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CLASSICAL BALLET PRE-POINTE EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
PEDAGOGY FOR THE TRAINING OF YOUNG DANCERS

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ROSE E. TAYLOR-SPANN
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CLASSICAL BALLET PRE-POINTE EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
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A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF DANCE

BY

Mr. Jeremy Lindberg, Chair

Ms. Rebecca Herrin

Dr. Lara Mayeux

Ms. Clara Cravey Stanley

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
Defining Pre-Pointe	7
Source Review	9
CHAPTER I. CODIFIED CLASSICAL BALLET METHODS AND PRE-POINTE ..	14
The French School.....	14
The Bournonville Method	22
The Cecchetti Method	31
Royal Academy of Dancing	39
The Vaganova Method	44
American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum.....	53
CHAPTER II. BALLET SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES	60
American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School.....	63
Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy	67
Kansas City Ballet School	72
Pacific Northwest Ballet School.....	76
Texas Ballet Theater School.....	80
Bluegrass Youth Ballet.....	83
Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet	86
Colorado Conservatory of Dance	89
Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet.....	92

CHAPTER III. ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF PRE-POINTE PEDAGOGY

Class and School Structure.....	96
Evaluating Student Readiness For Pointe.....	113
Pre-Pointe Training Methods	138
Pre-Pointe Shoes.....	150
Student Wellness	161
Class Observations	171
CHAPTER IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	182
BIBLIOGRAPHY	212
INTERVIEW SOURCES.....	217
QUESTIONNAIRE.....	218
VISUAL REFERENCES	220
LIST OF IMAGES AND ILLUSTRATIONS	220

ABSTRACT

The concept of preparing young female dancers for pointe work is not new to ballet education; however, attention to specific pre-pointe training has become more focused in recent years. Pre-pointe as a defined course of study within classical ballet training has become more common in programs throughout the United States. Contemporary knowledge in fields such as anatomy, exercise science and pre-adolescent and early adolescent development has motivated dance educators to reexamine the pedagogy of pointe preparation and how students are evaluated for pointe readiness. This consideration has prompted the evolution and prolificacy of pre-pointe specific classes and programs incorporated into American ballet training curriculum.

The timeliness of this topic in response to increasing conversations surrounding pre-pointe greatly inspired this project. The importance of pointe preparation and the evaluation of a student's readiness for pointe work, paired with the abundance of pre-pointe programs motivated the research for this project. Relatively little published information regarding pre-pointe pedagogical methods is currently available to instructors. Limited resources and the ambiguity of pre-pointe training significantly contributed to the development of the research model for this thesis.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and assess pre-pointe pedagogy in classical ballet training; determine effective and healthful approaches to preparing dancers and evaluate their readiness for pointe; and identify methods for effective communication between dance educators, students and their parents.

Codified classical ballet methods were assessed to identify elements of pointe preparation within the technical progression. It was determined that the most effective

method of gathering information regarding the questions and problems that inspired this project was to conduct interviews with select dance educators and observe ballet technique, pre-pointe, and pointe classes. Due to the newness of this topic, it was essential to consult current professionals in the field who are teaching classes and developing programs for pre-pointe. Interview questions addressed pre-pointe topics including school and class structure, evaluating student readiness for pointe, and pre-pointe training methods.

Subtopics pertaining to pre-pointe training were also considered through the development of this thesis. Areas such as pre-adolescent and early adolescent physical, cognitive, and social development, student wellness, the use of pre-pointe shoes, class observations, and communication between ballet teachers students and parents are presented as they relate to pointe preparation.

This thesis presents thorough feedback gathered from interview participants comprised of dance educators representing reputable ballet schools throughout the United States. Information gathered through the research process culminates in recommendations regarding the pre-pointe topics discussed including student wellness, pre-pointe training, evaluating student readiness for pointe, and the importance of class structure and consistent instruction. This document may serve as a resource for dance educators regarding pointe preparation and offers prospective continuing research possibilities.

INTRODUCTION

*“Practice is the hardest part of learning,
and training is the essence of transformation.”*

-Ann Voskamp

After years of training, a young dancer slips her foot into the satin pointe shoe and ties the ribbons around her ankle joining all of the ballerinas who preceded her in this rite of passage. Every female ballet dancer sentimentally remembers the day her teacher told her she was ready to begin pointe, making the pilgrimage to the dance store for fitting, anxiously anticipating pointe class, and rising onto her toes for the very first time. Not even the anticipation of Christmas morning compares to this experience.

This timeless practice has been a tradition of classical ballet training for much of its history. The concept of preparing young female dancers for pointe work is not new to ballet education; however, the attention to specific pre-pointe training has become more focused in recent years. Pre-pointe as a defined course of study within classical ballet training has become more common in programs throughout the United States. Contemporary knowledge in fields such as anatomy, exercise science and pre-adolescent and early adolescent development has motivated dance educators to reexamine the pedagogy of pointe preparation and how students are evaluated for pointe readiness. This consideration has prompted the evolution and prolificacy of pre-pointe specific classes and programs incorporated into American ballet training curriculum.

This evolution has made the relatively new term “Pre-Pointe” very fashionable in ballet education. The timeliness of this topic in response to increasing conversations surrounding pre-pointe greatly inspired this project. While pre-pointe specific training is becoming more prevalent in the United States, the method and consistency of training

have not developed as rapidly. The importance of pointe preparation and evaluating a student's readiness for pointe work paired with the abundance of current pre-pointe programs motivated the research for this project.

The primary problem with pointe preparation as a specific course of study, which inspired this project, is the ambiguity of training. As pre-pointe education is relatively new in classical ballet training, little information is available to teachers. Many books, journals, instructional videos and articles have been published on pointe but pre-pointe as its own entity is a relatively new frontier. The lack of standardization contributes to a wide variety of approaches to pointe preparation. I have a very distinct memory of being the teacher scheduled to instruct a newly added pre-pointe class at an established pre-professional ballet school. As this was an addition to the curriculum I wanted to plan and consider the most effective way the children could benefit from the additional class time. When I asked, "What should be covered and achieved in pre-pointe?" the response was, "Whatever you think the students need. Use the time as you see fit." This provided me with great flexibility to work with each individual dancer at my discretion. However, considering I was teaching only one of three pre-pointe sections within the level, I was concerned there may be inconsistent training and results throughout the level due to the vagueness of instructional guidelines.

The novelty of this topic often promotes similar scenarios in schools nationwide. Having little precedence or qualified available resources, each school is creating their own definition of pre-pointe training based on their student's needs. The flexibility allows the teacher to experiment and customize preparation for their students, but also makes continuity and consistency very challenging. Such vagueness may put teachers in

the difficult position of treading the uncharted waters of pre-pointe specific training with little support, precedence, or guidance.

Many questions initially came to mind when considering this project. Why is pre-pointe becoming such a growing presence in ballet schools? Should there be a pre-pointe specific curriculum? Should pre-pointe be a separate course of study within ballet training? Is there something lacking in classical ballet training in the United States that is contributing to student unpreparedness for pointe, requiring supplemental pre-pointe study? How is the addition of pre-pointe training affecting scheduling and time spent in technique classes? What exactly is happening in pre-pointe classes across the country? What factors are contributing to schools electing to implement pre-pointe or not? Are additional areas of knowledge including exercise science, adolescent development and student wellness factors in pre-pointe training? Are schools using pre-pointe specific tools such as TheraBands™ or pre-pointe shoes? How is the pre-pointe process being communicated to students and parents? How are students evaluated for pointe readiness and how is this determination being communicate to parents and students? What is the most effective research model to find responses to these questions? These problems, thoughts, and questions were the impetus of the research for this thesis.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and assess pre-pointe pedagogy in classical ballet training; determine effective and healthful approaches to preparing dancers and evaluating their readiness for pointe; and to identify methods for effective communication between dance educators, students and their parents when navigating through the process of beginning pointe work.

The research methodology began by looking into the history of classical ballet training to identify elements of pointe preparation. The term “pre-pointe” may be relatively new in dance education but there is nothing revolutionary about preparing young aspiring ballerinas for pointe. From the earliest onset of training, the expectation is for female students to eventually dance *en pointe*. Class structure, content and method are specifically constructed to prepare the dancer for this expectation. To properly identify elements of pre-pointe training in codified techniques, the history, influential people, training characteristics, and preservation of the methods were assessed. Reputable teaching manuals, publications, and visual materials served as references for this background information from the French, Russian, Italian, Danish and American schools.

Most of the aforementioned codified methods are more prevalent internationally. As this study assesses American pre-pointe pedagogy, it was essential to explore the culture of ballet education in the United States following the assessment of historical training institutions. This section presents information exploring how American ballet education built upon these foundational techniques, while identifying differences in instruction, culture, and philosophies. Teaching methods greatly vary in the United States, a contrast from how other countries approach ballet training. Initially, large samples of American organizations ranging from national to community schools were going to be included in this study. In order to present pertinent and concise information in the time constraints of this project, a select group of ballet schools were chosen based on their reputation for quality training. The schools were then divided into two categories: those affiliated with professional companies and those who are not.

Assessing a general overview of ballet schools in the United States allowed characteristics of American dance education to be presented, while also introducing specific points of view from those who actively participated in the research for this thesis. Available published books, journals, interviews and online recourses were referenced for further information. Each organization's mission and vision statements, class structure/curriculum, admittance and student evaluation processes, and alumni were also considered.

It was determined that the most effective method to gather information regarding the questions and problems that inspired this project was to conduct interviews with select dance educators and observe ballet technique, pre-pointe, and pointe classes. Due to the newness of this topic, it was essential to consult current professionals in the field who are teaching classes and developing programs for pre-pointe. This led to the creation of a questionnaire with primary topics including: school and class structure, how to determine pointe readiness and pre-pointe methods. Certain participants elected to complete the questionnaire and reply electronically, while others preferred phone or in-person interviews. Questions were designed to encourage participants to respond using their own experience discussing topics relating to pointe and pointe preparation. An additional level of research information was obtained through personally observing pre-pointe and beginning pointe classes at specific locations. It was extremely beneficial to observe topics brought up during an interview and see how the teacher implemented methods in the classroom, as well as how the students responded.

Another important element of this thesis pertains to student wellness, development and health. The resources relating these topics specifically to ballet training were very beneficial to this area of focus. Through the research process it was determined that this thesis would not present in-depth expertise on medical or psychological characteristics of the developing adolescent. As a result, information that was highly scientific in nature and less applicable to the pre-pointe age ballet student was not presented. This science may be beneficial for the personal knowledge of dance educators, but was omitted from this document in order to maintain pre-pointe training as the primary focus of this thesis.

The overarching thesis topic became layered with many important and necessary supporting subtopics that could have independently become thesis subjects unto themselves. Careful attention to editing and maintaining focus on the primary intent directed this research process. Interviewees and in-person class observation sites were methodically selected to utilize time effectively and ensure that a multitude of perspectives and expert opinions were represented. Supporting information was included that directly linked important supplemental areas of study to pre-pointe training. This thesis is an assessment and analysis of pre-pointe pedagogy, thus does not present scientific, medical or biological information unless it was directly beneficial to the study of this topic. All resources and interview participants were carefully selected to ensure the efficiency of the process and applicability of findings and recommendations.

By stating the importance of a methodical approach to pre-pointe training, it is implied that students with this education will be better prepared for pointe work. By

creating a systematic advancement protocol to determine a student's readiness for pointe in consideration of strength, technique and adolescent development, it is implied that technical execution, student health and wellness will also benefit. Additionally, it is implied that achieving some uniformity of pre-pointe pedagogy in the United States may contribute to the preservation of standards established and preserved by classical ballet training.

DEFINING PRE-POINTE

The etymology of the term pre-pointe is rather straightforward. "Pre" is the prefix indicating before or previous to. "Pre" is also used to abbreviate preparation. "Pointe" refers to dancing on the tips of the toes, primarily practiced by female ballet dancers. Therefore, the etymology of pre-pointe is before pointe or preparation for pointe work. With few exceptions, ballet terminology was defined and codified in the early developmental years of classical ballet. While certain modernizations are necessary, the classical ballet dictionary is rarely in need of drastic updating. On occasion, a contemporary concept or technical advancement interjects new terminology into ballet vernacular. Pre-pointe, as a defined term, is one of those new interjections.

Simply defined, pre-pointe is the preparation for pointe work. This basic definition encourages interpretations resulting from varied perspectives and philosophies. Some generally accepted interpretations include the following:

1. Pre-pointe is a specific curriculum within classical ballet training designed to prepare dancers for pointe work through the practice of definitive and systematic exercises.
2. Pre-pointe is an evaluation course that allows instructors to assess student readiness for pointe work with the support of clearly defined advancement criteria.
3. Pre-pointe is a course designed to transition students to pointe work and educate them in preferred procedures for pointe shoes through the use of lectures, demonstrations and exercises.

Each meaning above is defined by the purpose of pre-pointe within a given curriculum. Definition 1 requires a specific curriculum of objectives or a syllabus delineating what steps and exercises must be practiced and in what order they must be presented. This curriculum or syllabus will apply to all pre-pointe classes within in a school but may differ from one organization to the next. Definition 2 utilizes pre-pointe time as an opportunity for teachers to assess a dancer's physical, technical, psychological and developmental readiness for pointe. In Definition 3, pre-pointe is an educational process instructing students on the practices and logistics of pointe shoes including how to tie ribbons, types of pointe shoes, fitting pointe shoes, how to sew and prepare shoes, breaking the shoes in, and what to expect when first beginning pointe work. All definitions have the common purpose of preparing and educating young female students for pointe work and ensuring the transition will be as efficient and

healthy as possible. This thesis recognizes elements of all interpretations thus defines pre-pointe as:

A specific focus within classical ballet training designed to prepare students to dance *en pointe* through the use of exercises and supplemental study, educate students in pointe shoe practices, evaluate dancers' readiness for pointe work through clearly defined advancement criteria, implement wellness initiatives, and communicate pre-pointe and pointe procedures and expectations to students and parents.

SOURCE REVIEW

There are several ballet pedagogues whose contributions have facilitated this study and analysis. Additional scholars have preceded this thesis in research on topics relating to pointe preparation. Very few ballet technique publications detail pre-pointe education. Identifying elements of pointe preparation in codified training methods was elemental to the historical background of this thesis. This analysis was assessed through the study of published teaching manuals and additional visual materials. Classical ballet training, outlined by such methods, has great tradition and history largely preserved by passing down practices from one generation to the next. Published resources pertaining to codified methods compile the majority of the books accessed in this research. Interviewing current dance educators was essential to this research process due to the limited amount of published documentation available on pre-pointe specific training. Most of the sources contributing to this thesis are comprised of

interviews through the use of questionnaires, with additional support from articles and online references.

The book, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet; Theory and Technique*, by Cyril W. Beaumont and Stanislas Idzikowski, published in 2003 was the preeminent resource accessed in consideration of the Cecchetti method. This book was originally published in 1922, under the title, *A Manual of the Theory and Practice of Classical Theatrical Dancing*. Accredited instructors certified through The Cecchetti Foundation of America teach the official Cecchetti method. To ensure preservation, published curriculum and detailed syllabus of the method are unavailable outside of the council. As a result, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet; Theory and Technique*, is the most authentic reference material available to the general dance education community. This book outlines the fundamentals of this method by including theoretical principles, illustrations of prescribed positions with examples of exercises for barre work, center, adagio and allegro practice. Developed from Enrico Cecchetti's handbooks and manuals, this book is a primary resource defining characteristics of the method. Uncontaminated by the erosion time and human influence, this book offers the purest and closest representation of Cecchetti's initial intent and teaching method.

Specific information regarding the Vaganova method was found in the book *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique*, written by Agrippina Vaganova and translated by Anatole Chujoy, published in 1946. The original Russian version was translated into English, German, Spanish, Polish, Czech and Hungarian. As authored by the creator of the Vaganova method, this manual is the definitive guide for the Russian method of training. Many instructors may teach in the "style" of Vaganova

but do not follow the exact curriculum. Those who are certified in the syllabus train and study extensively to properly prepare students for annual examinations. This systematic training ensures preservation of the teaching method. The characteristics of the Vaganova method are outlined in this manual including such details as construction of the lesson, elements of the ballet class and sample lessons as prescribed by Agrippina Vaganova herself. While this book does not provide a syllabus or examination samples, the foundational technical progression and requirements are clearly defined. Information articulated by Agrippina Vaganova in this primary source allows components of pointe preparation to be identified and assessed. Pedagogical recommendations presented in *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet* support this thesis research by articulating the progression of beginning ballet to dancing *en pointe*. Such progression allows for the identification and assessment of pre-pointe elements specific to the Vaganova method.

Interviews and class observations for this thesis were conducted on-site at several locations including Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet (PAB) in Narberth, PA. John White, PAB founder and teacher, is the author of two books on ballet technique. Pre-interview information was gathered by researching White's books, *Teaching Classical Ballet*, published in 1996 and *Advanced Principles in Teaching Classical Ballet*, published in 2009. This preliminary research facilitated more effective use of observation and interview time by customizing questions to the individual practices employed by PAB.

There is relatively little notation or documentation published on the specific details of The Bournonville School's syllabus and teaching method. *The Bournonville*

School – The DVD, completed in 2005, visually demonstrates classes as prescribed for each day of the week. Where manuals and books may list exercises, notate desired positions, describe aesthetic goals and suggest curriculum progression, this DVD effectively presents such critical information as demonstrated by professional dancers. This format presents the ideal technical and artistic qualities only possible through the prowess of an accomplished dancer specifically trained in the style of the Bournonville method. Publications authored by August Bournonville would be closest to the original source; however, this DVD depicts how The Bournonville School aesthetic has grown with the increasing virtuosity of today's dancer. The clear progression and demonstration allow elements of pre-pointe training to be identified.

Several assessments and recommendations in this thesis are centered on student wellness in dance education. Many pre-pointe training methods and guidelines determining pointe readiness are dependent on pre-adolescent and early adolescent cognitive, social and physical development. Referencing sources that apply these developmental phases to female athletics, and more specifically ballet dancers, was imperative to the research for this thesis. Several key publications aided in the student wellness portion of this study. In conjunction with their National Training Curriculum, American Ballet Theatre authored a supplemental guide, *The Healthy Dancer: ABT Guidelines for Dancer Health*, published in 2008. The Board, Executive leadership and staff of American Ballet Theatre with the assistance of the American College of Sports Medicine created the American Ballet Theatre Advisory Board. This diverse group comprised of dance medicine and sports medicine professionals wanted to offer medical and health recommendations for ballet instruction. The result was a unique resource

about medical and psychological components of ballet that should be considered in dance education. *The Healthy Dancer* was beneficial to this research due to how the scientific information related specifically to ballet training and dancers. Experts from a variety of fields including medicine, psychology, sports medicine and dance education contributed to the text, which provides a comprehensive approach to healthy ballet training.

The majority of information for analysis and assessment of pre-pointe pedagogy was obtained through interviews. A formatted questionnaire was beneficial in streamlining information gathered from participant responses. The development and wording of the questionnaire was designed to encourage participants to answer openly and relate questions and topics to their individual school experiences. The questionnaire was foundational to this thesis topic because little published information is available on pre-pointe training. The term pre-pointe is relatively new in the dance education vernacular and carries a broad array of definitions and meanings. Composing a questionnaire allowed interviewees to define pre-pointe, outline their school structure, delineate how pointe readiness is determined, describe pre-pointe training methods, and share any additional experiences and thoughts they wished to express on pointe preparation. Gathering information from dance education experts as primary sources encouraged assessment and analysis, while making recommendations applicable to real world scenarios. The wording of the questionnaire was designed to ascertain specific information; however, the open ended format also allowed the document to be applicable to a broad and varied pool of interview participants.

CHAPTER I. CODIFIED CLASSICAL BALLET METHODS AND PRE-POINTE

THE FRENCH SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL BALLET

History and Development

Since the sixteenth century, theatrical dance instruction in France has taken many forms. Initially, dance was linked to the development of court ballet, becoming an academy in the seventeenth century.¹ While many occurrences and influential historical figures contributed to the development of dance, the French court of Louis XIV is undoubtedly considered the birthplace of classical ballet.

The French School of ballet began in the court ceremonies of the French monarchs. Louis XIV studied with the famous ballet master Pierre Beauchamp and established the first academy of dancing, known as the Académie Royale de Musique et de Danse, in Paris in 1661. The École de Danse de l'Opéra was founded in 1713 and is now known as the École de Danse du Théâtre National de l'Opéra. Among its most famous ballet masters were Beauchamp, Pécour, Lany, Noverre, Gaétan and Auguste Vestris, M. and Pierre Gardel, F. Taglioni, Mazilier, Saint-Léon, Mérante, Staats, Aveline and Lifar. The French School was known for its elegance and soft, graceful movements rather than technical virtuosity. Its influence spread throughout Europe and is the basis of all ballet training.²

The Paris Opera Ballet School (POBS) is the oldest dance school in the western world, established in 1713 by the reigning King of France, Louis XIV. “Louis XIV loved to dance and to stage elaborate ballets that included dance, mime, poetry, songs,

¹ International Encyclopedia of Dance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) s.v “France: Classical Dance Education,” accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0646?rkey=fMtSPc&result=646#acref-9780195173697-eSub-0118>.

² “Online Dictionary – ABT,” American Ballet Theatre Website, accessed November 15, 2015. [Theatrehttp://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/terms/methods.html](http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/terms/methods.html).

and such special effects as fireworks. In order that trained dancers (rather than the courtiers) could take part in these performances, the ballet school was established, and today still supplies dancers to the Paris Opera Ballet, one of the finest companies in the world.”³ Initially classes at Ballet Conservatoire were not intended for children, although some artists’ children would attend. It wasn’t until the first regulations that the school was devoted specifically to the training of young dancers. Several policies were implemented during the first regulations including free tuition, admission through selection, established fees and salaries, and assigning a professional frame to the education.⁴

In 1784, at the decree of Louis XIV, the length of classes was extended and special courses were created for children under the age of twelve. The importance of recruiting children with no prior training, devoid of any flaw to correct motivated the creation of these early childhood classes. “The French Revolution and the Empire did not challenge the school but refined its functioning with a series of successive regulations. In particular, to ensure impartiality, a jury from the company was formed.”⁵ From the French Revolution to the Third Republic teaching at the ballet school was conducted in three steps, an elementary school for children under the age of thirteen, the upper class for dancers thirteen to sixteen, and for a select few the advanced class. Students were not allowed to stay in the advanced class more than two years before their professional debuts and no dancer could study beyond the age of eighteen. This defined the duration of compulsory education as sixteen years for Paris

³ Alan Riding, “Training for the Paris Opera Ballet,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2002, accessed March 23, 2016, <https://global.factiva.com/ga/default.aspx>.

⁴ “History – The Ballet School – Artists,” *Opera National De Paris*, accessed March 18, 2016, <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/artists/ballet-school/history>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Opera Ballet School students who are historically and affectionately referred to as *les petits rats* or little rats.

The school lost significant momentum following the Romantic period in classical ballet. At this time the ballet academy's survival was largely due to Marie Taglioni, Rosita Mauri, Carlotta Zambelli, and Albert Aveline.

Taglioni was the primary teacher of the *classe de perfectionnement*, which was the class reserved for select students who were invited to participate in this advanced instruction. Madame Dominique, who originally taught the elementary class since 1860, succeeded Taglioni as the teacher of *classe de perfectionnement* in 1872, and was followed in turn by Zina Mérante, Madame Théodore, Rosita Mauri, and Carlotta Zambelli. Albert Aveline directed the school until 1950 and was succeeded by Harald Lander and Genevieve Guillot.

The school was reorganized in the 1960s to add further academic studies to dance education. Allowing students to complete the *baccalaureate*, which is equivalent to a high school diploma in the United States.

The academy continues to honor its 18th-century aristocratic origins, while also incorporating 19th-century Italian dance and 20th-century Russian technique. Rudolf Nureyev, who ran the POBS from 1983 to 1989, further influenced this combination.⁶ Mademoiselle Claude Bessy, former star of the Paris Opera Ballet, was Director of the school from 1973 to 2004 and is the person largely responsible for the school's present reputation for excellence. "Bessy infused the school with new life. She reorganized its structure in 1976, enriching the classical course of instruction with classes in historical dance, folk dance, character dancing, jazz, mime, adagio, variations, and repertory."⁷

⁶ Abby Gold, "The Paris Opéra Ballet School," *Dance Spirit*, January 1, 2010, accessed March 10, 2016, http://www.dancespirit.com/how-to/ballet/the_paris_opera_ballet_school/.

⁷ *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) s.v. "France: Classical Dance Education," accessed March 21, 2016,

Bessy gave the school educational autonomy with its installation in Nanterre, France.⁸ Elisabeth Platel succeeded Bessy in 2004 employing the philosophy, “The school must enroll artists with outstanding physical abilities and try to instill a common breathing whilst preserving individuality.” In 2004, medical supervision was implemented to assess a prospective student’s anatomical propensity to become a professional dancer.

POBS epitomizes the classic characteristics of French ballet training.

Admittance into the French school is highly selective and competitive. Prospective students must have attributes preferred for classical ballet including physical facility, favorable genetics, inherent artistic expression and mental acuteness. While all will not be selected for the company, students at the highest of six levels of training are prepared to join The Paris Opera Ballet as professional dancers.

Characteristics and Methodology

Although the Paris Opera Ballet School does not have a written curriculum, the school’s classical teachers, all former Paris Opera Ballet dancers, pass down the rich French history to the next generation of dancers. Paris Opera Ballet School’s goal is that by the student’s last year in the academy, they should be capable of dancing any principal role from any of the ballets in the company’s repertoire.⁹

POBS has 120 pupils ranging in age from eight to eighteen years old. Students are divided into six divisions, having school lessons in the mornings and their dance classes in the afternoons. The school’s uncompromising standards have been unaltered

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0646?rskey=fMtSPc&result=646#acref-9780195173697-eSub-0118>.

⁸ “History – The Ballet School – Artists,” Opera National De Paris, accessed March 23, 2016, <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/artists/ballet-school/history>.

⁹ Ibid.

for more than a century. Of the 300 or so who apply for entry each year, approximately thirty are accepted; after one year, ten survive; and of these, only a handful graduate.¹⁰ While POBS is the oldest ballet school in the western world, their curriculum has been updated to meet the growing demands of ballet technique and choreography. POBS students have ballet classes each day and also take folk dance, character dance, jazz and contemporary dance, *pas de deux* classes for the older students, mime, music appreciation, singing, anatomy, and dance history.

While information documenting the Paris Opera Ballet training method is not easily attained, certain characteristics definitively identify the French style. POBS students are trained with great focus on placement and orientation. There is significant emphasis placed on footwork and the rapidity of lower leg movements. The foot is considered the impetus of all leg movement. “Exercises in the beginning level are designed to: (1) develop the flexibility and strength of the foot; (2) enable dancers to bend their knees sharply; and (3) strengthen and improve the work of the adductors.”¹¹

Artistry is also essential to French training. Stemming from early courtly roots, nobility, charm and elegance are elemental to the French classical ballet aesthetic. Inclinations of the head are practiced with subtlety to exude a majestic quality. “Such *savoir-être* (knowledge or being of) is cultivated early in the studio, even in a beginning class. A simple walk, run, pose or the end of *port de bras* – all moments where students do not have to be preoccupied with the technical aspect of ballet – are opportunities for students to feel and pretend they are all ballet stars facing an audience.”¹²

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Vanina Wilson. *The French School of Classical Ballet: The First year of Training*. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013), 2.

¹² Ibid.

Quality, precision, purity and simplicity of technique are the foundation of French training taught at The Paris Opera Ballet School. Class exercises are designed to be repetitive and direct, void of ornamental choreographic expression. “In general, class combinations tend to be short and simple so that students can concentrate on perfecting one specific movement at a time.”¹³

Fifth position, as a hub, is a crucial element in all classical ballet schools. The French, in particular, view the use of 5th position as a tool to center the dancer, which facilitates execution of all steps. “This also enables the dancer to develop a sensitivity to the transfer of weight from one foot to another or from both feet onto one, for this sensitivity to weight transfer allows quick and light transitions from one step to another, without losing balance or disrupting the flow of movement.”¹⁴

Since 1987 joint educational projects between artistic and intellectual training have been implemented into the course of study. At the end of the curriculum, the students leave the School with the Higher Professional Diploma for Dancers and the baccalaureate in literature.¹⁵

The French School and Pointe Preparation

Pre-pointe work is incorporated into the French classical ballet technique curriculum. While pre-pointe is not a definitive term or course of study, elements of training are clearly designed to prepare students to dance *en pointe*. “Pointe work is

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Wilson, *The French School of Classical Ballet*, 3.

¹⁵ “History – The Ballet School – Artists,” Opera National De Paris, accessed March 15, 2016. <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/artists/ballet-school/history>.

usually introduced later in France than in other countries' ballet schools. The *demi-pointe* (raise high onto the balls of the feet), must be of sufficient height and strength to make the introduction of pointe work easier. Repetitive drills of all types of *relevés* (to rise, raised) during the first year of study prepare students for pointe work later in their training.”¹⁶

A very interesting practice linking pre-pointe to the French school is the exclusion of ballet slippers in early training. To better understand segments of the foot and develop articulation and malleability, dancers perform barre exercises in stockings or socks and only wear slippers for center practice.¹⁷ Practicing foot exercises without any encumbrance from a ballet shoe allows the dancer to feel, articulate and develop each segment of the foot and ankle. Students develop this foot malleability further with exercises that work through the ankle then the toes accessing the metatarsal arch, while carefully monitoring for unwanted pronation or supination. *Relevés* and *sautés* (to jump) are all introduced and developed in sixth position before advancing to the basic five turned-out positions. Proper alignment is always a factor determining a student's readiness for pointe. Practicing elements in parallel, or sixth position, prior to introducing rotation of the legs in the basic five positions reinforces proper alignment from the hip through the knee, ankle and foot.

The different modes of rising to *demi-pointe* are practiced in technique shoes. In the French school both feet must move towards the centerline for *sous-sus* (over-under). This gives the *relevé* to *sous-sus* a “springing” quality. The repetitive practice of *relevé* (without *plié*), *piqué* (to prick) and understanding of rolling through and springing up

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wilson, *The French School of Classical Ballet*, 9.

for *relevé* (with *plié*) in ballet slippers first on *demi-pointe*, prepare the female dancer for an effective transition to *pointe*.

Preservation

Ballet schools teaching the French method are less commonly found in the United States than Russian, English or Italian methods. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that French training is passed down through a great oral tradition from one generation of dancers and teachers to the next and is not documented or notated through manuals, curriculum, syllabus or examinations. “For more than 300 years the artistic education at the Opera favored direct transmission from master to student, guarantying the French School of ballet and ensuring the sustainability of the Paris Opera Ballet.”¹⁸ The French school is also the oldest method of classical ballet instruction. The art of teaching ballet cannot be mastered solely by studying doctrines or written manuals. Practices of ballet instruction are developed through the imperative relationships of mentor to mentee and student to teacher. While training as students, dancers personally refine their classical technique through years of rigorous study. During this process, not only do dancers develop as future performers but also inherit the foundational skills required of a teacher. Some graduates of classical ballet schools may grace the stage as accomplished performers, while others will bear the immense responsibility of preserving the technique as stewards and educators of dance training; and few are fortunate to be skilled at both. The French school places great importance on the

¹⁸ “History – The Ballet School – Artists,” Opera National De Paris, accessed March 23, 2016, <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/artists/ballet-school/history>.

tradition of passing down information, theory and philosophy from one generation to the next. Students of the French school often graduate to become proficient educators.

“The Ministry of Culture’s Directoir de la Danse established a national diploma that is now required of all future teachers. Such a requirement facilitates stricter control of the teacher’s competence and insures closer attention to the laws of physiology by standardizing classes for students.”¹⁹

THE BOURNONVILLE METHOD

History and Development

The French, Russian, Italian and English schools train ballet dancers in the individual stylistic qualities desired of their affiliated national company. Variations between these schools become apparent through the assessment of subtle, yet distinguishable, nuances. This is also true of Bournonville technique and the Royal Danish School.

August Bournonville (August 21, 1805 - November 30, 1879) was a Danish dancer, ballet master, teacher, and choreographer to some of the most treasured ballets ever created. His father, Antoine Bournonville, was an accomplished French-born ballet dancer and choreographer who studied with Noverre and later became director of the Royal Danish Ballet. August Bournonville was the only one of six children to express any interest in theatrical arts, which was apparent from a very young age. Bournonville initially studied both drama and dancing. His decision to focus solely on

¹⁹ International Encyclopedia of Dance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) s.v “France: Classical Dance Education,” accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0646?rskey=fMtSPc&result=646#acref-9780195173697-eSub-0118>.

ballet was inspired by witnessing a performance of visiting guest virtuosic performer Filippo Taglioni.

Bournonville studied under his father and later Vincenzo Galeotti who was an Italian dancer and ballet master in Copenhagen from 1775-1816. He later continued his training in France under Pierre Gardel, Auguste Vestris and Georges Maze, eventually joining the Opera Company in Paris. Bournonville absorbed the Parisian lifestyle while in the Opera, which contributed to the French influence on his later choreographic and pedagogical styles. In response to his dissatisfaction with the rate of promotion at the Opera, Bournonville began negotiations with the Danish Royal Theater. The return to his native land would set the stage for what would become his famed Danish and international legacy.

The aesthetic style, which is now identifiably Danish, began through the inspiration of Bournonville's international travels and the popularity of the Romantic Era in classical ballet. His travels to Milan inspired his choreography of *Napoli, eller Fiskeren og hans Brud* (Naples, or The Fisherman and His Bride), which became one of his most popular original works. During his ventures, he also observed rehearsals of *Giselle* in Paris, which embodied all essential elements of the Romantic Era. The Romantic story ballet featured peasants and commoners, in contrast to nobility centered narratives of previous eras. The light, ethereal sylph, most symbolically represents Romanticism by intertwining supernatural elements with humanism. Filippo Taglioni, who first inspired Bournonville to become a great male dancer, was the original choreographer of *La Sylphide* (The Sylph), created in 1832 for his daughter and first

ballerina to dance *en pointe*, Marie Taglioni.²⁰ Bournonville's recreation of *La Sylphide*, originally performed in 1836, is the version still performed by companies all over the world today.

With a few interruptions – in Vienna and Stockholm - Bournonville was ballet master in Copenhagen from 1830 – 1877. He staged nearly 50 ballets and numerous divertissements. Many of his works are still performed in a tradition that remains unbroken to this day. Thus, the Royal Danish Ballet possesses a greater number of ballets from the Romantic period than any other ballet company in the world. Among these are *La Sylphide* (1836), *Napoli* (1842), *Le Conservatoire* (1849), *A Folk Tale* (1854) and the *pas de deux* from *The Flower Festival in Genzano* (1854).²¹

The Bournonville method of classical ballet technique developed from the need to train dancers capable of performing his choreography. “Bournonville wanted dancing to look as natural as breathing—unforced and free, mirroring the rhythms of nature and expressing an unconscious joy in living.”²² Superbly executed, the technique should never be noticed or overshadow the grace of the movement. The vocabulary is the same as that of French, Russian or Italian schools but linked together by different transitions and highlighted by accenting alternate musical phrasing. These elemental stylistic characteristics called for modified specifications in training to produce masterful Bournonville dancers who were both exquisite technicians and expressive artists.

The Royal Danish Ballet School originated in 1771. Together with the Paris Opera Ballet School and the Ballet Academy in St. Petersburg, The Royal Danish School is one of the oldest ballet training institutions in the world. “Bournonville

²⁰ International Encyclopedia of Dance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v “Bournonville, August,” accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0274?rskey=I1yxvz&result=275>.

²¹ "The History of the Royal Danish Theatre | DET KGL. TEATER," The History of the Royal Danish Theatre | DET KGL. TEATER, accessed November 5, 2015, <https://kglteater.dk/en/about-us/about-the-theatre/history/>.

²²Ibid.

created a tradition for Danish male dancing of the highest virtuosity, raising the Royal Danish Ballet to an international level of ability while giving it the unique national quality which remains to this day its distinctive characteristic.’²³

Second only to Bournonville himself, Vera Volkova was perhaps the most influential figure in the codification and impeccable reputation of the Royal Danish Ballet School. Volkova, born 7 June 1904 in Saint Petersburg, died 5 May 1975 in Copenhagen, was an exceptional Russian ballet teacher who studied under Agrippina Vaganova. In fact, Volkova was one of the select pupils Vaganova tested her pedagogical theories on.²⁴ Athleticism in dance had come a long way since the inception of the early national ballet schools. Choreography was calling for multiple *pirouettes*, elevated *ballon* (elastic quality bounce), increased *batterie* (all beaten steps) and most of all, longer leg lines with higher extensions. Volkova, while keeping within the traditions of the Danish style, revolutionized the training to bring Bournonville into contemporaneity. Volkova is credited with teaching some of the leading dancers and choreographers of their generation.

“Volkova was of decisive importance in setting the technical and spiritual standard that led the company to international fame. Among her pupils in Copenhagen was Stanley Williams; in his later position as a teacher she was of great inspiration. Volkova also profoundly influenced such Danish soloists as Kirsten Simone, Erik Bruhn, Henning Kronstam, Peter Martins, Peter Schaufuss, Adam Lüders, and Lis Jeppesen. The American-born choreographer John Neumeier, head of the Hamburg Ballet, also said that his conversations with Volkova in Copenhagen were decisive in his decision to start choreographing. From 1950 to 1957 Volkova watched the Royal Danish Ballet from her seat in

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ International Encyclopedia of Dance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v “Volkova, Vera,” accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-1822?rskey=EH1zPy&result=1823>.

the stalls at almost every performance, in order to prepare for her teaching the next day.”²⁵

Characteristics and Methodology

Effective training of dancers in the Bournonville method consists of classes comprised of set exercises prescribed for each day of the week Monday through Friday. As in the Cecchetti (Italian) and Vaganova (Russian) methods, technique classes are firmly rooted in the practice of repetition and return, not choreographic expression. Bournonville selected exact steps to create the light and seemingly gravity defying *ballon* of his dancers.

Among the favorite steps Bournonville used to achieve these effects are the instantly recognizable *attitude effacée*, the *grand jeté en avant en attitude*, *grand jeté en attitude en tournant*, *attitude effacée sautée*, *ronds de jambe en l'air sautés*; myriad *batterie* steps such as *brisés*, *entrechats*, *sissonnes*, and *assemblés*; and *pirouettes*—many done from second position, *en attitude* or *sur le cou-de-pied*—with characteristic *port de bras*.²⁶

Bournonville methodically considered the use of *épaulement* (shouldering). Focusing the head and gaze of the dancer and minimizing the *port de bras* (carriage of the arms) help to direct the viewer’s attention towards the precise foot and legwork featured in the choreography. “There is a prominent focus on leg and foot work, with the torso and arms held with strength yet flaccidity. The theory of holding the shoulders steadily down serves to maintain a calm torso, while the legs and feet execute complexities of *batterie*, *élévation*, and *ballon*. Bournonville's ballets, and subsequently his Danish school technique, became identified with brilliance and intricacy of footwork.”²⁷ This is the most distinguishable aesthetic of Bournonville’s work.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

In addition to the *port de bras* and *épaulement*, quick footwork is a signature of the Bournonville style. Precise transitions and preparations contrast and further magnify larger steps. Articulation of the calves and feet allow for exquisite *batterie* and allegro work. Spatial and floor patterns also transform traditional vocabulary by presenting steps in many directions, exploring full use of the stage. Quick footwork and expansive traveling require great stamina and endurance of the dancer. The clarity of Bournonville movement is unobstructed by unnecessary ornamentation or inauthentic gestures. Artistic expression and narration through dramatic pantomime sequences are also foundational elements of the Bournonville method.

The percentage of class time spent at the barre is relatively less than found in other techniques. Exercises are short and concise so the dancer is able to warm-up quickly for center practice. There are three series of set barre exercises; Monday/Thursday, Tuesday/Friday and Wednesday/Saturday. All barre work follows the same sequential order. Different positions and variations are explored from one day to the next.

1. *Grande plié* (large bend) with *demi* and *grande rond de jambe en l'aire* (rounding or circling of the leg in the air)
2. *Battement tendu* with varying timing
3. *Grande battement à la seconde* (large beat to the side), *derrière* (back), *devant* (front)
4. *Rond de jambe par terre* and *rond de jambe en l'aire*
5. *Battement fondu* (to melt)
6. Adagio practice may include *développé* (to develop), *demi rond de jambe*, *grande rond de jambe*
7. *Petite battement* (small beats)
8. *Relevé*

The *port de bras* is generally held in second position *en bas* with clear use of *épaulement* and head inclinations to effectively establish *aplomb* (central line or

stability of pose) and counterbalance. There are clear preparations and transitions from the right to left side of practice. Repetition of *ballonné* (ball like), *rond de jambe en l'aire* (circle/rounding of the leg off of the floor) and *petite battement* develop the action and articulation of the calf and lower leg, which is perhaps one of the most brilliant characteristics of Bournonville choreography. Dancers alternate accents within a single combination, honing their ability to execute steps on varying beats of the musical measure. Another noticeable feature of this training system is the use of the wrapped *sur le coup de pied* (at the neck of the foot). Utilizing this position in practically every applicable scenario effectively molds the shape of the foot desirable in classical ballet.

Bournonville and Pointe Preparation

Bournonville training has the well-earned reputation for producing highly virtuosic male Principal dancers who perform with every major professional company in the world. This suggests that training in the Bournonville aesthetic also develops skills adaptable, universal, and relative to other styles beyond its own. The quick precision and strength of footwork elevate any choreography; most notably that of George Balanchine who specifically sought out Danish trained dancers to brilliantly execute the intricacies of his work.

While the Bournonville male dancer is reputedly exquisite, the prowess of the accomplished female dancer should not be unrecognized. Separate study for pointe preparation is not defined in Bournonville training; however, the system of study naturally develops strength and articulation required for pointe work. There is direct correlation between a dancers' aptitude for jumping and their potential proficiency *en*

pointe. Many of the same muscle groups are activated in *relevé* as in *sauté*.

Bournonville class exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles of the legs, feet and trunk to create *ballon* in *grand allegro*, while quick twitch response is developed for speed and articulation for *petite allegro*. Repetition of *tendus* (stretched) and *degagés* (disengaged) with varying accents and tempi inherently prepare dancers for jumping and *pointe* work.

The use of *demi-pointe* is not discarded once a dancer begins *pointe* work. Alternatively, many steps including *pirouettes* (twirl) and *bourrées* are performed on *demi-pointe* by male and female dancers alike in Bournonville choreography. This use of *demi-pointe* develops articulation of each part of the foot, which in turn strengthens and encourages the malleability desired for dancing *en pointe*. The *pointe* shoe, as we know it, first appeared in the Romantic Era worn by Italian ballerina Marie Taglioni, the original sylph and partner of Bournonville. The intention was for the female dancer to appear as if she was floating weightlessly in defiance of gravity. Bournonville's choreography, regularly described as light and effortless, epitomizes this quality so symbolic of Romantic ballet.

To create an appearance of ease when dancing *en pointe* takes great prowess. The shoe ideally should be a natural extension of the leg line. Beginning and intermediate students often labor to rise from the full foot to the tips of the toes and may appear unwieldy through their effort. It is only through the development of articulation, strength and control of the foot that the dancer is able to roll through the shoe creating a seamless transition to and from *pointe*. The set class exercises naturally prepare a dancer for *pointe* without the need of supplement pre-*pointe* practice.

At the barre, steps progress to execution on *demi-pointe* in adagio and allegro practice alike. This strengthens supporting muscles through long sustained suspension on *demi-pointe* in contrast to rapid, consecutive *relevés*. No matter the day of the week, barre practice always concludes with *relevés*. Consecutive rises are practiced both on two feet and one leg. In keeping with Bournonville's focus on musicality, *relevés* are performed with different musical accents.

The greatest correlation between Bournonville training and pointe preparation may be observed in center practice. All center combinations feature directional and facing changes. This forces the dancer's weight to be placed over the metatarsal of the supporting leg. It also requires lift in the lower abdominals and pelvis as well as support of the hamstrings and gluteus muscle groups, all of which are crucial to the dancer's success of pointe work. The use of *demi*, half and three quarter pointe are all showcased in Bournonville combinations and choreography. Many steps, including *pas de bourée*, *pirouette* and *bourée*, which females traditionally perform *en pointe* are often displayed on *demi* or three quarter pointe even when the dancer is wearing pointe shoes. Of all classical ballet techniques, Bournonville dancing demonstrates the endless qualities and possibilities the pointe shoe may offer. When this style is exceptionally performed, the pointe shoe is nearly unnoticeable, extending the line of the dancer while enhancing rather than encumbering the movement.

Preservation

As in the French school, Bournonville technique and choreography are largely preserved by the oral tradition of passing content and method down from one generation

of dancers to the next. Master teachers who are heirs to the Bournonville system of study may provide teacher workshops but no official certification or training program is offered or awarded by the official Royal Danish Ballet School. As a result, exact class and exercise notation is not readily available in print. However, The Royal Danish School officially released a video, “*The Bournonville School*,” in 2005 documenting suggested exercise and class work examples.

All classical ballet training methods, including Bournonville, are living theories capable of adapting and undergoing modifications in response to the contemporary student and evolving choreographic demands. This is a natural process for the progression of all techniques. Certain modifications must be made to respond to the changing trends and aesthetics of current choreography. Limiting the number of teachers permitted to train young dancers ensures preservation, stylistic uniformity and consistency. This also lessens the likelihood of undesired manipulation or deviation from the original form created by August Bournonville.

THE CECCHETTI METHOD OF CLASSICAL BALLET

History and Development

Enrico Cecchetti was an Italian dancer, choreographer and master teacher responsible for the creation of The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet. Cecchetti was born to dancer Serafina Casagli and Cesare Cecchetti, a dancer and choreographer. His early teachers included his father, Giovanni Lepri, Cesare Coppini and Filippo Taglioni, who all trained under Carlo Blasis and instilled the foundational contributions of

Cecchetti's teaching methods.²⁸ Cecchetti had a prolific performing career as a Principal dancer with companies such as Teatro alla La Scala in Milan, The Maryinsky Theatre and Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.²⁹ He was considered the greatest male dancer of his time and received accolades for his technical virtuosity, brilliant *batterie*, *ballonn*, multiple *pirouettes* and prowess for mime. Maestro Cecchetti, taught at the Imperial School in Russia from 1902-1905 then in Poland at The Warsaw State School before returning to St. Petersburg where he exclusively trained prima ballerina, Anna Pavlova.³⁰ Cecchetti's classes were overwhelmingly popular with students and celebrity famed ballet professionals alike. He developed his teaching style and method during his tenure in St. Petersburg and Poland, which he later formalized when settling in London. In 1922, Cecchetti and Stanislas Idzikowski worked with balletomane, author and bookseller, Cyril W. Beaumont to write and publish *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet Theory and Technique*, which greatly contributed to the dissemination of Cecchetti's teaching method.³¹ Later, Cyril Beaumont, Stanislas Idzikowski, Margaret Craske, and Derra de Meroda formally codified the technique. To further perpetuate this codification and teaching method, The Cecchetti Society was formed in London in 1922.³²

²⁸ "History of Enrico Cecchetti – Cecchetti Council of America," Cecchetti Council of America, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.cecchetti.org/about/history/>.

²⁹ International Encyclopedia of Dance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v "Cecchetti, Enrico," accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0340?rskey=ijXgKG&result=340>.

³⁰ "History of Enrico Cecchetti – Cecchetti Council of America," Cecchetti Council of America, accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.cecchetti.org>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Online Dictionary – ABT," Online Dictionary – ABT, accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.abt.org/education?dictionary/terms/methods.html>.

Characteristics and Methodology

The Cecchetti method has a definite program of strict routine which prescribes set classes for each day of the week. The purpose of class is not for choreographic experimentation or expression but to serve as a systematic formula for developing and strengthening classical ballet technique. The organization and order of daily exercises are presented in table format, which efficiently outlines the structure of classes for the week.³³ The dancer must approach these stringent classes with great reverence and responsibility. Beaumont and Idzikowski emphasize the importance of the dancer's intelligent focus to their daily work in the theoretical principles of *The Cecchetti*

Method of Classical Ballet:

Nothing is of greater importance than constant practice. It is necessary even to teachers, therefore indispensable to pupils. No other art demands so strict attention in this respect. A brief period of idleness or indifference regarding this essential of dancing causes the pupil to lose what it has cost him so much labor to acquire. To repair a week's indifference requires a month's labor. Concentration of thought and diligent careful practice, tempered with moderation, are the foundations of success. Be sure that you thoroughly understand a movement before you proceed to its execution, for the limbs are the servants of the mind.³⁴

There are fourteen essential theoretical principles of classical theatrical dancing in the Cecchetti method and include; the positions of the feet, the movements of the foot, the study of the legs, the study of the hand, the positions of the arms, the theory of *port de bras*, the positions of the head, the movement of the head, *epaulement*, the study of the body, *attitudes*, *arabesques*, movements in dancing and the directions of the body. All steps and movement varieties may be categorized within these foundational principles,

³³ Cyril w. Beaumont, and Stanislas Idzikowski. *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet: Theory and Technique*. (Mineola, NY: Doer Publications, 2003), 221.

³⁴ Beaumont and Idzikowski, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, 20.

which also define the required stylistic specification and nuances of the Cecchetti technique.

While strength of the trunk and legs are crucial to technical execution, the detailed use of the head, hands and *port de bras* as fundamental elements of technique illustrate the importance of dancing with the entire body for coordination and artistry.

The authors emphasizes this by referencing a quote by Carlo Blasis:

When the arms accompany each movement of the body with exactitude, they may be compared to the frame that sets off a picture. But if the frame is so constructed as not to suit the painting, however well executed the latter may be, its whole effect is unquestionably destroyed. So it is with the dancer; for whatever gracefulness he may display in the performance of his steps, unless his arms be lithesome and in strict harmony with his legs, his dance can have no spirit nor liveliness, and he presents the same insipid appearance as a painting out of its frame or in one not at all adapted to it.³⁵

A constitutional philosophy of the Cecchetti method is the responsibility of the ballet instructor. The professional expertise and acute discretion of the teacher is paramount to the presentation, application and execution of each element of classical ballet education. The instructor must possess acute analytical abilities to responsibly address individual dancer needs. This explains why exact exercises are not assigned to every exercise practiced at the barre. The order in which barre exercises are practice is extremely important in classical ballet training because it slowly and effectively warms the dancers' body for center practice while refining technique. Cecchetti argued this in his manual; however, this order is essential to all training methods. Injury may occur should a dancer perform a large extension of the leg before the smaller muscles of the extremities, feet, hips and back are warm. In addition, movement dynamics alternate

³⁵ Beaumont and Idzikowski, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, 28.

from sharp and quick to slow and smooth to strengthen different actions of muscles and develop quality of movement and musicality.

As in all codified classical ballet techniques there are defining characteristics that subtly distinguish one method from another. These attributes may include positions and lines of the body as in *arabesque* and *attitude*, detailed use of *port de bras* and the degree in which the head positions are performed. Cecchetti illustrates these preferences in *The Cecchetti method of Classical Ballet, Theory and Technique* by defining arabesques, positions of the feet and arms, and desired directions of the body and head.

Cecchetti and Pointe Preparation

While no specific component of Cecchetti training is dedicated to pre-pointe study, there are crucial preparatory elements intrinsically incorporated into the method. The second essential theoretical principle of classical theatrical dancing in the Cecchetti method is titled “The movements of the foot.” This may be considered the basic introduction of pointe preparation for the specificity and use of foot articulation. The Cecchetti method identifies and illustrates the ten movements of the foot:

6. *Pied à terre* – the foot flat on the ground
7. *Pied a quart* – with the heel slightly raised from the ground
8. *Pied a demi or sur la demi-pointe* – with the heel raised from the ground so that the foot is supported on the ball of the foot
9. *Pied a trois quarts* – with the heel raised considerably from the ground
10. *Pied a pointe or sur la pointe* – the foot supported on the extremity of the toes
11. The foot raised in the air and extended as much as possible with the instep forced well outwards and the pointe forced well downwards

12. The foot raised in the air and extended as much as possible, with the instep forced well outwards and pointe forced well downwards and backwards, so that the heel is brought well forward
13. An incorrect execution of movement in which the ankle is clutched and not fully extended
14. An incorrect execution of movement vii. in which the foot is sickled
15. Fully flexed foot that occurs in Russian and Chinese dances but which is opposed to the laws of classical theatrical dancing³⁶



37

Dancers are trained from an elementary level to utilize all desired positions of the foot for articulation, strength and malleability. Such attributes naturally prepare students to dance *en pointe*. The control achieved by exploring and strengthening each position of the foot allows the female dancer to roll through the pointe shoe with safe, proper alignment. The use of the *relevé* practiced in the described positions of the foot also strengthens the muscles of the legs and trunk. These muscular structures facilitate

³⁶ Beaumont and Idzikowski, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, 22 and Plate III.

³⁷ Ibid.

pointe work by supporting the dancer and preventing her from sinking into her shoes, thus placing unneeded additional strain and stress on the foot and ankle. Barre and adagio practice progress to execution of appropriate exercises on *demi-pointe*.

The Cecchetti method interjects an important element of classical ballet training in regards to teacher responsibility, discretion and the ability to evaluate, assess and respond to student needs. As articulated in *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, the instructor must possess acute analytical abilities in order to responsibly and effectively instruct each student in consideration of their individual anatomical structure. This elemental component of pre-pointe training greatly affects the evaluation and potential readiness of dancers for pointe work. While anatomical knowledge relating to ballet has since evolved, Cecchetti's acknowledgment of the significance one's facility contributes to their individual dance experience is fundamental to early pre-pointe training. As an interesting metaphor, Beaumont and Idzikowski liken a ballet education to the following medical scenario:

A new pupil may be compared to a sick person. Before the doctor can prescribe, he must understand his patient's constitution; thus, for one, he will prescribe six pills, for another a single pill will suffice. So it is with dancing. A good professor will decide how many plies, battements, etc., the pupil shall execute daily according to his knowledge of the physical merits and defects of the pupil.³⁸

Cecchetti suggests that proper classical ballet training does not result solely from a doctrine but must be presented, applied and honed by a truly insightful and adaptable teacher. The instructor must employ acute attention to assessing their students' individual needs through continual student evaluation. Each dancer has anatomical conditions that may call for modifications or individual instruction. Such

³⁸ Beaumont and Idzikowski, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, 36.

anatomical specifications certainly affect a student's propensity for dancing *en pointe*. Therefore, Cecchetti's principal reinforcing the importance of an insightful and adaptable teacher is critical when evaluating and preparing a dancer for pointe.

Preservation

The Cecchetti Council of America (CCA) is an organization dedicated to maintaining the standards of ballet training established by Enrico Cecchetti. The organization uses his teaching and writings in a sequence of grades, carefully measured as to degree of difficulty and physical development, and provides a system of accredited examinations to test the student's proficiency within those grades.³⁹ Cecchetti students are examined through a carefully graded system. Cecchetti instructors must be formally certified to teach the method. Certification is obtained by assessing an instructor's students in a ballet class. There are several levels of certification including Teacher Candidate, Teacher Member, Associate Member, Licentiate Member, Fellow Member and Diploma Fellow Member.⁴⁰ Each level of membership requires additional years of teaching experience in the Cecchetti method and examination certification in advancing grades. Certification and examinations ensure consistency in technical and artistic objectives being taught in all Cecchetti institutions, while preserving the method established by Enrico Cecchetti himself.

³⁹“About the Cecchetti Council – Cecchetti Council of America,” Cecchetti Council of America, accessed December 3, 2015, <https://www.cecchetti.org/about/>.

⁴⁰“Cecchetti Accreditation– Cecchetti Council of America,” Cecchetti Council of America, accessed December 3, 2015, <https://www.cecchetti.org/teachers/teacher-requirements/>.

ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCING

History and Development

Royal Academy of Dancing, RAD, is a grading system of classical ballet developed in London under the direction of Philip Richardson (1875-1963). He was motivated by the goal to standardize ballet training in England through process of examination. In 1920, at the time of its initial conception, countries such as France, Italy and Russia dominated classical ballet education. While there was quality ballet being performed by foreign dancers in England, there was no established, codified classical ballet method representing the country's individual stylistic preferences. Richardson felt England was in need of a systematic approach of training students to dance in the preferred technical and stylistic nuances. Philip Richardson, founded the Dancing Times magazine with publisher T.M. Middleton and immersed himself in the increasingly popular scene of British ballet. He became the driving force behind the establishment of many influential dance committees and associations, including the Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain, which grew into the RAD.⁴¹

There are identifying characteristics that uniquely distinguish Russian, French, Italian and English classical ballet styles from one another. However, all are branches extended from the same family tree. The rich exchange of artistic philosophy and discovery are partly responsible for the formation of all codified ballet techniques. Similarly, RAD resulted from the collective amalgamated efforts of acclaimed British and international ballet performers and pedagogues alike. Co-Founders of the

⁴¹ "Phillip Richardson Collection," RAD, accessed October 6, 2015, <https://www.rad.org.uk/more/library/library-catalogue-1/philip-richardson-collection>.

Association of Operatic Dancing, later the RAD, were Tamara Karsavina of Russia, who trained under Paul Gerdt and Enrico Cecchetti; Adeline Genée, Danish born famed ballerina in London; Eduard Espinosa of Moscow; English Prima Ballerina Phyllis Bedells and British publisher Philip Richardson.⁴²

Characteristics and Methodology

As in other methods, technical clarity is the foundation of RAD. In addition, emphasis is placed on developing coordination, aplomb, rhythm, artistry and character dancing. Great importance is placed on dancing with the entire body from the earliest stages of training. Sample lessons in RAD Pre-Primary class include exercises in locomotor skills, introductory ballet elements, eye focus, positions of the head and even details of the hands.⁴³ From this example, it may be determined that incorporating the entire body from gaze and focus to the delicate positioning of the hands is an integrated component of the technique rather than ornamentation added only after strength and execution by the trunk and legs have been mastered. Dancing with the entire body also suggests the importance of artistry and coordination through head positions and *port de bras* in RAD training. The elegance expressed through the *port de bras* of the RAD dancer does not diminish the athleticism and technical prowess. Attention to slow, methodical, technical training void of affectation trains the dancer to be a masterful technician.

⁴² Derek Parker. *Royal Academy of Dancing: The First Seventy Five Years*. (London: Battley Brothers Limited, 1995), 5-7.

⁴³ *Step-by-step Ballet Class: An Illustrated Guide to the Official Ballet Syllabus*. (London: Ebury Press, 1993), 25-29.

RAD student improvement is quantified by yearly examinations organized by grade levels. The evaluations serve as a rubric, formalizing objectives to be mastered for each year of study. RAD is not a syllabus of set prescribed exercises. Class objectives are presented and developed through each grade level at the discretion of the teacher. The majority of RAD instructors were trained in the method they now teach. As a result certain exercises may be passed down from one generation to the next due to their effectiveness. Pre-Primary and Primary classes are preparatory movement based courses designed to develop the youngest dancers' locomotor, coordination and fundamental ballet skills. Students beginning at age seven are eligible to study Grades One through Five, while Grades Six through Eight are designed for dancers beginning at age eleven.⁴⁴ Objectives for each grade level must be passed by examination before graduating to the next level of study. In addition to classical ballet training, the Vocational Graded Syllabus educates advanced dancers in supplemental genres of music and performance, in preparation for dance or dance-related careers.⁴⁵

RAD and Pointe Preparation

Preparatory pointe work is incorporated into the natural progression of classical ballet RAD training, rather than as a separate course of study. Pointe work is first seen in the Intermediate Foundation examination, which is typically taken by students who have been studying for 6 or more years and are at least eleven years old. Female dancers are trained from the beginning of study with the understanding that they must be gradually prepared to one-day dance *en pointe*.

⁴⁴ "RAD Exams," RAD, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://www.rad.org.uk/achieve/exams>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Beginning phases of pre-pointe may be observed as early as Primary Level when non-weight bearing rotation exercises are drilled to develop articulation of the foot and proper ankle alignment.⁴⁶ Malleability of the instep and metatarsal arch is further matured by the attention given to the use of *demi-pointe* in battement *tendu* and progressing steps. In Grade 2, *relevés* are explained in specific detail and are credited as the foundational step of early pre-pointe training. This movement strengthens the trunk of the body, legs and feet in preparation for pirouettes and pointe work.⁴⁷

The RAD examination process inherently evaluates the students' readiness for pointe. A female dancer successfully completing Grade 5, having mastered all technical and artistic requirements, must be prepared to begin pointe work in Grade 6. An experienced teacher will incorporate pre-pointe exercises in Grade 5. The systematic progression from grade to grade gradually improves the dancer's stamina, muscular strength, coordination and flexibility. These elements plus the increased use of *relevé*, *demi-pointe* and jumping prepares dancers for pointe work.

Pre-Primary students first explore the articulation of the foot with non-weight bearing exercise. As dancers progress through RAD training, this articulation is further strengthened. Slow *relevé* practice develops strength and control preparing students to properly roll through the pointe shoe, exploring the entire use of the foot, metatarsal arch, ankle and toes.⁴⁸ Not only does careful repetition of the *relevé* advance the dancer's technique, but also ensures proper foot and ankle alignment, thus lessening the risk of lower leg injury.

⁴⁶ *Step-by-step*, 31.

⁴⁷ *Step-by-step*, 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The RAD clear articulation of the foot in *relevé* promotes desired foot and ankle alignment and discourages the development of pronation or supination of the foot. Attention is equally given to the quality of rising to and lowering from *demi-pointe* with key descriptive images emphasizing resistance and control. Introductory *relevés* are initially practiced and mastered with straight, stretched legs before incorporating the use of *plié*.

In Grade 3, as *demi-pointe* work advances to two feet to one-foot *relevé* practice, the springing action desired of RAD pointe work begins to take shape. When describing the action of *relevé* to *retiré devant* or *derrière*, students are instructed to simultaneously spring both feet from third or fifth position through *sus-sous*, before proceeding to *retiré*. Similarly, on the descent, the working *retiré* leg must securely pass through the *sus-sous*, from which both feet perform a slight spring to allow the heels to lower simultaneously to the originating third or fifth position.⁴⁹ The use of the springing action is consistently required for *relevé*, *pirouettes* and related steps throughout RAD training. This technique develops muscle memory, which purposefully translates to pointe work. The use of subtle springing, when applicable, is the primary and preferred manner of getting onto pointe in the RAD method.

Preservation

It is important to understand that RAD training is not a specific syllabus but rather encourages teachers to develop their own exercises to prepare their students to meet objectives tested in yearly examinations. Consistency of educational standards is accomplished through teaching certification and degree programs with continuing

⁴⁹ *Step-by-step*, 84.

professional development courses. The examination syllabi are comprised of the examination exercises only and do not suggest any specific training combinations or progressions. RAD registered teachers are required to complete one two-year certification program or a higher education degree in order to qualify for Registered Teacher Status (RTS). Registered teachers prepare students with the yearly examination objectives as foundation for their course of study. Preservation of the technique is maintained through teacher training and the ongoing process of annually assessing each student's mastery of yearly requirements. Objectives are prescribed to each level of training. The students' mastery of these requirements is determined through an examination process. These examinations determine if the student is ready to advance to the following grade level. Ensuring level objectives and advancement criteria are achieved by all students assists in the preservation of the method

VAGANOVA METHOD OF CLASSICAL BALLET

History and Development

In 1738 Imperial Decree of Empress Anna founded the first Russian School of Theatrical Dance as the Imperial Theater School through the initiative of French ballet master and teacher Jean-Baptiste Lande.⁵⁰ In 1801 Charles Didelot came to St. Petersburg and took over the direction of the school. Following Didelot, more teachers of the French School arrived in St. Petersburg including Jules Perrot, Arthur Saint-Léon, and Marius Petipa.⁵¹ Petipa became one of the greatest ballet masters and choreographers of the 19th century, choreography ballets such as *The Nutcracker*, *Swan*

⁵⁰ "Vaganova History," The Vaganova Method, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.vaganova.ru/page_en.php?id=309&pid=272.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Lake, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Among other famous ballet masters who taught at the Imperial School were Enrico Cecchetti and Christian Johansson. Famed dancers who trained at the Imperial school include Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Mikhail Fokine. All of these important people contributed to the esteemed reputation of Russian classical ballet training and dancing. However, it was Agrippina Vaganova who is largely credited with creating and codifying a method for training exquisite ballet dancers in the Russian style.

Vaganova first began training at the Imperial Ballet School at the age of ten.⁵² After years of study, she graduated from the School and made her debut as a professional dancer with the Mariinsky Ballet. Vaganova's performing career steadily progressed and after a nineteen-year career, she retired from the stage in 1916.⁵³ As a dancer, she was credited with, "lifting the art of Russian choreography to great heights,"⁵⁴ and crowned with the title "queen of variations."⁵⁵

Despite her success, Vaganova left the stage feely deeply disappointed in her training's artistic and technical shortcomings. While this seems like a disparaging conclusion realized at the conclusion of an illustrious performing career, her dissatisfaction inspired the creation of the Vaganova method of classical ballet training. When developing her method, Vaganova identified desirable qualities in the French, Italian and Danish schools while reassessing the old system of Russian training. In recognition of her importance and influence to the world of classical ballet, the school was renamed The Vaganova Academy following her death.

⁵² Catherine E. Pawlick, *Vaganova Today: The Preservation of Pedagogical Tradition* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), xxv.

⁵³ Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, xxi.

⁵⁴ Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, xxv.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Training generations of classical ballet dancers to be exquisite technicians and artists has continuously placed the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet at the apex of classical ballet study. Since its inception as the Imperial Dancing School, this institution has produced distinguished dancers and choreographers. However, it was the renowned instructor Agrippina Vaganova who most profoundly influenced the school, its students, future educators and the international ballet community with the development and implementation of the Vaganova method. This pedagogical method continues to be the foundation of Russian training but is also taught throughout the world including several schools in The United States.

Characteristics and Methodology

In 1933 Agrippina Vaganova created the first edition of *Osnovye Klassicheskogo Tantsa*, published in English as *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique*.⁵⁶ Prescribed in this manual is a detailed breakdown of steps and elements of class components, with a logical division between basic concepts of classical ballet, *battements*, rotary movements of the legs, the arms, poses of the body, connecting and auxiliary movements, jumps, beats, pointe work, turns and a sample of exercises.

Much of Vaganova's early work on ballet technique concerned strength and breadth in dancing. The “well-arched back” and expansive upper torso that she stressed have remained in the Russian aesthetic and are especially noticeable in

⁵⁶ Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, xxi.

attitude and arabesque and big jumps in open leg positions. This forceful technique allowed Soviet dancers to achieve dramatic, heroic effects.”⁵⁷

The Vaganova Method prioritizes the importance for students to have emotional expressiveness, strictness of form and a resolute, energetic manner of performance.⁵⁸

While coordination of the movement is an essential component to all steps, specific instruction that “each step has to be introduced in its most basic, schematic form gradually reaching the expressive level,” is highly emphasized⁵⁹. The Vaganova Method builds upon the foundation of the strength of the trunk. Focus on *aplomb* and *épaulement*, in the Vaganova method encourages students to employ the core of the body as the impetus for all movement. In addition, the arms are not only “the crown of the artistic picture”⁶⁰ but an integral component of the coordination and execution of the movement.

Without exception, the introductory lesson emphasizes the importance of children practicing steps in the most elementary manner, void of deviation or variation.⁶¹ Barre exercises graduate to center practice and *port de bras* is incorporated as an essential coordination component only when the fundamentals of the movement are secured. Exercises then accelerate to execution on *demi-pointe*. The final level of advancement incorporates jumps.

This class progression is central to the Vaganova method. Great emphasis is also placed on the pace being slow with careful attention to detail and technique. The strong

⁵⁷ International Encyclopedia of Dance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v “Vaganova and the Russian School,” accessed June 5, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0138#acref-9780195173697-eSub-0032>.

⁵⁸ Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 31.

⁵⁹ Agrappina Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique*, trans. Anatole Chujoy, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 11.

⁶⁰ Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 35.

⁶¹ Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, 11.

foundation established in year one of training or when a step is first introduced is critical to the cleanliness of technique. Presentation and execution of the most fundamental form of any movement is elemental to success of the final product. In consideration of this theory, Vaganova explained that adagio practice is central to all training and builds strength and stability for every other section of class work. “In adagio, the pupil masters the basic poses, turns of the body and the head. A complicated adagio develops agility and mobility of the body. When, later in allegro, in facing big jumps, we will not have to waste time on mastery of the body.”⁶²

The strength and ability to maintain self-control that adagio practice builds translates directly to allegro work. While adagio is the backbone of form, allegro is what gives ballet its brilliance. Vaganova places extreme importance on allegro steps by writing, “Allegro is the foundation of the science of the dance, its intricacy and the bond of future perfection. The dance as a whole is built on allegro.”⁶³ This argument is rooted in the fact that most classical ballet variations and solo works are built on allegro. The importance of allegro work is reflected in the priority Vaganova placed on *demi-pointe* work. Female classical ballet variations are the culmination of pointe and allegro steps paired with artistic nuances.

Vaganova and Pointe Preparation

Students of the Vaganova method at the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg begin pointe work half way through their first year of study. While this may seem early, one must remember that dancers admitted into the Vaganova Academy are

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, 12.

selected through a strenuous examination process ensuring suitability and natural aptitude for the rigors and specificity of Vaganova training. Unlike most American schools, the Vaganova Academy only accepts children meeting the exact physical requirements and aesthetic preferences to study, which include slender, long legs and arms, long neck, short waist, tremendous flexibility and rotation of the legs. An estimated 4000 to 8000 children, ranging in age from eight to ten, audition for one of seventy places in the academy each year. There are fewer positions available each subsequent year of study resulting in an average graduating class of twenty dancers.⁶⁴ From the first year, students train six days a week taking multiple technique classes daily in addition to their academic studies. The admittance process and class schedule are fundamental elements contributing to the Vaganova student's readiness for pointe work early in their training. While there are schools that teach the Vaganova method in the United States, it is not possible to expect similar results or implement the training regime of the Vaganova Academy.

Preparation for pointe work is integrated into the Vaganova classical ballet syllabus, rather than as a separate or supplemental course of study. The graduation of steps progressing to *demi-pointe* and the importance placed on allegro work are fundamental components of pointe preparation. The inclusion of *demi-pointe* and jumping are not limited to female students alone but regarded as essential strengthening elements beneficial to both genders. Rising to and from and sustaining *demi-pointe* naturally develops the ankle, foot and supporting muscular structures, while jumping promotes the strength and coordination required for successful dancing *en pointe*.

⁶⁴ Kristin Lewis, "Inside The Vaganova Academy," *Dance Spirit*, accessed June 22, 2015, http://www.dancespirit.com/how-to/ballet/inside_the_vaganova_academy/.

Anatomical prerequisites ensure a prospective student will physically be able to execute steps with the desired Vaganova aesthetics. A dancer's facility greatly influences the level at which technical execution, strength, flexibility, and coordination may be achieved through Vaganova training. The structure of the foot related to pointe work is specifically delineated in *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique*:

Strictly speaking, pointe work is dancing on the extreme tips of all toes of the foot, the arch of which is extended. There are various forms of pointes, however, they depend on the construction of the foot of the dancer. The most comfortable for dancing is on toes of equal length, as if "chopped off," with a low arch and a solid, strong ankle. The foot we consider beautiful in everyday life, i.e. one with a high arch, a well-turned slim ankle, and correctly grouped toes, makes it difficult to execute movements on pointes.⁶⁵

Vaganova emphasizes the importance of proper progression of introductory pointe work. The primary methods of getting onto pointe in the beginning level develop from two feet *relevés* including *sus-sous* and *échappé*; then progress to *piqués* as in *glissade en pointes* and *temps lié en pointes*; followed by *assemblée soutenu* and *jeté en pointe*; progressing to two feet to one foot *relevés* such as *sissonne simple* and *sissonne ouvert*.⁶⁶ Through this progression, female students trained in the Vaganova method will be adequately prepared for pointe.

Preservation

The Vaganova method is preserved through strict adherence to teacher training and student examinations. Instructors seeking education may attend an introductory course at the Vaganova Academy of Ballet in St. Petersburg for four months covering

⁶⁵ Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, 109.

⁶⁶ Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, 110-112.

one level of training or nine months for the entire curriculum. Many Vaganova teachers were once students of the method and performed with preeminent Russian companies. The importance of how steps are introduced and the rate in which they progress may not be fully realized by studying documentation alone. Strict adherence to teacher training and certification preserves the high standards established by the Vaganova Academy. Only highly skilled teachers trained in the Vaganova method are permitted to teach at the academy. Specific instructors at the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg are slotted into only teaching certain years of the syllabus. This is not always true in the United States, as teachers often instruct a variety of levels.

Vaganova Training for All Dancers

While the Vaganova method is known for producing dancers with expressive use of *port de bras*, musicality, and technical virtuosity, several elements make the desired technical aesthetics impractical for all dancers outside of the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg. The Vaganova Academy only admits students with the ideal anatomical attributes for ballet. Students with varying physical attributes and abilities may find the demands of the method impossible to perform. While rotation of the legs and facility are requirements for any serious ballet dancer, the extreme specifications required by the Vaganova training method are impossible for all dancers to properly execute. Great emphasis and importance is placed on total rotation of the legs of 180 degrees with working leg placement directly side in *à la seconde*. According to Vaganova, “The turn-out is an anatomical necessity for every theatrical dance, which embraces the entire volume of movements conceivable for the legs, and which cannot

be accomplished without a turn-out.”⁶⁷ Illustrations in *Basic principles of Classical Ballet* depicting the correct alignment for *grand pli * in second position further support the necessity for exact *turnout* when studying the Vaganova method.⁶⁸ While dancers with this specific anatomical aptitude may excel under the rigorous syllabus, others with slight physical deviations may find proper execution of Vaganova’s exercises impossible without modification.

However, it is important to understand that the Vaganova syllabus outlines what steps are taught and in what order. The Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg further defines the demands and aesthetics of the steps prescribed by the syllabus. A student may be able to execute examination requirements delineated by the syllabus but may be unable to perform them at the standard set by the school due to physical attributes. For example, it may not be healthy for a dancer with limited rotation of the hips to dance with 180-degree turnout or rotation of the legs, but this execution is in better keeping with the aesthetic and technical demands of ballet.⁶⁹ *Vaganova’s Basic Principles of Classical Ballet* was, perhaps, not intended to be a fixed doctrine incapable of adaptation or evolution. In fact, Agrippinna Vaganova wanted the syllabus to continue to develop, existing as a living document capable of adapting to the evolving demands of classical ballet choreography. Following examinations, instructors at the Vaganova Academy meet annually to discuss what revisions should be made for the upcoming year. This ensures that the syllabus remains current and does not become antiquated.

⁶⁷ Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, 24.

⁶⁸ Vaganova, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, 18.

⁶⁹ Ilya Kozadeyev, interview by author, Norman, Oklahoma, February 17, 2016.

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE® NATIONAL TRAINING CURRICULUM

History and Development

Established ballet in the United States is relatively young in comparison to its French, Russian, Italian, English and Danish predecessors. However, American Ballet Theater (ABT) quickly rose to the ranks of these national institutions to become one of the world's leading ballet companies. When American Ballet Theatre was created in 1939, the aim was to develop a repertoire of the best ballets from the past and to encourage the creation of new works by gifted young choreographers.⁷⁰ This goal was met under the direction of Lucia Chase, of Chase Bank fortune, and scenic designer Oliver Smith from 1945 to 1980. "ABT's repertoire includes all of the great full-length ballets of the nineteenth century, such as *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle*, the finest works from the early part of the twentieth century, such as *Apollo*, *Les Sylphides*, *Jardin aux Lilacs* and *Rodeo* and acclaimed contemporary masterpieces such as *Airs*, *Push Comes to Shove* and *Duets*."

During Chase and Smith's tenure Russian defector and ballet extraordinaire, Mikhail Baryshnikov was breaking boundaries and wowing audiences with never before seen superhuman technique, artistry and virtuosity, reaching unrivaled American celebrity status as a ballet dancer. Having performed as a Principal dancer with ABT from 1974-1978, Baryshnikov was named Artistic Director in 1980, succeeding Chase and Smith.⁷¹ Under his leadership, numerous classical ballets were restaged. Jane

⁷⁰ "ABT: Inside ABT." ABT: Inside ABT, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.abt.org/insideabt/history.asp>.

⁷¹ International Encyclopedia of Dance, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v "American Ballet Theatre," accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0044?rskey=sftfY4&result=44>.

Hermann and the reappointed Oliver Smith succeeded Baryshnikov as co-directors in 1990. In 1992, former ABT Principal dancer Kevin McKenzie was named Artistic Director and remains to date.

In addition to its famed dancers and directors, ABT was also home to emerging choreographers defining dance in the twentieth century including Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Anton Dolin, Jerome Robbins, and Twyla Tharp who created new ballets on the growingly versatile troupe. On April 27, 2006, by an act of Congress, American Ballet Theatre became America's National Ballet Company®.⁷²

While ABT was founded in 1940, the presence of an official training program with the mission of preparing young dancers for the professional company was inconsistent until 2004. The original school was connected to the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School founded in 1950 under the direction of ABT choreographer Antony Tudor, in association with Margaret Craske.⁷³ This arrangement never progressed. In 1951 the official Ballet Theatre School opened and was initially directed by choreographer Branislava Nijinska. The school experienced changing leadership until being discontinued in 1981.⁷⁴ There was brief reinstatement by then Artistic Director Mikhail Baryshnikov to train a very select group of elite promising dancers, which was the early phase of the organization's studio company.

It wasn't until January 2004 that Artistic Director Kevin McKenzie and Studio Company Artistic Director John Meehan revived the school.⁷⁵ The academy was later

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at American Ballet Theatre," Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at American Ballet Theatre, accessed January 11, 2016, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/artist/B68388>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

named after Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (JKO School), who was the Honorary Chair of ABT for more than twenty-five years. The most critical ABT JKO School contribution in consideration of pre-pointe education is the creation, development and implementation of the ABT® National Training Curriculum, co-authored by Franco De Vita, Artistic Director of the ABT JKO School and Raymond Lukens, Artistic Associate for the ABT New York University Masters program and JKO School faculty member.⁷⁶ This teacher certification, introduced in 2007 is the first American system of codified ballet curriculum available to dance educators in the United States. The designation of ABT as America’s National Ballet Theatre by congress preceded the announcement of the National Training Curriculum.

In 2006, the United States Congress passed a resolution designating American Ballet Theatre, with its 65 years of experience, as America’s National Ballet Company. In doing so, the Congress recognized “that the American Ballet Theatre’s extensive and innovative education, outreach and artistic development programs both train future generations of great dancers and expose student to the arts.”⁷⁷

Characteristics and Methodology

ABT®’s National Training Curriculum is a program for the development and training of young students that embraces sound ballet principles and incorporates elements of the French, Italian and Russian schools of training. The ABT® National Training Curriculum aims to assist beginning through advanced teachers in training dance students to use their bodies correctly, focusing on kinetics and coordination, as well as anatomy and proper body alignment. Artistically, the National Training Curriculum strives to provide dance students with a rich knowledge of classical ballet technique and the ability to adapt to all styles and techniques of dance.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ F. De Vita, R. Lukens and G. Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer: Guidelines for Ballet Training and Dancer Health* (2nd ed.), (New York: Ballet Theatre Foundation, 2008), iii.

⁷⁸ “ABT: Education and Training,” ABT: Education and Training. Accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.abt.org/education/nationaltrainingcurr.asp>.

“In recent years, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of ballet schools throughout the United States. However, the competency of those teaching this physically and mentally challenging art form may not have grown commensurately. Too often, dance instructors lack the requisite knowledge.”⁷⁹ While there have been opportunities for teachers in the United States to be certified in Cecchetti or RAD methods, no American standardized system of training was available prior to ABT®’s National Training Curriculum. Moreover, ABT felt a great responsibility to take a leadership role in dance education and training in the United States. “Through conversations with ABT’s artistic faculty and dance teachers across America, it became clear that a comprehensive resource was needed to address the whole dancer.”⁸⁰ Two main issues were observed in students currently trained in the United States: dancers were subject to injury; and dancers trained in a specific style had difficulty transitioning to other styles, which also lead to injury. In consideration of these observations, ABT created a program centered in dancer training as well as dancer health. The curriculum includes a progression of material to be covered but is not a syllabus instructing how the material should be taught. ABT®’s National Teacher Training Curriculum’s theory for teacher training is comprised of ten principles that are implicit in all levels of training.⁸¹

- Correct Posture: with correct posture the bones are aligned in order that there is the least muscular effort to be upright; with the weight fully over one or two feet; the waist is held to engage the muscular corset, thus strengthening the postural muscles in the pelvis, stomach and upper torso.
- Turnout: is a rotation of the legs at the hip joints with no twisting of the pelvis, knees and ankles; with correct posture, control of the spinal muscles is emphasized; with turnout there is added use of the inner and outer thigh and

⁷⁹ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC training the whole dancer*, ii.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC training the whole dancer*, 84.

buttocks muscles; to attain turnout in high leg positions, it is necessary to have sufficient stretch; i.e. a straddle split.

- **Placement:** a dancer is placed when correct posture and turnout are maintained while moving the limbs and the natural articulation of the leg at its joints is not distorted.
- **Central Line of Balance:** is when the weight of the body is centered over one or two feet while still and in motion by also using natural opposition and *épaulement*; the head, one of the heaviest parts of the body should move to maintain the central line of balance and generally leads the movements; balance is sustained while maintaining correct posture, turnout and placement.
- **Transferring Weight:** the use of a downward circle as in *chasse*, the use of a pointed foot in *temps lie* or the use of an upward circle as in *assemble élancé* are some examples of the different ways of transferring weight; this gives movements texture and variety; weight must always be transferred through the central line of balance, while maintaining correct posture, turnout and placement.
- **Heels in *Demi-Plié* and *Grand Plié*:** heels must be kept down while executing *demi-plié* in the five positions of the feet and in *grand plié* in 2nd and open 4th positions; the heels are allowed to lift in *grand plié* in 1st, 3rd, crossed 4th and 5th positions; correct use of the *demi-plié* and avoiding rolling of the arches, twisting the knees or gripping the toes and bottoms of the feet prevent unnecessary strain on the joints.
- ***Pirouette* Preparation:** the use of the traditional rounded arm position for the preparation of all pirouettes is required; students will learn alternate styles the senior year of training.
- ***Port de Bras*:** natural arm coordination and the principles of classical *port de bras* must be understood and applied; this will develop stylistic sensibility.
- **Musicality:** the dancer must have a clear understanding of rhythm, quality and phrasing to enhance the application of coordinated movement, technique, style and artistry.
- **Coordination:** natural coordination is fine-tuned by adhering to the above principles; complex coordination is developed when movements are learned at a comfortable pace so that students can execute new vocabulary with relative ease, devoid of mannerisms and without risking unnecessary injury.

American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum and Pre-Pointe

The ABT® National Training Curriculum does not define pre-pointe as a separate element of ballet education but rather builds preparation into the technical level progression. Dancers begin pointe in Level 3 having been systematically prepared with jumps, foot strengthening, *pliés* and *relevés* from the earliest levels of ballet training.⁸² Gender specific class components are prescribed beginning in Level I. In preparation for pointe work, floor exercises and *relevés* are incorporated to strengthen feet, toes, calves and anterior tibialis.⁸³ More detailed information regarding the assessment and analysis of pre-pointe at ABT's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School will be presented in later chapters of this thesis.

Preservation

Preservation is an important component to the ABT® National Training Curriculum. One of the goals when creating the curriculum was to improve the standard of dance instruction in the United States and help preserve and promote the tradition and integrity of classical ballet training.⁸⁴ Quality control through education and teacher certification helps ensure this goal of improving American dance education.

To become an ABT® Certified Teacher, candidates must complete intensive training in the ABT® National Training Curriculum and successfully pass comprehensive examinations. In addition to the training certification, ABT also offers a Master of Arts in Dance Education, ABT Pedagogy through New York University's Steinhardt School, which requires thirty-six credit hours for completion. ABT®

⁸² Melissa Bowman, interview by the author, New York, January 14, 2016.

⁸³ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC training the whole dancer*, 21.

⁸⁴ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC training the whole dancer*, iii.

Certified Teachers are only permitted to teach the curriculum of levels in which they have completed the training. There are three levels of certification with required pre-requisites, which must be obtained in succession:⁸⁵

- Pre-Primary-Level 3
Pre-requisite: Candidates must have reached an advanced or professional level of ballet training. While there is no maximum age limit, the minimum age for candidates applying for the teacher training intensive is at least seventeen years old by the start of the first training session, with the further pre-requisite of having reached an advanced/professional level of dance training. This is the foundation for the curriculum and prepares teacher to instruct ballet students ages 3+. Course length is nine full days.
- Level 4-5
Pre-requisite is certification in Pre-Primary through Level 3. This continuation of the course prepares teachers to instruct intermediate and advanced ballet students age eleven to thirteen+. Course length is six full days.
- Level 6, 7 Partnering
Pre-requisite is certification in Pre-Primary through Level 5, along with a 1500-2000 word essay on one of four topics and a presentation of students for Affiliate Exams within 2 years. This further continuation of the course prepares teachers to instruct advanced and pre-professional ballet students ages 14+. Course length is six full days.

⁸⁵ “ABT: Education and Training.” ABT: Education and Training, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.abt.org/education/teachercertification.asp>.

CHAPTER II: BALLET SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES

There are many factors contributing to the variety of ballet training offered in the United States. Each school has an individual admittance protocol, curriculum, teaching philosophy, rigor of program, financial structure, and school size. Some academies are affiliated with national or regional professional ballet companies, while others are privately owned local schools providing community based dance education. The United States does not have an official standardized ballet training method and instructors are not required to fulfill educational requirements or certification to teach ballet. Some organizations adhere to a specific Vaganova or Cecchetti based syllabus or employ the ABT® National Training Curriculum. More commonly, ballet schools offer amalgamated training, combining elements of several codified methods based on the instructor's background. American ballet schools are not state sponsored and the admittance process is far less rigorous than that of schools in other countries. Dance education is available to a large percentage of American students due to the accessibility and abundance of ballet schools in the U.S. For all of these reasons, no two American schools are exactly alike and generalities cannot be summarized for ballet instruction across the United States.

For the purpose of this thesis, ballet schools will be considered in two categories: those in affiliation with professional companies and those that are independent businesses. Regardless of classification, all programs in this study have the reputation of providing high quality training with a history of producing professional dancers, teachers, choreographers and industry leaders.

Affiliation with a professional company influences the function of the organization's academy. Generally, students are selected through a specific admittance process. Instructors adhere to a prescribed curriculum or syllabus, which prepares students in the style of the company's repertoire. High quality ballet instruction is offered for professional minded dancers as well as meaningful programs for non-professional students including adult classes. The affiliated academy is generally recognized as the official school of the professional company, training students to ideally become the next generation of company dancers. Professional performances may require young dancers for children's roles in productions like *The Nutcracker*. Academy dancers often have the opportunity to perform such roles in addition to student showcases. The ballet school and company are components within the organization and operate with defined goals and objectives delineated by its mission and vision statements. Many of these organizations also provide community outreach through education or performance.

Schools without company affiliation also train their students to be professional dancers, not in the singular style of one particular company, but for a wider variety of performing ensembles. As students are not actively prepared to dance professionally in a specific company, more independence and flexibility may be exercised regarding curriculum content.

The professional company's academy may be one of several revenue generating departments within the institution that also may receive additional patronage support or outside funding. A larger revenue pool may allow a professional school the flexibility to make choices based more heavily on artistic needs rather than financial well-being.

The privately owned school may function to provide high quality ballet instruction but also must make decisions to secure the financial sustainability and longevity of the business. Independent studios have a private business plan with the self-serving revenue stream. An academy affiliated with a professional company may realize additional financial support from the larger organization as a whole.

Logistical factors are of consideration to privately owned schools. Resources may dictate studio space, instructor employment, class size, and enrollment numbers. These considerations do not necessarily dilute the quality of instruction but may affect admittance protocol, as well as class and school structure. Schools unaffiliated with a company act under philosophies self defined by mission and vision statements. Student based performances allow dancers the opportunity to perform a variety of roles from ensemble to principal parts. Schools with exceptional training from both classifications have the esteemed reputation of training dancers to perform with professional ballet companies throughout the world.

Representatives from the following schools were research participants for this thesis. Interviews and class observations were conducted to assess and analyze pre-pointe training methods. Each organization's mission statement, brief history, school structure, and successful alumni are elements that contribute to pre-pointe pedagogy as addressed in succeeding chapters of this thesis.

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE JACQUELINE KENNEDY ONASSIS SCHOOL

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

Mission Statement

American Ballet Theatre's mission is to create, to present, to preserve, and to extend the great repertoire of classical dancing, through exciting performances and educational programming of the highest quality, presented to the widest possible audience.

Furthermore, The American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School strives to produce superb dancers who have no technical limitations and are sensitive to different qualities of movement necessary to correctly execute the classical, neoclassical and contemporary vocabularies of dance; dancers who are strong, supple and dance without affectation.⁸⁶

Abbreviated History

While ABT was founded in 1940, the presence of an official training program with the mission of preparing young dancers for the professional company was inconsistent until 2004. The original school was connected to the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School founded in 1950 under the direction of founding ABT choreographer Antony Tudor, in association with Margaret Craske.⁸⁷ This arrangement never flourished and in 1951 the official Ballet Theatre School opened under the direction of choreographer Branislava Nijinska. The school then experienced changing leadership until it was disbanded in 1981.⁸⁸ There was a brief reinstatement of an official ballet school by Artistic Director Mikhail Baryshnikov designed to train a select group of elite promising dancers.

⁸⁶ "ABT: Education and Training," ABT: Education and Training, accessed January 17, 2016, http://www.abt.org/education/jko_school.asp.

⁸⁷ "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at American Ballet Theatre," The Kennedy Center, accessed January 15, 2016, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/artist/B68388>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

It wasn't until January 2004 that Artistic Director Kevin McKenzie and Studio Company Artistic Director John Meehan revived the school.⁸⁹ The academy was later named after Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (ABT JKO School), who was the Honorary Chair of ABT for more than twenty-five years. The most critical ABT JKO School contribution in consideration of pre-pointe education is the creation, development and implementation of the American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum, co-authored by Franco De Vita and Raymond Lukens, Artistic Associate for the ABT New York University Masters program and ABT JKO School faculty member.⁹⁰ This teacher certification is the first American system of a codified ballet curriculum available in the United States. The ABT Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School serves approximately 300 students ages three to eighteen.

School Structure

The ABT JKO School provides high quality ballet training consistent with the stylistic requirements of American Ballet Theatre, and offers dancers a rich knowledge of classical technique while training the ability to adapt to all styles and techniques of dance.⁹¹ Programs of study include the Children's Division, for dancers three to fourteen and the Pre-Professional Division, for students ages twelve through eighteen. The ABT JKO School developed and follows the ABT® National Training Curriculum. This Curriculum is a teaching tool that combines elements of French, Italian and Russian schools of training with scientific and wellness influences.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹“ABT: Education and Training,” ABT: Education and Training, accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.abt.org/education/jko_school.asp.

The Children's Division ballet program promotes discipline and creativity while encouraging each child to reach their highest potential. Classes focus on building a solid foundation in ballet technique with an emphasis on proper placement and safe progressions of movement while remaining sensitive to the developmental needs of younger dancers.⁹² Enrollment is open for the Pre-Primary and Primary classes. Admittance into the school is by audition only beginning in Level I of the Children's Division. The curriculum progression and student placement are based on individual technical ability in proportion to age. Prospective Children's Division students are evaluated in open auditions. The Children's Division is comprised of the following levels:

- Pre-Primary: one forty-five minute class per week
- Primary A: one 1-hour class per week
- Primary B: one 1-hour class per week
- Primary C: one 1-hour class per week
- Level 1A: two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique with Boys' Class per week
- Level 1B: two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique with Boys' Class per week
- Level 2: three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1-hour Character Dance; 1-hour Girls' Stretch and Conditioning or Boys Class per week
- Level 3: four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1-hour Character Dance; 1-hour Modern; 1-hour Girls' Stretch and Conditioning or Boys' Class
- Level 4: five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1-hour Character Dancer; 1-hour Modern; 1-hour Girls' Stretch and Conditioning or Boys' Class per week

⁹² Ibid.

In the Pre-Professional division, students thrive in an elite atmosphere dedicated to the success of each student, under the direction of Franco De Vita, Artistic Director of the ABT JKO School. Dancers take courses in Ballet Technique, Pointe, Partnering, Men’s Class, Character, Modern Technique, Variations and Pilates. Student technical experience is enriched through an on-going lecture series including topics on nutrition, women’s health, resume writing/career preparation, stress management, strength training and complete courses in dance history.⁹³ ABT JKO School takes student wellness very seriously and has implemented its Healthy Dancer Curriculum as an integral part of the ABT® National Training Curriculum. This physician approved teacher resource addresses both the physical and psychological needs of developing students. Dancers are considered for the Pre-Professional Division by video submission or through a live audition at ABT JKO School in the appropriate class level for their age. The Pre-Professional Division is comprised of the following levels and schedule:⁹⁴

Level 5 (ages 12-14)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

This schedule includes daily technique class, as well as one Character class, one Pilates class, one Dance History class and two Pointe classes.

Level 6 (ages 14-16)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.	2:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	2:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	2:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	2:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

This schedule includes daily technique class and: Pilates, Men’s/ Women’s Variations, Partnering, Character, Dance History, Men’s Strengthening, Pointe and Modern.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Level 7 (ages 16-18)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	11:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	11:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	10:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

This schedule includes daily technique class, daily rehearsal, as well as Partnering, Variations, Pilates, Men's Strengthening, Dance History, Character, Pointe, Healthy Dancer Curriculum Workshops and Modern.

ABT JKO School Alumni

In addition to American Ballet Theatre, ABT JKO alumni have gone on to join prestigious professional companies including Alberta Ballet, BalletMet, Ballet West, Boston Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Dutch National Ballet, Hong Kong Ballet, Houston Ballet, Hubbard Street, Joffrey Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, The Juilliard School, Texas Ballet Theater, Zurich Ballet, and many more.⁹⁵

HOUSTON BALLET'S BEN STEVENSON ACADEMY

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF HOUSTON BALLET

Mission Statement

To inspire a lasting love and appreciation for dance through artistic excellence, exhilarating performances, innovative choreography and superb educational programs

In furtherance of our mission, we are committed to maintaining and enhancing our status as:

- A classically trained company with a diverse repertory whose range includes the classics as well as contemporary works.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

- A company that attracts the world's best dancers and choreographers and provides them with an environment where they can thrive and further develop the art form.
- An international company that is accessible to broad and growing local, national, and international audiences.
- A company with a world-class Academy that provides first-rate instruction for professional dancers and meaningful programs for non-professional dancers.
- A company with state-of-the-art facilities for performances, rehearsals and ongoing operations⁹⁶

Abbreviated History

In 1955, the founding members of Houston Ballet Foundation had a vision for dance in Houston: to create a resident ballet company and to start a school, which would train its dancers. Houston Ballet Academy was established that same year under the leadership of Tatiana Semenova, a former dancer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. In 1969, the professional company was founded, under the direction of Nina Popova, a former dancer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and American Ballet Theatre.⁹⁷ From 1976-2003, Ben Stevenson, O.B.E., served as Artistic Director of Houston Ballet. In July 2003, Australian choreographer Stanton Welch assumed the leadership of Houston Ballet as Artistic Director.

Since its founding, Houston Ballet Academy has provided high quality ballet training. Currently (2016) over 500 students, between the ages of four and sixty, are enrolled in the academy's classes. In July 2003, Houston Ballet Academy was re-named Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy in recognition of the key role Ben Stevenson,

⁹⁶ "Houston Ballet Mission Statement," Mission Statement, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Inside-Houston-Ballet/Mission-Statement/>

⁹⁷ "History of Houston Ballet," Houston Ballet, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Inside-Houston-Ballet/History/>.

former artistic director of the professional company and director of the academy, played for twenty-seven years in shaping and developing the school.⁹⁸ The high standard of training has been internationally recognized with students having won and placed at the prestigious Prix de Lausanne ballet competition, a four-day competition in Switzerland for elite pre-professional dancers ages fifteen to eighteen from across the world.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy is the official school of Houston Ballet. More than half of the professional company's current dancers have come from ranks of the academy.⁹⁹ Houston Ballet students have the opportunity to perform with the company in repertoire including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Bolero*, *Cinderella*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Manon*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*.¹⁰⁰ Considering children perform in professional productions and may one day graduate in hopes of joining the company ranks, students of the Academy must be consistently trained to ensure stylistic and technical uniformity. The company currently performs choreography by Artistic Director Stanton Welch and diverse repertoire from classical full length works as well as contemporary and modern ballets.

School Structure

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy divisions include Preschool, Pre-Professional and Professional Divisions, and adult programs. Houston Ballet II is the organization's second performing company and part of the academy. The mission of Houston Ballet II is threefold: to provide students the opportunity to dance leading roles

⁹⁸ "About The Academy." Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Academy/About-the-Academy/>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

in varied repertoire; to allow the dancers to develop technically and artistically by actual performance experience; to serve the greater Houston community by providing quality, professional performances.¹⁰¹

Children in the Preschool Division range in age from two to seven years. Children ages four to seven take courses in Creative Dance and Pre-Ballet, which lay the foundation for further study. Children in Creative Dance gain awareness of music, rhythm and movement through the exploration and development of strength, coordination, creative thinking and expression. Pre-Ballet provides a bridge between Creative Dance and Level I introducing students to the discipline of ballet and basic terminology. Enrollment is open in the Preschool Program and includes the following Levels:¹⁰²

Parent and Me:	1-hour per week
Joy of Motion:	1-hour per week
Creative Dance I:	1-hour per week
Creative Dance II:	1-hour per week
Pre-Ballet:	1-hour per week

Beginning at age seven, students are required to audition for admission into the Pre-professional and Professional main school year-round programs. “At this level, they follow a structured sequence of training stages designed to increase their technical skills, stamina and discipline in accordance with their age and physical

¹⁰¹ “Houston Ballet II,” Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Academy/Houston-Ballet-II/>.

¹⁰² “Preschool Division – Houston Ballet Academy,” Preschool Division at Houston Ballet Academy, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Academy/Preschool-Division/>.

development.”¹⁰³ The Pre-Professional and Professional Divisions include the following levels.¹⁰⁴

- Level 1: two 1-hour Ballet Technique classes per week (plus 1-hour boys’ class)
- Level 2: two 1 hour 15 minute Ballet Technique classes per week (plus boys’ class)
- Level 3: two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique classes per week (plus 1-hour boys class)
- Level 4: three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; two 1-hour Pointe; 1-hour Social; 1-hour Boys’ Class
- Level 5: four 1.5-hour Ballet/Pointe; two 1-hour Pointe/Variations; 1-hour Character; 1-hour Jazz; 1-hour Modern Dance; 1-hour Pilates per week
- Level 6: five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique, two 1-hour Pointe, 1-hour *Pas de Deux*; 1-hour Pilates; 1-hour Modern Dance; 1-hour Character; 1-hour Repertoire; 1-hour Jazz
- Level 7&8: Evening or Full Day training Monday-Saturday with daily Ballet Technique and additional training in Pointe, Variations, Pilates, *Pas de Deux*, Pilates, Modern Dance, Character, Repertoire, Men’s Class and Jazz

Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy Alumni

In addition to joining Houston Ballet as professional dancers, graduates have performed with American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Vienna State Opera Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet, The Joffrey Ballet, Boston Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, San Francisco Ballet, Texas Ballet Theater, BalletMet, Memphis Ballet, State

¹⁰³ “About The Academy,” Houston Ballet Academy, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Academy/About-the-Academy/>.

¹⁰⁴ “Houston Ballet Academy Schedule,” Houston Ballet Pre-Professional Schedule, accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.houstonballet.org/content/Schedule_2015-2016_8_28_15.pdf.

Street Ballet, Ballet Florida, Pacific Northwest Ballet and National Ballet of Canada.¹⁰⁵

Those graduates that elect non-dance career paths gain “self-motivation, self-discipline, poise, grace, physical adroitness and an appreciation for the arts, which they will carry with them throughout their lives.”¹⁰⁶

KANSAS CITY BALLET SCHOOL

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF KANSAS CITY BALLET

Mission Statements

Mission: To establish Kansas City Ballet as an indispensable asset of the Kansas City community through exceptional performances, excellence in dance training and community education for all ages.

Vision: Making Kansas City a destination for dance.

Kansas City Ballet School Mission: To provide excellence in dance training to a diverse body of students. Our comprehensive approach is based on the traditions of classical ballet and prepares student for the widest spectrum of opportunities within the artistic community and professional dance world. Students develop skills including self-discipline, self-confidence and the ability to concentrate and collaborate. Our students recognize the importance of process and quality of work at the same time setting high standards for themselves in all areas.¹⁰⁷

Abbreviated History

In 1957 Mme. Tatiana Dokoudovska founded the Kansas City Ballet Company with the goal of bringing a regular ballet presence to the Kansas City area.¹⁰⁸ She served as director, advisor and choreographer for twenty years and brought the

¹⁰⁵ About The Academy,” Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.houstonballet.org/Academy/About-the-Academy/>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “The Academy,” Kansas City Ballet, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.kcballet.org/school/academy/>.

¹⁰⁸ ¹⁰⁸ “Kansas City Ballet History,” Kansas City Ballet, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.kcballet.org/about/history/>.

company from a metropolitan-area civic company to its first professional season. The 1976-1977 season would mark the entrance of the Kansas City Ballet (KCB) to the growing ranks of professional ballet companies found throughout the United States.¹⁰⁹

Upon Mme. Dokoudovska's retirement in 1980, the board of directors sought an artistic director of international stature based in the Balanchine technique. George Balanchine founded New York City Ballet (NYCB) with Lincoln Kirstein.

Balanchine's style has been described as neoclassic, a reaction to the Romantic anti-classicism, that was present in Russian and European ballet when he had begun to dance. As a choreographer, Balanchine generally de-emphasized plot in his ballets, preferring to let "dance be the star of the show," as he once told an interviewer.¹¹⁰

The KCB board sought the opinion of Lincoln Kirstein for its next Artistic Director and Kirstein recommended former NYCB dancer and choreographer Todd Bolender. Bolender was appointed Artistic Director in 1980, opening a new chapter for the ballet. "Under Mr. Bolender's innovative direction, the company became known for its vigorous dance style, naturalness of movement, theatricality and sense of humor."¹¹¹ William Whitener succeeded Bolender as Artistic Director following his retirement in 1995. Whitener encouraged varied programs ranging from great classics, to the best of Balanchine and created sixteen original works for the company. Devon Carney became KCB's Artistic Director in 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "George Balanchine," NYCB, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.nycballet.com/Explore/Our-History/George-Balanchine.aspx>.

¹¹¹ "Kansas City Ballet History," Kansas City Ballet, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.kcballet.org/about/history/>.

Kansas City Ballet School began offering pre-professional training in 1981 under the direction of Todd Bolender and Una Kai.¹¹² Each level has a codified syllabus to facilitate maximum physical, mental and emotional development appropriate to the age and physical ability of each student.

School Structure

Kansas City Ballet School (KCBS) is comprised of two divisions: The Academy Division for students ages three to nineteen, and the Studio Division for ages twelve and older. “The Academy’s comprehensive approach is based on the traditions of classical ballet and prepares students for a wide spectrum of opportunities within the artistic community.”¹¹³ The Academy Division is further segmented into the Lower School and Upper School. The Lower School offers two programs including the Children’s Program for ages three to seven, which introduces children to ballet and movement while focusing on creativity and group interaction, and the Primary Program for ages seven to eleven, which lays the foundation of classical ballet training.¹¹⁴ Level 1 is the official first year of ballet technique. The Lower School is comprised of the following levels (classes meet weekly):¹¹⁵

Children’s Program

Boys on the Move (boys ages 3-5)	45 minutes
Creative Movement (ages 3-5)	45 minutes

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Kansas City Ballet School.” Kansas City Ballet, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.kcballet.org/school/academy/>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Upper School,” Kansas City Ballet School Upper School, accessed March, 1, 2016, <https://www.kcballet.org/school/academy/upperschool/>.

Fundamentals of Dance (ages 5-6)	45 minutes
Pre-Ballet (ages 6-7)	45 minutes

Primary Program

Boys Level 1 & 2 (boys 6-9)	1-hr Boys' Class/Ballet Technique
Level 1 (ages 7-8)	two 1-hour Ballet Technique
Level 2 (ages 8-9)	two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique
Level 3 (ages 9-10)	three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; two thirty-minute Pre-Pointe/Boys Conditions; 1-hour Jazz

KCBS Upper School is comprised of the Intermediate and Advanced Programs. The Intermediate Program includes Level 4 and Level 5 offering a rigorous, extensive course of study with classes meeting four to five times weekly. “The students in the Intermediate Program develop a stronger understanding of the body’s movement capabilities while increasing stamina, flexibility, intellectual awareness and personal commitment.”¹¹⁶ Pointe work begins in Level 4. Levels 6 through 8 comprise the Advanced Program. Students in the most advanced levels take classes six days weekly refining their technique while also fostering artistry. Advanced Program KCBS students are preparing for careers as professional dancers. Programs of study in the Upper School include the following weekly schedules:

Intermediate Program

Level 4	four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1-hour Jazz; two 1-hour Pointe; 30-minute Conditioning; 1-hour Flamenco; Men’s Class
Level 5	five 1.5- hour Ballet Technique/Pointe; 1-hour Pointe; 1-hour Character; 1-hour Jazz; 1-hour Modern; Men’s Class, <i>Pas de Deux</i> ; Conditioning

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Advanced Program

Levels 6-8 Ballet Technique six days weekly with additional study in Pas de Deux, Pointe, Character, Jazz, Men's Class and Variations

Kansas City Ballet School Alumni

In addition to joining Kansas City Ballet as professional dancers, KCBS alumni have performed with Ballet West, Cincinnati Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Dance Theater of Harlem, Louisville Ballet, Minnesota Dance Theater, New York City Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, River North Dance Chicago, and many more.¹¹⁷

PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET SCHOOL

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET

Mission Statement

Vision

Enriching lives in the Pacific Northwest, considered a national treasure and acclaimed worldwide, PNB epitomizes excellence in the performing arts.

Mission

- Set new standards for artistic excellence, innovation and creativity.
- Attract the most talented dancers, choreographers, musicians, collaborative artists, staff and volunteers.
- Educate and develop dance artists as well as enthusiasts.
- Captivate a devoted, supportive, continually growing, and diverse audience.
- Strengthen our financial and organizational foundation.

Abbreviated History

Pacific Northwest Ballet was founded in 1972 as Pacific Northwest Dance Association, with early leadership provided by Leon Kalimos (Executive Director, 1973-1977), Janet Reed (Ballet Mistress and Director of the School, 1974-1976) and

¹¹⁷ Kansas City Ballet School, email to the author, March 8, 2016.

Melissa Hayden (Ballet Mistress and Director of the School, 1976-1977 and Artistic Director for the first five months of 1977).¹¹⁸ The company became an independent organization in September 1977 and was renamed Pacific Northwest Ballet in 1978. In August 1977, Kent Stowell and Francia Russell were appointed Artistic Directors of Pacific Northwest Dance. “During their extended tenure the Company and School attained an international reputation for superb performances and excellent training.”¹¹⁹ In 2005, Peter Boal succeeded Stowell and Russell as Artistic Director of PNB and Director of PNB School. Founded in 1974, PNB School is recognized as one of the top ballet training institutions in the United States, offering professional training to more than 1,000 students.

School Structure

The Pacific Northwest Ballet School program is divided into the Children’s Division, Student Division and Professional Division and also offers community outreach education and Open Program for teens and adults. Enrollment is open and does not require an audition for admittance in the Children’s Division for dancers ages two to seven. Levels in the Children’s Division include:¹²⁰

Pre-K Division – focus on movement, music and rhythm	
Duet (ages 2-3 with caretaker):	45 minutes per week
PNB Tots (age 4):	45 minutes per week
Creative Movement (ages 5-6)	1-hour per week
Boys Class (ages 5-6)	1-hour per week
Pre-Ballet (age 7)	1-hour per week

¹¹⁸ “History Pacific Northwest Ballet,” Pacific Northwest Ballet, accessed December 15, 2016, <https://www.pnb.org/aboutpnb/history/>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ “PNB’s Children Division,” Pacific Northwest Ballet, accessed December 10, 2015, <https://www.pnb.org/pnb-school/classes/childrens-division/#pre-kdivision>.

The Student Division consists of Levels I through VIII and admission is by audition only. Students enrolled in the Children's Division are considered for Level I placement at the conclusion of Pre-Ballet. Dancers are assessed by age, physical strength and development and are promoted according to individual progress. Classes in this division are carefully graded by age, physical strength and development. Students are introduced to progressive levels of ballet technique as described in the School Syllabus.¹²¹ PNBS Assistant Principal Meg Potter explains,

In our lower levels, our syllabus is based on traditional classical ballet training. The emphasis on musical timing and the attention to detail are key elements for us. PNBS has a reputation for Balanchine style, however we don't teach a specific style in our lower levels. The concentration is on clean, strong technique with correct placement and good coordination. There is a sense of style that is built into our training due to the specific elements of head and arms choices that our director, Peter Boal, has asked the faculty to incorporate into our syllabus. That comes more into play in our upper levels.¹²²

Students fourteen to eighteen years old who wish to be considered for admittance into the Student Division must meet the following criteria: at least four to five years of classical ballet training, minimum of two years of pointe work, and currently studying twelve to fourteen hours per week. Separate Boys'/Men's classes are offered at each level and focus on specific elements of male dancing. Girls in Level IV must meet the minimum standards required for pointe work.¹²³ In addition to multiple Ballet Technique classes per week, students in Levels IV-VIII may also have the

¹²¹ "Student and Professional Division PNB," Pacific Northwest Ballet, accessed December 10, 2015, <https://www.pnb.org/pnb-school/classes/student-professional-division/>.

¹²² Megan Potter, interview by the author, Norman, Oklahoma, November 22, 2016.

¹²³ "PNB Student Handbook," Pacific Northwest Ballet School Student Handbook, accessed December 11, 2015, <https://www.pnb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015-16-student-handbook.pdf>.

opportunity to explore other dance forms such as Jazz, Character and Flamenco. The Student Division is comprised of the following levels and weekly schedules:¹²⁴

Level I:	two 1.25-hour Ballet Technique
Level IC Boys:	two 1.25-hour Ballet Technique/Boys' Class
Level II:	two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique
Level IIC Boys:	one 1.25-hour and one 1.5-hour Ballet Technique
Level III:	three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 45 minute Pre-Pointe
Level IIIC Boys	three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique/Boys' Class
Level IV	four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three 1-hour Pointe
Intermediate Boys	five Ballet Technique/Men's Class; 1-hour Modern
Level V	five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three 1-hour Pointe; 1-hour Modern
Level VI	six 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; four 1-hour Pointe; 1-hour Modern
Level VII	six 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three 1-hour Pointe; 1.5-hour <i>Pas de Deux</i> ; 1-hour Modern; 1-hour Repertoire
Level VIII	six 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; two 1-hour Pointe; 1-hour Variations; 1.5-hour <i>Pas de Deux</i> ; 1.5-hour Choreography/Modern

The Professional Division is a one to two-year program designed to help students transition into becoming professional dancers. Concentration is on refining technique and developing artistry through an intensive full-day, forty-hour week comprehensive program. Prospective students must attend the five-week PNBS summer course to be considered for the Professional Division. Professional Division curriculum

¹²⁴ “Student and Professional Division Pacific Northwest Ballet,” Pacific Northwest Ballet School, accessed December 11, 2016, <https://www.pnb.org/pnb-school/classes/student-professional-division/#tuition>.

includes Ballet Technique, Pointe, Variations, Men’s Class, Adagio, Modern, Choreography, Pilates, Essential Barre, Strength Training and seminars on topics including nutrition, personal safety and life skills.¹²⁵

Pacific Northwest Ballet School Alumni

Training at PNB School prepares dancers for professional performance careers. In addition to PNB, graduates have joined companies including Ballet Austin, Ballet West, Boston Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance, Kansas City Ballet, Louisville Ballet, Milwaukee Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Philadelphia Ballet, Royal Ballet of Flanders and San Francisco Ballet, while others have successful collegiate and professional careers in academia, dance education and other fields.

TEXAS BALLETTHEATER SCHOOL

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF TEXAS BALLETTHEATER

Mission Statements

The mission of Texas Ballet Theater is to create, present and tour world-class ballet, from classical to cutting-edge, and promote its appreciation, accessibility, and technical mastery among students, pre-professionals, and audiences of all ages.¹²⁶

Texas Ballet Theater School: Training the next generation of dancers and arts patrons is the mission of TBT Schools. Starting with the very young, we nurture aspiring artists to discover their greatest potential and to develop a love of movement, a passion for creativity and an appreciation for the beauty and athleticism of classical dance.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ “About Dallas Ballet Fort Worth Ballet Texas Ballet Theater,” Texas Ballet Theater, accessed January 28, 2016, <http://texasballettheater.org/about/>.

¹²⁷ “Texas Ballet Theater Schools,” Texas Ballet Theater, accessed January 28, 2016, <https://texasballettheater.org/schools/>.

Abbreviated History

Texas Ballet Theater was founded by Margo Dean and Fernando Schaffenburg in 1961 as the Fort Worth Ballet, in Fort Worth, TX and became a fully professional ballet company in 1985.¹²⁸ In 1988, after the demise of Dallas Ballet, the company began additional performances of *The Nutcracker* in Dallas in partnership with the Dallas Opera.¹²⁹ Fort Worth Ballet became Fort Worth Dallas Ballet in 1994.¹³⁰ The two organizations, Fort Worth Dallas Ballet and The Dallas Supporters, operated under a two-corporation/two board structure for nine seasons. In 2001, the Dallas Supporters were not able to raise the funds needed to produce the company's Dallas season forcing FWDB to cancel productions planned in Dallas for early 2002.¹³¹ This occurred during the season when FWDB had no permanent artist director. Over the 2002-2003 season, an agreement to merge the two corporations and their Boards was created.¹³² The resulting organization was then renamed Texas Ballet Theater in 2003 when Ben Stevenson, formerly of Houston Ballet was named Artistic Director.¹³³

School Structure

Texas Ballet Theater School encompasses two locations: the Fort Worth School and the Dallas School. Texas Ballet Theater School (TBTS) provides a complete training program for recreational dancers as well as those aspiring to a professional dance career. The Fort Worth School follows the American Ballet Theatre® National

¹²⁸ Texas Ballet Theater, email to the author, February 22, 2016.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

Training Curriculum and is home to the Texas Ballet Theater School Professional Division, offering class in Preschool and Student Divisions, as well as Professional Division and Adult Classes.¹³⁴ The Dallas School offers training for the Royal Academy of Dance examinations, the American Academy of Ballet Performance Awards and annually participates in Youth American Grand Prix, the world’s largest international student dance competition.¹³⁵ The Dallas School offers training in Preschool and Student Divisions and Adult Classes. Research for this thesis was conducted at the Fort Worth School, which is comprised of the following levels in the Preschool and Student Divisions:

Creative Movement 3-5:	45-minutes per week
Level 1A & 1B	1-hour Ballet Technique per week
Boys Class	1-hour Ballet Technique per week
Level 2A & 2B	two 1-hour Ballet Technique per week
Level 3A	two 1.25-hour Ballet Technique; 1-hour Jazz/Modern Dance per week
Level 3B	three 1.25-hour Ballet Technique; 1-hour Jazz/Modern Dance per week
Level 4A - 4B	one 2.25 plus four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1.5-hour Jazz/Modern Dance
Level 5A - 5B	one 2.25 plus five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1.5-hour Jazz/Modern Dance
Advanced Level	six 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; 1.5-hour Jazz/Modern

¹³⁴ “Ballet Classes Fort Worth Texas Ballet Theater,” Texas Ballet Theater, accessed January 28, 2016, <https://texasballettheater.org/schools/fort-worth-school/>.

¹³⁵ “Dallas Texas Ballet Theater,” Texas Ballet Theater, accessed January 28, 2016, <https://texasballettheater.org/schools/dallas-school/>.

TBT School's Professional Division prepares advanced dancers for a professional ballet career. Students concentrate on perfecting technique and developing artistry through intensive full-day instruction. "This comprehensive program provides the experience necessary to transition from student to professional dancer, all while offering personal attention in an intimate, nurturing environment."¹³⁶ Admission to the Professional Division is by participation in TBT School's summer program or by individual audition. Professional Ballet Technique classes are held five mornings each week followed by Pointe, Variations, Repertoire and Rehearsals.¹³⁷

Texas Ballet Theater School Alumni

Many Texas Ballet Theater trainees and company members are graduates of the school. Alumni also dance professionally with BalletMet, Nashville Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Oklahoma City Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theater II, Ballet Austin, Tulsa Ballet II, Orlando Ballet II, Dayton Ballet and Louisville Ballet. Other graduates continued their higher educations at universities with reputable dance programs including Southern Methodist University, Texas A&M, University of Oklahoma and University of Utah.

BLUEGRASS YOUTH BALLETT

Mission Statement

Mission: To enhance lives by providing dance education in a positive environment for all youth through high quality training, innovative performances, and cultural experiences.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ "Texas Ballet Theater School Professional Division," Texas Ballet Theater, accessed January 28, 2016, <https://texasballettheater.org/schools/professional-division/>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ "Mission and Core Values," Bluegrass Youth Ballet, accessed March, 19, 2016, <http://www.bluegrassyouthballet.org/bybsite/mission-core-values-youth-ballet/>.

Core Values

Expectations of the Art form:

Dance is an art discipline that, by itself, will educate students in a variety of ways. Bluegrass Youth Ballet believes that the arts in general are a source of well-being. Dancers will benefit from this art discipline by improving their:

- Self-esteem and self-respect
- Ability to concentrate
- Ability to resolve problems
- Memorize skills

Expectations of our Students:

To conduct themselves with their best behavior and manners and to adhere to BYB Rules and Policies

- To give 110%
- To focus their energies on themselves instead of comparing themselves to other dancers
- To maintain the required level of commitment
- To avoid negative comments about other people
- To respect each other's person and personal belongings
- To attend class regularly and to be on time

Abbreviated History

Bluegrass Youth Ballet (BYB) is a non-profit organization in Lexington, KY providing high quality dance education so students can pursue a professional career in dance. BYB believes in the development of healthy, well-rounded individuals, and encourages its' students to explore interests outside of the studio. BYB performances are educational in nature, and they generally incorporate other art disciplines, so students learn how to work as part of one artistic body. Students perform in several community events, giving students community service opportunities. At BYB, no dream is too big.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ "History of Bluegrass Youth Ballet," Bluegrass Youth Ballet, 2014, accessed March 19, 2016, <http://www.bluegrassyouthballet.org/bybsite/history-bluegrass-youth-ballet/>.

Adalhi Aranda, founder and director of BYB trained under the Royal Academy of Dancing system. Aranda created Bluegrass Youth Ballet in 2003 to satisfy the need for high quality dance education in a healthy, fun and encouraging environment.¹⁴⁰

School Structure

All students are accepted through open enrollment into Bluegrass Youth Ballet. Prospective students are observed in an age and level appropriate class to be evaluated for level placement. BYB offers classes in the following programs of study each week:

Primary Division

Creative Movement (Ages 3-4)	one 45-minute class
Pre-Ballet 1 (Age 5 or 1st year student)	one 1-hour class
Pre-Ballet 2 (6,7 or 2nd year student)	one 1-hour class
Boys Ballet 1 (Ages 6-9 no experience)	one 1-hour class

Elementary Division

Level A	two 1-hour Ballet Technique; one 1-hour Modern/Character
Level B	two 1.25-hour Ballet Technique; one 1-hour Modern/Character
Level C	two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; one 1-hour Modern/Character

Intermediate Division

Level D	three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique one of which is Pre-Pointe; one 1.25-hour Conditioning/Contemporary/Jazz
Level E	three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; one 1.75-hour Ballet Technique/Pre-Pointe; one 1.25-hour Contemporary/Jazz
Level F	two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; one 1.75-hour Ballet Technique; one 1.5-hour Pointe; one 1.25-hour Contemporary/Jazz

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Pre-Professional Division

Level G five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique/Pointe; two 1-hour Rehearsal/Variations; one 2-hour Partnering; one 1.25-hour Contemporary/Jazz

Level H five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique/Pointe; two 1.5-hour Rehearsal/Variations; one 2-hour Partnering; one 1.25-hour Contemporary/Jazz

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH BALLET

Mission Statement

Vision: Changing lives through dance.

Mission: To inspire, educate and enrich lives through training in and performance of classical ballet.

Values: Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet strives to operate in accordance with the utmost integrity and the highest standards in all relationships. CPYB is committed to integrity, diligence, excellence and inclusiveness among all affiliates.¹⁴¹

Abbreviated History

Marcia Dale Weary opened the Marcia Dale School of Dance, now Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet (CPYB), in 1955 upon returning to her hometown after studying at the School of Ballet Repertory in New York City under the tutelage of Thalia Mara and Arthur Mahoney.¹⁴² Since its inception, CPYB has grown from a small, local dance studio to a nationally recognized school training 21,000 students over the past six decades. Weary began producing full-length ballets in the 1960s and today the Resident Ballet Company of CPYB's season includes both classical and contemporary performances throughout the year. CPYB is honored as the only pre-

¹⁴¹ "Vision, Mission and Values," Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/about/mission-vision>.

¹⁴² "The School CPYB," Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/school>.

professional company in the country licensed to perform *George Balanchine's The Nutcracker*TM. In 1998 CPYB initiated ChoreoPlan, a program developed to encourage the creation of new works in the classical genre by emerging choreographers from across the nation.¹⁴³

School Structure

Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet provides high quality training to students from across the United States and around the world. CPYB is an internationally renowned school offering preeminent training in and performance of classical ballet to students at all levels from beginner to pre-professional. Divisions of the school include Preschool for children beginning at age three, Primary for ages six and older and Pre-Professional in addition to summer and men's programs. Each division challenges students in their physical, mental, artistic and emotional development.

Evaluations for class level placement and promotions are solely based on individual ability and are independent of age or time spent in any given level. As a result, classes are often comprised of students of a wide age variety dancing at the same technical level. This structure affords any student regardless of age or experience the opportunity to train at CPYB should they commit to the rigorous schedule. The CPYB class schedule has a unique structure. Dancers are required to attend a minimum number of ballet classes per week for their age level but are encouraged take an unlimited number of classes within their level or below with no tuition increase.

CPYB's Academic Program is comprised of the following levels:

¹⁴³ "CPYB Curriculum," Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/about/profile>.

Preschool Division (minimum one class per week in each of the following)¹⁴⁴

Creative Movement (Pre-Kindergarten, ages three to five)

Tap (ages 3 to six)

Pre-Ballet (Kindergarten, ages five to six)

Primary Division (Ballet Technique Classes)¹⁴⁵

Level 1A minimum three; six plus classes available per week

Level 1B minimum seven; fifteen plus classes available per week

Level 2A minimum nine; fifteen plus classes available per week

Level 2B minimum twelve, twenty plus classes available per week

Pre-Professional Division: Students in the Pre-Professional Division must attend all required technique classes for their level Monday through Saturday completing a minimum of twenty-six classes per week. Additional optional classes are also offered affording pre-professional students the opportunity to take up to forty classes every week. In addition to Ballet Technique, students in the Pre-Professional Division who have achieved proper technique may qualify to participate in Pointe, *Pas de Deux*, Variations and Men's Class.¹⁴⁶ Informative seminars on topics including nutrition and wellness, injury prevention, resume preparation and more are also included in the curriculum.

¹⁴⁴“CPYB Preschool Program,” Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/school/academic-program/pre-school>.

¹⁴⁵“CPYB Primary Division,” Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/school/academic-program/primary>.

¹⁴⁶“CPYB Pre-Professional Division,” Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/school/academic-program/pre-professional>.

Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet Alumni

CPYB alumni in the field are renowned performers, artistic directors, choreographers and dance faculty. Dancers hold corps de ballet, soloist and principal ranks in many major ballet companies, some of which include American Ballet Theatre, Ballet Arizona, BalletMet, Ballet West, Boston Ballet, Carolina Ballet, English National Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, Miami City Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, New York City Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Slovak National Theatre, Stuttgart Ballet, and Texas Ballet Theater. CPYB alumni may also be seen on Broadway.¹⁴⁷

COLORADO CONSERVATORY OF DANCE

Mission Statement

Mission: The Colorado Conservatory of Dance provides the highest quality dance education in both classical and contemporary styles. Colorado Conservatory of Dance uses dance to foster community, create positive influence and inspire the individual.

Vision: The Colorado Conservatory of Dance will be a responsible and stable national model of excellence in dance education, health & wellness, and non-profit management.

Values: With direction, purposes, and intent, the Colorado Conservatory of Dance creates a healthy and generous environment where student, parents and community members are nurtured and encouraged to develop their most creative and fulfilled selves. We responsibly pursue our mission with high standards and high expectations. We value mentorship and partnership, and we believe that dance should be available and accessible to all.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ “CPYB Alumni,” Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet Alumni, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.cpyb.org/alumni/alumni-in-the-field>.

¹⁴⁸ “About Colorado Conservatory of Dance,” Colorado Conservatory of Dance, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://ccdance.org/about/>.

Abbreviated History

“Formerly known as Ballet Nouveau Colorado, Colorado Conservatory of Dance (CCD) was founded in 1992 to fill a need for quality ballet training and educational dance programs in Denver’s north metro community.”¹⁴⁹ The National Guild certified CCD’s quality programs for Community Arts Education in 1999.¹⁵⁰ A need for accessibility to dance performance drove the school to establish a professional company in 2002 with a small group of dancers presenting performances at local theaters.¹⁵¹ CCD now serves more than 400 students and through community education reaches 15,000 individuals each year.

School Structure

CCD has its own teaching syllabus based on a mixture of the English RAD system, the Italian Cecchetti method, and the French system.¹⁵² In more advanced levels, dancers study Pilates, Modern dance, Jazz, and Composition, as well as their regular ballet and pointe classes. “These classes work together to build kinesthetically healthy and diverse dancers. CCD offers programs in Early Dance, Primary Division, Intermediate Division, Advanced Division, Late Beginners, Adult Classes, Adaptive Dance Education, Boys & Men’s Classes and Professionals Program including the following levels, all classes listed per week.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ “Colorado Conservatory of Dance Alumni,” Colorado Conservatory of Dance, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://ccdance.org/?s=alumni>.

Early Dance (ages 1-8)

Dance With Me

Varying eight-week sessions

Children's Ballet I-III

one to two 1-hour Ballet Technique; Tap, Boys' Class, Anatomy and Strength

Primary Division (ages 7-12)

Level A

two to three 1.25-hour Ballet Technique, Jazz, Boys' Class; 1-hour Anatomy and Strength

Level B

two to three 1.5-hour Ballet Technique, Jazz, Boys Class; 1-hour Anatomy and Strength per week

Intermediate Division (ages 9-15)

Level C

three to four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; Jazz and/or Modern; Boys' Class

Level D

minimum of four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; two 45-minute Pre-Pointe; Jazz and/or Modern; Pilates; Men's Class

Advanced Division (ages 12-17)

Level E

minimum of four 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three 45-minute Pointe; Jazz and/or Modern, Pilates, Men's Class

Level F

minimum of five 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three 45-minute Pointe; Pilates; Jazz, Modern and/or Composition; Contemporary

Level G

minimum of six 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three Pointe; Jazz, Modern and/or Contemporary; Pilates; Men's Class

Level H

minimum of six 1.5-hour Ballet Technique; three Pointe; Jazz, Modern and/or Composition; Pilates; Contemporary, Men's Class

Colorado Conservatory of Dance Alumni

Colorado Conservatory of Dance Alumni have performed with professional companies including Ballet West, Dissonance Dance Theatre, Orlando Ballet and Verb Ballet. Graduates have also continued their dance education and performing at professional schools and universities including Ballet Arizona School, Harid Conservatory, Houston Ballet's Ben Stevensoné Academy, National Ballet School of Canada, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre School, Washington Ballet School, Dominican University/LINES, Indiana University, Marymount Manhattan, University of Arizona, University of Kansas University of Oklahoma, and University of Utah.¹⁵⁴

PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF BALLET

Mission Statement

Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Society Mission Statement:

- To educate the general public on the art of ballet and dance
- To foster an atmosphere to raise cultural awareness to the general public
- To provide performing opportunities for talented dance students
- To assist career-oriented dancers to find professional artistic expression
- To promote professionalism and excellence in the art of classical dance

Abbreviated History

Margarita and John White established Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet in 1974 with the goal of providing quality education in the art of classical ballet to serious students of all ages. The Whites met as members of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba where they performed internationally and began their teaching careers after learning the

¹⁵⁴ Wilkinson Manley, email to author, March 16, 2016.

Vaganova teaching method from Soviet Ballet masters.¹⁵⁵ In 1977 John White gave his first Vaganova Teachers' Seminar and to date has given his seminar in both national and international venues to over seven hundred novice and professional teachers, ballet masters and directors.¹⁵⁶ This first class of PAB graduates began their professional careers in 1978. In 1986 The Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Society was founded as a non-profit organization to offer high quality, low cost performances and provide support to pre-professional students seeking positions in professional companies. PAB instructors traveled to Saint Petersburg, Russia to observe classes in the Vaganova Academy, the method in which their training is based. In 2009, John White's first book, *Advanced Principles in Teaching Classical Ballet* was published. In 2013, White's daughter, Melinda Pendleton became the owner and director of PAB.¹⁵⁷

School Structure

All teachers at PAB follow the Vaganova method ensuring continuity of ballet instruction. The school is divided into sections based on age including: Creative Movement, Creative Music and Pre-Ballet, for children five to seven years of age; the Regular division classes for dancers eight years old through pre-professional; and Adult division classes. "Creative Movement, Creative Music and Pre-Ballet provide an introduction to dance and music in an enjoyable and relaxed environment. Focusing on coordination, musicality and basic ballet steps while fostering a love of dance and

¹⁵⁵ "The School Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Narberth, PA," Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.paacademyofballet.com/theschool/>.

¹⁵⁶ "PAB History," Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.paacademyofballet.com/lookingback/>.

¹⁵⁷ "Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet History," Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.paacademyofballet.com/lookingback/>.

music.”¹⁵⁸ The studio’s Regular Division is comprised of seven levels. Age, former experience and a placement class determine student level assignment.

Levels 1-4 emphasize the fundamentals of classical dance. Focusing on correct placement and execution of ballet steps paves the way for progressive ballet technique. Pointe work is introduced at Level 4 at the discretion of the teacher and director. Levels 5-7 challenge students with advancing technique combined with artistic demands. As students advance and grow stronger they begin to take lessons more frequently establishing a mental and physical confidence through the art of ballet. Variations and Partnering classes along with performance opportunities are introduced allowing students to grow as dancers and immersing artists.¹⁵⁹

Dancers at PAB train in the schedule and requirements of the following levels (all classes listed in each level meet weekly):¹⁶⁰

Creative Movement/Pre-Ballet

Creative Movement (age 5)	1-hour
Pre-Ballet I (ages 6-7)	1-hour
Pre-Ballet II (age 7)	1.5-hour

Regular Division

Level I	two 1.5 hour Ballet Technique
Level 2	two 1.5 hour Ballet Technique
Level 3	two 1.5 hour Ballet Technique
Level 4	one 2-hour and two 1.5 hour Ballet Technique/Pointe
Level 5	two 2-hour and one 1.5-hour Ballet Technique/Pointe
Level 6	two 2-hour and two 1.5-hour Ballet Technique/Pointe

¹⁵⁸ “Curriculum Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet,” Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.paacademyofballet.com/theschool/curriculum/>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ “Academy Schedule Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet,” Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, accessed November 3, 2016, <http://www.paacademyofballet.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/fall-2015-2016.pdf>.

Level 7

two 2-hour and three 1.5-hour Ballet
Technique/Pointe; Variations; *Pas de Deux*

Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Alumni

PAB alumni have danced in many professional companies around the world some of which include: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, Ballet Met, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Houston Ballet, Hubbard Street Theater, Mark Morris Dance Group, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Pennsylvania Ballet and San Francisco Ballet.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ “Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Alumni,” Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, accessed November 3, 2016, <http://www.paacademyofballet.com/lookingback/alumni/>.

CHAPTER III. ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF PRE-POINTE PEDAGOGY

SCHOOL AND CLASS STRUCTURE

How Many Years of Codified Ballet Training Have Pre-Pointe Students Completed?

It is important to quantify the amount of classical ballet training a dancer should complete before beginning pre-pointe and pointe. The physical requirements for pointe may only be achieved through the specific study, repetition, and proper execution of classical ballet technique. A student will not be qualified to begin pre-pointe and pointe training, regardless of natural aptitude, without mastering an appropriate command of predetermined ballet vocabulary. Such achievement may only be accomplished through concentrated dance training comprised of multiple classes weekly devoted to ballet technique. Such disciplines including Creative Movement, Tap, Gymnastics or Jazz may prove beneficial as supplemental training to the developing dancer but should not be considered substitutions for ballet technique in preparation for pointe.

The term “level” is commonly used in ballet to define a grade of study. Similar to elementary school, children will master information presented in Level I, II, III, and so on as they would in first, second or third grade. While a student will spend an entire academic year in first grade, the duration of time spent in a ballet Level I may vary depending on the ballet school’s structure, mission and teaching philosophy in conjunction with the child’s technical advancement and individual cognitive and physical development. It is not uncommon for some students to progress through ballet levels at a quicker rate in early childhood years, while others advance more rapidly during or after adolescence. It should be the goal of ballet schools to place each child in

the level most beneficial for their long-term growth. While it may be difficult for a dance student to understand and appreciate this varied rate of advancement, the end result of transforming a dancer from beginner student to professional artist is the motivating factor for these level placement decisions. Mission statement, teaching philosophy, curriculum, syllabus, student-teacher ratio, school size, and studio space all contribute to how ballet schools structure the program of study and determine the amount of time a child will spend in each level. Due to these variables, it is important to consider the length of study required to begin pre-pointe and pointe training from several different ballet organizations.

Meg Potter, Assistant Principal of Pacific Northwest Ballet School (PNBS) details the years of training their students must complete before beginning pre-pointe. “At PNBS students start Pre-Ballet classes at age 7 and then must have completed Level I (two times per week for 1.25 hours) and Level II (two times per week for 1.5 hours) in order to be promoted to Level III which includes Pre-Pointe class.”¹⁶² Potter elaborates that this timeline applies to students who are promoted each year. “Some students may repeat Level I or II before being promoted to Level III.”¹⁶³ Pre-pointe is introduced in Level III. At PNBS Level III students usually complete three years of study if Pre-Ballet is included and possibly four if a student has to repeat a lower level.

American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School (ABT JKO School) splits the school into two divisions, a Children’s Division, which includes Primary Levels, and the most advanced Pre-Professional Division. Melissa Bowman, ABT JKO School Children’s Division Principal explains, “Should a student enter ABT

¹⁶² Meg Potter, emailed to author, November 22, 2015.

¹⁶³ Potter, 2015.

JKO School in the earliest level, she would have completed five years before beginning pointe. This includes one year of study in each of the following levels: Primary A, Primary B, Level 1A, Level 1B, and Level 2. Students transition to dancing *en pointe* in Level 3 in ABT's curriculum."¹⁶⁴ Elements of ballet technique are introduced in the Primary levels; however, audition for placement within the school and formal classical ballet training begins in Level IA.

Dancers at the Kansas City Ballet School (KCBS) begin pre-pointe in Level 3 and pointe in their first year of Level 4, according to Grace Holmes, School Director. At this time, dancers will have completed at least two years of classical ballet training including one year each in Levels 1 and 2.¹⁶⁵ More time in a lower level may be required depending on each child's individual progress.

Students at Texas Ballet Theatre School (TBTS) begin pointe in their second year of Level 4. School Director Kathryn Warakomsky explains that on average students evaluated to begin pointe will have completed four years of codified training. This progression includes one year in each of Levels 1-3 plus their first year in Level 4, which is when pre-pointe is introduced.¹⁶⁶

Pennsylvania Ballet Academy (PAB) is a pre-professional school located in Narberth, Pennsylvania training dancers in the Vaganova method. Melinda Pendleton, School Director explains the adaptations necessary to adjust the Russian system of training to their American students, which impacts their class schedule, syllabus division and level structure. "In Vaganova, students begin pointe at the end of year one. Dancers are invited to join the school through a rigorous selection process and are very

¹⁶⁴ Melissa Bowman, phone conversation with author, January 14, 2016.

¹⁶⁵ Grace Holmes, interviewed by author, Kansas City, MO, January 1, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Kathryn Warakomsky, phone conversation with author, January 13, 2016.

talented and well formed, which is often in contrast to every student in a western ballet school. Therefore, year one of the Vaganova method will be completed in two years at PAB.”¹⁶⁷ If a student attends class regularly, they will have completed three years of training before transitioning to pointe work. John White, PAB founder and author of *Teaching Classical Ballet* and *Advanced Principles of Teaching Classical Ballet*, further elaborates by saying, “Those [students] who do not attend class two times per week are discouraged to do pointe at all.”

Students at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet (CPYB), located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania have a rigorous schedule, taking ballet technique classes six days weekly. Student placement and level promotion is based solely on their individual technical ability. The amount of training students complete prior to beginning pre-pointe or pointe varies greatly due to the frequency of study and the rate at which each dancer progresses through levels. Students are required to take a certain number of classes per week prescribed for their level placement. Level IA students must take a minimum of three classes per week; however, they are encouraged to attend as many classes as they would like at their level or below with no additional tuition increase. As a result, dancers in Levels 1-3 may take ballet class six days per week with several technique classes available every day. CPYB bases all student level placement and promotion on individual technical ability. Therefore, there is no universal length of study to begin pointe work. Age is not a factor in determining a student’s assigned level. CPYB School Principal, Alecia Good-Boresow comments, “Progress and readiness for pointe are not

¹⁶⁷ Melinda Pendleton, interviewed by author, Narberth, PA, November 5, 2015.

valuated in years. Students are evaluated individually and advance at their own rate. Thus, years of study will be different from student to student.”¹⁶⁸

Responses to this question often depend on the structure of the school and when students are permitted to begin training. Julia Wilkinson Manley, CEO and Artistic Director of Colorado Conservatory of Dance (CCD) explains,

As CCD is a community school of the arts, our students have a varying degree of experience when they begin pre-pointe training. Many students may have started at the age of three or five, some may have started as late as nine or ten, and others may have started as teenagers. The average pre-pointe student begins pre-pointe training at éen or twelve years old. Older students may have as little as two years of training prior to beginning pointe, while students who began at a young age may have five to seven years of prior training. All students who enter our pre-pointe program must have a certain level of strength and technical/kinesthetic understanding before beginning pre-pointe.¹⁶⁹

Students at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy complete four to five years of classical ballet training including Pre-Ballet, which is considered a transitional level bridging dancers from Creative Dance to Level 1 before beginning pointe work. Dancers are also assessed for admittance into the Pre-Professional Division in Pre-Ballet. While Pre-Ballet is part of the Preschool Program, it is considered the earliest level of ballet training, important for assessing the child and preparing them for classical ballet study.

How Many Ballet Classes/Hours Per Week Are Required of Pre-Pointe Students?

Students with predetermined sufficient experience and technical mastery may be prepared for pre-pointe study. Once dancers achieve this level of training, how much class time per week should be prescribed to ensure they graduate to dancing *en pointe*?

¹⁶⁸ Alecia Good-Boresow, interviewed by author, Carlisle, PA, November 3, 2015.

¹⁶⁹ Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

There are many factors determining a dancer's readiness for pointe, which will be addressed in following sections. Decisions concerning appropriate class length and frequency of study per week at the pre-pointe level must be determined by ballet schools so they may properly prepare a student to transition to pointe work. In addition to student readiness, sufficient class time ensures the instructor adequate opportunity for assessing a dancer's individual physical condition and in some cases limitations which may preclude or delay a child from beginning pointe. Such observations, noted over time, may aid in parent/teacher communication concerning promotion to pointe.

At the pre-pointe level of training dancers are introduced to new vocabulary, refine technique fundamentals and gain strength while experiencing significant physical development. Sufficient class time ensures these goals may be realistically met. At this level of training certain schools introduce courses in conditioning, Pilates or related body awareness disciplines. The purpose of this supplemental training is to further strengthen, address anatomical conditions and promote greater body awareness for developing adolescent dancers who are beginning pre-pointe and pointe work. This thesis research will present several courses of study which offer program structure for the pre-pointe student.

Dancers in pre-pointe levels at American Ballet Theatre JKO School, Kansas City Ballet School, Pacific Northwest Ballet School and Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet all require three 1.5-hour ballet technique classes per week. Texas Ballet Theatre students take four technique classes per week ranging from 1.5 to 2.25 hours in length. The extended classes at TBT allow for pointe specific study.

At Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet classes are unlimited. Pre-pointe students take ballet technique classes six days per week with nine to twelve weekly classes for their level. Dancers may also take any ballet class below the level they are assigned. Many classes at CPYB are set, which means that students repeat the same series of exercises with little variation. This structure requires less time for new combinations or sequences to be introduced. Classes where new material is introduced are longer, 1.5-hours in length, while classes designed for repetition are an hour.

In addition to technique, supplemental courses are implemented to develop strength or introduce the dancer to a secondary discipline. At ABT JKO School, Level 3 dancers take a 1-hour body conditioning class and 1-hour character class each week. KCBS dancers have 1-hour of Jazz class and the boys take 30 minutes of body conditioning twice weekly in lieu of pre-pointe instruction. While these new disciplines are introduced into the dancer's curriculum, ballet technique remains the primary focus. Dancers who have a strong foundation in classical ballet tend to more easily excel in other dance forms in addition to being better prepared for pointe work.

Several schools reserve a portion of class specifically for pre-pointe instruction. Kansas City Ballet School schedules two 30-minute pre-pointe sessions each week following ballet technique class for the girls while boys attend conditioning class.¹⁷⁰ Pendleton of PAB adds 15 minutes for all level 3 students at the end of technique classes in the spring semester for pre-pointe specific instruction.¹⁷¹ Pacific Northwest Ballet School students have a 45-minute pre-pointe class weekly following their ballet

¹⁷⁰ Holmes, 2016.

¹⁷¹ Pendleton, 2015.

technique classes¹⁷², while TBT incorporates ten minutes of pre-pointe exercises at the end of barre for their level 4 pre-pointe students.¹⁷³ Students at Colorado Conservatory of Dance (CCD) must take at least three technique classes and two 45-minute concurrent pre-pointe classes each week.¹⁷⁴

How Much Time is Scheduled for Beginning Pointe Per Week?

When pointe preparation is the topic of research, it is important to consider what the students are being prepared for. Obviously students are preparing to dance *en pointe* but what will they experience during their very first year in pointe shoes? There are different philosophies regarding this topic. Pointe shoes require a period of significant adjustment. In the earliest years of pointe training, the shoes can be painful, cumbersome and difficult to manipulate. Steps that once came with ease through years of diligent practice in ballet slippers often become more challenging in an instant when the dancer puts on her first pair of shoes. In consideration of this transition, the introduction and time spent in pointe shoes must be carefully examined. Prioritizing student health, safety, and wellness by following a gradual and systematic approach is essential whether schools elect to have several short pointe sessions per week or require full hour-length pointe classes. Gradual, systematic introduction with great attention to student health and well-being are of the utmost priority.

CPYB and PNBS students take three 1-hour beginning pointe classes per week. KCBS Level 4 dancers have two 1-hour pointe classes each week. At TBT students begin with 30 minutes of pointe per week then graduate to two 1-hour pointe classes.

¹⁷² Potter, 2015.

¹⁷³ Warakomsky, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Julia Wilkinson Manley, email to author, February 29, 2016.

CCD beginning pointe students are required to take a minimum of three technique classes per week and three concurrent beginning pointe classes.

An alternate philosophy incorporates pointe at the end of every ballet class. White of Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet recommends in *Teaching Classical Ballet* that “Separate pointe classes even at the advanced level are not advised. Rather, students should spend fifteen to twenty minutes at the end of each class several times per week. This accustoms students to the rigors and discomfort of pointe.”¹⁷⁵ White suggests that students realize greater benefit from putting their pointe shoes on more frequently in shorter increments than in 1-hour blocks of time.

Bowman of ABT JKO School elaborates that although beginning pointe classes are an hour, the students are not dancing *en pointe* the entire duration of class.¹⁷⁶ Children are becoming familiar with the shoes, learning and developing skills in putting the shoes on, ribbon tying, types of padding, toe taping and other logistical manners which accompany beginning pointe work. Exercises are slow and methodical with a low percentage of class time danced *en pointe*. Simply standing, walking and practicing steps which are non-weight bearing on the tips of the toes takes time and adjustment. The transition to dancing *en pointe* is a gradual process. ABT JKO School feels students should not be expected to execute technique steps *en pointe* with the same proficiency as they do in ballet slippers. Time spent simply wearing the pointe shoes without being *en pointe* toughens the skin and familiarizes the students with the shoes, which lessens pain and the likelihood of blisters and other ailments.

¹⁷⁵ White, *Teaching Classical Ballet*, 65.

¹⁷⁶ Bowman, 2016.

Pendleton, of PAB, also expresses concern for the amount of time students spend in pointe shoes when they participate in summer intensive programs.¹⁷⁷ Many schools require a student to be *en pointe* for a year to attend summer study. At this stage of training a student would still be considered a beginner on pointe and accustomed to wearing their shoes a maximum of thirty minutes to an hour a few times weekly. However, dancers attending their first summer intensive may be asked to wear their pointe shoes for multiple hours each day for class and rehearsal periods. This significant time increase can make the dancer more susceptible to injury. Health, student wellness, and experience *en pointe* should be considered in the class structure of summer intensive programs to avoid the potential of injury of beginning pointe students.

Do You Offer Pre-Pointe Specific Classes or Build Preparation Into The Curriculum?

As described in the background section of this thesis, preparing girls to dance *en pointe* has long been a fundamental objective of early classical ballet training. Throughout history young students of the Cecchetti method, The Bournonville School, The French School, Royal Academy of Dancing and the Vaganova method developed the use of the foot and strengthened the legs and trunk with *relevés* and *sautés*. Without specific attention to these elements, successfully dancing *en pointe* would be impossible. Until recently, female dance students progressed from using soft ballet slippers to highly structured pointe shoes with minimal attention to the transitional stage. However, contemporary knowledge in fields such as anatomy, exercise science and adolescent development is motivating dance educators to re-examine the pedagogy

¹⁷⁷ Pendleton, 2015.

of pointe preparation. This by no means suggests that foundational codified methods, which have produced generations of exquisite ballerinas, are antiquated or should be modified in any way.

ABT JKO School's curriculum prepares dancers for pointe without the need of supplemental pre-pointe classes. Bowman explains that *relevés*, *pliés* and foot strengthening exercises are implemented into technique classes from the earliest level of training.¹⁷⁸ Pointe combinations may be practiced on *demi* or three-quarter pointe to also develop foot strength and articulation. The children's body conditioning class also prepares the dancer for pointe by strengthening the muscles of the core and allotting additional time to focus on alignment and stretching.

Bluegrass Youth Ballet offers a detailed pre-pointe program, which takes approximately one year and a half to complete. "We follow a twelve week pre-pointe program. After students are evaluated and they have a green light from a physical therapist, they add one exercise per week each week until completing those twelve exercises at the barre. There are specific exercises and classes in preparation for pointe work. After they have successfully completed their beginning training of twelve weeks or so, we will add center exercises. After the first year, their classes become more of a regular technique class."¹⁷⁹

Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet integrates pointe preparation into their syllabus and also offers shorter increments of pre-pointe classes. Pendleton comments, "The Vaganova method trains and prepares dancers from the beginning by incorporating the use of *demi-pointe*, *relevé* and *sauté*." White further elaborates this concept by stating,

¹⁷⁸ Bowman, 2016.

¹⁷⁹ Adalhi Aranda, email to author, March 1, 2016.

“Classes that incorporate *demi-pointe* work better prepares female students for work on full pointe. A well-structured class and method should prepare students for pointe. *Relevé* should be incorporated in the earliest level and students should do a lot of exercises on *demi-pointe* both at the barre and in the center. Adding pointe for a dancer accustomed to working with regularity on *demi-pointe* presents fewer challenges.”¹⁸⁰

However, Pendleton recently started implementing fifteen-minute pre-pointe sessions following technique class in the second semester of PAB Level 3. This time is used for foot stretching and strengthening and also incorporates Theraband™ practice. She finds this additional class time allows a teacher to further analyze a student’s readiness for pointe and aids in communicating expectations and assessments to parents and dancers.

“Pacific Northwest Ballet School students have a dedicated pre-pointe class of 45 minutes, which is scheduled right after a regular technique class on one of the three days a Level III student attends class,” says Potter¹⁸¹. While two thirty-minute pre-pointe classes are built into the Level 3 curriculum at the Kansas City Ballet School. Female dancers at KCBS develop foot strength and articulation through the use of soft block shoes, Theraband™ and additional *relevé* practice, while male students attend body conditioning. Soft block shoes are a pre-pointe transitional shoe which provides the structured shank of the pointe shoe without the support of the block. Further information on pre-pointe shoes will be presented in subsequent sections of this thesis.

“Hopefully, pointe preparation is built into ballet technique curriculum as a natural part of what we do,” expresses Mary Margaret Holt Dean of the University of Oklahoma’s Weitzenhoffer Family College of Fine Arts and OU’s School of Dance

¹⁸⁰ John White, interviewed by author, Narberth, PA, November 5, 2015.

¹⁸¹ Potter, 2015.

Director. “However, there can be great value in additional time for pre-pointe training. The curriculum may be flexible, allowing the teacher to address specific needs of the class. The emphasis is on slow work and repetition. Classical ballet training, including pre-pointe and beginning pointe is so much more about the “how” than the “what”.”¹⁸²

Elements of pointe preparation are introduced as early as Pre-Ballet at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy with the inclusion of *demi-pointe* and jumping. Houston Ballet’s curriculum does not detail a separate course of pre-pointe study.¹⁸³ The progression of Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy’s training naturally prepares female students for dancing *en pointe* by developing the use of *relevé*, jumping, over all muscularity, and the understanding of stretch and extension.¹⁸⁴

Some schools combine pre-pointe and beginning pointe students as a method of pointe preparation. At Texas Ballet Theater School, dancers in their first year of Level 4 take the portion of class that is *en pointe* in ballet shoes with a heightened focus on the use of *demi* and three-quarter pointe for greater foot strength and articulation. This allows pre-pointe dancers to realize the benefits achieved through *relevé* and other pointe related exercises. Once they are deemed fit to begin pointe, students already know the combinations from their pre-pointe experience.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, students at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet take pointe class in technique shoes. CPYB has separate hour-long classes devoted to beginning pointe. Some children are strong enough to begin pointe immediately, while others need time to improve in strength from additional practice on *demi* and three-quarter pointe. As these students transition to

¹⁸² Mary Margaret Holt, interviewed by author, Norman, OK, February 12, 2016.

¹⁸³ Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, interviewed by author, Houston, TX, March 8, 2016.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Warakomsky, 2016.

pointe, they may be asked only to do a portion of the class, usually barre, in pointe shoes then complete the remainder of class in ballet slippers. The timeline will differ for each student dependent on their individual needs and abilities.

What Is The Average Pre-Pointe Class Size?

Many schools interviewed emphasize the importance of assessing each student individually at the pre-pointe level of training. Factors such as physical development, strength, technical ability and anatomical structure are unique to each child and necessary determinants in readiness for pointe. Schools must also consider class size, as this directly affects the instructor's ability to properly evaluate and guide each student. Logistical factors such as available studio space, enrollment and scheduling may affect a school's student-teacher ratio. While the number of students in pre-pointe classes may be different for each organization, it is important for schools to set appropriate class size limits to maximize student improvement potential and instructional effectiveness.

How Are Students Evaluated For Admittance Into The School?

At first glance, this question may not seem relevant to pre-pointe training. However, it is necessary to consider an organization's structure and business model when looking at a school's student body demographic. In an ideal world, ballet schools would have ample studio space, the ability to make all decisions based on artistic rather than financial needs, and only accept students who have the optimal physical requirements for ballet. This is rarely the scenario in American ballet schools where it

is possible for children of all ability levels to enroll in ballet classes. There are benefits of having a school with open enrollment. Independent or community schools offer the chance to dance to students who may not be given the same opportunity in a professional ballet academy. In addition to training dancers, these organizations also make business decisions in the best interest of the school to maintain financial viability. The structure of a professional academy or highly selective school affiliated with a professional company will be different than a school that is also a small business. It is important to identify the differences between these types of organizations, as they directly affect school structure and training methods.

A primary consideration influencing pre-pointe and pointe promotion is how students are admitted into a school. A ballet school that only accepts children with specific physical requirements will function differently than one that offers open enrollment. The inclusive practice of open enrollment allows children with varied body types and physical attributes to study ballet. Many dance professionals interviewed for this thesis recognize that it is not possible to predict with one hundred percent assurance a young child's likelihood of becoming a professional dancer. While students who may initially be overlooked have surprised teachers as they grow and mature.

Schools that admit students through an audition process are able to screen for particular anatomical limitations which are known to impede progress and ability to execute classical ballet vocabulary. Many of these anatomical characteristics are directly linked to potential challenges for pointe work. A school with open enrollment

permits children of all body types and physical limitations, which may present challenges for pre-pointe training and pointe promotion.

Data on curriculum, student advancement and promotion to pointe is dependent on the aforementioned logistical factors. It is unrealistic to expect the same results or implement similar programs in schools with differing admittance policies. This thesis will present student admittance procedures from organizations who practice open enrollment and those who select dancers through an audition process.

“Pacific Northwest Ballet School has open enrollment in the Children’s Division, which included classes through Pre-Ballet. At the end of Pre-Ballet, students are invited (or not) to continue into the Student Division (Levels I-VII). Any student eight years or older wishing to enroll in classes at PNBS, and not currently a student, must take an audition class,” explains Potter.¹⁸⁶ This is very similar to the audition process at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy. Students who have completed the Preschool Division will be given first priority for acceptance into the Pre-Professional Division through a closed audition at the end of their Pre-Ballet class. All prospective Level 1 through 8 students must audition for acceptance into the academy. This allows the faculty to assess a child’s projected aptitude for exceling at classical ballet training and screen for known challenging physical limitations.

Children at Texas Ballet Theater School must also audition for acceptance into the pre-professional school. While most students are accepted at TBT School, students must be at an appropriate level of technical proficiency proportionate to their age.¹⁸⁷

Kansas City Ballet School offers a combination of open enrollment and admittance

¹⁸⁶ Potter, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Warakomsky, 2016.

through selection. While any child may enroll at KCBS, they must take an audition class to be evaluated for level placement.¹⁸⁸ This is also true for dancers at Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet. Technical ability proportionate to age ensures a student will be placed with their peers, which is most beneficial to their physical and emotional well-being. If a young dancer just beginning at twelve or thirteen years of age shows great potential, PAB may offer a combination of private lessons, adult classes and supplemental instruction to transition the student into the appropriate level. This process is generally reserved for the exceptionally motivated student who is getting a late start in training.¹⁸⁹

Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet has an open enrollment policy, but does not take age into consideration for class placement. Level assignment is based solely on technical ability. For this reason, there is often a wide age range of students in each level. There could potentially be a six year old and a twelve year old beginner in Level IA. Conversely, an exceptional twelve year old may work alongside high school seniors in the most advanced class. The syllabus requirements alone dictate the placement of each dancer. “The benefit of this philosophy,” says Good-Boresow, “Is that any student who wishes to study at CPYB is given the opportunity to do so regardless of age. As age variety is commonplace in our school culture, students do not feel demoted or uncomfortable dancing among younger students or vice versa. Class size is limited allowing students, regardless of age, to receive individual attention which benefits their individual progress and advancement.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Holmes, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Pendleton, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Good-Boresow, 2015.

EVALUATION OF POINTE READINESS

Is There Any Other Time In Training Where Students Are Re-Evaluated

And If So, When?

Once a student is accepted into a school, there is no definitive predictor as to how quickly they will progress and graduate to advancing levels. Especially in organizations with open enrollment, there may come a time when a dancer's physical limitations may impede their progress and ability to execute ballet steps demanded at a given level of study. Generally, dancing *en pointe* exposes such limitations and may often be a natural point of departure from ballet or a transition into other dance disciplines including Jazz or Modern Dance where pointe is less important or not necessary at all. As previously described, children develop physically and cognitively at different rates which may affect the speed in which they graduate through levels of dance training. Once children are placed in a level, it is essential that there be a system of evaluation in place to stay abreast of their individual progress. Some institutions try to promote an entire class to keep the consistency of the group uniform, while others ask particular individuals to move-up or repeat a level based on the best projection of improvement. Regardless of philosophy, such decisions should be made in the best long-term interest of the dancer. As pointe is a natural "fork in the road" in ballet training, this evaluation process is a fundamental contributor of pre-pointe training. The difficulty of ballet technique is heightened with the addition of pointe shoes. The anticipation of going *en pointe* is quickly replaced with the realization that pointe work is challenging and sometimes painful. Many young dancers do not have the commitment level to continue ballet training required to meet these additional

challenges. Physical limitations also become more apparent when dancing *en pointe*, making the execution of pointe steps exceptionally difficult for students with limited facility. To continue ballet training beyond beginning pointe requires great determination and commitment. These are some of the reasons there is a natural departure from ballet for some students following their first year of beginning pointe.

As CPYB allows students of any age to join the school, resulting in classes with many ages present, there is no uniform prescribed amount of time required to complete each level. The varied time a student will spend in each level is a direct result of CPYB's student evaluation process. At CPYB, dancers are considered for promotion at any point through the semester, academic year or summer program. In fact, the school year calendar and enrollment are continuous and not segmented in the expected manner. The moment a dancer has achieved the desired technical and artistic requirements outlined by the syllabus, they are immediately promoted.¹⁹¹ Supporting and recognizing individual progress reinforces the theory that children develop and progress at different rates. A small class size is paramount to CPYB's evaluation process and promotion assessment.

Nearly all organizations included in this thesis support constant evaluations of students. These assessments usually culminate in semester and/or end of academic year recommendations. At KCBS students are provided with written evaluations once or twice yearly depending on level. At this time recommendations for promotion may be advised. Evaluations also enable communication with the parent and student regarding individual goals, expectations, areas of concern, or may provide an opportunity for giving positive accolades. As KCBS is in the process of restructuring several of their

¹⁹¹ Good- Boresow, 2015.

intermediate levels, dancer and parent expectations regarding advancement are evolving.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy also places great importance on annual or semiannual student evaluations. Students are generally given written evaluations mid to late January to ensure enough time has been spent in the current level before making assessments.¹⁹² While teachers are constantly monitoring student progress, findings are not expressed to the parent or teacher until the dancer has spent sufficient time in any given level. Written student evaluations are the primary method of parent communication at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy. Further in-person conferences may be scheduled in specific circumstances.

ABT JKO School's curriculum naturally defines annual assessment through the process of examination. Requirements are delineated by American Ballet Theatre's® National Training Curriculum for each level. How successfully students have met these requirements is assessed at the completion of each academic year through an examination class. If a student has achieved the desired proficiency of ballet vocabulary as outlined by the curriculum they will advance to the next level. A primary objective at the completion of Level 2 is that a dancer must be ready for pointe to advance to Level 3. This ensures that the entire Level 3 class will be prepared for pointe at the same time.

With few exceptions, there is a common time allotment students spend in each level. All organizations agree that this length of study is always best for every dancer in their school but gives the parent and child a projected course of study as they navigate through the school levels. Through this research it became apparent that there is a

¹⁹² Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

unanimous philosophy of allowing an individual enough time in every level to realize the full benefit of each phase of training. While evaluation processes among the schools studied differ, they are all in support of this theory for the effectiveness of training, responsibility of instruction, health and well-being of the dancer, and efficient communication with the parent. Evaluations ensure that student progress is measured equally and regularly throughout the semester. An instructor may assess how the class is advancing as a whole through a timely evaluation schedule. Further conferences may be requested regarding student health concerns through regular evaluations as they provide opportunity for parent/teacher communication.

What Is the Age Range of Pre-Pointe Students?

Physical maturation is an essential variable in evaluating pointe readiness for the health and safety of the dancer. As previously articulated, technical mastery, physical strength and duration of study are elemental to the success of dancing on pointe but the age and physical development of the dancer must also be considered. The age range of pre-pointe students is largely based on the age a student will begin pointe, as determined by each individual school.

Students of many ages may be enrolled in pre-pointe levels at CPYB due to the age variation throughout the school. Other academies presented in this thesis require a student to have technical ability equal to their peers and generally have a smaller age range in their pre-pointe classes. At PNBS children enter Pre-Pointe in Level III at the age of ten turning eleven, establishing a range of ten to twelve years old. Due to the

variety of time KCBS students spend in Levels 1 through 3, pre-pointe dancers may range from eight to thirteen years of age.

What Is The Minimum Age Requirement To Begin Pointe?

The age range of pre-pointe students is generally dependent on when dancers go *en pointe*. Renowned New York City Ballet Artistic Director, Founder and Choreographer George Balanchine once said, “There is no reason to get a young dancer up on full pointe if she cannot do anything once she gets there!” Dancers may only advance to beginning pointe after progressing through all subsequent levels. Schools also require children to be a certain age before enrolling in ballet class. These variables determine the age a child will begin pointe. For example, if a school requires a child to be seven to enroll in ballet class and she must complete three years of training before being considered for pointe, she will automatically be ten or eleven years old when beginning pointe. As in all aspects of ballet education, age may vary depending on each child’s individual physical development and rigor of training. A more athletic, muscular body type may tend to be stronger yet less flexible, while a willowy slight build may take longer to develop muscle. These examples certainly cannot be applied as generalities to all dancers. Adolescents develop at varying rates. Eleven years old may look very different from one child to the next. When discussing this topic with interviewees, all participants initially offered an ideal age generally between ten and twelve years old to begin pointe, then quickly elaborated that such an optimal number rarely applies to all students being promoted to pointe.

Potter of PNBS says, “Our youngest level IV student will be turning eleven years old by December of the year they enter Level IV. Since we have strict age requirements for our Children’s Division classes and a student needs to be turning eight to enter Level I by December 31st of that year, dancers are generally around eleven years old by the time they reach Level IV and considered for pointe. They also need to be ready strength-wise as well.”¹⁹³ At Texas Ballet Theater School the minimum age to begin pointe is eleven or twelve; however, on a rare occasion a ten year old may be mature and advanced enough to be included in this group.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, School Director of Grace Holmes of KCBS defines the ideal age to begin pointe as eleven years old but elaborates that some students may not be ready until they are older and occasionally a ten year old may also be considered. However, students under the age of ten are not eligible for pointe regardless of their natural ability and technical proficiency.¹⁹⁵

The optimal age to begin pointe is further defined by some dance teachers as eleven to twelve years. There is a shared feeling that putting students on pointe before eleven does not have long-term positive results. Age requirements and curriculum have students on track to begin pointe at eleven or at the earliest ten years old at ABT JKO School.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, the curriculum at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy dictates that dancers will spend an average of four to five years training in ballet class before beginning pointe work, which places them at ten to eleven years old.¹⁹⁷

Due to the frequency in which students attend weekly classes and the repetitious nature of the curriculum, dancers may begin pointe earlier at CPYB. With

¹⁹³ Potter, 2016.

¹⁹⁴ Warakomsky, 2016.

¹⁹⁵ Holmes, 2016.

¹⁹⁶ Bowman, 2016.

¹⁹⁷ Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

accomplished strength and mastery of vocabulary outlined by the syllabus, pointe generally begins at ten to eleven years of age. However, if a student begins attending class multiple times per week with more than one class each day, and has exceptional natural physical facility paired with physical and emotional maturity, they may be considered for pointe at the age of eight or nine. It must be noted the expectation for any student to begin pointe so early may only be realized at schools that employ such a rigorous class schedule as CPYB. Students at such institutions may exceed hours danced than those students training at organizations with more traditional class schedules, thus accelerating preparedness for pointe. Once pointe is introduced, beginning exercises are very slow and methodical, ensuring the safety and health of the dancer. Schools which require fewer lessons per week, may find it unrealistic to expect a child of this young age to be prepared for pointe.

What Are Several Principle Requirements To Begin Pointe Work?

This is a very important question when evaluating a student's readiness for promotion to pointe. The establishment of clearly defined pointe advancement criteria delineates the requirements to begin pointe work. Expectations and requirements ensure the safety of the dancer and allow instructors to assess the student's readiness for pointe work. A dancer's physical and emotional development paired with their experience and technical capability are primary factors contributing to the criteria to begin pointe work. When asked to define these requirements, dance teachers could have easily created a very lengthy and detailed list. So this thesis may present concise information,

instructors were asked to identify the most important requirements for a dancer to being pointe work.

Potter of PNB explains, “Students need to have acquired the appropriate amount of strength in their body core, as well as enough strength and stability in their legs, feet and ankles. Students need enough physical and mental maturity to handle the increased workload. Students must be promoted from Level III or have auditioned for entrance into Level IV.”¹⁹⁸ In order for a student to be promoted from Level III, they must be ready for pointe. Potter’s response emphasizes the importance of total body readiness for pointe including physical, mental and technical capabilities.

Priscilla Nathan-Murphy, former Lower School Principal and Principal Instructor of Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy considers strength of the ankles, strength of the core and leg muscles, alignment and the quick twitch muscle coordination when assessing a child’s readiness for pointe.¹⁹⁹ Quick or fast twitch response is defined as “relating to, or being muscle fiber that contracts quickly especially during brief high-intensity physical activity requiring strength.”²⁰⁰ Dancers with fast twitch response are naturally more kinesthetic. Muscles fire and react quickly in steps with attack like *relevé* and *sauté*, which naturally relate to pointe work.

Teachers of Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy do not find it necessary to separate what is assessed in standard ballet technique from criteria for pointe readiness. The proficiency achieved and evaluated in ballet technique should be the same for pointe. Whether on pointe or not, dancers at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson

¹⁹⁸ Potter, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ Priscilla Nathan-Murphy, interviewed by author, Norman, OK.

²⁰⁰ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “quick twitch muscle,” accessed March 5, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fast%E2%80%93twitch>.

Academy must have strong core and gluteus muscles, posture and alignment, and an understanding of stretch and extension. If students do not have a strong jump, the *relevé* and *pointe* work will be compromised. This criterion applies to all levels of training at Houston Ballet and directly relates to readiness and successful execution for *pointe* work.²⁰¹

The anatomical structure of the ankle and foot effects how a student will dance *en pointe*. Franco de Vita Artistic Director of ABT JKO School discusses the structure of the foot and ankle for *pointe* work. While a hypermobile or “archy” foot may be the most desirable aesthetically, this structure tends to be weaker with less stability for *pointe*. A straight foot is the strongest for dancing *en pointe*. A rigid metatarsal and inflexible foot may prevent a dancer from being able to rise to full *pointe* where the weight is placed on the very tips of the toes with the shinbone and metatarsal arch perpendicular to the floor. A flexible foot may look appealing but tends to be weaker and more difficult to control, while a stiffer structure presents limited mobility but can be stronger.²⁰²



**Incorrect
Foot Pulled Back**

**Correct
Tip flat on floor,
box perpendicular**

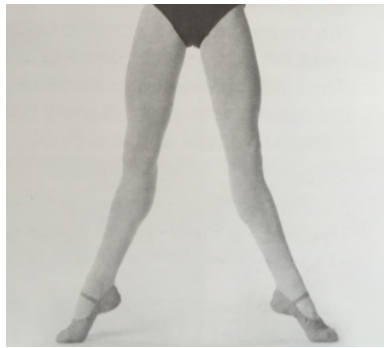
**Incorrect
Foot pushed forward**

²⁰¹ Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

²⁰² Franco De Vita, interviewed by author, New York, NY, January 14, 2016.

²⁰³ “Correct Position Foot En Pointe,” All About Pointe, accessed April 1, 2016, <http://allaboutpointe.weebly.com/advice.html>.

Kathryn Warakomsky defines Texas Ballet Theater School’s requirements to begin pointe as, “Strong use and ability to maintain rotation of the legs; adequate flexibility of the foot aligned with the tibia; strength of the foot, ankle and torso, and physical maturity ensuring the bones are developed generally by the age of eleven.”²⁰⁴ Observing a dancer’s heel height in a 2nd position *relevé* may assess the foot, ankle, and tibia alignment.



2nd Position Relevé with dancer’s right foot at 90 degrees and left foot at less than 90 degrees²⁰⁵

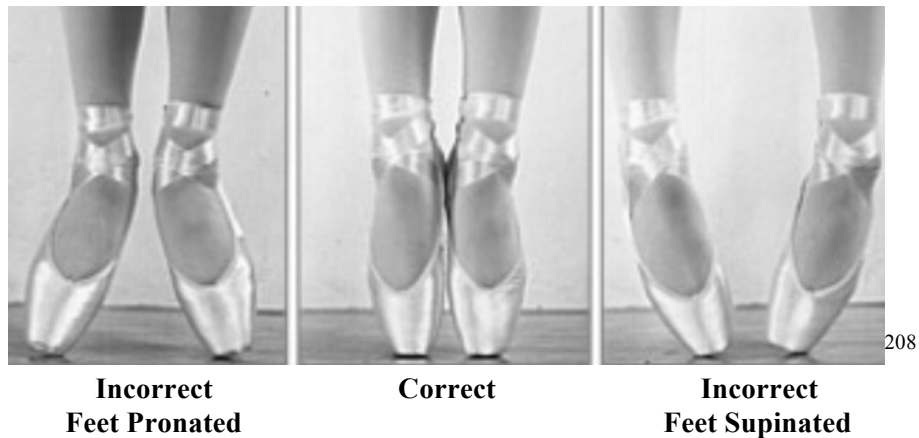
When assessing readiness for pointe at Kansas City Ballet School, teachers consider “alignment; the use of turnout [rotation of the legs]; core strength and an understanding of pronation and supination.” Pronation and supination are conditions of the ankle and foot alignment that occur when a dancer’s weight is improperly distributed. Pronation is defined as “rotation of the medial bones in the midtarsal region of the foot inward and downward so that in walking the foot tends to come down on its inner margin.”²⁰⁶ Dancers often use the term “rolling in” when describing pronation. This occurs when the instep or arch is dropped placing more weight on the inside or medial bones of the foot [towards the big toe]. When *en pointe*, pronation may lead to

²⁰⁴ Warakomsky, 2016.

²⁰⁵ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 32.

²⁰⁶ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “pronate,” accessed March 5, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pronate>.

excess stress on the big toe joint increasing the potential of developing bunion or hallux rigidus (stiff big toe). Supination is defined as “movement of the foot and leg in which the foot rolls outward with an elevated arch so that in walking the foot tends to come down on its outer edge.”²⁰⁷ The foot is supinated when more weight is displaced to the outside of the foot towards the smaller toes. When supinated, the structure of the foot is instable. The recurring practice of a supinated position promotes undesirable “sickling” of the foot increasing the likelihood of ankle sprain. Extreme bow-legged shape of the legs may also cause supination of the foot. Both supination and pronation weaken the foot and ankle *en pointe*. Weight that is placed over the second toe on *demi-pointe* and *pointe* is the safest and most stable position.



Pendleton of Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet outlines several important factors in evaluating a child’s readiness for *pointe* including: “The Basic Stance” (TBS), correct anatomical line, a strong jump, and an adventurous attitude of “going for it.” PAB founder and former director, John White, considers TBS the foundation for

²⁰⁷ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “supinate,” accessed March 5, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/supination>.

²⁰⁸ “Correct Position Foot En Pointe,” All About Pointe, accessed April 2, 2016, <http://allaboutpointe.weebly.com/advice.html>.

everything a dancer does from the simplest *demi-plié* and *battement* to the most complex grand allegro leap.”²⁰⁹

THE BASIC STANCE²¹⁰

- **Body Weight:** Should be distributed evenly over the whole foot, with approximately sixty percent over the balls of the feet and forty percent over the heels.
- **Feet:** In the beginning, feet are placed in a relaxed (no turnout) first position (side by side with heels together).
- **Ankles:** Evenly align on both the outside and inside of the leg and firmly support the shinbones above the arches of the feet.
- **Knees:** Although the legs must be held straight, the knee joints must not be allowed to lock at the rearward extreme. This is particularly important for students with hyperextended joints. The knee should help form and control a straight leg line extending from the ankle to the pelvis.
- **Thighs:** All four muscle groups (inner, front, outer, and rear) are pulled up under the pelvis, as if trying to lift the body upwards.
- **Pelvis:** With the abdominal muscles active and muscles of the buttocks held firmly, vertically align the pelvic block beneath the lower back. Do not allow the buttocks to be pushed or tucked under.
- **Buttocks:** Keep gluteus muscles firmly flexed.
- **Solar Plexus:** Abdominal muscles simultaneously lift and “grip” the lower rib cage.

According to Adalhi Aranda Founder and Director of Bluegrass Youth Ballet, dancers of Bluegrass Youth Ballet must have ankle and leg strength, core strength, and perpendicular foot toward the floor (or as close to a perpendicular line as possible).

“We also are very specific on turnout or rotation of the legs and technique. Once

²⁰⁹ John White, *Advanced Principals in Teaching Classical Ballet* (Gainesville, FL: University of Press of Florida, 2009), 51-52.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

dancers complete the one and a half years of pre-pointe, we bring Jacqui Haas, a former dancer who is now a physical therapist for dancers based in Cincinnati. She evaluates their range of motion, strength, turnout, and flexibility in different parts of their bodies.”²¹¹

Holt, Dean of University of Oklahoma’s Weitzenhoffer Family College of Fine Arts and Director of the OU School of Dance explains that proper alignment of the hip, knee, ankle, and metatarsal must be maintained when the legs are rotated outward before beginning pointe.²¹² Poor alignment is dangerous to the young dancer as injury may result. Dancers should have the ability to perform some appropriate barre exercises on *demi-pointe* including *dégagé*, *grand battement*, *battement fondu* to *relevé*, *ballonné* and *rond de jambe en l’air* while maintaining alignment.²¹³ Successful use of the foot in *petite allegro* is an indication of readiness for pointe. How the dancer uses the metatarsal arch is critical for pointe work.²¹⁴ A dancer may have archy feet but the articulation of the foot is more important. A young dancer must also have strength of the lower abdominals to support any movement.²¹⁵ The tendency is for students to bend the knees to get onto full pointe. For this reason, it is important that a student be able to roll through the foot without releasing the knees before they are allowed to begin pointe work.²¹⁶

²¹¹ Aranda, 2016.

²¹² Holt, 2016.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Wilkinson Manley of Colorado Conservatory of Dance explains that most advancement criteria can be classified in the following categories: physical strength with good alignment, technical prowess, and physical maturity.²¹⁷

Should All Students Be Given The Opportunity To Dance *En Pointe*?

If Not, Are Alternate Options, Such As Separate Classes That Offer Different Focus Available?

This is a very important question that many dance educators struggle with. The response to this question is often dependent on pointe advancement criteria as discussed in the previous question. If a school articulates the requirements to begin pointe work and a dancer is unable to achieve these demands, she may be deemed unfit or not ready to go *en pointe*. This decision may be temporary allowing the student to further mature before being promoted to pointe. In other circumstances certain uncompromising objectives for pointe may be unattainable due to a child's anatomical limitations. Organizations handle this delicate situation differently depending on their philosophy. When reviewing responses to this question, one clear constant was that educators make these difficult decisions in the best interest of the dancer's well-being. All decisions are individually based on a matter of health and safety.²¹⁸

The following section of this thesis will discuss if all students should go *en pointe*, how the decision and process are handled and what, if any, alternative options are given for dancers deemed unsuitable for pointe work.

²¹⁷ Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

²¹⁸ Holt, 2016.

While some students may be permitted to “try” beginning pointe, the rigors of advanced pointe work may become impossible or dangerous for a dancer with anatomical limitations. There may come a time where a student with such attributes may be physically unable to continue her training due to the difficulty of executing pointe vocabulary. Schools offering professional classical ballet training must preserve technical standards. Simply promoting a “good student” who may struggle with the material or be susceptible to injury does not benefit the individual dancer or the program. Potter of Pacific Northwest Ballet School explains,

This is a question that we struggle with on a constant bases at PNBS. We have many young dancers that are such wonderful students, have studied with us for many years and yet have very difficult natural foot structure for pointe work. For the most part, they do well enough with our syllabus until pointe work comes into the picture. We start talking to individual parents about the possible concerns of training past Level III [the level prior to beginning pointe] when their student nears the end of Level I. This provides them with information about the difficulties associated with unsuitable foot structure and the strong possibility that more advance pointe work may not be possible or advisable in our school.

If a beginning pointe program is methodically constructed, there is little risk of injury for the dancer. Even with physical limitations a student may safely attempt a beginning pointe curriculum that progresses carefully and slowly. At ABT JKO School, all elements of beginning pointe are practiced slowly facing the barre using two hands. These exercises are designed to be extremely safe for dancers of varying physicality. With careful instruction, there is limited danger to the student even if their foot structure is not ideal. Bowman recalls only two or three students being unable to continue with pointe work.²¹⁹ This decision was only realized after the dancers were allowed to try pointe. While Priscilla Nathan Murphy, former Lower School Principal at Houston

²¹⁹ Bowman, 2016.

Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy feels that not everyone should go *en pointe*, she argues that sometimes permitting a child to experience the difficulties of pointe work with a unsuitable foot structure allows them to feel and understand why advancing is not possible.²²⁰

In the circumstance of the unsuitable foot structure or other anatomical challenge, it is critical that the student and parents have realistic expectations of the challenges ahead and that the approach for pointe work be slow and safe. After council with parents and the student to ensure realistic expectations, a student may be allowed to go *en pointe* even though their bone structure may not be conducive for pointe. Often times the dancer comes to a place of acceptance through the struggle and painfulness and may choose to stop dancing *en pointe*. While this approach gives the dancer a chance to participate in the important accomplishment of experiencing pointe work, it can be difficult if they become disillusioned with their dance experience. Such a process may only be implemented through very thorough and concise communication with the parent and student. Aranda of Bluegrass Youth Ballet explains,

Most students end up going up on pointe, but they all have to do specific exercises to balance their own personal weaknesses. However, each year we do have those students who we know will struggle and don't have the right anatomy. We do not discourage them but we keep a close eye on them. Some eventually figure it out; others discover that ballet is not for them and they quit. We let that happen organically and allow them to make that decision if they so choose.²²¹

Many participants strongly emphasize the importance of teacher awareness, diligence and consistency to ensure the safety of dancers beginning pointe. A dancer with anatomical challenges can be offered modifications made by the teacher. If

²²⁰ Nathan-Murphy, 2016.

²²¹ Aranda, 2016.

allowed to dance *en pointe*, she may be required to practice all exercises at the barre for additional support. Stretch of the legs, outward rotation of the legs, strength of the core, articulation of the feet, alignment, and proper technical execution should not be compromised in the attempt to go onto full pointe. Full pointe is a position in ballet in which the body weight is placed on the extreme tip of the toes with the tibia and instep, or top of the foot, perpendicular to the floor. It is very tempting for novice pointe students to release and soften the knees to facilitate going onto full pointe. Ultimately, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that beginning pointe students do not develop such undesirable and potentially dangerous habits.



90 degrees of foot and ankle motion on pointe



Less than 90 of degrees foot and ankle motion on pointe²²²

It is impossible to predict with absolute assurance what a young dancer is capable of achieving. When discussing the topic of excluding dancers from pointe, many teachers eagerly shared inspirational stories of a young student who no one imagined would dance successfully *en pointe* due to anatomical limitations. Through unwavering determination, unbridled focus, and in no better words “through blood,

²²² De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 32.

sweat and tears” these dancers far exceeded their limitations and some even went onto dance professionally. In fact, several teachers recalled some dancers’ foot structures improved through the use of the pointe shoe and diligent tutelage. While these results are not standard, they are motivation for some instructors to allow potentially pointe-challenged candidates to attempt pointe work. As Kathryn Warakomsky of Texas Ballet Theater School says, “Everyone has body issues to be aware of. If a student is able to manage, loves what they do and is at no risk of injury, there is no imminent harm in allowing them to experience very basic pointe work.”²²³

Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy has not forbid a student from beginning pointe in recent history. By allowing students to begin pointe at ten or eleven years old, they are eager and more comfortable with the challenge. A dancer with a stiff foot that may be less aesthetically pleasing may be stronger than a student with a hyper mobile ankle structure. Even an experienced teacher cannot and should not wish to predict all student outcomes. If advanced pointe work is a natural point of departure from ballet training for some students with anatomical challenges and beginning pointe is practiced and presented responsibly, there is no reason not to allow a child who has grown through the school to experience dancing *en pointe*.²²⁴

It is advised that the decision to keep a student from dancing *en pointe* indefinitely should be made with great consideration and consultation. This does not mean, however, that every child should be promoted to pointe. While the decision to keep a student from dance *en pointe* is always difficult, there are circumstances where it may be in the best interest of the student’s overall well-being. It is also imperative that

²²³ Warakomsky, 2016.

²²⁴ Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

schools preserve their established technical standards so they may foster a focused training environment for their dancers. Advancement criteria for professional schools requires students to be ready for pointe work in order to continue training in the school. If they do not meet this requirement the potential for a professional ballet career is impossible. The purpose of a professional school is to train professional ballet dancers. Qualities required of a professional dancer may not be feasible for all children. Similarly, a 5'2" basketball player will unlikely play in the NBA. This realization does not mean a child who is passionate about ballet cannot find an educational institution to support her love of dance.

[At Pacific Northwest Ballet School] most students are allowed to try pointe work if they are deemed strong enough. We have provided them with a lot of information about the difficulties associated with the unsuitable foot structure and the strong possibility that more advanced pointe work may not be possible or advisable in our school. We do not have any alternate tracks of study at PNBS but make suggestions for other schools in the area that have less focus on professional training if a parent asks for that information, describes Potter.²²⁵

Later in this thesis, specific conditions that may preclude a student from starting pointe work will be considered. Before assessing those factors, it is important to consider what opportunities are available if pointe is not possible. Wilkinson Manley of Colorado Conservatory of Dance explains,

We strive to assist all of our students to experience pointe work, if they so desire. With new technologies in pointe shoes, almost all of our students have been able to study pointe for at least one to two years. We have had a couple of students with difficult feet who have studied for one to two years and then chosen to not to continue with pointe training. They have been able to continue with classical training (without pointe work) in addition to modern, jazz, and contemporary classes.²²⁶

²²⁵ Potter, 2015.

²²⁶ Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

Other factors such as studio space and types of classes offered dictate the opportunities available to non-pointe students. Aranda of Bluegrass Youth Ballet says, “Our school does not have the room, time or space to offer alternate classes for those students only wanting to continue on a part time basis and not *en pointe*. However, they could potentially take ballet class off of pointe but would not be able to perform.”²²⁷

Some schools allow dancers to continue ballet training off pointe until this arrangement is no longer relevant. It simply may not be appropriate to continue through advanced levels without the inclusion of pointe shoes. Many organizations who do not promote all of their students to pointe educate them in other dance styles including Modern Dance or Jazz that are not dependent on the use of pointe shoes.

In The Past Year, What Is One Of The Primary Physical Or Anatomical Conditions That Precluded A Student From Starting Pointe Work?

Most participants acknowledged that it was a very rare that a student was deemed unfit to dance *en pointe* at all. Many organizations do their best to help student experience pointe work, if only at the beginning level. However, there are several conditions that may preclude a student from being promoted to pointe. Ballet schools have different viewpoints on giving all students the opportunity to dance *en pointe*. While all perspectives are valuable, it is important to consider why schools find these particular conditions important factors when making the decision to keep a student from advancing to pointe indefinitely.

All responses to this question were based on student health and well-being. As previously expressed, most organizations work to assist students however possible in

²²⁷ Aranda, 2016.

their goal of experiencing pointe. There are several specific conditions that may supersede these efforts, preventing a student from pointe promotion. Wilkinson Manley of Colorado Conservatory of Dance articulates, “Our primary concern with not moving a student into pre or beginning pointe has been a lack of physical maturity.” This thesis addresses pre-adolescent and early adolescent physical development and the growth spurt in later chapters. Dance educators are looking for a certain physical maturity to ensure the dancer is strong enough muscularly and skeletally to manage the demands of pointe work. Most commonly at PNBS, it will be an overall lack of body strength and physical maturity that determines a dancer’s inability to begin pointe.²²⁸

A rigid metatarsal and inflexible foot structure may also prevent a student from beginning pointe work. The majority of the dance community believes that some specific feet are simply not meant for pointe. Limited mobility of the foot and ankle prevents the dancer from achieving full pointe with a perpendicular line of the tibia to the floor. This structure *en pointe* is prone to deviation from proper technical execution encouraging the undesirable softening of the knees and distortion of alignment. Technical fundamentals may be compromised with a foot of this structure. Conversely, the hypermobile foot may require extra strengthening exercises before it is strong enough to support the weight of the student *en pointe*. While this foot is aesthetically desirable, the loose ligaments and muscular structure is susceptible to instability.

A dancer will experience significant body and hormonal changes through pre and early adolescents. The female dancer becomes significantly more self-conscious and body aware during this time with changes in body fat percentage and weight fluctuations. Most teachers are aware of a young dancer who has become too thin,

²²⁸ Potter, 2015.

which is an obvious danger. However, sometimes if a dancer is significantly overweight it may be dangerous for them to begin pointe work. Excess weight may put too much strain on a growing child's joints leading to injury. The smaller structure of the ankles could become too compromised to properly support the child *en pointe*. It is critical to handle this circumstance with great sensitivity as to not cause emotional or psychological trauma to the child. If a teacher has this concern, the student's parents should be informed. It is at the parent's discretion whether or not to consult nutritionists and other professionals for additional support. It is not within the expertise of dance educators to offer advice or suggestions on such information. Many young dancers' bodies change and elongate in time with proper nutrition and exercise. This physical condition precluding a dancer from pointe is often temporary and can be overcome if properly addressed.

How Do You Address Anatomical Issues That May Affect Pointe Work?

Some anatomical limitations affecting pointe work may improve with specific ballet exercises. A teacher is often able to recognize physical conditions that may present challenges for pointe work. A seasoned instructor may suggest ballet combinations specifically designed to address the student's area of weakness improving the possibility of pointe promotion. It is important for instructors to only offer guidance within their expertise and, with parent approval, refer students to medical professionals for evaluation, diagnosis and treatment of physical conditions that impede a student's technical progress. Ideally, physicians, physical therapists and Pilates instructors who have specialized experience working with dancers are preferred. Communication with

parents and recommendations for additional support advocates for the health and well-being of the student. It is essential to consider how ballet schools address anatomical limitations once they are identified when discussing beginning pointe work.

Many schools feel it is their responsibility to communicate their observations with the parents as opposed to offering any specific remedies or treatment options. Potter of PNBS explains, “We talk about the issues and concerns we see from our perspective with each Level III [pre-pointe level] student and their parents/guardians during their Level III conference. Parents can then use this information to think about future plans, help redirect their student’s interest, seek out more information from a physical therapist or foot specialist, etc. We provide special seminars with our consulting podiatrist for both parents and students at the beginning of Level IV [when students begin pointe].”²²⁹

ABT JKO School students benefit from their access to resident physical therapists, trainers, nutritionists, and Pilates instructors whose work caters to the specific needs of dancers. ABT prioritizes the importance of addressing individual anatomical characteristics and is fortunate to have the support of medical professionals onsite to assist their young dancers. Body conditioning is built into the student’s weekly schedule at ABT JKO School.²³⁰ Ballet and body conditioning teachers are in constant communication with each other regarding each student’s needs. Dancers are able to take individual corrections from their ballet class to their body conditioning teachers for further understanding and suggestions on possible resolutions. This

²²⁹ Potter, 2015.

²³⁰ Bowman, 2016.

arrangement allows ballet teachers to identify potential areas of concern and refer all evaluation and treatment options to qualified medical professionals.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy also includes Pilates and body conditioning in the curriculum beginning in Level 4. This is a requirement for all students, not only for those dancers experiencing physical limitations.²³¹ All dancers have unique physical challenges based on their individual anatomy. Access to Pilates and body conditioning instructors who are specifically trained to work with dancers allows students to better understand their anatomy and the best way to get the most out of their body. Making these resources available to all students improves their progress in ballet class.

Many organizations have access to kenisio specialists whether in house or offsite, they feel confident referring their students to. "We will give specific stretches or exercises when appropriate, and since we have onsite physical therapy, massage and fascial distortion, we will send students to receive preventative care as needed," describes Wilkinson Manley of Colorado Conservatory of Dance.²³² Warakomsky explains that age is a requirement for Pilates recommendation at Texas Ballet Theater School.²³³ Generally, Pilates is suitable for children eight years and up under adult supervision. Instructors should not only be certified in Pilates but also have experience working with children. Equipment based Pilates work may not be suitable for young dancers unless careful modifications are made.²³⁴

²³¹ Houston Ballet Academy's Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

²³² Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

²³³ Warakomsky, 2016.

²³⁴ "Pilates for Children," Pilates, accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.pilates.com/BBAPP/V/pilates/library/articles/pilates-for-our-children.html>.

The most accessible method of addressing individual technical deficiencies that stays within a ballet instructor's expertise is through private lessons. One-on-one instruction allows the teacher to focus on the student who has anatomical challenges or is struggling with particular elements of classwork. Sometimes additional specifically focused ballet practice can be of great benefit. Weak ankles, feet, legs and abdominals may be strengthened with extra *relevés*, jumps or other strength building combinations. A child may better understand their issues of improper alignment, supination or pronation of the ankle and foot, or inflexibility with individual attention. A student who is behind in vocabulary or technical execution may catch up with extra class time.

Pendleton of Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet explains:²³⁵

It is very unusual that a student not be given the opportunity to dance *en pointe*. If a student has physical specifications that make pointe work more challenging there are several questions we ask:

1. Can extra work or private lessons solve or lessen the problem?
2. Can exercise modifications be made or perhaps the student may stay at the barre for pointe class?
3. If none of these remediate the issue, what are other options for the student?
If the dancer is comfortable and confident, they may continue dancing, progressing with their peers without dancing *en pointe*.

Communication with parents is important for all of these recommendations.

Parents and students alike must understand that these additional measures do not guarantee significant physical change or the promise of pointe shoes. Kinesio support, medical consultation or private instruction are supplementary efforts designed to shed

²³⁵ Pendleton, 2015.

light on anatomical conditions and may help to address them but do not assure complete resolution.

PRE-POINTE TRAINING METHODS

Do Dancers Begin Pointe Individually Or As A Class And

How Is This Transition Facilitated?

Organizations promote dancers to pointe differently. Some elect to have the entire class begin pointe at the same time, while others promote individuals or small groups when they are determined ready for pointe. This transition occurs in pre-pointe or beginning pointe class depending on the school's class structure. Each advancement protocol has benefits and challenges which will be presented in the discussion of this question.

Many schools find it most productive to promote the entire class to pointe at the same time. Generally, students must be ready for pointe to advance to the level where beginning pointe is introduced. This ensures that all dancers in one class are able and ready to begin at the same time. Dancers who are not ready to begin pointe will remain in the previous level or informed of alternate options. There are many benefits of promoting an entire class simultaneously to pointe. The instructor will only need to present information on pointe shoe logistics including fitting, elastic and ribbon sewing, and toe taping and padding one time. Even if students advance at slightly different rates; they will generally follow the same timeline of progression for beginning pointe. This means that the instructor will give one set of instructions for the entire group rather than teaching multiple combinations for a mixed class of pointe and pre-pointe students.

Going *en pointe* as an entire class is also a very exciting and bonding experience for the group allowing them to share in this monumental milestone.

While there are many benefits to promoting an entire class to pointe, this practice also presents potential challenges. Even when all dancers are deemed ready for pointe, inevitably there will be a smaller group that is not as strong. Within an entire class it is likely that some students will naturally excel *en pointe* while others may struggle with the transition from ballet slippers. This difficulty may contribute to feelings of inadequacy or self-consciousness. If there are substantial ability differentials, the teacher may still be required to offer several variations of the same exercises to provide modifications for the varied ability levels. Promoting an entire class may be ideal and convenient if every student is truly at a similar level of pointe readiness.

Pointe classes begin in Level IV at Pacific Northwest Ballet School. All Level IV PNBS students are required to take pointe classes. We have the professional fitters from Freed come to our school each September to personally fit each new Level IV student. After our students have their pointe shoes, several classes are dedicated to learning how to sew the elastics and ribbons correctly as well as learning how to tie pointe shoe ribbons.²³⁶

Similarly, students at Kansas City Ballet School, American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School, Bluegrass Youth Ballet, and Colorado Conservatory of Dance all begin pointe at the same time as their entire class. “Our dancers move into pre and beginning pointe as a full level at the beginning of each school year. If individual dancers are not ready to move into pre or beginning pointe,

²³⁶ Potter, 2015.

then they will either remain in the previous level for an additional year or move up in ballet technique without pointe training,” describes Wilkinson Manley.

Other schools take a more personal approach to pointe promotion by advancing individuals or small groups instead of the entire class. Organizations that share this philosophy find that an entire group of students is so rarely ready for pointe at the same time. Dancers who are promoted individually or in a small group have the benefit of receiving personal attention and instruction for their specific experience. Each child’s foot is very different, requiring individual shoe fitting, customized ribbon and elastic placement and sewing, and toe taping and padding suggestions to ease any potential discomfort. Promoting dancers in small groups ensures they are truly ready for the challenges of going *en pointe*. This special recognition also validates individual accomplishment, building self-esteem.

There are several challenges that accompany individual promotion to pointe. This practice usually creates several different subgroups within a single class. It is likely that within one class there will be some students in ballet slippers practicing pre-pointe, others who have been *en pointe* for several weeks, and an individual or small group who are just beginning pointe. An intuitive teacher will instruct all of these levels simultaneously in one 1-hour class. While this may seem challenging conceptually, teaching a class with this structure is not impossible with careful planning. Many exercises are applicable to all students, while others will require modifications or variations. Students who are more experienced always benefit from practicing fundamentals, and challenging work may be practiced at the barre or in ballet slippers for the safety of true beginner students.

Texas Ballet Theater School and Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet promote dancers individually or in small groups. Good-Boresow of CPYB explains their students' transition to pointe:

All students [at CPYB] begin pointe class in ballet slippers to learn all of the exercises. When they are determined ready for pointe, we will promote them individually or sometimes in small groups. New [to pointe] students practice all of the exercises at the barre then change into flat [ballet slippers] for center work. After approximately two to three weeks the new pointe students will have caught up to the beginning pointe students who started earlier.²³⁷

2015-2016 is the first academic year Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy promoted the entire Level 4 class to pointe at the same time.²³⁸ In previous years, individuals or small groups were promoted when deemed ready. Teachers felt that there were too many technical levels in one pointe class and more experienced students were being held back when new students started pointe. They decided to reassess their position considering the students were all meeting the requirements to advance to Level 4 together, but were starting pointe work at very different times. If pointe work is a criteria for advancement, all students promoted from Level 3 to Level 4 should be ready for pointe. It was determined that waiting a few additional months to begin pointe work did not make a significant difference in a child who would naturally struggle with pointe due to anatomical challenges.²³⁹ While promoting an entire class is relatively new for Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, instructors are pleased with the consistency and uniformity of progression among all Level 4 students observed thus far and plan to continue with this practice.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Good-Boresow, 2015.

²³⁸ Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

How Do You Define Pre-Pointe?

As discussed in the introduction, the etymology defines pre-pointe as before pointe or preparation for pointe. Schools may further define pre-pointe differently based on their individual methods and approaches. The purpose of pre-pointe also contributes to how an organization defines the term.

Potter defines pre-pointe at PNBS by explaining the focus of the supplemental training, “At PNBS, Pre Pointe classes are designed to provide specific, targeted time for working on enhanced foot articulation, increasing foot and ankle strength with additional *relevé* exercises, and working on steps that we would introduce *en pointe* in the first year of pointe class. This most often includes *échappé relevés*, *piqués* to 5th position, *piqué passé* and *arabesque*, *soutenu en tournant*, *piqué* turns and *chaînés*.”²⁴¹

Most schools simply define pre-pointe as preparation for pointe work study and focus more on establishing the method and content of pre-pointe training.

What Is The Primary Method Of Pre-Pointe Training?

This question is most important for understanding what exactly is happening in pre-pointe classes across the country. Most schools in this study relatively agree on the age range to begin pointe, how much ballet training is needed for pointe preparation and the necessary requirements for a dancer to begin pointe. However, the manner in which these students are prepared varies from one institution to the next. To assess and analyze pre-pointe pedagogy in the United States, the primary methods of training will be considered. Getting a “peek” into pre-pointe classrooms exposes the material is being covered and how it is being presented.

²⁴¹ Potter, 2015.

At Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, the extra fifteen minutes of pre-pointe time following technique classes includes additional strength building, foot stretching, use of the TheraBand™, and teacher directed and assisted stretching. “Students are also educated in recommended fitters for pointe shoes, preferred brands or makers of shoes etc.,”²⁴² says Pendleton.

Texas Ballet Theater School uses pre-pointe as an opportunity to transition dancers to pointe work. “Dancers take pointe in flat [ballet slippers] shoes to strengthen their feet to ensure properly aligned ankles. This develops strength in how the dancer will get onto pointe through relevé, piqué etc.,”²⁴³ describes Warakomsky. Bluegrass Youth Ballet has developed their own method, which includes specific exercises such as rolls, rises, *relevés*, *échappés* and other elements strengthening the foot and ankle.

Wilkinson Manley describes the pre-pointe process at Colorado Conservatory of Dance as:

In the beginning of the year, it is primarily strength training and alignment. Students learn all of their “everyday” exercises at this time, and we watch closely to make sure they are maintaining good form. As the year progresses, and if the student’s body is sufficiently strong, we have them fitted for pre-pointe shoes. Students learn how to balance, how to appropriately approach a *relevé*, how to articulate their feet, and they RE-learn proper alignment, which inevitably diminishes as soon as they put on their first pair of pre-pointe shoes.²⁴⁴

Kansas City Ballet School describes their method of pre-pointe training as, “a supplemental course of study using soft block [pre-pointe] shoes with ribbons and no toe pads, and TheraBands™ to prepare students for pointe.”²⁴⁵ Soft block, *demi-pointe*

²⁴² Pendleton, 2015.

²⁴³ Warakomsky, 2016.

²⁴⁴ Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

²⁴⁵ Holmes

or pre-pointe shoes will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Faculty and staff of KCBS feel that their students have been going *en pointe* too late. Many of their students were not dancing *en pointe* in time to attend summer intensive programs, which require pointe work for admittance. Summer intensive programs often require dancers to be *en pointe* or have a minimum of one year of pointe work experience to audition and attend. KCBS' newly developed pre-pointe program was created with the goal of preparing dancers to begin pointe earlier to remedy this issue. In their experience, the use of the soft block (pre-pointe) shoe quickens and streamlines the transition from ballet slippers to dancing in pointe shoes.

At Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, class begins as pre-pointe practice but transitions to beginning pointe one small group at a time. CPYB uses set exercises, or combinations that are memorized and repeated, for each class. New exercises are introduced for beginning pointe. These combinations are learned and practiced initially in ballet slippers to educate the children while developing strength and articulation of the foot. Dancers take pointe class in technique shoes [ballet slippers] until individual readiness is determined. The beginning pointe student continues in this same class but executes the learned combinations *en pointe* rather than ballet shoes. The pre-pointe/beginning pointe class will be a mixture of students on and off pointe but, with a few necessary modifications, all exercises are applicable to everyone.

Do You Have A Syllabus Or Curriculum Detailing A Pre-Pointe Program?

As pre-pointe is relatively new as a defined component of classical ballet training, many schools are just developing pre-pointe programs. Others are reevaluating

their pointe preparation approach to identify what their students need. During this period of growth, it is not uncommon for teachers to experiment with content and method. Only by evaluating student outcomes are teachers able to assess whether or not their pre-pointe training methods are effectively preparing their dancers for pointe work. More established pre-pointe programs may follow a curriculum defining course objectives or a detailed syllabus prescribing steps and exercises, while others allow teachers to cater classes to the needs of each group. Teachers who create the content of their pre-pointe classes often meet with other pre-pointe and beginning pointe instructors to ensure consistency throughout the school.

Pacific Northwest Ballet School does not have a separate written syllabus for its pre-pointe program but has a written syllabus for Level III, which encompasses the work needed for pre-pointe classes. There is also a written guideline for beginning pointe classes which can be used in the pre-pointe classes.²⁴⁶ These documents provide a basis for pre-pointe training and ensure all sections of Level III are prepared with the same objectives.

Bluegrass Youth Ballet and Colorado Conservatory of Dance have syllabi outlining their specific pre-pointe programs. Kansas City Ballet School recently implemented a school wide ballet technique syllabus. The next phase of this process is to develop a specific pointe and pre-pointe syllabus. The pre-pointe program at Texas Ballet Theater School is goal oriented but does not follow a detailed curriculum. There are, however, certain set exercises designed for repetition.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Potter, 2015.

²⁴⁷ Warakomsky, 2016.

As previously discussed, CPYB has a syllabus comprised of set exercises for all levels of training. As there is no separate course of study for pre-pointe, the preparatory syllabus is the same as that of beginning pointe. “Dancers begin executing exercises on *demi-pointe* early in their training. The use of *relevé* and *sauté* naturally strengthen the legs, ankles and feet for pointe work,”²⁴⁸ explains Good-Boresow. Dancers learn and practice the beginning pointe exercises defined by the syllabus in ballet shoes until they are deemed ready for pointe work.

Nathan-Murphy, formerly of Houston Ballet emphasizes the importance of consistent instruction. If there is going to be a pre-pointe program, the instructor should be knowledgeable regarding what exercises would be necessary to add to the pre-pointe syllabus.²⁴⁹ This is especially critical in schools that have multiple sections of one level. It is advised that each section has only one ballet teacher, especially for younger children. A single instructor is able to guide them through the week assessing and modifying teaching plans to meet student needs. If a level is “team taught” (having more than one teacher) it is difficult to create consistency, even with regular communication.

If there is a syllabus, it can be flexible to allow the teacher to customize content and progression to the class.²⁵⁰ A level of students may be slightly different than previous years. In a new area of student such as pre-pointe, a syllabus can be a “living” document capable of modification and adaptation.

All schools interviewed emphasize the importance of a knowledgeable, insightful and experienced teacher for classical ballet training. Individual teachers may

²⁴⁸ Good-Boresow, 2015.

²⁴⁹ Nathan-Murphy, 2016.

²⁵⁰ Holt, 2016.

be best suited for specific levels and ages. It is valuable to determine where teachers are the strongest and to utilize them in these areas to create a positive academy dynamic capable of efficiently training dancers. Conversely, smaller schools may only have resources available for one or two instructors who teach all levels. Whether a school offers a there is detailed syllabus or instruction is at the teacher's discretion within specified guidelines, consistency is one of the most fundamental characteristics of effective classical ballet education.

What Information Regarding Progression To Pointe Is Communicated To Parents And Students And How?

Many organizations recognize pre-pointe as an opportunity for more effective communication with parents and students regarding pointe work. This additional time allows for focused evaluation of a child's readiness for pointe. Promotion to pointe is a monumental milestone for the dancer. The parent has facilitated the student's journey in ballet training and listened to countless hours of pointe related dreams while chauffeuring their young dancer to and from class. The importance of such a milestone is accompanied with high emotions. Within reason, the more informed a parent and child are, the more likely they are to understand the pointe promotion process and trust the expertise of the teacher. In an age of Google search where a broad spectrum of quality and questionable information is available instantaneously, it is important to provide parents and dancers with reputable knowledge in keeping with the school's philosophy, goals, and traditions. There is a fine line between enough and too much information. The ultimate objective is to include all parties in the process enough for

them to trust that those making pointe promotion decisions have their child's best interest at heart.

The journey to pointe work can also be an opportunity to communicate any concerns to parents as soon as they are identified. Parents and students will be more prepared and less emotional in time with straightforward communication. Pacific Northwest Ballet School encourages dialogue with parents from an early point in training.

Parents of our students in Level I and II that have been identified as having very difficult foot structure for successful pointe work are given that information early. They can choose to share it with their student at that time or wait until they feel the time is appropriate for their child. It helps if a student is somewhat prepared to hear about foot structure and how it impacts serious ballet training before their Level III conference. A few students are given our recommendation not to go *en pointe* if we see some very real concerns about injuries. We usually invite them to repeat Level III if this is the case.

All Level III students along with their parents have a conference and are given information about the following year's schedule and pointe work if they are being promoted. We detail our approach, which is very conservative in the first year with the students mainly doing barre work and simple exercises on two feet. They are reminded not to go out and buy pointe shoes as they will have a special fitting in September and learn how to sew, tie, and break-in their first pair of pointe shoes during class time. During the seminar with our consulting podiatrist, information is given to our parents and student about foot type, toe spacers, taping, etc.²⁵¹

The announcement that a student is ready for pointe and may purchase their first pair of shoes is exciting for the dancer and the parent. Dancers spend years training and parents spend years investing in such an anticipated moment. Informing parents of the exact protocol for pointe shoe purchasing, approval and preparation ensures these practices are in keeping with the school philosophy. Bluegrass Youth Ballet discusses this process with students and families.

²⁵¹ Potter, 2015.

We sit down with the students and explain the process we follow including the year of pre-pointe, and the extra semester preparing them for the evaluation. After they are evaluated we go with them to the store to buy their pointe shoes and make sure they fit to our standards. Shoes are kept at the studio for twelve weeks so they aren't tempted to wear them at home. We take time explaining how to sew them, how to take care of them and educated them on the different parts of the shoe. We also take this time to explain to the students and families about the responsibility of taking good care of themselves, eating well and getting plenty of sleep.²⁵²

Parents and students at Colorado Conservatory of Dance who are moving into beginning pointe must go through an hour-long training session prior to their first pointe shoe fitting. Information is presented in a beginning pointe survival packet and details the following procedures and recommendations.²⁵³

Colorado Conservatory of Dance Pointe Shoe Survival Packet

1. *Checklist*

- Attend a meeting with the director to discuss the requirements and responsibilities of being *en pointe*.
- Attend a group fitting wearing class tights.
- Do not sew ribbons on shoes until you have checked for proper fit with director.
- Enroll in and consistently attend a minimum of 3 Ballet Technique classes (4 are highly recommended) and 3 beginning pointe classes per week (mandatory) to stay enrolled in beginning pointe. A Ballet Technique class must always precede beginning pointe.

2. *Preparing your pointe shoes for the first day (after your shoes are approved):*

- Pull drawstring tight (not too tight, however, you can always make them tighter, but once you cut the drawstring you can't make it looser).
- Sewing with dental floss or quilting thread is recommended. Sew through the canvas only, not the satin.
- Do not cut the ends of your ribbons until your first class.
- As padding, you will use the Ouch Pouch Pro Pad. Director must approve other padding. You will get this at the fitting.

²⁵² Aranda, 2016.

²⁵³ Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

- Elastic is not to be sewn to the shoe without approval from your pointe teacher.
- It is imperative that you do not dance in your shoes at home. However, you may want to walk around in the shoes with a thick wool sock covering them to break them in.
- Take proper care of your shoes after wearing them in class.

3. *How to care for your feet*

Items to have on hand at all times, first-aid items to have at home

- Make sure to keep your toenails cut just below the tips of the toes. They should be cut in the natural shape of your toenails. This will help to alleviate or prevent bruised or ingrown toenails.
- As you wear the shoes you may notice calluses developing on your toes and bottoms of your feet. This is completely normal and a good thing. Calluses keep you from developing blisters.
- If you develop a blister, apply rubbing alcohol and/or BFI powder a couple times per day until healed. This will dry it out quickly and you should notice relief in a few days. If your blister is hurting you during class, apply a square of second skin covered by a layer of athletic tape. This should also give you some relief. You can apply a Blister Block bandaid when you get home. Make sure to follow the directions on the package carefully.

PRE-POINTE SHOES

From Ballet Slippers to Pointe Shoes: An Abbreviated History and Explanation

A ballet slipper is made of canvas or leather with a pliable design to aid in the articulation of the dancer's foot. There is no significant support provided by the ballet shoe, as they are not designed for dancing on the tips of the toes. Dancers began performing on their toes in the early 1800s. "Although toe-dancing is synonymous with ballet in the public mind, it was incorporated in ballet technique only in the nineteenth century. Ballerinas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries wore high heeled

shoes.”²⁵⁴ In the Romantic Era of the sylph, the light and ethereal quality created by rising on the toes was so popular with audiences that choreographers began incorporating more pointe work into their ballets. “The ballerina’s traditional satin slipper became more and more specially constructed to aid the further development of pointe work. Individual detailing, such as darning the toe and the out edge of the sole, as well as improvisational stuffings and stiffenings, led steadily to the special reinforcing and shaping that became the prototype of footwear manufactured specifically as pointe shoes.”²⁵⁵ Marie Taglioni is the first known ballerina to dance a full-length ballet on pointe in *La Sylphide* in 1832²⁵⁶. These early pointe shoes provided little support only allowing dancers to go *en pointe* for brief moments at a time. “Early pointe shoes were strengthened by darning; cotton wadding was inserted into them to protect the dancer’s toes. Later the shoes were further stiffened with glue, starch, or sewn-on ribbons or tapes.”²⁵⁷ The shoes did not allow dancers to hold sustained positions *en pointe*. As ballet technique progressed, so did the pointe shoe. Taglioni’s shoes were relatively light and flimsy compared to the blocked or boxed pointe shoe that came into use near the end of the nineteenth century.

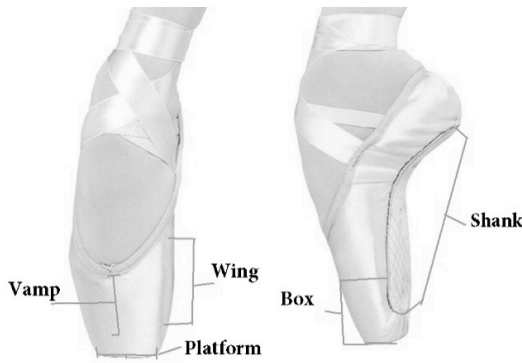
²⁵⁴ International Encyclopedia of Dance, s.v. “Pointe Work,” accessed April 2, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-1376?rskey=ERgalp&result=1376>.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ “Marie Taglioni Pointe Shoe History,” History Cooperative The Pointe Shoe, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://historycooperative.org/the-pointe-shoe-a-history/>.

²⁵⁷ International Encyclopedia of Dance, s.v. “Footwear,” accessed April 2, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0631#>.

While modern pointe shoes look very delicate, a brand new pair is quite hard and constricting. The box and platform of the shoe is a rigid box made of densely packed layers of fabric, cardboard and/or paper hardened by glue. The dancer relies on



the structure of the shoe to be extremely sturdy, so the entire weight of her body may balance on a small platform at the tip of the box. The box and the shank of the pointe shoe²⁵⁸ are designed to provide support and

structure. The rest of the shoe is made of leather, cotton and satin. No two pairs of pointe shoes are identical. Dancers select and further customize pointe shoes to fit their individual foot shape and strength. Although the shoes are hard, the dancer must have strong feet, ankles, and core muscles to prevent her weight from sinking into the shoe. Once a dancer receives a new pair of shoes, she must break them in by pounding or softening the box, bending the shank for more flexibility, cutting the satin and sometimes darning the tips to create traction. Ribbons and elastics are then hand sewn in place to her preference.

Due to the rigid structure of the pointe shoe, simple exercises in these shoes feel completely different than when they were performed in ballet slippers. Soft canvas or leather ballet slippers allow the dancer to feel the floor through the shoe, effortlessly rise to *demi-pointe*, turn and balance on a broad *demi-pointe* platform, smoothly execute transition steps, and jump with ease. Every element of ballet technique changes when wearing pointe shoes. The shape and thickness of the shank creates an unevenness

²⁵⁸ "Anatomy of Pointe Shoes," Chicago Dance Supply, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://www.chicagodancesupply.com/2012/11/pointe-shoes-for-all-shapes-sizes-and-budgets/>.

when standing on the full foot in the pointe shoe, requiring additional control and stability where executing steps and transition movements. Rising to full pointe takes strength and articulation to smoothly roll through each part of the shoe without collapsing or creating a “clunky” quality. Balancing shifts from the broad feel of *demi-pointe* to the much smaller platform at the tip of the pointe shoe. There is less friction during turns and the dancer’s center of gravity is higher requiring the balance must be more precise. Jumping requires strength and control to fully point through the shoes in the air and roll through the feet quietly on the descent.

Beginning pointe students are introduced to new vocabulary that is specific to pointe work. These significant adjustments are great inspirations for pre-pointe training and the creation of the pre-pointe, or sometimes referred to as the demi-pointe or soft block shoe. For consistency within this thesis, the transition shoes will be referenced as pre-pointe shoes. Until recently, students progressed from soft ballet slippers to hard structured pointe shoes with no transition shoe. The purpose of pre-pointe instruction and use of the shoe is to ease this dramatic transition. Some structural characteristics of the pointe shoe are introduced through the use of pre-pointe shoes as a means to stair step the dancer more gradually into wearing pointe shoes. As pre-pointe shoes are relatively new as a tool in dance education, concrete evidence as to their effectiveness is not yet known and teachers have widely varied opinions regarding their validity.

Purpose and Benefits of the Pre-Pointe Shoe

The practice of “de-shanking” or removing the shanks of pointe shoes, leaving the structure of the box without the support of the shank is a method used by some

schools, which allows dancers to work through the resistance provided by the pointe shoe without going onto full pointe. This idea has been used by advanced and professional dancers throughout history to work the foot with the added resistance provided by the de-shanked shoe. Some schools began having their pre-pointe students wear de-shanked shoes to familiarize them with the feel of the pointe shoe before beginning pointe work. However, when the shank is removed the dancer does not get the sensation of the uneven sole of the shoe the shank may create. In recent years, instructors and shoe manufactures thought perhaps a shoe with a shank but soft box could provide a more applicable transition for students into the pointe shoe. At first glance, one may not notice the difference between the pre-pointe and pointe shoe. Both have a similar look, materials, platform and shank but the pre-pointe shoe has a soft block, which discourages the dancer from going onto full pointe.



Pre-Pointe Shoes²⁵⁹

Pointe Shoes²⁶⁰

The pre-pointe shoes are firm around the box but become softer after the first or second wear. The platform will not break down normally since students will do not place their body weight onto full pointe. The full sole gives students more resistance

²⁵⁹ “Demi-Pointe Shoes,” Allegro Dancewear, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://www.allegrodanceboutique.com/2012/10/11/demi-pointe-shoes/>.

²⁶⁰ “Pointe Shoes,” Dance Supplies, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://www.dancesupplies.com/Capezio-1130-Airess-Pointe-Shoes.html>.

than a ballet slipper, forcing them to use the muscles of the foot to bend the shoe and to fully point through the entire instep and toes. This resistance provides students an opportunity to continue to develop the muscles of the feet necessary for pointe work. Pre-pointe students have to work hard to rise onto *demi-pointe* or to fully stretch the foot in *point tendu* when wearing the shoes.²⁶¹ Allowing pre-pointe students to experience characteristics of the pointe shoe without rising to full pointe provides a transitional option before pointe work promotion. Students are also able to become familiar some of the awkwardness or discomfort experienced when wearing pointe shoes without having the full weight of the body on the tips of the toes.

Simple barre, foot, and Theraband™ exercises may be practiced in pre-pointe shoes, adding resistance to build strength and develop further articulation of the foot. Rising onto quarter, *demi*, and three-quarter pointe with the structure of the pre-pointe shoe closely simulates the same action in pointe shoes. A class using pre-pointe shoes, should employ a shorter barre sequence including *plié*, *battement tendus*, *battement soutenu*, *battement dégagé*, *battement fondu* with *relevé* (if able), *relevés* (with and without *plié*), and foot stretching exercise. In the center, students may practice additional *relevé* or *pointe related* exercises and *sautés*. Students using pre-pointe shoes benefit from learning the preferred methods of ribbon and elastic sewing and tying, which eliminates that step when pointe work begins. The shoes are also a great incentive to students and parents, who recognize they are one step closer to pointe work.

Kansas City Ballet School has a pre-pointe program in which female students spend thirty minutes following ballet technique classes twice weekly. This program is centered on the use of the pre-pointe shoe. Students entering Level 3 at KCBS are

²⁶¹ Holmes, 2016.

extremely excited to begin using the pre-pointe shoes and feel a great sense of accomplishment.²⁶² By recognizing this achievement students feel their efforts are validated. Some children are not ready to begin pointe at the same time as their classmates. Having these students work in *demi-pointe* shoes softens this disappointment and allows them to continue to progress toward their goal of dancing *en pointe*. There are great benefits to providing a positive, encouraging experience to the developing adolescent. The pre-pointe shoes facilitate such an experience. As with any pre-pointe method, it is important that students and parents understand that the use of pre-pointe shoes does not guarantee a child will be promoted to pointe.

Transition shoes have transformed the pre-pointe program at Colorado Conservatory of Dance. “The use of demi-pointe shoes has completely changed the effectiveness of our pre-pointe program. Students moving into beginning pointe have a much greater understanding of how to work with their beginning pointe shoes, and their sense of balance and alignment is MUCH improved after having had a full year of pre-pointe training in pre-pointe shoes,” expresses Julia Wilkinson Manley CEO and Director of Colorado Conservatory of Dance.²⁶³

Mary Margaret Holt, Dean of University of Oklahoma’s Weitzenhoffer Family College of Fine Arts and Director of the OU School of Dance explains that pre-pointe shoes may be a beneficial tool for young dancers. The pre-pointe shoe allows the student to become more comfortable with just the shank without the presence of a box. The pre-pointe shoe gradates the adjustment from ballet slippers to pointe shoes and

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Wilkinson Manley, 2016.

requires students to work the feet harder through the added resistance and structure of the shoe.²⁶⁴

While students at American Ballet Theatre’s Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School do not use pre-pointe shoes, Melissa Bowman, Artistic Director, ABT Summer Intensives and Director, ABT Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School Children’s Division, recognizes some possible value in their use in certain programs and situations. “If there is no possible harm to the physical well-being of the child or the possibility that the shoes will compromise proper technique, demi-pointe shoes may provide students with an incentive to continue to work towards pointe shoes. If pre-pointe shoes are used with a similar philosophy as de-shanked pointe shoes, the students may gain additional foot strength, articulation, and experience certain stability challenges pointe shoes will later present.”²⁶⁵

Some believe that the pre-pointe shoe helps improve flexibility of a tightly structured foot and ankle. With careful monitoring, allowing a dancer to press over the tip of one shoe at a time stretches the top of the foot and ankle more than is possible in a ballet slipper. With additional support from the shank, the dancer may press over a “forced arch” position on one foot without putting their weight onto full pointe.²⁶⁶ The dancer may experience the ideal perpendicular line from the their shinbone and top of the foot to the floor. In this circumstance, the pre-pointe shoe may also be an additional supporting tool used to determine a child’s structural propensity for pointe work.

Allowing a student with stiff ankle and foot structure to practice in the transitory shoe gives them the opportunity to try. Having the child demonstrate their foot structure in

²⁶⁴ Holt, 2016.

²⁶⁵ Bowman, 2016.

²⁶⁶ Claudia Cravey, 2015.

the shoe may provide evidence if it be determined that pointe is impossible due to anatomical limitations. In either instance, the pre-pointe shoe allows a child to experience some elements of pointe work.

Contrary Thoughts on Pre-Pointe Shoes

Many dance educators are not convinced pre-pointe shoes are effective and offer valued noteworthy data supporting their opinions. Through the tradition of classical ballet education, ballerinas have been trained to dance exquisitely *en pointe* long before the creation of a transition shoe. There are many questions surrounding the skepticism. Is there really a need for pre-pointe shoes? Are there proven benefits of their use? Are they worth the expense to the parent? Is there a potential safety risk with their use?

Many respected authorities interviewed for this thesis felt that there was simply no sufficient need for using pre-pointe shoes. Ballet technique classes, extra attention to *relevé* and jumping, supplemental training in body conditioning and Pilates, foot exercises, and using Therabands™ provides enough preparation for pointe without the addition of pre-pointe shoes. These schools felt that the same results could be realized without the use of a specialized shoe. A well-structured class and systematic curriculum prepares dancers to go *en pointe* without the need of additional measures.²⁶⁷

Kansas City Ballet School acknowledges that when they began seeking a pre-pointe shoe, there were few options available on the market.²⁶⁸ While KCBS has found a shoe they prefer, several other dance organizations feel that the design of the shoe has not come far enough yet to warrant the investment and their use as a part of their pre-

²⁶⁷ Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, 2016.

²⁶⁸ Kansas City Ballet School, 2016.

pointe instruction. Many of the pre-pointe shoes are tapered towards the platform and do not properly fit all feet. This improper fit may encourage supination or pronation especially with the additional instability created by the shank.

The largest concern expressed was with the overall safety of the pre-pointe shoe. It is easy to understand why a pre-pointe student would be tempted to rise onto full pointe placing all of her weight on the tips of her toes. The pre-pointe shoes look and feel so much like a pointe shoe and the pre-pointe student is “so close” to going *en pointe*....what could be the harm? If a dancer is not ready to be promoted to pointe, they should not dance *en pointe*. While manufactures explicitly warn that the pre-pointe shoe is not to be used for pointe work, students will still be tempted. In doing so, there is a great risk of injury, developing bad habits, physical compensating, and distorting proper technique. All dance educators agree that the use of pre-pointe shoes must be carefully monitored by experienced and informed ballet instructors. Kansas City Ballet School has taken very conservative and well-conceived measures to prevent negative circumstances. Pre-pointe students are required to keep their shoes at the ballet school, which allows them to be worn only when supervised by their teacher. Students are also given a very short time to change from their ballet slippers into their soft block pre-pointe shoes, return to the studio quickly, to discourage extracurricular practice in the dressing rooms or hallways. Many schools employ the same practice with beginning pointe students as well. There is no guarantee that students will responsibly practice their slow rises on two feet facing the barre instead of transforming into a Swan Queen twirling around their bedroom.

While some schools believe there is validity to the use of pre-pointe shoes, they feel the benefit does not warrant the extra expense for parents. Adolescents are rapidly developing during pre-pointe study, thus grow out of shoes quickly. Pre-pointe shoes retail for approximately fifty dollars per pair, which far exceeds the cost of de-shanking and old pair of pointe shoes or working in ballet slippers. Certain schools experimented using the shoes for the second semester of pre-pointe but found the children outgrew them before the shoes served their purpose. As many instructors expressed, pre-pointe shoes may be worth the expense depending on an academy's individual program and length of study.

Opinions and reactions to the pre-pointe shoe may change over time. As the shoes are so new to classical ballet training, it is too early to fully determine their relevance and value to pointe preparation. Conceptually, they provide a methodical transition gradating the adjustment to pointe shoes. Further study beyond this thesis may assess how dancers transition to pointe after using the pre-pointe shoes as opposed to those who advance directly from ballet slippers. It would also be of interest to observe how shoe manufacturers continue to develop the product in response to the needs of students and specifications of teachers.

WELLNESS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRE-ADOLESCENT AND EARLY
ADOLESCENT DANCER IN REGARDS TO PRE-POINTE

Pre-Adolescent and Early Adolescent Cognitive and Social Development

It is not within the premise of this thesis to explore adolescent psychology in depth or offer qualified recommendations regarding the cognitive, social and physical development of the pre-pointe dancer. However, consideration of the developmental phases of students is essential to their health and well-being. Pre-adolescent and early adolescent children experience significant physical, cognitive and social changes. When paired with the monumental anticipation of going *en pointe* this time of personal growth may become a highly emotional experience for the growing dancer.

Peer relationships become more important as the adolescent moves towards self-reliance and independence. While most adolescents identify primarily with their school classmates, the serious ballet student often spends more concentrated time with their dance peers. The supportive nature of these groups is easily complicated with the inherent competitive dynamic cultivated by highly motivated dance students all working towards the same goal. Healthy competition can be a beneficial component to classical ballet training as it pushes students to continue to improve in each class, also preparing them for the selectivity of future auditions.

Pre-adolescence ranges from six to ten years of age and early adolescence occurs from eleven to fourteen years old. Both developmental stages are important when considering dynamics affecting pre-pointe and pointe students. Pre-pointe training is generally introduced in the final years of pre-adolescence. The pre-adolescent student

develops logical thinking as they further understand cause and effect, the viewpoints of others and how to prioritize the importance of information.

The American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum includes *ABT Guidelines for Dancer Health* compiled by medical professionals from fields of sports medicine, nutrition, physical therapy and orthopedics with specific focus on ballet training. The importance of the health and well-being of the young dancer was an essential component in the development of this curriculum. *The Healthy Dancer –ABT Guidelines for Dancer Health* presents an overview of anatomy and kinesiology with a focus on injury prevention and recovery. The document also offers advice regarding the dancer’s needs during each stage of physical and psychological development and gives suggestions regarding creating a healthy training environment.²⁶⁹

As outlined in *The Healthy Dancer – ABT Guidelines for Dancer Health*, “The primary task for pre-adolescent children is to exert control over their environment. In order to do so, they must be provided ample opportunities to feel successful physically, socially, and cognitively.²⁷⁰ The process and progress of an event, not just the outcome is essential to the pre-adolescent dancer. These students must be given strategies for success rather than simply being told how to do something. Understanding the way the pre-adolescent dancer thinks and how they may respond to different communicative approaches results in more effective teaching.

Pre-adolescent dancers need to begin processing how certain actions (thoughts, body language, breathing, etc.) contribute to specific outcomes (correct technique, improved performance, quicker turns, etc.). Effective strategies may include: key thoughts, refocusing exercises, breaking the skill down, doing a

²⁶⁹ “American Ballet Theatre Wellness,” American Ballet Theatre, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.abt.org/education/healthydancer.asp>.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

walk-through of the movement, drawing the movement, analyzing video and comparing a correction to a simple movement.²⁷¹

These teaching strategies are designed to give students applicable tools to use as they approach their work. Specific corrections are an example of key thoughts for students to keep in mind with the execution or quality of movement. As students learn differently and through varying processes, strategies like breaking down a skill to its fundamental elements, mapping a combination out spatially or sequentially, drawing the movement or analyzing video for visualization all present diverse learners with opportunities for success.

A dancer usually begins pointe work in her early adolescent years. Several developmental characteristics define early adolescence. Preteens and teens begin to speculate about what they might be able to accomplish as adults and begin to ask questions such as: “Who do I want to be?” and “What do I want to do?”²⁷² They struggle to forge an identity while wanting to be part of the group. Teens are preoccupied with their appearance and tend to compare themselves with their peers. The early adolescent also begins to evaluate how their time is spent including questioning the many hours and evenings devoted to dance.

Social Development and Beginning Pointe Work

Adolescent girls particularly feel self-conscious and anxious regarding their performance abilities. To remediate this issue, ABT advises teachers to reward effort, focus, small performance improvements, and encourage goal-setting.²⁷³ Receiving

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 54.

²⁷³ Ibid.

permission to purchase her very first pair of pointe shoes is a pinnacle of achievement in the young dancer's training career. Dancing *en pointe* for many is the sole inspiration for beginning ballet class. The youngest baby ballerina attempts to walk high on the tips of her tiny ballet slippers many years before she will realize her dreams of tying the ribbons on her very first pair of satin pointe shoes. The process of going *en pointe* paired with adolescent self-consciousness, physical changes and the need to be accepted by their peers creates a very tumultuous environment for students, parents and teachers alike.

Adolescent social factors certainly should not be the primary consideration when formulating a pointe advancement protocol; however, being mindful of these pivotal social dynamics will contribute to the health and well-being of each student. As previously discussed, organizations elect to promote dancers to pointe differently. Some institutions put the entire class *en pointe*. This philosophy is certainly more inclusive and may create a very exciting "team building" experience for the entire group. However, there are potential challenges with this practice. Adolescent children tend to compare themselves to their peers. If an entire class goes *en pointe* at the same time, it is likely that a percentage of them will be less physically capable than others. In this circumstance, the weaker group may struggle, finding pointe difficult and painful, leading to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among their peers. While all children may be eager to begin pointe, if they are not ready or have significant physical limitations, this transition will be extremely labored and physically and emotionally challenging.

Promoting an individual or small group to begin pointe work will certainly bolster the self-esteem of those dancers, rewarding their achievements with positive reinforcement. However, such distinction may also contribute to a “queen bee” mentality. Encouraging a balance of confidence and humility is difficult, yet necessary, in students of all disciplines. Perhaps the most delicate scenario for dancer teachers occurs when a child is deemed unfit to go *en pointe* at all, due to anatomical limitations or other reasons. She may be the only one in her class, or part of a very small minority who will not participate in such an important milestone. The decision to keep a student from dancing *en pointe* indefinitely should be made with great consideration and consultation, weighted against the implied social and psychological ramifications. As previously suggested, such social factors should not be the foundation for a teaching decision regarding whether to promote a student to begin pointe work. However, mindfulness of such issues may foster a more healthful outcome and positive experience.

The Role of Ballet Instructor

While the primary responsibility of the ballet instructor is to teach classical technique, inevitably these adults will also become role models, mentors, motivators and disciplinarians to their students. A dance educator must be aware that the early-adolescent student begins idolizing adult role models outside of their immediate family.²⁷⁴ Through the rigors of training, it is important to remember that the dance educator is grooming future dancers, while simultaneously contributing to the growth of young women and men towards adulthood. Some students will realize prolific

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

performance careers and others may become teachers themselves. All potentially fill the essential role of future dance patrons. ABT® National Training Curriculum offers several suggestions for teachers to assist their students' emotional competencies and to create a healthy training environment.²⁷⁵

- Validate dancers' commitment to ballet
- Allow dancers' voices to be heard
- Be a good role model for the use of effective coping skills
- Emphasize to dancers the importance of balancing the opinion of others with what they know about themselves
- Reframe failures and mistakes as opportunities for learning
- Focus on corrections

Additionally, developmental changes paired with the discomfort and difficulty of pointe work contributes to an elevated dropout rate during this stage of training. It is natural for a student to question their future commitment to dance.

Instead of scaring, guiltting or threatening dancers into continued participation, discuss options, goals, training requirements, sacrifices and benefits of participation. Early adolescence marks the time when students must be reminded that success in dance is a process. At this stage, children may be devoting more of their time and energy to dance. Yet, very few will live out their professional fantasy. Dancers drop out because fun turns to pressure or they believe they lack the physical capabilities to reach their goals. Regardless of dancers' talents, they all deserve to acquire the lessons and skills that you can bring to their lives.²⁷⁶

This is a time when much encouragement needs to be given to the student as the teenage ego is very fragile.²⁷⁷ All too often damaging self-image, body image and eating disorders may develop during this time. "If the students can recognize that their teacher

²⁷⁵ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 57 and 75.

²⁷⁶ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 54.

²⁷⁷ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 98.

is aware and understands their physical changes they will feel more comfortable in themselves.²⁷⁸

Pre-Adolescent and Early Adolescent Physical Development and Pre-pointe

There are specific physical developmental factors essential to determining a child's suitability and readiness for pointe. As observed through research, the traditional age for a dancer to begin pointe is eleven to twelve years old, while there are exceptions on either end of this spectrum. The general consensus the dance community in previous decades was that a student too young could injure the bony architecture of their feet by attempting pointe work prematurely. Through the consultation of medical professionals in specific regards to development and classical ballet training, ABT realized that there is little scientific support for this concept. Length, amount, and consistency of training are better predictors of pointe readiness. Wolf's Law medically supports this theory. The time necessary to develop strength and technical proficiency required for pointe generally is achieved by dancers ten to twelve years of age.

It is known that three to four years of early ballet training are necessary for a dancer to achieve the required strength, balance and coordination needed for purposeful pointe work. Prolonged early training also serves to slowly introduce stresses to bones of the feet, allowing them to build strength and density. Medically this known as Wolf's Law, which states that a healthy bone will adapt to the load that is placed on it. If loading on a particular one increases, the bone will remold itself over time to become stronger and more able to resist that sort of loading.²⁷⁹

Moreover, children mature and develop at different rates and may be ready for pointe work at varying times.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 57.

“Ultimately, an experienced dance teacher who sees students several times each week is in the best position to know when it is appropriate for a young dancer to begin pointe work.”²⁸⁰ While pointe promotion, in regards to health and wellness, is at the discretion of an experienced teacher, additional consultation may be helpful. Scientific support may prove beneficial for a student with physical limitations which may preclude them from beginning pointe or present challenges when dancing *en pointe*. According to Priscilla Nathan-Murphy, former Lower School Principal and Principal Instructor at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy, “Parents and students may be advised to obtain medical information from a professional in the field to enlighten the issue.”²⁸¹ Such knowledge may further support an instructor’s decision regarding pointe promotion.

The Growth Spurt and Puberty

From the ages of about twelve to sixteen, girls experience a time of rapid increase in height and weight. Bones grow faster than muscles and students outgrow their strength. When this occurs, the dancer will suddenly be unable to execute steps they once could. “The long bones of the body are not yet surrounded by sufficiently strong musculature, and once simple tasks now become awkward and difficult.”²⁸² The time of this growth spurt also may coincide with significant hormonal changes in the body. “For the girl there are obvious changes to the buttocks and breasts. In this situation, being in a leotard surrounded by mirrors is probably the last place the dance

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Nathan-Murphy, 2016.

²⁸² Thomasen, Eivind and Rachel-Anne Rist. *Anatomy and Kinesiology for Ballet Teachers*. (London: Dance Books, Ltd.), 97

student wants to be.”²⁸³ “Females tend to develop broader hips and relatively narrower shoulders with an increased proportion of body fat, and consequently demonstrate little or no improvement in physical performance.”²⁸⁴ The timing of this growth spurt and puberty varies from one individual to the next. “Thus, early-maturing males and later-maturing females tend to enjoy temporary advantages in performance over their peers who are average or late maturing. Such advantages however, are not permanent, and teachers should be sensitive to the needs of those that mature earlier or later.”²⁸⁵

“The onset of menses, known as menarche, typically occurs in females anywhere from nine to sixteen years of age. Girls who take more than twelve to fourteen hours of dance class per week often experience a delayed onset of menarche.” It is important for the dance instructor to be aware of this phase in a young woman’s development because amenorrhea, lack of menses, carries potential physical consequences including infertility and skeletal demineralization. Girls who are competitive athletes, dancers or those who exercise intensely are at a higher risk of developing a disorder known as female athlete triad. This triad is defined by disordered eating (leading to low body weight), amenorrhea and osteoporosis.²⁸⁶ Healthy weight supports proper hormone function and strong bone density. Stress fractures result from repetitive stresses placed upon bone that is not given enough time to recover between exercise sessions. These fractures are far more common in dancers with amenorrhea due to the hormonal impact on skeletal integrity.²⁸⁷ In young dancers, delayed puberty

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Tiannis Koutedakis and N.C. Craig Sharp. *The Fit and Healthy Dancer*. West Sussex, England: Jon Wiley and Sons, 1999.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Koutedakis and Rist, 249.

²⁸⁷ Koutedakis and Rist, 257.

may also lead to a delay in skeletal maturation. “Delayed skeletal maturation may increase the risk of certain types of tendon injuries. Once growth spurt is completed and the bones have fused these injuries tend to resolve.”²⁸⁸ So what preventative measures can be taken to discourage female athlete triad?

In 2007, the American College of Sports Medicine, in a position stand, called for all individuals working with physically active girls and women to be educated about the female athlete triad and to develop plans for prevention, recognition, treatment and risk reduction. The position stand recommends that:²⁸⁹

- Screening for the triad should occur at a pre-participation examination or annual health screening.
- Dancers with one component of the triad should be assessed for others.
- Dancers with disordered eating should be referred to a mental health practitioner for evaluation, diagnosis and recommendations for treatment.
- A test of bone mineral density should be done after a stress or low-impact fracture and after a total of six months of amenorrhea, menstrual cycle irregularity or disordered eating.
- Multidisciplinary treatment for the triad disorders should include a physician (or other health care professional), a registered dietitian and, for dancers with disordered eating, a mental health practitioner.
- Emphasis should be placed on optimizing energy availability and care should be taken to ingest sufficient calcium and Vitamin D in the diet to build and maintain bones.²⁹⁰

More directly, dance teachers are recommended to discourage frequent weigh-ins (either in class or individually), leave all discussions or recommendations regarding weight or percentage of body fat to the dancer’s physician or nutritionist, avoid

²⁸⁸ Koutedakis and Rist, 259.

²⁸⁹ De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 70.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

pressuring female dancers to diet and lose weight and provide educational resources regarding proper nutrition, safe training practices and the risks and warning signs of the female athlete triad.²⁹¹

The overall physical and emotional well-being of students should be considered in pre-pointe, pointe and all areas of ballet training. Pre-adolescent and early adolescent students have unique needs in response to their cognitive, social and physical development. The ballet instructor must be sensitive to these needs so they may encourage healthy habits and properly identify and address any concerning behaviors. Training each student to be her very best dancer while positively influencing the young adult requires that all physical and emotional developmental levels be considered by the dance instructor. While the primary role of the ballet teacher is to effectively train each student to be his or her very best dancer, it is unadvisable to compartmentalize the growing and evolving human being from the developing ballet technician. Effectively training ballet students and positively influencing the young adult requires that teachers consider the dance student's physical and emotional developmental levels in ballet education

CLASS OBSERVATIONS

In addition to onsite interviews, class observations were conducted at several schools in this study. Data collected through the interview process was further applied by observing the method of each school firsthand regarding ballet technique and pre-pointe pedagogy. While assessing an organization's curriculum or syllabus, essential elements of dance education may only be appreciated through witnessing an instructor

²⁹¹ Ibid.

teaching their class in person. Student performance was not evaluated for the purpose of this study. Observations were conducted to assess how teachers presented information and implemented pedagogical approaches to pre-pointe training discussed during the interview process. Classes were observed at American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School, Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet in Carlisle, PA, Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, Kansas City Ballet School, and Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet in Narberth, PA. Visiting each ballet school provided significant contributions to this thesis research.

American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School

ABT JKO School follows the American Ballet Theatre® National Training Curriculum. Levels 2 and 3 were observed for thesis research. Students begin pointe in Level 3 at ABT JKO School and while they do not have a pre-pointe specific class, Level 2 is considered the preparatory level for pointe work. Level 2 is recommended for students nine years of age and older and must have successfully completed the examination to advance beyond Level 1. Maintaining maximum turnout and correct posture are of great focus for this level. Attention is placed on keeping proper weight distribution on the feet discouraging supination or pronation, twisting of the ankles, or gripping of the toes and/or bottoms of the feet. How the weight is placed on the feet is essential to pointe work. Proper alignment of the knee, ankle, and foot ensures stability and safety *en pointe*. Practicing correct placement in Levels 1 and 2 develops muscle memory so students will not have to be as mindful of this when beginning pointe work.

Barre work in Level 2 consists of *pliés, battement tendu, battement dégagé, rond de jambe à terre, battement frappe, battement fondu, grand battement, adage, stretching, relevé, échappé, retiré* and *sauté*. Center practice includes exercises in *port de bras* and *temps lie, battement tendus, grands battements, adage, pirouettes*, and a significant focus on allegro. Many ballet schools, including ABT JKO School closely relate pointe to jumping. If students have a strong jump they will have greater success dancing en pointe. When jumping dancers must maintain the rotation of the legs, hold the back erect, fully stretch the legs and feet in the air, and utilize a pliable *plié*. All of these elements are essential for pointe work. Gender specific focus is assigned in Level 2. In preparation for pointe work, girls practice floor exercises and *relevés* to strengthen their feet, toes, calves, and anterior tibialis.

ABT JKO School builds pointe preparation into the curriculum from early levels and does not specify a separate course of study for pre-pointe. Supplemental body conditioning class begins in Level 2 providing an opportunity to address any individual anatomical issues that may affect pointe or ballet technique in general. Pointe work is introduced very systematically and carefully ensuring no student is at risk of injury. Students face the barre to execute all pointe exercises. Once dancers are able to execute combinations with correct posture and strong legs and feet, combinations can be performed side to the barre with one hand on the barre and then in the center. *Relevés* onto one foot are not introduced in the first year of pointe. Beginning pointe exercises include simple walks and runs off pointe, *battement tendu* with stretches, stepping up to pointe with parallel feet, *demi-plié* and *relevé* in parallel and 1st positions, *relevé* in 5th

position, *sous-sus*, *échappé*, *pas de bourée pique*, *pas de bourrée couru*, preparation for jumps on pointe, and slow rises with the feet in parallel and 1st positions.

Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet

Students at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet adhere to a very rigorous schedule taking multiple ballet classes each day up to six days weekly. Few schools in the United States offer such an intense course load. The curriculum at CPYB is largely based on set exercises focused on repetition, technical precision, and the development of muscle memory. There is little deviation from the prescribed combinations in the lower levels, while the more advanced students are challenged artistically and sequentially with varying exercises and guest teachers.

Priority is placed on the exact execution of each step practiced. The muscles of the legs and core must be engaged, requiring students to activate necessary muscle groups. The importance of accessing and maintaining turnout or rotation of the legs is enforced in students from a very young age. Due to the frequency and repetition of ballet classes students appear to have a developed understanding of their technique and a mature muscular support to their movement. Exercises are practiced at slow tempos allowing the child to execute each step with near perfect precision.

Class size is small and teaching assistants are present in most classes to ensure that each student may be taught and corrected through hands-on physical manipulation. Young students may have difficulty understanding how to perform steps though verbal instruction alone and respond well to physical touch to feel the desired positions. Once students experience the correct placement, they are more likely to be successful at

replicating it by themselves. This is why CPYB has an exceptional reputation for classical ballet training and has alumni dancing in professional companies throughout the world.

Levels 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, and 2B/3 pointe were observed. Viewing classes from the first level of ballet training through pointe allowed the level progression and preparation for pointe to be studied. CPYB's syllabus does not dictate specific pre-pointe training, but builds preparation into each level by challenging work on *demi-pointe* as levels advance. The foundation of barre and center exercises remains consistent through all classes observed; however, more difficult elements are added as levels advance. The most noticeable element of pre-pointe in classes at CPYB is the incorporation of *demi-pointe* through barre and center practice. Combinations that include *demi-pointe* include *battement soutenu*, *relevé to passé* from 5th position, *relevé to passé* from 2nd position for *pirouette* preparation, *battement fondu*, and *relevé* practice. There is no room for choreographic experimentation in technique class at CPYB. When students practice a single *battement tendu en crois*, each *tendu* and closing into 5th position must be as perfect as possible. The teacher must act like a "filter" quickly recognizing, catching, and correcting each and every technical mistake to prevent the formation of bad habits. Keeping exercises sequentially simple contributes to the student's strong sense of placement and alignment, which greatly prepares them for pointe work.

All applicable jumping steps are introduced and practiced at the barre so the student may have additional support for strength and elevation. Much of center practice is focused on different types of jumps. No step is repeated excessively and students

must use a great deal of strength to push their bodies into the air while maintaining placement and rotation. Depending on the level, students execute preparatory exercises before adding the jump. For example, *battement soutenu en avant* to *sous-sus* is practiced before advancing to the *assemblé*. Dancers perform drills for *sauté*, *changement*, *jeté*, *assemblé*, *sissonne an avant*, *sissonne, en arrière*, *pas de chat*, and *glissade*. CPYB prepares dancers for pointe by devoting a substantial portion of center practice to jumping or allegro practice.

Students begin pointe in Level 2B or 3 at CPYB. The time spent in each level depends on the individual progress of each student. All dancers in 2B/3 are required to take pointe class but do not wear pointe shoes until they are ready individually. Students practice “pointe” exercises in ballet slippers until they are promoted to pointe. This allows them to learn the new combinations and continue to develop strength and articulation of the feet. There may be students in ballet shoes, some who are brand new to pointe, and others who have been dancing *en pointe* for some time all in one single class. As all dancers know the set exercises, the transition to pointe is relatively smooth. Certain modifications are made for students when they first begin pointe. In their first class in pointe shoes, dancers may only execute certain steps at the barre before finishing the remainder in ballet slippers. This ensures that students are only practicing steps they are ready for. They will gradually add more combinations, as they are ready. All instruction at CPYB is centered on the individual and pointe work is an example of that philosophy. Each dancer works at their own level of technical ability.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy is the official school of Houston Ballet. Students train to become professional dancers with Houston Ballet or other professional companies throughout the world. Levels 3, 4 and pointe were observed at Houston Ballet. Dancers begin pointe in Level 4 and while Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy does not have a specific pre-pointe program of study, Level 3 is considered the preparatory level for pointe work. Houston Ballet does not follow set combinations, so exercises discussed in this section pertain only to the specific classes observed.

Dancers in Level 3 perform exercises at the barre including *plié*, *battement tendu* from 1st position, *battement tendu* from 5th position, *tendu* from 5th position with *port de bras* for coordination, *battement dégagé*, *temps lie*, *relevé* to *retiré* from 2nd position, *frappé*, *rond de jambe par terre*, *battement fondu*, and *relevé lent*. Center practice combinations include *grands battements*, *balance* and waltz, and allegro. Similar to pre-pointe levels at other professional schools, significant attention is placed on allegro work to develop the bone and muscular strength needed for pointe work at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy. In this particular Level 3 class, jumping exercises included steps such as *sauté*, *glissade*, *assemblé*, *soubresaut*, and a jump rope exercise emulating *temps levé* or jumping consecutively on one leg fully stretching the leg and foot in the air.

This is the first year the entire Level 4 class was promoted to pointe at the same time. All barre exercises are practiced facing the barre using two hands for support. Pointe barre exercises include foot stretches, prances or walking onto pointe, *battement*

tendu, relevés in 1st position, rises or *elevés, sous-sus, relevé* to *sur le coup de pied devant* and *derrière, échappé relevé, bourée* preparation, *bourrée*. Dancers practice simple steps in their shoes with few exercises *en pointe* for center practice. These exercises include *tendus* and balances on the full foot in *retiré devant*, challenging the stability standing in the pointe shoe. *Piqué* to *sous-sus* and *bourées* with *port de bras* variations complete the pointe class.

Kansas City Ballet School

The most significant information gathered from visiting Kansas City Ballet School was by obtained by assessing how pre-pointe shoes are being used in classes. KCBS has a defined pre-pointe program requiring students stay an additional thirty minutes following their ballet technique classes twice weekly. KCBS is the only observed school that requires pre-pointe shoes (referred to as soft block shoes at KCBS) of all Level 3 students. Dancers are required to leave their pre-pointe shoes at the ballet school and must change into them quickly between classes for their safety. It may be tempting for young dancers to rise all the way onto their toes even though the shoes are not designed for this purpose.

Dancers appeared to be rather proficient at putting on their shoes and tying ribbons quickly. They do not wear padding in the shoes as there is no need for additional cushion. The shoes have a shank but no box. The shank tends to make the bottom of the shoe feel uneven, which is a significantly different sensation than that of ballet slippers. The more structured material of the pre-pointe shoe creates resistance for the student. This resistance forces the student to use the muscles of the foot to

stretch to a fully pointed foot and rise onto *demi* and three-quarter pointe. Dancers repeated many barre exercises in their pre-pointe shoes including *plié*, *battement tendu*, *battement dégagé*, *relevé* on two feet, *relevé* from two feet onto one, *relevé* consecutively on one leg, *relevé* without *plié*, *échappé relevé*. In the center, students repeat *tendu* exercises and complete class with *sautés*.

While the use of pre-pointe shoes at KCBS has only been incorporated for two years, teachers have already noticed a substantial ease in transitioning students to pointe. Even pointe shoe fitters noted that students seem more knowledgeable and prepared when they purchase their first pair of shoes. There are certain tendencies that were observed when viewing the students dancing in their soft block shoes. It was clearly a challenge for dancers to work through the feet with the additional encumbrance of the shoe. The pre-pointe shoes require more effort for steps that previously came with ease. However, as students were unaccustomed to using a shoe with a shank, pronation and supination appeared to be more common than in ballet slippers. It also appeared as if students were tempted to relax their knees or distort their alignment to bend the shoes onto a full *demi* or three-quarter pointe. These observations may also be noticed in beginning pointe students adjusting a completely different shoe. These tendencies may not be unique to pre-pointe shoes and may occur when dancers transition from ballet slippers to pointe shoes. The structure and feel of the pre-pointe or pointe shoe may challenge the dancer's alignment and placement of weight. Small student to teacher ratio and/or teaching assistants may ensure such physical compensation and misalignment are prevented or corrected.

Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

It was interesting to observe the Vaganova method practiced in the American school Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet and how the Russian method applied to their students. The interview process for their school was extremely enlightening in that John White founder and former PAB director and current director Melinda Pendleton provided perspectives on the founding principles versus current practices of the school. Certain philosophies have evolved to fit the needs of their students. One of which is the inclusion of scheduled time devoted to pre-pointe. Only recently have dancers been required to stay an additional fifteen minutes after their ballet class for pre-pointe before they are eligible to begin pointe work.

Dancers begin pre-pointe in Level 3 and pointe in Level 4. The students begin every exercise with clear preparations and well-coordinated *port de bras* and heads. The PAB students proficiently displayed the importance of musicality stressed in the Vaganova method. Barre exercises followed the progression of *plié*, *battement tendu* from 5th position, *battement degage* from 5th position, *battement fondu* with *rond de jambe par terre*, *battement frappe*, *rond de jambe en l'air*, *petite battement*, and *grand battement*. A clear element of pointe preparation was the significant incorporation of *demi-pointe*, when applicable, throughout the entire barre. Center practice focused on stability through balancing exercises. *Plié*, *grand plié*, *relevé*, *battement tendu*, and *battement dégagé*, and *battement fondu* were repeated in the center. These are fundamental movements from which all classical ballet steps are derived. Repeating these exercises in the center reinforces proper execution while simultaneously challenging the dancer's stability without the use of the barre. The majority of center

practice included jumping with steps such as *sauté*, *changement*, *soubresaut*, *assemblé*, *échappé*, which strengthen the legs and feet for pointe work.

As opposed to other ballet schools, PAB does not have full one-hour pointe classes. Instead, they have dancers put their shoes on for the last thirty minutes of each class, extending ballet technique to accommodate the additional work. White feels it is important to perform barre exercises in ballet shoes for articulation. The shorter yet more frequent pointe classes accustoms students to the shoes and is more similar to how professional dancers take company class. This practice seemed to naturally suggest the inclusion of short pre-pointe classes for preparation. PAB pre-pointe students become accustomed to completing their technique class with pointe related steps executed in ballet slippers, further strengthening their feet and ankles.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistency of Instruction

Based on findings from this thesis research, there are two recommendations regarding consistent instruction: students in fundamental levels should have one teacher for ballet classes; and course instruction, content, and progression must be responsible. Young dancers benefit from the continuity of having one ballet teacher for all technique classes as opposed to multiple teachers each week. Responsible instruction and class content ensures students will develop clean technique while limiting the risk of injury or developing bad habits.

Recommendations in this chapter are largely based on the importance of consistency in dance instruction. High quality ballet training is a direct reflection of the expertise and sensibility of an experienced teacher. Details of student assessments and evaluations are at the discretion of the instructor and determine how students progress through the levels of the school. Instructor feedback given to students regarding areas in need of improvement is a necessary component of their dance education. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that course content is safe and effective for the student's well-being and technical progression. Many schools outline course objectives or employ a detailed curriculum or syllabus. Ultimately, it is up to studio teachers to structure classes that are appropriate, healthful, and challenging to fully benefit each student. Many recommendations in this section hinge on the importance of student assessment. Parents and students must trust the expertise and professional opinion of

academy instructors and artistic staff. In respect of this trust, teachers must always be mindful of each student's progress, communicate with other teachers in the school, plan classes in accordance with the mission statement and curriculum/course objectives of the organization, and stay abreast of industry teaching trends and developments.

It is recommended that classes not be team taught for foundational ballet technique levels. Consistency is extremely important for younger students. Even with an established curriculum or syllabus, each instructor naturally teaches material differently. Young students benefit from having a primary teacher for their level. One instructor is able to gauge the progress of the class allowing for adjustments or adaptations to teaching plans based on the students' needs. Children also benefit from working with fewer variables, which may include alternate teaching styles, different combinations or varied expectations. Eliminating these variables allows students to focus on improving the foundational elements of their ballet training. It is understandable that a smaller teacher arrangement may not always be feasible due to instructor availability and scheduling. In the event that a level is team taught, weekly communication between teachers is essential. Regular conversations will help ensure both educators are advancing the class at the same rate and that course objectives, student assessment, combinations, and class structure are similar and in alignment with academy goals for the level.

Duration of Training Before Beginning Pointe Work

This research supports the recommendation that traditional students complete three years of codified classical ballet training before beginning pointe work. Classes should meet twice weekly at minimum for the first two years and at least three times per week for the third year of study. Ballet technique classes should be 1-hour in length and progress to 1.5-hours by year three. While other disciplines may be practiced, these recommendations are specific to ballet technique classes that should be taught separately from other dance forms.

Pre-pointe training is the specific focus of this thesis. However, one of the most significant recommendations involves the training that leads up to pre-pointe study. Regardless of how established an academy's pre-pointe program is, it is never enough to solely prepare a dancer for pointe work. Preparation begins years earlier and may only be achieved through adequate time devoted to classical ballet technique. No supplemental training may substitute the importance of ballet class. As strength, coordination, alignment, posture, quick twitch muscle response, body awareness, flexibility, muscle memory, and understood ballet terminology may not develop without consistency and repetition. A relatively rigorous course schedule and progression of classical ballet study must be established to ensure students will have the foundation necessary for pre-pointe and pointe training. Ballet technique classes must be taught separately from other dance forms and not simply as a portion of a multidisciplinary class (ie. Jazz, Tap, and Ballet in one 1.5-hour course). The time required for the instructor to present and solidify the material in one class session dictates the need for separate ballet classes ranging from 1 to 1.5-hours in length depending on the level.

Considering ballet is the foundation for all dance forms, focused study will improve the technique of other disciplines. As the progression of barre and center practice is essential to building a strong technical foundation. This process cannot be rushed or condensed into a shorter class time.

Due to the importance of repetition in ballet training, one single ballet class per week is rarely sufficient to build the strength and experience needed for pointe work. If studio space and teachers are available, it is recommended that students take multiple ballet classes each week from the beginning of their classical ballet training. This does not include Creative Dance or Pre-Ballet, which are recognized as beneficial precursors to studying ballet. First and second year ballet students in Levels 1 and 2 should take at least two 1-hour classes per week if possible. Level 3 pre-pointe dancers should take a minimum of three 1.5-hour classes each week. Pre-pointe level students should also take supplemental strength building or body awareness courses weekly to develop further pointe related skills. Additional classes may include, but are not limited to, Pre-Pointe, Pilates, body conditioning, Jazz, Modern Dance, and stretching.

The amount of time each student will spend in any given level will depend on the individual's technical progress, strength, alignment, maturity, development, flexibility, and understanding of classical ballet vocabulary. Students develop and progress at different rates. The amount of time spent in each level will vary depending on the individual. While it may be difficult, requiring a student to repeat a level to master class objectives may be necessary for their long-term growth as a dancer. Pushing a student into a level for which they are not prepared causes far more harm than

the initial disappointment of delayed promotion. Negative results that may occur include injury, the development improper technique, and frustration.

To lessen the student/parent disappointment of repeating levels, it is recommended that communication between teachers and students take place prior to this decision. If the expectation is that all students will have to repeat levels through some point in their training, they will be prepared to do so. It should be explained frequently to parents and students that levels are not equivalent to academic grades in school and often require additional or in some cases less time for mastery. All decisions are at the discretion of dance educators and are made in the child's best interest. Every student's training will follow a slightly different path. While communication and regular evaluations may not completely alleviate disappointment, they will prepare dancers and parents for the possibility of level repetition. Employing the practice of "under promising and over delivering" is often effective when communicating anticipated outcomes to parents and students.

Student to Teacher Ratio for Pre-Pointe Training

Instructor corrections, physical manipulation, and individual attention from teacher to student are essential in the development of good technique. Based on research findings, it is recommended that schools determine and enforce a reasonable student to teacher ratio. Class size may differ depending on studio space, number of sections offered, and enrollment; however, an instructor must be able to see all children at all times during the class to quickly identify errors and make corrections. Qualified teaching assistants may be utilized to help with managing a large class.

Class size is always an important variable contributing to the efficient ballet instruction. Lower levels tend to be popular resulting in higher enrollment numbers. Regardless of a teacher's expertise, too many students in a given class inevitably lessens the instructor's effectiveness. Appropriate class size is particularly important in an academy's foundational levels. The goal is to teach students with pure technique void of affectations who are able to add more challenging vocabulary and choreography later in advanced years of training. Clean technique can only be achieved through the watchful eye and hands-on corrections of a responsible instructor. One small bad habit may easily sneak into a child's technique affecting myriad of steps that follow. It is always better to prevent habits rather than try to undo years of incorrect execution and muscle memory. Class enrollment must be limited to ensure proper monitoring of technical execution and teaching effectiveness in order for pre-pointe to build a solid foundation for pointe work.

Reasonable student to teacher ratio is extremely important when employing the use of pre-pointe shoes. It was observed that there is a tendency for students to pronate or supinate in the shoes. Students were noticed rolling out toward their smaller toes or onto their big toes on *demi-pointe*, creating a potentially harmful and instable position. Dancers are less able to feel their feet working properly in the shoe and along the floor in a more structured shoe. As a result, physical manipulation and/or teacher corrections must be employed to ensure that the student is feeling the correct knee, ankle, and foot alignment. This proper alignment whether standing on the full foot or on *demi-pointe* is the foundation of future pointe work and ensures the safety and stability of all positions. If a teacher does not correct these alignment issues, the student's body will try to solve

the problem on its own resulting in the potential formation of bad habits that will need to be broken down and retrained.

Additional measures may help counterbalance a large class. If smaller class sizes are not possible, utilizing advanced students as teaching assistants (TAs) can be an ideal way to balance the student-teacher ratio and provide a mentorship opportunity for future teachers. An advanced student may be trained to identify younger dancers' technical mistakes and how to correct them. Initially, teaching assistants will need to be supervised to ensure they are effectively helping the students. TAs may also serve as class demonstrator and become a relatable role model for younger students. This heightens school morale, allows young dancers to see what they can potentially achieve first hand, and provides a connection between the lower and upper levels. In addition, the assistant gains invaluable experience working alongside an experienced teacher and directly with children. Many instructors began their careers in this manner, graduating into the professional dance world with teaching experience, which may afford additional opportunities.

Pointe Preparation in Ballet Technique and Pre-Pointe Specific Classes

Due to the amount of time required to prepare students for pointe work, it is recommended that elements of pre-pointe be incorporated in ballet technique classes from beginning levels. Incorporating the use of *demi-pointe*, articulation of the foot and jumps develop foundational skills needed for pointe. These class elements should become more challenging as students advance closer to pointe. As students enter their final year prior to beginning pointe, it is recommended that additional time be devoted

to pre-pointe specific exercises and education to ease the transition from ballet slippers to pointe shoes.

It is recommended that elements of pointe preparation be included in ballet technique classes beginning in the earliest levels of training. No matter how defined an academy's pre-pointe program, a year or two of preparation will not sufficiently qualify students for pointe work. Children in beginning levels should be trained with the ultimate goal of going *en pointe*, and class content should reflect this purpose. Beginning students should practice *relevés* on both feet, from two feet onto one as in *relevé* to *retiré*, and consecutively on one foot. Barre exercises that may incorporate *relevé* include: *relevé*, *échappé sur les pointes*, *dégagé*, *ballonné*, *battement soutenu*, *fondue* to *relevé*, *développé*, *grand battement*, and sustained balancing in multiple positions. Different methods of going onto pointe including *piqué*, *relevé* (with and without *plié*), and through *chassé* should also be practiced. The differing qualities of rising as in "rolling up" and "springing" should be developed through lower levels of training before introducing the pointe shoe.

In center work, the use of *relevé* and *demi-pointe* should continue when appropriate. Center practice should include a significant amount of jumping to develop bone and muscle strength for pointe. Jumps on two legs include *sautés*, *échappé sauté*, and *soubresaut*. Jumps from one leg onto two as in *assemblé* should be strengthened. Two legs onto one jumps include *sissonne simple*, and *sissonne overt* and *fermé* in all directions (*an avant*, *an arrière*, *de côté*). Jumping from one foot onto the other includes steps such as *jeté*, *pas de chat*, *glissade*, *jeté entrelacé*, *grand jeté*. Finally, when

students have adequate strength consecutive jumps on one leg should be introduced as in *temps levé*.

In addition to this technical progression, supplemental time for pre-pointe training is often beneficial for pointe preparation. Pre-pointe study allows for additional time to be spent on further strength building, stretching, and practice using alignment. Pointe specific steps may be introduced in pre-pointe class allowing students to practice new vocabulary in ballet slippers before attempting them *en pointe*. Pre-pointe classes also provide an additional opportunity for teachers to further assess a student's readiness for pointe. While preparedness is generally determined in technique class, further assessment may support decisions regarding promotion to pointe. A parent and student may better understand the teacher's decision to delay pointe promotion if criteria are identified and assessed during a specific pointe preparatory class.

Pre-Pointe Shoes and Pre-Pointe Tools

Students may be well prepared for pointe work without the use of pre-pointe shoes. If pre-pointe shoes are required of students, it is recommended that schools create specific objectives, exercises or curriculum for the shoes, closely monitor their use to ensure student safety, schedule time for specific pre-pointe training in addition to technique class, and that a reasonable student-teacher ratio be enforced to ensure the shoes are used with proper technique and execution. If schools elect to incorporate the use Therabands™, Pilates, and/or body conditioning, it is recommended that practice be age appropriate at the instruction of a certified teacher who is preferably experienced with the specific needs of dancers and young students.

As previously discussed, the use of pre-pointe shoes and other preparatory tools is a somewhat polarizing topic among the dance community. Some instructors feel pre-pointe shoes are essential for transitioning dancers from ballet slippers to pointe shoes, while others strongly believe that they are unnecessary and pointe preparation may be achieved without their use. There are accepted benefits for using pre-pointe shoes which include the ease of transitioning students into pointe shoes, the dancer learning to work in a more structured shoe, the added resistance present for foot strengthening and articulation, stabilization gained from working in a shoe with an uneven bottom, and learning how to sew and tie ribbons and elastics. Concerns of using pre-pointe shoes include potential injury if unsupervised, their questionable necessity and expense, as well as the uncertainty surrounding using such a new concept shoe.

If a school elects to employ the use of pre-pointe shoes, it is strongly recommended that specific time be allocated for pre-pointe study. While transitioning to pre-pointe shoes is far less drastic for the student than immediately transitioning into pointe shoes, there still must be specific instruction and guidance for the adjustment. There is potential risk for injury when using pre-pointe shoes, as the student will be tempted to go onto full pointe, which the shoes are not designed to support. Should schools require these transitional shoes, it is highly recommended that students are carefully monitored and never left unsupervised to practice on their own. If possible, shoes should be kept at the ballet studio to prevent at home student experimentation, a policy Kansas City Ballet School enforces. Unlike ballet slippers, pre-pointe shoes may require specific exercises to be effective. Many barre combinations may be repeated in pre-pointe shoes challenging the technique and altering the approach to each step.

Attention to proper movement quality, alignment, and articulation of the foot are the primary purposes of using the pre-pointe shoe.

Similar to pre-pointe shoes, the use of Therabands™ should be monitored for proper technique and to avoid overuse. Pre-adolescent and early adolescent dancers may be eager to speed the process to pointe promotion by over working a particular area of the body making them susceptible to tendinitis or other injury. Whether employing the use of pre-pointe shoes, Theraband™, de-shanked shoes, Pilates, or body conditioning, it is essential to make certain that all work is age appropriate, taught by qualified professionals and complementary to classical ballet training.

Pointe for All Dancers

In consideration of student wellness, and pre-adolescent and adolescent social and psychological development it is recommended that precluding a child from experiencing pointe work indefinitely should be an extremely rare occurrence. A dancer who has achieved the required technical demands should be allowed the opportunity to experience beginning pointe work. In the circumstance of students with physical limitations, it is recommended that clear communication regarding concerns, potential challenges, and realistic expectations should occur with the parent and child prior to pointe promotion. Safe and responsible beginning pointe instruction minimalizes the possibility of injury to students with varied physical capabilities.

Should all dancers be given the opportunity to dance *en pointe*? This was perhaps one of the most challenging topics of discussion when conducting research for this thesis. A student who has met the technical requirements set forth by a training

institution, progressed through the school, and advanced to the appropriate level for pointe promotion should have the opportunity to attempt beginning pointe work. Only if a medical professional recommends the child not go *en pointe*, foreseeing imminent injury or harm, should she be prevented from ever experiencing an important achievement in ballet training. Many dance educators feel that certain ankle and foot structures are not “meant” for pointe work. A student with this anatomy will likely struggle and find pointe work to be difficult, painful, and eventually impossible. However, if the pointe class content is responsible, systematic, and safe there is no imminent harm or danger in a student trying.

Most professionals in this study agreed that beginning pointe work, with significant anatomical compromise, often results in the student’s eventual departure from classical ballet training. The introduction and progression of pointe naturally separates students who will continue towards professional careers from those who will find other more suitable opportunities. Occasionally, teachers are surprised by how well a student ends up doing *en pointe*. The aesthetically preferred hypermobile ankle with high instep may be weaker while a stiffer structure may be inflexible but stronger. A well-constructed beginning pointe class with appropriate student-teacher ratio will present little potential for injury. It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure class work is appropriate for all levels of training.

It is very important to differentiate between giving a child the opportunity to experience BEGINNING pointe and allowing them to move on to intermediate or advanced pointe levels. Students with anatomical limitations may only achieve the level of beginning pointe. If this occurs, these dancers may continue in beginning

pointe, advance to higher levels participating in ballet technique using ballet slippers only, or be advised of other opportunities. Some organizations allow dancers to continue beginning pointe but advance in levels of technique. This arrangement may continue until it no longer is appropriate to ballet training, as some technical elements may only be executed in pointe shoes. If students are unable to advance beyond beginning pointe they may be advised to study other disciplines such as Modern Dance, which does not require the use of pointe shoes.

Rare circumstances preventing a student from pointe promotion indefinitely will occur. If the issue is anatomical, it is often beneficial to recommend the parent consult a medical professional to further assess the particular area of concern. All recommendations should only be made within the expertise of a dance instructor and not suggest undocumented medical or outside specialty. Dance teachers may offer additional training through private instruction or prescribe specific ballet exercises to assist the student, but under no circumstances should an instructor make medical diagnoses or treatment recommendations.

Evaluating Students in Ballet Training

This research supports the recommendation of regular student evaluations to encourage effective communication with the parents and students. Written evaluations also serve as a platform to monitor, assess, evaluate, and document individual student and class progress.

Teachers constantly evaluate how a student is performing in ballet class. This is not intended to be judgmental or critical but ensures a dancer is in the correct level for

their technical ability. Dancers within a particular class may progress at a relatively similar rate throughout the year; however, some students may advance more quickly while others may need additional time to fully comprehend and properly execute the assigned vocabulary. A child who is more advanced and technically proficient than her classmates may not feel challenged, become bored, lose interest, or regress due to complacency. Conversely, if a student is struggling to keep up with the class they may experience feelings of insecurity, frustration, or develop bad habits by compromising in an attempt to perform the steps. Either scenario does not bode well for the long-term technical and artistic growth of the student. Ideally, the student should be placed in the level where she will gain the most knowledge, be physically and mentally challenged and have the ability to work with technical precision.

It is recommended that annual or semiannual written evaluations be distributed to parents and/or students depending on age appropriateness. However, if at any point in the semester a student seems to be struggling or is in need of advancement such recommendations should be encouraged at that time. Continual evaluation provides teachers the opportunity to offer additional recommendations for specialized study, private lessons, or other beneficial training. Such decisions are made at the teacher's discretion and in the best interest of the student.

Often times schools are organized so there are several sections of a given level in a ballet school. For example, Kansas City Ballet School has three sections of Level 3. To ensure each section is progressing at the same rate, it is advised that course objectives be established. Some schools follow a set curriculum or defined syllabus. Articulating objectives for each level allows the instructor the flexibility of creating

combinations and presenting information as they see fit, but provides structure and common goals for students within a given level throughout the school. Course objectives also serve as a valuable evaluation tool. Dancers are expected to reach a standard delineated by each objective in order to advance to the following level. This is a concrete measure of achievement that can be of support to instructors when discussing promotion decisions with parents and students. Course objectives should be the most important foundational accomplishments necessary for students to continue to more advanced study. Ballet training builds from fundamental to advanced vocabulary. Objectives may be explained as building blocks or stair steps from to one level to the next. Dancers may reach each objective at different rates depending on their individual growth, technical progress, and artistic development. If dancers and parents become familiar with course objectives and advancement criteria, they will in turn have a better understanding of pointe promotion criteria when the time comes.

Minimum Age to Begin Pointe

This thesis research supports the recommended that students be ten to twelve years old before beginning pointe work. Students must complete sufficient length of study, meet pointe advancement requirements and reach a level of social, cognitive, and physical maturity to before pointe promotion may occur.

Many dance educators believe that most students will be eligible to begin pointe at approximately eleven years old. While age is a consideration to begin pointe work, most teachers do not promote students to pointe based on age, but rather on strength, technical ability, length and rigor of study, and developmental and physical maturity.

Students most often begin formal ballet training in the United States at the age of seven. Programs with a traditional schedule require young dancers to take ballet class two to four times weekly depending on their level. On average, each level (one through three) may take at least one year to complete. Based on this formula, it is recommended that students should only be evaluated for pointe readiness after completing three to four years of training, which places them at ten to twelve years of age. It is accepted among dance educators that three to four years of early ballet training are necessary for a dancer to achieve the required strength, balance and coordination needed for purposeful pointe work.

Age should not be the primary consideration for pointe promotion. For example, a twelve-year-old student with only one year of ballet training will generally not be sufficiently prepared for pointe work. Physical requirements for pointe work may only be achieved through classical ballet training. Previous generations of “baby ballerinas” began dancing *en pointe* at seven or eight years of age. However, contemporary knowledge in adolescent development, exercise science, anatomy, and medicine suggests that this practice may not be in the best interest of the health and wellness of growing dancer. Responsible progression of classical ballet training paired with a dancer’s physical and emotional maturity protects the student’s well-being, better prepares them for pointe work, and contributes to a long and healthy adulthood as well as the potential of a performing career.

There are certain schools which offer a more rigorous course of study, requiring dancers to attend multiple ballet classes five to six days weekly from a very early age. This concentrated study allows students to realize technical improvements at a quicker

rate than children who only attend class two days per week. Prolonged early training serves to slowly introduce stresses to bones of the feet, allowing them to build strength and density. Medically this is known as Wolf's Law, which states that a healthy bone will adapt to the load that is placed on it. If the load on a particular bone increases, the bone will remold itself over time to become stronger and more able to resist that sort of loading.²⁹² A rigorous dance class schedule may result in early development of strong bone and muscular structures. Therefore, a student who adheres to a stringent training regime having developed sufficient strength may be ready for pointe at an earlier age. It should be noted that few schools in the United States offer this type of training program.

A methodical and responsible approach to beginning pointe work should be implemented at whatever age is deemed safe for the dancer. As in all pointe related decisions, consistency and sensibility of instruction is the most important component of student proficiency and safety. It is recommended that age be a consideration in determining pointe readiness, but must be in proportion to technical ability, coordination, strength, and other pointe requirements achieved through consistent ballet training. A teacher should also take the developmental maturity of a student into account when promoting a dancer to pointe. Many teachers interviewed expressed a very similar thought on starting children too young *en pointe* by saying, "Just because they can doesn't mean they should." The end result of training a beginning student through to a professional dancer should be the goal of all dance educators. The purity, quality and sensibility of a dancer's training will be reflected when they graduate into the professional world of dance.

²⁹² De Vita, Lukas and Wadler, *ABT NTC Training the Whole Dancer*, 57.

Pre-Pointe Curriculum and Methods

When a school has a specific pre-pointe program within their classical ballet curriculum, it is recommended that course objectives be established to ensure consistency throughout the school. Objectives support instructors with class planning through the benefit of guidelines and expectations for this evolving focus of ballet training. These goals allow the teacher to customize exercises and course content to guide students to satisfy the objectives and towards pointe readiness. It is also recommended that dancers be educated on pointe information including how to sew and tie ribbons and elastics, toe padding and taping, types of shoes, and what to expect when beginning pointe. This instruction will further ease the transition from ballet slippers to pointe shoes.

Pre-pointe as a specific area of focus is relatively new in classical ballet training. Many schools are just developing pre-pointe programs, some are assessing how pointe preparation is built into their ballet technique classes, and others have rather defined pointe preparatory programs in place. Whether pre-pointe classes are established or in development, schools are navigating newly chartered waters and are determining what method of pointe introduction will most benefit their ballet students. Only after dancers transition to pointe may the success of pointe preparation be determined. As schools evaluate their beginning pointe students, they will also reflect on pre-pointe methods to consider how the next group of dancers may be better prepared. It is undisputed that pointe preparation should be an objective in the training of young female students. Many professional schools view ballet training with additional focus on *demi-pointe*, jumping, and foot strengthening as a natural means of preparing dancers for pointe.

Other academies allocate specific class time, in addition to ballet technique, for pre-pointe training. Most pre-pointe classes range from fifteen to forty-five minutes following ballet class.

There are different methods of pre-pointe training including the use of pre-pointe shoes, Therabands™, additional foot strengthening and stretching practice, and/or body conditioning. All methods may be of great benefit to the dancer if complimentary to their classical ballet training. Additional pre-pointe time allows for more personalized instruction to address individual anatomical specifications and for teachers to further assess a dancer's readiness for pointe.

Whether instruction is built into ballet technique training or as a separate course of study, pointe preparation is essential to the success a dancer will have transitioning to pointe work. If a school details a pre-pointe program, it is recommended that the purpose of the class, course objectives, and goals be clearly defined. Identifying course objectives and goals ensures the purpose of the class is being fulfilled and still allows instructors the flexibility of structuring exercises to suit the needs of their students. Defining objectives also allows schools to assess individual elements of the program and identify those most beneficial, which should be carried over for future pre-pointe classes.

It is also recommended that basic information regarding pointe shoes be presented in pre-pointe class. Teaching students how sew and tie ribbons and elastics, about the parts and materials of the shoe, preferred brands, toe pads and taping, and what to expect when going *en pointe* aids in the transition to pointe work. The business of pointe shoes can be one less element to teach when students begin pointe.

Requirements to Begin Pointe

It is recommended that schools delineate prerequisites that students must meet in order to begin pointe work. Dancers may be assessed and evaluated for pointe readiness based on these requirements. Criteria may include required mastery of ballet vocabulary, technical elements, age requirements, developmental markers, and anatomical specifications.

Responses to this discussion were quite consistent throughout the dance community. Ballet teachers unanimously agree that skills needed for pointe work may only be gained through several years of rigorous classical ballet training. Consistent training with multiple ballet classes each week for three to four years must be completed in order for a student to be considered for beginning pointe work. Several key physical requirements result from this training. Students will master these requirements at different rates based on their individual development, growth, and maturity. There is no benefit to rushing a dancer into pointe shoes if they do not possess the attributes needed to meet the physical demands of dancing *en pointe*. Age is not the sole determinant for pointe promotion, but a child's development must be taken into consideration for their health and well-being. The rigor of an academy's program affects how quickly a student may develop muscular and skeletal strength. All decisions regarding pointe promotion must be made by a qualified, experienced ballet instructor in the best interest of each individual student.

While ballet schools have different philosophies regarding pointe promotion, several consistencies surfaced regarding the evaluation of a student's readiness for pointe. These requirements may only be realized through ballet training; however,

supplemental study in Pilates, body conditioning, and pre-pointe may assist with a student's readiness. The ideal pointe candidate will retain the following characteristics necessary to transition to pointe successfully: core, leg, foot and ankle strength; body awareness; proper alignment; good coordination; a certain level of athleticism, muscular attack or quick twitch muscle response; an awareness of how to activate or employ different muscles; a foot and ankle structure that may facilitate pointe work; an eagerness and responsible approach to her work; and a determined understanding and execution of ballet technique and artistry.

A ballet school should identify and define the important qualities they find necessary for pointe promotion. Similar to course objectives, a pointe advancement criterion outlines the requirements for a student to begin pointe work. When communicating with parents and students, outlined requirements of beginning pointe work provide additional support of instructor decisions regarding pointe readiness.

Promoting Students to Pointe as a Class or Individually

There is no definitive recommendation to whether it is advisable to promote dancers to pointe as a class, individually, or in small groups. If implemented correctly, either philosophy may be advisable. However, there are two recommendations this thesis offers regarding how students are promoted to pointe in consideration of both approaches. To help ensure individual attention and instruction is given during a student's first classes *en pointe*, it is recommended that dancers be promoted to pointe individually or in small groups. However, if pointe readiness is a prerequisite for

students to advance to the level in which pointe begins and appropriate student-teacher ratio is maintained it is recommended that students begin pointe as a class.

There are benefits of promoting students to pointe both as a class and individually. It can be a very exciting, supportive, and bonding experience to go *en pointe* as a class. Certain schools believe that if a dancer meets the requirements to advance to the level where pointe begins, they should be ready for pointe work. If students are promoted to this determined level, they may begin pointe as a class. This approach also enables an instructor to teach the entire class at the same level of instruction, progressing through their first year of beginning pointe. It may be most convenient and consistent to promote a class to pointe if they are all ready. There will always be students who find pointe work more challenging than others and struggle through their first year. Others will naturally take to the new apparatus and excel more quickly. Regardless, as a whole, the class should be able to move forward at relatively the same pace.

A greater technical separation may occur at the completion of the first year of pointe when students are evaluated for more intermediate pointe work. In many schools, the level in which students begin pointe must often be repeated if more time is needed to master beginning pointe objectives. In these circumstances, second year pointe students may have a different pointe class than brand new students to pointe. If the advancement criteria requires students be ready for pointe to be promoted to the level in which pointe begins, the entire class will be ready to begin pointe work at the same time.

More personalized attention and instruction may be given to students who are promoted to pointe individually or as a small group. Schools that promote dancers individually generally have very specific pointe advancement criteria and want to ensure each student transitions to pointe at the correct time. Teachers also want to have their hands and eyes on each dancer through their first few classes *en pointe*. It is certainly more difficult to physically guide and correct an entire class that is beginning pointe at the same time. Working one-on-one or in a small group with novice pointe dancers allows the teacher opportunity to give more focused instruction and supervised correction.

Promoting individuals or small groups often creates multiple levels within one class including students who are still practicing in ballet slippers, those who are completely new to pointe, and others who have more experience in their pointe shoes. This may be challenging for the teacher, but possible with careful planning and organization. If the class size is larger and students require individual attention, it may be recommended to promote students to pointe in smaller groups. Certain schools do not require dancers be immediately ready for pointe to advance into the level in which pointe work begins. Dancers are given more time in the corresponding level to become better prepared for pointe and then begin when they are deemed ready. In this scenario it is recommended that students begin pointe individually or in smaller groups.

There is no “right” answer as to whether students should be promoted to pointe individually, in small groups, or as a class. An academy’s class structure, curriculum, and advancement criteria of each level will determine what works best for the school. Both philosophies have benefits and challenges. As long as the chosen protocol is

beneficial to the student and organization there is no clear advantage or definitive recommendation.

Communication with Parents and Students

It is recommended that schools regularly schedule and determine effective methods of communication with parents, and when appropriate dancers. Topics may include student promotion, evaluation, identified concerns, possible anatomical issues, and pre-pointe and pointe policies. Annual or biannual standardized written evaluations are effective communication forums. Student specific issues or concerns may require in-person conferences with the parent.

It is essential to establish professional boundaries with parents and students. As teachers interact directly with students, parents receive information often filtered through the interpretation of their children. Dancers are enthusiastic about their training and eager to be rewarded with their teacher's validation. Parents act in support of their children's aspirations. Ballet instructors are the primary source of information and advice, trusted to guide students through the training process. The instructor's professional recommendations should be accepted and not challenged or debated. However, parents and students may react out of emotion or lack of knowledge if they do not understand or agree with a particular decision. Trust and respect must be gained and established between all parties, as everyone is working toward the same objective of assisting the student in healthfully achieving her dance goals. Fortright communication with established boundaries contributes to an effective working relationship between teacher, student and parent. Providing the parents with clear

information regarding procedures, expectations of the dancer and parent, the student evaluation process, mode of directing questions or concerns, and what the dancer and parent should expect while participating in the school may answer many questions upfront.

Many organizations provide documentation to parents at enrollment and other important milestones in their training. Handbooks and form letters are effective references used to inform parents of specific procedures for the ballet school. It is recommended that schools implement standardized written student evaluations to communicate a dancer's accomplishments as well as areas in need of improvement each semester or year. Evaluations are an excellent opportunity to recognize hard work, announce promotions, provide constructive criticism, or request a conference should there be concerns such as the necessity of a child repeating a level.

A certain level of communication and transparency with the parents is recommended for all decisions concerning pointe promotion. When a potential challenge for a student's ultimate pointe success is identified, it is advised that parents be informed. Once they are aware of the situation and presented with available options, they will have the tools they need to make decisions in the best interest of their child. If pointe promotion is delayed it is important to convey the reasons for this decision to the student and parent. While a teacher should not feel the need to validate their professional opinions, open dialogue inspires trust and clear communication.

It is always exciting to deliver the news in person that a student is ready to begin pointe work and may buy their shoes. There is also a very special sentimental practice of passing pointe traditions down from experienced dancers to novice students within a

school. Providing written instructions further explaining pointe shoe processes is recommended to ensure information is properly conveyed and interpreted. Julia Wilkinson Manley Artistic Director of Colorado Conservatory of Dance provides all new pointe students and parents with a pointe survival kit detailing CCD procedures. The packet includes: a beginning pointe checklist, recommended pointe shoe fitting locations, how to prepare shoes for the first day, how to sew the ribbons and elastics, how to care for feet, suggested first-aid items to have at home and in the dance bag, suggested resource material, pointe shoe preservation techniques, and a recommended shopping list. If boundaries are maintained, parent teacher communication contributes to an effective working relationship benefitting the student's ballet training experience.

PROJECTED CONTINUING RESEARCH

Follow-Up Interviews

Several schools in this study had well-developed pre-pointe programs in place, some were just conceptualizing adding a specific pointe preparation focus to their curriculum and others believed preparation should be built into all levels of classical ballet training. Regardless of the pre-pointe pedagogy, all participants expressed a desire to revisit many of the interview questions after an additional year of teaching their students. Many topics discussed through the use of the questionnaire inspired new thoughts and questions concerning pointe preparation. Discussions resulting from this process caused teachers to reevaluate select concepts, practices, and philosophies surrounding pre-pointe education currently in place at their schools. A large percentage of participants requested additional contact later in the year after they had an

opportunity to experiment with new pre-pointe ideas or training concepts. Inspiring teachers to reassess how they prepare their students for pointe work was a very exciting secondary consequence of this project. Beyond this thesis research, follow-up interviews would be conducted to assess the results realized from pre-pointe training in response to the enthusiastic feedback received from those interviewed. Regular yearly interviews would be scheduled to monitor how schools continue to modify their pre-pointe philosophies and methods.

Pre-Pointe Shoes

Further research concerning pre-pointe shoes should be conducted to continue exploring and assessing their relevance in pointe preparation. Pre-pointe shoes are a relatively new tool used in classical ballet training. Few schools currently require their dancers to use the shoes for pre-pointe class. Those who are implementing their use have only done so in the past year or two. Due to their infancy, it is too soon to fully assess the pre-pointe shoe's effectiveness in pre-pointe training. The validity of their use may only be quantified by comparing the pointe readiness of students who wore the pre-pointe shoes with those who transitioned to pointe shoes directly from ballet slippers. To obtain true results, two groups of students from the same school would have to be compared to eliminate variables caused by alternate training methods. In addition to assessing students and interviewing teachers, dancewear manufacturers would be contacted regarding client interest and product demand for the shoes. The market demand for a pre-pointe shoe presence would validate the growing popularity of pre-pointe education in classical ballet training.

Many dance educator objections to the shoes were rooted in the newness of their design and limited choices in fitting options. Following how the pre-pointe shoe design changes would reflect the modifications made to improve the shoe. These modifications may identify some of the challenges earlier designs presented to students and teachers. Statistics of injuries incurred while wearing the shoes would also be analyzed to assess the safety of the shoe.

Applying Pre-Pointe Methods

Further assessing the effectiveness of various pre-pointe methods would require applied study of each method on select groups of students. Student participants would need to have completed the same amount of ballet training, studied with the same instructors, and be the same predetermined age to eliminate unwanted variables. The study would be comprised of three groups: Group A would prepare for pointe using pre-pointe shoes and follow a set syllabus of pre-pointe exercises designed for the use of the shoes; Group B would have additional pre-pointe study with *relevés* and foot exercises practiced in their ballet shoes; Group C would use body conditioning, Theraband™, and Pilates supplemental training as their method of pre-pointe training. During this study Groups A, B, and C would continue to take the same technique classes but break apart for their separate prescribed pre-pointe instruction.

This experimentation would span an entire academic year concluding with all students being promoted to pointe. Data would be gathered during the entire process, documenting student improvement as it directly relates to each individual pre-pointe method. Groups A, B, and C would all take the same beginning pointe class once

promoted to pointe. Results would be obtained by assessing the ease of how students transition to pointe and the success throughout their first year of beginning pointe work. In order to validate results, this experiment would need to be repeated by three generations of pre-pointe students. This process would yield studied recommendations for pre-pointe training methods and supporting sample exercises.

Proposed Pre-Pointe Sample Curriculum

If this thesis study were extended, a sample pre-pointe curriculum would be recommended. This curriculum would detail suggested requirements or advancement protocol for students to begin pointe with additional information for teachers regarding how they may effectively evaluate student readiness for pointe work. Pre-pointe course objectives would clearly define the goals and purpose of the program. This document would not be a syllabus dictating required exercises, but a curriculum offering a general content outline and sample combinations to effectively prepare students to meet the course objectives required to begin pointe. Resources for health, wellness, and adolescent development would be provided along with recommendations for age appropriate use of body conditioning, Theraband™, Pilates, and pre-pointe shoes. Information packets and/or templates for parents and students discussing all topics related to pre-pointe and pointe training would also be provided in the proposed pre-pointe sample curriculum. Research to complete a sample pre-pointe curriculum as described above would require interviews and observations conducted over a period of years to adequately evaluate and assess the effectiveness of various pre-pointe methods.

For this reason, it was not possible to include a specific pre-pointe curriculum as part of this thesis – rather it would be an avenue of further study.

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ANALYSIS OF PRE-PIONTE CLASSICAL BALLET PEDAGOGY
QUESTIONNAIRE²⁹³

Name _____ School _____ Date _____

Class and School Structure

1. How many years of codified ballet training, not including creative movement, have pre-pointe students completed?
2. How many ballet classes/hours per week are required of pre-pointe students?
3. How much time is scheduled for each student's pre-pointe instruction per week?
4. How much time is scheduled for beginning pointe per week?
5. Do you offer pre-pointe specific classes or build preparation into the technique curriculum?
6. What is the average pre-pointe class size?

Evaluation for Pointe

1. How are students evaluated for acceptance into the above named school?
2. What is the age range of pre-pointe students?
3. What is the minimum age requirement to being pointe?
4. Should all students go *en pointe*?
 - a. If not, are alternate options, such as separate classes that offer a different focus available?
5. Do dancers begin pointe individually or as a class and how does is this transition facilitated?
6. What are three principle requirements to begin pointe?
7. In the last year, what is one of the primary physical conditions that precluded a student from starting pointe?
8. How do you address anatomical issues that may affect pointe work? (For example, are students given specific exercises, referred to a specialist of kinesiology etc.)

Pre-Pointe Methods

1. How do you define pre-pointe?
2. What is the primary method of pre-pointe training?
3. Does your syllabus or curriculum detail a pre-pointe program?

²⁹³ Questionnaire created by Rose Taylor-Spann for thesis research, October 2015.

4. How do you incorporate the use of pre-pointe tools such as pre-pointe or de-shanked shoes, TheraBand™ etc.?
5. Are you familiar and/or have experience with pre-pointe shoes? What are your thoughts regarding the shoes?
6. What information regarding progression to pointe is communicated to parents and how?
7. What information regarding progression to pointe is communicated to students and how?

Please leave any additional comments or thoughts regarding pre-pointe training that were not addressed in the previous questions.

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