

“It's work, work, work, work”: young people's experiences of effort and engagement in dance

By: Karen E. Bond; Susan W. Stinson

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Abstract:

This study is the second phase of a large project examining young people's experiences in dance education. It draws on multi-modal data from over 700 young people, diverse both demographically and in terms of degree and kind of dance experience. This phase focuses on data reflecting engagement and disengagement in dance, and illuminates them from a number of theoretical perspectives.

Article:

Melbourne, Australia. 20 four-year-olds in an early learning center:

Children sit clustered in one corner of a large open space framed with windows that reveal a panorama of moving clouds. Several flutter their arms as one boy takes a short flight, his hands forming claws. All eyes are on the teacher, who asks, 'Are you ready ... are you ready to fly?' The group erupts into excited bouncing, flapping, and assorted birdcalls, but children show bodily restraint to stay in their corner. Along the sides of the space, several practice aspects of eagle dance. At the end of the session, children don't want to stop: 'I've got one more dance'. ... 'Me too!' ... 'Me too!' ... 'Me too!' 'I've got one more dance ... lots of dances'. 'I want another go. I want another go'. 'Can we do that ballet again?' (A)²

Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Graduate students in chemistry:

Suddenly there are no tests to ace, just a lab bench silently awaiting ... some students jump for joy at this. 'Let me at it!' ... They have found their field of play. It will be hard, serious, exhausting ... They will bang their heads against the walls of undiscovered knowledge and come up empty again and again. They will curse their luck and worry that they will never find anything of significance. But they will love what they are doing anyway, because they will be following the force of their own curiosity. (Hallowell, 2002, p. 112)

What are we to make of the above-illustrated episodes of engagement, which cross boundaries of age and subject matter: is it work or is it play? Both young children and graduate students become excited and want to 'keep doing' ... it must be play! However, they also exhibit self-discipline, inexhaustible curiosity, challenge seeking, and commitment to practice, qualities that characterize the human drive to learn, know, and create ... it must be work! This article joins a long tradition of inquiry into the nature and meanings of work, in this case extending the discourse to students in dance education.

Background to the study

As dance educators and researchers, we have long been committed to understanding how young people experience dance and what it means to them, and to bringing their voices into professional discourse. We met first in 1985 at a Dance and the Child: International (*daCi*) conference in New Zealand. As we continued to

share our work over the next decade, we were intrigued at similarities between our individual findings, despite the different populations we had been studying. Karen's research focused on young children in Australia with and without disabilities, using multi-modal approaches that included videotaped classes, systematic on-site observations, conversations with children, and drawings about dance with captions spoken to teachers. Sue's research was based on in-depth interviews, supported by observations, with middle and high school students in North Carolina (USA).

By 1996, we had decided to initiate a collaborative project to extend our own work and try to understand whether there might be any common meanings of dance to young people that cross over demographic and other differences. At that time, we began to look at original data from colleagues as well as published and unpublished documents that describe the dance experiences of young people (ages three to completion of high school) and what they mean to them. To date we have gathered material from over 700 children and adolescents. Our collection includes diversity of gender, ethnicity, age, degree of dance experience, and country of origin. Despite this diversity, with most of the material from native English speakers, we know that we are leaving out large portions of the world. Further, most students had experienced only Western dance forms. We hope that colleagues in other countries will extend this work.

Methodological issues

The project has been daunting in a practical sense, as we faced the challenge of dealing with large quantities of diverse material. We spent months in multiple readings and viewings, sorting and resorting data. The first phase of analysis became our study of young people's experiences of the superordinary in dance (Bond & Stinson, 2000/2001). The study published here is based on material related to what we termed 'work' in dance. A third collection of material, dealing with relationships (to people and environment) in dance, still awaits analysis. Each section is important in understanding what has become a more refined quest, to both describe and understand the engagement (or disengagement) of young people in dance.

We also faced the same challenges as other researchers who study personal experience and meaning (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Gilbert, 2001; Prasad, 2005). Regarding interview data, for example, it is reasonable to question to what extent meanings of dance can be captured in words. Even though we draw on a variety of data sources including video and drawings, we know that we do not have, and can never have, the 'whole picture' of what dance means to any one child or collection of young people. Because it is constantly in the process of creation, meaning is always partial. This recognition allowed us to enter data analysis without concern for whether we had enough material or whether participants had been randomly selected. While not every possible meaning is being illuminated in this paper, we know that we are offering a broad representation of young people's experiences. At the same time, we acknowledge ourselves as both creators and discoverers of meaning. Finding many more examples than we could include here, we made choices based not only on a search for range of experience, but also on aesthetic criteria, illustrating themes with anecdotes that we found most vivid and engaging.

Despite the prevalence of qualitative studies in education, ours is unusual in several ways. One is the large number of participants drawn from such diverse sources. The original purpose of each study/source differs, so we cannot conclusively compare data from one population to another or draw conclusions about the different groups of young people represented. Nevertheless, the study's focus on phenomenological descriptions derived from the collective voices of many, systematically examined, projects a robust portrayal of 'working' in dance education.

In keeping with the phenomenological underpinnings of the study (Bond & Stinson, 2000/2001), we did not begin analysis with a detailed conceptual framework. Instead, we immersed ourselves in data for some time before we began to search for literature about emerging themes.³ The literature review may thus be found in discussion following the analysis.

Student experiences of working and not working in dance

The following thematic analysis is focused on young people's motivation to work hard in dance, and what inhibits hard work. Each statement and drawing is followed by a letter designating the data source from which it was drawn, as well as a standard citation if it was taken from a published source. In the Appendix, we have provided relevant demographic and bibliographic descriptions of each data source.

Obstacles to hard work

Although a large majority of our data report experiences of high motivation in dance, we begin with those that depict a variety of obstacles, including fear, lack of confidence, and dislike of hard work.

It's too hard or it's too easy

Some students perceive that dance is too difficult, or dislike the effort involved:

Pointe looks prettier, but it's hard work and it hurts. How can they stand it? (N)

When we do all those foot positions ... that is *tiring*. Ballet—that gets you sore. Coming up on your calves ... 'cause you do so much with your *legs*. And it kind of tires your arm out. Ballet is hard to me. I don't see how they can remember all of it. I guess you have to be all into it. (U)

Some dances I don't like to do ... like African dances. There's too much to it. (P)

In second grade I almost quit because I was getting tired of it and it was getting harder. (V)

Some students report that they exert themselves too much in dance, like the middle school boys who 'got tired' (Figure 1a) and 'got sick because I jumped too much' (Figure 1b) (G).



Figure 1a. I got tired.

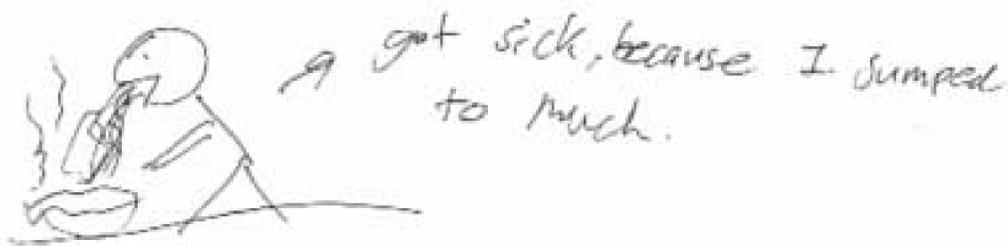


Figure 1b. Sick from jumping

In contrast, students who are motivated by challenge may be inhibited from investing full effort if they perceive that the challenge is not sufficient to match their skills:

Dance can provide a challenge, but not the way it's done here. (P)

Most of the stuff I already know, and it's hard for me to keep doing it over and over and pull myself down to a lower level when I know I can do more than that. (U)

I'm afraid

Dance puts students' capabilities in plain view. Fear is probably the most powerful inhibitor for engagement in dance, especially fear of how others will respond:

I felt imbarest because I was in funt of the class and scared to go up. I thalt I was going to get hert ... I didn't want to go up because I thoght I couldn't do it. (Figure 2) (C: Bond & Richard, 2005, pp. 96-98)

I didn't, like, have the whole dance done when you filmed it, so I didn't know what to do, and I was like a little freaked out, because I wasn't prepared. It was scary. (J: Giguere, 2006, p. 96)

When you're in front of people you don't know they laugh at you and make you feel uneasy. (Q)

When we perform in class in front of everyone it gets you nervous and if you mess up your whole group gets mad. (Q)

I'm nervous about the whole thing ... I'm in the back, so I can kind of fake it, but that's still not good. (R)

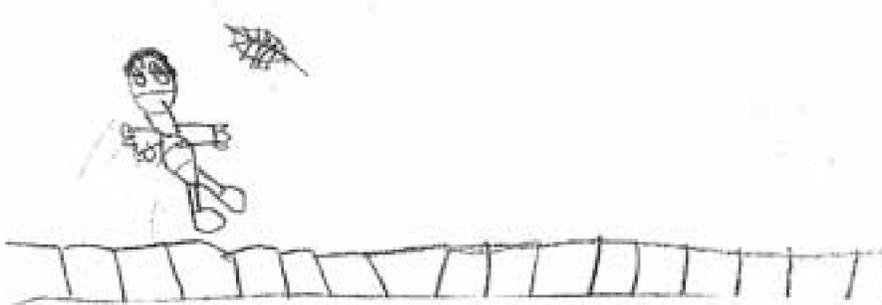


Figure 2. Imbarest and scared

I'm not good enough

Students confirmed in a variety of ways the statement by this student, for whom disliking dance was connected with lack of skill:

I like dancin' but not this kind of dance ... I'm not real good at dance. (P)

These students voice frustration over failure to accomplish a goal, based on standards they have set for themselves:

Sometimes I get upset 'cause I can't get the dance or I don't think I'm doing it right. (Q)

I don't like too much competition in dancing, because if you are not excellent it takes all the fun out. (Z)

I was so mad at myself for forgetting the dance. It wasn't that people knew I messed up, it was that I knew I messed up. (R)

The desire to achieve can create anxiety if students fear they will not achieve their goals, or even prevent them from trying:

While trying to put the dance together you were like pulling your hair out because you didn't know whether the dance would turn out right or not. (Q)

I don't feel I have enough basic knowledge of dance to be able to make up one that satisfies me. (U)

I can't get anything right so I'm not even going to try ... I wish I hadn't taken this class. (U)

It doesn't matter how hard I try

Students report that one's best efforts may not be enough, or limiting factors may appear beyond one's control:

I think about something really pretty but when I go to do it, it doesn't come out right. ... even if you worked the hardest you can possibly work. (N)

Anything you could think of to go wrong, it went wrong. ... I guess the biggest part of worst experiences is that you have such high expectations. (R)

If you have a hurt foot, and you have to watch everybody dancing ... you're like, 'I've got to get up there and dance!', but then you know you can't. Even if you did try, you couldn't do it. (P)

Just because you can do 32 fouettés and keep your leg ... does not mean you're going to do Sugar Plum Fairy. So that was hard for me. ... I was thinking I'm working so hard and learning so much. Why can't I do the parts I want to? (V)

It hurts that because the way your body is built, no matter how hard you try, you still can't do some things. (Z)

I'm trying too hard

Desire to improve can also have a negative impact. The first student quoted below indicates that trying too hard makes her less successful. The next two statements, from secondary school students, report that over-emphasizing improvement can reduce enjoyment:

If I keep falling down, or losing my spot, I'll go, 'Oh well'. ... Because the more and more I do it, the more and more and more I fail, and the worse and worse and worse it gets. So there's really no point. (T)

Sometimes I start thinking a lot about correcting and improving, but ... I just lose the enjoyment. ... Today I was willing myself to do the warm up 'cause I didn't have my center together. The more I concentrated, the more I lost it. (V)

If I feel like I'm doing it really well then I enjoy it ... But if I feel I'm not doing well then I'm concentrating on improving it so I can't really enjoy. (X)

Summarizing the above, students experience a range of personal disconnections within dance. Students also report that lack of commitment to hard work is an obstacle to achievement. We conclude this section with students commenting on their disengaged peers, describing states of uncaring, laziness, and lack of effort:

If they were more serious, they could do a lot more. They play around and talk ... If we could just concentrate, leave our lives outside the door, we'd learn faster. (U)

Some people didn't put their heart into dance; you can tell the effort of certain people by the way they leap ... and turn. (L)

Some people just don't like doing stuff that makes them work ... and I don't think it's fair to me ... the teacher ... or any of the other people that try to work. A lot of people don't care. (P)

I don't think people who slack off should be in dance class ... they're lazy. (P)

Experiences of high engagement

As stated previously, a large majority of the data report experiences of high engagement. We begin this section with comments reflecting commitment to hard work in dance.

Get serious

Student comments reveal that many recognize qualities needed to succeed in dance. A middle school student asserts that dance is serious business: it's 'work, work, work, work ... and there's no time for playing off' (P). The following three anecdotes offer advice from peer to peers found in a large study of children in a public elementary school program for those with artistic talent:

This is very serious and you must pay attention to learn your movements. (K)

Don't screw up ... you are not here to waste other people's time. ... Your parents pay taxes for this program. (K)

Do what your dance teacher says, don't fool around and don't get into trouble. Don't be discouraged if the teacher tells you it's wrong. (K)

Students also make self-statements about the importance of a serious attitude to working in dance:

In dance I can get a little bit more serious ... like 'OK I gotta get motivated here, all right push it'. (H: Lazaroff, 1998b, p. 83)

It's fun, it's hard work though ... you really have to, like, concentrate and, like, be there and pay attention to know what you're supposed to do. (P)

Sometimes I get in one of those giggly moods. ... It's not as much fun when I come out of dance class and say, 'Gee, I didn't learn too much today'. So I gotta work on that. (P)

Patience is similarly valued:

Teacher (to a group of four-year-olds waiting to begin creative dance class): Are you very patient?
Children: Yes! (A)

You've got to be patient with dance ... it doesn't just come; you can't just start doing all this stuff. (P)

In dance you work hard, you don't just come in there and throw something together. You have to learn how to do it. (U)

Although adults may tend to think that young children have short attention spans, their capacity for extended practice is evident in our data. A young child's persistence to carry out a 'plan' in dance is shown in two drawings (Figures 3a and 3b) made a week apart, with captions, 'This is my plan', and 'That's me running and my plan' (A). Children in a multi-grade lower elementary dance class demonstrate strong motivation to rehearse for a performance through unison chanting: 'One more time, one more time!!' (F: Bond, 1994b, p. 32). A high school student describes what enables her to persist in dance:

The key thing that keeps me going is self-discipline. (T)



Figure 3a. Plan one

The following students recognize that setbacks or failure are a natural part of the learning process and that effort over time is connected to success:

If you make mistakes, don't pout or give up - keep trying. (K)

Sometimes I say, 'That looks stupid!' But I say, 'Okay, let me try it again' ... (U)

You have this feeling inside saying, keep doing, keep doing, you'll get better ... And you keep trying, and sometimes you won't get it, but sometimes you do. (T)

I did one performance in lower school and I made one big mistake. I felt mad 'cause I messed up, and instead of working it into the dance, I just said, oh darn, and walked off. [Did that spoil performing for you?] No, because you can't let one mistake cut you down. (P)

We had a lot of trouble with our ballet recital ... we had to do it over and over again—it still wasn't right. ... At the last performance it all pulled together and it was really beautiful. (P)



Figure 3b. Plan two

I started going to dance in fifth grade ... I couldn't dance, not even a little bit. Then sixth grade I was a little better and seventh grade I became co-captain of the dance troupe and then eighth grade I became captain. Before I was introduced to dance I thought you couldn't really learn how to do it; you had to have it in your body. But really, if you don't have the determination to dance in your head then you can't. But your body, it can be taught. (W)

We recognize that young people need the kinds of work habits and attitudes described above if they are going to persist through obstacles to find the satisfaction of accomplishment. Clearly some students make the connection

between hard work and accomplishment in dance, but what is it that allows them to persist long enough to make that connection? Many report strong affective connections to dance or to a part of themselves they find in dance classes, both of which inspire hard work. Students describe finding 'love' in dance in terms of satisfaction and meaning, challenge and accomplishment, and the sense of personal autonomy.

I love to dance!

An observer describes three young nonverbal children with impairments of vision and hearing and three adult participants as they delight in group dance:

Excitement and giggles ... Everyone gets into it - rollicking, happy, laughing voices. ... These people enjoy each other's happiness. ... I see that adults are transformed here as well. (E: Bond, 1991, p. 336)

These students talk about dance with a sense of existential identification:

I'm gonna dance 'til death. (K)

Dance is for me, 'cause I don't like nothing else. (U)

When I came here, as soon as I heard the word dance I was like, I want it, I want it. Put me in there. I don't care what period—whenever. (W)

Emotional connection to dance may evoke total commitment:

I hold nothing back. I don't let up and I give it my all. There's no point in giving less than my best. (Q)

I worked like a demon in class. And at home I danced a lot in my living room. I worked so hard; I gave it 125% all the time. (V)

This student experiences a direct relationship between emotional engagement and hard work:

Dancing to me means ... commitment, fun excitement enjoyable Learn Consertration hard working + I ♥ dancing. (Z)

Some students reflect philosophically on the meaning dance holds in their lives:

It depends on the movements and how you do them and why you're doing them ... I mean if you really don't care about dance there's no reason to be doing it. (P)

It's an important class, it's your time to be yourself and to learn about dance, and to learn about how your body works, like why your legs go a certain way and everything ... you do learn in there, it's not just a fun time. (P)

I sometimes have to make sacrifices and can't have fun with other friends or be in clubs at school. I guess that's okay because dance ... will always be with me. Dance means a whole lot to me. (S)

Obviously it means more than anything else ... when I work hard for three hours a day, minimum, and four days a week. (V)

I love a challenge!

For many students in dance, challenge itself is a motivator, and the greater the challenge, the greater the motivation:

If it's hard, then I just want that much more to learn. (P)

I like things that are challenging because when you're done with it, getting through it all, you've conquered something and know you can do it again. (P)

I wasn't being challenged at my old studio. And fun, I kind of think that hard work and stuff is fun. (R)

You have to be supple as well as have style and very few people have excellence in both of these, but you have fun and pain in trying to achieve them. (Z)

It's like you're reaching for the sky. (V)

Many students enjoy the physical challenge of dance, as conveyed in the self-portrait of a child (Figure 4) 'trying to do a bridge' (C). These young people describe hard physical work as intrinsically motivating:

I get to do all that energy in dancing and I have like sweat dripping off my face. Sweat everywhere ... it feels really good. I like working. Working is very good. (H: Lazaroff, 1998a, p. 3)

I like technique because you have combinations ... you work real hard for those. You have to make sure your alignment's right and all that. They're fun. It's fast paced and you get a heavy sweat and get tired. I like challenge in dance. I guess I like it 'cause it feels like you're really dancing. (V)



Figure 4. Trying to do a bridge

Dance is not physical challenge alone. In Figure 5, a student tells us that he likes dance class because 'moving is pretty tricky' (G). Young people describe many kinds of content motivators in dance education settings, including the inspiration of historical figures:

I just love hearing about Isadora Duncan ... even though she's a little bit of a slut every now and then. (P)



Figure 5. Moving is tricky

Many, even the very young, describe awareness of cognitive aspects of their engagement. Here are examples from across the age groups:

'I've got a good idea!' 'I remember all the dances'. (A)

Improvisation was the first time I got to dance on my own without feeling I had to be perfect, and I could make stuff up that I wanted to do, so it gave me a larger field of vision to what dancing can be. (P)

I want to listen and learn ... 'cause it's interesting. And when something's interesting to me, I like to listen and y'all shut up. 'Cause what she has to say I think will be very important. (P)

If you make up a dance, you have to use your brain—think a long time. In dance, you have to put it all together. ... It makes my brain grow bigger. (U)

Improv is harder than technique because you have to think creatively. (V)

It's like I'm my own boss—I set my own standards

Autonomy and a sense of control are prevalent themes. This category is represented strongly by the young people from special education settings included in our study. This observation took place in a small group dance setting:

Marc looked like a person who knew exactly what he wanted to be doing at all times. His partner commented, '... He is just opposed to any outside direction'. It seemed clear from the start that Marc was expressing personal standards ... the exactness of his signature body shape ... his postural and gestural focus. (E: Bond, 1991, pp. 312-313)

Here are more examples of students setting their own goals and standards for achievement:

It's basically like you can decide for yourself whether you want to make it hard or easy ... because it's such an inner self thing. (P)

My ballet teacher only expects me to do my best, but I always want to do more. (S)

If you're just dancing for yourself, then ... you don't have any guidelines because you've set your own. (V)

I try to find at least one thing in every class I'm happy with, one thing I'm proud of. (V)

When you dance a solo it is all up to you. There is no one else to rely on. (X)

It's like I teach myself. It's like I'm my own boss. I get everything done and do it the way it is supposed to be done. (W)

I'd proved not only to myself but also to others that I was every bit as good as I hoped I was and I was really glad because I'm enough of a perfectionist. Like I said, Little Miss Perfect. (V)

I'm dancing towards an aim ... that one day I'll be able to dance professionally. (Z)

Sometimes standards involve attention to detail:

First I put my back up like this; well, that's what a turtle does! (Figure 6) (A: Bond, 2001, p. 48)

If you're dancing with two people on stage, you can each be doing something individualized, but yet have it together. Like I don't think it would look neat if one of you was doing a slide, turn, twist, and the other was doing ... lie down, then grow, and then doing leaps all over the room. It'd look like you were just messing around, but if you're both doing grow in a different way it looks neat. (P)

I want to know exactly where my hand's going. (U)

It's like when you stand in dancer/s stance, you focus on that one thing, like I'm getting ready to dance. Then you're more professional. You just don't do it any kind of way. (W)

When you're spinning you got to be on the ball of your foot, you got to remember to keep your balance, you've got to tighten your muscles, you've got to point your toes. Because your whole body got to be together. ... Like you know how to hold your pose right or whatever and then it just makes your body tight so you don't look like you're all over the place when you're dancing, so you don't look like a slob. (W)

In order for a movement to have its full impact, there are so many subtle things you can do. (X)

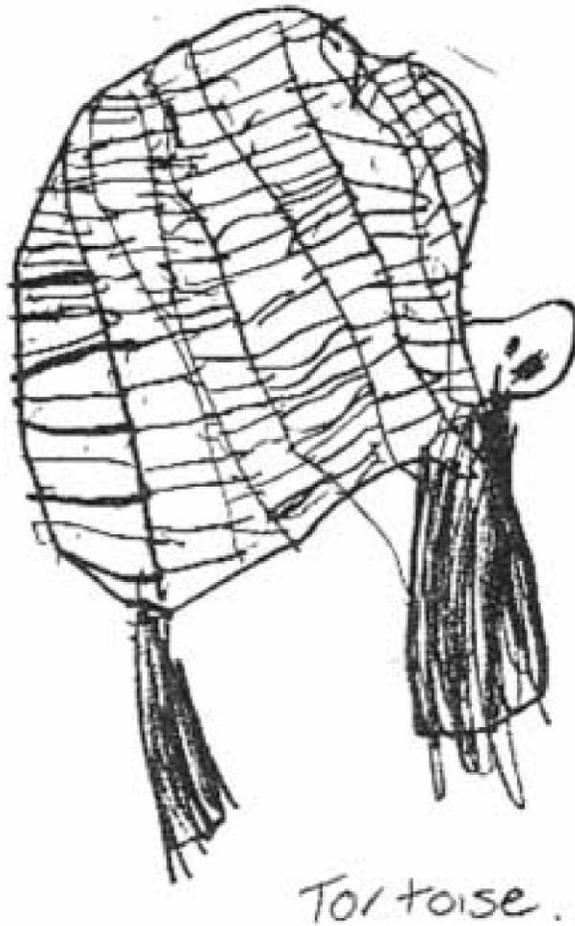


Figure 6. Tortoise

Sometimes the standard is 'doing my best':

Who cares about how I dance? Because I am giving it all I got and who doesn't like it can lump it. (Q)

I felt good about it because we went up there and we did our best. (P)

If I don't do the best that I know I can, I get really mad at myself, if I do half a job. But if I do my best, then I don't get mad at myself. (R)

I might be irritated with myself when I am not doing, performing ... up to what I know I can do. (V)

I'm good at it

The following anecdotes from younger students share a common trait in their expression of an inner locus of positive self-assessment:

I was flying and flapping and doing something very good. (Figure 7) (A: Bond & Deans, 1997, p. 368)

We are spinning around doing a very nice spider dance. (Figure 8) (A)

I'm a very good dancer. (F: Bond, 1994b, p. 32)

I can spin real, real, real, real fast too, but I can't walk on my hands. (B)

Don't be scared. There's nothing wrong with a little stage fright. It's time to see how good you are. (L)

Good dancers don't care if someone says they are good. (O)



Figure 7. Doing something very good

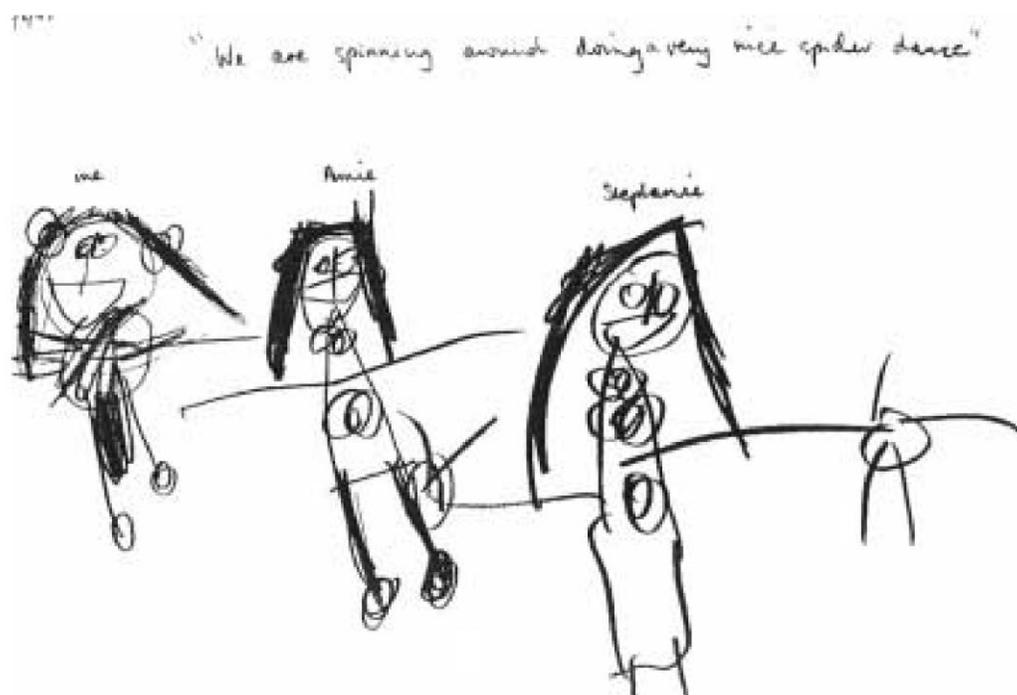


Figure 8. A very nice spider dance

Confidence (believing they are capable of success) is enhanced when students experience a sense of mastery. These older students reveal their belief that they are up to the challenge:

I know I can dance and I do it. (W)

I feel confident in that what I am showing is being understood. In that confidence I can put even more into it. (X)

If I see someone doing a triple, I say, 'Gee, I'd like to try one of those'. And then I go out there and attempt a triple. (T)

I feel ... a little bit more confident. When you have a better attitude toward everything, you can work at it better. (U)

I'll think, 'That's a nice move, I want to try it out'. I try and try and try so I can get it ... and I find out how I can adjust my body so that it does work that way. (U)

The feeling of mastery is pleasurable:

Knowing that I can do different things gives me a sort of satisfaction. (N)

When I am dancing I feel happy. It makes me feel good to know that in the end. I have come up with a magnificent dance. (Q)

We did this combination ... and we finally did it enough times that I didn't have to worry about my placement or anything. I was just doing it for the fun of it. (V)

Dance can be the cause of frustration, pain and disappointment, BUT the bliss and happiness I feel when I have achieved something or reached a goal overrides the bad points. (Z)

Doing a dance myself, getting all the footwork right, and then the feeling of it, is one of the most challenging tasks I've confronted. However, the reward is infinite. No matter how precise the movement, when performing I feel free to soar. (Y)

Likewise, the feeling of pleasure can facilitate mastery:

More funner things you do better at. (U)

For many students, the satisfaction of meeting personal standards motivates them to continue working:

It just comes and I know I'm doing it right ... if I can do it once and do the exact same thing again, then it's my dance. (L: Current, 1988, p. 22)

When you do get it, you feel really good. When you don't, you know you'll have to work harder. But, a lot of times you'll work hard because you want to be good at stuff. (T)

By the end of summer I was doing quadruples ... someone who couldn't even do a single the summer before. They're a challenge because I could not do them for so long. I did everything you were supposed to do in my mind but I couldn't get it down to my body. So when it came to the performance ... I wanted to do more than just the singles. I started doing double single and then single double double and double double ... In the second performance I just got up there ... and did a triple on stage. ... I just threw it in. It was like, well, why not ... show what I got. And that was a really neat moment. Just being able to say I can do it and doing it. (V)

Foreshadowing the next phase of our study, we conclude this section with comments from students whose personal satisfaction is enhanced by appreciation from an audience or teacher:

In dance you know you are doing good. It's a feeling that comes through your body ..., or somebody'll come up and compliment you. (L: Current, 1988, p. 17)

If you do something really good, you feel really good about it ... When we did that and everybody clapped and stuff that really helped because we felt better about our self. (M)

You feel so proud of knowing all these people are watching you and they think you're wonderful. (D: Brown & Wernikowski, 1991, p. 154)

My day that stood out was the day we did the dance for the PTSA [Parent Teacher Student Association], because I'd never performed for people, not in front of like everybody's parents and my teachers and stuff ... everybody really enjoyed it and our class was proud of ourselves, for what we'd thought up. (P)

I guess the satisfaction is greater 'cause you know without a doubt that they enjoyed it ... and all your hard work wasn't just for your own self-satisfaction ... You have to dance for yourself but it's nice to be appreciated. (V)

It's not that simple

The previous two sections of findings may imply dichotomies that oversimplify the complexities of effort and engagement in dance. We have considerable data revealing that dance is not just easy or hard, and standards are not simply met or unmet. Classification of students as either hard workers or lazy, fearful or confident, and interested or disinterested in dance, is similarly problematic.

For example, while many students find pleasure in hard work, this comment reveals pleasure in not working:

You don't have to work in dance class. That was the part I liked. (P)

Another student found dance easy, but does not explain why:

Dance has been the easiest thing to learn in my life. If I had this for all my school years, I'd be in the grade I'm supposed to be in. (U)

The next found difficulty in classifying dance as either one or the other:

Well, it's just that it was hard. Like most people would say, 'oh that's really easy' but it isn't ... it's really hard. (J: Giguere, 2006, p. 96)

Further complexity is revealed by a student who realized that having worked in dance made performance easy, 'because you knew the dance and you were up there and you knew what you were doing' (J: Giguere, 2006, p. 96).

Although meeting personal standards seemed to contribute to positive engagement for many students, some suggested that being good at dance is not necessary for participation or satisfaction:

I always do bad but dance makes you feel good. (Q)

People can do dance even if they're awful or they might not be good at it. (N)

In other examples of complexity, we found reference to simultaneous experience of emotions that might be considered contradictory. As we see in Figure 9, both fear (indicated by the caption, 'Help') and happiness

(indicated by a smile) accompany the accomplishment of a physical challenge (C: Bond & Richard, 2005, p. 97). Similarly contradictory emotions are expressed by this student:

I feel very nervous and very happy. (I: Wu, 2005, p. 148)



Figure 9. Help!!

While self-criticism can inhibit engagement, it does not have that effect in some highly motivated students:

We have a weekly goal and a goal for each class. After class we evaluate ourselves. Like did we accomplish our goal and, if we didn't, how we plan to accomplish it in the next class. We have 1 to 10. I usually have a 4 ... I feel okay right now but if ... I don't have a good performance level in the next class then I would definitely drop it down. (V)

I've been thinking about turnout and where you put your heel, because my turnout is my Waterloo. I have zilch!! You saw them get on me today for cheating my turnout ... I know I don't have it. I knew I was cheating ... now I have to make myself stop doing it. (V)

In the following comments, a focus on improvement ('getting better') appears to be the motivator:

I get all hot and fired up to learn even more and perform even better ... (Q)

You might forget something but you can make it look better ... you have more chance when you're older. (N)

I want the correction so I can get better at it. ... It just makes me work harder. (T)

I want to dance better and I don't want to stop dancing. We should have two-hour dancing. (U)

There's some complicated things ... I'm always trying to learn it better and so I get here and work on whatever I don't understand. (U)

Finally, students describe breakthroughs, despite fear or an inner critical voice:

I hope next time I can still learn dance. I am still shy. I don't know if I will become less shy. But I still want to join. (I: Wu, 2005, p. 147)

I remember the first day of dance class in school ... some people wouldn't dance. They were afraid ... then one day they would just break out and dance. (L: Current, 1988, p. 16)

This is my chance to be a really good dancer! At first I didn't think I should be there, cuz I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't think I could dance very well. (L: Current, 1988, p. 20)

I might have been too serious, a little bit hard on myself. At the end of class I was feeling a lot better ... starting to dance more than just execute the steps. (V)

It looks hard when you first get in there ... you're like 'I can't do that'. But you end up doing it anyway. So that's neat. (U)

Our concluding comment is from a previously disengaged and disruptive student whose decision to make a full commitment was transformative:

One day I decided to participate with 100% effort. ... Me and my partner made up a good dance and everybody liked it. I think I got a hundred for that day. That was my favorite class ... the dance was a good dance too. Everything was focused on, the swing, rise, fall, everything. Giving 100% you get a whole new outlook. (P)

Discussion

Through immersion in the words, drawings, and bodily expressions of young people collected in dance education settings, we have gained much insight into what engages students in the 'work' of dance, perhaps in any form of meaningful activity. We feel inspired by students' descriptions of complex emotional connections and challenges, habits of discipline and practice, autonomy and confidence, and the pleasure of accomplishment. It is also clear that not all young people in dance classes find them consistently engaging.

Our findings directed us initially to literature on intrinsic motivation, much of which clarifies and supports what we have learned from young people in dance education. One of the most significant sources is Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) pioneering work on what he called *flow*. Primary elements of the flow experience include control of one's actions and environment, clear feedback (not from external sources, but from one's own awareness), and autotelicity (needing no external rewards). In a study of people for whom intrinsic rewards overshadowed extrinsic ones as a reason for engaging in an activity, Csikszentmihalyi noted that the deeply satisfying state of flow is experienced only when opportunities for action are in balance with skills. As many less-engaged voices in this study make clear, if challenges are too great, one may experience anxiety or worry; but if skills are greater than opportunities to use them, boredom may result.

Recent studies by arts educators draw on Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow. Lazaroff (2001) explored links between dance performance and motivation, finding that both internal and external motivation are developed by intense physicality, positive feedback from a teacher, and the acquisition of new steps; many students in her study reported flow states in preparation for performance as well as during performance. Custadero (2002) studied flow through observational studies of children in music education and music play settings, finding that both challenge and skill predict flow experiences. She suggests that pedagogical practice should attend to flow through provision of communal settings for learning, encouragement of student autonomy, and curriculum that is 'artistically and developmentally authentic' (p. 6). Reeve (1996) refers to Csikszentmihalyi to suggest how to facilitate intrinsic motivation through uniting challenge, feedback, and enjoyment. He finds, as we did, that students may not try to learn something when they perceive that their efforts will have little or no effect, or that they have low ability.

Lepper and Henderlong (2000) provide an extensive critical review of research on motivation. A key finding is that children tend to become less motivated as they progress through school, which continues to be reflected in sources on motivational strategies for middle and secondary school students (Sirota, 2006; Theobald, 2006).

Lepper and Henderlong attribute the increasing apathy to conflict between young people's growing desire for autonomy and schools' increasing control, and the emphasis on performance goals over learning goals with accompanying decrease in students' self-confidence. Performance goals focus on gaining favorable evaluations (looking good, proving competence, and doing better than others). Learning, or mastery, goals focus on seeking challenge, improving competence, and understanding something new (Reeve, 2005).

The distinction between learning/mastery goals and performance goals is found throughout the literature on motivation; we propose that this conceptual framework has explanatory value for our findings as well. While these two orientations are typically described as dichotomous, Lepper and Henderlong (2000) observe that they often occur simultaneously with varied and complex effects, 'sometimes negative, sometimes positive' (p. 284). The authors assert, 'it is unfortunate that children appear to value [learning goals] less and less as they progress through school' (p. 284), since learning goals may be related to intrinsic motivation. Reeve (2005) suggests, however, that students oriented toward learning/mastery goals may become bored when their skills override the challenge of a task (echoing Csikszentmihalyi), while students with performance orientations enjoy easy tasks in which they can show high ability.

Students attribute school success and failure to a variety of causes. Wiseman and Hunt (2001) identify four: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck (p. 43). Wigfield and Eccles (2002) also discuss how beliefs about ability may affect motivation. Children who come to see ability as fixed are less likely to think that effort makes a difference; further, the need for effort may be viewed as an indication of low ability. Failure may also be perceived as low ability rather than the need for greater effort. Students may also avoid effort in order to look smart or avoid appearing dumb. Reeve (2005) suggests that performance avoidance emanates from fear of failure: 'I just want to avoid doing poorly in this class' (p. 179). Clearly, such perspectives hinder positive engagement and learning. As described by several young people, 'doing poorly' in dance is difficult to hide.

Student interest is a current focus of research (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Shen *et al.* (2003) examined the extent to which prior student interest (higher in girls) accounted for differences in learning between middle school boys and girls in a square dance unit. Because girls showed greater increase in skills and knowledge during the dance unit, it was inferred that their greater personal interest was the cause. It seems obvious that students will be more motivated to learn what they are interested in, yet students' interests may not be part of core curriculum.

Current brain research elucidating the role of emotions in learning and motivation (Damasio, 1999, 2003; Kytle, 2004; Ellis, 2005; Reeve, 2005) also supports many of our findings. Neurologist Damasio (1999) explains that reasoning and decision-making may be impossible without emotional triggers to the brain that integrate goals, decisions and action. He suggests, 'well-targeted and well-deployed emotion seems to be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly' (Damasio, 2003, p. 42). Reeve (1996, 2005) found that positive affect facilitates engagement through its influence on students' cognitive processes, persistence in the face of failure, efficient decision-making, and intrinsic motivation. Reeve (2005) synthesized 24 theories of human motivation (1959-2002) to generate a model of engagement that sets out specific conditions of support for psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Based on young people's experiential accounts and our review of scholarly literature on intrinsic motivation, it appears that the following may trigger the commitment to hard work necessary for success in dance:

- Emotional connection/personal interest/positive affect (*I love to dance!*)
- Challenge matched by skill, and a belief that effort matters (*I like a challenge!*)
- A sense of autonomy and personal control, especially in setting standards and assessing the degree to which they have been met (*It's like I'm my own boss. I'm good at it, and/or I'm getting better.*)

From his perspective as a child/adolescent psychiatrist, Edward Hallowell (2002) has generated a clinically based theoretical framework that links the above aspects of intrinsic motivation not only to learning but to the

larger goal of 'happiness'. He identifies two primary sources of individual happiness: the ability to create and sustain joy, and the ability to overcome adversity. Hallowell describes five steps to developing these abilities that speak directly to our study of young people's experiences of work in dance, as well as our larger study of engagement:⁴ 1) Connection (with parents and teachers, activities, the arts, and oneself); 2) Play (a requirement for ground-breaking in any field); 3) Practice (gives control of the environment and facilitates discipline); 4) Mastery (builds confidence to persist through obstacles); and 5) Recognition (the feeling of being valued by others). Echoing the anxious young people in our study, Hallowell writes, 'What holds children back the most is a fear of messing up' (p. 134), yet mastery can transform fear. Hallowell suggests also that if achievement is easy, students may not reach the satisfaction of mastery, which builds confidence to overcome future obstacles.

Summary and reflections

In this phase of our study, we started with data that we classified as 'work', later adding terms such as 'motivation' and 'engagement'. Through succeeding stages of analysis and reading of literature, layers of complexity were revealed. What have we learned?

First of all, dance is not so different from other school subjects, in that some young people are more engaged than others and may find some parts of it more appealing than others. We also found consistency between our data about dance education and literature on motivation in general. There are a variety of obstacles to active engagement in dance, including disinterest in the content, fear of failure, and lack of fit between individual skills and interests on the one hand and the content and demands of the class on the other. Students who find dance engaging and worthy of effort cite interest in activities and content, desire for challenge, and appreciation for autonomy in setting their own standards and their ability to reach them. Yet there is not always a clear distinction between engagement and disengagement; this is a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

We discovered that many young people join adults in blaming lack of effort on laziness and other personal failures. This is a long-held human belief; many adults are concerned that students who do not work in school will get into mischief, and that 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop' (Ciulla, 2000, p. 4). While we both possess a well-developed work ethic and believe in its importance if students are going to achieve long-term satisfactions (Levine, 2005), we also question the 'myth of laziness' (Levine, 2003) and the value of a work ethic that is indiscriminately applied to all activities. Like John Dewey, What we are after is *persistence, consecutiveness*; endurance against obstacles and through hindrances. [Yet] Effort regarded as mere increase of strain is not in itself a thing we esteem ... Effort, as a mental experience, is precisely this *peculiar combination of conflicting tendencies*—dislike (it's stressful to have progress impeded by obstacles) and longing (for the goal). (1913, pp. 46-49)

Dewey added that the negative emotion one experiences with effort (like the frustration and pain described in our study) is not necessarily a reason to give up, but should generate questioning about whether the goal is worth it.

Like Noddings (2003) we question many character traits that generations have tried to instill into children through 'propaganda-style techniques' (p. 166). For example, Noddings reflects on the lesson of 'Always do your best', asking, 'Should we always do our best in everything, or should we choose intelligently and bravely those tasks to which we will give our best?' (p. 166). Levine (2002) and Noddings (1992, 2003) encourage us to think about education as a way to identify and develop personal affinities and consider what makes for a meaningful life.

In short, we find that the issues arising from data and literature are complex. To speak simply of 'learning should be fun' or claim that all students need to do is work hard, seems simplistic. As noted by Ryan and Deci (2000),

Despite the fact that humans are liberally endowed with intrinsic motivational tendencies, the evidence is now clear that the maintenance and enhancement of this inherent propensity requires supportive conditions, as it can be fairly readily disrupted by various nonsupportive conditions. (p. 70)

The next phase of our study will explore some of the supportive and non-supportive conditions (social and environmental influences) necessary for engagement in dance.

Many educators might dismiss findings about engagement in dance as unimportant, assuming that it is irrelevant whether or not students are engaged in anything that is not assessed by standardized tests. There are many efforts in arts education to emphasize the arts as a way to teach core academic subjects (Arts Education Partnership, 1999, 2002). Dance educators have focused on the importance of learning through movement for kinesthetic learners. We agree that movement and the arts are likely to have value in teaching other school subjects; at the same time, we question the position that the arts should simply be taught as ends in themselves (Bond & Richard, 2005; Stinson, 2005). Both arguments (arts as instrumental, arts as ends in themselves) seem to leave out what matters most for young people as well as adults: the creation of a meaningful life, which includes but is not limited to work. We concur with Csikszentmihalyi (2000) that education should inspire an 'abiding interest ... in what makes life worth living' (p. x) and with Aristotle that 'our real work in life is the work of being human' (cited in Ciulla, 2000, p. 6).

We are heartened by the growing number of voices calling for education to engage students in experiences that will help them discover their passions and build on their strengths (hooks, 1994, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2000; Vandenberg, 1997; Bond, 2000; Levine, 2002; Noddings, 2003; Bond & Richard, 2005; Stinson, 2005). We recognize that such a goal is complex, and that ideas about what kind of a life and what kinds of work are meaningful have changed throughout history and cultures (Meilaender, 2000). These ideas also vary across individuals and throughout one's lifespan (Ciulla, 2000). It is as easy to be reductionist with regard to meaning as it is with regard to motivation.

The voices and images of young people in this research have reminded us of our own complex relationship with work, especially as we persevered through frustrating and tedious aspects of this research. Like many of the students cited, we continue to tap into 'something about dance' that inspires us to 'give 125%'. In closing, we suggest that the experiences of these young people in dance might have something to offer to *all* educators seeking to help students persist through boredom and frustration to find that place where work and play become one.

Notes on contributors

Dr Karen Bond is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Master of Education in Dance at Temple University, Philadelphia (USA). She was formerly Senior Lecturer in Dance Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia. At Temple she advises doctoral and masters students and teaches graduate courses on philosophical foundations of dance/education, dance pedagogy, and experiential research methods.

Dr Sue Stinson is Professor of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (USA), where she has been on the faculty for 28 years. She coordinates the Master of Arts in Dance Education program, delivered through mostly online coursework, at UNCG.

Appendix

Data from the following sources (arranged in order by chronological age of the young people) were included in this study. Studies where we used raw data, rather than or as well as a finished paper or publication, are indicated by an asterisk (*). In cases where multiple publications resulted from the same study, only primary publications are listed.

We have struggled with issues of demographic description for the data pools, in order to document our claim that these findings appear across diverse populations. We include specific information about age and gender, as

well as country and type of dance setting that was available about each data pool. It is important to note that we are not attempting to imply causality to the demographic characteristics indicated, and specifically caution against this kind of use, and that a description of the data pool does not necessarily indicate the age/gender of a particular source. (In many studies, individuals could not be described in order to maintain anonymity for the human subjects.)

We have elected not to include any information about race/ethnicity, even if it was described in other publications drawing on the same data pool. Earlier publications have described students by color (typically black or white), race (including the term *Caucasian*, which is now widely regarded to be as outdated as the terms *Negroid* and *Mongoloid*), and cultural group (especially Latino and African-American). We find all these ways of describing difference problematic in the 21st century, when scientists are still debating the biological, social, cultural, and political implications of findings from the Human Genome Project (McCann-Mortimer *et al.*, 2004). Two or three shades do not accurately describe the range of skin hues we actually see, and various terms for culture/ethnicity are not universal and are only useful if they are self-descriptions. We can summarize by stating that most of the public school populations were described by the researchers either as culturally diverse or primarily individuals from minority groups, while most studio populations were described as white middle class.

- A*:** 38 children ages 3-5 (23 girls) from an early learning centre in Victoria, Australia (Bond & Deans, 1997; Bond, 2001).
- B*:** one boy age 4 from a Master of Education intergenerational performance project, Temple University, Department of Dance, Pennsylvania, USA (McGuigan, 2002).
- C:** 25 children ages 9-10 (14 girls) in grade 3 charter school, Pennsylvania, USA (Bond & Richard, 2005).
- D:** 23 students ages 9-16 from school and community settings in Canada (Brown & Wernikowski, 1991).
- E:** 6 non-verbal deaf-blind children (4 boys) ages 6-9 in a residential educational facility, Victoria, Australia (Bond, 1991, 1994a, 2008).
- F:** 14 children ages 5-8 (8 boys); public elementary school in Victoria, Australia (Bond, 1994b).
- G:** 90 children ages 6-14 (gender balance); special education, upper elementary, and middle school groups in a cultural arts project in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (Bond, 1999).
- H:** Students in grades K-6 (primarily low-income Latino) from an after-school class in California, USA (Lazaroff, 1998a, b).
- I:** 12 third graders (7 girls) from an elementary school in Taiwan (Wu, 2005).
- J:** 16 5th grade children ages 11-12 (12 girls) in a public elementary school, Pennsylvania, USA (Giguere, 2006).
- K*:** 192 3rd-6th grade boys and girls (diverse ethnicities) from a project for talented dancers selected from public schools in New York City (BrooksSchmitz, 1990).
- L:** 3 boys ages 10-12 (diverse ethnicity and socio-economic class) from both public school and community setting in North Carolina, USA (Current, 1988).
- M:** small number of 10-12-year-olds from a short-term project in urban Canada (Krohn, 1995).
- N*:** 40 students ages 10-15 (80% female) from school and studio settings in rural Canadian communities (data contributed by Ann Kipling Brown).
- O:** 4th and 5th grade boys and girls from a public school in North Carolina, USA (Waegerle, 1997).
- P*:** 51 students (70% female) from two middle schools (one private, one public) in North Carolina, USA (Stinson, 1997).
- Q:** 11-14-year-old boys and girls from a large and diverse public school in North Carolina, USA (Mosteller & Davidson, 2002).
- R:** 11 girls (ages 11-18) from a studio in North Carolina, USA (Kinzer, 1997).
- S:** Middle school studio (Crabtree, 1989).
- T:** 4 girls ages 12-13 from ballet studio in South Carolina, USA (Slowinski, 1995).
- U*:** 36 students (33 girls, diverse ethnicities and socio-economic class) from a public high school in North Carolina, USA (Stinson, 1993a, 1993b).
- V*:** 7 16-18-year-old girls from dance studios in North Carolina, USA (Stinson *et al.*, 1990).

W*: 6 students (4 girls) from public performing arts high school, New York (Koff, 1995).

X*: One 17-year-old girl from a classical Indian dance company in Victoria, Australia (Vlassopoulos, 1995).

Y*: UK high school student evaluating international dance conference.

Z*: Girls ages 13-18; raw data shared by a studio dance teacher in South Africa.

Notes

1. We use the word 'effort' as it is commonly employed in standard English to refer to exertion or expenditure of energy, not in its specialized use in Laban analysis.

2. The source of each anecdote is identified by a participant code as well as a citation if the source is a thesis, dissertation, or other publication. The Appendix describes the different sources of data.

3. This is not to say that we entered this research as blank slates. We both have a strong inclination toward meaning making as a most significant aspect of what it means to be human, and have suggested in prior writings that this should be a critical aspect of education.

4. They are displayed here as a linear path, whereas Hallowell draws them as steps in a continuous cycle.

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