A Study in Swing: Communication, Dance Instruction, and West Coast Swing

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

West Coast Swing is a unique, improvisational form of partner dancing that's style and community stands separate from many other forms of partner dance largely due to its variability; its look differs slightly each year and based on the region and individual dancer. While the dance is present globally, dancers often travel and intermingle, which creates a more cohesive community, complete with identifiable social norms and patterns. The added layer of organized competitive events and people working as part- and full-time professionals produces effects noted in organizational communication theories. However, little research has been conducted on how these social-professional organizational hybrids operate, especially those that place its emphasis on the social side. This thesis inquiries into this community using the lens of organizational communication theory for the benefit of the dance community and other emerging hybrid organizations.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Process Analysis Statement

Throughout my experience as an Organizational Communication undergraduate, I constantly applied my studies to dance. Dance is one of the oldest forms of communication and yet is rarely considered in the academic discipline. I have always been drawn to the arts and intend to pursue both acting and dance professionally, but I chose to study communication in college because I wanted to know how to make a difference in the art industries. *A Study in Swing* is driven by that goal.

This thesis was born from a desire to take what I had learned from my degree and apply it to West Coast Swing, an elastic, sensual partner dance with a global social, competitive, and professional community. This dance is unique in its style and its placement in the world of partner dance; it stands separate from ballroom, Latin, country, East Coast Swing, and Lindy, and yet most of those communities have a form of West Coast as well. I began learning how to teach West Coast Swing almost as soon as I started learning it, and now I do teach it, as well as other dances, professionally. I have had a myriad of experiences in the community since I began dancing West Coast Swing in December 2014, including as a student, teacher, social dancer, competitor, someone who has helped organize and worked at dance events, and someone who has moved primary dance communities. All these roles have given me a standpoint useful for analyzing and understanding the community.

Once I realized how well Communication research applies to the community, I used every chance I had to do so. I wrote my first paper entitled "Identity Construction of Partner Dance Instructors in the Total Institution of the Dance Industry" as an autoethnography during the Spring 2019 semester at Ball State, which served as the groundwork for the four blog posts in this project.

The blog posts, rooted in Communication research, aim to provide useful information to West Coast Swing dancers. They are written for the average reader, not an academic audience, though they read more like a research paper than a how-to online blog post. They each specify how the information relates to the reader and what the reader can or should do with the information. These posts were the largest and most difficult part of the project. The topics chosen for each post were massive, and narrowing the focus of each of the short articles was daunting, considering the decades of previous research done on each of the four topics. However, I became more reliant on process assignments than I ever have been with any other research endeavor and more appreciative of nonfiction writers, especially those who publish how-to and explanatory pieces. In addition to the research for the posts themselves, I spent a significant amount of time researching and drafting effective and appropriate titles for the posts and how to write accessible blog posts that keep the reader's attention.

The other main section of the thesis is four lesson plans for a Beginner Track, but the lesson plans specifically were added to the project late. Part of the purpose of this assignment was to improve my own teaching and business to be better able to serve my students. My capstone class in my major focused on organizational training, and that class inspired me to create full lesson plans for dance. I brought the idea to my mentor after I had already begun

working on my thesis, and she helped me set goals and process assignments for the lesson plans and gave me resources to help build them. These lesson plans turned out to be my favorite part of the thesis. They challenged me to lock down my process for teaching and specify the purpose of each activity. I found several gaps in my conceptualization of each lesson, such as transitioning between concepts, and the plans inclined me to develop these missing parts. I also realized how valuable such a structure is for a lesson. I was always afraid creating a lesson plan would make it difficult to be flexible and alter the lesson in real-time to accommodate for students' needs, but creating a structure will allow me to spend less energy thinking of what comes next or how I want to explain something so I can instead focus entirely on meeting the students' needs. The timetable was also one of the hidden benefits of creating the lesson plan. I occasionally struggled to determine how much time I needed for each section of the lesson, but the careful planning enabled me to include more material and also structure in time for an expectations check at the beginning and a debrief and review at the end of the lesson. Since I do mostly private lessons, and students are often at different levels, have different needs, and are also likely learning from other teachers as well, I will not be able to create full lesson plans for each student that build on each other. So, my goal is to use the experience of creating lesson plans to build segments (such as advanced compression, intermediate compression, specific patterns, etc.) and pull those developed segments into a lesson based on what the student does and does not know. For example, a student may have an arsenal of patterns and decent partner connection but know very little about musicality or posture, so I can use pre-developed segments to work on musicality and posture. Another student may excel at musicality but need the segment on posture and intermediate compression, so a pre-made lesson plan that tackles posture and musicality will not work as well for them.

There were a few other fundamental parts of my thesis, including a Teaching Philosophy, follow-up guidelines, a Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet, and ten reflections, which were completed over the course of the semester. The Teaching Philosophy was relatively straightforward. I read my mentor's teaching philosophy to get a feel for the format and then wrote my own, which can be found on my website. This document was relatively straightforward because I had been thinking about why I teach and my thoughts about the purpose of teaching for years, I had just never articulated them into one comprehensive document before. It was interesting to see how my ideas manifested into an actual teaching philosophy. I believe that the philosophy is important to show students who are considering taking lessons from me because it is a quick document to read and helps them understand my approach to teaching and if that will work for them. I also created a Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet and follow-up guidelines, two business tools to help ensure my students and I have all of the information we need to have a successful time together. The goals sheet was quick and easy to make because I already knew what information I like to have before I teach someone. The follow-up guidelines were more time-consuming to create because I outlined the timetable for communication as well as outlines and scripts for email communication. I did this last so that I could base my communication off what was covered in the lesson plans. The reflections were written at the end of each week to catalog my thoughts on the process of creating that week's assignments. These allowed me to critically reflect on my work and

discover what insight was gained. Sometimes they felt like one more arduous task after a week of writing, but I usually discovered something new about my work when I wrote them.

Finally, the project culminated on my website where I created a blog, added a link for my teaching philosophy, and designed a separate page for my thesis under Sample Work. This was an arduous process, even though my website was already built and has been live for years. The addition of my thesis required design work and careful attention to detail to ensure that the information was accessible and appropriate. On the thesis page, I had to decided if I should include such things as the assignment calendar and how big of an excerpt from the lesson plans. The format of the thesis was different from the design of the blog, both of which were in the style of my website but pointedly unique. I wanted the blog to be a little more fun and interesting than my website, which is sleek but personable, whereas my thesis was simpler and more professional. I also ran into a few issues with the website build, especially with the blog. I was familiar with how to use Wix.com since I had previously designed the rest of my website but altering both the design of the blog homepage and the individual posts was difficult to navigate. In fact, I eventually resigned to keeping the text font of the blogs with the default because I could not figure out how to change it. Still, I think both pages show a marked increase in design skill.

Altogether, this project combines my studies in my major with the West Coast Swing dance community in order to benefit dancers, whether from the blog posts or through interacting with me as a dance instructor.

Blog Posts

"How to Give Genuine, Useful Dance Feedback"

Imagine you are at a spotlight practice. Sitting with a group of your peers, your name is called, and you wipe your sweaty palms on your pants as you eagerly take the floor. They ask you what, if anything, you want them to specifically look for. Perhaps you have something, perhaps not. You dance to your song, proud of some moments, but perhaps not feeling your best. Finally, the song is over. Your friends clap. You hug your partner and turn to your peers expectantly. "First off, that was great!" One person says. "Your musicality on this one part was really cool," another chimes in. You ask what they thought about your anchor. "It seemed fine. I didn't notice anything weird," someone answers. "You do tend to roll into your anchor a lot," someone else observes. "It looks cool as a style choice, but make sure you're using it as a stylistic choice, not a bad habit." No one else raises their hand, and you have to sit down because the practice session is only a couple hours long and there are a lot of people to get through.

Feel unsatisfied reading that? But why? You received compliments, someone answered your question, and you got a critique to help you improve. Everything was respectful, and you did not feel insulted. So why are you left feeling like you didn't get much out of the experience?

Before you say that it's because your friends are not professional dance instructors, that's not the reason. Of course, peers vary from teachers, both in authority and expertise. However, everyone has something valuable to give you. The problem comes from not knowing how to give feedback.

There are varying results regarding how effective peer feedback is, and a lot of the literature focuses on a traditional classroom, especially in writing courses. Nilson (2010) found three main problems with student peer feedback: "the intrusion of students' emotions into the evaluative process, their ignorance of professional expectations and standards for various types of work, and their laziness in studying the work and/or in writing up the feedback" (35). However, Van Steendam, Rijlaarsdam, Sercu, and Van den Bergh (2010) found that "through discussions with peers, students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning process" (319) and found it was important students be taught "how to detect global flaws and secondly how to remedy these flaws" (323-324) because students rarely look at a work holistically (323). So, being aware of the problems associated with peer feedback while building the tools to give effective feedback can be beneficial to the growth of both for the feedback receiver and giver.

In highly competitive environments, communities with people who feel disconnected or isolated from others, and places with anxious or self-conscious people, among others, feedback sessions are pretty much non-starters. Even if everyone knows how to give feedback, which is unlikely because it is a rarely taught skill, people are tentative to say anything that might possibly be a little hurtful or insulting. So, the question remains: how do we give constructive, useful, caring feedback?

What Is Helpful Feedback?

According to Wiggins (2012), feedback is "information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal" (10). Dance feedback can be verbal, visual, or kinesthetic (Gibbons, 2004). Visual can be as simple as a smile, a full demonstration, watching a video of your dancing, or even written analysis (Gibbons, 2004). Kinesthetic feedback "enables the student to feel a correction" (Gibbons, 2004, p. 39). This can be touching the dancer's body, so they know what part to move or placing their body in a specific way. Make sure you tell them what you are going to touch and get their permission before doing so. This also helps build both of your anatomical vocabularies.

There are two types of verbal feedback: corrective and confirming. Corrective feedback "explains to the learners how they can attain the objective" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2011, p. 84) and should be positive and encouraging. Confirming feedback "informs the learners that they have attained the objective" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2011, p. 84). Both should be specific. Instead of saying, "You did a great job!" or "Your anchor was strong!" for confirming feedback, you could say, "Your anchor was strong because you got to the front of your heel every time and sank into your stretch through your hip. The movement looked deep and elongated even though the music was fast. You didn't miss the 1, so the anchor really connected you to your partner." Alternatively, for corrective feedback, you would specify what needed to improve. For example, you could say, "You were off time on the 1, which is why some of those moves did not work well. Try staying closer to your partner on 4 so you have more time to sink into your anchor and less space to travel to get to your 1."

Good feedback is not advice or evaluation, it tells the receiver what they did and did not do (Gibbons, 2004, p. 39). Wiggins (2012) says that "helpful feedback is goal-referenced; tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific and personalized); timely; ongoing and consistent" (11). Below is a table of these characteristics and their definitions.

Helpful Feedback (Wiggins, pp. 11-15, 2012)

Characteristic	Definition
Goal-referenced	"Effective feedback requires that a person has a goal, takes action to achieve the goals, and receives goal-related information about his or her actions.... Information becomes feedback if, and only if, I am trying to cause something, and the information tells me whether I am on track or need to change course" (12).
Tangible and Transparent	Tangible results relating to goal and feedback in a way that is understandable to learner (i.e. not opaque) (12).
Actionable	"Concrete, specific and useful," Sufficiently descriptive, "Neutral, goal-related facts" (13).
User-friendly (specific and personalized)	Learner must understand it and not be overwhelmed by it. "Too much feedback is also counterproductive" (14).
Timely	Generally, as soon as possible, given it is appropriate. For example, not giving feedback during a performance (15).
Ongoing	"Adjusting our performance depends on not only receiving feedback but also having opportunities to use it... [and] to reshape the performance to better achieve the goal" (15).
Consistent*	"Performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate, and trustworthy" (15).

*Consistent feedback is difficult because of the subjective nature of the dance and judges; so, when giving feedback, it is important for the receiver to be aware of and share their goals and the feedback their primary coach(es) have given them and be discerning of the feedback received from the group.

The goal of feedback for dancing is to help a dancer be better able to do something, which is known as procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge encourages students "to be more active in their own learning" (Barr, 2009, p. 42). Stolovitch and Keeps (2004) explain that "most expertise develops [with procedural knowledge]. The majority of what we have learned to do has been acquired without words. By trial and error over time, we simply have built up the capability to do it" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2004, p. 37). Procedural feedback "provides students with the desired 'how' of execution, the crucial means through which all dancers can incorporate movement beginning from where they actually are" (Barr, 2009, p. 42).

How to Give Feedback

Gigante, Dell, and Sharkey (2011) explained that feedback should "provide reassurance about achieved competency, guide future learning, reinforce positive actions, identify and correct areas for improvement, and promote reflection" (205). It should specifically describe observed behavior, leaving the receiver to decide which behavior should be repeated or improved to reach their goal.

Gigante, et al. (2011, pp. 206-207) outlined a 5-Step Framework for effective feedback, which is included verbatim below (please see citation at the end of the post):

i. Outline the expectations for the learner during orientation. Learners cannot succeed if they do not know what is expected of them.

ii. Prepare the learner to receive feedback. Learners often state that they receive little feedback, whereas educators report consistently giving feedback. Bridge this gap with the phrase, "I am giving you feedback." Specifically using the word "feedback" helps the learner recognize the intent. To minimize discomfort or embarrassment and promote a dialogue, feedback should be given in a private setting.

iii. Ask learners how they think they are performing. Encouraging learners to assess and correct their own performance routinely helps them to develop the skills of lifelong learning and leads to a shared view of what needs improvement.

iv. Tell the learner how you think he or she is doing. Feedback should be based on specific, observed actions and changeable behaviors. Provide concrete examples of what the learner did well and what the learner could improve. The feedback needs to be appropriate to the curriculum and the developmental stage of the learner.

v. Develop a plan for improvement. The learner should have the opportunity to comment on the feedback and make his or her own suggestions for improvement. The preceptor can then suggest additional ways to improve learner performance. The learner and preceptor can then develop an action plan for improvement together.

How to Help Your Community Develop Feedback Ability

1. Dedicate a practice session to learning about and practicing giving feedback

   This will give your group the opportunity to brainstorm ideas. It helps everyone on the same page regarding effective feedback and how your group wants to give and receive feedback.

2. Collaboratively write a feedback guide

   If your group is especially close and hands-on, a group feedback guide might be both useful and a fun bonding activity.

3. Have a professional attend your practice session to help facilitate feedback and help you learn what to look for to give feedback on

   You might ask the pro to teach a workshop on evaluative criteria and giving feedback and then practice what you learn. Even having a pro attend your session so you can emulate them is incredibly helpful and informative.

4. Provide feedback on feedback

   During a regular practice session, have receivers tell the feedback-giver what is missing from their feedback, what is useful, etc. You may also find it useful for the entire group to provide feedback to the feedback-giver. It is important to agree beforehand which sessions will use this exercise.

Final Thoughts

   The way we give feedback not only impacts a dancer's growth but also the culture and cohesiveness of the group. No matter the size or composition of your group, whether you are working with one practice partner or an ever-changing group of dancers, establishing effective feedback techniques will help everyone grow and feel cared for. These tips will help get you started, affirm effective techniques you already use, and explain why some strategies have not been working.

   Please email me or leave a comment to let me know what you have tried! If something I suggested worked (or didn't) in your community, I want to know about it! Additionally, if you try another method to help you community develop your feedback ability that worked well, let me know, and I will add it to this post and credit you. Let's all help each other grow!

"What You Need to Know to Build a Supportive Dance Culture"

Studying the West Coast Swing dance community through the lens of Organizational Communication became my research focus during my undergrad at Ball State. Culture, specifically, was the most fascinating, especially because of how vastly different each of my dance communities have been. I don't think insight into any community can be potent without an understanding of how culture works. But I also want to go beyond what culture is and delve into how to consciously build a positive growth- and community-oriented culture. What I have found is that a culture that focuses on those aspects have more conversations about consent, are more welcoming and inclusive, and dancer retention is higher.

Culture is "a pattern of shared basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, is to be taught to new members of the group as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Godwyn & Gittell, 2012, p. 313). Culture is, essentially, the lens through which we are taught to see and understand our organization or community. Clifford Geertz, an organizational culture scholar, "regarded shared interpretations as naturally emerging from all members of a group, rather than consciously engineered by leaders" (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2012, p. 251). We build our culture together.

Culture is unique to each individual organization (or community). Think about the different norms your local community has compared to the larger West Coast Swing world. How do you set up practice sessions differently than other communities? How do you celebrate each other? Those norms, however, are influenced by the larger West Coast Swing community. For example, if you are teaching a beginner workshop, you probably have everyone line up and likely rotate the followers, a format used throughout the whole community.

If you are curious about how to identify what culture your group or the larger West Coast community has, look at the metaphors and rituals enacted, which are two of the three "forms of communication" (Griffin, et al., 2012, p. 247) that is a part of the work scholars Clifford Geertz and Michael Pacanowsky did on culture and organizational culture. Metaphors are language that associate one thing with a more vivid, familiar thing. One ballroom scholar wrote down the responses students gave to answer why they continued to dance, and the language included words like "addiction" and "hooked" (Picart, 2006), which are words I have heard in the WCS community as well. Rituals are habits, behaviors, communication patterns, and so on that "articulate multiple aspects of cultural life, often marking rites of passage or life transitions" (Griffin, et al., 2012, p. 250). They may be regarded as almost sacred in the community, will be difficult to change, and will be more prominent in a group that values tradition but is still present in groups that value innovation and change.

So, what makes a supportive culture? The goal is to increase cohesion to create a positive climate by using supportive communication and reducing communication that creates a defensive climate. Communication includes all forms, including verbal and nonverbal. A positive climate is based on "individuals personally [committing] themselves to the group's wellbeing"

(Beebe & Masterson, 1997, p. 127), which allows the group to influence the individuals and create cohesion. Members in highly cohesive groups "know that they will not be rejected for their views and are therefore more willing to express them" (Beebe & Masterson, 1997, p. 126). These lines of open communication, which are elaborated on below, will make members feel heard and help make and keep the group supportive.

Jack Gibb (1967) comprised the characteristics of supportive versus defensive climates that continues to be used as a framework for small group scholars. Supportive climates use description in their language over evaluation, problem orientation over control, spontaneity over strategy, empathy over neutrality, equality over superiority, and provisionalism over certainty. I have outlined these below:

Description: "Speech acts which the listener perceives as genuine requests for information or as material with neutral loadings is descriptive. Specifically, presentations of feelings, events, perceptions, or processes which do not ask or imply that the receiver change behavior or attitude are minimally defense producing" (144).

►Description does not place a value on the person or their behavior. This can be

applied to conflict management, conversations among the group or between individuals,

and even when giving feedback, both in terms of behavior and dancing: "You do this,

which might be causing this problem in your dancing" rather than "You do this here,

which is not effective and doesn't look good."

Problem orientation: "When the sender communicates a desire to collaborate in defining a mutual problem and in seeking its solution, he tends to create the same problem orientation in the listener; and, of greater importance, he implies that he has no predetermined solution, attitude, or method to impose" (145).

►Gibb further writes that "implicit in all attempts to alter another person is the

assumption by the change agent that the person to be altered is inadequate" (144). The

goal is, instead, to create a collaboration. If, for example, one member tends to give

hurtful feedback, someone might approach the situation by observing that the feedback

does not seem to be received well and ask the person to work together to figure out why

and how to improve.

Spontaneity: "Behavior which appears to be spontaneous and free of deception is defense reductive. If the communicator is seen as having a clean id, as having uncomplicated motivations, as being straightforward and honest, and as behaving spontaneously in response to the situation, he is likely to arouse minimal defense" (146).

►Of course, as Gibb explains, someone who tries to "make a stratagem appear spontaneous" (145) creates severe defensiveness. I'm sure we have all experienced someone who approaches us trying to appear relaxed but has clearly rehearsed what they are going to say, and we question what their actual meaning is. Spontaneity cannot be a tactic that is used but must be integrated into the behavior of the individuals.

Empathy: "Reassurance results when a message indicates that the speaker identifies himself with the listener's problems, shares his feelings, and accepts his emotional reactions at face value. Abortive efforts to deny the legitimacy of the receiver's emotions by assuring the receiver that he need not feel bad, that he should not feel rejected, or that he is overly anxious, though often intended as support giving, may impress the listener as lack of acceptance" (147).

►For example, we have all been disappointed at the results of a competition before (and, if you haven't, I'm jealous). A supportive comment would ask the other person how they feel and share your emotional experience at a similar result if necessary, followed by support or encouragement. A statement such as, "Don't take it personally" or "Judging is subjective" may make the person feel they should not have their feelings because of the reasons presented.

Equality: "Defenses are reduced when one perceives the sender as being willing to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect. Differences in talent, ability, worth, appearance, status, and power often exist, but the low defense communicator seems to attach little importance to these distinctions" (147-148) when equality is established.

►A great way to do this is to include everyone and genuinely seek other's feedback. For example, a community leader may ask for feedback on how to improve social dances. A teacher may encourage their student to set their own goals and reflect on their dancing before giving feedback themselves. A dancer may choose to be engaged and friendly in every dance, regardless of their partner's dance level*

*Dancers should be aware of their own boundaries, however. If a dancer has hurt you physically during a dance, it is important to let them know, respectfully. If someone is a threat to you personally, it may be a good idea to discuss the situation with your community leader and/or the authorities.

Provisionalism: "One reduces the defensiveness of the listener when he communicates that he is willing to experiment with his own behavior, attitudes, and ideas…. Those who seem to know

the answers, to require no additional data, and to regard themselves as teachers rather than as co-workers tend to put others on guard" (148).

►To create provisionalism, we must set up an environment in which everyone receives and gives feedback, regardless of dance level/ability or length of time in the community. The most supportive community I had every been in asked me for my feedback to improve practice after I had only been to a few of them.

All of these modes of supportive communication are true regardless of the type of group, including competitive ones. Competition is in itself not a good or bad thing "but can be either positive or negative, depending on the goals that one pursues out of one's competition-based concerns" (Elliot, 2020, p. 8). Performance-approach goals, according to Elliot's research, "focus on striving to attain competence relative to others" (Elliot, 2020, p. 4) and results in a positive implication for competition. When we see others who inspire us or we want to improve our performance in relation to other's abilities, competition is positive.

The largest issue building a supportive culture faces is group size. While there is no research that determines the ultimate optimal group size, "there is a positive relationship between the level of people's participation and the degree of their individual satisfaction. Obviously, as the size of a group increases, the opportunity to interact with other members decreases" (Beebe & Masterson, 1997, p. 125). Beebe and Masterson (1997) continue that "people want groups small enough to encourage maximum participation yet large enough to generate the maximum number of ideas" (125-126). As with many cases involving people and their communication, much of what will be successful will ultimately depend on your specific group and what the individuals want and are willing to do. If you are in a large local community, one solution is to create smaller breakout groups that work together to build a supportive culture among the smaller group and welcome new members after the group culture has been established to better integrate the new members into the value system.

Culture is unique to each individual group and is a pattern of shared assumptions and values. Group culture is developed by the members and cannot be wholly created or changed by group leaders alone. A supportive climate can be made by group members using forms of supportive communication, keeping group size optimal, and promoting performance-approach competition goals. This will help the group members feel heard and welcomed, increasing safety and dancer retention.

"You're a Westie, But Do You Know Why?"

Take a second and write down what qualifies someone as a West Coast Swing dancer. What characteristics does a Westie have that makes them identifiable or different from everyone else?

I began to call myself a Westie after I started social dancing regularly and competing, even though I had been taking lessons for almost a year at that point. It was not until I integrated into my local community that I began to consider myself a West Coast dancer. When people would compliment and be impressed by my dancing, I felt an even stronger sense of belonging because I felt validated: if a community of real West Coast dancers thought I was good, I must be a Westie too.

When I moved to Muncie to go to Ball State, my community changed from the Chicago scene to the Muncie and Fort Wayne communities, and I struggled to figure out how I fit in with the different dynamics. The songs that were played every week were different than what I was used to. People supported each other in different ways. There was more of a focus on community feedback and building beginner level dancers in my Indiana communities; whereas, in Chicago, the focus was on building each other's dance ability and competing at events.

As I navigated these new dynamics, how I thought of myself as a West Coast Swing dancer changed. At first, my self-image began to deteriorate, and I started to see my competitiveness as an ugly thing. I would worry that I was coming off as egotistical and selfish in my dancing. Even though these thoughts never completely faded, I realized that my role as a more experienced dancer in a relatively young community was simply to make friends, have fun, and encourage others. My desire to compete lessened, even though my passion to improve did not. I no longer felt I was a member of the Chicago community, but I never felt completely at home in the Indiana communities before I graduated. My understanding of myself as a Westie continues to change to this day.

The construction of an identity does not just happen, but, rather, it forms based on others in the group. "A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Those who are similar to you become the "in-group" and those different become the "out-group." First, you identify who counts as a West Coast Swing dancer, and then you begin to narrow your "in-group" and "out-group" members even more into categories like "same level as me" and "type of West Coast dancer I am" and "people in my dance community."

One identity scholar explains that communication between people determines what characteristics make someone a member of the community. For example, a lot of people I know would say that just because you have danced West Coast, it doesn't mean you are a Westie. That belief has been developed over time based on a myriad of experiences such as dancing with someone new who says they are "just trying it out" or labeling the West Coast taught at ballroom studios as "not real West Coast."

Serrano (2015) further explains that your conceptualization of yourself "is symbolically referring to the relationship with the other and vice versa" (Serrano, 2015, p. 553). This means that how you see your identity shapes how you see other people's identity, and how you see other people's identity further shapes how you understand yours. So, when I started social dancing and interacting with a larger community that validated me as a West Coast Swing dancer in Chicago, I began to identify them as my in-group and base my own identity on their behaviors.

As we continue to categorize ourself as a member of our in-group and identify the outgroup, one result is depersonalization, which means that "people come to see themselves and other [people in their group] less as individuals and more as interchangeable exemplars of the group prototype," (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208-209). We start to accentuate the similarities between us and other people in our group in all of our "attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and other properties" (Stets & Burk, 2000, p. 225), and we accentuate the differences between our group and the outgroup. This is why our behavior becomes more similar to those we perceive to be our type of "West Coast Swing dancer" and how we identify which dancers are not "your" West Coast Swing dancers.

Additionally, our relationship with pros, higher level dancers, and community leaders influence our identity (AP dictionary of psychology, n.d.). When we engage in upward social comparison (comparing ourselves to those we perceive are better than us), we may experience the assimilation effect, which is an improved self-concept because the object of comparison (e.g., the pro) provides inspiration or we have a close relationship with them. However, we may also experience the contrast effect, which has a negative impact on our self-concept because we feel we are inferior or are distant from our object of comparison.

Our conception of own identity is also challenged as we move between our local communities (social dances, studios, etc.) into the larger West Coast Swing community (e.g. dance events) or when we move and change communities altogether (like I did when I went to college). One article found that this collective identity becomes more complicated with these "interorganizational collaborations" (Socializing collective identity, 2018). As interaction with our original community or a newer community is reduced or increased, our sense of belonging and, ultimately, our identity shifts as well. For me, after a while I did not feel like I had a community and somewhat lost my understanding of myself as a West Coast Swing dancer. However, over time, I began to assimilate into my Indiana dance communities, and dancing in Chicago began to feel foreign.

But our identity as West Coast Swing dancers is also bound by our history and our activity. One ballroom scholar writes, "Examining ballroom dance, particularly as a social and competitive event, necessitates that we theorize the complex relationships binding the public display of bodily movement and the articulation of social categories of identity and gendered bodies" (Picart, 2006, p. 38). However, in recent years, we have made a huge push to de-gender West Coast Swing, and the relationship between follower and leader are much more communicative and fluid than many other partner dances. Picart (2006) continues that the follower "is never an unthinking puppet: her responsiveness – which requires that she combine

decisiveness (particularly in her forward steps) with nonanticipation, an almost oxymoronic combination of aggressiveness with infinite pliability – is crucial to generating the dynamic that constitutes their identity as a dance couple" (Picart, 2006, p. 35).

What I think is most interesting about this is how we conceptualize our role in the dance partnership and how it becomes part of our identity as a West Coast Swing dancer. Think about how different your approach to dancing is when you dance with a friend versus a stranger. My role as a follower is bound not just to my own ideas about what being a follower means (which I determined based on my interactions and discussions with other people in the community) but changes in every dance I have. With some of my friends, my role as a follower is to challenge the partnership. When I dance with a pro, I usually feel my role is to react well to what is being led. When I dance with someone new at an event, my role is to determine what level of collaboration this partnership will have (which we do by communicating through our bodies – how cool!).

This also means that our idea of what it means to be a follower/leader/switch is greatly influenced by our environment. If I only ever danced with controlling leads who were never interested in giving me space to play or influence the flow of the dance, I would see following as a very passive role. As with most things in life, having diverse experiences and dancing with many people helps us constantly challenge our own beliefs and build a more inclusive, well-rounded understanding of our role and the roles of others.

So, what do you think about your identity now that you have more background on how identity is constructed? What experiences have influenced the way you view yourself as a West Coast Swing dancer? Leave your stories in the comment section!

"WCS Aesthetic: The Good, The Bad, The Surprising"

Isn't it wild how much the look West Coast Swing changes over time? When I began competing in 2015, the style of West Coast Swing was lyrical. The songs were emotional, the movement was elegant, and the costumes elongated the legs of the dancers. Hip Hop gained popularity in West Coast around 2017, and dancers began sporting jogger harem pants. At the U.S. Open 2019, close to half the routines were danced to blues music.

Perhaps West Coast Swing changes because a pro does something new and cool, and everyone else wants to do it too. But does that account for such a widespread change in the whole community?

There is a concept called aesthetic labor that "involves acquiring or maintaining a particular bodily performance" (Wissinger, 2009, p. 281) and can be a certain look, attitude, demeanor, or behavior that is appropriate and appealing for the circumstances.

Think about it: what style of shoes do you wear? How do you dress for competition? Does that vary based on what level you are and which pros you want to emulate? What rules do you follow when you compete to make sure you stand out for your level? All of these are examples of work that we do to show we belong in the community.

Pros drive what is considered "aesthetic" in West Coast. Like any influencers, they are expected to be cutting edge and "model a lifestyle appropriate to the image they are trying to sell, which also has the effect of glamorizing and popularizing the products, locations, and clients the [pro] is associated with" (Wissinger, 2009, p. 285). This is why some dance shoe companies give pros shoes for free: so that dancers will see the pros wearing a style and get it themselves.

Pros have this power because of social capital, which is an investment people make in each other to reap some benefit (Lin, 1999). Someone or something with social capital is seen as being valuable as "resources that [a person] can use to achieve their interests" (Dasgupta & Serageldin, 2000, p. 16). We primarily invest in pros for mentorship and learning: to show us what West Coast Swing is and how to do it. This gives them the power to influence what the behavior and style is for the rest of the community.

The best part of this is that pros can spearhead discussions about boundaries, technique for safe dancing, and consent. Yet, despite the power and influence this seems to give a pro, they are still confined by the expectations placed on them. They have to look the part of a pro to maintain that social capital. They do, after all, need dancers to teach and perform for.

Part of maintaining their image may be to have an unpaid social life in which they spend "their free time making connections and building an image" (Wissinger, 2009, p. 288). Oftentimes, most pros are not paid to social dance but are expected to be on the floor, dance with the line of people waiting for them, and be engaging the whole time.

If maintaining a certain aesthetic persona sounds emotionally draining, that's because it's a form of emotional labor. "Emotional labor is the term used to typify the way roles and tasks exert overt and covert control over emotional displays" (Putnam & Mumby, 1993, p. 37).

Essentially, we behave in a certain way "within the constraints of interaction, communication, and local social norms" (Tracey, 2000, p. 94) because that is what is expected of us. Think about the upbeat, energetic, welcoming attitude the pros exhibit. We expect them to maintain this demeanor at all hours of a dance event, from their first 10am workshop all the way into late night dancing and socialization. We are expected to do the same, just not in as high-profile of a way. Has there ever been a time when you wanted to go out dancing, but you did not have the energy to be overly friendly to strangers, so you stayed home? (You can admit it; most of us are introverts here.)

Despite what we might feel in a particular situation, we are expected to behave in socially appropriate ways (e.g. we might be upset we did not get called for finals, but we are expected not to cry in the ballroom, even if we feel the urge to). In other words, we regulate our response by deep acting or surface acting. This involves "modifying feelings by 'thinking good thoughts' or reappraising the event (deep acting) or modifying expression by faking or enhancing facial and bodily signs of emotion (surface acting)" (Grandey, 2000, p. 99). In deep acting, we might tell ourselves that competitions are political, and so we did not make it because the judges only chose the people they know and like (deep acting). We also may simply fake a smile to pretend we are not bothered (surface acting). What other ways have you regulated your emotional response at a West Coast gathering? Leave your thoughts in the comments!

Of course, there are tons of communities and subcultures within the West Coast Swing world that do not follow the region's "mainstream" West Coast Swing aesthetic. You are going to be most influenced by what you see the most; so, if you have a tight-knit local community that does not go to dance events often, you likely will have your own aesthetic and social norms that influence your behavior and attitudes.

The goal in understanding aesthetic labor, emotional labor, and social capital is to be aware of how these systems function in our community and work to ensure they serve as a marker of identity, not a system of control. As such, celebrate differences with dancers and look for ways that dancers shine in their style, whether it is the "mainstream" style or not because, as we've established, style varies. Consider the expectations you and other dancers in your community have for each other and spearhead conversations about what works and what doesn't and how to improve the areas you would like. For example, if you feel like a lot of dancers feel obligated to dance whenever asked, even if they are tired or came to dance to be around friends, have conversations about how to reframe expectations around asking and accepting a dance. Just remember that every group of people is unique, so how you have these conversations will vary from community to community and will likely take some trial and error.

And give the pros some space occasionally. They're people too.

Teaching Philosophy

<div align="center">The Collaboration of Learning</div>

<div align="center">Teaching Philosophy</div>

First and foremost, I believe that each person contains within them the object of their desire; that each student is already a dancer; that they already possess their potential to achieve their goals. I believe that my role is to help carve out that potential and the object of desire based on the individual student's needs. I believe that the teacher can be useful as a guide, a source of knowledge, practice, and feedback, and, most importantly, encouragement and support. The teacher is, however, only one component of the student's learning, and my goal is to remain a resource and encourage my students to utilize other sources of learning, outside practice, competition, peer feedback, and self-guided practice, to the fullest potential the student is able to use them, so that they reach their full potential, beyond what I alone can help them with.

Hence, I believe that learning is a collaborative process wherein my role is to not only meet the student's needs but to also help them discover and take ownership of their learning. The environment needs to be setup so that the expectations for our student-teacher relationship are clear to both parties and communication flows freely. This is done by layering in conversations and planning expectations checks throughout our lessons. Feedback is also essential to this goal, and I encourage my students, with help, to provide their thoughts on what they did well and what did not feel right and why before I provide feedback. At the beginning, especially for new dancers and dancers new to private lessons, collaboration will need to be more directed so that they have time to develop an understanding of themselves as a dancer and learn how to communicate their needs. In order to facilitate this, I send out a pre-lesson goals and experience sheet to give me an idea of where they are in both their understanding of themselves as a dancer and how they communicate their needs so that I may best serve them.

I believe in a student-centered approach, which is essential to private lessons because of varying abilities, needs, and reasons for dancing. West Coast Swing and other partner dances can be modified for physical abilities and boundaries. Students will also benefit from a specialized cognitive approach. My goal is to understand what metaphors and analogies through which the student sees the world, which is often based on their education and occupation, so that I may best connect dancing to their life and their understanding so that they build confidence in their ability to learn dance and take ownership of that learning. Dance is, after all, a form of expression and communication, and students should be encouraged to include their entire self in their dancing.

For students to dance with their entire being, students must be reached holistically. My goal is to be a home base for my students to experience dance in an encouraging, challenging, and rejuvenating way. Even if students have a goal of becoming a top-level dancer, most dancers also see dance as serving personal purposes, such as relaxation, a way of connecting to themselves, forming deep relationships with others, spirituality, etc. However, dance, especially partner dancing, also goes beyond the individual, and a holistic approach must include topics beyond the student. Conversations about consent, boundaries, etiquette, identity, and community

are essential to developing a dancer. A dancer's education should situate themselves within the dance, its historical roots, and the larger community. My job is to facilitate these explorations with the student.

In summary, I believe that each student has the potential to achieve their goals and that a teacher's role is to serve as a guide to reach that potential. In order to do so, I believe learning is a collaborative process between teacher and student; wherein, the teacher does not dictate the learning, nor is the student a passive dumping ground for information. It is the teacher's responsibility, however, to facilitate collaboration as the terms of the teacher-student partnership. For a teacher to guide the student to reach their full potential, I believe in a holistic teaching approach, which includes guiding the student to discover how they best learn, meeting students' individual needs, and facilitating discussions about dance beyond the student's own experiences so that students take ownership of all of these aspects of their dance education.

Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience Sheet

New Student Form

I am so excited to be a part of your dance journey! These questions are designed so I get a better understanding of where you are and what goals you have to best assist you in the lesson.

Name:

Why do you want to dance?

What dance style(s) do you want to work on for this lesson?

Is this your first time taking a lesson in this style?

What experience in this style do you have?

What other experience in dance, music, and sports do you have?

What are your goals for dancing, if any?

What do you want to work on for this lesson? (Write "intro to dance style" if you don't have anything specific)

Please send this back to rachelbonarek@gmail.com!

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan: West Coast Swing Beginner Lesson 1

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Identify the "2's" in music
- Transfer weight from one foot to the other
- Use the appropriate hand hold
- Dance in a "slot"
- Perform the Left Side Pass footwork with guidance
- Perform the Right Side Pass footwork with guidance

Materials Needed: Instructor

- Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet
- Music (e.g. phone, sound system, speaker(s), etc.)

Materials Needed: Student

- Notepad (optional)

Welcome: "Hello, [name(s)]! I am Rachel, your instructor. Thank you so much for booking this lesson, I am so excited to be working with you."

Transition: "Before we begin, I want to look over your Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet you filled out for me to make sure we are on the same page and can have a successful time together."

Start Time: 0 minutes

- A. Expectations Check
  - a. Rationale: Builds rapport, establishes goals
  - b. Necessary Materials: Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet
  - c. Activity: Instructor introduces herself and asks student(s) to talk about/expand on their goal(s) and expectations. Instructor and student formulate a solid goal and expectations for dancing together and write these on the back of the sheet.
  - d. Activity take-aways: "By establishing these goals and expectations, we can both refer back to them and make sure we are on the same page."

Transition: "Great! So, we are going to start by learning the basics of how music works and how we dance to it."

Start Time: 5 minutes

- A. Timing: Counting & Weight Change
  - a. Rationale: The ability to remain on time with proper weight distribution is necessary for the dance partnership to function smoothly and enables the dancer to move freely, not hinder their or their partner's movement, and sets the groundwork for more creative movement within a pattern.

      b. Necessary Materials: Music (1-minute segment of "Slow Dancing in a Burning Room" – John Mayer)

      c. Activity: Instructor plays a slow song and identifies the 2s in the music. She encourages clapping then stepping in place to the beat then moving throughout the space to the beat (progression based on student ability). Instructor ensures that students are not shuffling their feet and making full weight transfers.

      d. Activity take-aways: "It is important to know what count we are on in the music and how to transfer our weight when dancing. This helps us look like we are dancing to the music, which is called having musicality. It also makes us better dance partners: timing makes sure we take steps at the same time, and our weight changes help clarify where we are moving."

Transition: "Now we are going to do that timing with a partner."

Start Time: 15 minutes

  A. Partnership: Slot & Handhold

      a. Rationale: Partnership agreements, such as slot and handholds, are necessary to dance West Coast and translate movement between partners.

      b. Necessary Materials: N/A

      c. Activity: Instructor explains what a slot is and shows proper handhold.

      d. Activity take-aways: "The handhold connects us physically with our partner, and a correct handhold will be comfortable and safe for both partners and allow us to freely dance. The slot is another agreement we have with our partner for how we are going to move in the dance and is one of the things that makes West Coast Swing look like West Coast Swing."

Transition: "Now that you can walk to the music while holding hands with a partner, I am going to separate you so that we can learn the footwork for the Right-Side Pass."

Start Time: 20 minutes

  A. Right-Side Pass

      a. Rationale: The Right-Side Pass (RSP) is one of the fundamental patterns and has many variations. This move shows students the fundamentals of a West Coast Swing pattern (i.e. passing partners, leverage, leading and following, etc.) so that technical concepts may be understood and applied later. It also keeps students from associating West Coast as a dance "stuck" in the slot.

      b. Necessary Materials: Music

      c. Activity: Student(s) are taught and then practice the Right-Side Pass footwork in three sections (1, 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6).

         i. If single: the student is paired up with the instructor, and the instructor leads/backleads the hand pathway.

        ii. If couple: the students are told the hand pathway, and the instructor practices with each before pairing them up together and having them practice as a partnership.

      Activity cont.: Student(s) practice the pattern to music.

d. Activity take-away: "Now you can dance one of the fundamental West Coast Swing patterns! There are numerous variations you can do off this move, one of which you will learn in Lesson 4."

Transition: "Awesome job! I want to add one more pattern to your toolbox today. The Left-Side Pass is similar to the Right-Side Pass, except the follower passes on the left side of the leader."

Start Time: 30 minutes

A. Left-Side Pass
   a. Rationale: The Left-Side Pass (LSP) is one of the fundamental patterns and has many variations. It provides all of the same benefits as RSP, but it additionally uses most of the same footwork as the RSP, so student begin to build connections between moves and understand the "look" and structure of West Coast.
   b. Necessary Materials: Music
   c. Activity: Student(s) are taught and then practice the Left-Side Pass footwork in three sections (1, 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6).
      i. If single: the student is paired up with the instructor, and the instructor leads/backleads the hand pathway.
      ii. If couple: the students are told the hand pathway, and the instructor practices with each before pairing them up together and having them practice as a partnership.
      Activity cont.: Student(s) practice the pattern to music.
   d. Activity take-away: "This is another of the fundamental West Coast Swing moves. The footwork and movement are similar to Right-Side Pass, so you can start to see how the dance is structured."

Transition: "Alright, now we are going to put those two moves together to music."

Start Time: 40 minutes

A. Practice
   a. Rationale: Students need to practice combining patterns together to music so that they build confidence in their ability to dance and begin to learn how to transition between patterns.
   b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full: "Slow Dancing in a Burning Room" – John Mayer)
   c. Activity: The instructor explains that students will dance RSP then LSP for a song, and then the activity is executed.
   d. Activity take-aways: "Practicing what you have learned to gives you the opportunity to see what works and what doesn't and helps you learn how to think on your feet the way you would need to during a social dance."

Transition: "Great job! That concludes our lesson. I would like to spend a few minutes discussing what you learned and how it aligns with the goals we set at the beginning of the lesson. Did you bring a notepad?"

Start Time: 45 minutes

A. Debrief & Scheduling
   a. Rationale: Students need the opportunity to use reflect on and summarize their learning. This enhances long-term memory storage and retrieval ability, builds confidence, and shows the student(s) how much they have learned in a short time.
   b. Necessary Materials: Notepad (optional)
   c. Activity: Instructor encourages students to write down what notes during this section. Instructor reviews what was learned and how they aligned with previously set goals and expectations. Discussion is encouraged (Note: the next lesson should also be scheduled during this time). The student is asked not to practice what they learned before the next lesson to avoid practicing incorrectly.
   d. Activity take-aways: "I will always give you an opportunity to take notes and reflect on the lesson because it will cement your understanding and help you remember what you have learned long-term."

End Time: 50 minutes

Lesson Plan: West Coast Swing Beginner Lesson 2

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Perform the Left Side Pass footwork with guidance
- Perform the Right Side Pass footwork with guidance
- Perform the Sugarpush/Basic footwork with guidance
- Perform LSP, RSP, and Sugar in a sequence
- Use exercises to build proper posture
- Define what compression is
- Identify where compression happens in a pattern

Materials Needed: Instructor

- Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet
- Music (e.g. phone, sound system, speaker(s), etc.)
- A wall (as needed)

Materials Needed: Student

- Notepad (optional)
- Phone/Recording Device (optional)

Transition from Welcome: "Just like last time, I would like to start with a review of the goals and expectations we set last lesson to make sure we are on the same page. Then, we will move into a review and warm-up dance."

Start Time: 0

A. Expectations Check
   a. Rationale: Ensures expectations and goals are at the forefront of the lesson.

b. Necessary Materials: Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience Sheet
c. Activity: Instructor welcomes student(s) back and reviews goals and expectations and previews the lesson, connecting it to goals and expectations
d. Activity take-away: "Reviewing the goals and expectations we have set in relation to what we are working on makes sure you know why you are learning what you are and gives us a chance to reconnect before we start the lesson."

Transition: "To start our warm-up, let's review the Right Side Pass and the Left Side Pass."

Start Time: 5 minutes

A. Warm-Up
  a. Rationale: Students are given the opportunity to remember what they have learned.
  b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: "Slow Dancing in a Burning Room" – John Mayer)
  c. Activity: The instructor reviews the footwork with the students and then plays a song: RSP, RSP, LSP, LSP, Repeat
  d. Activity take-aways: "This review let's you explore and remember what you learned so we can build new material on top of it. Right now, I am giving you a specific sequence so that you can focus on what you are doing and don't have to think about and choose the next move."

Transition: "West Coast Swing connection is based on having proper body alignment, which starts with posture. So, now that we have an idea of what West Coast Swing is, how it looks, and how to do it, we are going to work on posture exercises."

Start Time: 15 minutes

A. Posture
  a. Rationale: Proper posture enables dancers to use core connection, which is necessary to execute more advanced variations and creativity in a partnership and feel and respond to connection.
  b. Necessary Materials: Wall (as necessary)
  c. Activity: The instructor discusses posture position, and students practice uses various exercises as necessary
      i. Feeling the instructor's shoulder blades for placement
      ii. Brick-on-a-String: The student is encouraged to imagine a string that runs through their spine and shoots up over a rafter in a ceiling and is attached to a "brick" the student holds. As the student slowly lowers the "brick," the "string" lengthens their spine.
      iii. Wall: The student stands against a wall and works to have all four corners of their back against the wall (the teacher can touch the areas with permission). Alternatively, the student can place the back of their hands flat against the wall near their head and push their hands up, keeping their elbows on the wall as well. This opens the back and promotes posture.

d. Activity take-aways: "These are exercises you can practice at home to improve posture. Posture will help build your core strength so you can have better connection with your partner."

Transition: "Now, I want us to practice posture partnered up."

Start Time: 20 minutes

A. Compression
   a. Rationale: Compression is one of the two basic forms of connection within a partnership. Compression absorbs energy and allows the dancers to execute direction changes and know where each other is in space.
   b. Necessary Materials: Wall (as necessary)
   c. Activity: The instructor should transition into compression as an exercise of posture and explain what it is and how it is used during the exercise. Each student compresses with the instructor in the compressed position of the Sugarpush.
   d. Activity take-aways: "Compression is one of the two basic forms of connection we use in West Coast. Notice how you need to have good posture and proper body alignment to be able to feel it well."

Transition: "We are going to practice compression in the Sugarpush, which is also called the Basic."

Start Time: 30 minutes

A. Sugarpush/Basic
   a. Rationale: The Sugarpush is one of the fundamental West Coast Swing moves that has several variations on top of it. Because of its structure, it encourages proper body and partner alignment and reinforces the slot.
   b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: "All of Me" – John Legend)
   c. Activity: Student(s) are taught and then practice the Sugarpush footwork in three sections (1, 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6). Instructor should highlight the compression section. Instructor begins to use the cadence "An-chor Step" for the "5 & 6" and explains that the anchor will be taught next lesson. Practice should be done to music.
      i. If single: the student is paired up with the instructor, and the instructor leads/backleads the hand pathway.
      ii. If couple: the students are told the hand pathway, and the instructor practices with each before pairing them up together and having them practice as a partnership.
   d. Activity take-aways: "This move shows the slot more than any other, and there are plenty of variations you can do off of this move. The Sugarpush is often used as a practice pattern for connection, so this will be coming back."

Transition: "Now, I would like to give you the opportunity to practice posture and compression with the three patterns you have learned."

Start Time: 40 minutes

B. Practice

     a. Rationale: Students need to practice combining patterns together to music so that they build confidence in their ability to dance and begin to learn how to transition between patterns.

     b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: "Classic" – MKTO)

     c. Activity: The instructor explains that students will dance RSP, LSP, Sugar, Repeat for a song, and then the activity is executed.

     d. Activity take-aways: "This song is a little faster to purposely give you less time to think about compression so that your body can start practicing doing it without deeply thinking about it."

Transition: "Good work! This concludes our lesson for today, but, just like last time, I want to take a few minutes to review what we have learned and schedule our next lesson."

Start Time: 45 minutes

  B. Debrief & Scheduling

     a. Rationale: Students need the opportunity to use reflect on and summarize their learning. This enhances long-term memory storage and retrieval ability, builds confidence, and shows the student(s) how much they have learned in a short time.

     b. Necessary Materials: Notepad (optional), Phone/Recording Device (optional)

     c. Activity: Instructor encourages students to write down what notes during this section. Instructor reviews what was learned and how they aligned with previously set goals and expectations. The instructor offers to demonstrate the posture exercises for the student to record and practice. Discussion is encouraged (Note: the next lesson should also be scheduled during this time). The student is asked to wait one more lesson to start practicing at home.

     d. Activity take-aways: "It's important we have this time for you to reflect on your learning, ask questions, and take notes. This will help you transfer your learning into long-term memory.

End Time: 50 minutes

Lesson Plan: West Coast Swing Beginner Lesson 3

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Perform the Left Side Pass, Right Side Pass, and Sugarpush/Basic in two different sequences
- Perform the Tuck Turn with guidance
- Use the core to create basic compression
- Use the core to create leverage
- Reach the basic anchor position

Materials Needed: Instructor

- Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet
- Music (e.g. phone, sound system, speaker(s), etc.)

Materials Needed: Student

- Notepad (optional)
- Phone/recording device (optional)

Start Time: 0

B. Check-In
   a. Rationale: Builds rapport
   b. Necessary Materials: Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience Sheet
   c. Activity: Instructor inquires about the student's week and tells the student they will be introduced to some fundamental technique and learning a new move this lesson. The instructor inquires about the student's understanding of core and body movement based on their answer to Q5 of the Sheet.
   d. Activity take-aways: "I like to start the lesson with a brief talk because a lot can happen in life that distracts us from learning, so, giving you a quick buffer to get into the mindset of the lesson should help you focus. I asked about your understanding of core because we will be building on compression from last week and learn a new type of connection this week."

Transition: "Before we get into more technique, I want to review what you have learned."

Start Time: 5 minutes

A. Warm-Up
   a. Rationale: Students are given the opportunity to remember and use what they have learned.
   b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: "Classic" – MKTO)
   c. Activity: The instructor asks the student if they have any questions about the Sugarpush, RSP, or LSP and answers appropriately. The student then dance a whole song without the instructor giving them a sequence with the only stipulation that they cannot dance the same pattern three times in a row.
   d. Activity take-aways: "This is the first time I have not given you a set pattern. This will help you start to build your ability to think on the spot."

Transition: "Now that we have had our warmup dance, I want to ask you about your understanding of compression."

Start Time: 10 minutes

A. Compression Review
   a. Rationale: Compression is one of the two basic forms of connection within a partnership. Compression absorbs energy and allows the dancers to execute direction changes and know where each other is in space. This activity reviews this essential technique and further solidifies it in the student's body.
   b. Necessary Materials: N/A

    c. Activity: The instructor asks the student to explain what compression is and helps as needed. They practice compression in the Sugarpush. The instructor asks the student to think about doing the same thing with their feet and the floor (compression) and explains the heel and ball of the foot.

    d. Activity take-aways: "Being able to articulate what you are doing and visualize where you are sending your energy will build your critical thinking skills pertaining to your body movement."

Transition: "As we've established, compression is a type of connection where our energy is going toward our partner. Leverage is the opposite, where our energy is sent away from our partner."

Start Time: 15 minutes

  A. Anchor/Leverage
    a. Rationale: Leverage is one of the two basic forms of connection within a partnership. Leverage sends the energy away from the partner and prepares the partnership to drive energy into the next move. The anchor is leverage to a further extreme that provides the deepest level of connection.
    b. Necessary Materials: N/A
    c. Activity: The instructor, during the above compression exercise in the Sugarpush, asks the student to keep their core farther back at the end of the move to create tension. They continue to move in and out of the Sugarpush, occasionally varying with Left- and Right-Side Passes. The instructor explains leverage and the anchor throughout the practice, giving additional tips and information as needed to help the student better use the technique, such as what part of the foot the weight is on.
    d. Activity take-aways: "You have now learned the second fundamental connection type in West Coast Swing. You will continue to refine these throughout your entire dance education. Leverage sends the energy away from the partner and prepares the partnership to drive energy into the next move. The anchor places the partnership in the move extreme leveraged connection to reset and prepare for the next move."

Transition: "Because learning connection can be mentally draining, I want to give you the opportunity to implement these into a practice dance."

Start Time: 25 minutes

  A. Practice Song
    a. Rationale: A practice song gives the students a mental break to practice integrating what they have learned without focusing too deeply on the technique itself.
    b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: "Body Say" – Demi Lovato)
    c. Activity: The instructor plays a song and dances with the student with rare feedback, if any.
    d. Activity take-aways: "Practicing what you have learned, especially as it relates to connection and technique, is important because it moves the new knowledge from

a cognitive understanding, or something you can do when you really think about it, into your muscle memory."

Transition: "Now that we've talked about a lot of technique, I want to shift into a cool variation off the Sugarpush."

Start Time: 30 minutes

    A. Tuck Turn
        a. Rationale: The tuck turn is a variation based off the Sugarpush that utilizes compression but brings the connection point up in space. This adds a new body position as well as pattern to the student's repertoire.
        b. Necessary Materials: N/A
        c. Activity: Student is taught and then practice the Tuck Turn footwork in three sections (1, 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6) with the instructor highlighting the compression, leverage, and anchor. The student should practice several times with and then with music.
        d. Activity take-away: "This is the first variation you've learned so far, and I hope it shows you how West Coast Swing builds on top of some basic patterns. This move gives you a new body position, which is bringing the arm up for compression, and also uses all three of the fundamental techniques you have learned: compression, leverage, and anchor."

Transition: "We are going to do another practice song so you can practice this new move and try out your compression, leverage, and anchor now that you have had a brief break. I won't be giving any feedback; we're just going to dance."

Start Time: 40 minutes

    A. Practice Song
        a. Rationale: This second practice song provides all of the benefits above while giving the student complete freedom to try out all of what they have learned.
        b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: "I Forgot That You Existed" – Taylor Swift)
        c. Activity: The instructor tells the student that they will dance a whole song and that the instructor will not give any feedback so that the student can try out everything they have learned without limiting themselves or waiting for corrective feedback.
        d. Activity take-aways: "This type of practice let's you try out whatever you would like without limiting yourself by waiting for feedback. This helps both of us see what you can do with your dancing."

Transition: "That was a lot for today! If you brought your camera, I would like to have you record a few videos that show what you have learned so far so that you can use them as a reference and start practicing at home. Then, we will talk about what you learned, just like we have at the end of the last two lessons."

Start Time: 45 minutes

C. Debrief & Scheduling
   a. Rationale: Students need the opportunity to use reflect on and summarize their learning. This enhances long-term memory storage and retrieval ability, builds confidence, and shows the student(s) how much they have learned in a short time.
   b. Necessary Materials: Notepad/phone/camera (optional)
   c. Activity: Instructor encourages students to film during this section. Instructor reviews what was learned and how they aligned with previously set goals and expectations. Discussion is encouraged (Note: the next lesson should also be scheduled during this time). The student and teacher talk through the student's strengths and weaknesses to make a plan for what to practice before the next lesson, though the student is encouraged to practice all technique and steps in various sequences on their own. The instructor gives the students music suggestions. The student is asked to bring their recording device to the next lesson.
   d. Activity take-aways: "As always, these reflections give you the opportunity to reflect on your learning and ask any questions you have. It also gives us time to set you up to practice before our next lesson."

End Time: 50 minutes

Lesson Plan: West Coast Swing Beginner Lesson 4

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Perform LSP, RSP, Sugar, and Tuck in multiple sequences
- Perform multiple patterns in handshake hold
- Transition between regular and handshake hold without pausing footwork
- Feel basic compression using the core by working to implement proper posture
- Feel basic leverage in the basic leveraged body position

Concepts

- Warm-up w/ steps review as necessary
- Alternative hand holds
- Compression
- Leverage

Materials Needed: Instructor

- Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience sheet
- Music (e.g. phone, sound system, speaker(s), etc.)
- Notecard with students goals and space to write
- Pen

Materials Needed: Student

- Notepad (optional)

- Phone/recording device (optional)

Transition from Welcome: "We are going to start with a warm-up song today to give you the opportunity to both show what you have been working on and so we have a dance to reference so you can give me your thoughts on your strengths and weaknesses afterward. This lesson is going to be focused on building your analytical and critical thinking skills, but we will get to some new material as well today."

Start Time: 0 minutes

A. Warm-Up
   a. Rationale: Students are given the opportunity to remember and use what they have learned.
   b. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Song: The student is asked for their preference; otherwise, "Mates of Soul (Remastered)" – Taylor John Williams
   c. Activity: The instructor tells the student that they will dance a whole song and that the instructor will not give any feedback so that the student can try out everything they have learned without limiting themselves or waiting for corrective feedback. The instructor notifies the student that they will be asked about their strengths and what they can improve upon after the dance.
   d. Activity take-aways: "Dancing a warm-up dance like a social dance lets you practice freely without the overwhelming feeling of being evaluated. Starting the lesson like this gives you the chance to practice so that you can get your mind ready to think about dance."

Transition: "Now that we've had the chance to warm-up, I want you to analyze your dancing. To start, give me three things you did well and one thing you think is missing or needs work."

Start Time: 5 minutes

A. Reflection
   a. Rationale: The student needs to think critically about what they are doing well so that they can build their analytical skills for their dancing and be more aware of their progress.
   b. Necessary Materials: N/A
   c. Activity: The instructor asks the student to provide feedback on what they did and did not do well in the warm-up dance. The student is then prompted to discuss their practice the previous week and how it went. Additionally, follow-up questions will be asked as necessary.
   d. Activity take-aways: "These discussions are meant to help you build a toolbox for analyzing and discussing your own dancing. My feedback is to help you refine those skills. I started by asking you to focus on the positive because we often fall into a habit of thinking critically about ourselves, but it is important to recognize our strengths and where we have improved. This increases our confidence, but it

also helps us see our dancing holistically. Knowing what we do well and why and why something is not working in our dancing helps us improve overall."

Transition: "Now, I want to delve into a review of leverage, compression, and anchor."

Start Time: 10 minutes

    A. Technique Review
- a. Rationale: Technique is fundamental in executing patterns and communicating with one's dance partner. This review will help solidify what the student has learned.
- b. Necessary Materials: N/A
- c. Activity: The instructor should lead the student in a discussion of compression, leverage, and anchor, where the student explains what each is and what is important and can analyze their own technique while executing the sequence: Sugarpush, RSP, Tuck, LSP, Repeat.
- d. Activity take-aways: "I want to make sure you can explain these concepts because then you have a firm grasp of what they are and what they are supposed to do so that you can identify when you are doing them well and where you can improve them in your dancing."

Transition: "Now that we have gone through a thorough review and worked on building your analytical skills of your own dancing, let's learn something you can use to create variations in the patterns you already know."

Start Time: 25 minutes

    A. Handshake Hold
- a. Rationale: A different handhold will help the students build a toolbox for creating variations and keep them from associating a pattern with strict footwork, handholds, and positioning.
- b. Necessary Materials: Music
- c. Activity: The instructor shows handshake hold in Tuck Turn and RSP and double handshake hold in Sugarpush, RSP, and Tuck Turn and how to transition. Then the student tries the following sequences
    - i. LSP, Tuck (double handshake), RSP (single handshake), Sugarpush (reg)
    - ii. Sugarpush (reg), RSP (single handshake), Tuck (double handshake), LSP
    - iii. Tuck (reg), RSP (double handshake), LSP, Sugar (double handshake)

    Activity cont.: The student is asked what they think of the new hold and when/if they would use it in their dancing.
- d. Activity take-aways: "The handshake hold is something that you can apply to a wide variety of patterns. As you learn more patterns and even make up some of your own, I encourage you to try out this hold. Sometimes it will work, and sometimes it will not, but now you have this new hand position in your toolbelt and the ability to transition between it and the regular handhold without pausing your footwork."

Transition: "We have gone through a lot this lesson, and because this is our last lesson in the Beginner Track, I wanted to take some time to solidify and build on what you have been learning. I want to give you the opportunity to dance a couple of practice songs to integrate everything you have learned into a social-style dance. You can take this time to think critically about your dancing while you are dancing to a song or spend it enjoying the dance. Both are valuable."

Start Time: 35 minutes

    A. Practice Song x2
- e. Rationale: The student needs to opportunity to combine all acquired elements in a song without immediate feedback to see what works well and what needs to be improved.
- f. Necessary Materials: Music (Full Songs: The student is asked for their preferences. Otherwise: "Don't" – Ed Sheeran, "Heathens" – Twenty One Pilots)
- g. Activity: The instructor tells the student that they will dance a whole song and that the instructor will not give any feedback so that the student can try out everything they have learned without limiting themselves or waiting for corrective feedback.
- h. Activity take-aways: "These practice dances gave you the opportunity to experience a social dance the way you would out in the wild where you combine technique, transitioning between steps, and variations without pausing."

Transition: "I'd like to now spend some extra time debriefing our last four lessons and reviewing your goals that we set at the first lesson."

Start Time: 42 minutes

    A. Debrief, Expectation Check & Scheduling
- a. Rationale: Students need the opportunity to use reflect on and summarize their learning. This enhances long-term memory storage and retrieval ability, builds confidence, and shows the student(s) how much they have learned in a short time.
- b. Necessary Materials: Pre-Lesson Goals & Experience Sheet, Notecard with goals, Notepad/phone (optional)
- c. Activity: Instructor encourages students to film during this section. Instructor reviews what was learned and how they aligned with previously set goals and expectations. Discussion is encouraged. The instructor then conducts an expectations check. The student is given a notecard with their goals written on it with space to add new goals. The next lesson should also be scheduled during this time). The student is encouraged to practice all technique and steps in various sequences on their own.
- d. Activity take-aways: "This should show you how much you have learned in a relatively short time. You also now have set goals to direct you in the next phase of your dance education.

End time: 50 minutes

Follow-Up Guidelines

Session One

Before

- First email

Dear [name],

Thank you so much for your interest in the 4-Part Beginner Track! I am very excited to get started with you. I have attached a Pre-Lesson Goals and Experience form for you to fill out. Please do so and get that back to me at least two days before our lesson.

The 4-Part Beginner Track is a series of lessons designed for someone with little to no experience in West Coast Swing. This is designed to help you gain the basics of the dance, including patterns, technique, and the ability to dance socially. While the content is carefully structured, the lesson will very much be centered on you and your needs, which is why the attached form is so important. If you have any questions about my approach to teaching, I have my teaching philosophy on my website, and you can email me any time with questions.

I have [insert dates/times] available for our first lesson. What works best for you?

I look forward to hearing from you!

Best wishes,

Rachel Bonarek

- Second email
  - Confirms date/time
  - Has the following:
    I recommend 1-2 lessons a week and waiting no more than a week between lessons unless there is an illness. This helps to ensure you are getting the most out of our time together. We can either schedule all the lessons now or book our next meeting at the end of each lesson. Which would you prefer?
  - Answers any questions
  - Includes a list of materials they need to bring
  - Has the following:

Wear whatever is comfortable for you! I recommend wearing socks or shoes with suede or soft soles. Any shoes with soles made of rubber or deep indents will hamper your movement. We will start the lesson by reviewing the goals you sent to me in your Pre-Lesson Goals and Experience Sheet and talk about what we can expect from our time together. Then, we'll jump right in! You will be dancing actual West Coast Swing at the end of the first lesson.
- o Has the following:
  I do require payment for the full 4-Part Beginner Track before we begin. I accept PayPal, Venmo, and checks, and you will receive a paper receipt at the first lesson. What is your preferred method of payment?

- Send a text/email confirming the lesson date and time the day before with excitement. Include any materials they need to bring.

After

- Send email as soon as possible (within 24 hours)
  - o Thank them and include some encouragement (e.g. "You did well" or something more specific)
  - o Confirm next lesson
  - o Include expectations sheet and any added goals and expectations
  - o Briefly cover what was learned during the lesson
  - o Remind them not to practice yet and why
  - o Thank them again, offer to answer any questions they have, and sign off

Session Two

Before

- Send a quick text/email confirming the lesson date and time the day before with excitement. Include any materials they need to bring.

After

- Send email as soon as possible (within 24 hours)
  - o Thank them and include a specific thing they did well
  - o Confirm next lesson
  - o Briefly cover what was learned during the lesson
  - o Thank them again, offer to answer any questions they have, and sign off

Session Three

Before

- Send a text/email confirming the lesson date and time the day before with excitement. Include any materials they need to bring.

After

- Send email as soon as possible (within 24 hours)
    - Thank them and include a specific thing they did well
    - Confirm next lesson
    - Briefly cover what was learned during the lesson
    - Ask them to practice and use their video as reference
    - Thank them again, offer to answer any questions they have, and sign off

Session Four

Before

- Send a text/email confirming the lesson date and time the day before with excitement. Include any materials they need to bring. Remind them that this is the last of the 4-Part Beginner Session.

After

- Send email as soon as possible (within 24 hours)
    - Thank them and highlight several of their key accomplishments
    - Confirm next lesson (if scheduled)*
    - Highlight the objectives they gained throughout the four sessions
    - Thank them again and sign off

*If they did not schedule another lesson, include this after the objectives:

- I look forward to the next time we are able to work together. My private lessons are normally structured a little differently. As you practice dance, you will be able to determine your strengths, weaknesses, and where you want to improve. When you schedule a private lesson with me, we discuss what you want to learn ahead of time, and I structure a lesson around the objectives you tell me or we create together. Please reach out to me at any time to schedule, and I hope to see you out dancing!

The student may give a specific time frame for following up. If they do so, follow it. If the student does not follow-up or schedules a lesson, three follow-up emails/texts are sent. The first one at one month from the lesson, the second at three months, and the third at six months.

- Pleasant greeting
- Ask how they have been and how their dancing is going
    - Use rapport build throughout the lessons
    - Respond accordingly
- Ask if they would like to see your openings for lessons that week

Reflections

Reflection 1

This week, I finalized the topics for the four blog posts, which are aesthetic labor, Social Comparison Theory and identity construction, how to give feedback, and the culture of a social organization. I wrote a guiding purpose for each of them and outlined the content without research based on those purposes. I brainstormed what content a new West Coast Swing dancer should learn within their first four lessons and organized the it into the four lessons. The course calendar was also updated to include the additions of the lesson plan

This week was incredibly useful in establishing a direction and strong start for the project. I feel confident that each of the blog posts have a clear purpose that will be useful for actual dancer that goes beyond academic interest. The article on aesthetic and emotional labor will shed light on, not only these important topics, but also how systems of emotional control and social capital interact and influence the dancer's experience and behavior in order for them to make more informed behavioral decisions about their role in the community. The identity construction post will build on these concepts while remaining a separate entity so dancers are prompted to reflect on their own identity as a dancer and how discourses within the community not only influence their identity but how other dancers establish their identity and the communal identity; so that, again, dancers may make more informed behavioral choices and understand how they build and influence their social circle. The post on feedback moves from the theoretical, though useful, topics into the practical and applicative ones. This article is designed especially for communities and groups that want to work together to give feedback and help each other grow as dancers but may not necessarily be or want to be teachers. It uses research to provide tools for giving feedback in a way that helps build a supportive culture. Finally,

"Culture of a Social Organization" is a post that uses an organizational communication framework to provide suggestions and resources on how cultures are formed and how to intentionally build a supportive one as a community member and as a leader. This article will likely pull personal experiences and be disclaimed as somewhat autoethnographical.

These four blog posts will be posted on my website at the end of the semester and shared in dance communities. My intention is to use these to improve communities and increase education. Through sharing the article, there will be increased traffic to my website, and so the posts double as a marketing tool for my teaching. Additionally, published research articles related to one of my industries will likely be attractive to potential professional jobs, if I ever choose to pursue one, and hopefully when I am looking for an agent as well to show that I am disciplined and considerate of the industries that I am in.

This week, I also outlined the content for the four lessons I will be planning this semester. This will be used as a starting point to build my instructional objectives and to refer back to throughout the planning process. Each of these will be planned for a 50-minute segment. Even though deciding on content was not particularly difficult or time consuming because of my background in teaching, it did prompt me to consider several things to keep in mind as I build my lesson plan.

In reflecting on my own dance training, I was thinking about how my first lesson was 30 minutes, and, at the ballroom studio I taught at, the first few lessons were all 30 minutes as well. The idea was that there is only so much content that a new dancer, especially one who has never taken a West Coast, ballroom, or any dance lesson before, might be able to handle. Keeping that in mind, I might tweak the content in each of the lessons throughout the planning process to ensure that I am keeping students first. Also, I want to make sure, as I plan these lessons, that

they are malleable enough so that the speed in which a student learns can be adapted to (e.g. if a student is moving slower, a pattern is moved to the next lesson, but if a student understands the materially faster than the typical beginner, perhaps because they have a dance background, content can be moved up in a way that allows the student to be challenged while still also having enough time to fully grasp the more advanced concepts). I also need to keep in mind that each student has a unique background that should be utilized to enhance their understanding. As such, it is important to keep in mind how to alter verbiage to someone who has learned another dance, be in ballroom or not, played music, was in marching band, played a sport, is good at math and patterns, etc. Each of these backgrounds has a specific benefits and hindrances to learning a West Coast, and it is important for me, especially, to understand what those are.

Finally, it is also important that I build the lessons so that the learning process is collaborative. I have had students who come into a lesson without expecting to exert any effort besides what is specifically asked of them (i.e. they consider themselves secondary in the process). I have been working to build a more collaborative environment where I ask them what they want to learn and for reflection on what they did well and where they could improve within a given exercise. However, I recently had an experience where a student showed me a video at the beginning of the lesson and wanted to learn a step in the video, then paused the lesson to go and watch the video themselves. While a more structured approach to the lessons and clearer expectations will ensure that does not happen again, it is a useful experience to consider as I work to build a collaborative learning environment into my teaching.

Reflection 2

This week, I conducted research for the blog post on aesthetic labor and the one focusing on social capital and the Social Comparison Theory. I also finalized the Pre-Lesson Goals and Experience sheet.

The Pre-Lesson Goals and Experience sheet will be given to students when they first sign up to take a lesson with me. The first question "Why do you want to dance" gives me an idea of their goals and drive so that I can tailor the lessons around that goal and refer back to it when needed. The next three questions tell me what style of dance they want to learn and where I need to start the training based on what they already know. For example, a student who has taken a group lesson once a month over a year likely has significantly less technical training than a student who has taken five private lessons from multiple instructors in a month. The following question asks what other relevant experience the new student has. Different backgrounds with dance, music, and sports provide different understandings of movement and music from which I can pull comparisons to help teach West Coast Swing. Each style of dance and different sports bring both benefits and difficulties to learning West Coast Swing. For example, Ballet dancers often have a difficult time being led. East Coast Swing dancers often have trouble sinking completely into their anchor. I once taught a student who water skied, and he tended to lead with his shoulders because of the primary muscle groups used in water skiing. Asking the students if they have any specific goals is a more direct way to ask the "Why do you want to dance." It is asked again more directly at the end of the sheet because students might have a more specific answer after filling out the rest of the questions. It is also a more specific question compared to the broader question of why they want to dance in general. Finally, the last question asks what

the student wants to work on. This gets them in the collaborative mindset and encourages them to reflect on what they want to improve on specifically.

Creating this sheet was relatively straightforward because I have been teaching for so long and with multiple managers and mentors who all had different suggestions for how to get at the root of a student's needs and goals. All of these questions are intended to help me get a sense of their needs based on their own self-assessment, but I will likely gain most of my answers over time, especially if they are new to West Coast, new to partner dancing, or new to dancing entirely. I chose each of these questions based on my own experiences teaching and what I am learning in my communication classes. While other teachers may not need a sheet or would, perhaps, ask different questions, these questions are specifically designed for me as the teacher based on what I want to know about my students ahead of time to best serve and collaborate with them.

This week, I also added research to my blog post outlines, specifically focusing on the one about aesthetic labor and the one about identity construction. Researching always takes much more time than I expect, but I want to ensure that I provide quality and useful information to my readers. Unfortunately, several of these articles will be difficult for non-academics to access, but I hope that the connections I make to their experiences will be sufficient for most dancers, assuming I adequately explain the research. This research will serve to support the observations I make about and the suggestions I make for the dance community on these different topics. Because so many of the topics in my blog posts overlap, I found myself using one source for three different posts, but then later not using any of the quotes directly, though I saved them all in a separate document. As I continue to research the blog post on culture, I might find content to add into these posts, and I may find that certain points might serve better in

a different post. As such, I have begun to think of them as living documents until I publish them at the end of the semester, and these outlines provide a solid base to begin writing, open to adding or deleting research as necessary.

Reflection 3

This week focused on my teaching philosophy and the research for the last two blog posts: how to give feedback and culture of a social group.

I wrote my entire teaching philosophy in one writing session, not including edits for clarity. A year and a half ago, I stopped working for Five Star Dance Studios, the third dance organization I have taught for, and began teaching independently exclusively. In the past year, especially, I have thought extensively about my conceptualization of the teacher-student relationship outside of the contexts of other organizational constructs and ideology. I have considered the different approaches that I have taken as a student with new teachers and different teachers' approaches to me as a student. After mimicking several styles (e.g. dictating what would be learned, letting the student pick the direction of the lesson, etc.), I have drawn the conclusion that my teaching philosophy centers on the collaborative nature of the student-teacher relationship and the autonomy of both individuals coming together for a singular purpose: to enhance each other's (but namely the student's) dance journey. As such, the teaching philosophy flowed easily. The benefit of writing the teaching philosophy down, rather than considering it mentally, is that it provides a framework to base each lesson off of intentionally.

I also finished the research for the feedback post, which was by far the easiest post to research. The topic was narrow and did not require much conceptual or theoretical background

information because its purpose is to provide practical and useful strategies. This will also likely

be the most useful blog post for dancers for that reason. The culture of a social group post is

similar in that its primary purpose is to provide suggestions strategies, but a sufficient amount of

conceptual background information (e.g. regarding what culture is, what a supportive versus a

defensive climate is, etc.) is necessary. While the feedback post simply explains the components

of effective feedback is and how to give it, the culture post, as with the aesthetic labor and

identity construction, must establish what these vague concepts even are, how they are relevant

to the dance community, and why the reader should care before providing suggestions and

strategies. The other difficulty with the culture post is that there is little research on

culture/climate of a social organization like West Coast Swing. I have had to dig into

interdisciplinary theories and concepts because many of the contemporary research studies, even

the ones testing these theories, are specific to industries that are not conducive to comparison of

the West Coast Swing community. What this post really needs is primary research testing these

theories in the context of this community. However, some comparison can still be extrapolated

considering my experience within the community.

Reflection 4

This week, I wrote the first draft for the blog post about aesthetic labor (and, by

extension, emotional labor and social capital), finished the research for the culture/climate blog

post, and wrote the instructional objectives for each of the four lessons.

The first blog post was difficult yet rewarding to write. The difficulty came from how

complex each of the concepts are, making writing challenging both because of the depth of

research behind each concept and how little space I had to explain and relate each to my

audience. I read that a blog post should be between 300-1000 words, so I am aiming for each

post to be around 1200 to ensure the content is developed enough for my readers to understand.

To check that I did this, I sent the first draft to a friend who dances West Coast Swing and has

been involved in several social communities and competes as well. He gave me some stylistic

tips to improve clarity and confirmed that the post was both interesting and relevant to the

community.

The Instructional Objectives were difficult because of the scaffolding I am working into

the lessons. Several of the technical concepts, such as posture, compression, and leverage, are

simply introduced because they are concepts that will be worked on, improved, and nuanced

throughout a dancer's entire journey. As such, figuring out how to quantify a level of

understanding for a beginner was difficult, considering the variety of abilities different students

have when they begin West Coast. However, the rest of the concepts, including counting,

handholds, and footwork, were easy to form into an objective because there is a clearer

distinction between correct and incorrect.

Reflection 5

This week, I wrote a blog post about identity construction of the West Coast Swing

dancer. This post ended up being much different than I expected because research led me down

a different path than I thought it would. There was not only so much research, but my

understanding of identity construction changed. So, the focus of this post shifted from

explaining the intersection between identity construction and culture to simply explaining how

we construct our identity. After this initial draft, I will send it out to people I know in the community to solicit feedback on how useful and understandable this post is.

Because the research on identity construction is dense for me, it was an exciting challenge to both apply it to West Coast Swing and explain everything in an understandable manner for my readers. While most of the people I have met in the West Coast Swing community are in or have gone to college, I want to make sure that my posts are accessible to everyone.

Making the concept of identity construction understandable is helped by the anecdote at the beginning of the post that delineates my experience with identity as a Westie (what we colloquially call ourselves). While this journey may not be the same for everyone, it can both be explained by research and is relatable for most people, based on those I have talked with. I chose which parts of my dance journey I shared to keep the story relevant and reduce confusion.

Reflection 6

This week, I completed the lesson plans for Beginner Session Lesson 1 and 2, wrote the first draft of the blog post on giving feedback, and edited the final draft of my teaching philosophy.

My Teaching Philosophy, while it did not change, has less superfluous information and streamlines my beliefs. While barely over a page, I think it does an excellent job of encapsulating what I believe as a teacher and how I will enact those beliefs in private lessons. While this will be helpful for students interested in seeing if I would be a good fit for them, it has also been useful as I have started drafting my lesson plans for the Beginner Session. Now that

my ideas are on paper, I can easily refer back to them and keep them at the forefront of all of my work on lesson plans, website, and blog posts.

The Lesson Plans were both easier and more difficult than I expected. While some of the sections of how I teach something has remained relatively constant with minor alterations, I was intrigued by how many little transitions and explanations had fallen through the cracks. As I struggled to decide if I should place teaching handhold and slot before or after the first pattern in Lesson 1, I realized that I may have been confusing my students by inserting the explanation into the middle of teaching the pattern. As I struggled to write down review/practice/warm-up, I realized I had been winging those parts of my lessons, likely making it not as effective as it could be with a plan. As I wrote up Lesson 2, I realized that Compression would be much easier to understand in Lesson 2 than in Lesson 3, and how I had been teaching it was likely the reason I was seeing certain issues (such as students being top heavy) develop later. After this experience, I will start outlining each lesson in more detail beforehand and take notes of what I teach and how I taught after a lesson to reflect on the process.

The blog post on feedback was the longest and will likely be the most immediately useful for dancers because it gives them straightforward information and actionable tasks that can be tried immediately. This was also the easiest and most fun to write. My sense of audience was clear, and I did not have to spend as much time explaining the research because it was less theory heavy than the other posts. My only concern is that there was a lot more quoting to streamline the information, but I think this approach will be easier to digest for my readers.

Reflection 7

This week, I worked on the first draft for the blog post about culture and the first drafts of Lessons 3 and 4.

The blog post defined culture, shared forms of communication used to identify culture, and explained how to build a supportive culture using Gibb's characteristics of supportive climate and discussing how competition can be positive and how to handle a large group. This is the longest blog post so far because of the explanation needed for each of the characteristics of a supportive climate, but the article is still a quick, easy read, unlike the first two posts on identity construction and aesthetic labor that were more theoretical. I realized as I was writing that I had merged this and the post on feedback, so some of what I would have discussed in this article I had already included in the feedback one. This shows how integrated these concepts of communication and organization are. Keeping these concepts separate has been a struggle with all four blog posts, but I will send them to dancers to make sure that they make sense and are useful.

Lesson Plans 3 and 4 were easier than the first two because I had already established a system for writing, but they were more difficult in that I wanted to add more review and struggled to articulate the rationale and the activity. The activity portion was especially hard because much of the review will depend on what each individual student needs to work on. I also realized as I was finishing the fourth lesson plan that the "Activity take-aways" section should simply be an objective, so all of my final drafts will show an improved objective that is clearly listed under each activity.

The other struggle is that I am at a place usually reserved for vacationing to stay safe from the coronavirus pandemic. Distractions are high, even though the person I am sharing the space with is also working. Neither of us are particularly productive. However, I am excited to edit these drafts with feedback because now I have done the hard part of creating the baseline content.

Reflection 8

This week was the first big week of revisions. I finished my final drafts of the first two blog posts (aesthetic labor and identity construction) and the first two lesson plans.

The lesson plans were primarily expanding on what I had already written, revising the activity take-aways after gaining a better understanding of that segment, and writing full transition statements. The transition statements and activity take-away statements were challenging but helped solidify the purpose of each of the activities throughout the lesson and how to explain a concept to a new student. I used to like to keep my lessons relatively open-ended so that I can adapt to my students' needs in real time, but, through this process, I have realized how important it is to write down every intended lesson, the reason behind it, and how to explain it. This will make concepts clearer to the students because I have already determined what is important to know and have an idea in my head of how to communicate the concepts. It will also help me to refine my teaching and adapt better to each student if I have a definite starting place. The whole lesson plan helps with all of this, but specifically writing down full sentences moves the material from the planning to the presenting.

I also worked on revising the aesthetic labor and identity construction blog posts, both of which were relatively difficult to create because of how theory-heavy and concept-heavy they are compared to the other two. However, I started the week by researching how long a blog post should be and ended up doing research on what makes readers finish a post, leave before they are done reading, and share it. Understanding the insight from and tools used by other content creators helped me reframe the information to achieve my goals: enrich the community through knowledge of communication theory and create content that will drive people to my website. I easily revised the aesthetic labor blog post to make it more engaging and accessible. The identity construction post posed more of a challenge, but I believe there has been significant improvement. I more fully explain the research and provide more examples and opportunities for engagement with the piece.

Reflection 9

This week was a fast turn-around for revisions. I edited the Feedback blog post, the Culture blog post, Lesson Plan 3, and Lesson Plan 4. There were significantly fewer comments on all four of these documents, and most of the comments on the lesson plans were the same additions of transitions and activity take-away statements, which were easy to implement after having done the previous two lesson plans.

Going through the last two lesson plans after revising the first two last week helped to ensure that all four were building off of each other and were consistent with what and how I was teaching. I found that my transitions were often becoming whole scripts to introduce a new concept, so I had to occasionally edit the transitions to ensure that I was not going overboard on

those. Often in those edits, I would move a teaching statement down to the activity take-away. Even though including a whole script is inappropriate and unhelpful as a teacher because I need the option to adapt to my students' needs, it was a confidence boost that I knew exactly how I would move from the transition into the explanation and then into the activity. It helped to show me that I build lessons that's flow I was comfortable and confident in.

The two blog posts were also straightforward in the editing. The comments asked me to elaborate on a few specific areas, but there were little to no comments on the overall structure or content of the articles. I did move around and delete some content to make it flow better, but, overall, I made minor edits. There were also quite a few positive and encouraging comments on these posts. I am still not entirely confident in how useful the Culture post will be, but, hopefully, it will have a positive influence on the community to become more supportive. For the moment, I left out a call to comment on the Culture post, but I may add something when I post it on my website where I ask readers what their community's culture is like and what metaphors or rituals they have that lead them to that conclusion.

Overall, this week was a confidence boost in my writing and teaching ability.

Reflection 10

This Thesis has been an incredible experience in both the process and the learning outcomes. I have learned so much more about spearheading my own projects research endeavors, including becoming more comfortable with process assignments.

This thesis started out as a business plan for my business as an independent dance instructor, but I wanted my Communication Studies major to play a large role in the project as

well. In the end, the thesis included four blog posts that applied communication research to the West Coast Swing dance community with the purpose of providing tools and resources for dancers, four lessons plans for a Beginner Track, a few business tools (including guidelines for following up with students and a goals sheet), a teaching philosophy, ten reflections on the process, and an updated website with much of these assignments accessible to the public.

I have undoubtably become a better teacher this semester. I had thought I had a solid idea of what my teaching philosophy was, but I learned so much more about what I believed when I articulated it. I think that having the philosophy right at the top of my Dance Coach page on my website will help students and potential students understand who I am, how I approach teaching, and if we will be a good fit.

The blog posts were both more difficult and easier than I was expecting them to be. The largest issue was actually narrowing a direction for each post. I had done a research paper during the Spring 2019 semester that discussed aesthetic labor, identity construction, and a little bit about culture, but they were broadly applied. The blog posts were difficult because I was not simply analyzing a concept within the dance community, I was explaining how the concept functions within the dance community to those not familiar with communication research, why it should matter to them, and what to do with the information. I think that the articles read more like research papers than blog posts, and I think they could have been more accessible if I kept what I wanted my audience to gain out of or do with the information at the forefront of my mind while writing.

The lesson plans were my favorite assignment to work on, though they were added to the project last minute. I learned how to effectively organize a lesson to clarify the purpose of each concept and activity and transition between concepts. This level of organization actually allows

for a higher-quality lesson and more personalization, rather than less flexibility. The structure provides a framework so that most of the lesson can focus on adapting to the student's learning needs.

I did create follow-up guidelines and a Pre-Lesson Goals and Experience Sheet as well, and these are beneficial in a similar way that the lesson plans are. These two tools provide a structure so that I am communicating clearly with my students and gaining the information I need to be able to teach them effectively and help them reach their goals. The follow-up guidelines do include email scripts and a timetable for following up so that I am consistent with my students and can ensure that I am always including the necessary information in each email.

Overall, I am incredibly thrilled with this project. It was ambitious and challenging, and I think the end products show my best work. This is a fantastic culmination of my Communication studies and honors curriculum at Ball State, and I hope others do find the material useful.

Website Links

Homepage: www.rachelbonarek.com

Blog: https://www.rachelbonarek.com/blog

Teaching Philosophy: https://www.rachelbonarek.com/dancecoach (link under "My Offer")

Thesis Overview: https://www.rachelbonarek.com/samplework

Thesis Page: https://www.rachelbonarek.com/thesis

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