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An exploration of reciprocity among teacher and students in female pre-professional ballet education: a shared reality theory perspective

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The purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of shared reality in teacher-student partnerships in ballet, and how these perceptions were related to experiences of quality in the relationship and well-being. A longitudinal qualitative study design was adopted, with three female ballet students and their teacher participating in three semi-structured interviews each over an eight-month period. Data were analyzed using a combination of thematic and narrative analysis. Findings indicated that across the teacher-student relationships there were perceptions of a shared reality only on the professional and distanced level and not on a relational and personal level. This was achieved by a common experience of what matters in the world of ballet education as well as students finding their teacher as trustworthy. Furthermore, it appeared that the authoritarian apprenticeship culture in ballet, where the teachers give clear instructions and feedback, and where the student role is to listen and adapt to the teacher's instructions, was a barrier to fully achieving a shared reality on a personal and deeper level. In turn, this influenced the quality of the relationship and the wellbeing of both teacher and students. The present study offers critical reflections on the cultural backdrop of teaching and learning in ballet and highlights the importance of teachers to facilitate a supportive, unconditional, and trustworthy relationship so that they can work together in a more productive manner.

KEYWORDS

narrative inquiry, ballet dancers, teacher-student relationship, apprenticeship learning, shared reality theory, interpersonal trust, longitudinal qualitative research

1. Introduction

The teacher-student relationship is acknowledged as the heart of performance coaching (Van Rossum, 2004; Gaunt, 2011; Jowett, 2017), and a good quality relationship is proposed to be essential to enhance wellbeing and performance (Jowett, 2017). To establish such a quality relationship, a shared reality of mutual understandings, interests, and goals, as well as established trust and good communication are needed (Gaunt, 2011; Jowett, 2017; Vigário et al., 2020). A few relevant studies have shown that there seems to exist a gap between the ideal case and the daily reality in dance teaching (Van Rossum, 2004; Rafferty and Wyon, 2006). Furthermore, studies have identified an authoritarian teaching culture in ballet, negatively affecting the relational quality between teacher and students (Haraldsen et al., 2020a, 2021). However, the research is immature, and more knowledge exploring how different types of dyadic relationships develop over time is needed to ensure quality teaching and learning in specific talent development (TD) contexts. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of shared reality in teacher-student partnerships in ballet, and how these perceptions were related to experiences of quality in the relationship and wellbeing.

Performance domains are manifested in unique TD cultures, which constitute structural, relational, and pedagogical conditions of deliberate practice (Johnson, 2011; Stabell, 2018; Haraldsen et al., 2020a; Solstad et al., 2022). TD environments in ballet are grounded in the conservatoire-tradition (Persson, 2000), which is known as experience-based, involving early specialization and professionalization, and often based on asymmetric power-relations and formal top-down delivered learning methods (Lakes, 2005; Stabell, 2018; Haraldsen et al., 2019). However, over time, new pedagogical research, and societal developments, such as feminism, diversity, empowerment, and increased focus on mental health, have influenced dance education with more progressive, student-centered, and holistic perspectives on teaching and learning (Dragon, 2015; Ritchie and Brooker, 2019; Lindblom, 2020). Yet, evidence from research on dance students' and dancers' health and wellbeing underpin many occupational hazards and ethical challenges, questioning the fulfillment of these trends in practice (Hill et al., 2016; Mainwaring and Finney, 2017; Kolokythas et al., 2021). For the student, the teacher is often seen as an authority figure and gatekeeper, someone who might evoke various, even contradictory feelings in the student (Van Rossum, 2004; Aalten, 2005; Rimmer, 2017). Particularly within the highly physical ballet culture, students have reported experiencing objectification and control (Gray and Kunkel, 2001; Aalten, 2005; Nordin-Bates, 2014). Indeed, 78.3% of students in a dance conservatoire reported their teacher as the most important person in their career (Van Rossum, 2004). Studies have also shown that while the characteristics of the ideal dance teacher seem very similar for both teachers and students, differences have appeared in the perceptions and the ratings of teaching behavior (Van Rossum, 2004; Rafferty and Wyon, 2006). Taken together, it appears that the ballet culture is likely to influence the teacher-student relationship in unique ways, yet many unanswered questions linked to the

quality of the teacher-student relationship in dance education exist.

To date, there exist very few studies on the dyadic relationship between teacher and student in ballet or dance contexts with data from both parties (i.e., teacher and student). Furthermore, there are few overarching theoretical frameworks on reciprocal interrelations in TD to draw upon. Nevertheless, Higgins's (2019) overarching social-psychological theory of *shared reality* (SRT) seemed relevant to examine this specific context due to its integration of aspects such as inner states, cultural world views, motivational orientation, goals, standards, and behavior (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). As the theory is novel in this context, we will in the following sections present the theory in more detail.

Shared Reality Theory (SRT; Higgins, 2019) stipulates that people take the views of others into account, particularly significant others, to appraise experiences and events, to construct or verify their views and goals, and even to develop and maintain a sense of who they are (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Cornwell et al., 2017). Indeed, past research has shown that the absence of perceiving a shared reality might have negative and detrimental consequences for people's wellbeing and personal strivings (Echterhoff et al., 2009).

According to SRT, four conditions must be satisfied fully establish a shared reality. The first condition refers to a subjectively perceived commonality between people's inner states of feelings, attitudes, and opinions (Echterhoff et al., 2009). These inner states are a product of previous life experiences and socialization processes, especially with significant others such as parents and teachers (Higgins, 2019). Adopting shared self-guides from others creates a shared relevance that affects people's motivational orientation, goals, standards, and behavior (e.g., who they want to and ought to be; Higgins, 2019).

The second condition posits that the perceived commonality of inner states must be regarding a target referent (Echterhoff et al., 2009). This means the shared reality must be in reference to something, concrete or abstract in the world (i.e., the criteria that manifest performance quality), creating a triadic relationship between the teacher, student, and the target referent. Two unique motivational systems called the promotion system and the prevention system underpin these differences in personal striving for a target referent (Higgins, 2019). When promotion-oriented, people are in a regulatory state concerned with advancement, accomplishment, and aspirations (Spiegel et al., 2004; Higgins, 2019). Conversely, if people are prevention-oriented, they are driven by a regulatory state occupied with protection, safety, and responsibility, and their main concern is about maintaining the current state. Hence, these different motivational orientations influence how the process of striving (i.e., striving either eagerly or vigilantly) toward a performance goal (i.e., a target referent) is experienced and the subsequent feelings associated with a potential success or failure (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Echterhoff and Higgins, 2017; Higgins, 2019). Differences between the teacher's and the students' motivational orientations (e.g., eagerness vs. vigilance), might challenge the process of perceiving a shared reality about a target referent. A promotion-oriented teacher might push a prevention-oriented student too far by giving overly challenging tasks and focusing on ideal aspirations, which, in

turn, might result in enhanced feelings of insecurity and anxiety in the student's learning experience. Hence, the experience of a regulatory fit in the teacher-student relationship is important to successfully establish a shared reality in the pursuit of performance development (Higgins, 2019). Moreover, a regulatory fit has also shown to increase performance (Spiegel et al., 2004) and individuals' sense of self-esteem and wellbeing (Haraldsen et al., 2021).

The third condition suggests that the commonality of inner states must be appropriately motivated, driven either by epistemic motives (i.e., to search for a common meaning, truth, and understanding of the world) or relational motives (i.e., the need for relatedness and connectedness with others; see Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). Both the epistemic and the relational motive play a critical role in creating a shared reality because they determine how willing people are to create a shared reality (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). According to SRT, experiencing a shared relevance of what matters in the world (e.g., epistemic motive) is enough to create a state of shared reality (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). However, to also experience a "we-ness" at a deeper level requires both a unity in relation to the epistemic and the relational motive (Higgins, 2019). Indeed, people are most likely to create shared realities with in-group members (e.g., people who share their viewpoints about the world) that they identify with and trust (Higgins, 2019). The ballet culture is often described as an absorbing and narrow way of living, as entering a convent, but offers in return the admission to the exclusive world of ballet and the specific identity of a ballerina (Aalten, 2005). Hence, sharing a collective identity within the context of ballet is likely to enhance motivation to engage in sharing one's inner states (Korsgaard et al., 2015).

To fulfill the fourth condition, there is a need to experience a successful connection to other people's inner states, recognized subjectively by both persons (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). This condition underlines that an experience of a shared reality is a two-way matter, established when the basic aspects of world views and/or personal inner states are mutually shared and verified with significant others. This process is proposed to be nurtured by experienced 'we-ness', trust, personal autonomy, and the absence of conditional regard (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). Hence, the asymmetric power-relations and the high level of discipline that frames the relational interaction in the learning practices in the conservatoire context of ballet poses a potential challenge (Aalten, 2005; Gaunt, 2011). Research from conservatoire settings has shown that the students rarely discuss explicitly their opinion on the relationship or reveal learning difficulties to their teachers (Gaunt, 2011), which might indicate potential issues with trust and a subjectively perceived shared reality that is unconditional, balanced and shared by both the teacher and the student (Gaunt, 2011; Rimmer, 2017).

In our view, SRT is an analytical tool to further explore and deepen the knowledge of the teacher-student relationship in pre-professional ballet education. Therefore, in line with SRT and to address the overall purpose of the study, the following research questions guided our work: (a) In what ways are a shared reality perceived in teacher-student relationships in ballet? and (b) how are the perceptions of a shared reality in teacher-student relationships related to experiences of quality in the relationship and wellbeing?

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Methodology and philosophical underpinnings

To explore inner states and perceived shared reality, the notion of lived experience is essential (Cornwell et al., 2017). Hence, a qualitative interview study positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on how world views are subjective and individually created in interaction with cultural norms and values, was chosen (Papathomas, 2016; Higgins, 2019).

Given that the teacher-student relationship is a dynamic temporal process influenced by both personal, contextual, and situated processes (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Jowett, 2017; Higgins, 2019), and that the emphasis in SRT is on individuals' past and ongoing present experiences, a longitudinal qualitative research design (LQR) was employed (Hermanowicz, 2016). Additionally, inspired by the "linguistic turn" in social science, focusing on the social construction of reality, a narrative methodological approach, was implemented during the analysis process (Papathomas, 2016; Higgins, 2019). Smith and Sparkes (2009) highlight the narrative form as a way of using the participants' stories to show their experiences in a holistic way, connecting both the 'what', 'why', 'how' and 'when' of the stories rather than breaking the stories down into fragmented units and general themes (Riessman, 2008). This allowed us to study and interpret the quality and change in the teacher-student relationship in a more holistic and meaningful manner both in real-time as well as in retrospect (Hermanowicz, 2016).

2.2. Participants and procedure

Approval from both the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and the Ethics Committee for the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences was obtained after which the recruitment process started. Three female pre-professional ballet students in the age range of 17–18 years (Mage = 17.3) and their primary ballet teacher were recruited to the study using purposive sampling (Etikan, 2016). The students were situated in a high-performing ballet conservatoire context. They started dancing ballet, on average, at 8 years of age. They attended the conservatoire 6 days per week from 9am to 6pm, completing dance classes alongside academic schooling. They usually had a day off on Sundays. The teacher was a well-known ballet teacher with previous professional ballet experience, who had been employed at the ballet conservatoire for more than 10 years.

The data collection occurred over eight months, from April (T1) - June (T2) - November (T3). Semi-structured interviews were conducted at each time point, which lasted between 25 to 125 min (T1, M = 35.6 min; T2, M = 48.4 min; T3, M = 99.5 min). The participants decided the time and place that was convenient for them to meet, and the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To build a relationship and establish safety for the participants, the researcher made time to talk about everyday life, especially before the interview started (Smith, 2016). Also, we observed the student's body language, particularly at the beginning of each interview, to see how they responded to the conversation (e.g., not being uptight, unfolding their

arms and hands, sitting-position, and eye-contact). After finishing the interviews, a conversation took place with each participant regarding their experience of the interview, how they felt, and things that were happening in their everyday lives (Smith, 2016).

2.3. Data generation

The process of developing the interview guides occurred dynamically through peer debriefing with the research group over several meetings in advance of each data collection. A teacher-specific and student-specific interview guide was developed for each of the three time points, structured around key ideas and concepts pertaining to SRT and the interpersonal trust literature (Simpson, 2007; Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019), but with slightly different wording to suit the specific roles [e.g., ‘What are your thoughts on developing pre-professional ballet students?’ (teacher’s version) versus ‘What are your thoughts on developing yourself as a ballet dancer?’ (student’s version)]. The different interview guides covered several topics. First, a central objective was to examine the inner states (e.g., values, attitudes, feelings, beliefs; i.e., “can you describe your thoughts on developing young ballet dancers?”) and past experiences (e.g., self-guides and promotion/prevention systems; i.e., “where do these thoughts come from?”). Second, a central focus was to look closer at the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships (i.e., “can you describe your interaction with your teacher in the studio”) and the development of common goals and motives in the teacher-student relationship (e.g., target referent and regulatory fit; i.e., “when you work in the teacher-student relationship over time, you may develop equal or different types of goals. Do you have any experiences with these issues?”). Third, we targeted the process of teaching and learning in ballet (e.g., commonality on an epistemic vs. relational level; i.e., “can you describe how you (teacher-student) work together in the training process?”). Especially, we explored how the interpersonal trust, embedded in an asymmetric relationship between teacher and students, affected the process of establishing a shared reality (i.e., “how does a safe and trustful training and competition environment look like for you as a student?”). Forth, the psychological wellbeing of the teacher and the students, both in the context of ballet and their everyday lives was included (i.e., “on an everyday basis, how do you feel?”).

After each data collection, the interviews were analyzed so the next interview guide could build on prior findings and guide subsequent questioning (Hermanowicz, 2016). Although the interview guides were developed considering certain themes aligned with SRT and the interpersonal trust literature, the participants were frequently asked during the interviews if they could tell stories, which exemplified how the themes manifested themselves in their everyday life as teacher and students in pre-professional ballet (Riessman, 2008). Note that this was emphasized across all data collections and interviews.

2.4. Analysis and interpretation

Data were analyzed using a combination of thematic and narrative analysis aligned with central aspects from SRT, where

the focus is on the individual experiences and perceptions, both ongoing, in the past, and toward the future (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019; Solstad et al., 2022). The procedures occurred in several phases and followed several guided steps inspired by Riessman (2008) and Smith and Sparkes (2009). First, the research team started by reading and re-reading the transcripts to become more familiar with the data. Next, a cross-cases thematic analysis was conducted. Through this process, data were sorted and examined to identify and categorize important general themes, the “what” of the stories, reflected in the lens of SRT (e.g., inner states, motivational orientation, trust perceptions, regulatory fit, communication and collaboration, level of shared reality). On completion of this analysis, key interpretations pertaining to the quality of the relationships and SRT were identified. However, it was also identified that the ‘what’ of the stories reflected in the themes needed to be directly connected to the ‘why’, ‘how’, and the ‘when’ in each participant’s story to fully understand perceptions of their shared reality. Specifically, the combined teacher-student data and the three unique interrelationships showing the *variation* across the themes, deemed to be the main focus of the analysis. As such, the analysis process moved from a thematic to a narrative approach, to better explore the participants’ lived manifestations of and variations across the identified themes. Thus, the final phase of analysis, was to re-construct the unique interrelation in each teacher-student case narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004). To display the results from this last phase of data analysis and to align with narrative research the research team adopted the role as a “storyteller” where each interpreted story of perceived share reality was written out more as a narrative novel than a theoretical thematic interpretation (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). This was an important analytical tool, showing participants’ perceptions rather than telling them, by staying close to the original data (Smith et al., 2015). In developing the stories, the key ideas from the thematic analysis were used to create the structure of the stories, and the narratives were constructed around the themes, seeking to retain the holistic nature of the stories in time and place that developed throughout the different interviews. Consequently, the theory remains in the background through the results section but is brought forward within the discussion to provide an opportunity for cross-case meta-reflection of data in relation to SRT.

2.5. Methodological rigor

Quality and validity were viewed in line with a relativist approach (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). This does not mean that ‘anything goes’, rather Sparkes and Smith, 2009 encourage researchers to be transparent about their research process and ongoing strategies. Transparency has been stressed in qualitative psychology as crucial for quality judgment, in all aspects of the procedures and methods used (Smith and McGannon, 2018). We have therefore tried to offer rich descriptions of the process to make critical evaluation possible. Furthermore, we engaged in actions to safeguard the interview setting, using a series of interviews and member reflections (Smith and McGannon, 2018).

Drawing on a critical friend procedure (Smith and McGannon, 2018), peer debriefing sessions in the research team were used actively during the entire research process (i.e., planning, data

collection, analysis, and writing) to enhance reflexivity. An important aspect of reflexivity is to acknowledge the effect of the researcher's co-constructive role and be aware of the influence on all parts of the study, including the interview situation and analysis (Tanggaard, 2009). This was central in the roles of being a storyteller in the process of transferring the interview data from verbatim transcripts to constructed narratives. For example, reflections about prior assumptions held about TD in ballet, ongoing judgments about the data and interpretations of these, and to encourage reflection upon, and exploration of, alternative explanations and interpretations as these emerged in relation to the data was repeatedly peer debriefed in the interdisciplinary research group (Finlay, 2002).

In addition, the longitudinal study design provided the opportunity for a relationship between the interviewer and each participant to develop. Although helpful for the research process, as the participants more openly discussed their experiences, it also raises ethical concerns (Hermanowicz, 2016). In this case, due to a small sample size, the concern of anonymity became a critical aspect. Hence, we decided to arrange an additional meeting with the participants to discuss the dilemma of anonymity and the possibility of identification by their colleagues and peers. We offered participants the possibility of removing statements for their discretion and their transcripts were sent out for member reflections (Tanggaard, 2009). Yet, the students consented to follow through with the personal narratives. The teacher had some small comments but agreed to the overall story.

3. Results

In this result section, the focus is on the results of the final within-case analysis. First, we present the re-constructed teacher's narrative followed by the students' narratives. The narratives are unique with different perceptions concerning the experience of a shared reality in the teacher-student relationship. In the students' narratives, reflections from the teacher are added, to bring in the reciprocity perspective. The narratives are given pseudonym names, and the direct quotes are marked by perspective (t = teacher; s = student) and time (T1 = time 1; T2 = time 2; T3 = time 3).

3.1. "Ella": struggling between expectations from the world of ballet and care for the students' wellbeing

3.1.1. The world of ballet has been the stage of my life

Ella initially stumbled her way into the world of ballet. When she discovered that her body was born to master this art form, she went all in, dedicated herself to the world of ballet and soon recognized that "the physicality and competitiveness in dance were always on my mind" (tT3). As an introvert, she felt that the silent culture of ballet suited her well as she had "never been good with words; dance has therefore been a way of expressing myself" (tT3).

Continuing the dance journey as a young adult, Ella had the world as her workplace. Given her introverted nature and "always feeling inadequate in social settings," this was particularly hard.

She did not feel that she could "understand the codes regarding her social life" and was never "good at being in the inner circle" (tT3). In addition to the social difficulties, because of traveling around the world as a professional ballet dancer, within the hierarchical structure of a ballet company, she experienced power abuse that shaped her future life: "[it was] in the era when 'me-too' was happening, without us knowing it was 'me-too'" (tT3). The experiences of prominent persons that misused their position made her even more relational withdrawn, defining the boundaries between her professional and personal life more clearly. "It affected me in a personal way, in which I became more private. Hence, by wanting my personal life to be more private, I preferred keeping to myself" (tT3).

The career shift into teaching changed her being, "when I met pedagogy, I became less competitive" (tT3). She had "always [had] a desire to learn" (tT3) and when she decided to use her competence in professional ballet in a new way, she wanted to do it properly and thought that "if I was going to be a teacher, I wanted to know how to teach" (tT3). Eventually, when Ella finished her teaching studies in ballet, a new chapter in her life began, and she started to explore her new identity.

3.1.2. Representing the world of ballet comes with a great responsibility

Recalling her journey into professional ballet education, Ella felt that it was essential that "once you become a teacher, you represent ballet" (tT1). As a mentor and teacher, "I am the person having the experience and knowledge of how ballet works" (tT1). Also, she felt it was her responsibility to "establish a safe environment that makes room for the students to explore their movements and create a dialogue to promote reflection and learning" (tT1, tT2). However, she quickly learnt that creating a safe environment and a good teacher-student relationship is not always an easy task, "it needs to be open enough, close enough, and personal enough without being too personal" (tT1, tT2). She recognized that even though "I know about personal matters in my students' lives, it has to be clear that it is not our main dialogue while working together in the ballet class" (tT1). The reason being that "I am an individual and the students are individuals," and because of that, "it is easy to get a favorite if you connect more with one student than the others" (tT1). Hence, creating a personal connection with the students, "it may influence your work in the class and the group dynamics" (tT2). Consequently, "it is best to just be the teacher and promote clear roles," which might contribute to avoid out-groups in the ballet class, because as ballet teachers, "we have way too much power, and I try to be aware of it" (tT1, tT2). As a strategy, she focused on the subject matter of ballet and avoided establishing a personal relationship with her students.

3.1.3. Educating and empowering healthy students or making professional ballerinas?

When representing ballet as a teacher, Ella wanted to empower her students by "allowing them to give corrections and feedback to each other" (tT1, tT2). This approach "gives them a chance to reflect and communicate their knowledge—it is about expecting them to have an opinion" (tT1, tT2). She particularly liked to do this in her ballet classes, because "it removes the power from the teacher" (tT2). However, she often found it hard

to have enough time for such learning activities, due to the pressure and expectations on performance results placed on ballet teachers. She explained, “I have experienced high levels of stress for several years—at least four years” (tT3). Indeed, when working in a high-performing environment she “always wants to do better,” consequently, “feeling responsible for [her] students, because [she] needs to teach them how to set limits for themselves, and at the same time push them to reach their goals” (tT3). As a ballet teacher, she felt trapped in between producing high-achieving students and ensuring their wellbeing. As such, “when [she] is feeling nervous and stressed, it is mostly about what the students are doing with their bodies in the long-term” (tT1, tT3). Overall, she found her role as an educator also becoming a bit unclear: “the objective seems to be to train and indoctrinate the students, for me, this is different from educating them” (tT2).

When working with young female ballerinas, Ella found it hard to deal with the pressure to perform and to look a certain way, “receiving comments is part of the reality in professional ballet” (tT3). As their ballet teacher, “it is difficult knowing how to help the students to become resilient in dealing with the comments because external comments can destroy their self-confidence” (tT3). She was fully aware that health-related challenges (e.g., injuries and eating disorders) are well-known problems in this performance domain, and she “wished we had a supervisor at the school because sometimes you need to ask for help and guidance” (tT1). Having dealt with situations like these she currently knows, “a bit more about what is my responsibility, but it still affects me” (tT1). Given the responsibility of being a teacher, and additionally, the experience of stress over time, “it would have been nice to have someone to assist you under such circumstances. Indeed, it would probably help to release my tensions” (tT1).

3.2. Stella: narrative tensions and ambivalence

3.2.1. Fighting her way into the world of ballet and distancing from the social world

From an early age Stella drew on experiences to learn and accomplish things independently. She explained, “by taking the train by myself one hour each day to dance ballet and moving to another country, I had to be independent” (sT3). At the same time, as she committed herself to ballet, her ability to engage in social events evaporated because she was “away so much due to my priorities in ballet” (sT3). As ballet consumed her life, she found that she and her friends “lived in two different worlds” (sT3), and she experienced a growing distance from them. As a result, Stella came off as a bit shy or reserved. According to her present ballet teacher, Stella is withdrawn and distanced: “she kind of gets into herself” (tT1).

Stella’s journey into the top level in ballet education, was not an easy one. She faced numerous rejections at auditions before she was finally accepted at the professional ballet school she now attends. Also, in following her dream of being a ballerina, she made the choice to move further away from her home environment and friends. However, her decision to prioritize ballet despite

rejections, resulted in her working with a private teacher for a year. This interaction was a turning point for Stella, as she experienced a deep personal connection with, and support from, this teacher, as she explained “I shared my problems with her, and she became like a second mother to me” (sT3). This kind of teacher-student relationship was something that she was not used to, because she did “not often share so much with a teacher” (sT3). The commitment of time was probably the cornerstone of the relationship because “the private teacher took time to be with [her] every morning, even if it was not her job, she just did it because she wanted to work with me” (sT3).

3.2.2. The teacher will show me the way

As a dancer, Stella was motivated to develop her skills and accomplish her performance goals; hence, she actively sought out feedback from her teacher. She expected “that the teacher would help me to develop” consequently, she became “motivated when [she] received corrections from the teacher,” because it meant that she was “developing as a ballet dancer” (sT1). Hence, she was motivated to create a functional relationship to the teacher because “teachers have been through the same things when they were younger, so they know how we feel and how to improve” (sT2). Stella highlighted that “we must trust our teachers,” and “tell them if we feel pain and we must trust what they are saying because of their knowledge” (sT2).

3.2.3. Expecting the teacher to be in power

Stella’s teacher explained that “The teacher has much power. We have way too much power. We decide everything” (tT2). Stella agreed, explaining that the teacher “decides what, when, and how much we should do,” (sT2). However, she perceived this power differential as something positive because “the teacher pushes us to where she knows we should get pushed, and no further” (sT2). Further, she believed that “this particular teacher could have been more than a teacher to us,” (sT2) because this teacher cared about her students regardless of her power, “still, she is just like any other teacher in my eyes” (sT3). Although the student and the teacher valued development as their common goal in the teacher-student relationship, Stella expressed that “to reach the performance goals, I must focus on the corrections I receive from the teacher” (sT1), while the teacher said that “I expect my students to learn how to interact and how to have an opinion (. . .) to give them ownership is probably one of my main goals as a teacher” (tT1). As such, Stella and her teacher disagreed regarding their definition of development.

3.3. Victoria: am I talented enough?

3.3.1. From a safe haven to instability and insecurity

Victoria came from a supportive family that inspired her to have a secure future. However, after her parents got a divorce, she sometimes “felt that she was in the middle of my parents” (sT3). Victoria spent most of her time with her mom growing up and described her as someone who “likes to plan things and may come across as stressed,” compared to her dad who “is way more relaxed and does not care about what other people think” (sT3). Given their

different natures, she “missed having equal input from both of her parents” (sT3).

As a young dreamer, her desire to dance ballet at a prestigious school led to moving to a larger city with her mom. Despite positive mastery experience, like getting a main role in a production, and the support she gained from her family, when she moved, she “became less extroverted and more reserved as a person” (sT3). The social insecurity of “relocating to a new place was a lot to handle, and [she] became concerned with what people thought about [her]” (sT3). Both life changes (e.g., the divorce and the moving) negatively influenced her personality and wellbeing in everyday life in the next years, making her socially insecure.

Adapting to her new life Victoria struggled to find security and her own identity when she stepped into the period of upper-secondary education. She explained, “I constantly thought what I did was wrong instead of what I accomplished in ballet.” As such, struggling with her thoughts she “was always wondering what the ballet teacher thought about [her], and started to overtrain” (sT3). At the same time, Victoria spent time with teachers who “exposed us in the class and was asking personal questions during classes.” Being insecure, this environment nurtured comparability particularly because “other teachers were favoring individuals in the ballet class, chatting on Facebook, and placing dancers up against each other” (sT3).

3.3.2. The lack of self-esteem: am I talented enough?

After she graduated from upper-secondary education, she experienced a tough period. She got turned down the first time she applied to a professional ballet school, leading to the only time she “had the feeling of really failing in ballet,” and because “everyone expected that [she] would get approved for the school” (sT3), this was shameful, and Victoria felt like a public failure. However, she got invited back to a second audition at the original school she applied for a few months later, a school in which she “had the opportunity to take also academic subjects.” Although she was conflicted about the possible outcomes ahead, she returned because her “mom and grandfather were concerned with a safe and secure future, and they convinced me” (sT3).

While worrying about the future and aspiring to fulfill her family’s expectations, she moved back home again. Victoria was not pleased about this, because she “never got an explanation why they wanted me back at the school” (tT3). These circumstances left her with ambivalent feelings because she was, “so confused” and “did not feel welcome.” Consequently, as she explained, “I have never been as insecure in myself as I was during my first year” (sT3). At the same time, her teacher pointed out that “I saw Victoria’s eyes being open, but it came to a point when you looked at her, and she was always into herself. Right now, she is ‘out’ - but for how long?” (tT3). For instance, Victoria explained that “in this period, I think I showed much nervousness to the teacher because of my insecurity and confused state of mind,” thus, “I did not dare to take as many risks as I knew I could do” (sT3). She did try to cope with the challenges actively as “one of my goals this fall has been to be more positive, open, and present” (sT1). The teacher was aware of her difficulties, saying that “there are many ways this could go for her.” Although “she is young and in good hands, I wonder whether she will be able to ask for help if she needs it” (tT3).

3.3.3. The teacher-student relationship: established trust, professional, and safe

Victoria experienced her ballet teacher as professional, caring, and interested; she “always felt secure and not afraid of making mistakes when [she] was in her [the teacher’s] classes” (sT1, sT2, sT3). This was exactly how she wanted a teacher to be: “the teacher has to express that I am good enough and that I have got the potential, even though I may not always feel it myself” (sT1). Similarly, the teacher communicated that “a great value for me is trying to get rid of what is right and what is wrong,” (tT1). Unlike Victoria’s earlier experiences, this type of teacher-student relationship was beneficial because “the teacher makes me feel good enough when she gives me an exercise and continues to observe me.” She “becomes more motivated” when she “get the acknowledgment” from the teacher and, at the same time feels that she has “improved”, (sT1). Having such interactions, the teacher explained that “when they trust that something (e.g., correction) is moving them in a slow pace forward and they feel accomplishment and get acknowledged, that is when you gain trust as a teacher” (tT2). The teacher expressed that “the professional world of ballet is brutal” and caring for Victoria she was nervous because “I know how little it will take to crush her” (tT3).

3.4. Leah: being at the top of the game

3.4.1. I believe in myself

Leah was surrounded by family, friends, and teachers who provided support in her upbringing. Through the experience of support, she developed self-esteem, and she “learned that my success does not depend on anybody else” (sT3). She was confident that “to become a dancer I need to trust myself and my abilities to accomplish my goals” (sT3). However, having a strong sense of inner drive, Leah wanted “to show my mom that I can attain an education and do ballet at the same time,” because Leah’s mom expressed “skepticism when [Leah] decided to commit herself to professional ballet.” The skepticism toward professional ballet originated from “wanting an academic future for me because my mom thinks it is essential to have a stable and secure future,” although it “made me want to become a professional ballet dancer even more” (sT3). Being surrounded by her friends and teachers who created a safe environment, she explained that “most of the teachers I have had, have made a good impression on me” (sT3). In fact, she “never experienced a teacher crossing my boundaries,” instead, her past experiences were filled with support and mastery, and “have made me believe in my skills, learning basic techniques, and ensured my blooming” (sT2, sT3).

3.4.2. Born with the body of a ballerina

Leah had a body for ballet, and “the movements came naturally to me” (sT3), even early in the career. Her current teacher shared that “when I first met her, she had the facility of a fabulous body, it is tremendous, it is a ‘Rolls Royce,’ but it was like her body had driven on a road in the mountains of China” (tT2). The gift of having the body of a ballerina and experiencing a safe environment, made Leah secure and confident and she highlighted that “learning from each other and building each other up” is the benefit of “being in an environment that makes you feel safe”, because “you stop

doubting yourself and dare to show what you can do in ballet” (sT2). She felt that one of the important ingredients in her positive past experiences might have been the positive and supportive teacher-student relationships.

3.4.3. Being pushed by the teacher equals development

Leah has learned that the teacher “would not expect something from me that I would not expect from myself” (sT2). Along with this particular view she regarded the teacher-student relationship as: “I need a teacher that is strict in a way that makes me focus. Determined, and clear in what he/she requires from me, fair in paying equal attention to everyone, and patient by not giving up on me” (sT1, sT2, sT3). However, her teacher “could have been more definite in terms of what she wants me to do,” for example, regarding the difference between dancing styles, however, overall, she views her as “very kind, patient, and I am not afraid of her” but “I could have more significant improvement if this teacher had been stricter [with me]” (sT1, sT3).

The teacher acknowledged that they had different goals (i.e., target referent), “the students expect me to push,” and because of that, “it is stressful being a teacher concerning that it comes with much responsibility” (tT1). The teacher identified with the student since “I know how it feels to be at their age” when “they have a huge desire to achieve, yet, they do not have the appropriate knowledge” (tT1, tT3). Leah also highlighted that “this teacher is concerned with us having ownership in what we are doing in the ballet class,” however, Leah believed “it is in my best interest to know what to do” like for example “the exact angle of the head in a position” (sT3). However, the teacher and Leah shared commonality in one specific period when Leah was injured and did need help to explore and solve the cause of her injury and required personal support from the teacher. As the teacher stated: “Leah eventually realized what she did wrong when the pain appeared, without having me to correct her” (tT3). The teacher acknowledged this situation as a breakthrough moment of “growth, reflection, and learning” (tT3) in Leah.

Leah “likes working and she is a competitive girl,” but the teacher expressed concern that originated from her experience with anxiety in Leah: “when Leah is unsure and carries a lot of feelings inside herself, she restrains” (tT3). The teacher expressed care for Leah explaining, “it will be unfortunate if I learn that she has experienced fear to perform” (tT3). Leah also recognized that the teacher “cares about how I am doing” when she “shows interest in chatting outside the class” and “knows about my family and asks how things are at home, and whether or not I get enough support” (sT3). However, another teacher that “I have does not know much about my family,” and when she has been “in class, she is concerned about working with us in the present time, without dealing with personal matters” (sT3). Leah “prefers the last teacher, because I notice that I make progress” (sT3), expressing that a shared reality on an epistemic level is the most important, not the relational level. However, when it came to other aspects concerning a professional teacher-student relationship, she still “likes the present teacher better when it comes to being outside the ballet class” (sT1, sT3). Hence, her desires of a teacher-student relationship might be a paradox to surviving in the world of professional ballet.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of shared reality in student-teacher partnerships in ballet and how these perceptions related to experiences of quality in the relationship and wellbeing. In the discussion, we have sought to integrate the meta-perspective and reflect on the narratives in relation to SRT and the research field of talent development (TD). We start by highlighting the ways in which a shared reality was perceived in the teacher-student relationships in ballet by the different participants. Next, we reflect on the contextual backdrop that is, the cultural factors that seem to constitute the motives of establishing shared reality within the domain of pre-professional ballet. Lastly, we discuss the role of shared reality in relation to quality in the teacher-student relationship and wellbeing.

4.1. A shared reality perceived only at epistemic level

Findings showed that the ballet teacher’s past experiences seemed to influence her motivation to share inner states. The combination of being an introverted individual and having negative ballet experiences (i.e., the culture of ballet) appeared to affect the level of trust that was experienced in unsafe situations (Simpson, 2007), indicating a prevention-orientation in the teacher (Higgins, 2019). Moreover, by feeling obliged to reproduce the culture of ballet (e.g., teach the way she was taught) despite expressing critical reflections and ambivalence in doing so, the findings postulated that the craft and culture, more than the teacher, set the premises for the teacher-student relationship in the world of ballet (Morris, 2003; Lakes, 2005; Higgins, 2019). Hence, influencing the teacher’s motive for creating a shared reality with the students toward the epistemic level in line with the hierarchical structure of ballet education and organization (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Cornwell et al., 2017; Higgins, 2019). However, findings also indicated that the teacher felt a responsibility concerning the female ballet students’ wellbeing. Thus, the target referent of whether the teacher should make professional ballet dancers (e.g., pressure from above), push the students to their limits and give strict instructions (e.g., pressure from below), or educate human beings and enhance their wellbeing (e.g., pressure from within) highlight the tension the teacher is struggling with (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Reeve, 2009; Higgins, 2019). Hence, our findings indicate that ballet teachers are likely to be conflicted about the target referent in the teacher-student relationship, experiencing tensions and ambivalence when executing the role (Blevins et al., 2020; Haraldsen et al., 2020a).

When focusing on the three specific teacher-student partnerships, our findings and interpretations indicated perceptions of only aspects of a shared reality in the relationship between the teacher and the first student, Stella. Stella’s past experiences seemed to have nurtured independence and robust characteristics like self-regulation and self-confidence (Higgins, 2019). Hence, Stella’s past experiences made her develop inner states that encouraged goal pursuits and a promotion-orientation (Higgins, 2019). However, this created a regulatory non-fit with the teacher’s motivational orientation (i.e., prevention-oriented). Also, on a personal level they faced relational challenges with

communication and trust. Stella, as an independent, shy, and reserved student probably needed more time, care, and dedication than the introvert, and distanced teacher at the TD school was able to provide. Based on the teacher's expert knowledge and power, Stella seemed to trust the teacher to verify her competence in ballet, thus sharing the epistemic motive (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Echterhoff and Higgins, 2017; Higgins, 2019). Yet, Stella did not feel personally connected or motivated to share her inner states with the teacher (Higgins, 2019).

In the case of Victoria, findings and interpretations showed perceptions of shared reality at a deeper level in the teacher-student partnership. Victoria's past experiences seemed to create vulnerability and insecurity (Higgins, 2019). A prevention-oriented motivation was visible in her concerns about not achieving and lack of willingness to take risks. Hence, this established a regulatory fit with the teacher (Higgins, 2019). The target referent was likely aligned because they worked together vigilantly toward performance development. Nevertheless, findings indicated that the motive for creating a shared reality in the relationship was mainly epistemic. However, Victoria shared her inner states with the teacher, which seemed to increase the level of trust between them, indicating that there also was a degree of relational motive in their relationship (Simpson, 2007; Cornwell et al., 2017; Higgins, 2019).

In contrast, in the relationship between the teacher and the third student, Leah, perceptions of a shared reality were not very evident in our findings. This was interpreted as related to a regulatory non-fit with the teacher. The non-fit was created by Leah's clearly promotion-oriented motivation, nurtured by past experiences of mastery and successfully taking risks to enhance her performance, and the teacher's prevention orientation (Higgins, 2019). Furthermore, in the case of the target referent (i.e., performance development), there seemed to be a mismatch, challenging the perceptions of shared reality also at epistemic level. Leah preferred a teacher who was mainly professional and instructive, whereas the teacher wanted to expand beyond this by being more student-centered and supportive (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). This showed that there was little interpersonal connection for sharing inner states at a personal level (Higgins, 2019).

Overall, findings concerning the perceptions of a shared reality in teacher-student partnerships in TD program in ballet indicated that the main motive of a shared reality was epistemic. This finding is in line with the traditional conventions inherited in the ballet culture like hierarchical structures and asymmetric power relations (Lakes, 2005; Gaunt, 2011; Alterowitz, 2014; Haraldsen et al., 2019, 2020a), which might create barriers toward the third (i.e., motive for establishing shared reality) and fourth (e.g., two-way mutual recognized connection of inner states and world views) condition of a fully perceived shared reality (Higgins, 2019). Specifically, the results indicated that the students found the teacher trustworthy, based on the teacher's knowledge and experience in ballet (i.e., epistemic motive; Gray and Kunkel, 2001; Morris, 2003; Lakes, 2005). Yet, neither the students or the teacher seemed motivated to establish a shared reality at a personal level, due to aspects such as inner states (e.g., introvert, reserved, self-regulated, independent), misfits in motives or target referents, previous experiences with teachers and conditional regard, or pre-conceived notions (e.g., cultural

world views) of what a teacher-student relationship ought to be. Although trust is important to create a shared reality, without a sufficient relational motive, previous studies have shown that a superficial level of trust might negatively influence interpersonal communication and collaboration between teachers and students (Simpson, 2007; Kristiansen et al., 2012; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Solstad et al., 2022). The lack of shared reality at a personal level was something the teacher expressed as challenging and a cause of tensions and ambivalent feelings. In contrast, especially the two students (Stella and Leah) who rejected the invitation from the teacher to establish a personal relationship did not seem to acknowledge this as problematic. However, Stella, did recognize and express the importance of a shared reality at a personal level with a previously private teacher, as this relationship represented a positive turning point in her development, nurturing her development, self-worth, and wellbeing in a difficult time. Still, this experience seemed an exception in Stella's overall experiences with ballet teachers.

4.2. The role of the cultural backdrop in perceiving a shared reality

The results of this study highlighted that the social-cultural environment in pre-professional ballet education played a significant role in the perceptions of and motives to establishing a shared reality. Previous studies have shown that the culture runs deep in dance (Aalten, 2005; Lakes, 2005). A recent published scoping review on mental health in dance identified cultural stressors, "such as cultural hegemony, set physical ideals, narrow minded identity ideals, cult-like behavior expectations, traditional gender roles, and hierarchical and top-down organizations" as the most cited stressor in dance (Dwarika and Haraldsen, 2023, p. 7). This cultural backdrop is likely to discourage the ballet students from participating in dialogues during classes (e.g., sharing inner states), which, in turn, might diminish the relational motive (Johnson, 2011; Rimmer, 2017; Higgins, 2019). This tendency was evident in the current study in the way Stella and Leah appeared to reject the teacher's attempts for a more student-centered teaching, caring approaches, and building a personal relationship. Hence, creating a shared reality with the teacher based on a relational motive might not be acknowledged as relevant for performance development and the quest of becoming a professional ballerina (Blevins et al., 2020). Indeed, findings indicated that the ballet students wanted the teacher to be stricter and focus more on practicing the correct ballet techniques; namely, the 'right' and 'wrong' of dancing ballet. Also, it seemed that the students' focus on learning and performance development was rather narrow in contrast to the more holistic view held by the teacher (Jowett, 2017); perhaps driven by a desire to achieve short-term performance development objectives. Other studies have shown that the deliberate focus on short-term development, when being in a vulnerable age and environment, is not beneficial for students' wellbeing and long-term development (Baker et al., 2018; Moksnes and Reidunsdatter, 2019; Haraldsen et al., 2020a; Solstad et al., 2022). Conversely, the teacher's target referent, which was long-term development (e.g., ownership, reflection, self-regulation), seemed to lack support both in the cultural

backdrop, and in the target referent held by the ballet students. Consequently, the pressure from above (e.g., cultural norms, school policies) created a lot of ambivalence in the teacher and pushed her to exert a more controlling teaching style and focus on short-term performance objectives. Additionally, the pressure from below (e.g., ballet students desire for the teacher to push and be strict) was experienced as conflicting concerning the teacher's worries about their wellbeing and resilience, resulting in the teacher experiencing illbeing because of the burden of all the perceived responsibility and obligations (Reeve, 2009; Higgins, 2019). These findings highlight important aspects of ambivalence and pressure that teachers have to deal with in their daily practice, making the establishing of a shared reality rather complex and difficult.

4.3. The importance of a shared reality in the teacher-student relationship in ballet

A *shared reality* is, in our understanding of SRT, when the basic aspects of the world views and the personal inner states (e.g., motives, goals and ambitions) are mutually shared and verified by significant others, and where the relationships are characterized by trust, autonomy, with transparent distribution of power, and the absence of conditional regard. Past research on performance development and mental health highlights the importance of a considerate and understanding relationship between teacher and students (Higgins, 2019; Moksnes and Reidunsdatter, 2019). Our findings support this view, indicating that experiencing and valuing a shared reality seemed to be the most functional both for relationship quality and wellbeing. Specifically, such examples were evident in the relationships between Victoria and the current teacher, and between Leah and her previous private teacher. However, as the results showed, these characterizations were rarely present within this specific performance culture (Lakes, 2005). Differences and misfit in inner states (i.e., promotion- or prevention orientation), alongside the lack of motives to establish a shared reality on a personal level, affected the experience of a shared reality and the perception of quality in the interpersonal relationship. Specifically, in high performance environments, regulatory fit seemed vital, as striving for high achievement goals is so important. Hence, tensions and misfit concerning the shared reality, might be a risk factor in the context of ballet, negatively affecting the quality of the working relationship.

Performance development relies on the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student by understanding each other in both a personal and professional manner (Jowett, 2017; Higgins, 2019). According to previous literature, a shared reality is vital to acknowledge in pre-professional performance settings to fully be able to teach or coach in complex TD contexts (Jowett, 2017). Specifically, the need of mastering interpersonal behaviors such as engaging, interacting, communicating, perspective taking, empathizing, reflecting, empowering, collaborating, trusting, and understanding to name a few, are put forward as important (Jowett, 2017). Hence, the absence of a relational motive appeared to create barriers in the teacher-student partnership. In turn, putting the students and the teacher at risk of withholding their true

selves and for instance important feelings, attitudes, or beliefs about performance development (e.g., motivation, physical and mental health issues; Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 2019). These personal aspects were information all participants reflected on and disclosed more openly in the interview setting, yet not directly to each other or to their leaders in the educational setting. By withholding important information from each other, the interpersonal communication is at risk of becoming unclear and poor, likely to negatively affect the teacher behavior and the quality of the relationship in general (i.e., motivation, trust, a shared reality; Simpson, 2007; Jowett, 2017; Higgins, 2019).

Previous research has shown that the quality of the relationship between teacher and student, or coach and athlete, is linked to experiences of wellbeing (Nash et al., 2011; Jowett, 2017). Moreover, both short- and long-term development and thriving of the athlete are central aspects of coaching excellence. High quality coaching can only be achieved if athletes and coaches relate and connect in ways that facilitate trust and commitment, as well as have the willingness to know and understand one another (Nash et al., 2011; Solstad et al., 2022). Further, research informed by self-determination theory has found robust evidence from sports, performing arts, and educational settings of the importance of being able to experience a coherent and true self with a sense of autonomy and integrated unity in relation to facilitating learning, wellbeing, and thriving (Ryan and Deci, 2017). This requires a willingness to develop a shared reality also on a personal level. In contrast, being in controlled conditions, where preconceived way of thinking, feeling, or behaving is enforced, is evidently linked to psychological malfunctioning and illbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Haraldsen et al., 2019, 2020a,b). In the current study, evidence was found of that preconceived world views, influenced of conventional ballet education, determined the terms of the teacher-student relationship. In turn, undermining both the teacher's and the students' motives to connect at a deeper level, even though they expressed a need for a more personal relationship and support in the demanding and complex TD context.

From a long-term perspective, more severe health issues, previously evident among dancers (i.e., overtraining, eating disorder, injuries, and burnout) might accelerate within a poor-quality teacher-student relationship (Blevins et al., 2020; Haraldsen et al., 2020b). Interestingly, recent studies have shown that ballet students experience lower wellbeing than athletes in organized sports (Haraldsen et al., 2019, 2020b, 2021). In a recent qualitative study, young students in ballet and music TD schools emphasized the competitive nature of their domains and seemed to feel more dependent on teacher approval than young athletes in comparative TD schools (Stornaes et al., 2023). Future research is required to help us move from these descriptive research designs into evidence-based interventions that may help alleviate some of these apparent problems.

4.4. Strengths, limitations, and future directions

The sample and type of data is one of the main limitations. This study included only four female participants and three

equal-gendered teacher-student relationships, and the study is based on interview data only. As such, other relationship (e.g., mixed gender or males only) or types of data (i.e., observations or diary notes) could provide different perceptions regarding shared reality. However, it is common practice in ballet to be taught by teachers of the same gender. The longitudinal qualitative research design is a strength, offering prolonged engagement and rich data. Also, a research design targeting the same teacher in relation to three different students, is an asset, offering interpersonal variation that facilitated deeper understanding of how the perception of a shared reality is situated and complex, affecting the teacher-student working partnerships in various ways. The role of SRT might be both a strength and a weakness. As a novel analytical tool and framework to help grasp and describe the complexity of the interrelationships studied, and to deepen the general knowledge, it can be considered a strength. On the other hand, one might question the use of a predefined, prescriptive, and normative theoretical lens in qualitative and narrative research, narrowing the lens of exploration and reflection. Finally, a strength is the unique contribution to the research field, as there exist only a handful studies within the field of dance education including reciprocal data of both teacher and student perspectives, and none that has employed SRT as a theoretical framework.

Future research should investigate both genders and gender non-conforming students of ballet to get more rich data on shared reality and the quality of the interpersonal relationship between teacher and students in pre-professional ballet across cases to offer more generalized knowledge and applied guidance. Specifically, exploring more in-depth experiences and consequences of motivational regulatory non-fit, or the culture-specific asymmetric power relationships in relation to establishing trust and interpersonal communication in ballet teacher-student partnerships would be valuable.

5. Conclusion

The present study has explored the role of shared reality in a set of teacher-student relationships in the context of pre-professional ballet education. Our findings indicated that there were perceptions of a shared reality only at the epistemic level, making the partnership between the teacher and the students of professional, yet not personal, nature. Also, motivational tensions and different views on the common goals and the nature of a quality relationship were identified. An important finding was that the culture of ballet played an important role, likely to determine the possibilities of and motives to creating a shared reality across the teacher-student partnerships in this pre-professional conservatoire context. The results indicated that the lack of shared realities on a deep and personal level negatively affected the teacher-student working partnership (i.e., motivation, trust, enjoyment) and the wellbeing of both teacher and students in pre-professional ballet. Thus, SRT seems to highlight some important aspects of the complex reciprocal relationships that exists in the world of ballet education.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the participants have been assured full anonymity and safety, and hence, the data will not be passed on to a third party. Requests to access anonymous abstracts of the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to HH, heidhara@khio.no.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Norwegian Centre for Research Data, ref. nr.: 872310. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

This article was based on material from DF's master thesis (Fredriksen, 2020) where HH, BS, and HG were supervisors. HH, BS, DF, and HG conceived the presented idea, developed the theory, discussed the results, and contributed to the first draft of the manuscript. DF, BS, and HH developed the interview guide. DF performed the data collections. DF, BS, and HH performed the analysis. All authors peer debriefed and verified the analytical methods and results, contributed to the article process and writing, and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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