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## A Collaboration in Care: Re-visioning Teacher-Student Dialogue in Dance Education

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### Abstract

The following narrative recounts a collaborative reflective investigation into pedagogical care using a teacher-student dyad approach. Originating from the student's inquiry that fulfilled her teacher's assignment, the ensuing exploration investigates care from both teacher and student perspectives in the classroom and choreographic settings. This concept of care—while not without its challenges and complications—is essential for the development of a healthy dynamic of mutual respect and learning between teachers and students. Supported by Noddings' ethic of care (Noddings, 2003; Warburton, 2004), the authors examine how a holistic approach fosters open communication between teacher and individual student, allowing a rich collaboration and re-examination of the traditional dance classroom. To reflect the unique dialogical process of this collaboration, the authors have

fashioned sections of the paper into divergent formats such as dual narratives and reflective dialogues.

### **Introduction**

This article details a collaborative inquiry into the issue of care in the dance class undertaken by a teacher-student dyad, whose inquiry began with the following questions: What characterizes a caring relationship between a dance teacher and his or her student, and what are the responsibilities of each participant in facilitating and nurturing it? What are the potential biases, challenges, and possibilities involved? Furthermore, how do embedded teacher and student schemas regarding expectations, roles, and behaviors in the dance class and rehearsal space shape the interpersonal dynamics between teachers and students, and how can those frames be reconsidered in consciously caring pedagogical practices? Lastly, within this caring context, how can the teacher see the student as an individual?

It is often assumed that teachers possess an understanding of the ethic of care. Thus, in the preparation of teachers, this topic is often overlooked (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Although dance education has begun to address this topic further (Warburton, 2004), more extensive inquiries into how caring practices between teachers and students are realized are sparsely represented, particularly those that include both teacher and student voices. Moreover, where differentiated instruction attends to the individual learning variances within the classroom, teaching with the individual in mind “privileg[es] the individual voice” (Burnidge, 2012, p. 45) viewing each student as a person who is learning. Therefore, understanding ways that teachers view and communicate with each student as a unique and constantly evolving individual as a component of a caring pedagogy is deserving of further dialogue and integration into teacher preparation in dance. Emerging from the student within the context of her teacher’s written assignment, this joint inquiry moved out of a structured classroom and into an open field of dialogue. From this widened space, preconceptions, experiences, fears, challenges, and ideas surrounding teacher and student were more freely yet respectfully shared.

Warburton (2004) describes Noddings’ “caring encounter” (p. 90) as a meeting between at least two individuals, engaging and responding to both their internal and external worlds. This interaction is fundamental to a caring pedagogy, and according to Warburton (2004), requires of the teacher, “sensitivity to an emotional opening” and “receptivity” to what the student communicates, verbally or otherwise; an inclination to care; and the ability to engage in the caring encounter (p. 90-1). However the nature of the student’s contributions to this encounter and a caring relationship as a whole has yet to be fully considered. Student voices are a vital component of the complex ecosystem of any classroom. Through both personal reflection and pedagogical analysis, this article foregrounds the student’s first person

perspective within this interactive learning environment, contributing an added dimension to the experience of the teaching-learning locus. In addition to the dance class setting, care in the choreographic context is also considered.

This dialogue unfolds in a post-positivist framework where multiple truths are acknowledged and personal experiences inform a mutual, socially constructed tapestry of meanings. Furthermore, as an immersion into our respective beliefs and practices that shape our behavior, it is enacted primarily through uncovering and sharing stories. In this way, it employs narrative inquiry (Bruner, 1990; Lauritzen & Jaeger, 1996; McEwan & Egan, 1995; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000) as a primary methodology, illuminating the unique binary and overlapping experiences and perspectives that conspire to re-negotiate shared meanings within a dynamic, lived pedagogical ecosystem. Narrative is used as a way to understand experience (Clandinin, 1999). According to Dyer (2010), “Narrative approaches to pedagogical inquiry and student learning invite teachers and learners to retell and interpret experiences as a means to construct knowledge and meaning” (p. 6). Embedded in this narrative inquiry is the act of reflection as a way of knowing. The concept of reflective learning draws on the work of Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983), emphasizing that learning arises out of experiences that are thoughtfully considered and possess continuity, or connectedness in both time (e.g., past and present) and in relation to others. Furthermore, as a way of knowing, reflection is exhibited within the improvised, responsive adaptations within an experience. As Dyer (2010) aptly states, “Reflecting on the narratives that have shaped our practices as learners and teachers can lead us to realize the meaning systems that live within our actions” (p. 6).

In this journey as collaborating authors, we gradually became aware that our ongoing conversations, a sharing and reconsidering of ideas and perspectives, and subsequent transforming attitudes and behaviors, mirrored the pedagogical care that we were investigating. In order to exemplify the exchanges that enriched this collaboration and the discoveries therein, this article documents these two layers of a reflective, collaborative inquiry, highlighting both what could be called the outer epidermal layer, comprised of critical reflection and theorizing on our topic, as well as the subcutaneous, metacognitive layer (depicted here as reflective dialogues) in which our recounted conversational exchanges model the characteristics of a caring encounter. Both of these narrative forms, braided together, inform and express the investigation and its process.

### **Personal Histories and “Visionary Practices”**

In the following section, the origins of this inquiry are recounted in a dual format (from both teacher and student), allowing for a visual pairing of these distinct perspectives to more clearly view where they might intersect and interlace. It is from these disparate histories that the teacher and student began their joint inquiry.

**Rebecca (Teacher)**

In considering my incoming students at the start of a new semester of my dance pedagogy course, “Issues in Dance Education and Pedagogy,” a dance student’s initiation often begins in a studio at an early age. Therefore, by college, he or she has likely formed many beliefs about teaching, learning, as well as about teachers and students, albeit from the student’s viewfinder. And, although I hoped to provide students with new ideas and information, I realize this prior knowledge and/or pre-formed conceptions would be a competing influence. My revised goal in this course was to find opportunities to crack open prior knowledge and acknowledge the role it plays in learning new ideas.

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) explain the contemporary view on learning that new knowledge is built upon prior knowledge, including the pre-conceptions or beliefs surrounding that knowledge by recounting the story of *Fish Is Fish*, a children’s book by Leo Lionni (1970). It is a story about a fish that wishes to see the wider world on land but, for obvious reasons, cannot do so. In making friends with a tadpole who, as a frog, travels out beyond the water and onto land, the fish eventually learns about people, cows, and other animals through the frog’s sojourn and subsequent return. From the book’s visuals depicting the fish’s perceptions of the animals, it is revealed that the fish imagines them as fish-like creatures with only small land animal adaptations that match the frog’s descriptions. For example, the cows become “fish with udders” (as cited in Lionni in Bransford, et. al,

**Grace (Student)**

In the fall of my junior year, I took Rebecca’s “Issues in Dance Education and Pedagogy” course, a class focused on pedagogical theories and practices that prompted us students to reflect on our personal dance histories, the teachers we had encountered, and the positive and negative memories that came along with those. We often discussed our “belief statements” on teaching, culminating in a final “Visionary Practices” paper and presentation. At the time, I was particularly struck and concerned by the lax attitude of my fellow dance students when it came to respecting our teachers. It seemed like the shared passion among the group was not dance, but complaints and criticisms.

Sometimes these were legitimate; for example, a student mentioned how frequently she witnessed her fellow dancers leaving rehearsal crying because they were being pushed too hard physically or emotionally, feeling like means to a perfect performance end. As choreographic tools, they felt disrespected and uncared for. Other times though, these perpetual criticisms—of the way a teacher dressed or spoke for instance—lacked any true substance, but persisted by force of habit. Either way, rarely were these issues (so readily raised amongst each other) raised with our teachers themselves. I asked myself (and a couple of other students who were noticing the same thing), “Why is this happening?” and “What kind of teaching practices might encourage a different attitude?” Something was clearly missing in these teacher-student relationships, creating an us versus them dynamic. Petty

2000, p. 11). The example here was to illustrate how students develop beliefs about scientific concepts that are difficult to alter with new, factual information. Although the course content prepared within my dance pedagogy course is not intending to teach Newton's second law of motion, or how the planets revolve around the sun, asking every student to untie deeply rooted beliefs they have formed prior to intersecting with domain specific knowledge is equally important to dance, and every subject area, as prior knowledge and beliefs that learners hold play an important role in learning that must be attended to (Minstrell, 1989; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

Specifically in this endeavor, I was concerned that even after learning about pedagogical principles and theories and practicing their application, a student's visions and conceptions of teaching would still be something akin to the "fish with udders," contorting many newly acquired facets they have learned about to fit their prior knowledge from early ingrained dance experiences. Aligning with this logic, I redesigned my dance pedagogy course so that it more overtly acknowledged the personal experiences and perceptions about teaching and learning that the (undergraduate) students bring with them rather than by a series of teacher or topic-driven content (Gose Enghauser, 2012). I wanted the students' current conceptions of teaching to serve as the starting point and an ongoing reference through which new information would be threaded. My hope was to make the transition process of learning about teaching more conscious, relevant, and hopefully more resonant, yet the reality exists

student complaints were just a symptom of a greater problem at play.

Back in Rebecca's class, while reflecting on memories that had shaped my beliefs about teaching, I found that I was particularly resentful of one teacher. A few months before our annual concert, I overheard her talking about me to an administrator, saying, "I hope Grace isn't feeling too beat up that she wasn't picked for that piece. We'll find her something special to do for her graduating solo." Though I appreciated her concern for my feelings, as well as her desire to seek out an interesting project for me, I couldn't help but feel frustrated that this sort of conversation didn't happen with me personally. Instead, she approached me much later, proposing I do a restaging of a resident choreographer's solo. "I've already talked to the choreographer," she told me, "and he's willing to work with you and let you use his choreography." Grateful that she had gone through the effort to grant me this unique opportunity, I didn't tell my teacher that for my senior work I wanted to present something personal to me, and not someone else's solo. I didn't want to seem ungrateful, so I agreed to it. Come the night of the dress rehearsal, I was ready to step onstage and run through the piece; instead, my teacher called out to me, "Grace, we're running out of time. You can run it in the studio if you want. I'm sure you'll be fine tomorrow!" The next night, anxious about performing a solo in a huge concert hall and about presenting someone else's own personal and professional work, I botched it. Never had I felt so badly about a performance. Never had I had others come up

that the terrain we map will be, at best, an incomplete picture of the whole.

As a part of a course overhaul, amidst other assignments, I initiated a mid-semester “Visionary Practices” paper assignment. My rationale for this assignment was that once students had been introduced to a survey of instructional theories and principles in various sub-areas of pedagogy (science, history, motor learning, social foundations, and feminist and critical theory), they would narrow in on an issue of interest and begin to formulate a teaching vision based both on their personal experiences, interests, as well as related research, which they would have to investigate more deeply. In order to successfully complete this paper, the students had to try to identify with and communicate as teachers, wrestling as best they could with the pros and cons, complications, and challenges of the vision that they had chosen.

Submitted papers covered a variety of issues such as the use of mirrors in the dance classroom, the importance of dance as a subject in K12 education, dance as a way to increase socio-cultural understandings, and the benefits of dance for adolescent females. Many students included why this particular issue was important to them, and many of those reasons were steeped in personal histories. Grace’s story about teaching the individual and practicing caring pedagogy and the personal history intertwined within it was particularly engaging to me as a teacher. Upon reading her paper I felt she had targeted a teacher’s Achilles’ heel: a practice that teachers support in theory but do

to me after a show and say, “But it was looking so good in rehearsal! What happened?” That was how I finished up many intensive and dedicated years with that program. Unsurprisingly I was upset, and couldn’t help but blame my teacher in part for not granting me the two minutes to run the piece through in the space where I would be performing it. I felt overlooked, unappreciated, and unimportant to the program I had given so much to.

With this and other personal experiences at the forefront of my mind and with what I was witnessing at the time Rebecca assigned her Visionary Practices paper, I started thinking about the importance of knowing students as individuals (What do they aim to get out of this? What are their interests? What is their background? What are their short- and long-term goals?), working with them as individuals (How do they best learn?), and dialoguing with them in an open, respectful, and honest manner (How can teachers and students constructively communicate? How does this communication vary from one individual student to another?). The inherent authority the teacher has already complicates the teacher-student relationship; in a pre-professional context it can get trickier, as a teacher for a technique class might also be a student’s choreographer and/or director. These immediate power disparities do not automatically promote trust and honesty from student to teacher. Trust and honesty are instead achieved once the teacher introduces the care factor, and students trust that a teacher’s care for their needs won’t negatively impact them. If students feel their individual goals and learning needs are being addressed and nurtured

not always execute with success in the studio. I knew this to be a difficult challenge for teachers, and although I had developed strategies over the years, I felt this to be a meaty issue worthy of more in-depth focus. I later suggested that we might mutually benefit from a collaborative exchange around this paper, which recounted many stories of difficult teacher-student relationships. Upon entering a slow and purposeful, ongoing dialogue outside of class, each participant could look into this issue with both the “biases” of her individual perspectives and histories, and, through deep listening and a willing demeanor, disassemble some of the constructs to gain a deeper experience from another’s perspective.

With this Visionary Practices writing assignment, I was hoping students would be able to put themselves in the midway and messy place of learning, stretching themselves between their personal dance histories and new ideas upon which they could experiment with. Furthermore, as a scholar and teacher I was interested in further investigating Grace’s ideas of teaching each individual. My initial interpretation of this was differentiation—the practice of adapting instruction to individual student learning styles, learning challenges or assets. Yet her idea of seeing each student and his or her particular perspective and needs was more focused on the communication issues between teacher and student. With the prospect of working through these notions with a motivated and mature student partner and with a mutual goal to present at an upcoming conference, I felt that much could be learned from this project, both individually and

in the studio and their teachers are truly trying to get to know them as more than just movers, they will feel more comfortable opening up to those teachers and discussing their concerns, concerns that might just be gossiped about otherwise. The respect and care teachers demonstrate to their students garner respect and care from the students in turn. This can prevent a contagious lack of respect spreading amongst all parties involved; once something like that spreads far enough, the origin of the problem can often be forgotten despite its perpetuation.

Furthermore, respect initiated from teachers and imitated and acted upon by students would inspire those students to behave respectfully and caringly in whatever field they might go on to pursue. Specifically in the dance world, these students would be more likely to become respectful and caring teachers, directors, and performers themselves. In this way, perhaps the toxic cycle of discord and mis- or non-communication between dance teachers and dance students could be broken, and a healthier, more ethical learning environment promoted.

With Nel Noddings’ ethic of care (2003) as my starting point, I developed my Visionary Practices thesis that, “teachers should work as participants and not sole contributors to the learning process. In order to successfully do this, these teachers must recognize and respond to each student as an individual, not just a small part of the larger unit, the class. This caring approach to teaching is critical, as teachers aren’t just training their students technically; they are shaping the kinds of dancers, choreographers, directors, and teachers these

collectively.

Grace's paper detailed experiences she had as a student and how the poor quality of communication affected how students viewed themselves, how comfortable or safe they felt to engage in learning, and how motivated they became. Concerned about the lack of attention to these aspects of teaching, I was compelled to learn more. Educational theory emphasizes the need to differentiate one's teaching so as to reach the vast array of learners a teacher encounters. This offers a starting place for teaching the individual; however, it fails to zoom in closer to account for the individual relationships that are formed through dynamic communication with individual students, and its influence on shaping a learner's experience. I was beginning to see more clearly how the interactivity creates the learning—that is, being in relationship to the teacher, the content, and to the environment, as a system, that affects as well as adapts to change.

students will one day be, as artists and as people.” I presented my paper to the class and Rebecca was particularly struck by the notion of teaching the individuality of students. We met to discuss these ideas further and decided to dig deeper into what I already started by analyzing this notion of care and the individual collaboratively from two perspectives: that of the dance teacher and that of the dance student. After all, that is what caring is all about: being receptive and attentive to the other's perspective. Co-writing this paper and co-presenting its preliminary ideas at a national conference have been an exploration in and of itself of such caring practices for both teacher and student, and has informed our work up to the publication of this paper.



Table 1. *Reflective Dialogue A*


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**Grace:** At what point in our collaboration do you think we become aware of this metacognitive, or reflexive inquiry layer?

**Rebecca:** I think it was a gradual awakening. As we were unpacking these concepts I feel as if we gradually realized we were also seeking to practice them with each other. Between our meetings, I felt that we were returning to our respective roles as teacher and student with increased awareness. Then, when preparing for our presentation of an initial iteration of this investigation (for a conference paper), I recall that we consciously decided to demonstrate a caring encounter within the format of the presentation.

**Grace:** You mentioned seeking to practice these concepts with one another as well as going outside of our meetings with an increased awareness of the practices. I think doing that—bringing these ideas with me outside of our conversations and into class—changed how I went about daily teacher-student interactions, and from conversations we’ve had before, I believe did something similar for you. Around then we realized that our daily interactions examined through the lens of these concepts could further inform our inquiry and research.

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### **Communication and the Caring Encounter (Grace)**

*“The truth is, just as dancing requires continuous streams of energy (even in stillness) so does the concept of caring rely upon a constant flow of feeling, of mutuality, of effort” (Warburton, 2004, p. 91).*

Teachers often say they care about their students, but here we examine care in a less colloquial way. In a caring pedagogy, it is important to think of care as concern for the teacher-student relationship (Noddings, 2003) and the type of communication that results from that relationship (Warburton, 2004) as they pertain to the advancement of the individual student’s development toward his or her goals. The nature of this relationship and communication dictates how teachers learn about and understand their students as they seek to foster the students’ growth, as well as assist and inspire them. In this section, I will briefly introduce Nel Noddings’ (2003) ethic of care and its application by Edward C. Warburton (2004) specifically to dance education, apply their thinking to personal experiences in the dance classroom, and challenge the gaps in this literature by exploring the student’s role in a caring relationship.

As a student writing the Visionary Practices paper for Rebecca's class, Noddings' philosophy on care struck me as I parsed out how exactly a teacher goes about teaching the individual. Noddings (2003) addresses this relationship and the role care plays in it from an ethical and moral standpoint, noting that ethical care is not necessarily natural and involves three things: "engrossment," "motivational displacement," and "recognition of caring" (p. 69).

Noddings (2003) defines engrossment as requiring of the teacher a "presence" and "reception" (p. 176) to the student, through which he or she can "[undergo] a motivational displacement toward the projects of the cared-for" (p. 176). Motivational displacement is achieved once the teacher receives and realizes the student's perspective as his or her own; the student's journey of learning is therefore one of co-learning with the teacher who is experiencing the learning through the student's eyes and with the student him or herself. According to Noddings (2003) motivational displacement is more than just the typical understanding of empathy, as it does not allow for projection of the experiences or feelings of the teacher—the "one-caring"—but requires instead total receptivity of what the student—the "cared-for"—is experiencing (p. 4). The teacher's experience then becomes one of teacher-student "duality" (p. 30) through which the teacher's "motive energy [is] shared . . . at the service of the other" (p. 33).

Warburton (2004) lays the groundwork for what Noddings' (2003) caring pedagogy looks like specifically in a dance education context, examining the caring encounter in highlighting the centrality of effective communication to a caring classroom. In the caring encounter, teachers practice Noddings' idea of motivational displacement, but Warburton adds more to this, arguing that caring requires reason in addition to feeling. Together, reason and feeling result in three intensive criteria for a teacher in the caring encounter: "sensitivity to an emotional opening" and "receptivity" to what the student communicates, verbally or otherwise; an inclination to care; and the ability to engage in the caring encounter (Warburton, 2004, p. 90-1). This method of communicating with students openly fosters teaching the individual. It is flexible enough to account for the different ways a student may individually express his or her needs while setting up an emotionally safe environment in which a teacher can better understand the student's personal dance history, goals, challenges, and best learning methods, teaching with those in mind. Communication via this caring encounter allows a teacher to better know the student and to stay aware of how this student is developing. What are the student's goals and how may those goals and the student's personal outlook be changing? The caring encounter facilitates continuing conversations on these important topics for teachers and students. Teachers can only understand their students in a narrow and biased way from their own inherent position of authority; open and honest dialogue between teacher and student is vital for this understanding to remain as broad and unbiased as realistically possible.

In my Visionary Practices paper, I reflected back on an experience that particularly shaped my thinking on communication and the caring encounter, and the important role listening plays in teacher-student relationships. Years beforehand, a new program director at our studio arrived, made an effort to get to personally know me and each of my fellow dancers. She spent the first hour or so of our first rehearsal together talking about who we were, our past dance training, and our interests outside of dance. I remember greatly appreciating this, thinking that here was a teacher and director who would listen to us, understand us, and therefore cultivate what I now recognize as caring relationships with each of us. What I soon realized though was that her listening became less receptive after that first day. What she garnered about us from that relatively short group conversation shaped who we were to her; the sensitivity and receptivity to the caring encounter was not there over time. My friend, who was new to the world of modern dance, came from a hip-hop background. Our teacher labeled her from the beginning as, “the hip-hopper,” not recognizing her desire for development in other dance genres. Two years later, even though my friend had developed a beautiful modern technique and aesthetic, and now considered herself primarily a modern dancer, our program director required that she do a hip-hop piece for her senior solo. My friend became disillusioned with dance and with her own capabilities as an artist and stopped dancing soon after.

This account demonstrates the importance of continuous care and what Greene (1978) describes as a state of “wide-awakeness” (p. 162) crucial to the caring encounter. For Warburton (2004), wide-awakeness involves the teacher’s recognition and openness to a caring encounter, preparing them for the open dialogue required to get to know a student. It is exactly this sensitivity and awareness to an emotional encounter that shifts a teacher’s focus from “self” to “us” (Warburton, 2004, p. 90). The better a teacher knows a student, understanding his or her needs, goals, and challenges, the better he or she can teach the individual in a collaborative manner, moving away from self and toward an us-perspective of co-learning through motivational displacement. In this story, our director never shifted her focus; she started by initiating a conversation to get to know us, but was not wide-awake or sensitive to further openings for caring encounters that would have allowed for the co-learning that results from successful motivational displacement. Her vision remained *her* vision, not that of her students’. Had our director practiced wide-awakeness by realizing an opening existed to discuss my friend’s desires and goals, perhaps this story would have ended differently. Though fitting dancers into neat categorized labels is a tempting way to more easily work with a classroom of dancers as a group of individuals (as opposed to a mass of students), it does not incorporate wide-awakeness. As Noddings (2003) notes, “To be treated as ‘types’ instead of individuals, to have strategies exercised on us, objectifies us. We become ‘cases’ instead of persons” (p. 66). As cases, students are shut off from the open dialogue of a caring encounter necessary for the teacher to understand them and assist in advancing or

achieving their goals.

When it comes to open dialogue, Warburton (2004) proposes that the caring encounter requires the teacher to practice active listening, presumably drawing upon research originating from a therapeutic context (Gordon, 1975; Rogers, 1951) and later applied to education (Topornycky & Golparian, 2016). Active listening requires more than simply being a good listener. Warburton (2004) states,

Simple listening implies hearing and interpreting the verbal and nonverbal text of the speaker. Active listening on the other hand requires observing verbal and nonverbal cues; it requires placing the interlocutor's words and ideas into a context of meaning prior to final interpretation. The active listener attends to what someone says and reflects back to the speaker what is heard in order to insure a valid rendering and interpretation of their meaning. . . . It is a means to true dialogue: a talking together, not a talking at one another (p. 93).

Beyond what Warburton outlines for this process of active listening, teachers must intentionally practice motivational displacement in their interpretations of text and cues, otherwise risking constricting their understanding to what Noddings (2001) calls their "own conceptual structures of the situation" (p. 99). In this way, teachers and students are more likely to avoid miscommunication, which could lead to misunderstanding, resentment, frustration, and lack of motivation as the teacher-student relationship progresses.

I personally experienced such frustration as a student with a teacher who would regularly in class or while cleaning choreography use negative language to correct her students. Accusatory cries such as, "Why are you doing it *that* way?" and "That's not what I taught you!" were not uncommon. When we asked her questions for clarification, we were often shut down with dismissive remarks or different questions were answered instead. Our teacher listened in-actively while taking advantage of her inherent position of power in her relationships with us students; she worked from that position of power as opposed to a collaborative position of care. With her negative language, she isolated us from a helpful and open dialogue of a caring encounter that could have inspired some sort of co-learning through cooperative problem solving. This cooperation may have looked something like, "Grace, be aware of your arms in this section," followed by a demonstration of how the arms should go, and an explanation of what I was doing differently. As a student, I would then too seek to practice active listening, repeating back my understanding and interpretation of what had been

shown and told to me.<sup>1</sup> Throughout corrections like these, the teacher should be wide-awake, sensitive to how the student responds and ready to be receptive to any questions or personal concerns the student may have as he or she seeks clarification in an open dialogue supported by care.

While Warburton's contribution of the caring encounter and application of active listening to the conversation on care in dance education from the teacher's perspective are vital, it is troublesome to me as a student that he largely overlooks the student's role. Firstly, Warburton (2004) accepts and adopts Noddings' labels of carer and cared-for and in fact includes them in the definition of a caring encounter, "a meeting between two people, a carer and a cared-for" (p. 90). If we refer to the teacher as the carer and the student as the cared-for, what does that say about the student's role in a caring pedagogy? We risk suggesting that the student has little to no caring agency. Noddings (2003) at least recognizes that the use of these labels is "bothersome" (p. 4), and for her part, uses them to develop a moral outlook that includes all types of caring relationships (i.e. parent-child, counselor-patient, teacher-student) for which her terms must be all-encompassing. Warburton perhaps, like Noddings, relies upon them for the sake of clarity and consistency. However, he develops a moral outlook for the teacher-student relationship, specifically. There is no reason not to use the terms "teacher" and "student." The use of "carer" and "cared-for" in the education field requires reconsideration. In relying upon these terms, Warburton seemingly places sole caring responsibility on the teacher, which as a student, is as disempowering as the typical teaching practices he rejects. If the caring encounter encourages an open and honest dialogue *between* teacher and student and not just *from* teacher *to* student—"a talking together, not a talking at one another"—an effort toward care should come from both parties involved (Warburton, 2004, p. 93).

Furthermore, Warburton (2004) concludes that, "a caring orientation in teaching is ultimately defined by a willingness to *let others learn in an environment of mutual effort and responsibility*," (italics original, p. 94) something that is exhibited through students' critical and reflective thinking provoked by the teacher. Undoubtedly it is the teacher's responsibility to create a caring environment in which students are challenged to think critically, and it is the student's responsibility to ask questions that exhibit this thinking. Importantly however, despite all this effort on the part of the teacher, caring is about relations and not individuals

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<sup>1</sup> This is just one option of a caring response to a student in making a correction. Warburton (2004) stresses that, "caring manifests itself in a wide variety of ways" and that it "differs across cultures and even in the same individual at different times" (p. 90). What is critical about this example is the language used—that the teacher is wide-awake to an opening for a caring encounter and responds positively, instead of with negative language that shuts off the student and exacerbates the power differential between the two in the teacher-student relationship.

(Noddings, 2003). While Warburton (2004) does recognize that caring is a joint endeavor, he offers no clear picture as to what the student contributes specifically to the caring relationship. On the other hand, for Noddings (2003), the student's role, "recognition of care," (p. 94) is in fact the third requirement of a caring relationship. She posits that care requires the student to recognize care "by responding in some positive way" (Noddings, 2003, p. xiii) so that the care on the part of the teacher is "completed" (Noddings, 2003, p. 19). The student completing the care then sustains the teacher's ability to care. If students are closed off, apathetic to the care offered, or even disrespectful to the care offered, no amount of care on the teacher's part can be impactful. Instead, students must be willing to engage in caring encounters and should be consciously aware of their own needs and goals so they can clearly communicate them in a caring manner.

Noddings' examination of the student's role in care is not without fault either. Examining these pedagogical philosophies from the student's perspective, and reflecting back on my experiences, those of my fellow dancers, and my observations of the culture of negativity when I first began my Visionary Practices paper, it is clear to me that the student can and should do even more than be open to asking questions and participating actively in class, or simply completing care. Students should be actively aware of their contribution to the caring relationship and the caring learning environment. Particularly in a university or pre-professional learning environment, it should be the student's responsibility to also employ some of these caring practices, to be open to caring encounters, and to actively listen. For dancers especially, who will likely move on to positions as directors, choreographers, rehearsal directors, or teachers, practicing care to prepare for future caring encounters is essential to their careers. Students must be understanding of the stringent demands on a teacher attempting to individually care for and teach classrooms full of students. If this respect, care, and understanding are established on both sides, the mutuality of learning Noddings and Warburton call for will be richer, fuller, and ultimately more successful.

Noddings (2003) somewhat discourages the practice of care in this way on the part of the student: Because there is a disparity of authority and power between teacher and student, naturally they "meet each other unequally" (p. 66) in their interactions and should a student try to take on what Noddings views as the teacher's role of carer, than this encounter becomes one between two friends or peers instead of one between teacher and student (p. 71). More importantly, this shifts the student's focus from learning to the needs of the teacher, distracting from his or her goals (Noddings, 2003). However, care on the part of the student does not require full engrossment and motivational displacement through which he or she constructs a duality of learning from the teacher's perspective, as Noddings (2003) seems to suggest. Instead, it can be marked by the same engrossment in the goals and projects that the caring teacher would have. Students, and not just their teachers, contribute to the environment

in which the teacher-student relationship flops or flourishes, and the forward progress toward achieving these goals is bolstered by a caring learning environment and caring relationship with the teacher. If a student is similarly engrossed, then he or she must be concerned and responsible for contributing to the learning environment and teacher-student relationship. To not practice regard for the teacher's view and a caring learning environment can actually be *more* distracting to the pursuits of the student's learning as non-caring learning environments and relationships become the focus of the student instead, as it did for many of my fellow dancers I observed at the time I wrote my Visionary Practices paper.

In fact, these fellow students demonstrate why the intentional practice of care becomes even more important for students working with a teacher they feel does not care. When I presented my paper to my classmates, one of them posed this quandary to me, "What should we students do when we feel a teacher does not care about us as individual learners?" She was part of the complaints and criticisms crowd I had noticed at the time, and seemed to be seeking validation for her behavior. These students felt like they were not being listened to or respected, as their teacher did not open the space up for care, and they acted out by demonstrating a lack of respect in turn. This behavior, however, only reinforced the negative learning environment, and in fact, seeped into relationships with other teachers who sought to foster healthier, caring classrooms. In these situations, is one to assume that the relationship is hopeless? Should the teacher not act to change his or her ways? Does the student no longer have an obligation to maintain a productive caring relationship with the teacher, and hence lose out on the time for which he or she must work with that teacher? By the time students reach young adulthood and are capable enough to contemplate and articulate their goals and desires, they can take more responsibility not just for completing care, but also perhaps, for encouraging care.

Noddings (2003) argues that motivational displacement "occurs naturally, supported by the buoyant responsiveness" (p. 72) or "spontaneous disclosure" (p. 74) of the student. When students actively participate in their own learning and the teacher-student relationship, the teacher is more likely to naturally practice care. Because in a relationship in which a teacher successfully practices care, the student's active response is "unselfconscious" (Noddings, 2003, p. 73), it cannot be perfectly constructed by an uncared-for student seeking care. These students are quite conscious of their efforts in building caring relationships. In fact, the students are put emotionally at risk, revealing themselves and their goals without any guarantee they will be accepted by the person of authority in these naturally unbalanced relationships. Noddings (2003) goes further than Warburton (2004) in examining the student's role in a teacher-student relationship in that she recognizes the possibility of a student taking initiative in promoting a caring relationship. Though it is not technically a caring relationship and the student is only acting as if the teacher cares, such a student proves

it possible to learn how to care and receive care without an example of it. According to Noddings (2003), the student's engrossment and pursuit of his or her learning goals in working toward a caring dynamic is in fact the ethical course of action. It should not be ignored that it is not just possible for a student to promote care, it is morally necessary.

In contrast to Noddings' (2003) view, the student is responsible not only for completing the care or imitating the behavior of one completing care, but also for considering the relationship itself, actively listening, remaining open to a caring encounter, and while not fully practicing motivational displacement, at least working empathetically. In this way, students are more than just cared-for. And so to respond to my classmate's inquiry, the student learning with an uncaring teacher must care regardless. What does that look like in this unbalanced scenario? This calls for respect for and patience with the teacher, even if you are receiving none; for active listening; for looking out for and supporting your fellow students without meanwhile baselessly tearing down your teacher; for critical thinking and reflection on one's own needs, goals, and concerns; for persistence in clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully communicating those needs and goals in a caring encounter initiated by the student given the opportunity; for courage to address those issues with other teachers or administrators in the case that this opportunity never presents itself or that this communication is fruitless; for the decency to approach those other teachers or administrators in a caring manner, respectful of them as well as the teacher in question; and for the self-awareness to not internalize these teaching methods and behaviors and carry them on into other relationships, whether they are pedagogically related or not. Students are not passive beings, and though poor examples may be set for them, that is no excuse for disrespectful or negative behavior. As students, we too can and must practice care.

Table 2. *Reflective Dialogue B*

**Rebecca:** I agree with your thought that students can also be active caring partners in a relationship. I feel that this view has not been fully examined. Also, I am curious as to what it is like to be a student in the dance class and to interact with a variety of teachers and their various behaviors towards students.

**Grace:** Even though students should be carers, it's natural to recognize a power differential between teacher and student, no matter how positive or negative their relationship may be. For



me, this difference warrants a degree of respect and deference to each and every teacher, and as such, I naturally take cues from teachers in determining the nature of our relationship or how we should go about communicating.

**Rebecca:** What do you think these cues look like specifically for students and how do you move forward from them?

**Grace:** In discerning and negotiating a teacher's behavior towards me, the small things matter. That means that if I ask a question in class, how the teacher responds to that question indicates to me how he or she views communicating with me in general and how an interaction regarding a bigger issue might hypothetically go. For instance, if I ask for clarification about whether or not a particular exercise is in turn-out or parallel and a teacher responds dismissively and seems annoyed, my natural reaction is to think that this dismissiveness and annoyance would await any other questions or issues I might pose, however big or small. Small interactions like these really shape how students view communication pathways with their teachers. However, as a student seeking to care, I realize that teachers are not constantly aware of how they're responding to their students; a desire to efficiently use class time, a rough morning, or any number of things could be weighing on the mind of a teacher and explain a single dismissive response.

**Rebecca:** How do you navigate those challenges? And at what point would you know if you were being uncared for and what options do you perceive exist?

**Grace:** As caring students, we should empathetically reflect on these negative experiences and consider why the teacher may have reacted in that way. This encourages us to continue to stay open to caring encounters and opportunities for dialogue with our teachers, instead of shutting down to them automatically. Caring is a two-way street, so if I as a student do not try to participate, my teacher can't effectively do so (and vice-versa). If I had repeated negative interactions with a teacher and felt I could not caringly communicate and work with him or her, the next option would be to talk to another teacher or administrator about my concerns.

**Rebecca:** So, perhaps if the majority of the interactions between the teacher and student are positive ones and thus the environment is one of trust, then a student and teacher might likely be able to navigate successfully through the labyrinth

of communications. Yet, if the default relationship has been characterized by a majority of negative communication patterns, then there is no basis of trust that would sustain this dyad through some of the more complex interpersonal engagements that could potentially occur in a class or rehearsal contexts. Do you think as a student you have any agency to be able to enact any changes in such a relationship?

**Grace:** Each case will be different and specific to the teacher and student in question. Generally though yes, because a student has some choices: to mirror the teacher's behavior or not, and to attempt to address the problem or not. A student resorting to a teacher's non-caring practices exacerbates and perpetuates the negative learning environment.

**Rebecca:** So this can negatively impact the student's cohort or his or her other teachers as well, as you noticed with your own fellow dance students.

**Grace:** Exactly. The student then may make a habit of behaving in that way, and unintentionally carry that behavior into encounters with other teachers (who may actually care!) or with future students or colleagues, all while impacting those currently around them. Instead, a student could possibly enact behavioral changes by attempting to create an open dialogue with the teacher in which concerns could be discussed and addressed, and if the teacher was not receptive to that, bringing the issue to an administrator who could perhaps interfere at a higher level. Attempting to address the problem does more to protect a student than continual subjection of the student to the status quo. This requires maturity and emotional risk-taking on the part of the student, but is certainly possible.

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### **Care in the Choreographic Setting (Rebecca)**

Beyond the dance class lies the applied educational setting in which the student dancer partakes in the choreographic process. This process consists of the construction (or even reconstruction), rehearsal, and performance of a completed dance work. In this setting, where the teacher becomes choreographer, the interpersonal dynamics shift from explicit structures that reflect clearly stated objectives of a dance class to a less codified or predictable setting as new material, structures, and designs are being invented, experimented with, and refined. In this context, communication protocols can also become less explicit, and students can be less clear about how they are expected to communicate. In applying the tenets of a pedagogy of care to the myriad of methods of making dances, two inquiries lay at the threshold of this turn

in the discussion. First, what kinds of encounters between student and teacher are consciously fostered as instruction, and how do teachers recognize and facilitate them, and equally, how do students also participate? Secondly, how can a pedagogy of care, centered on positive communication, be recognized, articulated, and consciously fostered in this unique setting?

Historically, many dance makers in the professional dance context have demonstrated how a creative laboratory can become filled with manipulative and abusive language on the part of those in charge (Lakes, 2005). Although perhaps more recently dancers have been viewed less as instruments or tools and more pervasively as artists who contribute creatively (Warburton, 2002), directed by their choreographers and teachers who work in a multitude of ways, from using improvisational structures and soliciting performer material to meticulously composing completed, detailed movement vocabularies for the dancers to replicate. None of these methods are without challenges to both the creative and the communication process.

Psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, founder of Nonviolent Communication, often used in conflict resolution, cogently points to specific, habitual language-based obstacles such as making moralistic judgments and comparisons, requests articulated as demands, a denial of taking responsibility, and a lack of honesty and empathy in relationships as the foremost unexamined communication practices that create barriers to healthy relationships (Rosenberg, 2003). The following example of punitive language used by Martha Graham when speaking to her (then) dancer, Paul Taylor, reflects this kind of judgmental communication that is lacking in empathy,

Paul, what are you doing? I said get off [the stage]! You have had plenty of opportunities to learn the back fall on one. Even beginners know the back fall on one. Do you expect me, me, to give you special coaching on the back fall on one? Oh no, sweetie pie, you are a big boy now. I am not your mother! (Lakes, 2005, p. 5).

As this account clearly demonstrates, language can serve as a weapon for wielding control over dancers in the making of a dance. Yet, possibly for some choreographers, inviting a more open communicative relationship of listening and exchanging might be conceived of as threatening, power-tipping, or messy in that such exchanges with dancers are often time-consuming, unpredictable, and challenging. Such conditions might be interpreted as interfering with the predetermined timeline of a choreographer's artistic process and/or goals. Moreover, whether due to a lack of ability or inclination to communicate compassionately, with an absence of administrative check on these teacher behaviors a viral cycle of violence and disrespect between teacher and student is pipelined through generations as leaders within institutions condone, ignore, and even reward the problematic behaviors (Lakes, 2005).

Such negative communications have a personal resonance as both my co-author/former student and I handily recounted our own such experiences through our various reflective conversations. For her, they are exemplified by disheartening interactions with her former director during a dress rehearsal, as well as interactions with her current peers about their teacher. Ideally, this environment would be characterized by students who feel empowered and respected in a communicatively productive environment, regardless of how they contribute to the choreographer's vision. Instead, the traditional notion of "student" is often a negative one in dance (at the mercy of a teacher's grade, conforming to teacher's rules and lacking autonomy), as well as for the notion of "dancer" (an "instrument," vulnerably expressive and yet often quietly submissive to a choreographer's wishes or demands), and even the notion of "choreographer" (impatient, domineering, possessing a vision to see through at any cost). The perpetuation of these problematic notions create the potential for increased power disparities and become fertile ground for uncaring teacher attitudes and, thus, student reactionary behaviors.

Specifically within an educational setting, little clarity exists in practice or in the literature in terms of specific learning objectives for the student performer, besides the implicit choreographic apprenticeship between the student and the choreographer/teacher (Stevens, 2000). In terms of the literature, The National Core Arts Standards for Dance ([nationalcoreartsstandards.org](http://nationalcoreartsstandards.org), 2014), separates skills into overarching categories including: Creating, Performing, and Responding, and provides a modicum of guidance for what students should know and be able to do regarding this performance context. Narrowing in on Performing at the advanced level of the high school grade band (grades 9-12), presumably where a student in postsecondary education commences, may be a location for this particular kind of student learning outcome in the choreographic setting. Anchor Standard Six, the conveyance of meaning through the presentation of artistic work, includes leadership qualities (commitment, dependability, responsibility, and cooperation), performance etiquette and performance practices during class and rehearsal (2014, p. 7). Perhaps considered falling outside the purview of such benchmarks, little emphasis can be found on interpersonal communication skills or dispositions in this setting. Devising clear and positive communication expectations and even goals, those which are reflective of the interrelationships desired (and directly tied to performance and choreographic outcomes), will require deeper consideration of the behavioral and communicative roles between choreographer and student performer.

Manifested from the scholarly investigation into artistic and social relationships between choreographer and student performer in the making of dances, Jo Butterworth's (2004) Didactic-Democratic Spectrum model defines a comprehensive range of possible relationships. These defined relationships can help point to the dialogical relationships

possible in this setting. According to Butterworth (2004), five articulated relationships between dancer and choreographer provide a spectrum of interaction: dancer as instrument (choreographer as expert), dancer as interpreter (choreographer as author), dancer as contributor (choreographer as pilot), dancer as creator (choreographer as facilitator), and, finally, dancer as co-owner (choreographer as collaborator) (p. 55). A key to this model, according to Butterworth (2004), is creating awareness in both parties as to the choices within and beyond these five strands so that, “students can become more powerful and effective learners as they develop greater awareness of the parameters of the current dance ecology and the ‘field’ of their discipline” (p. 65). These strands also track both the amount of artistic contribution/choreographic ownership by students and decision-making on the part of each participant and in so doing, further scores the range of possible differences in working modalities. Within this discussion, these relationships go beyond tacit correlations, providing explicit nomenclature that not only defines working modalities, but also potentially helps to define roles and relationships in the making of a work. Furthermore, Butterworth’s detailed model, which enumerates teaching methods, dancer skills, and social interactions, allows for a vivid analysis of the kind of social and pedagogical dynamics that might characterize the variant categories. For example, moving along the spectrum from student passivity and one of receiving and processing instruction to interactive and fully contributing (p. 55), the more the student can be engaged in the choreographic process (choreographer and student as collaborators), the more interactive and less passive the communication exchange has the potential to be. Importantly, Butterworth (2004) notes that in this co-authorship condition, every participant must articulate their concerns (p. 63).

Interfacing this with Noddings’ (2003) concept of care highlighting receptive listening and inclusion of a dynamic dialogue, one could reason that more collaborative methods would inherently induce conversation, and inversely, such dialogue and listening could, in turn, induce even minimal collaborative processes. In Butterworth’s (2004) directorial role, or as an expert choreographer, where less input is requested of the dancer as instrument (p. 55) and, where the dancer primarily receives only instructions, dialogue (two-way, interactive communication) may be minimized. Yet, although dialogue might have the propensity to induce a caring environment, this is not to definitively say that the more collaborative the process the more care is being enacted, or that the dialogue is always a caring one. In addition, shared authorship in choreographic process and productivity requires a different kind of communication than that of a more single authorship model. Regardless of the model type, the quality and nature of the communication between constituents in any of the five processes, from didactic to democratic, becomes the primary determinant of whether this relationship will be a caring one. For example, in Grace’s reported scenario, her teacher was acting as an “expert” with Grace, the “instrument,” who was called out for executing the expert’s movements incorrectly. The fact that Grace was to imitate what the teacher-choreographer

had in mind is not necessarily problematic. Rather, the accusatory and punitive language, revealing a preconception of power and lack of listening, prevented a compassionate and educative exchange here. Particularly in situations where the teacher's authority dominates, negative language must be avoided if a caring communication is to endure.

According to Noddings (2012) care necessitates that students are "hear[d]" (p. 772) and in order to be heard, there must be some evidence of student voice. So, even if the choreographer has decided to generate all the material and possess control of the concept and structure of the dance, his or her needs and preferences should be clearly communicated through a mutually respectful exchange where the dancer is provided the opportunity to respond, and also initiate his or her own comments and/or responses in order to be successful, or, what Noddings (2003) refers to as "complet[ing] the care" (p. 181). For example, refraining from asking questions or requesting clarifications of the choreographer are one of the all too common unwritten rules of this arena. An ethic of mutually respectful behaviors is replaced by one-way demands or expectations that perpetuate domination and fear and eradicate the possibility of a safe and communicative exchange.

In altering these negative patterns, imagine if choreographers and dancers consciously adopted a rehearsal of their working communication practices just as they rehearsed phrases and dances. Alternatively, what if teachers-as-choreographers prioritized a "wide-awakeness" (Greene, 1978, p. 162), in their working relationships with dancers so as to be open to an ongoing enactment of care? Could this not be a set of skills that become a part of learning what it means to work together in the making of dances?

Finally, as articulated earlier in this discussion, a caring encounter involves an awareness of such a need, a receptive disposition, as well as an ability to engage in a caring encounter. Often, it has been my experience that students' conceptions of their responsibility, either in class or in choreographic settings, lie primarily with receiving instruction rather than actively engaging with it. In discussions with students within my own choreographic development, I found they feel generally as if they have not been given the needed permission to engage proactively in choreographic settings. In discussing our respective preconceptions and expectations, we were able to move forward to a more dialogic and communicatively collaborative environment. From this experience, I realized the important role teachers play in understanding the students and in guiding them in the engagement of positive communication practices. As Grace suggests, it is important that the student be an active participant in the caring encounter, so that the current of care via communication and dialogue runs bi-directionally rather than only from teacher to student. A choreographer working from a consciously caring perspective would likely welcome a student who engages actively in this context.

Table 3. *Reflective Dialogue C*

**Grace:** I find it striking what you said about a student failing to feel compelled to be fully engaged, and thinking back on my own experiences, find that this is perhaps aggravated in the choreographic setting.

**Rebecca:** Although I feel that there is a similarity in their preset assumptions of their teacher's needs and expectations for them, I agree that these assumptions are, as you say, aggravated in a choreographic setting where the communicative structure is more open. I am curious about your thoughts on the differences between the dance class and the choreographic setting in terms of the dancer's communication.

**Grace:** Here as a student I would assume that I am there as an instrument to do only exactly as the teacher as choreographer asks in order to fulfill his or her artistic vision, inhibiting the desire to speak up and initiate a dialogue. What are your perceptions of how students behave or communicate differently in this setting than they do in the classroom and what might a choreographer do to address that?

**Rebecca:** Well, when I am in a choreographic rehearsal with dancer-students, I try to communicate with them in ways that makes both explicitly and implicitly clear what I am asking of them and how I am working. Sometimes I ask them to solve a movement problem on their own and sometimes I request that they learn a movement phrase. From these experiences, and from direct conversations in rehearsals, I have gleaned that students generally work from the assumption that they require some kind of permission to take any active step in the process. I find this similar to the dance class setting, as students often ask, "What do you want?" or "What are you looking for here?" Secondly, in my mind dancers have a unique and insightful vantage point by being located "within" the dance as it is under construction and even as it is eventually completed and performed. As the choreographer situated "outside" this place, this is a vantage point I do not share.

**Grace:** I've never explicitly thought of these two different vantage points of being "within" and "outside" the movement or choreography, and I love that image and think it harkens back to Noddings' concept of motivational displacement.

**Rebecca:** Yes, I suppose it does in that way. No matter whether I exert control of the movement content or if the content development is shared collaboration, their

vantage point from inside the dance itself is something I call upon and inquire about frequently. Once called upon for volunteering information such as sensations, timing, proximities, etc., I have felt dancers actually become more engaged. In some cases, dancers have spontaneously volunteered suggestions for solutions explicitly from within their perspective.

**Grace:** I agree that addressing that disparity of perspectives, not just in the choreographic setting, but also in the classroom, would motivate students' engrossment in the choreographic work and their learning, while facilitating a recognition of their own roles in the learning process.

### Re-visioned Practices and Personal Futures

Rebecca (Teacher)

From both reflecting upon the written assignment I developed within my dance pedagogy course, its outcomes, and my experiences within an in-depth, reflective collaboration with my student, one initial realization that emerged is the degree to which teachers and students work from completely separate silos and are each missing a world of information and experience contained within each person's perspective that could help them connect or meet in a middle ground in the learning place.

As in Lionni's story, we tend to base our assumptions on what we know and understand and find it most difficult to imagine an "other" who possesses a very different perspective; who actually sees a world that we do not see. This idea of perspective taking, or empathy, is one that perhaps requires deeper personal reflection and consistent practice.

Grace (Student)

When I first began working on my Visionary Practices paper, I sat down and reflected on experiences with teachers and how they made me feel. After all, Rebecca's class was about dance pedagogy, and my fellow students and I were learning how to be the conscientious and effective teachers we would have liked to have had ourselves. At the start of this collaborative project with Rebecca, I still approached things from only my, the student's, perspective. However, as we delved deeper into the work and started more intentionally practicing care within our own relationship, my awareness broadened and began to encompass the teacher's perspective in addition to the student's. In fact, this change in view required me to rewrite my introductory narrative from the "Personal Histories and 'Visionary Practices'" section multiple times before I felt that I wasn't misrepresenting my former teacher.



In retrospect, I see there were two layers in my pedagogical sojourn: the first involved, in guiding my students toward becoming teachers, to help them create a bridge between their prior conceptions of dance teaching and learning (from their role as student) to the forming of a new blueprint that, by setting their prior experiences onto an active workspace, allow it to be vulnerable to amendments and transformations as students intersect with new information (theories and principles), take new perspectives, and integrate them into a new worldview. The second goal was to investigate empathy and care through a reflective inquiry in open dialogue with a former student. Surprisingly, from within this second goal, an additional objective emerged—that of modeling the collaboration of care inside the context of our inquiry.

Through this layered reflective dialogue, I was able to consciously practice care with my student, one-on-one, while simultaneously writing about it with her. Through our countless sessions of discussion, practicing conscious communication, exchanging our own personal experiences, listening to and ruminating over the other's experiences and perspectives, and digesting this information between our meetings, my circumference of understanding of the topic widened immensely. Our implicit agreement to have an exchange where we practiced active listening and motivational displacement created a safe and caring space from which new learning could emerge for each of us without fear of failure or conflict.

Reflecting upon my experiences with this teacher brought back up my original self-focused emotions, and I had to reprocess them from this lens of the us-focused and co-learning caring perspective. Where originally I had been thinking, "I'm upset"; "she doesn't understand me"; "this is my solo," I should have been asking, "How can we communicate and work together to create something we will both be happy with?" and, "How is this situation looking from her perspective?" While she could have done a better job maintaining a sensitivity and receptivity to caring encounters to understand my individual needs and interests as a student, I likewise could have done a better job initiating such an encounter, communicating my concerns, and empathizing with my teacher, understanding the enormous strains placed upon her in her roles as director, teacher, choreographer, and mother.

Ideally, I would have been trained in an environment in which I felt comfortable honestly speaking with her. We would have discussed my graduating project together instead of her discussing it with others and then presenting it to me with seemingly no other option. Had I been able to communicate my personal goals for my graduating project, had she known my anxiety going into the show having not run the solo in that large venue before, and had we developed the sort of trusting relationship in which I felt comfortable communicating these things to her, our work together would have been more productive and satisfying for both of us.

What initially incited my curiosity in this inquiry still holds interest for me and what I have discovered only propels me to look further into how to help other teachers structure conscious reflection for themselves and in conjunction with their students, both in the classroom and in the rehearsal space. As I venture into new semesters of my pedagogy course, I have a renewed understanding of the student's perspective. However, although another's views are ultimately unknowable to me, through empathetic listening and caring encounters, efforts toward a mutual relationship is an essential component to a productive and respectful relationship.

It was only after months of reflection through writing and rewriting sections of this paper, dialogue with Rebecca, and the intentional application of care in my collaboration with Rebecca as well as with the other authority figures in my life that I was able to reevaluate my experiences and understand what it means to pedagogically care. Now that I am a professional working with dance students myself and working towards a Masters of Education to move into the academic classroom, I am grateful and indebted to Rebecca and the time she took with me to undergo this reflective and practical exploration of care. My change in thinking from the start of this project to now demonstrates the importance of reflection and personal stories in the intentional practice of care. I am excited to move forward in my career continuously reflecting on past and current student-teacher relationships, and encouraging my students to do the same—practicing opening a space for the caring encounter where now I find myself in a position of authority and motivating my students to be carers themselves.

### **Constructing a Culture of Care in Dance Education**

What skills beyond the established technical and performance repertoire do future dance professionals need that prepare them specifically for today's complex environment of professional dance, which still may be far from a psychologically neutral or nurturing ground? How can the educational process help initiate awareness and agency in the student, bringing forth positive changes in the interpersonal behavioral culture? In a setting where the rules of engagement rely hugely on human dimensions, involving people working in close proximity and communicating with others in order for the tasks at hand to be accomplished, and where these encounters figure as prominently as the dance content itself, where are the parameters for this process clearly articulated, and how does the field ensure that it is humane and

compassionate? The common thread in these various troubling situations is the lack of awareness of one's communication behavior set (and the seemingly unmet needs from which they arise) as well as a lack of specialized tools for more effective and caring communication. Although positive communication free of abusive language is a basic responsibility of the dance educator, teachers reportedly do not necessarily feel qualified to address a dancer on a psychological level (Klockare, Gustafsson, & Nordin-Bates, 2011). Quin, Rafferty, & Tomlinson (2015) report that psychological skills training for teachers are minimal, and "Education on positive psychological approaches is not commonplace during dance or dance teacher training" (p. 159). In the dance pedagogy course, where our teacher-student participatory investigation began, the specifics of language in most all areas of teaching and learning have now become part of the content for the course and are addressed directly. Yet whether these mini-lessons on the importance of language in the classroom can provide sufficiently effective tools for large-scale socio-cultural, psychological, and institutional change remains undetermined.

Our findings through joint exploration of existing literature and into the importance and challenges of teaching the individual do clearly demonstrate the significance of mutual open communication in building a caring teacher-student relationship that supports the instructional and learning goals of both parties. As we intentionally sought to practice the components of a caring relationship, a three-pronged cyclical process emerged: reflection, dialogue, and application (See Figure 1).

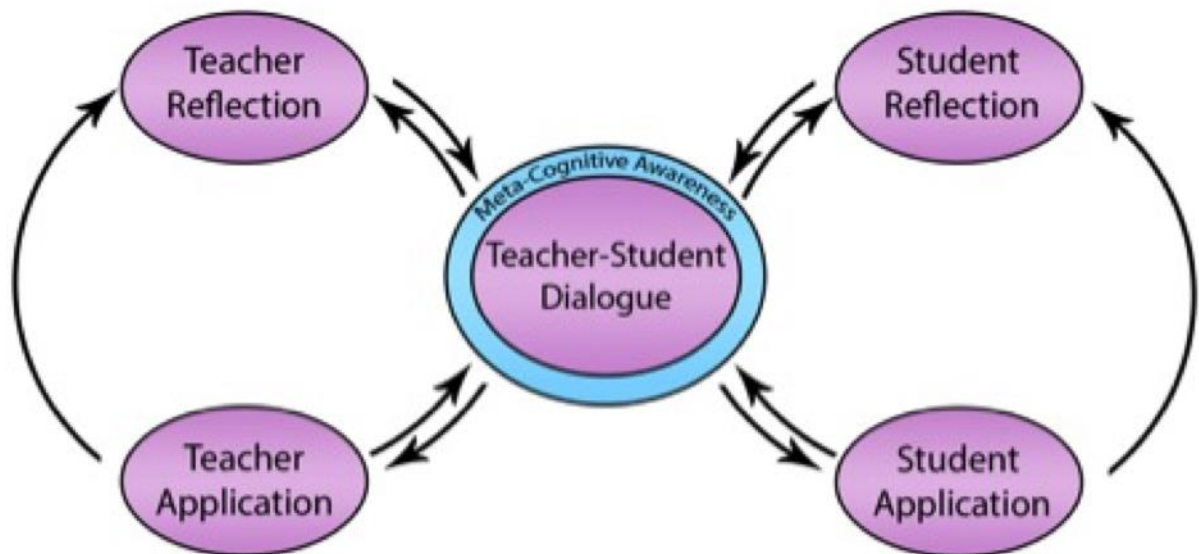


Figure 1. RDA Cycle

Practicing care began with individual reflection on past experiences and relationships, both positive and negative (the reflection stage). Moving forward to dialogue in an open and honest environment, we discussed the thoughts and beliefs that arose in the reflection stage, while intentionally focusing on how we were communicating (the dialogue stage). This teacher-student dialogue influenced our thinking on communication and care, changing how we interacted with each other, as well as the application of this thinking to other teachers and students (the application stage). This process was cyclical as we consistently reflected on our own experiences, discussions, and research, met weekly to discuss our emerging thoughts, inquiries, observations, and analyses, and continued to apply what we learned with each other and others.

Reflection, dialogue, and application between us in our respective roles as teacher and student about teaching the individual, communication, and care elucidated new thinking and behavior for both. We believe the sort of reflective and collaborative thinking in which we engaged would be helpful for other teachers and students. Of course, not every teacher-student pair can feasibly invest in such a long-term and in-depth inquiry; however, teachers can use structured writing, discussions, and reflections within the context of a class or company setting, improving the empathetic awareness among teacher and student. As the facilitator, the teacher should offer such structured opportunities for these dynamic exchanges. We encourage teachers to cultivate an intentional process of reflection, dialogue, and application by using the adjoined prompts (see Table 4) to reflect upon their own understandings before implementing this idea with students.

Table 4. *Care and Communication Reflective Prompts*

<i>Prompts for Teachers</i>	<i>Prompts for Students</i>
<p>Use these questions to reflect upon your beliefs and practices in terms of care in the classroom and rehearsal studio. What kinds of practices could result from this observation and analysis?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think back on your various teacher-student relationships. What was the communication in these relationships like? What was the student's role in the relationship? What was the teacher's role?</li> <li>2. What does a "caring encounter" look like? Think of a few examples from your own experiences: A time when, as a student, you and your teacher were both open to such an encounter; when as a teacher, you and your student(s) were both open to such an encounter. Also consider those times when both as a student and a teacher, you felt the other was not open to such an encounter. What behaviors and communication characterized each exchange?</li> <li>3. How do your teaching style, overall communication, and language choices reflect your teaching philosophy and instructional goals?</li> <li>4. How do you get to know your students and their preferred learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, and goals?</li> </ol>	<p>Teachers can provide the following questions within a dance pedagogy class, as part of a program entrance matrix of reflections (e.g. freshman seminar course), or as part of an interactive course syllabus, spurring conversations or individual student journal entries.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are your short- and long-term goals in a dance class? How do you communicate these goals to your teachers and do you think they are aware of them? What do you expect your teachers to contribute to the pursuit of your goals?</li> <li>2. What do you believe is your role in your learning and the pursuit of your goals? How do you take responsibility for your learning? What do you actively do to achieve your short- and long-term goals?</li> <li>3. What does active listening mean to you? How is listening different in a one-on-one interaction from a group/class interaction? If you have taught before, do you feel differently listening as a teacher than you do as a student?</li> <li>4. Think back to a time when you felt like you had to adapt to a teacher's "one-size-fits-all" or impersonal teaching style and to a time when you felt like a teacher taught in a manner coherent with your and your</li> </ol>

5. Think back to a time when, as a teacher, you felt like you may not have successfully adapted to your students' learning needs. What challenges kept you from doing so, if any? What kind of behaviors did you observe? What would you do differently given the same set of students? What would you repeat?

classmates' learning needs. How did you feel in these opposing learning environments? If you were to work with these teachers again, how might you approach class with them differently? In teaching your own class, what would you do differently from or similarly to these teachers? What challenges may come with that?

5. How do you think your learning style preferences, communication practices, and language choices reflect your beliefs and values about yourself as a learner? How do your practices and those of your peers potentially affect the learning and teaching environment?

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***For teachers and students to answer together:***

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In absorbing both the individual reflections and the joint discussion questions, work towards applying these practices in your respective roles, with particular mindfulness of both your expectations as *well as your choices of language and the way you listen.*

1. Recount an experience that resonated with you from your corresponding prompts. From active listening, witness and describe back to the other what you feel the other to be saying.
  2. Start by having the teacher introduce the meaning of a "caring encounter." Together, discuss what each party believes his or her role is and what the other party's role is in the caring encounter. What do you believe the caring encounter to be and what does it look like? What are your expectations for each other in the caring encounter?
  3. Discuss your goals for how you approach teacher-student communication and the concrete ways in which you can achieve those goals. Offer each other suggestions given your respective roles as teacher and students. How might successful mutual communication contribute to your larger dance goals?
  4. Reflect together on how you listened and responded to each other in answering the above prompts. Was it different from how you normally communicate? What did you find interesting, helpful, or difficult about it?
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## **Conclusion**

Historically, with the exception of its early years, dance in higher education has been under the primary influence of generations of dance professionals who carried their temperaments and belief systems from the stages and rehearsal studios into the classrooms, with the

intention of building expressive and virtuosic performing artists. Unfortunately, not all of those transferred practices have proved optimal for students' well-being. In fact, the merit of one's dance training could be tacitly measured by the number of stories of struggle and/or abuse—battle wounds that any former student or professional had for the telling. Lacking empowerment, particularly in a traditional teacher-centered instructional context, students have had little agency to enact change within this frame. The cyclical perpetuation of traditional practices that ensue as students become teachers themselves creates further resistance to change in the field. More specifically, the concentric rings of cultural influences brand within students and teachers ready-made scripts for how students should behave and repressive mythologies of the body that prevent transformative pedagogies from taking a stronger hold in the bedrock of dance education structures. Furthermore, failed efforts to effectively address a more holistic approach to pedagogy that acknowledges the importance of social and emotional aspects of learning (Love & Love, 1996; Sööt & Viskus, 2014) complicate the struggle toward transformative pedagogy. As a next step to developing caring teacher-student communication skills on an individual level, it is necessary that the dance education field as a whole address these persisting norms, shifting the culture toward one that prioritizes and practices "communication competencies" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; Zlatić, Bjekić, Marinković, & Bojović, 2014, p. 607).

Students, meanwhile, must also play a role in advancing dance education toward a culture of care. By incorporating reflective practices into their training, empathetically considering the perspectives of those in authority, actively listening, initiating openings to a caring encounter, and becoming active participants engrossed in their own learning, students can model care for others. Moreover, in initiating conversations with their peers about group behaviors and co-created learning environments, students can encourage a broader awareness of each individual student's contribution to the teacher-student relationship and the dance education field as a whole. The student's role here is vitally important as oftentimes in uncaring learning environments, students may respect or value the thoughts of their peers more than those of their teacher whom they feel does not understand their perspective. Ultimately many students will become choreographers and teachers themselves by actively implementing caring practices as a student, they will be better fit to influence change in their field as professionals.

Given there is no "common code of ethics" explicitly promoted by the dance education field (McCutchen, 2006, p. 458), dance programs, institutions, conservatories, and studios may consider instigating professional dialogues, beginning with this structured RDA cycle in order to initiate the process of creating communication competency and ethical standards of practice in their working and learning environments. Proposing a template of something akin to an ethics code for teachers and students to adapt for individual courses, studios, or programs may be another plausible solution. The mutual creation of such a code of practice for all

participants can be a step toward establishing more explicit standards and expectations to which teachers in training can be introduced. The establishment of positive, safeguarding practices can be a part of any dance community's overall educational mission. Furthermore, more specifically tailored codes could be created collaboratively by faculty, students, and/or whole dance programs and placed on websites and outlined within course syllabi.

When we began our exchange as co-authors, we were aware of our distinctive perspectives, yet joined by our common curiosity, we were enthusiastic to explore this shared landscape. The intent of this article was to document and even recreate in some instances the generative exchanges and insightful findings that led to more expansive, receptive understandings for each of us. Though many essential components of a caring pedagogy have not been directly addressed in this paper, such as practices of care at the intersection of cultural and gender orientations, varieties of age groups, or the challenges of class size to teaching the individual, this conversation is a hopeful starting place for such further inquiries and a placeholder for reformative practices. Additional future investigations might include qualitative research that explores instructional language or the development of instructional systems that incorporate dialogic structures that invoke reciprocal communication practices, professional development training for teachers in caring communication, and the development of adaptable codes for ethical communication in dance education and training settings. Teachers may also wish to engage in action research—systematic inquiry by and for the teacher practitioner that spawns deeper knowing and adapted practices in classroom communication and activity.

Lastly, caring communication evolves from an individual's own volition. It must come from a personal desire to understand the needs and concerns of others in the teaching and learning cycle. Rather than enforcing rules of care on a community, it is only through a committed engagement by willing participants—leaders willing to facilitate a discussion process, for example—can a sea of change in dance education potentially spring forth. Through active listening and caring encounters, empathetic and caring relationships can begin to transform the educational setting and the implicit pedagogy therein.

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Rebecca Gose, MFA, Associate Professor at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA, teaches contemporary modern technique, dance science, and pedagogy. A former professional dancer and arts educator, Rebecca's experiences have led to her scholarly interest in critically exploring motor learning, somatic, and communication principles and practices in the dance learning environment. She has been published in *The Journal of Dance Education*, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, and the *International Journal of Arts Education*, among others. She is also an active choreographer.

Grace Siemietkowski received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and French with a dance minor in 2015 from the University of Georgia. There she completed a Capstone thesis on the benefits of therapeutic dance for child and adolescent refugees resettling in the U.S. She then worked as the Registrar and Admissions Manager at CityDance School and Conservatory in Bethesda, MD, where she also teaches modern and jazz. Grace's experience and research in dance education motivated her to pursue a Master's in Elementary Education; she will graduate in May 2018 with her MEd from George Washington University.

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