

Private Studio Education

Edited by Patricia G. Cohen

The Business of the Dance Studio

Including the Concerns of Studio Ownership in Dance Education

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The development of future dancers and teachers begins in the studios of the hometowns across our country. Some of these students, inspired by a positive studio experience, enter college dance programs with expectations of furthering their knowledge. Thus the responsibility of educating our young dancers shifts from the studio teacher to the college professor.

I believe that it is important to consider the preparation of our university dance majors aspiring to pursue career paths in dance education. What exactly are the issues and how are university programs preparing students to enter professional careers in various settings? Pragmatically, what should be taught at the undergraduate level to ensure our dance majors graduate from degree programs equipped with current educational philosophies and tools to meet the challenges of working with various levels of students? What course work will give them the business skills necessary to be successful in negotiating and securing a job? And what prepa-

ration will enable them to successfully meet the challenges of owning and operating a dance school? Preparing our college graduates for these challenges needs to be attended to responsibly and creatively in an effort to ensure that they complete the circle and return to a studio or classroom situation equipped to bring dance into the new century.

A Teaching Methods Syllabus

Most college dance programs augment requirements for a degree in dance with a core curriculum in choreography, dance history, social dance forms, and kinesiology. Many also offer pedagogy courses designed to help students prepare for a career in teaching dance. I have had the opportunity to design the Teaching Methods in Dance course at the University at Buffalo to meet what I feel are the needs of young dance teachers entering today's work force. The course, offered to both BA and BFA students, meets twice per week for 1.5 hours and offers 3 credits. The course addresses contemporary issues including:

- Teaching in the dance studio,
- Teaching in public and private school systems,
- Teaching in a university, and
- Working as a teaching artist.

We cannot expect our young dance teachers to enter the work force as professionals with little instruction on how to handle the practical aspects of our discipline. The theme of my Teaching Methods course centers on the exploration of current trends in dance education. In this article I will outline the jumping off point of the

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course – the curriculum for the dance studio setting.

Dance and the Business Aspects of the Studio

Most, if not all of my students at the University at Buffalo have grown up in dance studio settings across the country. Many aspiring dance teachers want to return as a faculty member to the place where it all began. They often have a working relationship with their former studio teacher who has nurtured them and in many cases supports their growth and development throughout their college years. A similar number of students plan to strike out on their own, trying their hand at owning a studio and finding parental support as families see this as a viable career move.

However, being equipped with the latest in dance technique and inspired by the experience of choreography and production honed in the university environment is not enough. Students need to understand the practical business aspects of dance. Early in the Teaching Methods in Dance course, students are given the assignment of developing a viable business plan for future studio ownership. This assignment serves as a means of assessment for the course, but more importantly as a blueprint for future employment after graduation.

The topics covered centered around the business of the dance school. Many lectures are augmented through the use of guest speakers from the business community.

They can be most clearly defined by the outline summarizing the topics covered:

- Developing the Mission Statement: Students are asked to explore a philosophical premise that will be the foundation of their studio and formulate a clearly written mission statement. After deciding what type of school and what its focus will be they are instructed to answer the following questions in terms of the school they are about to create: *Who are you? Who are your customers/students? What can you do for them? What sets you apart from everybody else?*
- Brochure Evaluation Workshop: By analyzing an assortment of dance studio bro-

chures gathered from different schools across the country, the students analyze and begin to identify and develop their own philosophy. Through guided critical questioning students evaluate various brochures by asking and answering a series of questions designed to heighten their sense of evaluation.

- Getting Started: Buying an existing business; Starting from scratch.
- Forming a partnership or sole proprietorship.
- What is a DBA ("Doing Business As" or legally naming your studio)?
- Choosing profit or not-for-profit status and the process of incorporation.
- The role of the attorney, the insurance agent, and the accountant.
- Negotiating the Lease: using your attorney, monthly payments, property maintenance.
- Conducting demographic and market research.
- Paying employees and the independent contractor.
- Taxes.
- Insurance: professional liability, general liability, abuse/molestation liability, fire, business interruption, Workers Compensation.
- Pricing lessons: methods of payment and collection.
- Open House and Registration Strategies.
- Hiring a Staff: hiring teachers, student teachers, office staff.
- Studio Communication: web sites, newsletters, bulletin boards, employee handbooks.
- Dress Codes: determining a dress code; sale of dancewear.
- Recital: Format of the show, show timelines, studio pictures, rehearsal.
- Recital Alternatives: opportunities for performance and summer programs.

It is my hope that this course will help students establish a working blueprint for future project development. Equally, and a bit more difficult to teach, it is also my hope that each lecture and project assignment is developed to emphasize the importance of integrity and professional ethics in the field of dance.