

IADMS

International Association
for Dance Medicine & Science

The Bulletin

for Dancers & Teachers

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**When do
injuries occur
across
dance training
and career
development?**

Melanie Fuller PhD

**Preparing
dancers for
upper body
demands in
ballet and
contemporary
dance**

Claire Farmer MSc and
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**Teaching for
Well-being: A
Dance
Teacher's Guide
to Managing
Dancers' Stress**

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**The way out is in
(Thich Nhat
Hanh):
Cultivating
awareness
through
meditation for
dancers**

Livia Massarelli MA and
Phaedra Petsilas MA
PGCE

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About the IADMS Bulletin for Dancers & Teachers

The Bulletin for Dancers & Teachers is produced and published by the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science (IADMS). The Bulletin translates scientific research into accessible, practitioner-oriented articles for dancers, educators, parents, and others invested in dancer health and safety. Drawing on leading peer-reviewed academic sources, including the *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science*, the Bulletin exists to bridge research and practice in dance medicine, science and education.

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Letter from the Editors

Dear dancers and teachers,

Welcome to this new edition of *The IADMS Bulletin for Dancers & Teachers*. We are delighted to introduce a refreshed version of the Bulletin, created with a clear purpose: to bring research and practice into meaningful conversation with those in the dance community.

The Bulletin exists to bridge research and practice in dance medicine, science and education. Our vision is to create a publication that connects, respects, empowers, communicates and dialogues with the communities it serves.

We aim to connect by translating peer-reviewed research into accessible, engaging and practically useful insights for dancers and teachers. We respect the lived knowledge and artistry of educators and artists, meeting them where they are and recognizing that experience and science together shape effective practice. We seek to empower readers with tools, strategies and resources that can be applied immediately in studios, classrooms and rehearsal spaces. Through clear writing, visuals and multimodal formats, we aim to communicate ideas in ways that are tangible and adaptable. Most importantly, we hope the Bulletin fosters dialogue, encouraging reflection, adaptation and feedback, and positioning this publication as a space for ongoing conversation between researchers, teachers and dancers.

At the center of this vision is a commitment to wellbeing and artistry. Every contribution in the Bulletin aims to support healthy, inclusive and sustainable dance practices while honoring the creativity and expressive power that make dance such a meaningful art form.

We are deeply grateful to the Rudolf Nureyev Foundation for their partnership and support in making this publication possible. Their commitment to excellence in dance and to the development of future generations of artists aligns closely with the aims of this Bulletin.

This issue brings together research and practical insights that address key aspects of dancers' training, health and development. The articles explore mental wellbeing in the studio, the physical demands of choreography, the relationship between training load and injury risk, and mindfulness practices that support self-awareness and resilience. Together, they offer tools and perspectives designed to help dancers and teachers create training environments where performance, learning and wellbeing can flourish together.

Melanie Fuller's article, *When Do Injuries Occur Across Dance Training and Career Development?* examines how injury risk changes across key transition points in a dancer's training and career. Drawing on injury surveillance research, the article highlights how shifts in training volume and intensity, such as transitioning to full-time training or entering a professional company, can increase dancers' vulnerability to injury. Melanie offers practical guidance for educators and training organizations on how to manage training loads, integrate conditioning programs and support dancers through these transitions in ways that promote long-term health and career sustainability.

In *Preparing Dancers for Upper Body Demands in Ballet and Contemporary Dance*, Claire Farmer and James Brouner explore the increasing physical demands placed on dancers' upper bodies in ballet and contemporary dance, including lifts, inversions and weight-bearing floorwork. Through analysis of ballet and contemporary performances, the authors examine

how often these movements occur and what physical capacities they require. The article translates these findings into practical guidance for teachers and dancers, outlining strategies to develop strength, endurance and technical understanding to perform these movements safely and confidently.

Michelle Dwarika's article, titled *Teaching for Well-being: A Dance Teacher's Guide to Managing Dancers' Stress*, draws on her systematic review of mental health in dance, to offer teachers practical strategies for supporting dancers' psychological wellbeing. The article identifies common stressors in dance training such as cultural body ideals, teacher-based power dynamics and high-pressure environments, and offers actionable tools to address them. These include approaches for opening conversations about mental health, creating emotionally attuned dialogue, supporting dancers' needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness, and building learning environments that balance challenge with support. The article highlights the important role teachers play in shaping studio cultures where dancers can thrive both artistically and mentally.

Finally, *The Way Out Is In (Thich Nhat Hanh): Cultivating Awareness Through Meditation for Dancers*, by Livia Massarelli and Phaedra Petsilas, explores how meditation practices can support dancers' wellbeing, focus and self-awareness. Based on an eight-week meditation intervention with conservatoire students, the article highlights how contemplative practices can help dancers develop emotional regulation, compassion toward themselves and greater awareness of their bodies. The authors offer a practical toolkit of meditation exercises and reflective prompts that teachers and dancers can integrate into training contexts to support resilience and sustainable artistic development.

We're hugely grateful to all the authors for their contributions to this issue. We hope this Bulletin offers not only ideas to read, but tools to try, adapt and discuss within your own practice. Whether you are a teacher, dancer or educator, we invite you to engage with these insights, reflect on how they resonate with your own experience, and explore how they might shape your work in the studio and beyond.

Most importantly, we encourage you to continue the conversation. Share your reflections, test the ideas presented here in your own contexts, and connect with others in the dance community who are working toward healthier, more sustainable and artistically vibrant training and education environments. We look forward to learning together with you and invite you to dialogue with us. Our email is bulletin@iadms.org

With very warm wishes,

Elsa Urmston PhD, MSc, PGCAP, SFHEA

Sue Mayes AM, PhD, B.App.Sci(Physio), PGDip (Sports Physio), APAM

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When do injuries occur across dance training and career development?

Melanie Fuller PhD

Melanie Fuller is a Lecturer (Physiotherapy) at the University of Southern Queensland, and Touring Physiotherapist with The Australian Ballet. She has 18+ years experience as a physiotherapist, with Masters qualifications in Sports and Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy. Melanie's research investigates reducing injury in dance, and optimizing health and well-being for dancers.

Introduction

Dance training involves high training hours, and a high level of skill to produce a desired level of dance performance. Most dancers get injured during their training or career, and it is important to understand when and why dancers experience re-injury or multiple injuries that can impact their training and performances and even lead to long-term pain.

Rate of Injury

Injury may be related to a dancer's training hours, and the number of injuries sustained relative to the number of training hours is referred to as the rate of injury.¹ We can further consider what happens within these training hours; the intensity, or the level of exertion of these training sessions is as important as the number of hours, or volume of training.

Training Load

The product of training volume and intensity (volume x intensity) is known as training load.^{2,3} There is very little research on training load and injury in dance.⁴ Training load monitoring collects this data over a period of time, but there is no long-term training monitoring data in dance due to the challenges of collecting this data in dance contexts. We can, however, see patterns of increased training hours, or training intensity across a dancer's training and career development. It is possible to infer changes in training load at these times, and these changes in training load may explain the increased rate of injury reported in dance injury surveillance research.

Research Summary

Our research synthesized existing injury surveillance research that reported on injuries occurring at different time points across a dancer's training and career development.⁵ We

considered two time points when a dancer could be 'transitioning', or experiencing a change in their training load across their training and career development:

1. When a dancer transitions to full-time training, with a likely increase in training hours and intensity; and
2. When a dancer transitions to work in a professional dance company, likely involving more rehearsal in their day and performances across the year.

Student 'Transitioning Dancers'

Along with the likely increase in training loads during a transition to full-time training, dance students often move away from home to commence full-time training, and this and other lifestyle changes can also contribute to an increased rate of injury once they commence full-time training.⁵

When evaluating the available research, we compared injuries in student 'transitioning dancers' who were in lower year levels of training to those in higher year levels and found mixed results.⁵

One study⁶ showed that first-year pre-professional ballet and contemporary dance students experienced an increased rate of injuries compared to second- and third-year dance students. This could be related to an increase in training hours when transitioning from part-time training to full-time training, or related to other potential factors outside of training that a young dance student may face when commencing full-time training. Of note, there was a greater frequency of upper limb injuries in first-year students compared to the students in higher year levels. We proposed that:

- The increase in upper limb injuries in first-year students could be related to an increase in contemporary dance technique loads relative to the students' prior training, where contemporary dance technique tends to involve higher upper limb loads compared to classical ballet training.⁵

There were conflicting results in other studies on student 'transitioning dancers'.⁵ In another study⁷ with pre-professional ballet students, there was an increased rate of injury in the second- and third-year students compared to the first-year students, with a greater rate of injuries seen in the third-year students.

- Ekegren and colleagues⁷ proposed that this may be related to a change in training from more technique classes in earlier year levels, to an increase in rehearsal and, in turn, performance schedules. Dance performance training loads have been shown to be at a higher intensity than class work and rehearsal.⁸
- Another potential factor related to the increase in injuries in the third-year students in this study, is that previous injury is a risk factor for future injury,⁹ and the majority of students in this study had experienced an injury in their first-year of full-time training, potentially leaving them more susceptible to future injury. This highlights the need for appropriate rehabilitation of any injury to reduce the risk of future injury.⁵

Professional ‘Transitioning Dancers’

We also compared injuries in professional ‘transitioning dancers’ at a lower rank in a company or a junior company, and those who were younger or had fewer years of experience compared to more senior professional dancers.⁵

Some research showed that professional ‘transitioning dancers’ had a higher rate of injuries in ballet,¹⁰ when compared to more established professional dancers, but, in other contexts, dancers new to the profession had less injuries in modern dance.¹¹ We felt that the lower injury rates seen in professional modern ‘transitioning dancers’ may relate to the comprehensive healthcare available at the company’s pre-professional training school that offered continuation of care into the professional company.^{5,12} Of interest, the injury rates in the modern dance company’s pre-professional training school was higher¹² compared to those in the professional company.¹¹

- This potentially highlights the success of the comprehensive healthcare available to the dancers in these settings, that may allow full rehabilitation from injury, and potentially reduce the risk of future injury.⁵
- The increase in injury rates seen in professional ballet ‘transitioning dancers’ could be related to an increase in performance demands that requires higher work intensities than the technique classes that student dancers are typically more often exposed to, but also, that there is likely an increase in the number of performances they undertake.⁵

Application of Research Findings to Practice for Dancers and Dance Educators

Dance specific training and conditioning can complement each other to support a student’s transition to full-time dance training. The commencement of a dance training program, or training year can be optimal times to focus on conditioning training, but conditioning and dance-specific training must be balanced to avoid overloading dance students. The infographic (figure 1) below highlights key considerations when supporting dancers during these transition periods, and an example of how to guide the implementation of balanced dance-specific training and conditioning has been provided (table 1).

Tools and Resources

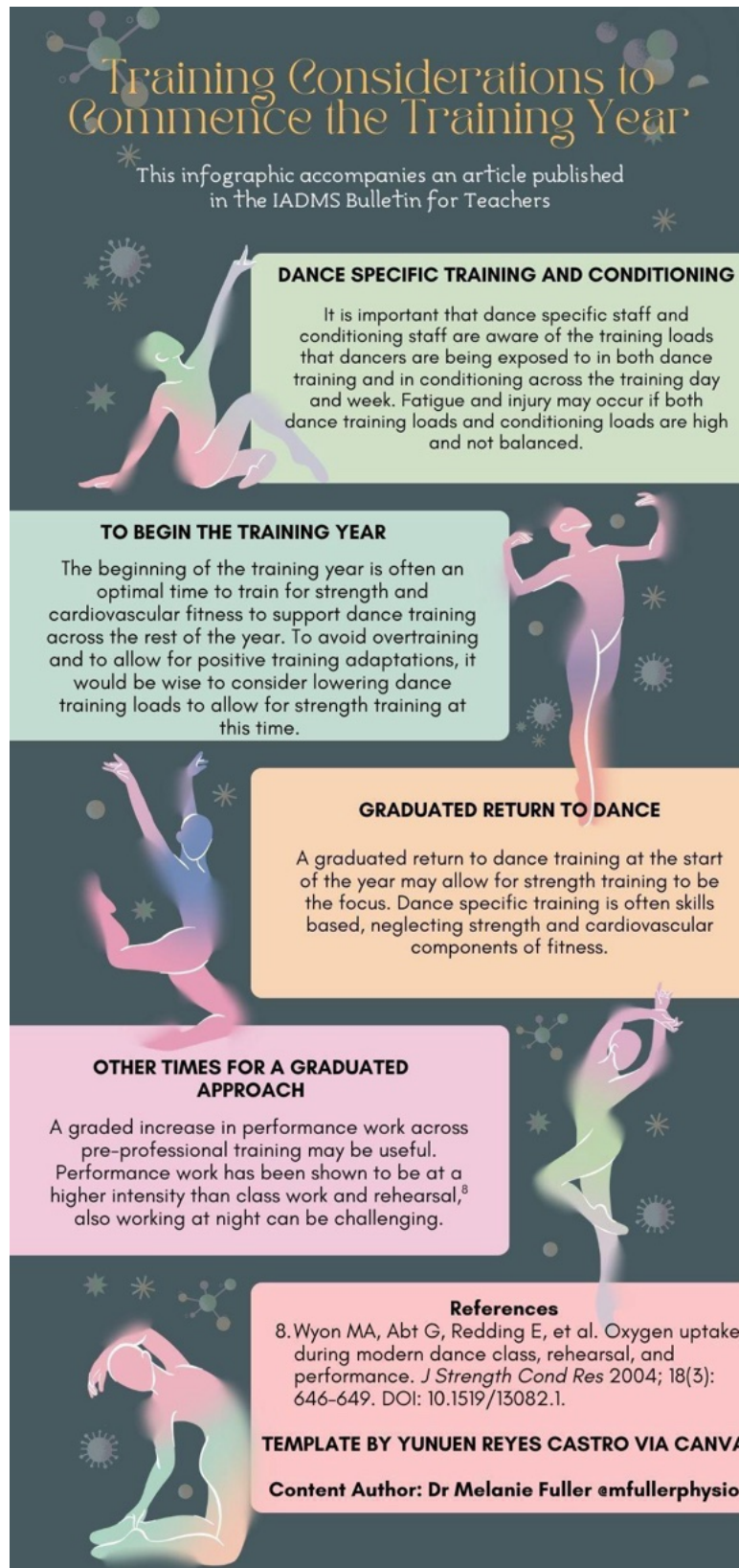


Figure 1: Key considerations when supporting dancers during transition period

Table 1: An example of a graded return to dance with volume and intensity of dance specific training and conditioning to commence full-time dance training

Week	Volume of dance specific training	Intensity of dance specific training	Volume of conditioning to support dance training	Intensity of conditioning to support dance training
			Nb. This is the skills domain of appropriately qualified strength and conditioning coaches or other exercise training professionals	
1	50% of full ongoing training hours	No jumping, easier skills of pointe work. No upper limb loading for contemporary and other dance techniques. En l'air work that does not involve holds e.g. a grande battement or kick versus a held developpé.	3 x 1-1.5-hour sessions of appropriate strength training per week 3 x 30-minute cardiovascular training sessions per week Nb – ensure to include conditioning to support dance loads – calves, quads, glutes, trunk, foot intrinsic muscles, upper limb strength. Use time to build strength-based work to support dance training, then maintain it.	If no training history in strength-based work, focus on technique to start with, and body weight work.
2	60% of full ongoing training hours	Commence 2 feet jumps. Build pointe work loads, build upper limb loading, and commence a low number of short hold developpés.	3 x 1-1.5-hour sessions of strength training per week 3 x 30-minute cardiovascular training sessions per week	If technique is strong, and accustomed to body weight strength-based training, increase loads, monitoring for mild delayed onset muscle soreness as an indication of positive adaptation, rather than extreme delayed onset muscle soreness.

3	70% of full ongoing training hours	Commence small single leg jumps, build the amount of upper limb based contemporary and other dance work, include more high skill pointe work, and a gradual increase in the number and length of holds of développés.	3 x 1-1.5-hour sessions of strength training per week 3 x 30-minute cardiovascular training sessions per week	Build consistency in strength-based training for further incremental strength gains.
4	80% of ongoing full training hours	Build to grande allegro or big travelling jumps, increase upper limb loading, and the amount of pointe work.	3 x 1-1.5-hour sessions of strength training per week 3 x 30-minute cardiovascular training sessions per week	Maintain consistency.
5	Full dance training hours	Aim for consistency in loading from 5-6 weeks post-holiday period or transitioning in load. Avoid big changes in loads, and plan for upcoming changes in load with new choreography for example.	Continue 2 x 1-1.5-hour strength training sessions per week 1-2 x cardiovascular training sessions. Maintenance is the aim here, rather than further strength gains. Consider the need for future recovery weeks in conditioning, to reduce the volume of conditioning work, whilst maintaining intensity, to avoid overtraining, particularly when dance loads increase e.g. performance periods, to ensure conditioning and dance specific loads don't add to too much.	Look for other times in the year to focus more on strength-based training for further strength gains. But consider a decrease in dance training loads to ensure increased strength training is matched with appropriate dance training loads.

Conclusion

There are times across a dancer's training and career development when they may be more susceptible to injury, when training can change in intensity and volume, particularly when commencing full-time training, or beginning a professional career. Dance teachers and artistic staff can communicate and work with strength and conditioning staff, these teams can better understand the training loads that dancers are being exposed to. Dance-specific training and strength and conditioning training can complement each other during the start of a training year to set dancers up for success.

Reflections and Invitations

Am I seeing more injuries at certain times of training development? Can I vary load to reduce injury risk?

Is this week's planned training too much of a spike in training load from last week's training?

What's the individual's training history? Are they returning post injury, or post holidays? What pointe work, pas de deux or contemporary work are they used to?

Are this week's dance specific training loads matched with what is planned for conditioning?

Original Article:

Fuller, M., Moyle, G., Hunt, A., & Minett, G. (2019). Ballet and contemporary dance injuries when transitioning to full-time training or professional level dance: a systematic review. *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science*, 23(3), 112-125.

<https://doi.org/0.12678/1089-313X.23.3.112>

Further Reading and Resources

Armando C, Kurapati SS, Voulo MA, et al. Influence of training load on the risk of injuries in preprofessional contemporary dancers: a scoping review. *Orthop J Sports Med* 2025; 13(10): <https://doi.org/10.1177/2325967125136>

This scoping review is a valuable resource for dance educators, as it examines how training intensity and scheduling directly impact the physical health of pre-professional contemporary dancers. By analysing nine studies, the researchers identified critical patterns that can potentially help teachers reduce injury rates and improve student longevity.

A primary concern for teachers is the high prevalence of overuse injuries. The authors point out that many students continue to train through pain, meaning standard "time-loss" tracking, where a student only reports an injury if they miss class, underestimates the true physical toll on the body. For a more accurate picture of student health, the study suggests

adopting an "all complaints" approach, encouraging dancers to report any pain or hindrance to their normal movement.

The research highlights the risk of erratic training schedules, specifically "spikes" in hours during the final weeks leading up to a performance or when returning from a break. These sudden increases in workload have been linked to higher injury rates because the body does not have time to make the necessary physiological adaptations. While technique classes are usually balanced (bilateral), rehearsals often favor a dominant side, leading to asymmetric loading and muscular imbalances that may increase the risk of injury.

To mitigate these risks, the article recommends that dance programs:

- Implement graduated progression of programs to slowly build technique, strength and stamina rather than allowing sudden spikes in rehearsal hours.
- Introduce supplemental training, such as strength, mobility, and plyometric work, outside of technique class to counterbalance the repetitive stresses of choreography.
- Prioritise adequate nutrition and sleep, especially during intense pre-performance periods.
- Focus on functional measurements (like pain levels and range of motion) rather than just "days lost" to assess the severity of a student's injury.

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Preparing dancers for upper body demands in ballet and contemporary dance

Claire Farmer MSc and James Brouner PhD

Claire Farmer is a dance science educator, strength and conditioning coach, and researcher. Her main research focus is upper body strength in dance, female dancer health and dance for health. She works with dance training organizations and companies across the UK, advocating for greater integration of strength and conditioning into dance schools and companies. Claire has published work in international dance medicine and science journals and recently published a book on the female dancer. She is also Chair of the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science Strength and Conditioning Special Interest Group.

James Brouner is the course leader for Sport and Exercise Science programs at Kingston University, London. James also delivers biomechanical curriculum on the MSc Dance Science at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. James' research interests span Sport and Dance, with a focus on fundamental mechanical mechanisms and how they impact movement quality, and how fatigue can impact movement efficiency. James also researches performance analysis to explore the global understanding of in-event metrics and locomotive actions taken by performers, with the aim to enhance training and overall performance.

Context and Rationale

Dance choreography can include many impressive and demanding movements that require upper body strength and endurance, including lifts and inversions such as handstands.¹ The ability to perform these movements safely and with the required aesthetic components relies on both sufficient levels of muscular strength (the muscles' ability to overcome an opposing force, often including external resistance such as another dancer or a weight), and endurance (the muscles' ability to resist fatigue and maintain contraction over time). Technical understanding of the biomechanics of those movements is also necessary.

Recent studies have suggested that injury risk for dancers during lifts lies not only in insufficient strength but also in a misunderstanding of the mechanics of the lift.² Additionally, choreography also now requires more athletic and acrobatic components including inversions such as handstands or movements that require the dancer to support their bodyweight through their upper body.³ Therefore, in order to prepare both male and female dancers to carry out these kinds of demands, dance teachers, dancers and strength and conditioning coaches can work together to develop the requisite strength, alignment and technical understanding.

It can be beneficial for training to include specific coaching in lifts and inversions to break down the movement into smaller chunks, developing the dancer's confidence so that they build the necessary strength required and become more familiar with the movement pattern itself. Sufficient time to practice these skills to develop movement memory should also be built into training to avoid what Lafortune² describes as "trial and error" in learning to lift a dancer. Together, these two components can address the concerns around injury risk.²

Research Summary

In order to begin understanding the demands placed on dancers' upper body strength and endurance during ballet and contemporary dance performance, we carried out a performance analysis of 12 ballet and 12 contemporary digitally-recorded performances.¹ Where possible, two male and two female dancers were analyzed per performance, totaling 46 individual ballet and 44 individual contemporary dance performances. To help us understand the requirements more specifically, we recorded the frequency of all lifts and upper body weight-bearing movements such as handstands in each performance.

Our findings showed that male ballet dancers carried out more lifts than their female counterparts and a greater frequency of above shoulder assisted lifts (assisted by the dancer jumping into the lift or by another dancer supporting the lift) than male contemporary dancers. The findings also highlighted that the majority of lifts took place at the eye-level of the dancer carrying out the lift, rather than directly overhead. Contemporary dancers demonstrated a greater frequency of movements that required hand contact with the ground including holding their own weight in movements such as a plank than ballet dancers.

These findings encourage teachers and coaches to question to what extent dancers' current training sufficiently prepares them to execute these movements in relation to technical proficiency, and their muscular strength and endurance. Lifts that require movement of the dancer to between hip and eye level of the dancer carrying out the lift require the use of different muscles than an overhead lift. This includes developing strength of the muscles around the shoulders and upper arms, such as the anterior deltoids and biceps brachii to maintain these lifts (Figure 1).

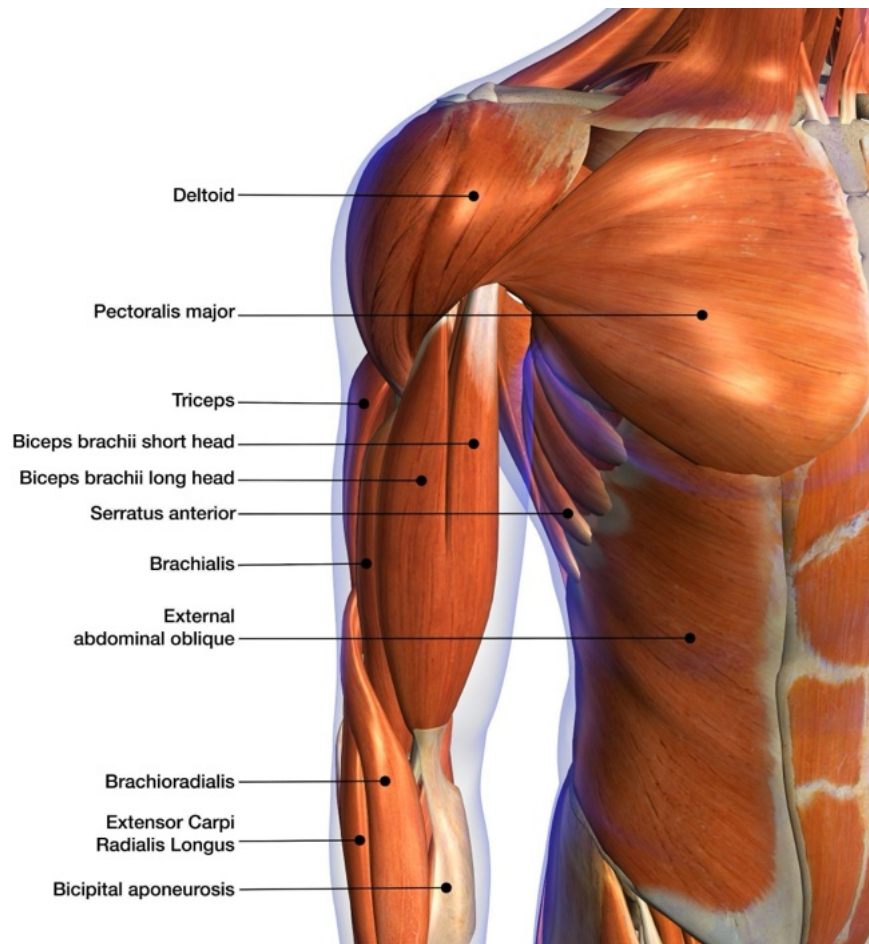


Figure 1: Male shoulder anatomy (anterior view)
Image credit: Hank Grebe

Strength training as part of a dancers' training regime should therefore include specific exercises to address this requirement (see tools and resources below). Likewise, the greater number of movements in contemporary dance where the hands are in contact with the ground such as a plank or handstand also suggests that strength and technical training for these movements should be incorporated into both male and female dancers' training.

Understanding the demands of current choreography can help dance teachers and coaches ensure they are supporting dancers to sufficiently prepare for these movements in terms of physical capacity and technical knowledge. Likewise, an understanding of the upcoming choreography can help dancers mentally and physically prepare for their role, whether that is in new choreography or with a new dance contract.

Application of Research Findings to Practice for Dancers and Dance Educators

When considering lifts or inverted movement during class, rehearsal or performance, it is important for the dancer and their teacher to reflect upon whether efficiency and accurate performance of the movement could be improved with increased muscular strength and endurance alongside technical awareness. We know from previous research that dance class alone does not increase physical fitness,⁴ but that increased fitness during training can allow room for greater focus on artistry and reduced injury risk. For example, if a dancer is not strong enough, their focus may be on worrying that they will not be able to lift the dancer, rather than the specific technical requirements of the lift in order to make it aesthetically pleasing. If they know they are strong enough, they are able to focus on the artistry of the movement.

It is perhaps useful to reflect on the following prompts:

- Do you or your dancers have access to strength training, not as supplementary fitness, but as an integral aspect of dance training, preparing them for the specific movements to be carried out?
- If a piece of choreography has lifts in it, do the dancers carrying out these lifts have sufficient strength to perform them?

For lifts between hip level and eye level, this will require strength in the biceps brachii and anterior deltoids as well as the ability to stabilize the core to protect the spine. Likewise, if the choreography asks dancers to perform an inversion, including but not limited to handstands, cartwheels and walk-overs, a lack of sufficient strength may also lead to nervousness around inverting. Again, dancers having confidence in their ability to hold their own bodyweight when upside down, understand their alignment when inverted, and control the movement through core stabilization can allow them to think about the choreography and perform the movements with confidence.

Tools and Resources

The resources below constitute a list of suggested exercises, cues and movements to aid in neuromuscular development of upper body movements. These can be integrated as part of or after a thorough warm-up and overseen by a qualified professional. If you are at all unsure about any of these movements or their suitability for the dancer(s) you are working with, please seek advice from a qualified strength and conditioning coach, physiotherapist/physical therapist or athletic trainer.

- Include the upper body and ground contact with the hands during warm-up. Sufficiently mobilizing shoulder girdle and the wrists is important for preparation for upper body movements.



[Watch a short video of an upper-body warm up](#)

- Understand and encourage good hand placement on the floor for better control and protection of the wrist. Spread fingers out wide and dig the fingertips into the floor (Figure 2). Images such as *trying to dig your fingertips into sand*, or to *pull the floor towards you* are useful cues. This helps to spread the weight through the fingertips, knuckles and heel of the hand, reducing pain in the wrist.

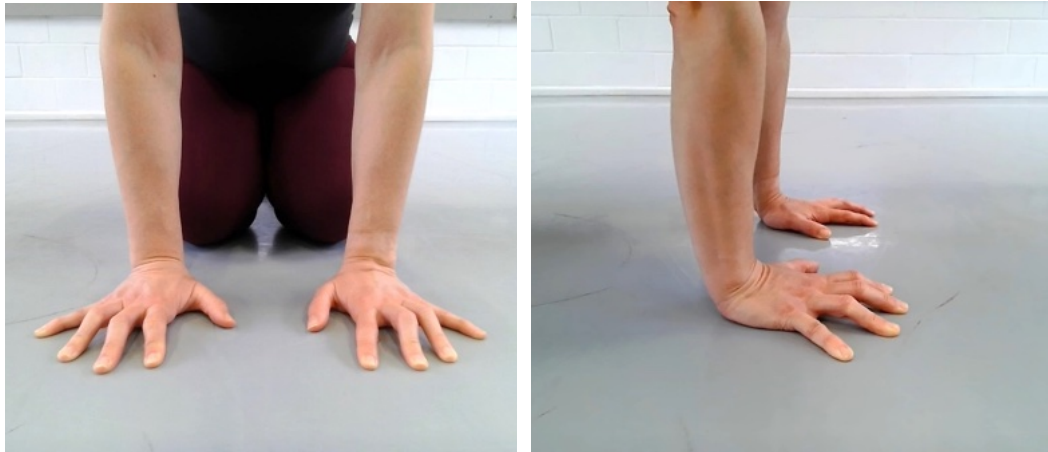


Figure 2: Hand placement for greater control and even distribution of weight



[Watch a short video about hand placement](#)

- Encourage development of upper body strength. This can be integrated into class including push-ups (Figures 3, 4 and 5), banded overhead presses and bicep curls, alongside resistance training with free weights.



[Watch a short video about push-up variations](#)



[Watch a short video about the banded overhead press](#)



Figure 3: Pull push up or plank position – ensure that the shoulders are stacked over the wrists and that hypermobile dancers do not lock into their elbows. The body should be in a straight line from head to heels with the core engaged to prevent arching of the lower back (lumbar spine).



Figure 4: Modified push-up position. The body should be in a straight line from the head to the knees with the core engaged to prevent arching of the lower back (lumbar spine).



Figure 5: Push-up variation. By raising the height of the upper body, the push up becomes easier. As the dancer becomes stronger the surface can be lowered until they are able to complete the push up on the floor. Maintain a straight line from head to heels.

- Particularly important for hypermobile dancers is stabilization of the shoulder girdle. Therefore, consider including exercises to strengthen the rotator cuff muscles which stabilize the shoulder joint. Useful exercises include banded shoulder external rotation and scapular push-ups. These can be incorporated into a warm-up to activate the muscles.



[Watch a short video about the banded shoulder external rotation](#)

ROTATOR CUFF MUSCLE

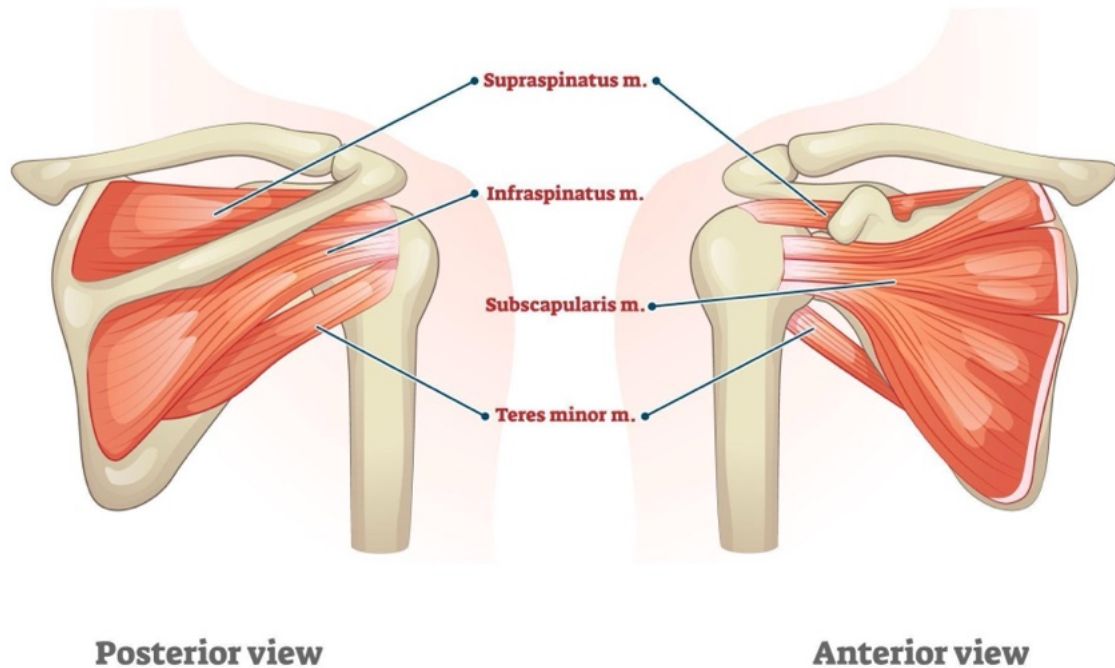


Figure 6: Muscles of the rotator cuff (stabilizing muscles of the shoulder)
Image credit: VectorMine

- Where possible, source expertise from a qualified strength and conditioning coach to design specific training programs for dancers.

Conclusion

It can be challenging for dancers to find sufficient time within training, rehearsal and performance schedules to include strength and conditioning training. However, a combination of focus on the technical skills required for lifts and inversions, as well as developing the requisite strength can potentially mitigate injury risk, and help dancers to feel more confident in these movements. Where possible, dancers, dance teachers and coaches working together can develop these skills in relation to the choreographic upper body demands. You can find a strength and conditioning provider [here](#). Where resources do not allow for a strength and conditioning coach, the above tools will provide a stepping-off point to begin considering the demands placed upon the upper body in ballet and contemporary choreography.

Providing dancers with the tools to develop both their technical ability and the required strength to perform these movements safely and correctly can help them to reduce the risk of injury, perform with more confidence and focus on the artistry of their dancing.

Reflections and Invitations

What ways can we invite equity in discussions around strength training and who has access to it?

Consider: Is muscular strength in your dance class or rehearsals gendered? Do all dancers have equal access to strength and conditioning (S&C) or conditioning classes? If you have access to free weights such as barbells, are these only used by the male dancers? Is the space available for strength and conditioning training friendly, accessible and supportive?

Strength and technical proficiency go hand in hand for safe execution of upper body movements. How can we give equal precedence in training these to fully optimize performance? Is strength and conditioning currently an integral part of your/your dancers' training? What steps can you take to integrate it into your/their schedule?

Consider: If there is strength and conditioning, is it compulsory or viewed as "supplementary" or "optional"? Is there something in their schedule that can be removed to ensure strength and conditioning can be accommodated?

Try adding the upper body warm up to the final stages of your normal warm up routine.

Were there any movements that felt particularly challenging? Why do you think this is?

Did your dance class feel any different afterwards, particularly during upper body movements such as a port de bras or any floorwork that includes planks or downdogs?

Hand placement – Next time you have your hands on the floor during something like a plank, try using the imagery of sand, or pulling the floor towards you to spread the weight through your hands.

Do you notice any difference in your wrist compared to your normal hand placement? Is it more or less comfortable?

Does this placement make your movements or static stance in a plank feel more or less stable?

Did you try any of the exercises? If so, which one(s)?

Were the movements challenging or easy?

Could you pay attention to which muscles were working?

Can you set yourself a goal? For example if you can currently complete 5 modified push ups can you set a goal of 10 modified push ups, or maybe 2 full push ups? What time-scale do you want to add to your goal?

Original Article:

Farmer C, Brouner J. Frequency of upper body muscular demands in contemporary and ballet dance performance: a cross sectional performance analysis. *Journal of Dance Medicine and Science*. 2025;29(4):237-245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1089313X251313664>

Further Reading

Wyon M, Clarke S. *Strength and Conditioning for Dancers*. Crowood; 2021.

Strength and Conditioning for Dancers is an accessible guide for dancers and teachers to consider how they might design and implement an effective program including strength and conditioning exercises. When initially implementing strength and conditioning, it can be difficult for dancers to know where to begin; this book provides the doorway to this information in an accessible and engaging format. The authors provide a theoretical overview of fundamental anatomy, key athletic components including cardiorespiratory training, strength, flexibility and plyometric training, with examples of how this might be implemented in dance training. Chapters 5 to 9 provide crucial step-by-step guidance to help dancers and teachers carry out a self-screening to establish current levels of physical fitness and ability, and then design and implement their own training program. This includes basic Pilates and specific exercises for the core, upper and lower body including photographs and exercise protocols, and training programs to get you started. This book demystifies strength and conditioning exercise selection for dancers and teachers, offering an access point to incorporating this into dance training and education.

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Acknowledgements

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Photo and video credit: Claire Farmer

Teaching for well-being: A dance teacher's guide to managing dancers' stress

Michelle Dwarika MAS

Born in Switzerland, Michelle Dwarika is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham. She has a background in performing arts and a MAS in dance science. Her research interests are geared towards dancers' mental health, mental skills training in dance, and systemic approaches in dance research.

Introduction

Mental health is central to optimising how dancers learn, grow, and sustain their careers. A scoping review of 115 studies on mental health in dance highlighted that dancers' well-being is shaped by individual personalities and the environments in which they train. Stressors such as cultural ideals, power dynamics, emotional suppression, and unsupportive learning environments consistently emerge as major contributors to distress, particularly among young dancers.^{1,2}

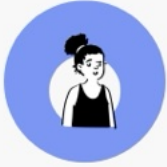
The review identifies powerful protective factors that teachers can directly influence: autonomy, competence, relatedness, emotional support, and a facilitative environment that balances challenge with care.³ Despite the growing body of research, there are few resources that offer practical tools for the teachers who interact with dancers most consistently and shape their daily experience.

Drawing on the scoping review and on evidence-based practices from dance psychology and education, this article offers a focused toolbox for teachers to use that can support dancers' mental well-being. Each tool is mapped directly to a specific stressor identified in the research, offering concrete strategies that can be integrated into everyday teaching. The aim is to help teachers create environments where dancers can thrive both artistically and mentally. The scoping review identified several core stressors that shape dancers' mental health. Each tool below is designed to reduce one specific stressor through everyday teaching practices.

Stressor 1: Lack of Psychological Support During Distress

Teachers can support dancers in managing distress. Here are some ideas on how to start conversations about mental well-being with your dancers. Be sure to stay within your own expertise: signpost dancers to mental health professionals when needed and ensure you are supported too.

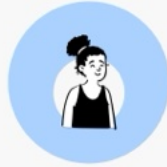
Tool: Start a conversation about mental health



1. ASKING DANCERS: “ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”, “HOW ARE YOU?”, “ARE YOU OKAY?”

When we show that we care about a dancer’s emotional state, they are more likely to confide in us. Keep in mind to:

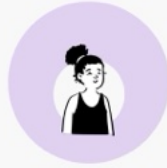
- Avoid rushing the conversation.
- Take the time to listen attentively and observe their responses.



2. BE A GOOD LISTENER

Show empathy and warmth for the dancer’s situation and avoid diagnosing or trivialising their worries. A good listener:

- Takes the time to listen and understand what the dancer is saying.
- Pauses and makes space for some silence.
- Avoids interrupting the dancer mid-sentence.



3. OFFER CONSTRUCTIVE AND REALISTIC HELP

At the end of the conversation, offer some way forward, however, stay within your expertise and signpost to mental health providers and services if needed.

- You can offer to catch up the next day
- Accompany the dancer to an appointment with a mental health professional.
- Follow up with your offers so that the dancer feels heard and seen.

How this reduces the stressor: It provides a starting point to have ongoing conversations, reduces stigma about mental health, and offers support to dancers, reducing isolation and fear.

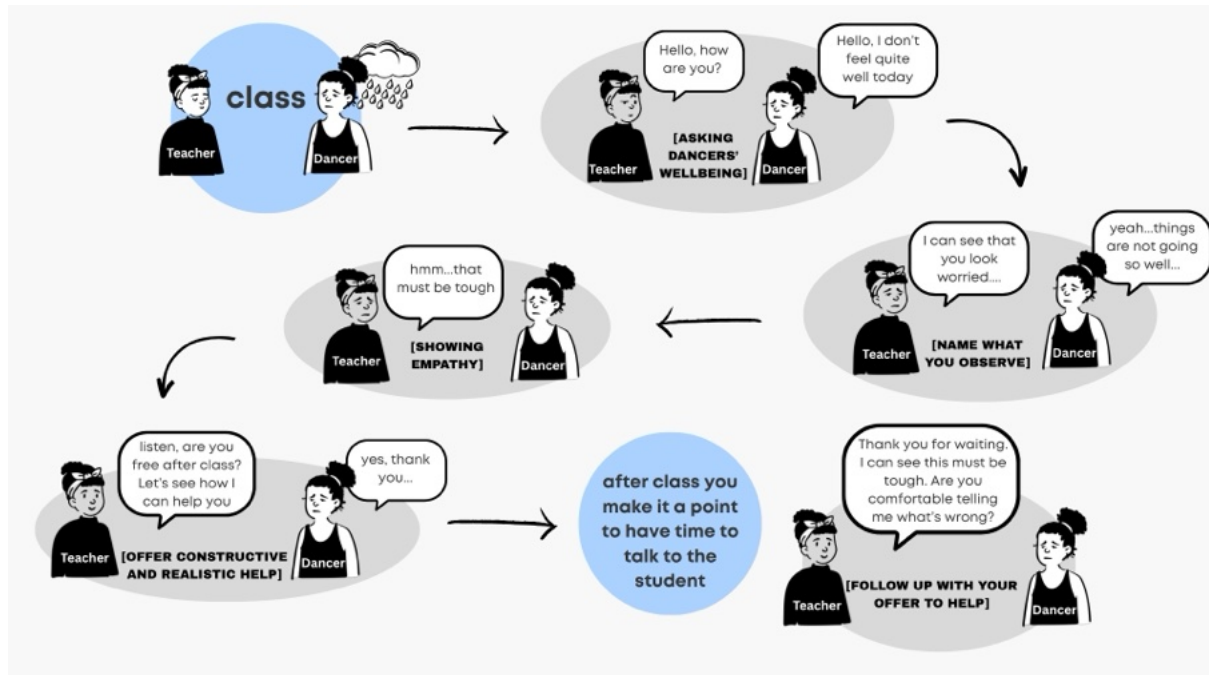
Stressor 2: Body Ideals, Appearance Pressure, and Cultural Norms of Silent Conformity

Tool: Emotionally Attuned Conversations (Notice → Name → Validate → Explore)

Cultural ideals like body aesthetics can concern dancers. While these can be delicate conversations to have, they help teachers emotionally attune to dancers and what concerns them. Here are some key points that can help you hold a warm and gentle dialogue that guides the dancer emotionally.

Key practices:

- **Notice** emotional cues (“You seem unsettled today”)
- **Name** the feeling (“It sounds like this was very upsetting to you”)
- **Validate** the experience (“It is ok to feel that way”)
- **Explore** gently (“What would help you right now?”)

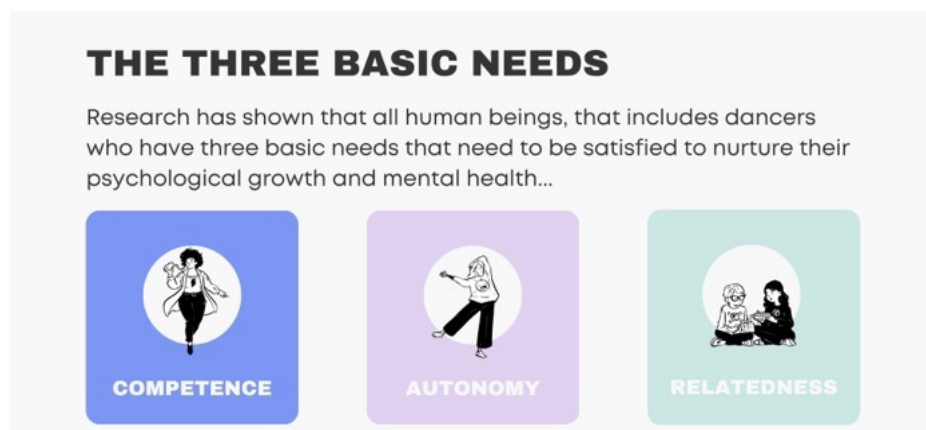


How this reduces the stressor: It breaks the culture of silence, reduces shame, and creates a safe space for dancers to express concerns and emotional distress.

Stressor 3: Power Dynamics and Lack of Autonomy

Tool: Support the Three Basic Psychological Needs (Competence, Autonomy, Relatedness)

When teachers assume hierarchical relationships in which they hold power over dancers through their teaching approach, dancers can feel voiceless and dependent on approval. Being aware of the teaching approaches teachers use, making informed choices about who holds power, and incorporating the three basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness can support dancers' mental well-being.



The NEED for **COMPETENCE**

Satisfied
When a dancer feels efficacious and able to successfully execute desired actions.

Frustrated
If dancers are led to focus on or need to demonstrate superior ability that is normatively defined



**Teaching
Reflection**

To Address Dancer Competence Needs

- How can I show appreciation for a dancer's individual progress and learning process?
- In which way can I normalize setbacks, celebrate milestones?
- How can the dancers and I set realistic, achievable goals together?

The NEED for **AUTONOMY**

Satisfied
When dancers perceive themselves as initiators of their decisions and can behave in a way that reflects their aims and choices.

Frustrated
When dancers feeling coerced into actions.



**Teaching
Reflection**

To Address Dancer Autonomy Needs

- How can I acknowledge a dancer's individuality and use it in their learning progress?
- How can I involve dancers in making choices in class?
- In which way can I present different outcomes of choices or decisions that are being made (think of yourself as a compass rather than the hand leading down the path)?

The NEED for **RELATEDNESS**

Satisfied
It refers to feeling understood by, cared for, and connected to other individuals.

Frustrated
Dancers might feel a lack of relatedness when, for example, teachers favour one dancer to another



**Teaching
Reflection**

To Address Dancer Relatedness Needs

- How can I acknowledge the dancers' different strengths and use them to work on skills together?
- How can I support dancers in seeing peers as learning resources?
- When and how can I acknowledge kindness, warmth and the dancers' willingness to help each other?

How this reduces the stressor: It shifts the studio environment from compliance to collaboration, reducing fear of authority and increasing agency.

Stressor 4: Lack of a Facilitative Environment (High Pressure, Low Support)

Tool: Build a Facilitative Environment (High Challenge + High Support)

Creating a facilitative environment has been identified as a protective factor in supporting dancers' mental health. A facilitative learning environment offers a high level of support and an equally high level of challenge for dancers to develop their dance skills. Based on Sanford's theory of balancing support and challenge in learning contexts³, there are four distinct environments that teachers can cultivate, distinguished by two factors of challenge and support. This theory provides valuable guidance for building a facilitative setting in which dancers can thrive.



As illustrated in the matrix, Sanford suggests that too many challenges and insufficient support are part of an unrelenting environment, which, as the review shows, compromises dancers' mental health and well-being. Yet, if dancers perceive that they are not challenged and receive low support, their progress can become stagnant. If too much support is provided with insufficient challenge, the environment becomes too comfortable and might not enhance dancers' growth and performance. Therefore, we can aim to create a facilitative learning environment with the following characteristics:

High challenge:

- Learning from mistakes and failures

- Giving dancers agency and responsibility for their learning
- Recognition and celebration of success
- Constructive feedback
- Opportunities to grow

High support:

- Warmth and empathy
- Relationships built on learning from each other's strengths
- Psychological safety (daring to speak up and ask for rationale)
- "We're in this together" mindset
- Scaffolding and check-ins when needed

To start creating a facilitative learning environment, the following checklists might be useful to print out and reflect upon. Feel free to adjust the list as you go along.

FACILITATIVE CLASSROOM

Support-Challenge Checklist: High Support - High Challenge

INDICATORS OF APPROPRIATE CHALLENGE

- ☐ Expectations are clear and aligned with the group's developmental level
- ☐ Tasks promote progression rather than repetition
- ☐ Precision, quality, and refinement are encouraged without promoting perfectionism
- ☐ Feedback provide developmental guidance on how to improve
- ☐ Students are held accountable for effort and engagement
- ☐ The level of challenge is purposeful and connected to learning goals

INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

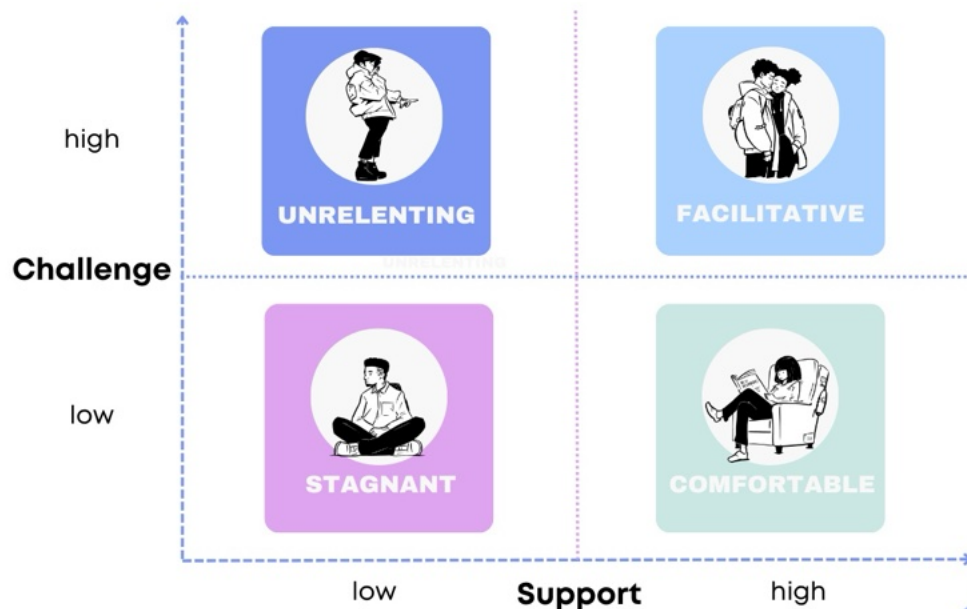
- ☐ Teacher's tone communicates belief in students' capacity to improve
- ☐ Strengths, progress, and effective strategies are acknowledged
- ☐ Students feel able to ask questions, seek clarification, or try again
- ☐ Emotional cues (e.g., frustration, withdrawal, overwhelm) are noticed and responded to with empathy
- ☐ Options, scaffolds, or pacing adjustments are offered when appropriate
- ☐ Effort, persistence, and personal qualities are reinforced



ENVIRONMENT SCAN

IDENTIFY THE CURRENT BALANCE OF CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT

Environment	Challenge	Support	Typical class indicators
Stagnant	Low	Low	• Low energy • Disengagement • Minimal progression
Unrelenting	High	Low	• Tension • Fear of making mistakes • Withdrawal or shutdown
Comfortable	Low	High	• Warm atmosphere • Limited progress or development
Facilitative	High	High	• Focused engagement • Psychological safety



REFLECTIONS FOR YOUR CLASS

IF THE ENVIRONMENT IS **TOO COMFORTABLE**

- ☐ How can you introduce a clear goal or additional layer of complexity?
- ☐ Can you provide a developmental feedback?
- ☐ Have you increased expectations for detail, quality, or artistry?

IF THE ENVIRONMENT IS **TOO UNRELENTING**

- ☐ Can you reduce the complexity or pace in a section during your class?
- ☐ How can you validate effort and acknowledge progress?
- ☐ When is it more effective to provide one clear, actionable piece of feedback rather than addressing multiple points?

IF THE ENVIRONMENT **IS STAGNANT**

- ☐ When and how can you reconnect relationally (e.g., warmth, curiosity, presence)?
- ☐ When and how could you introduce a purposeful challenge?
- ☐ How can you clarify the immediate focus or success criteria?



How this reduces the stressor: It replaces harsh or stagnant learning environments with a facilitative environment that supports both performance and well-being.

Conclusion

The scoping review highlights that dance teachers are central to the mental health landscape of dance. While dancers face a range of stressors, from injury and body ideals to power dynamics and emotional suppression, the studio environment can either amplify these pressures or actively buffer against them. Teachers shape that environment every day through their language, feedback, expectations, and cultural leadership.

The tools presented in this article are designed to help teachers reduce common stressors, strengthen dancers' internal resources, and cultivate a learning environment where well-being and artistry develop side by side. The toolbox offers teachers strategies which can enhance dancers' well-being for you to trial, adjust, and modify as needed.

Hopefully, you will be able to integrate these tools into daily practice and create training environments where dancers feel safe, motivated, and able to thrive across the full arc of their careers.

Original Article:

Dwarika MS, Haraldsen HM. Mental health in dance: a scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2023;14:1090645. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1090645>

Further Reading and Resources

Lundqvist C, Andersson G. Let's talk about mental health and mental disorders in elite sports: a narrative review of theoretical perspectives. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2021;12:700829. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.700829>

Let's Talk About Mental Health and Mental Disorders in Elite Sports: A Narrative Review of Theoretical Perspectives by Lundqvist and Andersson offers valuable ways of understanding well-being in sport psychology, serving as a useful reflective tool for dancers and dance teachers to consider mental health in dance. The article outlines how various organizations and individuals interpret, define, and discuss mental health. It also explains the strengths and limitations of each perspective, offering insights that can serve as a useful reference for dance training and practice.

The authors conclude that mental health is a highly complex construct and that consensus on a uniform definition is unlikely. Yet, they suggest that diverse perspectives and experiences can foster a more holistic understanding of how mental health can be promoted and incorporated. By opening up more platforms for conversation, varied viewpoints can be accommodated, helping to establish a shared understanding of mental health within the dance community. Ultimately, the article provides dancers and dance teachers with a valuable framework for approaching mental health.

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The way out is in (Thich Nhat Hanh): Cultivating awareness through meditation for dancers

Livia Massarelli MA and Phaedra Petsilas MA PGCE

Livia Massarelli is a dance artist, researcher and holistic coach whose work investigates meditation and coaching as tools to support dancers' well-being and sustainable careers. Her project The Mindful Dancer bridges academic research and practice-as-research. She has published in the Journal of Dance and Somatic Practice and for One Dance UK, and presents her research internationally.

Phaedra Petsilas is a dance educator and academic with 25 years' experience in training, education and research. As Head of Studies at Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance, she leads academic provision and research, with an interest in inclusive learning environments, student agency and care-centered approaches to dancer training and well-being.

Introduction

In this article, we share our findings from a research intervention at Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in the UK which focused on meditation practices for dancers. The purpose of this article is to consider the intentions, context, design, methodology, process and outcomes of the research, with the aim of sharing how our work can be applied in various dance contexts. We invite dance practitioners to explore some of our meditation approaches via a toolkit of videos and reflective prompts which dancers and teachers can apply in their own context.

Context and Rationale

Conservatoire dance training prioritizes technical excellence, performance outcomes and employability, often at the expense of psychological skill development. Students frequently face high expectation and perfectionism, stress and anxiety, low self-esteem and self-worth, and a pressure to demonstrate resilience.¹⁻⁴

Through our research and practice, we argue for a shift toward a pedagogical model rooted in ethics of care, autonomy and embodied self-awareness. Meditation is positioned as a somatic and contemplative practice that supports self-regulation, agency and well-being,⁵ disrupting traditional externally driven, performance-focused training models.

Research Summary

We designed a small-scale qualitative study with 15 second-year contemporary dance students, focusing on meditation practices created for dancers which focused on self-care, emotional regulation and focus, and body awareness, while providing a non-judgmental space away from performance pressure. Our overall research aim was to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of a specifically-designed meditation program on the well-being and performance-related capacities of dance students in a conservatoire context. Our study evaluated an eight-week meditation program designed for undergraduate dance students within a conservatoire training environment.

Our specific objectives were:

1. To investigate whether meditation reduces perceived stress and anxiety by exploring its role in emotional regulation and coping strategies.
2. To assess improvements in mindfulness and self-awareness through fostering cognitive clarity, emotional insight and non-judgmental awareness.
3. To evaluate changes in body perception and somatic awareness by heightening awareness of tension, injury and spatial presence.
4. To examine the development of psychological skills relevant to dance teaching such as self-confidence, self-acceptance, focus and concentration, and self-regulation.
5. To explore the value of meditation as a sustainable self-care toolkit that students can autonomously practice.
6. To consider the broader pedagogical implications of meditation by embedding care in conservatoire curricula, shifting authority towards student agency, and integrating contemplative practices into dance education.

Over eight weeks, we facilitated weekly guided meditation sessions including reflection and feedback, alongside recorded practices for students to continue practicing independently. Data were gathered through reflective journals, final questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Our findings suggest that meditation can support growth in emotional and cognitive awareness; indeed, by the end of the course, most participants described feeling more confident, and being kinder and grateful towards themselves. Students reported being better able to distinguish between helpful and unhelpful thoughts and feelings, and over time, were increasingly capable of redirecting negative mental patterns and relating to their inner experiences with less judgment. Breath awareness became an especially practical tool because it was a quick and effective way to interrupt negative self-talk and reconnect with a more compassionate mindset. Participants described improvements in concentration and self-awareness with clearer thoughts, less self-judgment, better emotional regulation and stronger coping skills when dealing with stress or anxiety. Many also mentioned increased self-acceptance and confidence.

Participants also noticed that regular meditation practice enhanced their sensitivity to bodily sensations, becoming more aware of core temperature, muscular tension, fatigue and the

early signs of potential injury. Meditation created a dedicated moment to check in with the body, which many students found helpful in their recognizing and caring for pain and injury before it escalated. This awareness translated into clearer movement choices and a better understanding of habitual movement patterns too.

Importantly, no adverse effects were reported. Although some students initially found it challenging to sit still or maintain focus for longer periods, these difficulties softened with regular practice. All participants described meditation as a useful self-care tool, and most expressed a clear intention to continue practising on their own. For these participants, consistency in meditation practice really mattered; the more regularly students practised, the more benefits they noticed. Participants described positive shifts in how they saw themselves, both in daily life and in the studio.

The high level of engagement from students and their strong motivation to continue their meditation practice independently suggests that meditation can be a valuable educational resource for students in professional dance training that can be integrated sustainably and meaningfully for those taking part. At Rambert School, meditation sessions have continued beyond the project, a decision rooted in the physical, emotional and psychological well-being benefits students identified. Keeping meditation within the program reflects a broader commitment to supporting dancers not only as performers, but as whole human beings, fostering a culture of self-awareness, self-care and resilience within professional dance training.

A Practical Toolkit for Meditation for Dancers and Teachers

The following toolkit is a practical, adaptable resource designed to support dancers, dance teachers, practitioners and institutions in practicing meditation as a means to embed care, awareness and resilience within dance education and professional practice. Built around five themes from our research (attention; somatic awareness; emotional/cognitive awareness; kindness/self-compassion; and resilience), the toolkit provides prompts and video links to micro-meditation practices which readers can try out for themselves. The toolkit offers practical entry points rather than prescriptive solutions, inviting ongoing inquiry amongst dancers and teachers to adapt the materials to their specific context and community. The toolkit recognizes that psychological skills and somatic awareness are not separate from performance, but underpin sustainable artistic development.

Theme 1

Attention

The Tool: *Mindfulness (vipasana)* to cultivate focus, clarity and present-moment awareness

This tool supports your:

- Development of sustained and flexible attention within studio performance contexts, as well as individual practice
- Noticing when your attention drifts, becoming aware of distraction without judgement, and consciously returning to the task in hand

Practices might include:

- Breath anchoring
- Sensory awareness
- Check-ins before and after class

The aim is not rigid concentration but responsive awareness and ability to shift focus intentionally, manage overstimulation and remain present under pressure. In dance contexts it strengthens retention of material, responsiveness to feedback and embodied presence in performance.



[Watch a short video to practice mindfulness to cultivate attention](#)

Prompts for reflection and factors to consider

1. When and where can you carve out dedicated time and space to activate this tool?
2. Listening can be hard to achieve and is often challenging for students to do straightaway.
3. Full presence in each task, situation or context may be tricky too, especially for neurodivergent individuals
4. Practicing non-judgment takes time, but consistency and repetition will help.

Theme 2

Somatic Awareness

The Tool: *Body Scan* to strengthen the connection to breath and embodied perception, and focus on internal awareness of physical sensation

This tool supports you to:

- Center the body as a source of knowledge rather than only an object of correction
- Notice internal sensations, patterns of tension, breath dynamics and spatial orientation

Through practising, dancers develop:

- Sensitivity to subtle body cues, including early signs of fatigue and strain
- Enhanced injury awareness, roundedness and clarity of movement

By shifting attention inward, this theme balances external feedback (mirrors, teachers, audiences) with internal sensing, supporting dancers' autonomy and embodied authority.



[Watch a short video to practice a body scan for somatic awareness](#)

Prompts for reflection and factors to consider

1. How can you integrate this tool in daily sessions, for example, listening to your body whilst moving, closing your eyes during an exercise, slowing the pace of an exercise or task to connect with your internal physical sensations?
2. How might you use this as a gateway into improvisational or creative processes?
3. Body scanning is helpful to refine technical precision, and really useful for when finding stillness is challenging for dancers.
4. Body scanning encourages interoceptive awareness; there might be ways to connect meditation practice with other somatic approaches such as integrating body scanning with slow exploratory movement, combining scanning during breathwork, or applying body scanning during rest or recovery periods.

Theme 3

Emotional and Cognitive Awareness

The Tool: *Visualisation* to recognise thoughts, emotions and internal patterns and nurture clarity, detachment and non-identification

This tool:

- Supports the identification of emotional responses and habitual thinking patterns
- Encourages dancers to notice negative self-talk, anxiety triggers, maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies and avoidance behaviours

Practices might include:

- Guided reflection
- Thought labelling
- Reframing exercises

Rather than suppressing emotion, the focus is on developing emotional literacy by naming experiences, understanding their impact and learning to respond rather than react. Over time, this strengthens self-regulation, clarity and perspective in high-pressure situations.



[Watch a short video to practice visualization to recognise thoughts and emotions](#)

Prompts for reflection and factors to consider

1. By acknowledging what is there and encouraging a sense of presence, how can dancers and teachers create safe spaces for exploring emotional and cognitive awareness?
2. Where is visualization most useful to explore in your context?
3. How might emotional and cognitive awareness connect with your own personal, educational, professional and artistic values?
4. Addressing emotional states can be overwhelming, so progressing gently and with care for yourself and others is important. Encouraging clarity of emotional thought requires time; again consistency and repetition will help.
5. Do check your safeguarding policies and procedures when doing this kind of work.

Theme 4

Kindness and Self-Compassion

The Tool: *Self-Compassion Visualisation* to introduce practices that cultivate non-judgement, acceptance and compassionate internal language, to help reduce self-judgement and foster a supportive inner dialogue

This tool:

- Encourages dancers to relate to mistakes, setbacks and vulnerability with curiosity rather than criticism
- Supports sustainable motivation and psychological safety

By strengthening self-compassion, dancers develop resilience, confidence and a healthy relationship with challenge - qualities essential for long-term artistic development.



[Watch a short video to practice visualization for self-compassion and kindness](#)

Prompts for reflection and factors to consider

1. In practicing gratitude and cultivating a healthy relationship with yourself, how can you consider the use of compassionate language in your practice, and encourage this in others?
2. How can you use the concepts of kindness and compassion in formal processes such as teaching and assessment?
3. In using this tool to counter maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies or self-judgment, remember to be sensitive to those who may have these attitudes. It's likely they might need time and space to explore these ideas at their own pace.

Theme 5

Resilience

The Tool: *The Mountain Meditation* to develop adaptive responses to challenge and sustain well-being in high-pressure contexts

This tool:

- Builds capacity to navigate difficulty without becoming overwhelmed or disengaged
- Helps dancers strengthen their ability to remain steady under pressure, recover from disappointment and maintain motivation without compromising well-being

Practices encourage:

- Reframing setbacks as part of growth
- Recognising stress responses early
- Responding with intentional strategies rather than reactive patterns



[Watch a short video to practice resilience](#)

Prompts for reflection and factors to consider

- How would you define resilience in your context and how can you encourage it mindfully?
- How might you integrate the concept of resilience in your practice by using, for example, goal setting or reflective practices?
- Resilience comes in many forms, so what internal and external sources of support do you have available to you and students/dancers?
- In embracing an integrated, holistic sense of self for teachers, students and dancers, what institutional responsibilities regarding mindful practices might be necessary, alongside encouraging personal resilience strategies?

Conclusion

Meditation offers dancers a practical pathway to cultivate awareness, emotional regulation and compassionate self-understanding within the demanding context of conservatoire-based dance education and training. Our findings suggest that integrating meditation practices into dance education can strengthen focus, resilience and embodied autonomy, supporting dancers as whole human beings. By embedding care-centered approaches such as meditation within curricula and daily studio practice, dance organizations can foster more sustainable, reflective and humane models of artistic training.

Original Article:

Petsilas P, and Massarelli L, Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of meditation in a dance conservatoire context. *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*. 2024 16(1-2), pp.107-124. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp_00119_1

Further Reading

Kabat-Zinn J. *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion Books; 1994.

Wherever You Go, There You Are is an accessible guide for individuals to consider how they might integrate mindfulness into their daily lives, and has immediately recognizable implications for dancers' and teachers' practice, training and education. When initially approaching mindfulness, it can be difficult for dancers to know how to bridge the gaps between relevance, execution and effective wellbeing outcomes; this book provides the doorway to this information in an engaging and non-esoteric format. Kabat-Zinn provides a theoretical overview of mindfulness as the practice of paying attention to the present moment intentionally and without judgment, offering a foundation for improved emotional regulation and well-being.

The text explains how cultivating this awareness helps individuals become more attuned to thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations, which is crucial for dancers navigating the high-pressure environment of rehearsals and performance. Throughout the chapters, Kabat-Zinn highlights the role of "non-striving" and the "beginner's mind," offering a step-by-step philosophical framework which dancers and teachers can consider in relation to their own habits and reactions. By providing specific mindfulness activities and "non-doing" exercises, the book offers a practical access point for supporting a more conscious engagement with daily life and, through application, the specificities of dance education. Ultimately, this book demystifies mindfulness as a construct, offering a vital resource for cultivating the psychological resilience and focus necessary for long-term artistic growth.

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