centre, as they always do, ready to perform *reverence* (genre specific) in acknowledgement of the teacher and musician, before class begins.

Broader traditions relating to pedagogical delivery, are determined by the context of delivery whereby students are taught in school year groups. Whilst class sizes vary dependent on the genre being taught and whether classes are gender focused, the teacher will likely have responsibility for upward of 15 students. In the ballet setting these students will be dressed identically. Each year group is identified by a specific colour of leotard/unitard. Tights worn by the ladies have, until very recently for every female student regardless of skin colour, traditionally been pink. For the men, class tights are black. Hair, for the ladies, will be ordered in a bun, where often the style of bun is also prescribed. Hair for the men should be neat and tidy. Within a contemporary setting, where students may be older when commencing this training, the class dress code may appear less doctrinaire and more casual. However, this is deceptive. Whilst the colour and texture of dance clothing may be more varied, hair less uniform, and socks replacing shoes, the aesthetic is carefully crafted. Whomever occupies the studio, practice is bound to historical and pedagogical tradition. Central to this tradition and how it is upheld, is the system, make-up and organisation of a vocational dance faculty. This includes the artistic leadership of the faculty, and the processes by which artistic directors and vocational dance teachers become employed. As a team, these people become instrumental in shaping the environment for teaching and learning whereby the dancers produced are those to whom the baton for shaping the future of dance will subsequently be passed.

Paskevska (2002), defines dance teachers as those who ‘start life as dancers’ (1). Vocational schools attest to this practice in advertisements for, and appointment of, artistic

directors and teachers, where the specificity of experience these individuals bring to an artistic faculty, is both quantifiable and qualitative in nature. Whether the dancers training aligns with the traditions embedded within in the French, Italian, Russian, Danish or English Ballet Schools, of equal stature is the ensuing embodied knowledge and understanding of dance technique and artistry. This rich experience informs the epistemological approach dance teachers take to their teaching, and as custom is one whereby Paskevska (2005) connects teaching to the art of storytelling and the oral tradition that exists within dance where 'knowledge is passed from master to pupil' (45). This concept of hierarchy is one carried into the structure of company and performance life. The repetiteur, rehearsal director, coach, choreographer and artistic director are all roles which wear the cloak of master to that of the dancer as pupil. At the heart of these relationships is an engrained pedagogical approach to working which connects to the 'decision structure of the command style' (Mosston and Ashworth 2008, 77). Here objectives and behaviours intrinsic to this style include; achieving accuracy and precision, mastery of skills and synchronized performance, perpetuating cultural traditions and rituals, developing habits, following direction on cue, and achieving conformity and uniformity (Mosston and Ashworth 2008, 76). This approach continues to produce the desired performance outcomes effectively, and in an efficient and timely manner. As such it is understandable how as perpetuating practice, such legacy occurs. Equally comprehensible is any ensuing resistance to change; as such one may question where the driver for change sits?

Evidence for change: Dance Science, Pedagogy, Coaching and Consensus

Integral to the debate, and extending the discourse calling for a 'more democratic ballet pedagogy' (Alterowitz, 2014, 9), is the question of interdisciplinary training methodologies and, as previously highlighted, the importance of considering 'how dancers learn and the teaching strategies or philosophies employed to deliver the technical information' (Rafferty and Stanton 2017, 193). Much of the pedagogical research conducted which develops and

supports this discourse takes place within the Higher Education (HE) sector, where 'increasingly dance teachers … are becoming facilitators of learning' (Ritchie 2018, 168). This climate, which differs to that of vocational training, allows for an experimental system to be set up in which the dance class can be a laboratory (Stanton 2011, 87). This setting facilitates a teacher as researcher approach to teaching and learning, recognising the patience, tenacity and ensuing time which is required when the dancer and teacher engage with pedagogical problem solving processes (Stanton 2011, 86). It is clear that research in the domain of dance, appreciates the tension for vocational teachers pursuing 'the best technical route and optimal training' (Rafferty and Stanton 2017, 192) in relation to the acquisition of technical skills. Nevertheless, the unswerving view is of the need for vocational training to be more holistic in approach, and for teachers to employ strategies which are more inclusive of the student dancer.

Supporting this position are dance scientists concerned with the psychology of dance teaching approaches which 'enhance the mastery of skills and promote self-esteem, self-efficacy and positive self-image' (Mainwaring and Krasnow 2010, 14). Furthermore, a systematic review of dance psychology literature, conducted by Mainwaring and Finney (2017), draws attention to seven categories of risk 'factors reported to be associated with the incidence, frequency and outcome of dance injuries' (Mainwaring and Finney 2017, 87). These are identified as stress, mood and psychological distress, sleep, disordered eating, personality, coping and social support (Mainwaring and Finney 2017, 90). Providing further evidence to transition away from a uni-disciplinary approach of only developing physiological performance, to a more integrated interdisciplinary approach for pedagogy. Furthermore, Mainwaring and Finney (2017) underline the historical focus of dance medicine and science as being on physical rather than psychological aspects of dance, and highlight the relationship between physiological injury and unhealthy psychological behaviours. Additionally, they indicate the need for further research in relation to both dancers and injury, and posit the

potential benefit for dance schools and companies in offering 'dancers access to psychological interventions and treatment programmes' (94).

If we consider the complementary physiological training provision introduced as part of the RBS Healthy Dancer Programme (RBS 2019), we can see how the interconnectivity between research related to improved performance and reduction in injury rates, has impacted on curriculum development. If we then consider Mainwaring and Finney's recommendation about the psychological health and wellbeing of the dancer, implicit in their proposal is the suggestion of taking a similar approach. If such an approach were to be considered, this stimulates the question as to the type, nature, frequency and purpose of such interventions in relation to both psychological injury and injury prevention. As previously detailed, the suggestion of this paper is to consider the potentiality of coaching practice; an existing practice within professional dance, as one which can synchronously offer a fresh perspective from which to support the holistic health, wellbeing and development of the dancer. In considering such a suggestion it is thus critical to assess coaching practice and how dance traditionally engages with coaching.

At a recent conference (UKCoaching, 2020) a keynote speaker outlined to delegates, who were predominantly from the field of sport, that in the dance world, we have teachers rather than coaches (Quin 2020). In the way Côté (2006) refers to the coach, within sport, as someone who fulfils many different roles (217), the role of the teacher in dance can be seen in a similar vein. As such, it is understandable why this statement was made, based on the previous discuss within this paper. However, whilst the term coach is not widely used across the dance spectrum, coaching practice as discussed by Lyle and Cushion (2017) in relation to the 'demands of the situation' (43) does take place. There are several contexts in which the practice of coaching, whether in a company or vocational school, is recognised and referred to. These contexts are associated with repertoire, and in the vocational training context also

preparation for exams or assessment and encompasses the technical and artistic aspects of performance. Who takes charge of any coaching will range from the artistic director, rehearsal director/ assistants, repetiteur, to the ballet master/mistress or invited guest who is seen as a designated expert. Coaching will be dependent on the rehearsal schedule in the run up to any performance, and differing factors will determine the coaching responsibilities each person is given. These can be, but are not restricted to, the connection the coach has to the repertoire being rehearsed whereby the original repertoire may have been made on them, or they were in the company on which the original repertoire was created. Equally, someone with a respected reputation for outstanding performances/interpretation of the particular role, will coach other dancers taking on that role. Furthermore, where a ballet is licensed by an established trust or foundation, a coach will be someone identified as a designated curator who has been given authority by the trust or foundation, to restage and coach a particular work (Yeoh 2012).

In whichever context coaching is taking place, specific to each situation is that the dance material or choreographic content is already known by the dancer. As such when a dancer refers to having been coached or working with a coach, they are referring to a process which focuses on developing their performance of known repertoire, not being taught unknown material. As examples of coaching contexts within dance, this performative practice connects with the discussion Garvey (2011) draws attention to in relation to consensus and coaching as a social activity where 'some groupings have a *'Consensus'* on what they believe to be true about coaching, for example, professional bodies' (Garvey 2011, 17). Furthermore, it aligns with the aforementioned writing of Paskevska (2005) and the oral tradition within dance, which involves dance experts in a process of '*story-telling'* as they pass on their subject knowledge and expertise. This being the case, what seems integral to envisioning coaching as intervention to supporting the holistic health, wellbeing and development of the dancer, is reflecting on the pedagogical approaches implicit to the coaching of dance (Lyle and Cushion 2017, 4) and

consideration of what this reveals.

Many examples of coaching practice in dance can be viewed in the media. Palpable to these examples of a coaching process, is the employment of coaching skills which correspond absolutely with the traditional pedagogical approach to dance teaching and technical training, and the decision structure of the command style (Mosston and Ashworth 2008, 77). Direction, instruction or advice is given. Any feedback comes predominantly from the coach, and more often the voice of the dancer does not feature. If we consider these factors alongside that of researchers in dance education, it becomes evident that a dominant pedagogical approach; the directive, autocratic command style, underpins the teaching, training and coaching of dance technique and performance within the vocational and professional dance domain. In accordance with such a position, the locus of control sits with the teacher's expertise, with the learner as one who acknowledges that expertise and is willing to accept the teacher's decisions. (Mosston and Ashworth 2008, 85). This poses a critical question. If, as suggested, coaching has the potential to address the '*how*' as well as the '*what'* of the dancers learning, and furthermore develop dancer empowerment, where is the potential for coaching, situated? In order to consider these questions it is important to establish parameters for discussion. Given the historical connection between sports science and the development of dance science (Brinson and Dick 1996), the paper will draw from sports coaching concepts and coaching processes to inform debate.

The Case for Coaching: Coaching and the Coaching Process

Lyle's (2002) definitional framework for coaching, is illustrative of the difficulty in summarising coaching as a 'catch-all statement' (38). The themes of this framework highlight the complexity of coaching as a sensitive weave of multiple disciplines, whereby the process includes all aspects of coaching; the performer/athlete, the coach and the environment. For

dance such disciplines include the science of dance (physiology, psychological, biomechanical, skill acquisition) and the social science of relationships, the interaction through pedagogical processes and mechanisms. Furthermore, the semantics of language used to define coaching across multiple domains, is indicative of it as practice which facilitates learning as a means of developing empowerment, ownership and agency (Kidman 2001; Lyle and Cushion 2017; Van Nieuwerburgh 2017), whereby the process, as different and distinctive in each case (Lyle 2002, 40), is 'a discursive relationship aimed at an improvement in achievement within specific contexts' (Garvey 2011, 15). Expanding on Garvey's words, Downey summarises coaching as 'the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another' (2003, 21). Downey advocates a spectrum of coaching skills which underpin coaching practice. These skills move from being directive (push) to that of non-directive (pull), whereby the pull skills are identified as raising awareness, summarising, paraphrasing, reflecting, and listening to understand (23). As previously highlighted these pull skills are not employed in the practice of coaching dance. This reinforces the position that the dominant pedagogical approach underpinning the vocational and professional dance domain is one which emphasises the dance educator/ teacher/coach as expert promoting, historically, the traditional authoritarian command style teaching. Again, as previously commented upon, this approach is effective and efficient, and is doubtless symptomatic of the continued pedagogy problem highlighted by researchers. Therefore, the position of this paper is for the reframing of educational delivery as one which integrates a pull focused 'coaching process.' This will develop the landscape of teaching and learning, moving towards an environment where dancers are empowered to engage with and shape their own learning. Such 'reframing' of the delivery of dance training offers a fresh perspective enhancing the dancer's lifelong journey, throughout their performance careers.

Intrinsic to the development of a coaching process which moves dance training away from a unidimensional approach, is ensuring vocational training continues to effectively and efficiently develop the dancers technical and artistic talent to the highest level, in order to meet the demands of the profession. Such demands link to the artistic identity of individual companies. These are nuanced. Repertoire is bespoke, and whilst companies may stage some of the same dance works, other works will be unique to a company. Likewise, the scheduling of a company's season of programmes will be dependent on the theatres in which companies perform, and whether a company does or does not tour. Furthermore, there will be expectancy to both attract and develop new audiences, whilst maintaining a core audience base. Subsequently, each season of programming will be distinctive with no one year being the same as a previous year. Additionally, factors such as the size of company and whether the dancer is a principle, soloist or member of the corps de ballet, determine the performance demands for the dancer as their career progresses. As a consequence, a dancer, as artist, needs to be versatile. Such versatility is multifaceted, and how this is developed and nurtured, links to the interaction between the expertise and experience of the dance educator as teacher, trainer, coach, mentor, and the physiological and psychological makeup of the dancer.

In recognising these factors, two coaching challenges emerge within dance where the coaching process needs to create the environment which meets both the idiographic and nomothetical characteristics of the performance setting. There is a tension between the requirement for the dance educator to develop dancers able to work within a body of dancers and move as one; representative of the perfection of a nomothetical performance aesthetic, and the development of dancers as individuals, promoting an idiographic approach. The former nomothetical more akin to traditional authoritarian style of delivery, the latter more akin to the coaching approach proposed in this paper. The term idiographic, defined as relating to the study of individuals, (Collins 2020) is specifically selected to reflect the call for dance

educators to move towards an approach facilitating the empowerment of the individual to take responsibility for their own learning. As such, the dance coach personalises the coaching process.

Acknowledging the challenge inherent in such a shift, this paper argues for such an enhancement to the vocational training curriculum through the addition/introduction of performance coaching framework which focuses on the empowerment of dancers and dancer educators. As outlined above, consensus around coaching in dance exists, yet there is no framework specifically associated with performance coaching in dance. Therefore, as a mechanism to facilitate discussions, this papers takes steps to providing a positional framework ‘’PRACTISE’ a performance coaching framework focused on the empowerment of dancers and dance educators. The schematic diagram (*Figure 1*) is an illustration of the PRACTISE Framework, which places the environment, and the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships of dancer and coach as central to the coaching process. Furthermore our view is that once coaching has been reframed through the mechanism of further research, adopting such a framework and an empowerment approach to performance coaching in dance, could be transformative.

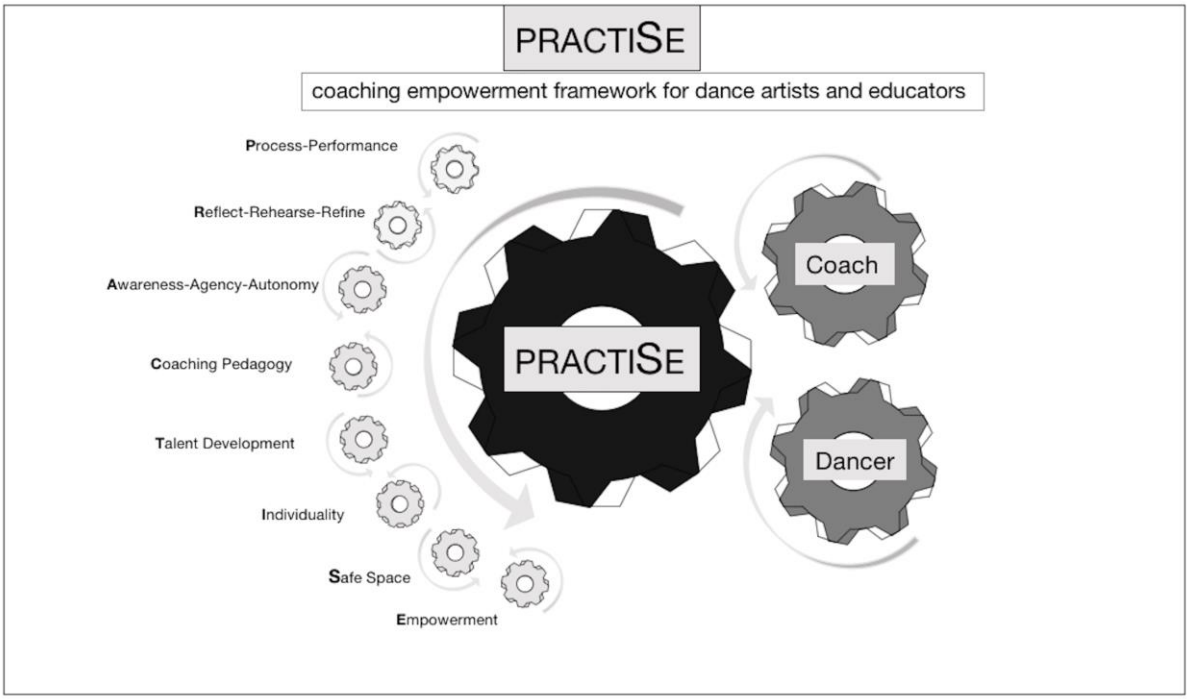


Figure 1 : PRACTISE; a coaching empowerment framework for dance artists and educators.

Through the lens of the author as Scenographer, the visual design of the framework's mechanism *(see* Figure 1*)* is influenced by the visual representation of both Oskar Schlemmer's 'laws of cubic space [and] the invisible linear network of planimetric and stereometrics relationships' presented in Figure 2, (Huxley and Witts 1996, 332), and 'laws of organic inner man resid[ing] in the invisible functions of the inner self…' (333) (Figure 3). As laws derived from the study of the performance space and the performer, there is an interesting correlation when abstracting such laws to inform the visual design of a coaching framework for performing artists and arts educators. The PRACTISE Framework *(*Figure 1*)*, representative of situational performance coaching, applies the principle of gears and leverage transmission (processes and mechcanisms), and places the PRACTISE concept as the driver gear. Eight subsequent driven gears, hereafter referred to as *'performance cogs', (moving forward abbreviated to 'cogs')* represent the constituent factors which are fundamental to the coaching process and pedagogy relating to dance. Presented in an order that corresponds to the name given to the framework, they operate as part of on an interrelated, interactive, non-hierarchical process in which there

is no fixed position/order for each driver gear. A performance related process, which engages with reflection as a mechanism through which to rehearse and refine. The reflection facilitating, backward and forwarding reasoning processes, both for the coach and also for the dancer. Where awareness, is central to dancer agency and autonomy, and coaching pedagogy underpins the major driver of developing individual talent. As such one could argue that the factorial principle of eight exists, where there are 40,320 permutations of how the coaching process can manifest. Whilst, in the context of the framework this is not an absolute number, given the specificity of the individuality intrinsic to the PRACTISE concept, the principle provides a visual anchor to a heuristic process.

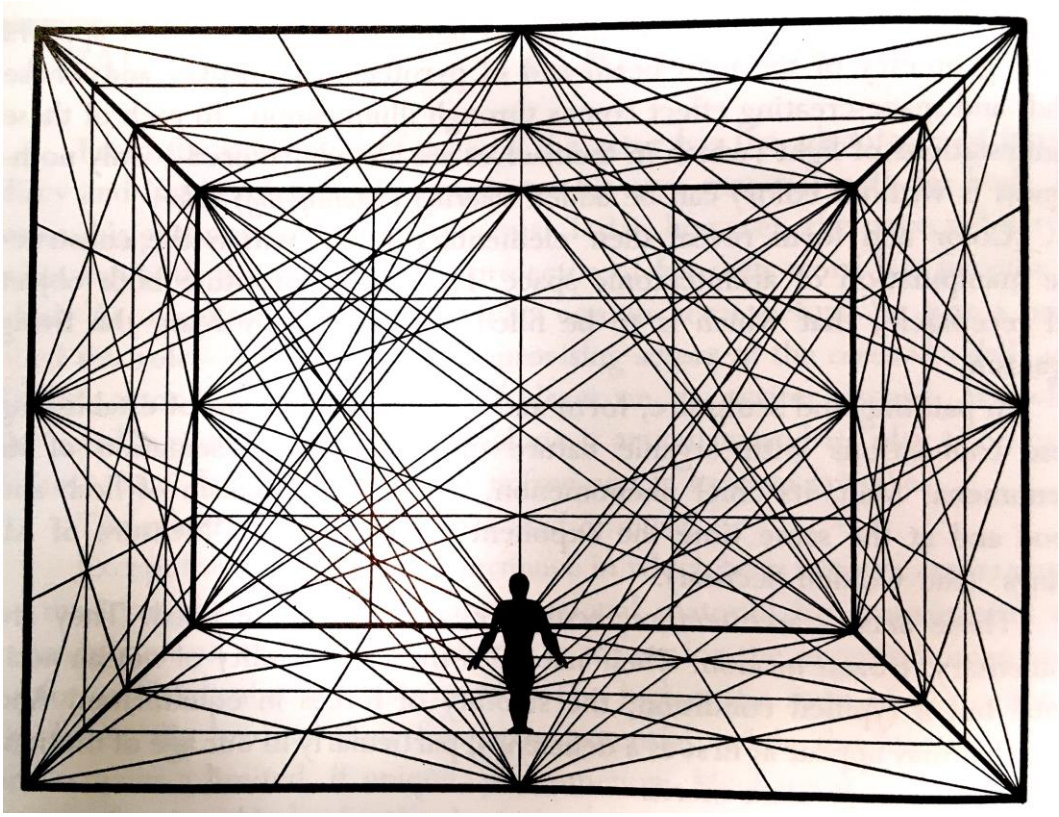
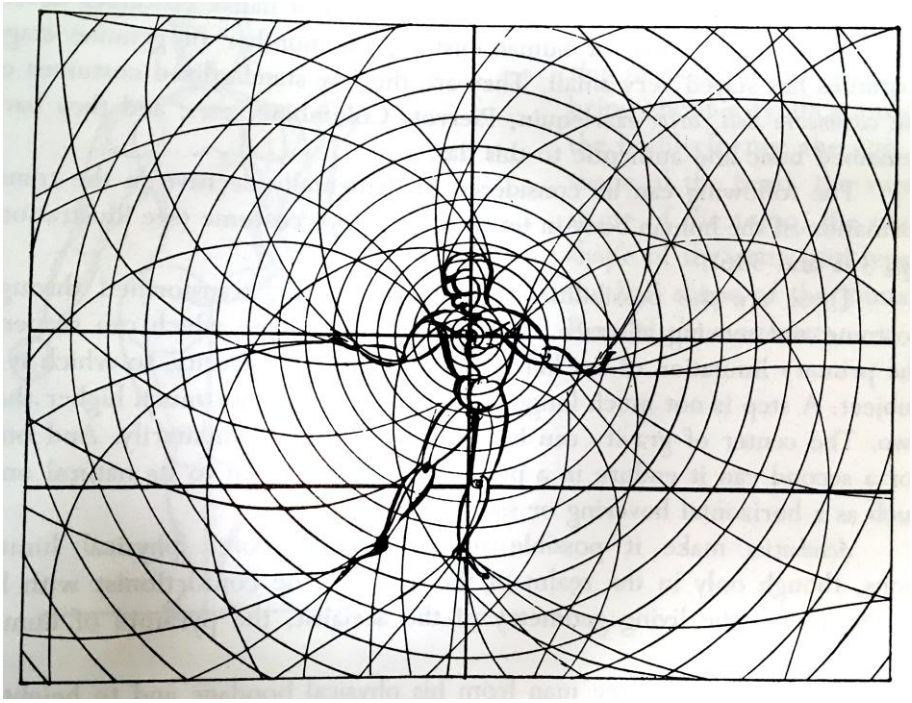


Figure 2 Laws of Cubic Space (Schlemmer 1924 in Huxley & Witt 1996, 322)



Laws of Organic Man (Schlemmer 1924 in Huxley & Witt 1996, 323)

As previous stated, no framework currently exists which specifically addresses performance coaching in dance. This paper therefore takes steps to providing a positional framework from which to evoke and encourage discussion. As outlined in the paper, the theoretical pedagogical frameworks and models specific to education and dance education have been incorporated and exist within the new holistic dance framework format presented; represented by the different 'cogs' (Figure 1). Subsequently, moving forward, the aim is for practice-driven research to develop, and further reveal a definitive interconnected PRACTISE framework, into which key components are embedded.

The PRACTISE Framework, as guided by eight component cogs, looks to reframe the concept of coaching within the domain of Dance. Mindful of the recommendations of Mainwaring and Finney (2017), such coaching would be comparable to the physiologically focused training programmes. Complementary to that of technical teaching and training (skills acquisition), coaching research would be highly individualised, taking place within a safe space

on a one-on-one basis. Furthermore, the advocated coaching approach will align with the 'pull' skills outlined by Downey and respond to the language populating pedagogical dance research focused on how to optimise both 'skill acquisition and the development of high self-esteem and personal growth in dancers' (Mainwaring and Krasnow, 2010, 14). Returning to the function of vocational training and the question of life-long learning, such a framework will look to enhance the dancers lifelong journey as someone prepared physiologically, and psychological, to navigate the 21st Century workplace.

Conclusion:

This paper explores the integration of coaching pedagogical concepts and practices, to inform an innovative approach to dancer empowerment, where dancers are developed as graduates displaying the skills of self-determined decision-makers. Such a rationale supports a number of interconnected factors presented above which, it is hoped will facilitate discussions to inform the evolution of the learning environment of dance. The changing landscape of vocational dance training over recent years, combined with the evolution of the professional performance environment is indicating that change in pedagogical process is needed. The increasing demands being placed on the dance teaching profession, to develop the next generation of dancers as graduates prepared for the 21st Century workplace, requires an innovative and interdisciplinary approach as outlined in this paper. Responding to researchers in dance education who draw attention to the importance of considering the understanding of the 'what', and the 'how', of the dancer's learning.

The paper has therefore, examined the vocational training environment, looking at the function and purpose of vocational training alongside the tradition of teaching and training dance technique. It has reflected on the research in the fields of dance education and dance science and considered the impact this has had on current vocational dance training practice. The paper

outlines the complexity of dance pedagogy with the consideration of ideographic and nomothetical characteristics of dance, and the complexity of this being contextualised within different dance genre across the life cycle of the developing dancer.

The recommendations and implications presented through this paper relate directly to opening discussions to facilitate more practice informed research which places the dancers voice as central to their corridor of learning. Inherent to this research is collaboration between researchers, vocational training institutions and professional dancer companies. As highlighted by the RBS initiative earlier, physiologically focused dance science research conducted as a result of such collaborations, is informing the vocational dance curriculum, and the professional dance environment. However, although of value, the dominance of physiological research in isolation of other key factors, does not present a holistic understanding of the science of dance. Researchers in dance education and training continue to advocate for more research which addresses the psychological needs of the dancer (Nordin & McGill 2009; Mainwaring and Finney 2017).

To conclude, the most pertinent message which this paper speaks to, and one which it hopes will out discussions in the dance and research community, is the need to embrace an innovative interdisciplinary approach to dancer empowerment, placing the dancer at the centre of the learning process. The development of ‘’PRACTISE’ a performance coaching framework is therefore presented to initiate such discussions so as a community passionate about dance, we can collectively find workable solutions which will develop and empower our next generation of dancers and dance educators.

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