

Re-thinking Dance Technique in HE: PALATINE online questionnaire

15 respondents representing 12 institutions.

Which dance techniques are taught on your courses?

The most commonly taught technique is contact improvisation (14). This is followed by named contemporary dance techniques (e.g. Graham, Cunningham, Laban, etc) (12); then ballet (10) and release based techniques (10).

What do you most want your students to learn from dance technique?

Some responses focussed primarily on the acquisition of technical skills e.g. flexibility, coordination, stability, use of gravity, etc

The development of individuality, especially in the sense of self knowledge, was seen as key. Conscious awareness, reflection and the development of responsibility for learning were all mentioned in this respect.

What other skills and understanding do you aim to teach for?

- Transference of skill and knowledge
- Ability to work with others
- Observation
- Musicality
- How to learn
- Curiosity
- Performance skills

How has your teaching of dance technique changed in the last 5 yrs?

Most responses described shifts in teaching methods to encourage student engagement through student centred learning (e.g reflective and collaborative learning).

- More discussion and observation.
- 'I do less and they do more.'
- Less demonstration – 'I am not the exemplar'
- Suggestion rather than insistence

Other responses included changes to the way in which classes are structured; a greater emphasis on long term health and well being

What has influenced or caused this change?

These were almost exclusively attributed to:

- Maturity (sometimes arising from constraints of ageing) together with self reflection
- Involvement in research and/or professional development. (The impact of an increased emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning).

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What aspects of teaching dance technique do you find most challenging?

- Dealing with a broad range of ability and attitude
- Resolving conflicting needs and requirements (e.g. of students, the syllabus, the university)
- Communicating and motivating students to engage in process
- Balancing the representational and the experiential in 'traditional' dance technique

What do you think most inhibits student learning in dance technique?

This was mostly attributed to students' prior learning and understanding:

- more authoritarian, didactic approaches to dance teaching resulting in a 'lack of commitment to sharing the responsibility for learning'
- a limited view of dance (especially arising from engagement in commercial dance styles and a view of dance as entertainment).

This coupled with an unwillingness or inability to engage with new thinking and styles. Also low self-esteem/lack of confidence. (Possibly linked with body shape/image – 'not having an awareness of how far they can improve their bodies and technique' – not helped by the use of mirrors)

What do you think most enables student learning in dance technique?

Most respondents referred (in one way or another) to student preparedness to engage in processes of learning such as reflection, enquiry, critical thinking, problem solving. Also mentioned was the need to understand the body (to lessen a reliance on copying a teacher's demonstration).

'Removing mirrors and not allowing Gucci, Prada and any other 'in' label into the studio!'

In an ideal world what would you like to change about how dance technique is taught and learned in HE?

A desire to emphasise learning was voiced strongly. This included a call for a variety of teaching and learning methods e.g. making time for reflection and discussion; more opportunity for students to experience 'doing/questioning/doing the work'. The need to encourage students to take a more proactive approach was recognised.

There was a call for fewer 'codified' techniques; less emphasis on 'styles associated with American modernism' and a higher profile for 'somatic practices' in relationship to 'the more traditional dance techniques.'

'Not separating technique from creativity and performance.'