

*Growing up in dance:
Enhancing education
and creating sustainable
practices in growth and
maturation*

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Introductions



DOCTORAL
RESEARCH



WORK WITH EXETER



WORK WITH ISTD

The paradox



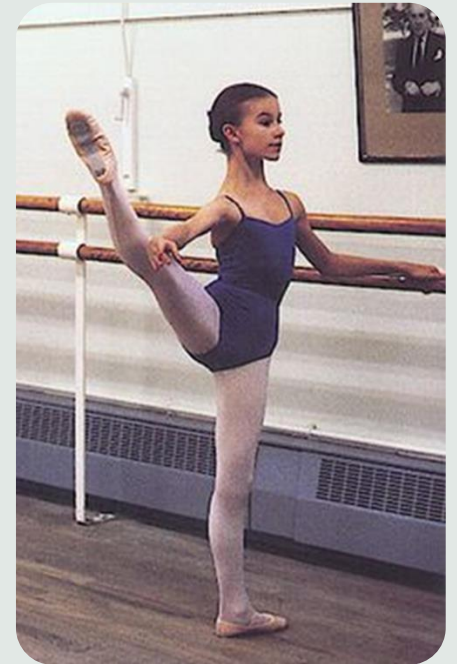
Dance has the potential to cause both harm and benefit



Recreational dancers report more positive psychological outcomes (self-esteem, adaptive motivation), promoting **positive** and sustainable involvement in dance



Vocational dancers more susceptible to **negative** psychological and health outcomes



A perfect storm

Puberty is an interval during which **risk** to health and wellbeing is increased

Many **psychosocial issues** such as eating disorders begin during adolescence

How well an individual **adapts** to changes at puberty is key for psychological wellbeing

Young dancers must adapt to puberty within a **context** which subjects them to **amplified risk**; limited research on this subject

The challenges associated with pubertal change are further complicated by the **significant variation in age of onset**.

Largely overlooked population with key insights on this topic

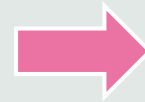
In depth interviews with 10 UK dance teachers

Exploring the adolescent female body in ballet as perceived by the dance teacher and how social value may change during puberty

Dance teacher perspectives

Dance teacher perspectives

- Puberty as **'make or break'**
- Combination of **direct** and **indirect approaches** used by teachers to negotiate issues surrounding pubertal change
- Perception of different timing and associated advantages and disadvantages **varied greatly** among teachers
- **Late maturing** dancers seen by teachers to be at a **disadvantage**



How do young dancers perceive the challenges of puberty?



What are the experiences of maturing and developing in the context of vocational dance training?

- Exploratory research
- 28 interviews with young dancers in 3 different vocational ballet schools in the UK
- IPA Analysis

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the **experiences** of maturing and developing young dancers in the context of dance training environments?
- What (if any) are the **differences in perceived wellbeing, coping** and how individual's of differing maturity timing manage different **learning experiences?**

Existing research in this area

- Mostly in ballet and with female participants
- Dated
- The social context of ballet may amplify detriment to psychological wellbeing during puberty
- Earlier (early and on time) maturation associated with poorer psychosocial wellbeing
- Advantages for later maturation in ballet (physical and psychosocial) Up to 70% of female ballet dancers are late maturing

Brooks-Gunn, 1988; Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1985; Hamilton, Hamilton, Warren, Keller, & Molnar, 1997

Findings from this study

3 key areas affected by maturity timing:

- Social support
- Time to adjust
- Training experiences (injury/selection and evaluation)

Mitchell et al., 2020



Findings

Late Maturing Dancer

- Feeling lucky
- Fitting in
- Physical and aesthetic advantages
- Feeling prepared

- Decrease in physical performance as others increase
 - Experiencing physical change during crucial later training years
- > INITIAL EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL CHANGE

- Feeling left behind
- Ongoing physical injury
- Not ready for testing/evaluation – Needing time to catch up
- Learning to cope

Early Maturing Dancer

- Being different
- Feeling Unprepared
- Decreased performance
- Physical change and injury

- Struggling and overcoming
 - Time to adjust to change
- > LEARNING TO COPE

- Physically ready for testing/evaluation
- Physically and psychologically prepared

Year 1 - 2 of training

Year 3 - 4 of training

Year 5 - 6 of training



How can we work to optimise experiences for dancers of differing maturity timing?

1. Opportunities for dance teachers to **advance knowledge**
- 2. Measurement and monitoring** of growth and maturation
3. Adapting **approaches** to training

*Aim to improve adaptive responses at puberty

*Needs to be guided by dance professionals



Opportunities for further teacher education

Dance teachers are key figures, responsible for guiding young dancers through their training

Research conducted with dance teachers in the UK via national organisation One Dance UK

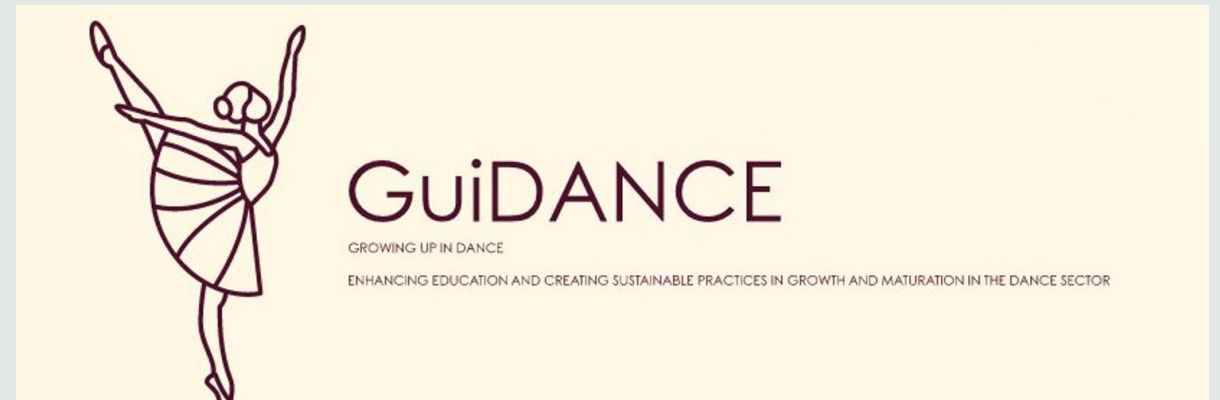
- **Over half** (59.5%) of teachers reported that they had **not received any education** or training on this topic.
- Least confident in **biological changes at puberty** and their effect on health and wellbeing, **impact of maturity timing** on physiological/psychological development and approaches to **managing and monitoring puberty**.
- The majority (89%) of dance teachers wanted opportunities to learn more - demand for further resources in this area.

Opportunities for further teacher education

Guidance from teachers for development of educational resources on growth and maturation:

- Maintain a **practical and applied focus**; how to apply knowledge to teaching contexts rather than just providing information
- Provide more **regular opportunities to learn** about this topic
- Cater to **all levels** to ensure that more advanced as well as basic knowledge is being offered.
- Offer a **time/space to share experiences and practices** as well as providing information
- **Different approaches** for vocational and recreational

The GuiDANCE project



ROYAL ACADEMY OF
DANCE



**One
Dance**
UK
The UK Body
for Dance



ROYAL
BALLET
SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER | MEDICAL
SCHOOL



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



GuidANCE

GROWING UP IN DANCE
ENHANCING EDUCATION AND CREATING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN GROWTH AND MATURATION IN THE DANCE SECTOR

Advisory groups



DANCE TEACHER
ADVISORY GROUP



STUDENT ADVISORY
GROUP

Overarching goal

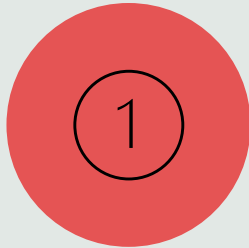
- As a partnership, we aim to address the challenges associated with pubertal transition in dance for young people.
- In so doing, we aim to equip the sector to better support healthy adolescent development within dance careers and to equip the next generation of dancers to manage sustainable careers.

We will do this by:

1. educating key stakeholders in the dance sector about growth and maturation;
2. co-creating a best practice policy within a leading establishment;
3. co-creating an online resource with sector-wide bodies.



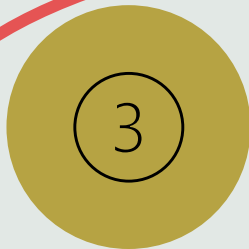
The project



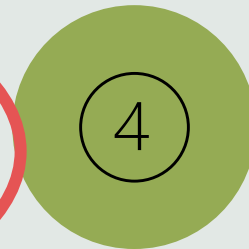
Developing data



**Review of practices
and protocols at RBS**



**Evaluation and
refinement of
educational workshops**



**Co-creation and
implementation of
best practice**

*REVIEW OF EXISTING EDUCATION
ON GROWTH, MATURATION AND
DEVELOPMENT IN DANCE*

77 participants completed the survey

85.7% female

Ages ranged from 21-76 (mean of 45 years)

Majority (75.6%) had been teaching 11+ years

Most common age group taught 10-18 years (62.8%)

Range of teaching contexts: Private, vocational, secondary school, community, primary school, further education, higher education, teacher training, pre-vocational and other

47.4% obtained their ITT qualification from RAD, 15.8% from BBO, other 42% made up of IDTA, RBS, ISTD, Northern Ballet School, Washington School of Ballet.

Survey respondents overview

Interview overview

10 interviews

Range of teachers- recreational, vocational, newly trained, highly experienced, all ballet focused

All female

All attended training on the adolescent dancer through RAD, ODUK or ISTD

Education in growth and maturation



48% of dance teachers had not received any education or training on growth and maturation in their initial teacher training (compared to 59.5% in the original 2016 survey)



43.6% had attended CPD training on the topic of growth and development



Of those who had attended CPD training, 58.8% had already received education on this in their initial teacher training, 41.2% had not.

Where does this training primarily sit?

Findings suggest not being satisfactorily achieved through initial teacher training

CPD important for those already completed TT to fill gaps BUT this space should also be used to build and advance training

Not prioritised within ITT or CPD currently

Subsequently, not prioritised by teachers/seen as essential

"...you know cpd is seen by some teachers or somebody's got to take...**just got to tick the box.** ...I think it's actually about finding teachers who want to develop their practice and grow their practice...so it's how you work with the reluctant, the unconverted"



Role and remit

82.1% of teachers agreed this topic sits within their remit as a dance teacher.

"Dance teachers often have the unique position of teaching the same children all throughout their childhood and adolescence. This makes you significant adult role model in their lives and in my view means you have a responsibility to assist in ensuring their social and emotional wellbeing alongside their physical development."

"**Dance is more than learning technique, routines and steps**, dance is a community that brings us together through the art and we teach them through their most vulnerable years, particularly socially, so it is our duty to ensure that help them outside the classroom as well as within."

"...the responsibilities that we have as dance teachers, I don't think we always necessarily realize that there's just so much more to teaching them to point the toes and skip."

"For me, the biggest impact I have in people's lives is the fact that they shut the door, we put the music on and the world goes away. And they come and do this with me for 10 years. And **so I'm not just present in their lives one year I'm part of their entire childhood.**"

What about parents and students?



79% of respondents agreed it would be beneficial for the parents of their students to have more knowledge about growth and development



96% of respondents agreed it would be beneficial for their students to have more knowledge about growth and development

Reasons for attending

Topic not covered or
not covered adequately
in ITT

Self-identified gap in
knowledge

General interest in topic

"In my experience, virtually nothing literally nothing [covered in ITT] the focus was very much on how the steps were built on the grades."

"There was a little bit of child psychology, but it was a bit rough and ready....You know it was...It was amateur...**It wasn't introduced to us as a science in the same way that anatomy was.**"

"I was increasingly the teaching older girls not boys and **I just felt it was a lot I didn't know about them.** Okay, I knew all the kinds of technical stuff about the grades, and the steps that **I didn't really know enough about them as people.**"

Barriers to training

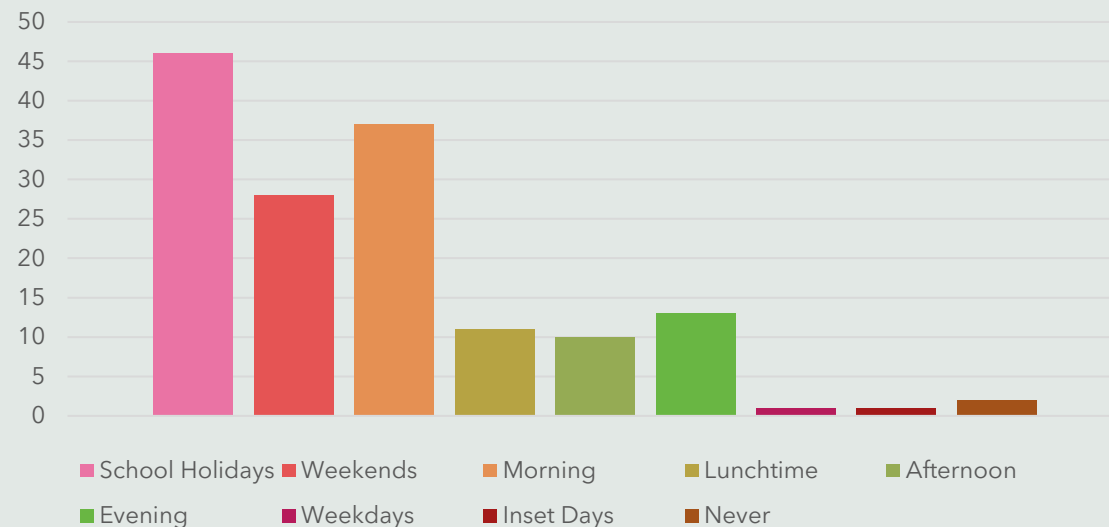
Teachers commented that training on this topic "... was not always readily available, accessible or affordable"

Biggest barriers to accessing training:

1. Time available
2. Cost
3. Timing of training
4. Location/travel

Teachers most likely to attend training in the school holidays, on weekends, with the most popular time of day for this to take place, in the morning.

When would you be most likely to attend a CPD session?



Training format

The majority of training sessions participants reported attending were one-off sessions (46.2%), or part of a series of sessions (30.8%)

62% agreed that a one-off CPD session was not enough to facilitate changes in practice

Most frequently cited training providers for this were RAD, ODUK and ISTD.

“Courses I attended were often ‘one off’ events, **disconnected from each other** and often not widely advertised. It would be really good to have a series of wellness focused workshops (with online participation options) covering a full range of topics related to adolescent dancer wellness”

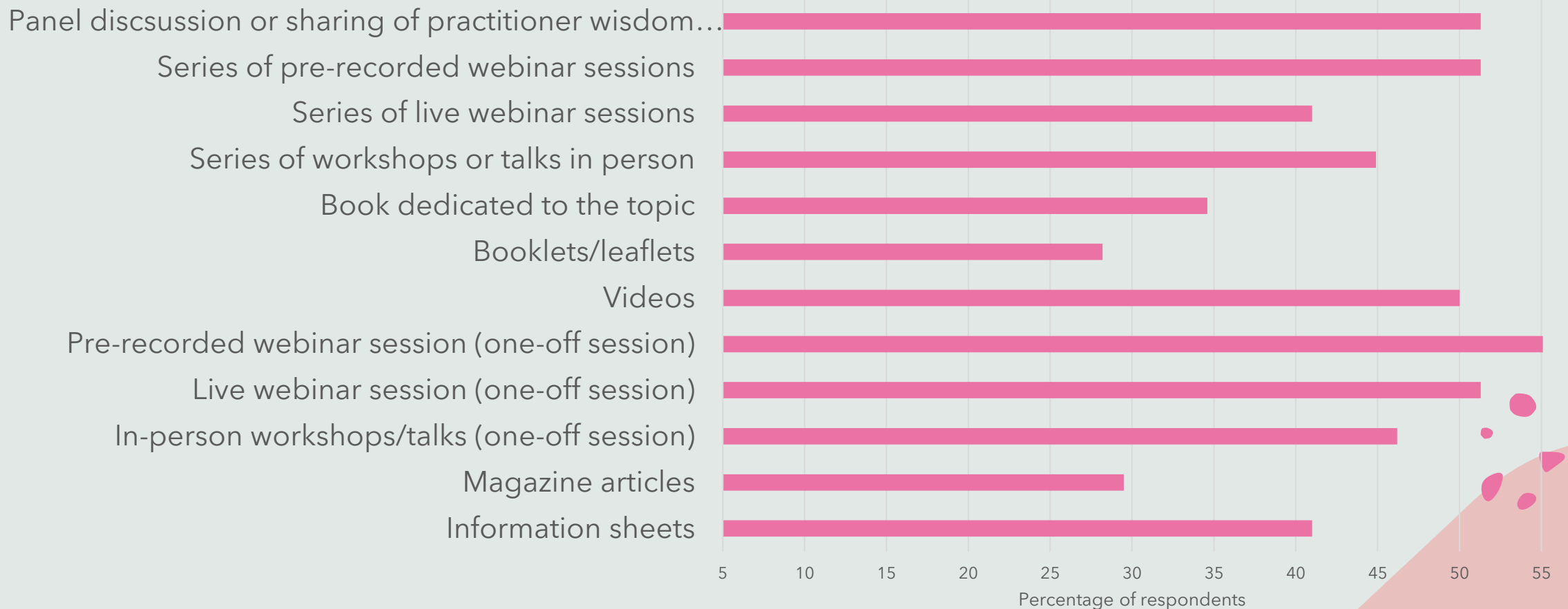
“I would like to [join a training course], however I don't believe one-hour online discussion or even a day would be enough. If I can afford the cost and time, I would like to read about this and learn through writing, getting feedback about what I have written, discussions and asking questions.

This would need to be over some time.”

Training format

When asked how they would like the topics to be addressed, webinars were the most popular choice

Mode of delivery most likely to engage with



Training content

- Primarily knowledge/theory based
- Primary focus : 64% said focus was on knowledge and 36% said focus was on both knowledge and skills. None of the participants indicated that the primary focus was on applied skills.
- When asked what the focus should ideally be on all agreed both knowledge and applied skills should be covered.

Training content

Training respondents had attended focused on physical development and growth (46.7%) and psychological wellbeing (13.3%).

The area teachers felt most confident in was managing a student who is struggling with flexibility, balance or coordination just after going through a growth spurt, for which 62.8% felt they had the skills needed to manage this well.

The area the teachers felt least confident in was managing a student who is engaging in risk-taking behaviour, for which nearly 30% felt ill-equipped.

The topic which attracted the most interest was mental health and wellbeing at adolescence, for which 70 respondents (89.7%) expressed an interest in further training.

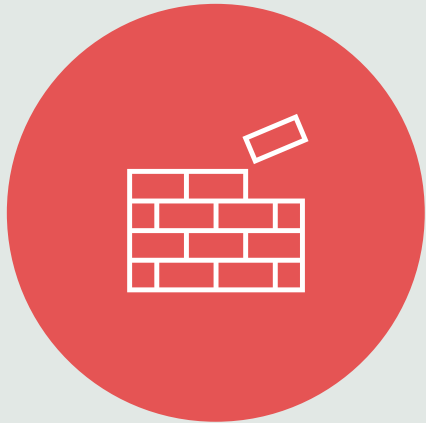
Experiences of training

"I remember going on to on the course and thinking oh wow there's so much that I hadn't given a thought to, **it was an eye opener for me**"

"...the overarching theme about it was oh my God **I've just opened the door, what do I do now. So it felt very much like the beginning of a journey** in terms of increasing awareness. I think that it was one of those pieces of training, where you kind of went away and thought about it and went away and put certain things in action."

"**It woke me up**...We can't afford not to be looking at this"

How much of this reflects your own experiences of training and CPD in this area?



SIMILAR?



DIFFERENT?



ANY FURTHER THOUGHTS ON
WHAT COULD MAKE IT BETTER?

“If you've gained the knowledge you are only successful if you have put your knowledge to use in the student and the student is better as a result.”

Examples of application to practice

Communication

- With parents and increasing confidence in these interactions e.g. letter to parents
- With students e.g., starting a dialogue, providing greater autonomy - goal setting

Noticing and understanding "I've always sort of done that, but now I understand."

- e.g., consideration of maturity in class groupings, increased awareness, maturity timing, understanding the 'why' of adolescent behaviour

Teacher strategies

- Costuming/uniform - being more sensitive to physical change
- Emotion coaching
- Goal setting
- Reflective practice

Sharing learning

- "I took all my notes and then I had an evening with my staff, my teachers, and we did 2 hours of going through what that was. I went through most of the notes and the slides and things, and then I and then we had good discussions. So **it was a really good launching pad for us** to then talk about things that it sparked."

What works

General

Access to expertise

Importance of networks for discussion

Resources

Training content

Opportunity for discussion with other teachers

Value of data, facts and theory

Challenges, tasks & interactive methods

Training that is specific to dance context



"it was opened up for discussion, and it was a mixture of OK take this concept and reflect on your practice like what have you seen 'Have you seen this?' And it was **the ability to talk to your peers in a room...** You know it was **the ability to share stories and share experiences** and to hear how other people tackle things and how the language that people use...So that's really, really helpful because you always get a golden nugget from another teacher and you think, oh God, yes, that's what I need, I'm taking that. That's really helpful, and that sort of peer to peer exchange is really helpful."

"...new information, then it means that **I can sit my practice on that.** You know certain that I can trust it, so that's helpful."

"...**it makes you think critically,** not just about that question, but about the other things as well. And the other thing it gave me was actually confidence that I was sort of roughly in the right place, you know."

"And the other thing that was helpful is that... **it was given very firmly within the context of dance** not just general childhood, it was provided to dance teachers with a knowledge of how you interact with them and what you see in the studio, not just the general population...**it was targeted to my profession**"

How can we improve...Format and accessibility of training



Where possible schedule training sessions in school holidays or on weekends, ideally in the morning.



Optimal price £10-50 (up to £75 if necessary) per training session



Consider use of advocate training to help schools with costs - 78.2% of respondents were interested in completing training as an advocate for their dance school or place of work.



Provide a range of formats to engage teachers: webinars (live/pre-recorded); series in person; panel discussion or sharing of practitioner wisdom, videos, information sheets



Where 'one off' sessions are provided ensure a follow up session is also scheduled ~ 6m later to allow time and space for reflection

*“...OK, now there's a follow up on what you learned.
How's it gone in application?
And where did you see the gaps?
Or here's some more information for you to think about...
I think that to me, that's true CPD because it's not just taking it away, it's then coming back and reassessing what you've learned through doing it”*



Reflecting on your own experiences in teaching what are the key challenges you face in this area?



How well has your initial teacher training prepared you for managing issues related to growth and development in the dance studio?

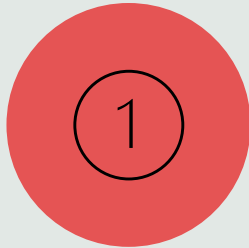


What opportunities/training/CPD could you seek out to fill any gaps?



Are these related to theory or practice?

The project



Developing data



**Review of practices
and protocols at RBS**



**Evaluation and
refinement of
educational workshops**



**Co-creation and
implementation of
best practice**

Co-creation process

Aim: To co-create the basis of guidelines for best practice around growth and development in the dance sector

Series of structured group discussions using the learning from the project as a starting point to co-create guidelines for best practice in the wider dance sector

Focus of best practice

Ensuring the pubertal transition is as healthy (physically/mentally) as possible and students feel supported

Providing developmentally appropriate training and support

Time period of focus = adolescence (i.e., 10-24 years)

Guidelines aimed at non-vocational dance training and teacher training orgs - broad brush

Key concepts of best practice

Awareness

Communication

Education

Resource/tools

Practice and implementation

Feedback/reflect/evolve

The GuiDANCE project co-creation process

WE ARE HERE TO LOOK THROUGH DIFFERENT LENSES

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

WE NEED TO ADDRESS THIS FULLY!

EDUCATION in GROWTH & MATURATION

IT IS MISSING FROM INITIAL TRAINING!

OTHER BARRIERS: TIME + MONEY

I'M INTERESTED IN THIS SO I WILL KEEP LEARNING!

the ADOLESCENT DANCER

- PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
- PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING
- MENTAL HEALTH

£10-£50 PER SESSION WOULD BE OK?

NOW I UNDERSTAND.

PROVIDE VARIETY!

ACCESS to EXPERTISE & RESOURCES

COMMUNICATION

DISCUSSION & NETWORKING

SETTING GOALS

WHAT TO EXPECT...

TEACHING STRATEGIES

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS!

DRAWING UNIFORMS

SHARING WISDOM & BEST PRACTICE

EVIDENCE BASED!

REGIONAL ADVOCATES!

WHO IS THE TRAINING FOR?

ENGAGE FULLY WITH THE PROCESS OF LEARNING!

REFLECTION TIME!

FOLLOW UPS + FEEDBACK

STUDENT ADVISORY GROUPS

NORMALISE the TOPIC!

- INFORMAL
- CONSISTENT
- FOLLOW-UPS
- REDUCE STIGMA
- FEEDBACK

WE NEED TO START these CONVERSATIONS BEFORE ADOLESCENCE!

TEACHERS CAN ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO DISCUSS GROWTH AND MATURITY ISSUES WITH THEIR PARENTS!

PARENTS NEED HELP...

WE HAVE a DUTY of CARE

TEACHER ADVISORY GROUP

CUSTOMISE & evolve your PRACTICE!

- WHAT'S APPROPRIATE?
- QUESTION YOURSELF
- EDUCATE YOURSELF (CULTURAL DIFFERENCES)

TEACHER CONFIDENCE

HOW DO I HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS?

WE SHOULD GET TO KNOW YOUNG PEOPLE BETTER!

PRACTICE AT RBS

WE ARE CAPTURING MORE DATA ON the LOAD

MONITORING GROWTH & MATURITY

MANAGING LOAD

- JUMPS
- HOURS DANCED
- BIOLOGICAL AGE

RISKS AND INJURIES

KNEE PAIN HERE? DON'T DANCE!

CAN LEAD TO MISSING TRAINING FOR A LONG PERIOD!

ADOLESCENT PERIOD

- AWKWARDNESS
- FLEXIBILITY
- INJURIES!
- CHANGE IN BODY SHAPE
- STRENGTH LEVELS

DISSEMINATION

- ASSOCIATE PROGRAMMES
- CROSS SPORT COLLABORATION
- EDUCATION (LIKE: PIV)

DATA

- ENSURE ACCURACY + CLARITY
- TALENT ID PROGRAMME
- SECURITY & STORAGE

Key concepts for best practice

AWARENESS - COMMUNICATION - EDUCATION

THERE IS NO REGULATION IN THE DANCE SECTOR!

WE NEED TO EDUCATE INSTITUTIONS!

GENERAL AWARENESS OF GROWTH AND MATURATION IN THE SOCIETY

WE CAN KEEP ON IMPROVING!

CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE & CONTENT

DANCE INSTITUTIONS NEED TO IMPLEMENT A FEEDBACK STRATEGY

STUDENT/TEACHER AGREEMENT

EXPECTATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES

Ideas for guidelines

DANCE INSTITUTIONS TO CREATE MINIMUM - and GOLD STANDARDS IN DANCE TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

CO-CREATE ACCESSIBLE messages

an INFOGRAPHIC ABOUT KNEE PAIN (highlighting OSD)

IT PROVIDERS SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST 1x MODULE ON G&M IN DANCE CONTEXTS!

THEN: CARRY ON TO SERIES OF CPD SESSIONS!

WE NEED TO CREATE SYSTEMS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE feedback

REFLECT

SYNTHESISE INFORMATION

MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

PERIODIC PEER REVIEW

ALL DANCE SCHOOLS COMMIT TO GROWTH AND MATURITY CPD

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION - FOLLOW UPS FOR ANY COURSES!

66 This needs to be a COLLABORATIVE EFFORT across the dance sector! 99

RESOURCE/TOOLS · PRACTICE /IMPLEMENTATION · FEEDBACK /REFLECT /EVOLVE

NOT JUST A ONE OFF!

% CPD SESSIONS!

WE CAN KEEP ON IMPROVING!

CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE & CONTENT

DANCE INSTITUTIONS NEED TO IMPLEMENT A FEEDBACK STRATEGY

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*Guidelines for best
practice*



Practice and implementation and feedback/reflect/evolve

Teacher training organisations should commit to...

Providing opportunities for reflection and follow-up in growth and maturation CPD training to consolidate and advance learning and application

Implementing a feedback strategy in order to share knowledge and inform evolving good practice

In order to achieve this the dance sector will need to prioritise...

Making CPD training affordable and accessible to more teachers

This will be underpinned by...

Dance sector commitment to work towards regulating dance teacher training

Sector-wide promotion of the value of training, knowledge, and skills in this area

Supporting dance schools to commit to engaging in reflection and implementation of growth and maturation CPD

Education and resource/tools

The dance sector will work towards...

Reaching a consensus of what constitutes minimum and gold standard knowledge in the area of growth and maturation

Initial teacher training including at least one module of growth and maturation in the dance context, addressing physical, psychological and cognitive aspects of development and CPD courses to build on this

This includes a commitment to work towards...

Integrating learning on growth and maturation throughout the curriculum and CPD offering

Integrating theory and application, and mental and physical knowledge on growth and maturation

In order to support this we will work to...

Develop shared resources/collaborate to reduce cost and develop resources for all

Create a repository of well managed information and resources

Communication and awareness

The dance sector commits to normalise (not stigmatise!) the topic of growth and maturation by...

Working to co-create accessible messages around growth and maturation for teachers, parents and students.

Supporting dance teachers to ensure that they understand the impact of growth and maturation on their students and make this part of dance practice and conversation

In order to support this we need to ensure...

Strong communication with children and young people in dance, to seek their input and contribution

Create a workflow of information

Provide opportunities for discussion and networking amongst dance teachers

Maintain continued collaboration across organisations including young people to reflect and evolve our practice as a sector

Relating these guidelines to your own practice



Ideas/strategies



What might this look like
in your dance studio?

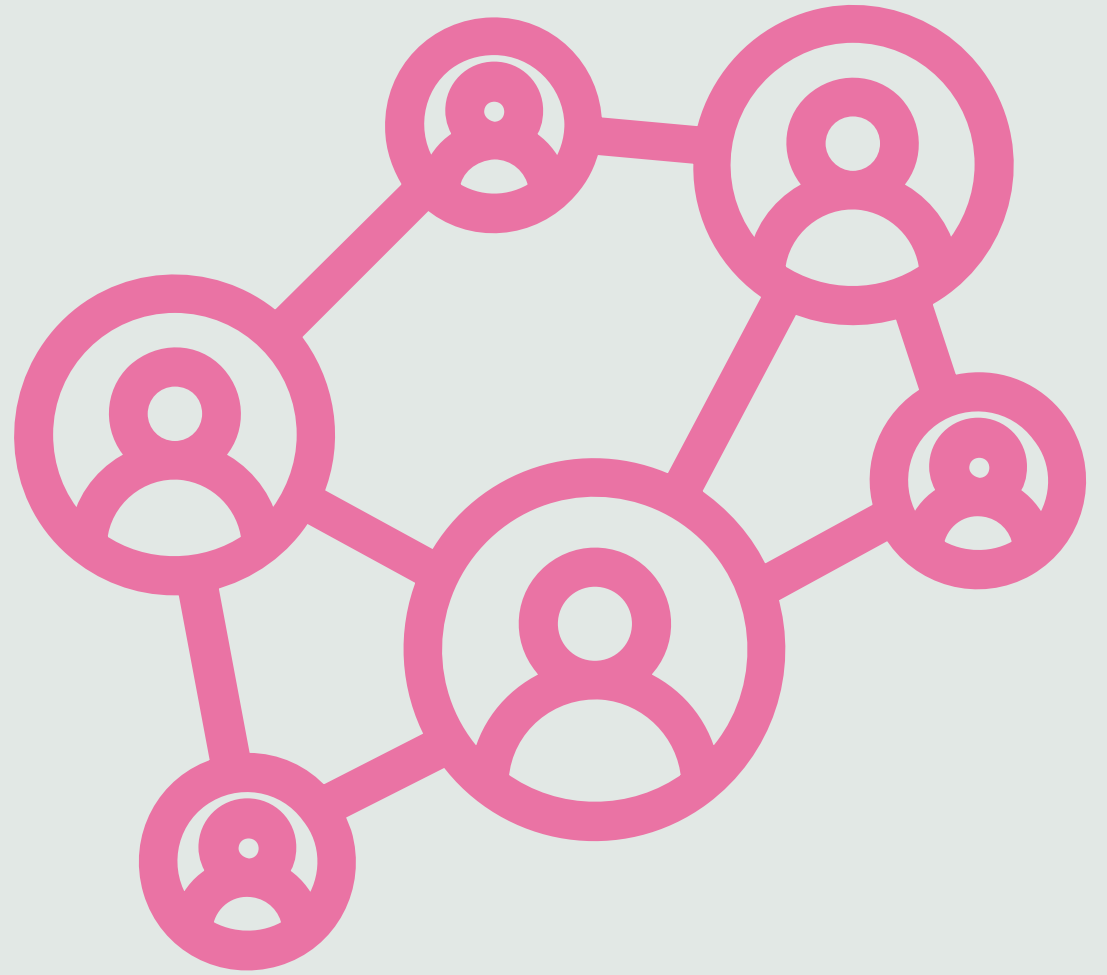


What can you do for your
practice as a teacher



Next steps

Introducing the
GUiDANCE Network...



WANT TO KNOW MORE?



To find out more see www.theadolescentdancer.com

Or email theadolescentdancer@gmail.com



Follow

<https://www.instagram.com/theadolescentdancer/>



Follow @Siobhan_Dance for all things growth and development

Follow @GuiDANCEproject for updates on the GuiDANCE project

THE
—
ADOLESCENT
—
DANCER



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