

EXPLORING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING BOYS IN BALLET

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ABSTRACT

Exploring pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet
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This research explores the pedagogical practices employed by ballet instructors for engaging boys in ballet. It also examines inclusion practices for gender non-conforming children in ballet, using principles of inclusion to make recommendations for instructors to employ with all children. Four current ballet instructors shared their experiences in semi-structured interviews. An overarching finding involved the role of parents in engaging boys in ballet and in creating more inclusive practices. Findings indicate that parent education is needed for more boys to be presented with ballet as an option. With regard to teaching practices involving gender non-conforming children, participants noted the need for parents to support an inclusive environment, and be open to their child's gender expression in order for inclusive practices to be implemented. This paper presents recommendations for ballet instructors to create more welcoming environments for all students and suggestions for implementing gender-inclusive practices.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to everyone with a love for dance - may we all have the opportunity to express ourselves through the art of the dance.

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Introduction

I started ballet at the age of 7 and, 17 years later, continue to dance as a hobby. I danced competitively in ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop and contemporary for 10 years with dance studios, then competed at the university level with my school's dance team. Dance has always been a big part of my life. It has given me more confidence, friendships, time management skills, and many other competences. Though dance afforded me many skills and continues to bring me enjoyment, I have recently begun to reflect on the gendered elements of ballet that can be problematic and exclusionary. I have found myself focusing lately on gender studies, which may reflect the larger conversation that society has begun to have around gender. In line with queer theory, I view gender as a spectrum that is non binary; however, in my experience in dance, specifically ballet, students have been traditionally treated in a gender binary manner. Throughout my dance training, this treatment is reflected in the costumes and training attire, as well as in subtle differences in dance movements. For example, the colour of practice tights is different for boys and girls, with boys in black and girls in pink. In the early years of ballet, the movement differences might involve arm placements, such as girls using 'butterfly arms'- floating the arms up and down from low V to high V positions - while boys hold their arms out to the side in second position. In more advanced technique, there can be complete movements that are not performed by one gender, for example girls do not typically perform double *tour en l'air*¹ and

¹ "Turn in the air" (Grant, 1982, p. 121).

boys do not perform *fouetté* turns². My experience of ballet, and my understanding of gender as spectrum, are not in line with each other.

Ballet has been seen as a feminine form of dance in Western theatrical dance and boasts a large female presence in the art (Halton & Worthen, 2014; Risner, 2009). There is collective desire within the global ballet community for greater inclusion of men in ballet, however, boys are often recruited to ballet using hypermasculine strategies; “characterizing ballet as macho, in the sense of making it seem athletically masculine and resolutely heterosexual” (Fisher, 2007, p. 46). These hypermasculine strategies contribute to gender roles and binary portrayals of gender in ballet. The overarching problem that this study aims to address is how to create more gender-inclusive environments in ballet by exploring the pedagogical practices of engaging boys in ballet. It aims, specifically, to uncover alternative ways to recruit boys to ballet without using hypermasculine strategies, and to explore how gender non-conforming children can be included in ballet.

Purpose and significance

The purpose of the study is to gain insight into ballet instructors’ perspective on strategies for engaging boys in ballet. The value of this research is in questioning the practice of hypermasculinizing boys, as this marginalizes boys who do not identify with a hypermasculine rhetoric, and contributes to a gender binary rhetoric. The gender binary discourse also marginalizes people who are gender non-conforming, either forcing them to adopt a gender binary role for the purposes of ballet, or be excluded altogether. Therefore, this study may be

² “Whipped circle of the leg turning[.] the dancer executes a series of turns on the supporting leg while being propelled by a whipping movement of the working leg. The whipping leg should be at hip level with the foot closing in to the knee of the supporting leg” (Grant 1982, p. 57).

important for children who do not identify with hypermasculinity and for gender non-conforming children.

Conceptual framework

The theoretical framework that is used in constructing and analyzing this study is queer theory. The principles of inclusion are used as a lens in the analysis of the findings. Previous research in dance has taken on a feminist framework to critique the stereotypical roles of males and females in ballet (i.e. Fisher 2007, Klapper, 2017, Risner, 2009). Poststructural feminism has been used to examine hypermasculinity in the presentation of boys in ballet. Though this research does use the work of poststructural feminism to examine how boys are recruited to ballet, it aims to extend beyond the confines of gender categories. Much of the current research has examined ballet and gender from a binary view of gender. However, queer theory examines gender from a non-binary view, and this non-binary view of gender was applied to the current research to explore how gender non-conforming children can be included in ballet (Butler, 2004; Taylor & Blaise, 2007). Queer theory seeks to disrupt and unsettle known categories relating to gender and sexuality (Butler, 2004).

Manalansan (2015) expresses the unsettling of queer theory as messy; it does not neatly fit into current categories and exists in and around multiple schemas. Manalansan (2015) discusses how “everyday is the messy ground upon which a kind of vernacular queer worlding occurs” (p. 571). Manalasan notes that the queer world is messy and the world around it is constantly trying to package it into a category with which it is familiar, trying to make it something that it understands. The notion of the queer world not fitting into predetermined categories is paralleled in the complexity of how to include gender non-conforming children into

ballet, which is built on structure and categories. Manalansan (2015) expressed that art or aesthetics is a combination of how we perceive experiences through our senses and how these senses facilitate our feelings. Perhaps for ballet to better portray non-binary storylines it, too, must get messy and find a way to exist outside of the strict rules that dictate its technique and aesthetics. The very nature of contemporary dance allows for less structured and less categorical movements, which is potentially why there has been more queer representation in the stories portrayed through contemporary dance.

Principles of inclusion are used in the analysis of data. A universal design model considers situations that have not necessarily arisen yet (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002). Universal design takes its diverse population into consideration to create something that is flexible and extends beyond the norm. Universal design follows anti-oppressive practice, working towards an inclusive environment that aims to not oppress any person, even if they are not yet a part of the community. The universal design is not meant to be seen as ‘universal’ per se, as there will inevitably be situations that are not foreseen; however, it is an attempt to actively consider as many different scenarios as possible. The universal design also implements the idea of taking the information or accommodation that arose for a specific person or situation and offering or implementing it for everyone, with the belief that, in most cases, it can help everyone, leading to a more inclusive environment.

The paradigm that is used in this study is constructivism - the understanding that knowledge is constructed (Creswell, 2012). Through the perspective of constructivism, different social groups create knowledge, and knowledge is in the minds of people (Creswell, 2012). In this study, ballet instructors were invited to share the knowledge they had constructed to explore

pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet, with the goal of creating a more gender-inclusive environment for all children. Constructivism recognizes that people, as experts in their field, hold and construct knowledge that is valuable to the field as a whole.

Language

Throughout this paper the binary language of boys and girls and females and males is employed. This is done to represent the age of the students being discussed and because it is the language that is consistent with many dance studios' marketing. It is also the way in which the students are treated and labelled by most studios and instructors. Through this research, my hope is that the language will ultimately begin to change to be more gender-inclusive; however, I feel that this change must come from the community, the studios, and the children, for it to be meaningful.

Personal location

As previously stated, I have extensive dance experience and dance continues to be a part of my life. Dance has offered me an outlet to navigate other stressors in my life. When dancing, so much energy and focus goes into mastering the steps and movements that you can shut out outside thoughts. When dancers perform they have the opportunity to tell a story and communicate with other dancers, as well as the audience, through movement. It is an amazing experience to develop skills in dance and to perform these skills in an artistic manner. I experienced dance as someone who identifies as female and fits in the gender binary system that has existed in ballet. I recognize the privileged position from which I experienced dance, and therefore want to extend the opportunity to everyone who wants to experience dance and ballet. I strongly believe that there should be active efforts to create a more inclusive environment in

dance. I have chosen to focus on gender inclusion in this research because I have reflected on the problematic nature of gender binary treatment in dance studios. However, I am also aware that there are other areas such as race, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, etc. that need to be better included in ballet.

Literature review

As the focus of this research lies at the intersection of dance and gender, the literature used to examine gender in ballet spans a variety of fields. Dance research is used to examine the specific context of gender roles and gendered experiences in dance. Gender studies are considered to understand current views on gender, and connections to implications for ballet. Since this research adopts a pedagogical perspective of gender in dance, some education-focused literature is also explored. Some of the literature on gender and pedagogy speaks directly to dance and ballet; some reaches more broadly, but its findings are applicable to the context of ballet.

Gender in ballet

Ballet is typically labelled as a highly feminized dance form in Western theatrical dance culture. This label has not been applied to ballet throughout all of history; however, it is the current view in Western countries (Burt, 2007; Halton & Worthen, 2014; Risner, 2009). Ballet has deeply embedded gender norms, though not all Western theatrical dance styles reinforce stereotypical gender roles (Halton & Worthen, 2014; Risner, 2009; Shay, 2006). Tap and hip hop, for example, can have much higher male participation and can incorporate differing gender roles (Peters, 2010; Prickett, 2013). Furthermore, modern dance tends to be more androgynous

and do not follow as rigid gender roles. In ballet, there are distinct and separate male and female roles that mimic the gender stereotypes of females as gentle and docile, and males as strong and powerful (Stinson, 2005).

Hidden curriculum. Gendered roles in ballet can be observed through the inspection of dancers' physique, as well as, the ways in which their bodies are discussed. Dance uses the body to create images and stories; as such, dancers must constantly analyze and critique the movements of their bodies, which some scholars have observed leads to scrutinizing gender in the body (Kahlich, 2001). Stinson (2005) illustrates how critiquing the body and, in turn, gender, reinforces societal gender roles in dance classes and contributes to a hidden curriculum in dance. This hidden curriculum, as it relates to gender, perpetuates misogyny and patriarchal understanding of gender (Hebert, 2016). Hebert (2016) specifically speaks to the hidden curriculum of sexualizing children in competitive dance. Blaise's (2010) study, which investigated gender with young children found that children know and understand gender and (hetero)sexuality from a young age. Children understand and engage in heteronormative and gender binary discourses. Furthermore, Blaise also found children also understand the social consequences of deviating from the norms (Blaise, 2010).

The practices of dance educators in policing children's behaviours are deeply embedded in society and culture, even if individual educators do not support these views, and this can include dance educators (Stinson, 2005). According to Stinson (2005), some dance education has historically employed methods of teaching that segregate men and women, reinforcing gendered roles in ballet. This separation is often done in an attempt to recruit boys to dance (Risner, 2009). Depending on the level and style of dance, the ratio of female to male dancers' changes;

however, overall in dance there are large majorities of females (Risner, 2009). Some dance centres offer all-boys ballet classes which, often target specific skills that male dancers are expected to have, and may attempt to create a more masculine environment (Risner, 2009).

Predominantly heteronormative storylines are the norm in ballet, with well-defined gender binary female and male roles (for example, the nineteenth century ballet *The Nutcracker*). Kahlich (2001) encourages dance instructors, in their role as educators, to be mindful of the materials and language they use when working with young dancers, and to recognize the power they have in choosing only to choreograph certain stories. Telling exclusively romantic storylines focusing on a male and female, tells a limited story. There are few ballets that explore relationships that extend beyond the heterosexual relationship and gender binary characters. Representation of different storylines is important, as individual dancers and audience members should be able to see themselves in the roles, in part so that they can feel welcomed into that environment. The discourse of gender as binary can be reinforced through dance, and instructors need to be cognizant of this practice (Kahlich, 2001).

Discourse. Foucault's (1971; 2008) discussions of discourse can be used to examine the importance of language, as well as the message the students receive about attire. Typically, students are expected to wear tights and leotards during training so that instructors can survey the movement of their body. Ballet has very specific technique that requires constant close examination of the body. Foucault (2008) specifically discusses surveillance, watching over others and ourselves, and how it is used as a disciplinary mechanism. Gender is surveilled and disciplined to hypermasculinize male dancers (Halton & Worthe, 2014). This elicits a culture in

which students learn to surveil and police each other, and themselves as they are policed by instructors (Foucault, 2008).

It is crucial to understand the importance of language and the messages that are used when instructing children in dance, and how this language may encourage peer surveillance. The judgement and labelling of male dancers is not only imposed from outside sources, such as school classmates labeling boys who take ballet, but there can also be judgement from internal sources. The internal sources come from within the dance community or studios - from instructors and other students (Polasek & Roper, 2011).

Performativity focuses on how gender is performed - how these performances of gender are encouraged or discouraged (Butler, 2004). Often binary performances of gender that are cisgendered (having the same gender identity as assigned sex at birth) are encouraged and gender non-conforming performances are policed. As Butler (2004) explains, gender norms continue as they are performed in social contexts, and are supported in a systematic manner through our interactions with others. Dance, regardless of the context in which it is experienced, is in a constant state of performance where all movement generated in the space is in many ways performative, and critiqued by dance teachers and the audience.. There are two aspects to performativity in dance: first, how the dancers perform their gender as themselves, and then how they are asked to perform as dancers. Butler's (2004) concept of gender as performative is connected to ways in which gender binary is understood and perpetuated in dance.

Surveillance and performativity have similar attributes; both are focused on how others perceive us and how our behaviours either follow the dominant accepted discourse or challenge it (Butler, 2004; Foucault, 2008). The discourse that is presented by instructors sets the stage for

what is acceptable among dancers, and this can lead to judgement and labelling. The nature of dance as a skill-based activity involves constant surveillance and feedback on ways to improve. This can lend itself to critiquing performances of gender, and presenting oneself in a manner that supports a binary understanding of gender and reinforces cisgender performances (Kahlich, 2001). The environment and the dance instructor “often reinforce hegemonic masculinity, delegitimizing “other” masculinities [...]” (Edward, 2014, p. 474).

In ballet, the performativity of cisgender binary is encouraged through different costumes, footwear, dance quality and dance movements. Typically, at the professional level female ballet dancers wear pointe shoes and male dancers wear soft block shoes; though young children all wear soft block shoes - the males typically wear black and the females pink. Often female dancers are encouraged to be graceful and light in their performance. This can be demonstrated through long extensions in their arms and legs (Glasstone, 1981; Halton & Worthe, 2014). Male ballet dancers are often encouraged to show their masculinity as it relates to their strength, showcasing their ability to jump and lift their female partners (Glasstone, 1981; Halton & Worthen, 2014). With older children there are specific movements that typically only males perform, such as tours, and others that typically only females perform, such as *fouetté*. However, even with young children there are arm movements that typically only females perform such as cross wrist positions - these positions are typically seen as too feminine for boys (Halton & Worthen, 2014). Costuming can depend on the style and story of the performance, but there are typically differences between girls’ and boys’ costumes, some more dramatic than others (Risner, 2009). The costumes and movements are clear ways in which ballet encourages performances from girls and boys in a manner that encourages gender binary (Edward, 2014).

Profession of dance. The patriarchal views of ballet even permeate dance as a profession. Though ballet is a female-dominated field, there still exists a glass ceiling that results in most choreographer and director positions being held by men (Crawford, 1994; Fisher, 2007; Risner, 2007). As ballet is extremely taxing on the body, it is understood that if one chooses to make a career from dance that it cannot continue much past the age of 40; however, choreographing and teaching can continue over a much longer career (Fisher, 2007). There are several explanations as to why there are fewer women in higher roles in dance, and much like many fields that are female-dominated, the men seem to rise to the top (Wilson, 2004). Males are seen as more creative and less structured, leading to more acceptance of them in creative positions (Harris, 2012). Males are often given more opportunities to contribute to the creative process from a younger age, as a way to make the boys in the class “feel more comfortable” (Risner, 2007, p. 141). Men as leaders in dance also aid in combating feminine stereotypes - though they are in a female field, taking on a leadership role in a more creative position is more widely accepted as masculine (Harris, 2012).

Sexuality

The discussion of sexuality needs to be addressed in dance, even as it pertains to young children. Sexuality is often considered in relation to gender, and it is important to understand the desire to cling to traditional gender norms is linked to sexuality, specifically homophobia (Risner, 2009). There is a gay stereotype of male dancers, which is particularly prevalent in male ballet dancers, as ballet is often seen as the most feminine style of dance (Polasek & Roper, 2011). Dance studios sometimes try to fight the gay male stereotype in ballet by making clear divisions between the male and female dancers. These divisions can be in the form of different

movements that hyperfeminize females and hypermasculize males. According to Fisher (2007), there is great effort put into fighting the association between homosexuality and male dancers, with little consideration for the message thereby sent to dancers who do not identify as heterosexual (Fisher, 2007).

The literature up to this point has focused on a poststructural feminist view (Fisher, 2007; Risner, 2009), but this topic can also be considered through the lens of queer theory. Queer theory is explained by Taylor and Blaise (2007) in relation to feminist theory in the following manner, “poststructural feminist tradition of theorizing gender and challenging its binary framings, queer theory then located these gender binaries within the field of sexuality” (p. 1). Poststructural feminism discusses the role of language in the construction of gender binaries; queer theory takes the gender binaries and investigates how it relates to sexuality, and how it influences the heteronormative discourse. Just as the education system plays an important role in the heteronormative discourse in its perpetuation of this discourse in its practices (Robinson, 2012), the same can be said of dance education - specifically, with regard to the heterosexual storyline that is typically told in ballet – for example, in the *Nutcracker*, *Giselle*, *Cinderella*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Some researchers have considered the impact of heteronormative practices on dancers who do not fit this mold, as well as on those who do identify with a gender binary category but who struggle with sexual stereotypes in their profession. Polasek and Roper’s (2011) study explored the ways in which male professional dancers negotiate the gay stereotype. Some of the self-identified heterosexual participants noted how they would outright discuss girlfriends or make statements about being heterosexual to make the point clear to both the men and women in

their industry. There was a tendency to hypermasculinize themselves, in an attempt to distance themselves from the gay narrative (Halton & Worthen, 2014; Polasek & Roper, 2011). The participants shared ways in which they had to negotiate the stereotype of male dancers over the course of their dance lives and how this changed over time (Polasek & Roper, 2011). This stereotype started in their younger years when they were labelled effeminate or called ‘girls’. Later, it shifted from comments about their gender to questions about their sexuality, and they were labelled as gay (Polasek & Roper, 2011).

The participants in Polasek and Roper’s (2011) study also discussed the homophobia that exists from within the dance community. Bailey and Oberschneider’s (1997) study, however, indicated that gay male dancers feel the dance community is more accepting of homosexuality than the general society. Still, Polasek and Roper (2011) noted that “several of the participants made homonegative remarks by contrasting masculinity and homosexuality” (p. 183). The participants also described instances where choreographers of professional dance jobs would attempt to find out individuals’ sexuality before hiring them, as they were trying to present a “straight guy image” (Polasek & Roper, 2011, p.185).

Previously, there was an emphasis on male dancers’ masculinity being tied to their success in the field and the quality of dancing. Glasstone (1981) shared that “[e]ffeminate male dancing is quite simply bad dancing” (p. 10). While that may no longer be a statement that instructors would make in an overt manner, it is important to recognize that many dance instructors still feel that masculinity in dance is associated with the caliber of a dancer (Fisher, 2007). Hebert’s (2016) discussion with judges at a dance competition illustrates how maintaining gender roles and gendered movement is often rewarded by the judges’ scores. The association

between male masculinity in dance and being a better dancer is discriminatory. It sends a message that performing gender in a manner that is cisgender makes you a better dancer, which discriminates against other styles of performing (Hebert, 2016). Though not all of the judges in Hebert's (2016) research felt that there needed to be different, distinct movement, they often still recognized the predominant gender roles that are present in competitive dance.

Fisher (2007) describes the hypermasculinity as macho: "making it seem athletically masculine and resolutely heterosexual, has been a common attempt to counter effeminate stereotyping in the ballet world" (p. 46). In an attempt to make ballet less feminine and more masculine, dance instructors attempt to compare ballet to sports and therefore emphasize the physicality and athleticism that is needed as dancer (Risner, 2009). Though ballet does take a great amount of strength and athleticism, attempts to draw parallels between other more 'masculine' sports may ultimately undermine it, essentially saying that ballet is not enough on its own. While some boys have expressed that comparing ballet to other sports helps them explain it to individuals who criticize their involvement, many feel that the comparison is not necessary (Risner, 2009). They simply enjoy ballet and believe that this should not need further justification.

Evidently, there are some people who can dance and not have their sexuality questioned because of their well-established masculinity through other athletic endeavours (Metz, 2011). Metz (2011) noted that Dancing with the Stars celebrity males tend to be athletes who are involved with high-profile sports that are seen as masculine to the general public. They physically meet the demands of an accepted athletic field, and gained recognition in this field before taking up dance. It appears that, as a society we deem certain activities masculine and

other feminine; however, depending upon an individual's intersections, they are treated differently. This is, perhaps, an extreme example, as the contestants on the show are stars - they are famous and have societal recognition of their involvement in sports. Metz (2011) is discussing the intersection of career and hobby, masculine and feminine activities; however, there are multiple intersections that affect an individual's experience as a dancer.

Though intersectionality is not the focus of this research, it is important to note that individuals' experiences in dance are necessarily impacted by other factors that intersect with who they are and their environment. The larger society that individuals are a part of, and the widespread beliefs that exists within the society, will impact their experience in dance. For example, geographically - where students are taking class will impact upon the different dance options they have available to them (Burt, 2007). Likewise, individuals' gender and sexuality will intersect with their experiences as students in dance. Their race, religion, class, socioeconomic status, family networks, talent, motivation, and physical body will all impact upon their experience in dance (Tzintziloni, 2015). The previous list is not exhaustive, there are many other factors that intersect and shape how individuals experience dance.

Hidden curriculum. The hidden gender curriculum in dance is discussed by Stinson (2005) as it pertains to what children are overtly and implicitly taught, as well as what they are not taught. Indeed, the notion of hidden curriculum might be extended to a hidden sexuality curriculum as well. As previously mentioned, dancers experience homophobia from outside sources, but also from within the dance community. For example, Halton and Worthen's (2014) study showed how male dancers "experienced negativity when engaging in perceived feminine behavior while simultaneously experiencing the reinforcement of heteromascularity from their

superiors” (p. 760). It seems crucial that dance instructors are aware of the role that they play and how their own personal views may impact upon their interactions with students.

Dance instructors teach students what is and is not acceptable through their language and their portrayal of heteronormativity (Stinson, 2005). It is important that educators reflect on their practices, and are aware of the hidden gender and sexuality curriculum so they can, at the minimum, be aware of the messages they are sending to their students, and hopefully make adjustments to better create an inclusive environment for all (Stinson, 2005). They also need to be aware of beliefs that their dance institution may be perpetuating, and how they can be better for their students and society as a whole (Risner, 2007).

The hidden curriculum is also evident in the role of female-male partnering in ballet (Glasstone, 1981). The partnering of a male and female dancer in portraying a sexual storyline contributes to heteronormativity in ballet. Historically, partnering of male and female dancers has influenced the sexual storyline of dance and impacted notions of what is acceptable and is not in regards to partnering (Burt, 2007). The basis of the partnering is almost always romantic and though the female is often the main focus of the performance, the story being told is equally important.

Bullying

Klapper (2017) and Risner (2009) suggests there may be boys in ballet who face less overt harassment, but instead experience subtle forms of bullying. The cultural discourse creates an environment in which boys need a certain courage to pursue dance (Risner, 2007). Because of the strong association between ballet and femininity there can be varying consequences for males at any age who choose dance as hobby or occupation (Fisher, 2007). Such consequences can

range from subtle comments, to exclusion, to abuse, in all its forms (Fisher, 2007). As mentioned when discussing intersectionality, every individual's experience will be different, and the bullying and harassment boys face differs, as bullying can be influenced by a combination of factors. Some boys who are interested in taking ballet are deterred because they understand the likelihood they will be bullied and harassed for their participation (Edward, 2014).

The efforts to distance homosexuality from dance sends a homophobic message. Stinson (2005) noted the importance of dance instructors' discussion of sexuality with parents. Some parents have fears about their sons being bullied because of the association between homosexuality and male dancers, or that they may become gay or have increased chances of becoming gay (Stinson, 2005). Though those are fears come from a lack of understanding of sexuality and its development, they are fears that parents have expressed and instructors' responses are important in helping parents better understand gender and sexuality. There is a belief that "environments tolerant of homosexuality will spawn more homosexuals" (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997). As some parents may hold this belief, instructors need to make sure that they are not contributing to a homophobic culture and make clear that being gay is not a worse fate (Stinson, 2005). The homosexual stereotype of male dancers is prominent; it is educators' responsibility to recognize their role in supporting all of their students.

Gender inclusivity

Gender inclusivity refers to creating an environment in which children identifying with any and all genders are taught in a way that respects their gender identity and does not segregate them based on gender binary categories (Davis, 2009). Gender inclusivity also refers to creating an environment and curriculum that attempts to support any and all children regardless if there

are children who are gender non-conforming in the specific environment. Creating an environment that is sexually inclusive, can also be discussed; where students of all sexual orientations are given opportunities to tell stories through their movements (Davis, 2009). Gender and sexuality have been tied together even though they are two separate aspects of identity that do not necessarily influence each other (Killermann, 2015). Research shows that gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are all independent of each other. (Killermann, 2015).

Within the understanding of gender as existing on spectrum, gender non-conforming refers to individuals who do not feel that they neatly fit into the binary boxes of female or male (Davis, 2009). They may feel that their gender exists on continuum between extreme femininity and extreme masculinity or that they may not feel that they experience gender (Davis, 2009).

Traditional Western ballet has not treated gender as a continuum, but rather as binary. This calls into question how to include transgender children in ballet, understanding that their physical appearance may align itself with either the female or male position in ballet; however, that may not be how they self-identify nor the position that they want to perform.

The understanding of gender and sexuality as fluidly, moving on multiple spectrums simultaneously, has been depicted in some genres of dance (Davis, 2009). In contemporary dance, there have been more non-heteronormative stories portrayed (Crawford, 1994). For example, Travis Walls, an American dance choreographer, created a dance piece that portray a story of two men's love (Wall & Ubeda, 2016). Contemporary dance is an abstract category of dance that takes on many different shapes depending on the choreographer, dancers and story that is being told (Burt, 2007). As a newer form of dance, contemporary dance does not suffer

under rules that are rigid or embedded in history, allowing for more freedom and less criticism (Tsintziloni, 2015). Stories told in contemporary dance that deviate from the dominant discourse of Western society also highlight the potential for dance at large to deviate, change, and evolve to reflect the changes that are happening within society, and perhaps even assist in leading these societal changes.

Gap in the literature and education

The literature has shown that there is a desire to recruit more boys to dance, specifically ballet (Burt, 2007; Fisher, 2007; Risner, 2009). Because of the societal label of ballet as feminine, there is a rhetoric that defines male ballet dancers as feminine or ‘girly’, especially with young boys (Risner, 2009). As male dancers age, the scrutiny changes from one of gender to one of sexuality, where male dancers negotiate the gay stereotype of male ballet dancers. Ballet has previously been rooted in heteronormative storylines with a strong division between females and males, perpetuating gender binary (Burt, 2007; Glasstone, 1981; Risner, 2009). There have been critiques of the gendered dance instruction of children, but a lack of recommended alternatives. Similarly, there is recognition in the literature that hypermasculinity and heteronormative instruction is potentially harmful, as well as an imbalance in the ratio of boys to girls enrolled in ballet (Fisher, 2007).

Hypermasculinization of ballet instruction has sometimes been effective in recruiting certain boys who might not have joined otherwise. Some boys who are interested in learning dance, specifically ballet, have expressed concern that they would be bullied with gender and sexual slurs (Edward, 2014). For boys who are reluctant to take ballet classes because of its

feminized perception, attempts by instructors to emphasize more masculine aspects of ballet, and employ themes, music and/ or costumes that match masculine stereotypes could be effective (Fisher, 2007). However, each of these hypermasculine strategies can be seen as prioritizing a specific group of boys over the rest of the children (Fisher, 2007). It reinforces advantages offered to an already privileged group in our society - heterosexual, cisgender males.

From a North American societal understanding of masculinity, ballet is not masculine. While ballet does require a great deal of physical strength, endurance, flexibility, and perseverance, it is an art. And it is possible that no amount of hypermasculine or ‘macho’ strategies will change public perception and redefine this particular art as ‘masculine’. According to Fisher (2007), ballet needs to be accepted as feminine and the focus needs to shift towards acceptance of all genders taking part in feminine activities.

The goal of the present research is to investigate the gap in the literature by exploring the pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet. This encompasses understanding the dance instructors’ teaching backgrounds and the general environment that dance centres create. It involves exploring techniques that instructors and dance centres use to recruit and encourage boys to stay in ballet, and examining the potential gendering of current teaching practices. The effectiveness of these strategies in retaining boys in ballet are considered. The current study aims to explore teachers’ use of recruitment strategies that do not use hypermasculine strategies. The literature has shown how hypermasculinity is used in an attempt to distance male ballet dancers from feminine association (Burt 2007; Glasstone, 1981; Fisher, 2007; Risner, 2009). The focus

on exploring alternative recruitment and retention strategies is to aid in creating a more welcoming gender-inclusive environment for everyone.

Though pedagogical practices pertaining to boys specifically are explored, the potential implication of alternative strategies to recruitment may extend to all genders. Distancing boys from girls and femininity in ballet sends the message that femininity is less than masculinity and that there is something wrong with femininity (Risner, 2009). As previously noted, hypermasculinity can be harmful to boys who do not identify with that discourse. Attempting to distance ballet from the gay male stereotype sends the message that there is something wrong with being a gay male ballet dancer - a potentially harmful message for young boys who are developing their self-identity. The hyperfemininity that is encouraged in ballet sends an equally strong message to young female dancers - that the very notion of them not firmly identifying with femininity and heterosexuality has not even been considered. What is not discussed sends a strong message about what is valued, accepted, worthy of even being considered. Through exploring pedagogical practices of dance instructors to recruit boys to ballet, more inclusive strategies that are not rooted in gender differences are sought.

Methodology

Scope

This study focusses on the voices of current ballet instructors, exploring their pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet. While there is some research on the experiences of boys in dance, I could find none that investigate pedagogical practices pertaining to boys from the perspective of teachers. As evidenced in the literature review, there are considerably fewer boys than girls engaged in ballet, and there is interest from dance centres, and the dance community as

whole, to attract more boys to ballet (Fisher, 2007; Risner, 2009). This study considers participants' backgrounds in teaching ballet, as well as their specific experience teaching boys. The environment in which participants teach ballet, and their backgrounds are important as they impact pedagogical practices (Kahlich, 2001). Finally, the study explores marketing techniques employed by dance centres to attract boys to ballet.

Using hypermasculine strategies also implies that all boys are the same and that there are only two genders. This study also seeks to uncover pedagogical strategies for children who are gender non-conforming. The participants were all current ballet instructors in the Greater Toronto Area and thus this research has a Canadian context. Though the literature and many of the findings can be applicable throughout North America the research and the focus is Canadian.

This qualitative study does not attempt to develop an exhaustive list of strategies for including boys in ballet nor to uncover all the pedagogical strategies for including gender non-conforming children. It is exploratory in nature and limited in scope, and will therefore attempt to provide a preliminary understanding of teachers' strategies with regard to boys and gender nonconforming children. As a project specifically designed to investigate gender and dance, other factors and intersections that impact upon children's experience in ballet are not examined, but are noted if they organically arise due to the open-ended nature of the interview design.

Approach

This study used a qualitative methodology to develop an in-depth exploratory approach to the topic. While previous research has considered gender issues in ballet; pedagogical practices of dance instructors have not been explored (Burt, 2007; Edward, 2014; Polasel & Roper, 2011).

The limited research on recruitment and retention of boys in dance has not been undertaken from the lens of queer theories, nor has it considered dance inclusion for gender non-conforming youth. The qualitative approach was purposefully chosen because it allows for more in-depth data collection with a smaller sample, as appropriate for the MRP timeline and the novelty of the research questions (Creswell, 2012).

Strategies

The strategy used in this study is generic qualitative. The generic qualitative approach does not take its guidance from an explicit philosophy or set of assumptions (Kahlke, 2014). An aim of this type of study is not to have assumptions, but to allow for new perspectives on the area of study to emerge from the research (Kahlke, 2014). This strategy is appropriate for this particular study because the intention is to explore strategies, without assumptions, with a focus on uncovering new perspectives pertaining to pedagogical practices for boys in ballet and creating more gender-inclusive environments.

Sample and setting

The intent of the project was to conduct between four and six interviews – which was determined to be a reasonable number given the limited timeline for the study and the expected depth of the responses. Four interviews were ultimately conducted, with two taking place in person and two taking place over media (one on Skype and one using webex with only audio). Participants were given the option to conduct the interview either in a private room in a university setting or over Skype, allowing them to choose the location most convenient for them. Both options provide auditory and visual privacy to maintain confidentiality of the participants and reduce risk to participants.

All participants were current ballet instructors with five or more years of experience teaching all genders of children 12-years and under. The criteria for participation was determined for the following reasons. First, as societal understanding of gender is constantly evolving, having current experience was considered vital. Second, as experience is essential to credibility in terms of speaking to the overall culture of ballet, a minimum of five years as a ballet instructor was chosen as a substantial background in the area. Third, experience in teaching all genders of children was also deemed to be important -while the focus is on boys, it extends to considering boys and girls, as well as gender non-conforming children. Finally, the age 12-years and under was chosen because the research is specifically interested in teaching practices related to children, taking into consideration that boys tend to join dance somewhat later than girls. Participants were recruited by reaching out to dance studios in the greater Toronto area via their public email contact.

Ethical considerations pertained to potential for minimal psychological and sociological risks. Minimal psychological risk was deemed possible, in terms of stress or discomfort during the interview, as participants reflected upon their teaching practices. This risk was managed by having the interview take place in a private setting and by requiring full informed consent in order to participate. Additionally, every effort was made to ensure that participants understood the voluntary nature of the study - that they could withdraw from the study at any point and their data would be destroyed, and that they could ask any questions about the consent form and questions. The set interview questions were shared with participants a week prior to their scheduled interview. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcript before they are used in the project. There was also a minimal risk of being recognized as a participant in the

study, which could cause embarrassment. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudo names and not including any identifying aspects of the participants. The author and her supervisor are the only people who have access to the identity of the participants and the linking document between the participants' identity and their pseudo names will be in password protected file on a password protected computer.

Data collection tools and procedures

This study used semi-structured, open-ended interviews with ballet instructors. Since this project is exploratory, interviews were used as previous research has shown the value of interviews when exploring new topics (Creswell, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were used as there is currently a limited amount of research on dance instructors' perspectives on boys' inclusion in dance. A less structured interview format allowed for more in-depth understanding (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews tend to allow for areas of discussion to emerge that the researcher has not previously considered, leading to more robust findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to facilitate transcription for more thorough thematic analysis of the data (Creswell, 2012). Once transcribed, interviews were sent to individual participants to give them the opportunity to review it.

Data analysis

Analysis of audio recordings and transcripts were thematically coded. The specific type of thematic analysis that was used is a constant comparison, the process of which is outlined as follows: first, the entire dataset was read thoroughly before the data is chunked into subsets (Leech & Onwenegbuzie, 2007). The chunks are labeled as codes, and each new chunk of

information was compared to the established codes, so if the new chunk fits the criteria for an established code it is given that code, and if not the new chunk was given a new code (Leech & Onwenebuzie, 2007). Once the data has been coded, the similar codes were placed together and themes emerge from the data (Leech & Onwenebuzie, 2007). The data was interpreted using the theoretical foundations of queer theory. Poststructural feminist theory was used to examine hypermasculine strategies in ballet. However, queer theory is the lens that was used when grouping the data codes into themes that emerge, and gender is extended beyond a binary understanding and is connected to sexuality. There was opportunity for member checking, with participants having the opportunity to review their transcripts before they are analyzed.

Findings

Context

Four participants were interviewed. All of the participants taught boys consistently throughout their time as a ballet teacher. Three of the participants had 15 years and one had six years of teaching experience. All participants had taught at dance studios, which typically consist of recreational classes and a competitive team; one was also a current dance studio owner. One participant had 10 years of experience teaching for a professional training conservatory ballet school. A professional ballet training conservatory typically trains dancers for the explicit purpose of preparing students for employment in a future professional ballet company. There is an audition process for acceptance into a professional training conservatory. Furthermore, these training sites often have a higher caliber of dancers because of the audition process, teachers, and the hours of training. Competition is not typically a component of the professional training

conservatory experience. The primary focus is on performance. The participant in this study who currently teaches at a professional training conservatory had previously taught in studio settings and continues to travel to studios to audition children for the ballet school.

All four participants reported that, in the studio settings where they taught ballet classes, all of the classes combined girls and boys and did not offer boys-only classes. In the professional training conservatory there are separate classes for boys, as well combined classes for girls and boys, with the choice left to parents as to which class their child takes. The ratio of boys to girls in the combined studio classes varies based on age and grouping but there was consistently a large majority of girls in the ballet classes.

Engaging boys in ballet

Participants reported that marketing techniques that the dance studios they worked for or in one case, owned, tend to offer price reductions to their students' classes. Some dance studios have price reductions for boys ranging and from 25% off to completely free. Participants also discussed ensuring that images of boys are visible in their media advertising, "when I have pictures of students that I want to put out you know on social media or, what have you, I, I definitely try to make sure I include pictures that have boys in it" (Olivia, personal communication, June 28, 2017). Some studios also offer gender-specific programming to attract boys to ballet. Another marketing strategy reported is to feature boys at public family events, but not in a manner that takes away from the females' performance. Dance studios also use public events as opportunities to promote ballet classes with the children and families in the audience. One teacher noted also being mindful of the names that they give to beginner classes, to ensure that they are not off-putting to boys.

Most participants noted that getting boys into their first class is often the hardest part of engaging boys in ballet. All four participants highlighted the need for a welcoming environment that assures the boys that it is okay to be there, and that they belong. Olivia elaborates on this is done:

I've never wanted to make it a thing, and to say that boys shouldn't be here or that ballet is not a class for boys, they have to have their own special thing. I've always wanted boys to feel that ballet is absolutely for them and, they are welcome to be in the class and not separate them from the beginning (Olivia, personal communication, June 28, 2017)

Wendy also noted that the welcoming environment needs to extend beyond gender – that dance studios need to work to be welcoming environments for all –regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. Wendy felt that ballet in North America has remained very White despite a much more diverse population, and therefore felt that efforts should be made to present ballet on a level playing field so that it is attainable for all.

You might find that studios are predominantly White, which is a concern, with what the demographics have been for Canada, we remain a predominantly White art form, and to remain relevant but also, are we really serving our community as dance providers if only a select few people in a community feel welcome in our spaces (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

These educators indicated that there are also males that begin ballet as teenagers, something that is not common for girls. It was speculated that boys join late, as teens, because they then have the autonomy to ask to take ballet or because they have exposure from high school dance classes and want to further their studies. The following is Winnie's explanation:

I'm finding in my, in my teen classes, I get a lot of boys starting to come in, not a lot, but, in ratio wise, like a few more, and I think it's because they, went, like mom never put me in and now I want to pursue something, or I'm interested in it and so I'm going to you know, I'm going to express that desire and sign myself up or get my parents to sign me up now, and start now cause I didn't get to start when I was younger, you know. (Winnie, personal communication, June 23, 2017)

Strategies used to engage boys in ballet and to encourage them to persist into their teenage years vary from giving boys more focused attention to being mindful of the students in each class. Participants felt that imagery presented in class needs to resonate with the specific students. Olivia shared that the imagery they use, such as telling female students to pretend they are wearing a tiara to stand tall, is different from what they would use with boys.

I'm typically not talking about, you know the tiara on your head or you know I had teachers, who in talking about port de bras³ would tell you things like, you know it's like you're looking out over your sparkly ring, and well that's usually not going to do it for boys in class [...] those kinds of examples are different (Olivia, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Another strategy discussed was allowing boys to wear their own choice of clothing at the beginning of studies, for fear that traditional ballet attire might deter them from taking ballet. Participants discussed presenting students with ways ballet could be beneficial to them and help them reach other dance goals, as a strategy to engage boys in ballet. They shared that they try to show male students aspects of ballet with which they feel the specific student might connect.

³ "Carriage of the arms" (Grant, 1982, p.89). Movement of arms passing through various positions (Grant, 1982).

Often dance studios make ballet mandatory for the competitive team, which the educators pointed out ensures that all competitive male dancers at their studio take ballet - “having them have to take it at the studios, so if they want to be on the competition team they have to take ballet, and that goes for the girls as well” (Ashley, personal communication, June 28, 2017). One participant felt that some studios give focused attention to boys. Wendy speculated that it could be because there are often fewer boys and therefore more resources that can be shared with them. “If you have one or two boys, they can probably get a lot of resources from the studios and teachers to try to keep them around, whereas if you have lots of girls they might not get as much attention” (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017). Most participants felt that they do give boys individualized attention, but noted that they try to give individualized attention to every student in their class.

Participants discussed hypermasculine strategies that are sometimes used to engage boys in ballet. They described focusing on the athleticism and strength elements of ballet – for example, elevation in jumps and power of movements – to get boys interested or to convince them to persist. There was also some discussion of song choices and dance themes being influenced by the presence of boys in the class. Olivia discussed showing boys videos of male dancers doing big jumps and tricks that would interest them, then connecting these images back to ballet.

Guys who can hit Russians⁴ all that those are cool to see and so many of those jumps have been coopted into other forms of dance and, or look like what like martial arts performers do and so sometimes it's boys look at stuff like and they're like ‘oh that's

⁴ Similar to a *grand jeté*, a “large *jeté* [...] the legs are thrown to 90 degrees with a corresponding high jump” (Grant, 1982, p. 63).

cool' and I'm like 'that's ballet, right'. And it's getting them to see that, you know a lot of the stuff that they think is really cool is ballet so you do think ballet is cool [laugh] right (Olivia, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

The intention was to use the flashy movements showing power, strength and athleticism to attract boys to ballet. Ashley discussed employing choreography with young boys that is more contemporary in style, for fear that they might be less interested in traditional ballet. "so I'll give everyone the exact same costume and um and try and make it as much ballet as I can before it hits contemporary[laugh], and I'll go with that to try and keep those boys in there um as long as possible" (Ashley, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Differences between training and choreography

All participants noted that in the ballet studio, the physical teaching and demonstration of codified ballet technique designed for young students (male and female) are relatively same. For example, the manner in which a young boy learns to execute a *plié* (a knee bend) requires the same basic movement principles, as a young girl. Therefore, while participants noted subtle differences in arm placement, movements names, and quality in which the movement is to be executed, such differences in the dance studio training setting are relatively minor. Where participants noted the most notable gender differences in movement execution and quality is in the preparation and performance of choreography for the stage and short dances prepared for external dance examinations. The following are some of the participants' words on the topic:

“Ballet is ballet and I mean yes, the males obviously have different movements, especially when you get into higher levels, but the boys have to learn all the same stuff” (Winnie, personal communication, June 23, 2017).

“When it comes to choreography, um, especially doing partnering work, well then, you know I’m teaching different stuff” (Olivia, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

“[...] the boys and girls work is very similar except for when they’re doing their *enchaînemen⁵t* or their dances. So I would say it’s more of a choreography difference than a training difference” (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

Therefore, although participants reported that the gendered differences in the physical execution of the steps, i.e. the way boys hold their arms, or gestures range from minor to major, they are substantial enough in the performance setting to be visibly gendered. For example, one would not see a young man curtsy at the end of a performance, but rather bow. One teacher even noted that providing different movements for boys and girls during regular class time can affect pacing, since giving alternative instructions typically slows down the pace of the class.

Gender non-conforming children

This section will focus on experiences that participants had with gender non-conforming children, specifically with regard to the role of costumes in performances. The historical role of gender in ballet was discussed, as well as the changing perspectives currently emerging within the dance community.

⁵ “A combination of two or more steps arranged to fit a phrase of music” (Grant, 1982, p. 47).

Three participants had experience with gender non-conforming children in their ballet classes, and they shared their thoughts about costumes. The teachers expressed feelings of uncertainty and discomfort around what to do, but all teachers navigated through and presented choices of costumes to the gender non-conforming children. “For most teachers, I think at first there’s a certain kind of discomfort or lack of assurance about what you should do, and you feel like you’re saying all the wrong things” (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017). When discussing gender non-conforming children as not identifying with either gender, the teachers noted maintaining similar choreography and costumes for everyone. Ashley felt that studios can be afraid of presenting options to children for their dance costumes out of fear of backlash from parents who are not in support of their child’s gender expression deviating from the norm.

“Yeah, I think that’s what a lot of teachers and studios are afraid of, is okay, we give them the option and then you know their little princess choses the pants and they come at us with, why is she wearing the boy costume and that’s a conversation that a lot of studios don’t want to have” (Ashley, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Of the three participants who had experience with gender non-conforming children ranging in age from 7-year-old to teenage years, two participants had experience with one gender non-conforming child while the other participant had experience with two gender non-conforming children. In some cases, parents had disclosed that the child was not identifying with a specific gender at the moment, and in others the ballet teacher was not told directly, but became aware as the child’s body began to mature. Some participants expressed that they had a lack of confidence in how to include a gender non-conforming child, but that through experience

and communication they navigated the situation. “After doing it once or twice, now I feel more confident asking people what they like to be referred to as, or and just like what I said in any class I try and be mindful and this is true for kids and adults” (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

Changing perspectives towards boys in ballet and gender non-conforming children were noted. The masculine presentation of boys was described by Wendy as being in line with the traditional role of men in ballet two or three centuries ago.

So I think the male role is very stereotypically male, but I think that developed in the time and space, I mean that’s the way men were represented in that time and space were echoing back to you know whatever 300, 400-year-old tradition of the men playing that part (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

The educators discussed the fact that traditional roles are still prominent, but that there are companies that are deviating, in which you can see males on pointe⁶. They noted a larger spectrum of male dancers, with more physical diversity than among female dancers. Wendy explains the spectrum of male dancers:

I think one of things that is nice now is that there is a lot of media that you see from the point of boys too, so there is a lot of ways for that they can watch a spectrum of male dancers, and say I like this or I like that, there is a spectrum within the professional ballet world of male bodies, um, more so than women, there is different heights, different

⁶ Although the pointe shoe has a somewhat varied history in its design, “today the toes of pointe shoes are reinforced with a box constructed of several layer of strong glue in between layers of material” (Grant, 1982, p. 89). This action adds approximately two inches to their height. Pointe work is typically taught to advanced female ballet dancers since it requires a great amount of strength and training. Male dancers do not traditionally use pointe shoes, but rather they wear soft canvas ballet slippers and are not typically required to dance *en pointe*.

[inaudible]. Um, so in a sense the boys get to look up to a more diverse spectrum than the girls do (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

Participants described how diverse genders have recently received more media exposure, which has contributed to shifting views. It was also noted that the younger generation of dance teachers has grown up during a more open and accepting time and tends to have more open views and greater understanding of gender.

Now a lot of the teachers are younger, right, [...] anyone I talk to in their late 20s/ early 30s has the same thinking as I do, you know like let's give them options, let's try and keep all the choreography the same, like none of this boys' fist, girls are in whatever. Um, so I think the younger the teachers are, talk about this so much more than we do, like I've listened to kids talk in the bathroom and um, you know they'll just be talking about their trans friends and they're like 8, I didn't know what trans was until I was 24. It's just so interesting that they're so open to this, and you see it on TV shows as well" (Ashley, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Recommendations

Recommendations that emerged from the interviews spanned from recruitment and retention of boys, considerations for gender non-conforming children, as well as overall gender inclusion strategies. Recommendations from the participants for encouraging boys to get started in ballet involved offering introductory classes in the summer. This would allow students to test out styles without the pressure of signing up for a full term or year program. Parent education and societal understanding of gender was noted as a necessary change in order for more parents to present ballet as an option for their boys. Participants felt that what is needed is a broader

societal change, in order for ballet to be more widely accepted as a viable endeavor for boys, so that parents present it as an option to them. An excerpt from Winnie's transcript describing gender beliefs and parent education:

[I]n terms of attracting boys to ballet, it's it's just a tough a one, because essentially you are dealing with people's gender beliefs and gender biases and we know what a crazy crazy world that is, and how do effect people's moral beliefs? It's just takes a really long time and a lot of you know leadership I think [...] I think the main barrier to children getting into, into ballet specifically especially for boys, is parents. It's parent education, its parent beliefs, parent, like it has everything to do with the parents (Winnie, personal communication, 2017).

To help boys persist in ballet, participants in this study felt that role models in dance would not only offer much needed inspiration for young boys, but also offer a possible career path for young men to follow. They noted that having a role model in the specific style of ballet may be necessary, since having a male teacher in another style may not necessarily transfer to benefits for ballet. Winnie discussed the importance of role models of parents as well, people in positions of power and authority showing their support and actively contributing to the discourse of changing gender roles.

Adults we still have to have role models right you know people that are in positions that in of respect. Like maybe if somebody sees government or prime minister and they are you know there, they're doing more to accept all these things, and you know that is happening in the world and it's exciting (Winnie, personal communication, June 23, 2017).

It was noted, while not necessarily specific to boys, that teachers need to be mindful of who is in their class, targeting their specific style and interests to make the experience enjoyable for them – for example, beginning with themes and styles that are less traditional and closer to contemporary in style. When boys are struggling to decide if they want to continue in dance, teachers discussed how they can use media to show the boys successful male dancers and articles about boys persisting in ballet and the positive experience they had. Ashley explains this:

I kind of sat down and showed him all of these videos of where ballet can take you later and, in more contemporary settings and you know you can't get good at contemporary without ballet and, I just kind of read him some articles from some boys who said 'you know I wanted to quit and, here are the benefits', um and stuff like that (Ashley, personal communication, June 28, 2017)

Specific recommendations that participants suggested for gender non-conforming children were offering children the choice of which costume they wanted to wear on stage; one educator also suggested that this should be done with all children, as teachers may not be aware of their students' preferences. The idea of presenting all children with costume choices was extended to considering having multiple costume pieces and allowing all children to choose some combination of them. Having a range of pieces that all go together was suggested, as this presents some uniformity to the costumes, but it also reflects the individuality of the children.

...even three options is a good idea, like here is 5 pieces you can chose from, and pick and choose whatever ones and these are the options though and this is it [laugh], so pick what you identify the best with. I feel like that would be the best way to go (Ashley, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

However, if a student joined a company and wanted to pursue ballet in a professional setting, options in costuming might not be realistic. As Wendy stated “in the end ballet is a very gendered thing, it has a male and female role” (personal communication, July 21, 2017). This can make it challenging for gender non-conforming people to pursue ballet at a professional level.

It was suggested by the participants that gender non-conforming students may seek to join a contemporary or modern dance company because ballet technique and movement is widely used in those settings, but they tend to have less defined gender roles.

[T]he nice thing is that there is a spectrum of dance, that people who do maybe identify maybe in a non-binary way, there is opportunity in other dance forms, but it’s true um, they are not um, as based in opportunities in ballet companies or people who don’t fall into a gender category but in modern dance that’s something that’s more or contemporary dance that’s more (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

Wendy shared that it is important to teach all children a wide range of movement qualities, as it is important for all dancers to be able to create movements that depict multiple qualities. Wendy also suggested that movement qualities should be discussed in terms of soft or powerful, rather than associating them with being female or male qualities.

...rather than saying ‘well, this is what boys do’, you need to be able paint any set of pictures, you need to be able to express, you need to be the wind, you need to be sadness, you need to be excitable, so you need the full spectrum, and a flexible spectrum, anything they say to the girls. It’s about qualities of movement not about being girly or male (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

The importance of having professional development for dance teachers was emphasized by the participants. Having more knowledge and tools to teach a more diverse group of students could help ballet teachers feel more comfortable and confident in their practice, which the participants felt would ultimately lead to better teachers. A teacher suggested that having a platform for ballet teachers across the country to communicate with each other and share experiences and advice could be valuable. Wendy felt such a platform could offer dance teachers the opportunity to move beyond their current studio's perspective and expand their own understanding of working with children. "Where if there's a way for teachers across the country to have conversations and get together that can be part of a conversation that then spreads, but when it's such unique [inaudible] institutions it can be hard to spread ideas like that" (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017). For example, Wendy discussed having conversations with other dance studios about changeroom rules to make that everyone feels respected and how to share the rules with the dance studio.

Another recommendation for creating a more positive and inclusive environment for all children was to focus less on the competition culture that tends to create a strong divide in studios between recreational students and the competitive team. Wendy suggested that studios consider a move away from auditioning for competitive teams, as this can create an unwelcoming environment and put new students at a disadvantage. As previously mentioned, boys often start ballet later than girls, so it can be intimidating to audition with similar-aged children who have trained for longer. Wendy explains:

Especially because boys often start late um so the idea that in order to be included I have to audition and have skills, where the girls might have been dancing for 5 years, and I've

only been dancing for 1, I think that might be something that would push him away” (Wendy, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

Rather, the participant suggested that dance teachers and studios focus on emphasizing to children and parents the benefits that children get from dancing, in hopes of changing the competition culture. Aside from the physical strength and development that comes with ballet training, the simple enjoyment of dance was noted as an important component of participation. One teacher felt that taking part in dance as a child can open up more options as an adult. Dance can be continued as an adult for physical fitness, or give people the confidence to try different physical fitness activities in adulthood, because of the base they learned as child in ballet. Participants felt that ballet can support people spiritually, mentally, and is a means of self-expression; it can build students’ overall confidence, movement confidence, and musicality. The educators felt that, ultimately, people who choose to dance and continue to pursue ballet do not have regrets, because of all the benefits they gain and the overall enjoyment that it brings. As one of the participants, Winnie, stated “nobody has ever said, I wish I didn’t dance” (personal communication, June 23, 2017).

Discussion

Many of the findings from this study are align with existing literature on boys’ experiences in ballet. There are similar strategies for getting boys started and encouraging boys to persist in ballet, specifically with regard to the hypermasculine strategies that presented in both the findings and the literature. The findings also present new strategies and perspectives, specifically considering changing views about boys in ballet and its impact on less gendered teaching practices. What the findings and the study uniquely bring forward are the experiences of

gender non-conforming children in ballet, and recommendations for creating more gender-inclusive environment in ballet.

Including boys and gender non-conforming children in ballet

The literature indicates that a lack of male role models can be a barrier for engaging boys in ballet (Halton & Worthen, 2014; Polasek & Roper, 2011; Risner, 2007, 2009). Polasek and Roper (2011) specifically discuss how role models can provide social acceptance, while Metz (2011) focusses on athletes as role models. Educators in the current study all stressed the importance of role models for boys. They noted having role models with whom boys can relate can encourage a sense of belonging within the dance community which in turn encourages young boys to persist in dance into adulthood. Instructors stressed the importance of having role models and male teachers in ballet specifically, as there tend to be more male role models in other dance styles, such as hip hop, but that connection does not necessarily transfer over from one dance style to another.

Marketing strategies, privileges, and relaxed uniform policies are other strategies that are used to engage boys in ballet. The marketing strategies shared by teachers, such as price reductions and male visibility in advertising is also noted in Klapper's (2017) study. Price reduction and male visibility can also be observed by searching online dance studios' pricing and images. Klapper (2017) and Risner (2009) note challenges getting boys into the environment of a ballet class, and this hurdle was shared by the instructors in this study. As in Klapper (2017), teachers here also recommend allowing boys to not wear ballet attire at the beginning of their training, as it can deter them from taking ballet class.

The use of hypermasculine strategies to recruit boys to dance is documented in the literature (Fisher, 2007; Halton & Worthen, 2014; Klapper, 2017; Risner, 2009). Metz (2011) draws attention to athletes as role models, and how athleticism is used to hypermasculinize boys in dance. The participants here did discuss that some hypermasculine strategies, such as emphasis on strength, and power, and athleticism of ballet, are used to recruit boys; however, there was much less discussion of hypermasculine strategies than of other types of strategies. The instructors felt that there are changing perspectives about boys and hypermasculinity in ballet, specifically with younger staff and students, which corresponds to them putting less focus and importance on hypermasculine strategies.

It was noted by a participant that the hypermasculinity and gender differences in the performance of ballet is well rooted in its history; that the way males are portrayed in ballet is reflective of the how males were portrayed in society hundreds of years ago. All of the participants noted that traditionally ballet has two roles, a male and female role. This is supported in the literature, which describes the roles in a gender binary manner (Hebert, 2016; Burt, 2007; Klapper, 2017). The instructors also noted that the binary roles have started to shift and that more diverse stories are starting to be told in ballet.

A recurring theme was the difference in dance movements for training (in-class practice time) versus choreography for a performance or examination. This was noted by all of the participants. The literature focuses predominantly on choreography and discusses the different movements for males and females in that setting (Edward, 2014); however, the participants noted that training actually has few differences for girls and boys. The instructors stated that while ballet technique is the relatively same for boys and girls, even though there are some movements

that typically are not performed by boys, and vice versa, everyone can still learn the movements in training. Educators noted that, of the different dance styles, ballet is more gender-inclusive in the movements for training and can be a welcoming environment for gender non-conforming children if the ballet instructor uses inclusive language and practices.

There are gendered movements, costumes, and roles in ballet choreography, which led to the question of how gender non-conforming children can be included ballet. Specifically, children who do not identify with one, or only one, of the gender binary categories around which ballet is based – female and male. If there are only two costume choices, and the choices correspond to binary genders, gender non-conforming children may not feel that either represent their gender expression. Participants in the current study had experiences with gender non-conforming children, and shared gender-inclusive strategies which are not found in the current literature relating to dance education. The teachers suggested offering multiple costume choices to everyone, using language that does not stereotype children's gender, and not assuming children's gender. When using different movements, they suggest giving the option to everyone to choose which movement they would like to do, or keeping the movements in choreography the same for all. Burt (2007) discusses less gender conforming professionals in dance but, the literature has not yet explored connecting these dancers' experience in expressing less gender conforming roles to inclusive practices for young dancers in training.

Another consideration for creating a gender-inclusive environment for children in dance that participants discussed was the use of changerooms. The use of changerooms and washrooms has been discussed by Bowers and Lopez (2013) with regard to schools and sports teams; however, it has not been discussed in the context of dance studios. It was noted in the current

study that, in most cases, studios allow students to use the facilities with which they are comfortable' however, not all studios may have this approach, especially if they have not been made aware there are individuals in their environment who are gender non-conforming. Bowers and Lopez (2013) discuss the need to ensure that everyone can use whichever changeroom or washroom they feel comfortable using. They also caution against giving gender non-conforming children access to a staff washroom or a different changeroom, as this practice can out children and/or alienate them from their peers (Bowers & Lopez, 2013).

Parent role

A prominent theme that emerged from the findings was the important role that parents play in children's involvement in ballet. Though some of the literature touched on parent education, specifically to get boys involved in ballet, in the current study participants stressed the role of parents throughout dancers' childhood. The findings suggest that, even if there are tactics to target boys directly, ultimately it comes down to parents presenting their child with the option of taking ballet or not. In rare instances, boys come forward with an interest in ballet outside of their parent's offering it as an activity for them, but in most cases, the participants conveyed that it is usually the parents who ultimately decide if their child takes part in ballet classes or not, especially in the younger years.

Parent's role also comes forward as a theme when discussing the participants' experiences with gender non-conforming children. Though among the participants they had only had a few experiences with gender non-conforming children, most relied on parents coming forward to discuss their child's gender with them as the ballet instructor. Manning, Holmes, Sansfacon, Newhook, and Travers (2015) discusses the role of parents of gender non-conforming

children to advocate for their child in an educational setting; however, this need for advocacy can be applied to dance education as well. Since ballet, and society in general, typically operates with a binary understanding of gender, it falls on parents to advocate for their child within dance studios. Participants in this study expressed that it was not common practice to give children the option between the male costume and the female costume, but when parents discussed it with them, they did. Some of the participants suggested that dance studios may not offer the option to all the children out of fear of backlash from parents. Again, this shows the important role that parents play. If parents are not in support of a gender-inclusive environment, in which their child may choose a costume that does not align with their assigned sex at birth, and do not support the gender expression of their child, then it can create a great deal of conflict within the dance studio environment, as expressed by a participants fear of backlash from parents when presenting costume choices to children.

Recommendations

With the large role that parents play in children's engagement in ballet, parent education emerged as an important recommendation for engaging more boys in ballet. Risner (2009) discusses parents and the different levels of encouraging that boys can receive from their peers and their families about dancing. The participants in this study specifically spoke about informing parents of the benefits that ballet can bring to all children. In order for substantive change to occur around the inclusion of boys in ballet, the participants in this study also discussed the pivotal role of parental education would need to play. It was also suggested that parent education include further understanding gender identity and gender expression.

A specific recommendation about parent education was to focus on the benefits that children get from engaging in ballet. The literature has discussed sharing potential benefits with boys to get them to engage in ballet (Risner, 2009); however, the participants in this study focussed on more gender-inclusive benefits. Instructors felt that dance instructors should emphasize the value of movement confidence and overall confidence that can be gained from dancing. Additional benefits, identified by participants included body and movement awareness, increased, short term and long term physical fitness including opening up opportunities for other physical fitness later in life. Ultimately, participants advocated that dance instructors should ultimately emphasize the joy that dance can bring to people, and the view that all children should have the opportunity to feel welcome to dance.

An instructor suggested offering professional development opportunities for ballet instructors. Hargreaves (2003) discusses the importance of professional development for educators, as teaching can occur in a relatively isolated environment, it is important to have platforms in which to discuss teaching practices with other educators. Participants specifically noted that having a platform to discuss challenges and strategies for gender non-conforming children in ballet would be helpful. Professional development could also help to create more gender-inclusive environments by giving instructors strategies to teach in a less gendered manner, as well make them aware of the hidden curriculum. It was noted that dance instructors can have a narrow understanding of teaching if they trained and then later teach, at same dance studio without other experiences. Dowling (2006) discusses professional development for teachers of physical education, noting the different treatment of boys and girls that occurs in physical education and stressing the importance of professional development to make educators

aware and to present them with strategies for fairer treatment of girls and boys. The findings from Dowling's (2006) study can be extended to the current study, in which there can be differential treatment of boys and girls in ballet, and language that stereotypes children based on their gender. The literature supports professional development of educators and specifically teachers of physical education, which corresponds to comments made by participants to extend professional development to ballet instructors.

The principles of inclusion are applied to the recommendations shared by participants in this study. For example, there should be a conversation, which participants feel should include children, around what options they prefer for using changerooms rather than dance owners and staff making assumptions about what facilities they feel are appropriate. In relation to the issue of costuming, if there are two distinctive costumes, every child should be given the choice regardless of their parents' disclosure to the dance instructor about their gender identity. Based on the participants' views, the researcher feels if more parents understood and respected their children's identity and expression there would be less fear from dance studios of backlash about giving children choices about their dance costumes. As discussed in the findings, gendered movements there can be different movements in ballet for girls and boys are present in ballet training, especially in performance contexts; therefore, it was recommended that the instructors can give everyone the option of either movement to create a more gender inclusive environment. Another strategy that was recommended was having movements all the same for performances; however, this would be more challenging as children age and if they seek to continue with more competitive or professional training.

Validity (trustworthiness, reliability, generalizability)

The research process followed a rigorous and consistent procedure to ensure that the data measures what it claims to be measuring. Clear and concise language was used in creating the interview questions, to ensure that what is being asked of the participants was clearly understood. All efforts were made to limit biases during the interview process.

Many of the themes that emerged from the interviews were supported by all four participants; however, the specific experiences that participants shared about their interaction with gender non-conforming youth were unique to 3 of the participants. The findings and suggestions that participants offered for engaging boys in ballet and including gender non-conforming youth can be extended to all dance studios that aim to engage more boys in ballet, in line with views that all children should be welcome to dance. The gender-inclusive principles can also be applied to any dance studio in North America that has gender-inclusivity as a value and goal of their dance studio.

The findings from this research are shared with the MRP Oral examination committee and, once approved, become posted on the Ryerson website with previous MRPs. The goal is to continue the dissemination process by presenting the findings at pertinent conferences and to publish in a peer-reviewed journal to share the findings among other academics. As such, this study may contribute to the existing literature on boys in ballet and present suggestions for areas of future research in this area from a broader spectrum of researchers. Another goal in the dissemination process is to share the findings with interested ballet instructors, to offer them constructive strategies for engaging boys in ballet, and to create a more gender-inclusive

environment for all ballet students. This information would be shared with ballet instructors in the form of a guide manual, in order to make it more accessible.

Limitations of the research

The limitations of the research are outlined in the scope of the research and generalizability of the findings. There were a limited number of participants in this study based on access and the time allotted to collect the data. The recommendations presented are not an infinite list, but merely represent some strategies that have worked in the specific contexts of the participants involved in this study. Strategies can be implemented in other dance studios that have goals around having more boys engaged in ballet and creating more gender-inclusive environments. As outlined in scope, the focus of this research was inclusion from a gender standpoint; the study did not focus on inclusion from other intersecting identities.

The gender of the participants could have impacted upon their views and experiences as dance teachers. However, participants were not asked their gender, and given the nature of the study, I felt it was important not to then make assumptions about their gender. Moving forward I suggest asking participants at the end of the interview if they are comfortable sharing their gender. That way, sharing of this information would not have altered their responses to study questions, but would inform the research findings.

Future Research

The current research has uncovered strategies for engaging boys in ballet and creating more gender-inclusive environments in ballet classes. A theme that emerged from the findings was parents' role. A direction for future research is to investigate parents' views on engaging

boys in ballet and gender inclusion in ballet. As the findings from this study point out, children have limited autonomy with respect to what activities they take part in as young children, therefore parents' perspectives could be helpful in developing more strategies and specifically targeting parents to have more children involved in ballet. There are studies with current dancers' perspectives on boys in ballet that retrospectively discuss their experience as young children; however, future research could ask children to discuss their gendered experiences in ballet to gain knowledge from current children. Another direction for future research is to focus on female ballet dancers' experiences of assumed sexuality. There is a great deal of discussion around the gay male stereotype of ballet dancers, but little about the experiences of female dancers and their assumed heterosexuality or the experiences of female dancers who do not identify as heterosexual. As discussed, this research focussed on inclusion in ballet around gender; future research might investigate strategies for inclusion in ballet with regard to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability and other intersecting factors.

Conclusion

This study explored current pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet, through semi-structured interviews with four current ballet teachers. Participants reflected on strategies for recruiting boys to ballet, as well as strategies for encouraging them to persist. The teachers shared marketing strategies and specific efforts that are made to encourage boys to join ballet. Through sharing their views, the theme of parents' roles emerged in multiple contexts. Understanding the role that parents play in the selection and support of extra-curricular activity was an overarching finding in this study. Parents' roles were discussed around presenting ballet

as an option for boys to take part in, supporting and encouraging their sons to view ballet as a place that they are welcome.

The teachers also shared their experiences with gender non-conforming children in ballet. They shared strategies they used to make gender non-conforming children feel welcome and respected in their ballet class. The participants also shared general strategies for creating more welcoming environment for all children in ballet. The principles of inclusion were used when analyzing the recommendations and suggestions that were made for specific situations, and extended so all children can benefit from the strategies, even if the strategies are not aimed at targeting them.

The participants felt that there is a changing perspective around boys in ballet, however, there should be continued efforts toward this end. With society's changing understanding of gender, it was felt there should be continued efforts to make spaces more gender-inclusive. The creation of more inclusive environments would open opportunities for more children to discover the joy of ballet.

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script

My name is Laura Feltham, and I am a Masters of Early Childhood Studies student at Ryerson University. I am also an experienced competitive dancer and dance instructor. As part of my graduate work, I am currently conducting a research project on dance education practices pertaining to boys and would like to invite your participation.

I am interested in interviewing current ballet instructors with 5 plus years of experience and who have taught all genders of children under the age of 12. I am specifically interested in participants' experience teaching boys in terms of strategies, retention, stereotypes, and recruitment.

This study is voluntary and participants can skip any questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time with the option of having their data destroyed. The interview would take place at a private location at Ryerson University or over skype. The interview is expected to take approximately 40 minutes. If you choose to move forward and take part in the study, the consent form and pre-set questions will be emailed to you a week before the interview date. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at any point throughout the whole consent and interview process.

I am very interested in learning from your insights and expertise in the field. Please contact me at your earliest convenience should you have any questions about this work, or if you are interested in participating in the study. My research supervisor is Dr. Charlene Ryan – you may also feel free to contact her at charlene.ryan@ryerson.ca or 416-979-5000 ext. 7635

Sincerely,

Laura Feltham

lfeltham@ryerson.ca

APPENDIX B

Consent Form



SCHOOL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES
FACULTY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

Exploring pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by Laura Feltham, Masters of Early Childhood Studies student, and supervised by Dr. Charlene Ryan, at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Laura Feltham at lfeltham@ryerson.ca and/or Dr. Charlene Ryan at charlene.ryan@ryerson.ca or by telephone at 416-979-5000 ext. 73635

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to gain insight from ballet instructors into the education of boys in ballet. Specifically, the study aims to better understand strategies to recruit boys to ballet and explore strategies that do not use hypermasculinity. The goal is to create a more inclusive environment for all children and to better understand how to include gender non-conforming children in ballet. This study is in-partial fulfillment of Laura Feltham's master's degree program. Approximately six ballet instructors currently teaching ballet in the Greater Toronto Area who have at least five years of experience teaching all genders of children 12 and under will be recruited to take part in the study.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to set up an interview time with the researcher (either using skype or in person) to discuss your dance teaching practices. If done in person, you and the researcher will agree on a private convenient location at Ryerson University. The pre-set interview questions will be sent to you a week before the interview. The expected duration of the interview is approximately 40 minutes. Should the research findings be presented at academic conferences or published in

research journals, or if a published guide manual is created from the findings, you will be notified via email.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There will be no direct benefit from participation in the study. A potential benefit may be in your contribution to the broader knowledge in the field of gender inclusion in dance. Sharing your experience and expertise in this study may also offer additional aid or resource to some other instructors in how to include boys in dance and create a gender inclusive pedagogy and space.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT: I do not anticipate any risks to participants in this study. However, it is possible that there may be minimal psychological risk for you, should you find the interview questions, conversation, or personal reflection on your teaching practices to be stressful. There may be minimal social risk of feeling embarrassed if you were recognized as a participant in the study.

These potential risks will be minimized by having the interview take place in a private setting with only you and the researcher present. You can skip any and all questions without explanation, and you can withdraw from the study at any point. Should you choose to withdraw, you may request that your data be destroyed. The prepared questions will be shared with you one week prior to the interview. Your confidentiality will be maintained by inviting you to choose a pseudo name and by not using any identifying information about you.

There is minimal risk of you sharing information about a child being at risk of neglect or abuse because of the nature of this research and the guide questions. Please note that if you do share such information we have a duty to report this information to the Children's Aid Society.

CONFIDENTIALITY: While your identity will be known to the primary researcher and co-researcher, your confidentiality will be maintained. You will choose a pseudo name for the research, and a linking document will be created with the pseudo name and your identity, which will be password protected. The researcher will not use identifying language in the project. Any hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office at Ryerson University.

By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study. There will be an opportunity for you to review your transcript before it is used further in the study. You may withdraw from the study up until one week after you have received your transcript. Once you have had a week to review your transcript and make changes or clarifications to it your data will be analyzed in this study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigators Laura Feltham and/or Dr. Charlene Ryan.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact Laura Feltham at lfeltham@ryerson.ca and/or Dr. Charlene Ryan, Director of the School of Early Childhood Studies at Charlene.ryan@ryerson.ca and 416-979-5000 ext. 7635

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

CONSENT AGREEMENT

Exploring pedagogical practices for engaging boys in ballet

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. How much teaching experience do you have with male dancers?
2. At your current dance centre are there separate classes for girls and boys? If yes, until what age? If no, what is the typical ratio of boys to girls?
3. Do you typically teach different movements for boys and girls?
4. Are your teaching strategies different for boys versus girls?
5. Does your dance studio do any gender specific marketing (eg., reduced pricing for boys)?
6. Do you and/or your studio make any specific efforts to attract boys to ballet? If yes, what strategies do you and/or your studio use? How effective do you feel these strategies are?
7. Do you make any specific effort to encourage boys to persist in ballet into their teenage years?
8. When you have boys and girls in the same class, do the boys receive focused attention that is distinct from that offered to girls?
9. In my experience as a dancer, there is a tendency to hypermasculinize boys in dance to overcompensate for the feminine stereotype typically associated with the art. Do you think there is an alternative way to encourage boys to join or stay in ballet?
10. So far we have been discussing dance students in terms of boys and girls, but this can leave out a group of students who are gender non-conforming, who do not feel they are girls or boys. Have you had any gender non-conforming students? If yes, what was your experience? Generally, do you feel gender non-conforming children can be included in ballet? If yes, how?

APPENDIX D

Recommendations for dance studios

Recruitment of boys

- Introductory classes with less commitment: more drop-in style classes allowing children to take classes and see if they enjoy the class before committing to a full term
- Parent education: educating parents to lead to an understanding that ballet as an option for boys, specifically their sons
- Broader societal change: changing societal views to eliminate any stigma associated with being a male ballet dancer
- Emphasize benefits from dance: discussing the benefits that children gain from dance in an inclusive manner, specifically focusing on confidence that is gained, movement awareness, and self-expression through movement

Including boys and gender non-conforming children

- Role models in ballet: having male role models specifically in ballet to create a more welcoming environment, also allowing boys to see a path that they can follow in ballet
- Move away from competition culture: less of a division between recreational and competitive teams, move away from auditioning for the competitive team
- Using media to show success: sharing articles and videos of male dancers that continued on in ballet and how they are glad that they persisted in ballet
- Mindful of specific students: tailoring teaching practices to the specific students that are in the class to make it a fun and meaningful experience
- Presenting costume choices: presenting multiple costumes pieces to all children that can go together but also let children express themselves
- Professional development: having opportunities and platforms for ballet teachers to share their experiences and expertise with each other, share inclusion strategies and
- Using language and imagery that doesn't stereotype based on gender
- Options to everyone if there are different movements
- Keep all movements the same even in choreography for all genders
- Discussions around changerooms: studios should have conversations around what their rules for changerooms are and to make that known to the children and families that
- Parent education on gender inclusivity: educating parents on gender and gender inclusivity

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