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Trends and Traditions: A Mixed Methods Study of Tap Dance Education in the  
Private Sector Dance Studio

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## Abstract

The experience of the tap dance educator in the private sector studio was studied using a mixed methods approach that included a survey and individual interviews. A total of 338 tap teachers representing diversity in age, experience, location and competition participation responded to 25 survey questions that asked about enrollment and hiring, training and curriculum, dance competitions and social media, and challenges and benefits. Interviews with five private sector tap teachers and four master teachers collected in-depth descriptive data that expanded on the primary topics explored in the survey. Key findings include the following: tap enrollment stayed the same or is increasing, it is extremely challenging to hire qualified tap teachers, tap teacher training opportunities are lacking, most tap teachers learn from their own teacher when growing up; and tap history, music theory and improvisation are rarely taught. In the area of dance competitions: urban studios compete less than rural and suburban studios; and judging, flooring and amplification in competitions are not satisfactory for tap dance. Teachers' greatest challenge is teaching mixed levels and their greatest benefit is working with students and watching them acquire new skills. A major conclusion is that the current trends influencing the field align with significant periods and personalities in tap dance history. In order for tap dance education to become more relevant in today's dance world, improved teacher training programs should be designed which include "how" and "why" to teach tap history and music theory.

*Keywords:* tap dance, private sector dance studio, dance competitions, master teacher

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Is tap dance dying? This question has been asked for decades, most recently by journalist and dancer Brian Seibert in his 2015 book about the history and current state of tap dance (Seibert, 2015). It is a question that has implications beyond the community of tap dancers in the United States, because the art form has deep roots in history, especially African American history, and because tap dance offers an artistic and healthy outlet for adults and children of all ages.

Yet a related and essential question that has rarely been asked is: what role does tap dance education – that is, training and support for those who teach tap dance – contribute to the status of the art form and its viability?

In this study I sought to address these questions by exploring the experience of tap dance educators in the private sector dance studio in the United States. I focused on the topics of enrollment and hiring, training and curriculum, dance competitions and social media, and challenges and benefits. My mixed methods approach included a survey that reached 338 respondents who teach tap dance in private sector studios, and one-on-one interviews that I conducted with nine tap dance educators who work with private sector students and educators. My own researcher reflections and observations provided additional data.

My first chapter includes a personal statement of the rationale and significance of this study. In addition, I provide an overview of the background and context of the problem I'm seeking to better understand, including a brief history of tap dance, and an introduction to the topics of tap teacher training, the private sector dance studio, and dance competitions. I include a statement of purpose, research questions that frame the study, a discussion of my research approach and preliminary assumptions. Below are definitions of key words used in the study.

## **Definition of Key Terminology Used in the Study**

**Tap dance** – Tap dance historian Constance Valis Hill (2010) identifies tap dance as a fusion of British and West African musical and step-dance traditions that originated in the Five Points neighborhood of NYC in the early 1800s. Although there are different styles of tap dance, the common element is the production of percussive rhythms through four taps located on the heels and toes of tap shoes. A “Broadway” style of tap is likely to focus on the look and presentation of the final product while the term “rhythm tap” is often used to describe tap dance that is focused on rhythms and sound.

**Private sector dance studio** – Private sector dance studios started in the early 1900s as Vaudeville performers hung up their shoes and dedicated themselves to teaching (Hill, 2010). The oldest known school still in existence opened in 1910 in Boston. It is estimated that there are 49,000 private sector dance studios operating in the United States (Austin, Houck-Cox, & Rogoski-Rutta, 2019). No licensing is required to open a dance studio. Although dance is offered in some public-school communities, most dance education takes place in the private sector dance studio (Gilbert, 2005).

**Dance Competitions** – Dance competitions, as discussed in this research, are privately-owned businesses which bring private dance studios together over a single day or weekend for the purpose of creating a platform where dance studios compete with dance routines performed by students. Trophies and prizes are usually awarded based on a 100-point system, but no standard scoring measurement or judge’s qualifications regulate the industry.

**“Master” tap teacher** – There is no standard definition of the term “master” as it relates to a tap dance educator. In this dissertation, a master tap teacher is someone who has demonstrated excellence and leadership in tap dance education, either through performance,

teaching, choreography, or production of tap-related events. Age is not a factor, as some masters are young dancers who have demonstrated unique skills and expertise.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Several years ago, when *New York Times* dance critic Brian Seibert (2015) wrote a book about the history of tap dance and asked, “Is tap dance dying?” I was entering the Doctoral Program in Educational Studies at Lesley University. I entered the doctoral program to further my knowledge of how students learn to tap dance and how teachers learn to teach tap dancing. My goal was to do research that might support the development of teaching tools for the tap classroom. Since that time, I explored the question of whether tap is dying, and the role that tap teacher education plays, through both formal and informal inquiries, including literature reviews, a pilot study, observations, and discussions with countless dance teachers. Although many tap enthusiasts responded with a resounding “No,” the question continues to be asked among private sector tap dance educators who are experiencing unstable enrollment. Four years later, I can finally respond to this question with both quantitative and qualitative data that provides a clearer understanding of the status of tap dance education in the private sector dance studio in the U.S. at the beginning of this new decade.

### **Problem Statement**

It is estimated that there are 49,000 private dance studios in the United States, yet little is known about the status of tap dance education in these studios (Austin et al., 2019). Despite its identity as a uniquely American art form and its rich and complex history, tap dance remains under-represented in higher education dance and dance education programs, in dance history books, and in dance-related popular culture, including television and studio dance competitions. Another issue facing the field is that steps were often handed down in an oral tradition, leading to

many variations of the same routines, different names for movements, and disagreement over what, when and how to teach. Although several tap educators have organized syllabi to assist studio teachers - curricula include Al Gilbert Technique, Judy Ann Bassing, Debbie Dee, Diane Gudat, Andrew Nemr, and my own program, Thelma's Tap Notes (Goldberg, 2013, 2015) – it is not known how many teachers use guided curricula and how they are trained. Tap teacher workshops and courses are offered at dance teacher conventions, at tap festivals throughout the world, through tap education foundations, and through dance teacher organizations, yet, little is known about the content and value of these programs.

Dance education – of all genres – in the U.S. is rapidly changing. This is due to many factors, including dance competitions, the increase in K-12 dance programming, and the recent movement in higher education to explore vernacular dance forms and their histories, as evidenced by several papers recently presented at the 2019 National Dance Educators Conference (Cohen, Guarino, & Scheff, 2019; Kosstrin, George-Graves, 2019; Sieradzki, 2019). With limited training opportunities, there will be, and I believe there already is, a lack of qualified tap dance educators able to respond to new demands in dance education.

With this study, I hope to bring understanding to how tap dance educators in the private sector are responding to the lack of representation, limited training opportunities, and debates surrounding tap dance performance, choreography, pedagogy, competitions and education.

### **Background and Context: What is Tap Dance?**

Tap dance historian Constance Valis Hill (2010) identifies tap dance as a fusion of British and West African musical and step-dance traditions. It is characterized by the percussive sound made when metal taps, located on the heel and toe of shoes, connect with the floor in movements that range from digging or striking to brushing or sliding different parts of the taps. Based on

personal feedback, many people associate tap dance with a Broadway show such as “42<sup>nd</sup> St.,” dancers like Fred Astaire or Shirley Temple, or a dance style taught in a local dance studio. I present a brief history of tap dance to provide an historical context for understanding the debate around its relevance in today’s dance scene. Tap dance history provides a unique and compelling story of both the Irish indentured servants and the African American dancers during the early days of slavery, through Vaudeville and the Movie Musical era, as he/she navigated issues of racism, sexism and classism. Few women are included in the history books and their stories also deserve to be told. A deeper discussion of the role women played in tap dance history is outside the main purview of my dissertation, but it demands much greater attention and is critical to an understanding of tap history.

I believe that students of all ages gain a deep respect for the artistry and traditions of tap dance, as well as an appreciation for the struggles experienced by early immigrants to our country, when history can be embodied through movement.

**A brief history of tap dance.** To understand where tap is today it’s important to understand where it came from. Most historians agree that tap dance originated in the Five Points neighborhood in New York City around the late 1820s as a result of the exchange of rhythms and social traditions of the Irish and African Americans living there (Hill, 2010; Seibert, 2015; Stearns, 1994). The Civil War emancipation of the slaves and the Irish potato famine in the 1840s saw a rise in U.S. urban populations and the growth of the entertainment industry. By the 1880s, vaudeville shows were performed with a wide variety of both white and black acts, and troupes of performers would travel from theater to theater along different circuits. The *Orpheum Circuit* had 45 theatres in 36 cities across the U.S. A smaller circuit was the *Peanut Circuit*, which focused on theatres in New England. Black vaudeville acts were booked through the

T.O.B.A (Theatre Owner's Booking Association), known by many black performers as "Tough on Black Asses." The Whitman Sisters, known as "The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville" were one of only a few troupes that performed in both the white and black vaudeville circuits, negotiating issues of race, gender and class, while maintaining high standards of performance and behavior until the popularity of vaudeville faded during the 1930s Great Depression (George-Graves, 2000).

The 1920s and 30s saw tap dance meet jazz rhythms on the Broadway stage with Ziegfeld's *Follies of 1914*, *Blackbirds of 1928*, and the all-black musical, *Shuffle Along* (1921). According to Hill (2013), "The musical part of [Shuffle Along] embodied a new image of the black dancer as a rhythmically propulsive source of energy. Tap dance was thus resurrected from its nineteenth-century minstrel origins to a modern twentieth-century art form" (para. 34). This led the way for creative expression and tap artistry to flourish.

The golden age of tap, the 1930s and 40s, saw tap dancers such as Jimmy Slyde, Buster Brown, and the Condos Brothers become featured soloists in front of swing bands led by Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Tap dancing opportunities were divided along racial and gender lines due to the fear of censorship and public opinion. Bowing to the racism of the time, Hollywood was making movie musicals with primarily white tap dancers such as Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, who performed a stylized, balletic, Broadway form of tap dance. Clubs like the Cotton Club and the Apollo in Harlem featured many black tap acts such as the Nicholas Brothers, who were famous for their flash dancing, and Honi Coles and Cholly Atkins, who epitomized the "Class Act" with their artistry and grace. Bill "Bojangles" Robinson partnered with Shirley Temple in *The Little Colonel* (1935) as the first interracial tap dancing couple in film history



(Hill, 2010; Stearns, 1994) and the all-black musical, *Stormy Weather* (1943) featured the Nicholas Brothers and their daredevil splits, leaps and flips.

In 1943, Agnes DeMille choreographed ballet into *Oklahoma*, and in 1957, Jerome Robbins used jazz-style dancing in *West Side Story*. With the advent of rock and roll in the 1950s, the popularity of tap dance on stage and in film declined, and many tap artists moved overseas or settled into teaching careers. Television offered minimal opportunities through variety shows like *Ed Sullivan* while other weekly programs such as *Dick Clark and American Bandstand* introduced U.S. audiences to new trends in music and dance, such as rock n' roll and the twist. There were exceptions to this diminishing interest in tap. The Copasetics, a fraternal organization of musicians and tap dancers formed in 1949 in tribute to Bill “Bojangles” Robinson “to do all in their power to promote the fellowship and to strengthen the character within their ranks” (Morrison & Waag, 2016, para. 1). They supported each other during the lean years of tap by producing boat cruises, annual balls, and charitable performances for the Harlem community.

The 1960s saw the beginning of a tap revival when jazz dance historian Marshall Stearns presented members of the Copasetics at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1963. Beginning in 1969, Leticia Jay renewed interest in tap with her weekly *Tap Happenings*. The show then reopened as *The Hoofers*, at the Mercury Theatre, off-Broadway. With the return of tap to Broadway in *No, No Nanette* (1971), tap emerged from the underground and experienced a renaissance. The evolution of postmodern dance as a form that welcomed everyday movements coincided with tap’s resurgence. Both were casual and democratic, open to all, and able to be performed anywhere.

In the 1970s and 80s, women tap dancers, including Jane Goldberg, Brenda Bufalino, Acia Gray, Sarah Petronio and others assisted in the tap revival by seeking out veteran African American tappers and studying under their tutelage. Bufalino became a force of innovation and creativity through her work as soloist, choreographer, and musician. She revolutionized ensemble tap choreography as a concert dance form through the American Tap Dance Orchestra and she continues to teach and mentor tap students and teachers around the world. Jane Goldberg, whose Changing Times Tap Dance Company was formed in 1979, was dedicated to promoting and preserving tap dance through performances that brought all ages, genders, and races together. She produced the first week-long tap festival, *By Word of Foot*, gathering masters and students together to talk about tap, share steps and styles, and celebrate its traditions. In Los Angeles, Lynn Dally formed the Jazz Tap Ensemble, a collection of jazz and tap percussionists, and in Boston, Dianne Walker studied with Leon Collins and helped preserve his work through teaching and performing.

*No Maps on my Taps* (Nierenberg, 1979) documents the tappers who kept tap alive through the 1950s-70s and serves as a lasting tribute to the mostly men who dedicated their lives to sharing tap with others. Tap's rebirth was celebrated on Broadway with *Sophisticated Ladies* (1981), *The Tap Dance Kid* (1983) and *Black and Blue* (1989), and in films such as *White Nights* (1985), *The Cotton Club* (1984) and *Tap* (1989). The Copasetics toured across the United States in tap revival performances from the 1970s to the 1990s. In Boston, the show was called the Great Tap Reunion, and it featured Bunny Briggs, Brenda Bufalino, Charles "Honi" Coles, Gregory Hines, Jimmy Slyde and a young phenomenon, Savion Glover, at the Boston Opera House in 1990.

Gregory Hines became a leader in the tap community through his lifelong performance career which started in the 1950s with a family act and continued into the 1970s with a successful Broadway and movie career that earned him a Tony award in 1992. On television, Gregory Hines hosted the 1989 PBS production of *Tap Dance in America*, informing thousands of television households that tap was back. He used his influence to uplift his role models, the Copasetics, and interest in tap dancing grew.

In 1989, with Gregory Hines' help, National Tap Dance Day became an official national holiday, in commemoration of Bill Bojangles Robinson's birthday, May 25. This acknowledgement of tap as an American treasure and as a vital force in dance education gave rise to tap festivals across the country and the world. Savion Glover, the "boy wonder," was influential in introducing tap to a new generation through his performances on Sesame Street from 1989 to 1995. Children and their parents became interested in tap dance and signed up for classes at local schools. Glover's propulsive, powerful and intricate choreography won a Tony Award for his show *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* (1996). Critics applauded his ability to infuse tap with hip-hop, making tap cool again, attracting a new, younger generation to the possibilities offered through tap dance. Shows such as *Stomp* (1994) and *Tap Dogs* (1997) also combined hard-hitting movements in percussive extravaganzas that appealed to younger audiences.

"The new direction is the younger generation" (Glover, as cited in Hill, 2010, p. 293) said Savion Glover, who helped usher in a new wave of tap artists. Gregory Hines shared his view that the future of tap dance rested with the young lions and lionesses that were searching for new ways to express themselves. Tap jams and challenges were happening regularly at clubs in NYC, at festivals, and on stages.

This period in tap history, from 1996 to the early 2000s, was dominated by young male and female hoofers who created their own shows, taught at festivals, and moved the form forward with phenomenal footwork and unique artistic expression on film, stages, and in music videos. For these dancers, how tap sounded was more important than how it looked. Ayodele Casel, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Chloe Arnold, and Michelle Dorrance are women leaders who continued the path started by an earlier generation of women, expressing their unique tap dance voices. Men, too, embraced a period where boundaries were being broken, although not always with positive reviews.

Traditionalists didn't like tap being performed to hip hop music, and others, such as tap historian Constance Valis Hill, didn't want to see tap become codified like ballet. Some tappers didn't want tap to be fused with other dance styles or used to make a political statement, as Josh Hilberman did in his piece, *The Warrior*, a tap commentary on censorship. Other issues emerged around sexploitation in videos and labeling tap as "rhythm" or "Broadway." The death of tap's beloved leader, Gregory Hines, in 2003, left a void that remains today. His call to unite, as he did in his fight for National Tap Dance Day, is not being heard and no one leader is stepping into his shoes.

Critics such as Joan Acocella, staff writer at the New Yorker, suggested that tap was "fundamentally a solo form" in her criticism of Glover's 2003 ensemble work in *Improvography* after complimenting his solo performance (Acocella, as cited in Hill, 2010, p. 332). Tap scholar Margaret Morrison found Acocella's comments "pitted predominantly white women (who choreographed, led, and performed in tap ensembles) against African American male tap dancers, ignoring the history of black and white dancers who performed in duos, trios and ensembles, and chorus lines during the heyday of tap in the 1930s and 1940s" (Morrison, as cited

in Hill, 2010, p. 333). A schism was forming along race, gender and tap styles that Derick Grant hoped to resolve in his ensemble tap production, *Imagine Tap!* (2006). He tried to bridge the divisions that separated tap enthusiasts. “Black, white, male, female, young, old, gay, straight, we are everything, and I’m proud of that” (Grant, as cited in Hill, 2010, p. 336).

That effort to bridge the divisions has continued with enthusiastic response for recent tap performances at prestigious venues like Jacob’s Pillow and the Joyce Theatre in NYC. Jason Smith and Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards were featured in Grant’s revue and together the three recently performed *And Still You Must Swing*, a production directed by Sumbry-Edwards to connect tap dance back to its history, to jazz and swing music. The work of these seasoned tappers and the work of Michelle Dorrance, who credited Sumbry-Edwards and Grant as co-choreographers in her own recent show, is resulting in more positive reviews from critics such as Acocella, who praised Dorrance’s ability to create ensemble work in her production *The Blues Project* as “rich and exciting” (Acocella, 2016, para 8).

The issues facing women in tap were addressed at the Women in Tap Conference at UCLA in 2008. Lynn Dally, adjunct professor in the department of World Arts and Cultures, organized panel discussions, classes, and performances to unearth stories of women in this historically male-dominated field. Four generations of female tap dancers honored the rich contributions and celebrated the possibilities available to women in tap. Many of the women at that conference brought the inspiration they received to their home studios and worked to present new choreography and programming that was accessible and affordable. Efforts to preserve tap’s history, and especially women’s stories, resulted in documentaries, books, and articles that provide limited but important information necessary for scholarly tap dance research to move forward.

One of those books resulted in controversy. “What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dance” (Seibert, 2015) bemoans the lack of sophistication in today’s tap artists and their lack of creativity as choreographers. In his book, the journalist Brian Seibert expresses his opinion that tap shares the same danger of death as other art forms like jazz. Without a scholarly study and without the funding that ballet receives, “Tap is much poorer, scrappier, more vulnerable” (p. 539). Several of his fellow New York dance critics shared his view. The former chief dance critic of The New York Times, Alistair Macaulay, viewed tap dance as mere nostalgia (Macaulay, 2016) and Joan Acocella of The New Yorker announced “Tap could die....in that case, it will go down in the history books as a marvelous thing that grew and died under certain historical conditions, mostly in the twentieth century” (Acocella, 2015, para. 21). In contrast to Seibert’s and Acocella’s opinions, tap scholar and historian Constance Hill wrote, “Tap dance has been ‘invisible’ in the scholarly canon because it continues to be characterized as a constantly dying art form” (Hill, 2016, para. 9). Margaret Morrison, a rhythm tap soloist, dance scholar and choreographer responded, “Tap is *not* dying.... We keep putting on our shoes and making music with our feet” (Morrison, 2016, para. 19). It took three years, but Seibert now credits Michelle Dorrance with giving tap new life and recently commented, “But it’s not anywhere near dead, and it’s still a thriving, changing form” (Seibert, as cited in Levine and Wolf, 2018, para. 9). Seibert has changed his opinion since he suggested that tap was dying in 2015. He bases his change of attitude on the recent success of the innovative, thriving tap dance company Dorrance Dance.

### **Tap Teacher Training and the Private Sector Dance Studio**

Although much has been written about the colorful personalities and pivotal events in tap’s story, including new and contemporary tap projects, little has been written about the source

from which many tap dancers spring – the private sector dance studio. Private studio dance educators have kept tap dancing alive and accessible to the general public since the early 1900s and continuing to this day. Understanding their role is key to understanding the status and viability of tap dance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The local neighborhood dance studio is an important fixture in the field of dance education, in the community where it resides, and in the hearts and souls of the students who study there. It is not unusual for a young dancer to begin classes as a preschooler and remain in a particular studio through high school. The studio owner, with no outside oversight, teaches however and whatever s/he chooses and decides the qualifications of her/his faculty, for the government does not regulate this business of private dance education. Likewise, no licensing or certification is required to teach dance, which leaves the topic of training up to the individual educator and studio owner. With little or no options for studying tap dance or tap dance education in college, teachers seek training at dance teacher summer conferences, weekend workshops with master teachers, tap teacher courses, and through mentorships with their own teachers or master teachers. The lack of consistency and standardization in training tap dance teachers has left the field susceptible to confusion and disagreements over what, why, or how to teach. Unlike ballet, which has been codified for hundreds of years, tap has resisted attempts to standardize and teachers are left to make pedagogical decisions with little guidance. Traditions and techniques vary widely. (Further discussion of tap teacher training options will be reviewed in Chapter Two.)

The typical neighborhood dance studio, offering instruction in multiple styles of dance, started in the early 1900s as both male and female vaudeville performers hung up their shoes and dedicated themselves to teaching. Many local studios throughout the United States continue the

tap traditions shared by vaudevillians like Stanley Brown and Leon Collins who had studios in the Boston area, and by Lou Conte in Chicago, Eddie Brown in San Francisco, and Henry LeTang in New York City. A second generation of women tappers, many of them proteges of the vaudevillians, include Brenda Bufalino, Dianne Walker, Acia Gray, Heather Cornell, and Barbara Duffy. These master tap educators share their unique approaches and influence tap education throughout the country.

Many professional tap dancers from Broadway and movie musicals also found careers as educators and passed on traditions based on their own experiences with tap dance, which differed from the experiences of the hoofers who toured in vaudeville shows. Among this group of dance directors, whose emphasis was on precise staging, formations, and full-body expression, were Ned Wayburn, Busby Berkeley, Gower Champion, and Danny Daniels. “Crucially important to [Wayburn’s] work was a concern for spatial organization and the sensory relationship with the audience established by the arrangement of the performers onstage” (Stratyner, 1996).

Other Broadway choreographers like Cholly Atkins and Gregory Hines focused on small footwork and sought that same “sensory” connection with the audience through sound. Despite differences in focus and labels of “Broadway” or “rhythm tap”, at the core of all tap dance is a dedication to rhythm. There is no mistaking the “sound” of tap dancing as those metal taps hit the floor, whether in a concert hall, small jazz club, or studio classroom. Unlike other dance forms, an audience learns to listen as well as look at the dance.

But teaching students about “sound and rhythm” requires specialized attention in the classroom and, with no established criteria for tap teachers, it’s unlikely that all tap teachers are exposed to this kind of training themselves or are confident about including this kind of training in their programs. This has implications for the content and style of tap dance being taught in



private sector studios and calls into question whether the rhythm-focused style of tap born in New York in the 1800's is able to thrive today in the typical studio. One venue where "sound" is often second to the "look" of the dance is the dance competition stage.

### **Dance Competitions**

Dance competition has its roots in early tap dance history when slaves danced to earn "bragging rights" for their owners. The first commercial dance competition started in 1978 when Showstopper, one of the oldest competition businesses, started offering an experience with professional lighting and sound, glitzy backdrops, and large stages, providing a classy, top-notch venue in which to "sell dance." Since then, dance competition has become a complex exchange of capital between parents, dancers, private studio owners, competition corporations, costume companies, dancewear vendors, hotels, venues, light and sound crews, and a host of other companies that provide trophies, advertising and more (Schupp, 2018a, 2019; Weisbrod, 2010). As reality television dance contests have become popular, studios are entering dance competitions at higher rates than ever, in hopes of winning awards and gaining status in the industry. Several researchers (Guarino, 2014; Foster, 2019; Schupp, 2018a) have brought attention to the growing phenomenon of dance competitions and the influence they have on private sector dance education. Positive benefits include intangible character traits that develop during training and performing: resilience, perseverance, time-management and self-awareness (Schupp, 2018c). These researchers have also raised concerns about unintended consequences of competition, including lack of diversity and accessibility due to high costs and promotion of a certain Eurocentric standard of appearance, body, and movement; a narrow range of choreographic and musical styles and a focus on conformity over creativity; and concerns about age-inappropriate costumes and musical choices in an environment where sexy sells.

These consequences are of particular concern for tap dance, which, as a vernacular form, is accessible to all, open to improvisation, and focused on sound more than looks.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

My purpose for this mixed methods study is to gain understanding of the experiences of tap dance educators in the private sector studio and how they contribute to the viability and quality of tap dance education and tap dance in general. By exploring, through both a survey and interviews, the artistic and professional challenges they face, I hope to offer a clearer understanding of the meanings and needs of tap dance educators. With these greater understandings, dance educators – of which I am one - can improve and develop teacher training programs, and classroom resources to reestablish tap dance as a relevant genre in dance education and performance. My research questions center around the investigation of how tap dance educators in the private sector studio understand their teaching practices and the influences that guide their decisions. To respond to this purpose, I am guided by the following research questions, organized under primary topics:

#### **Enrollment and Hiring**

- Is tap dance enrollment increasing or decreasing?
- How difficult is it for private studio owners to hire qualified tap dance teachers?

#### **Training, Curriculum, and Resources**

- How are private sector tap dance educators trained and what professional development opportunities do they value?
- How often do tap dance teachers include tap history, music theory, vocabulary, technique, choreography, and improvisation in their curricular and, if so, how?

- Are there relationships between variables such as age, years of teaching experience, location of studio, and decisions teachers make about training, class content, and competition participation?
- What resources are needed to support tap dance education in the private sector?

### **Dance Competitions and Social Media**

- What influence is the dance competition culture having on tap dance education today?
- How is commercial dance, as presented on social media, television and films, influencing teachers' experiences of teaching tap in private dance studios?

### **Challenges and Benefits**

- What do teachers believe are the greatest challenges and benefits to teaching tap?
- What trends are teachers themselves seeing in tap dance education today?

### **Research Approach**

In this mixed methods study I utilized a survey (Appendix A), which provided a numeric description of the opinions, trends and attitudes of a cross-sectional sample of 338 tap teachers, and one-on-one interviews of nine teachers, which provided an in-depth understanding of the experience of teachers who represented diversity in age, gender, size of student population, location and ownership of studios, and competition participation. Seeking a diverse sample ensured that different voices would be represented. My considerations included whether there were generational differences associated with teacher decisions about competitions, music, choreography, and curriculum and whether rural studios approached curricula differently than suburban studios. Including teachers who compete was critical to my understanding the competition phenomenon.

The survey data provided basic descriptive information about teaching tap in the private sector but were not intended to illuminate tap educators' deeper understandings of the experience of teaching tap. To gather that information, I conducted interviews to explore the phenomenon of teaching tap dance. The questions I formulated for and asked during a pilot study that took place in the summer of 2017 informed the questions I asked in this study.

Capitalizing on the strengths of each quantitative and qualitative method is a fundamental principle of mixed methods research resulting in a study that can produce corroborating evidence (Johnson & Turner, 2003). For this purpose, the interview guide (Appendix B) aligns with survey questions. Another feature of mixing methods of inquiry is the opportunity for surprising and divergent data to emerge and for new questions to be raised (Greene, 2007). By combining the quantitative data collected in a web-based survey with the qualitative data I gleaned from the interviews, I grounded my findings in both research traditions.

### **Assumptions**

My role as a tap dance educator, studio owner for 38 years, author and creator of tap-dance related teaching tools, and master tap dance teacher has led me to enter this study with certain assumptions. First, I believe that teaching tap dance requires a special appreciation for the artistry and respect for the traditions and history that characterize this art form. This assumption is based on the feedback and behavior I've observed when teaching tap workshops to teachers at festivals and in the American Tap Dance Foundation (ATDF) Tap Teacher Training program. Teachers frequently use the word "love" in describing a phrase of movement, a new exercise, or a feeling they experience when tap dancing. A second assumption is that this appreciation for tap dance is not enough to provide the essential information needed to know how and what to teach. Being a strong tap dancer or loving tap dance does not make someone a qualified teacher,

although loving tap dance is a requirement. Third, I believe that an emphasis on “content-driven” classes that emphasize teacher-directed choreography provide the “what” about tap dance education but not the “how” or “why.” By addressing only the appearance of the dance, the musicality and roots of the movements are missing, and dancers are not experiencing the deeper connection with music, sound, rhythm and history that tap dance instruction can provide. A fourth assumption is that dance competitions fail to provide tap dancers with knowledgeable judges, and appropriate flooring and amplification. This results in tap dance competition routines that emphasize flash tricks and presentation over rhythm and sound. Rather than celebrating excellence in tap dance, as defined by intricate rhythms and dynamic tones and shading, dance competitions focus on how the tap dance looks.

### **The Researcher**

I started tap dancing when I was six years old and continue to take classes and teach 12 hours a week to students ranging from 6 to 80 years old. I have owned a dance studio for 38 years. I developed a tap dance curriculum and methodology based on my personal experience and understanding of how people learn. This rhythm-first holistic approach resulted in two tap teaching manuals, DVDs, tap history posters and other classroom tap teaching tools (Goldberg, 2013, 2015). After publishing these materials, I decided to pursue a scholarly study of tap dance education.

As a dance studio owner and teacher, I have encountered the same challenges of teaching, staffing, and maintaining a viable business model as my participants. Like them, I have to stay relevant amidst the outside influences that are changing the public’s perception of dance. I acknowledge my biases around the topics of tap teacher training and curriculum, private studio business, and dance competitions. In the first two areas, I believe that private sector tap dance

educators should be required to demonstrate understanding of pedagogy, curriculum, child development and “best practices” in dance education. Tap curricula can go beyond the simple reproduction of teacher-demonstrated choreography and include tap history, music theory, vocabulary, improvisation, and vocalizing. In addition, students can be invited to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving activities within the context of tap lessons. Tap dance offers students the opportunity to improve their physical, social, and cognitive well-being, regardless of age or ability, due to its emphasis on rhythmic patterns and connections - with oneself, with others, with music and with the earth. I have been greatly influenced by Billy Siegenfeld and his Jump Rhythm Technique©, which “promotes grounding the body so that it can move with power and efficiency, singing as well as dancing the rhythms of movement, and using rhythm-driven group and partner dancing to build community” (Siegenfeld, 2009, p. 111). “Standing down straight” requires that students connect with self and community and, through this groundedness, increase their ability for rhythmic expression (Siegenfeld, 2009).

My biases in the area of dance competitions are based on my opinion that they: 1) exclude dancers without financial capital; 2) marginalize and discourage dancers who do not have a standardized body type - long, lean, flexible and strong – by overvaluing those who do; and 3) often objectify young girls’ bodies with inappropriately sexualized costumes and choreography. In addition, dance competitions are not regulated and, without training for judges and a standardized scoring system, they lack professionalism and credibility.

By reflecting on these biases, I place myself in the community of individuals I seek to understand. My commitment is to remain vulnerable and to practice empathic neutrality, “understanding a person’s situation and perspective without judging the person – and communicating that understanding with authenticity to build rapport, trust, and openness”

(Patton, 2015, p. 57). My closeness to the topic provides insight but is also a liability. To address this concern, I commit to procedures such as member checking, triangulation of methods and data sources, and constant reflection.

Private sector dance studio owners and teachers are often left out of important conversations about research and new practices and are left to respond to the commercial trends and economic realities of business ownership without the benefit of evidence-based data. As a member of this community and as an established leader in tap dance education, I have the opportunity to represent the private studio tap teacher. This voice is missing from conversations about tap dance education. As dance becomes more integrated into public school classrooms and as vernacular dance styles gain a foothold in academia, research related to private sector tap dance teachers' experiences will add important data to the discourse about tap dance's place in dance education and in dance teacher training. I hope that this study will lead to a greater understanding of the experience of teaching tap dance in the private sector and inspire those in the field of tap dance education to consider the influences that guide teachers in programming decisions. It is time for dance teacher education programs and dance-related businesses to respond to the concerns of tap dance educators in the private sector studios. This research will fill a void in the literature about dance education.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The purpose of my study was to understand the experience of tap dance educators in the private sector studio. A search of peer-reviewed articles on the topic of tap dance education provided discussion of tap dance history but no discussion of issues related to teaching tap dance or training to be a tap dance teacher. Several topics have received limited attention: dance and dance teacher training in higher education, the benefits of dance education, and the impact of dance competitions on dance education. The topic of dance competitions is unique to the private sector studio; the limited but emerging literature on this topic provided important data to support my inquiry into dance competitions and their influence on tap dance education.

Section One of this chapter presents a brief history of dance education as it moved from the private studio to higher education and to K-12 public school settings, and Section Two presents a review of the literature on dance competitions.

### **Section One: Dance Teacher Training**

#### **Brief History of Dance Education**

Tap dance education has changed significantly since its informal beginnings in places like the Hooper's Club, where, during the early 1920s, rhythms and footwork were shared and stolen as tap dancers experimented and showed off new moves to impress their fellow hoofers. Although one-on-one tap sessions continue to occur in living rooms, on street corners, and in studios, most dance education takes place in group classes in private dance studios (Gilbert, 2005). Tap, along with ballet and jazz, is traditionally offered in studios which may be located in teacher's homes, in strip malls, in community arts centers, or in commercial buildings. With no government oversight, dance education in the private sector is designed by the studio owner, who balances the need to maintain a fiscally successful business with the desire to share her/his



passion for dance. All dance educators, whether in private studios, public schools, or in higher education, face similar demands to be relevant, inclusive and affordable, advocating for dance to be valued and accessible to all. As the benefits of dance, as an activity that enhances one's physical, social and cognitive health have become more widely realized, the need for qualified dance teachers has expanded. "Who are our tap dance teachers, what are they teaching, and how are they being trained?" are questions posed by my study. Dance researchers across the country (Bonbright, 2002; Cohen & Posey, 2002; Gilbert, 2005; Risner & Barr, 2015; Risner & Stinson, 2010; Westreich, 2003) have asked this question of dance education in general. Research on tap dance education and teacher training is lacking; thus, this review will include relevant discussions that can be applied to tap dance education in the private sector studio.

**Dance in the private sector dance studio.** Dance education in the United States as an art form that is taught from one person to another or to a group in a formal setting, has many origins. Isabella Duncan taught her unique, unstructured approach to dance in her living room studio in the late 1800s (Holzknecht et al., 2008). More organized lessons based on one of many ballet pedagogies started in metropolitan areas around the same time as more and more European dancers migrated to the United States and opened ballet academies. The typical neighborhood dance studio, offering instruction in multiple styles of dance, started in the early 1900s as both male and female vaudeville performers hung up their shoes and dedicated themselves to teaching. Other studios opened in major urban cities where dancers sought training to perform in movie musicals and Broadway shows. The Hazel Boone Studio, the oldest family-run studio in the country, opened in 1910 in Boston and continues to operate today in Canton, MA. There are now 49,000 private sector dance studios in the U.S. (Austin et al, 2019).

**Dance in public K-12 education.** At the same time as private dance studios were opening in the early 20th century, dance found its way into public education in physical education classes for women, where physical as well as intellectual development was emphasized. The educational value of dance was promoted through the work of John Dewey (1934) and other philosophers who advocated a progressive approach to education aimed at active, embodied, experiential learning instead of passive methods like rote memorization. Dance education in the public classroom was delivered through gym teachers or through enlightened teachers who believed that teaching to the whole person would result in a deeper, more meaningful educational experience.

A shift in priorities occurred in 1957 during the Cold War after the Soviets succeeded in launching Sputnik, challenging U.S. superpower primacy (J. M. Bonbright, 2007). As a result, educational values shifted to an emphasis on math, science, foreign languages, and standardized test scores, all but eliminating dance programming in public education. The arts became marginalized as extra-curricular and were deemed unworthy of funding. Dance, like other art forms, was considered a frill, and dance education was increasingly left to be taught in the private studio, which thrived during a time when movie theatres and television were introducing families to the latest trends in dance.

The federal government, beginning with the Kennedy administration in 1962, and the appointment of August Heckscher as Special Consultant on the Arts, renewed interest in arts education. The National Endowment for the Arts and for the Humanities was established in 1965. Additional legislation through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) "...brought educators, administrators, arts educators, and artists together for the first time, and opened the door to new ways of thinking about the government's role in the arts and education"

(Bonbright, 2007, p. 3). In 1973-74, major government funding expanded the Artists-in-Schools (AIS) programs to include dance, thus continuing its gradual transition to becoming a fine arts subject in K-12 education.

Since then, several government administrations, initiatives and national reports have furthered arts in education. Among these are the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, signed by President Clinton in 1994 and the *National Standards in Arts Education*, originally written in 1994 and recently revised as the *National Core Arts Standards, 2014*. Dance finally emerged on level footing with other core subjects. Becoming an equal partner raised, among other issues, the need to establish standards, provide for assessment, do research, and identify teacher qualifications, and certification requirements in the arts. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), signed by George W. Bush, furthered the need for standardized assessments. With emphasis placed on test scores, funding soon was directed almost exclusively to core academic subjects, leaving the fine arts in jeopardy. Progress in developing standards, assessments, and teacher qualifications for dance was slow. Dance, as a fine art, was included as a core subject but, because it was not easily quantifiable, funding was redirected to subjects like math and science, and dance all but disappeared from school programming. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015 replaced the NCLB and provided for a well-rounded education rather than an emphasis on core academic subjects. Responsibility returned to the individual states and many are directing funds to integrating the arts, including dance.

Key findings from a recent survey by the National Dance Educators Organization (NDEO, 2017) found that almost all public schools offer music instruction but only 3% of the schools surveyed offered specific instruction in dance. Among those, 57% of teachers were arts specialists, up from 38% in 1999-2000. In secondary schools, dance was taught 53% of the time

by full-time dance specialists, 13% by part-time dance specialists, and 31% by other instructors (artists-in-residence, classroom teachers, other faculty or volunteers). Dance education in the public pre- K-12 schools still remains dependent on the availability of funding, space, qualified instructors, and administrative support. No data defines the type of dance offered in these public school programs, but personal conversations indicate that most public school dance resembles creative, interpretive movement, not instruction in a formal dance genre such as ballet, modern, jazz or tap.

**Dance in higher education.** Margaret H'Doubler, who studied with John Dewey, established the first dance teacher training program in 1926 in Wisconsin. Between then and the early 1970s, dance in higher education continued to be closely aligned with women's physical education programs (Bonbright, 2007). H'Doubler's effort to conceptualize dance and teach it as a science and a creative art was furthered by Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1930) in his book, *Eurhythmics, Art and Education* and also by Rudolph Laban and his work in modern dance and movement analysis (1928, 1975). Modern dance established a foothold in higher education dance programs with the establishment in 1934 of Bennington College's Summer School of Dance. Dancer/educator Martha Hill brought established dancers and choreographers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey together to develop a model for university-level education programs. Since then, modern dance has maintained an elite position in academia.

With the passing of Title IX (1972), a federal civil rights law barring discrimination based on sex from any federally-funded programs, and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (1974), prohibiting discrimination against faculty, staff or students or segregation based on race, physical education programs became co-ed and dance programming moved out and joined other

fine and performing arts. The work of Martha Hill and others supported this transition to dance as an academic exercise, joining music, visual arts and theatre in fine arts departments.

### **Dance Teacher Training**

Dance teachers receive their teacher training in both formal and informal ways. Some receive degrees in dance education from a university, others study in a specific modern or ballet technique at a private academy. Many dance teachers receive training through their own teachers and teach the way they were taught. Summer intensives and conferences appeal to some dance teachers while others participate in weekend workshops, visit online sites, or study from a teaching manual. The training required to teach in private sector studios, K-12 public schools, or universities varies with each setting and state, and the need to obtain certification motivates many dance educators to participate in formal dance teacher training. With no certification required to teach in a private sector studio, most private sector teachers receive no formal dance teacher education.

**Issues of certification.** An important topic related to dance education programs is the subject of dance teacher certification. There are numerous dance teaching certificate programs offered throughout the country. With no national standards, the value of each certificate is in the hands of the individual who earns it and in the power of the person who hires them. A recent mixed-methods study sought to understand the attitudes of teaching artists in dance and theatre arts towards a potential credential program (Risner & Anderson, 2015). The authors found diverse perspectives. Some participants argued for the benefits of professionalizing the field; others expressed concern that standardization would negatively affect the artistry. Additional concerns ranged from the cost and time involved in a credential program to the question of how such a program would be administered. For any credentialed dance teaching artist program to

become a reality, all affected individuals must join the conversation (Saraniero, 2009). Gilbert (2005) calls for reaching consensus on curriculum issues, organizing research, and forming partnerships so that more dance educators become trained and certified, and share research, ideas, and networks. Bringing all stakeholders to the table is a challenge and, with no convincing demand for credentialed programs, this topic continues to be hotly debated among all dance educators, with no discernible action plan in place.

It's important to note that the setting where one teaches dictates the need for certification. As mentioned, no certification is required to teach in the private sector. Most universities require an MFA or advanced degree in dance, and a public-school K-12 dance educator requires a certificate or licensure issued by a state's Department of Education, as well as an undergraduate degree and related coursework in education as well as dance (Bonbright & Faber, 2004). Unfortunately, states vary in additional requirements and in implementing national standards originally specified in NCLB of 2001. During the years of NCLB, Gilbert (2005) recommended that every dance educator include dance vocabulary, history, anatomy, fundamental technique, improvisation or choreography, feedback, and reflection in every class. She further promoted a conceptual approach that engaged the whole brain, providing deep learning. These recommendations continue to have merit today. There is no way to know if teachers are following Gilbert's suggestions or whether teacher training programs in higher education are educating students in her conceptual approach to learning.

To gain a fuller understanding of how tap teacher training compares with other genres, I will present a brief discussion of ballet and modern dance teacher training.

**Genre-specific programs.**

*Ballet and modern dance teacher training.* Genre-specific associations such as American Ballet Theatre and Royal Academy of Dance provide intensive teacher training programs in their particular ballet techniques. Likewise, training in a specific modern dance technique such as Graham or Horton requires an extended commitment that includes advanced repertory and teaching internships at a designated school, such as the Alvin Ailey School in NYC. My personal conversations with colleagues suggest that the approach used in these genre-specific programs remains teacher-centered and focused on technique, with little opportunity for student-centered projects in these curricula. Risner and Stinson (2010) point out that the auditions required to enter such private, higher-education programs eliminate those unable to access formal dance training, thus setting up a socioeconomic barrier to diversity among dancers and teachers. Although Misty Copeland made history as the first African American female principal dancer with the prestigious American Ballet Theatre in 2015, change in the color of ballet has been slow, as has been diversity in the color and gender of dance teachers. (The topic of gender and race in dance education is not within the scope of this dissertation but is a topic of great importance, especially when discussing tap dance, a genre with deep African American roots).

*Tap teacher training.* Unlike ballet and modern, there is currently no tap curriculum that presents a specific pedagogy and methodology that is recognized and accepted by a large group of dance teachers in the U.S. In comparison, the United Kingdom has a national tap curriculum that includes regular assessments and core standards monitored by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing. Within the U.S., the National Dance Educators Organization (NDEO) recently revised the core standards that include tap dance, but only approximately 30% of their

membership are private sector studios and there is no data as to who is using these standards to guide their tap programming. I am one of the minority private studio members and have reviewed the standards. Although they include important topics that should be part of a tap curriculum, such as vocabulary, history, and improvisation, they are more geared to the K-12 public school teacher who needs to meet certain academic goals. It may not be reasonable to develop tap dance standards that would satisfy all populations and settings, but conversations between universities, K-12 programs, and private sector tap educators would help identify common concerns and goals. The NDEO standards are a good starting point for such conversations to take place.

The American Tap Dance Foundation (ATDF) offers a certificate at the successful completion of its Tap Teacher Training Program, one of the few dance teacher education programs in the United States dedicated to tap dance. I have been on the faculty of this program since it started in 2014. This comprehensive approach to teaching rhythm tap technique, repertory, and performance skills includes pedagogy, jazz music concepts, tap composition, improvisation, and tap history, based on the Copasetic canon. As discussed in Chapter One, the Copasetics was a fraternal organization of tap dancers who came together upon the death of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson to support and strengthen their friendships as they pursued a life in tap dance. Several classic tap routines, handed down from these performers, are taught as part of the curriculum. These include the Cole Stroll, the New Low-Down, the Shim Sham Shimmy, and Laura. Choreography designed by Brenda Bufalino is also taught, such as the Soft Shoe, Strike up the Band, and specific exercises that teach steps such as flaps, and paddle and rolls.

The tap course is offered in New York City for one week during the summer. It continues through the year under the guidance of a mentor who views video footage of the student teacher



dancing and teaching specific skills and choreography. This complex, interpersonal and dynamic learning relationship challenges both mentee and mentor to reflect on personal teaching practice, pedagogy, and identity (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Hauschild-Mork, 2012; Risner & Anderson, 2015). Working as a mentor for the last five years has forced me to clarify my own approach and priorities. Encouraging the mentees to self-reflect on the video footage is a successful tool that brings increased understanding and acceptance of the observations being shared. This positive benefit of video documentation was confirmed in a recent thesis about video as a tool for giving and receiving feedback (Thomas, 2014). The ATDF Teacher Training Program is continuing to evolve and, during the summer of 2020, will be offering expanded Foundational Training, including Pre-Tap and Early Curriculums, and Rhythm Tap is Music.

The Chicago Human Rhythm Project (CHRP) presents an intensive summer festival that includes teacher training seminars with leading tap educators. Unlike the ATDF course, which focuses on a common Copasetic curriculum, the teachers in the CHRP teacher training program present their personal approach to tap dance education. Other tap festivals that offer teacher-focused classes include the D.C. Tap Festival, the Sole to Soul Tap Festival in Austin, Texas, and the Beantown Tap Festival, now known as the Boston Tap Party. Individual tap dance educators, such as Heather Cornell, offer their own intensive teacher-training workshops. Heather, who is celebrating her 30<sup>th</sup> year of such offerings, call hers a “Tap Lab or Salon” and, like the ATDF, often designs her classes as homage to a hooper from the golden age of tap, such as Eddie Brown. A year-long teacher-training program offered in Barcelona under the direction of Guillem Alonso, and the Jimmy Slyde Institute offered by Roxanne Semadini in France, demonstrate a universal interest in tap teacher education.

The financial commitment to attend one of these intensive tap training experiences is high, especially when one considers the cost of travel and housing in a metropolitan community. With no requirement for certification, tap dance educators may opt for less expensive training opportunities such as online courses, books, and DVDs.

As mentioned in Chapter One, several tap dance educators, including myself, have developed teaching manuals for the private studio teacher. One of these, the Al Gilbert Technique, started in 1952 and continues to be followed today. The website which sells his songs and dances states that it is “the world’s most used tap technique” ([www.musicworksunlimited.com/collections/al-gilbert](http://www.musicworksunlimited.com/collections/al-gilbert)). Likewise, curricula by Judy Ann Bassing, Debbie Dee, Diane Gudat and myself serve as guides for studios seeking direction and support for their tap programs. These master teacher curricula are often shared at conferences or teacher-training programs offered through a dance teacher organization or at a conference. Most of these manuals provide guidelines for what to teach, and how to use specific movements in combos and choreography. Some offer more conceptual ideas for developing musicality, improvisation skills, and appreciation for tap history (Goldberg, 2018).

**Private-sector dance studio organizations.** In a doctoral dissertation in which she interviewed private studio owners in South Carolina, McLaine (2011) found that interviewees credited former teachers and dance organizations such as Dance Masters of America (DMA) for their pedagogical practice rather than knowledge attained in formal educational settings. There is no academic, peer-reviewed literature available on the programs offered by the membership organizations that uniquely serve the private sector dance studio population. Information on each organization’s website offered brief descriptions of such training programs.

*Dance teacher organizations' teacher training programs.* Since the early 1900s, many private studio teachers have sought more training through a local or national non-profit dance teacher organization (Posey, 2002). As a member of one of these organizations, I am personally familiar with several programs. Dance Educators of America (DEA), the Dance Teachers' Club of Boston (DTCB), and Dance Masters of America (DMA) are three examples of organizations that offer intensive training programs that result in a Certificate of Completion. Each offers a summer program ranging from three days to one week per summer for two- to four-years. Several master teachers focus on basic teaching methods for pre-school children through teens in tap, jazz, ballet, and lyrical/contemporary. Some include training in teaching hip-hop, acrobatics, ballroom and more. Most offer specialty classes in subjects like kinesiology, choreography, and conditioning. Occasionally, music theory is integrated into lessons. All are similar in their focus on teaching teachers how and what to teach and all require successful scoring on an exam to receive the Certificate of Completion. I received such a certificate more than 30 years ago. It is a problem that no regulations required that I receive this certificate, or that I continue training beyond receiving it.

*Dance teacher conferences.* A recent trend in dance education has been programming offered at summer dance teacher conferences offered by private companies. The Rhee Gold Company, Dance Teacher Summit, Dance Teacher Web, and More Than Just Great Dancing are just some of the companies that offer summer workshop experiences, with course titles ranging from Preschool Dance, to Acrobatics, Contemporary for Children, and Tap Combos. Many include Injury Prevention, Pilates for Dancers, Choreography, and Dancers with Disabilities classes. Most, too, offer business classes that include Tips on Marketing, Technology in the Classroom, and Studio Management. Classes are taught by master teachers who are either

established experts in their particular fields, or one of the current winners of *SYTYCD*. Dance Teacher Web acknowledges that, “It was important to us that our conference and expo environment be nurturing, educational and welcoming to all in attendance. We envisioned a creative oasis where everyone involved would feel relaxed, re-energized and open to learning and sharing” (Sirico & Sirico, 2020, para. 4). They claim to offer college credit for summer conference participants through the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and they promote their program as being designed by college educators. Unlike the teacher training programs run by teacher organizations, which require an exam and completion of a detailed course of study that spans several years, each of these companies provides a Certificate of Participation for a single weekend or week of classes.

As the creator of a tap teaching approach, I have had the opportunity to teach at the Dance Studio Life Conference on several occasions. Based on personal experience and the information gained from colleagues who teach at or attend other conferences, the number of participants can range from 100 to 1000 teachers per week. Many of these companies also offer weekend retreats throughout the year. The Dance Life Retreat Center in Norton, MA exemplifies this approach. “*It is not a convention or a conference.* We welcome a world-wide following of dance school owners and teachers. The objective is simple: create a beautiful place to learn, share and rejuvenate the dance spirit. It is an intimate setting for the mind, body and soul of the dance teacher. (Gold, 2020, para. 2). Personal experience confirms that attendees are there to become better teachers and business owners and are looking to the master educator for help. With no guidelines to follow, each master educator decides the focus and format of her/his own classes.

With glitzy marketing, popular educators, and exotic locations, dance teacher conferences, retreat centers and training programs attract thousands of dance teachers who seek continuing education, and particularly, new choreography ideas. This common approach supports Warburton's term "folk pedagogy," the view that dance education is necessarily authoritarian, that teachers need to be seen as giving something and students need to be able to show what they learned (Warburton, 2003, p. 13). It's not surprising that dance studio owners would be attracted to programs that are content-based and that include multiple styles of dance. Success in the private studio business is largely dependent on the parents' satisfaction with the final "product" performed at an annual recital, or with a trophy won at a dance competition.

**Higher education.** A 2019 College Dance Guide produced by dancemedia, a large dance publishing company, lists 637 university and college dance programs. There is no data regarding the availability of tap courses but an informal inquiry of college representatives at the 2019 NDEO conference indicates that most college dance and dance education programs include no tap dance training. A recent article in Dance Magazine confirmed this observation, "We have over 600 college dance programs in the United States, and less than 10 of them focus on something other than ballet or modern" (McCarthy-Brown, 2020, p. 21). All of the dance major programs include a competitive audition process that is ballet- or modern-based, perpetuating the elitism that permeates the private ballet academies discussed earlier. This intense audition process often eliminates the dancer who was trained in the private sector, which focuses less on ballet technique and more on a multi-discipline experience in dance. For those private sector students who are accepted into college dance-major programs, the transition can be difficult, particularly if the student participated in dance competitions, where the product is emphasized over the process of learning (Schupp & Clemente, 2010).

There are a wide variety of approaches to training dance educators in higher education and many programs can only be compared based on their coursework requirements, which tells nothing about the content of the course. Although all universities will offer Dance Pedagogy, many will vary in the approach. Warburton challenges his colleagues in higher education to “...think about the ways our jargon-filled vocabulary, teaching approaches, and attitude of supervision distance us from caring. This caring calls for a “willingness to *let others learn in an environment of mutual effort and responsibility*” (Warburton, 2004, p. 94). Stinson also calls for higher education to examine the power structures that inevitably give professors power over their students, and that becomes self-perpetuating as students move themselves into positions of power when they join the teaching profession (Stinson, 1999).

Higher education has been at the forefront of new directions in other dance forms. The movement to incorporate cultural, historical, and social issues into dance education started in colleges and universities. There, discrimination in major ballet companies was first discussed and multicultural dance forms were added. Although these efforts may have increased students’ appreciation for a range of dance forms, they unfortunately have failed to challenge assumptions about the nature of dance itself, because dance educators have not moved beyond a superficial treatment of other cultures (Risner & Stinson, 2010; Bouey, 2020). Honest reflection and dialogue in some college communities have given rise to important changes, particularly in the area of teaching dance history, where the movement to include vernacular dance is bringing increased respect and attention to marginalized forms such as tap and jazz dance (Kosstrin & George-Graves, 2019).

There is promising movement toward humanizing and expanding college-level dance teacher education by including sociocultural as well as pedagogical training (Swain, 2013).

Risner & Barr (2015) developed an undergraduate dance pedagogy course taught from critical and feminist perspectives. Drawing on the work of Swain, they address the problem of curricula that produce teachers who merely meet the testing guidelines of the NCLB regulations. Stinson (1991) also supports a new approach to training educators through pedagogy that encourages exploration and understanding of the underlying concepts of dance movement, choreography, and teaching. She believes that dance technique should be taught as a tool of empowerment, providing students with the means to accomplish their own artistic challenges.

Risner and Barr (2015) argue that a course that adds social issues to those of technical pedagogy will better prepare teachers for a complex world. These issues include gendered learning and teaching, diversity of learning styles, socioeconomic factors, and ethnic and racial disparities in educational achievement. Their online, NDEO dance pedagogy course, *Foundations of Dance*, begins with an overview of dance education in general and an examination of the student's individual dance education. The aim of this course is to prepare teachers to face the inequities that will confront them and their students. It is of utmost importance to the authors that the prospective teacher considers the central questions, "What kind of teacher do I want to become?" and "What does it mean to be responsible for someone else's learning" (p. 85)? They hope that the answers to these questions will provide a vital missing link in methods-centric, "how-to" teacher preparation. Tap is well-suited to this training approach due to its rich cultural history.

***Online dance teacher training.*** Numerous online sites provide choreography, teaching tips, and weekly dance steps to inspire and assist the dance teacher in planning weekly lessons. There are several dedicated to tap dance education, including *Operation Tap*, one of several online sites that provide exercises and choreography to subscribers.

The NDEO runs the Online Professional Development Institute (OPDI)<sup>TM</sup> which offers online dance education courses ranging from pedagogy to history and much more. OPDI is accessible to all dance educators seeking professional development, although at this time, there is no course specifically dedicated to tap dance education. The courses appeal to those professionals who want to enhance domains of knowledge, learn new content areas, and strengthen their own teaching and learning skills. Based on my research, this is the only online program that offers courses that consider social foundations and critical and feminist pedagogies. Teachers can earn college credits for each course, which can then be applied to degree programs, or they can receive the Certificate in Dance Education (CiDE) by successfully completing 33 credits.

### **Conclusion**

The research cited in this literature review presents the complex factors facing the field of tap dance education that ground the need for my study. With no requirement for certification or continuing education, what drives the private studio teacher to pursue advanced training? Other questions that emerge from this review include: What is the most significant influence in a tap teacher's training? Are tap teachers influenced by college dance education degree programs? Are tap dance teachers focused on just the *steps*? The issue of tap dance teacher training is complex and involves entrenched educational systems in both the private and higher education sectors, and power struggles within and outside the tap dance education community. The results of my mixed methods study will provide data that can engage both higher education and the private sector community in relevant conversations about tap teacher training.



## **Section Two: Dance Competitions**

Dance competitions for children have become increasingly common in the private sector dance studio experience since 1963. This is not surprising given the popularity of television dance programs such as *Dancing with the Stars* and *SYTYCD*, which started in 2005, and *Dance Moms*, which premiered in 2011. Competitions have grown beyond a simple sharing of choreography between local studios to three-day events with adjudication, awards, and a complex exchange of capital. There are more than 150 unregulated competition companies that cater to children and teens aged six to eighteen. No data or literature is available that discusses tap dance and the current dance competition scene; thus, this literature review will present relevant sources that have applications to tap dance competition and private studios.

The major themes discussed include: early dance competition; dance competitions and the private sector dance studio; the business of dance competitions; economics; competition or non-competition studio; who competes; why compete; why not compete; judging; age-appropriateness; the impact of media; pedagogical concerns; gender, race, and class; and other dance competition models. Because the literature is limited, resources will include articles from peer-reviewed journals and books, newspaper articles, dance magazine articles, websites, dissertations, and personal communications.

### **Early Dance Competitions**

Although it is not a theme in the prevailing literature about dance competitions, understanding the early history of dance contests helps bring an historical perspective to the topic and demonstrates tap dance's early influence on competitions. According to dance historians, (Hill, 2010; Seibert, 2015; Stearns & Stearns, 1994) in the early 1700s, Irish indentured servants and West African slaves were brought to southern plantations where owners would build

platforms and invite other owners to bring their best dancers to compete for money and bragging rights. Throughout the 1800s in the antebellum U.S., lower and working class people of African, Irish and English descent participated in “challenge dancing” that drew crowds to theaters, taverns and circuses in urban cities, including the Five Points neighborhood in NYC (Masten, 2015). This blending of cultures and genres led to a dance form called “jigging.” Jig dancing, sometimes called hornpipe, walk-around or breakdown, was a valued skill performed by both men and women of different cultures. Money was exchanged and, just as importantly, social capital was gained. Intrinsic and additional financial benefits were available to the best “jiggers” who could gain acclaim by being hired to dance with vaudeville troupes or in minstrel shows (Hill, 2010).

One such dancer was William Henry Lane, hailed as the “King of all Dancers” after beating the reigning Irish American minstrel, John Diamond, in the mid-1800s. Charles Dickens, in “American Notes”, famously describes his visit to Pete Williams’ dance-house where he observed a man believed to be Lane, also known as Master Juba “turning in his knees ... spinning about on his toes and heels...all sorts of legs and no legs...” as he and his female partner win a match by combining Irish steps and African moves (Dickens, as cited in Stearns & Stearns, 1994, p. 46). This blending of dance genres is evident in today’s competition scene, where elements of ballet and jazz have combined to form a style called contemporary (Foster, 2019; Schupp, 2018a). Likewise, “winning” still results in celebrity status and acclaim, as competition stars enter the commercial dance world (Schupp, 2018a).

During the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cakewalk evolved from the walk-around to become a dance craze that attracted contestants to many venues, including Madison Square Garden (Stearns & Stearns, 1994). Initially a satire of the Southern gentleman, it soon became a

popular dance style performed by both men and women that paved the way for ballroom dances. The cakewalk, a very serious and competitive dance sport, allowed for improvisation that showcased fancy footwork.

Solo dance contests often featured buck and wing dancing, which evolved from jigging and which became synonymous with tap dancing. Buck-dancing contests became formalized with judges sitting beside, before, and sometimes beneath a stage to score dancers' clarity, speed and presentation. As in the cakewalk, improvisation was a key factor in winning.

One setting where improvisational skills were especially honed and rewarded was the Hooper's Club in Harlem, a small room in the back of a comedy club that served as a tap dancer's hangout in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Hill, 2010). These mostly African American gentlemen engaged in friendly contests that inspired fast footwork, swinging rhythms and flashy tricks. Jeni LeGon, an African American tap dancer, was one of the only women, and Hal Leroy was one of the only white men invited to dance (Frank, 1990). This focus on improvisation continues today at tap dance festivals that include a "cutting contest" where one dancer goes up against another, with no separation by gender or race. Whoever has the best footwork wins, determined by the teachers of the festival and the audience (Hill, 2010). In contrast, the typical tap dance in today's dance competition includes no improvisation. The emphasis is on a theatrically-driven performance with clean lines and precise movements, often including ballet-like pirouettes and sharp hip-hop patterns, creating a blended form of tap dance (personal observation and communications).

Other competitive dance forms emerging during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century included the Charleston and the Lindy. Nightly contests at the Savoy Ballroom in NYC pitted lindy-hoppers of all kinds in competition to see who could soar the highest and perform the most unique

breakaway, or solo improvisation (Stearns & Stearns, 1994). The Lindy revolutionized dance and its popularity inspired both black and white teenagers to dance to jukebox music across the United States. Rock and roll soon replaced swing music as the 50s television program, *Dick Clark and American Bandstand* (1952-89) commercialized dance, informing audiences about American pop dance and music culture – a preview of MTV, YouTube, Instagram and today’s dance competition reality TV shows *SYTYCD*, *Dance Moms*, *World of Dance*, and *America’s Best Dance Crews*. These television dance contests gave rise to a culture of competition that manifests itself in theatres, high school auditoriums, and hotel function rooms where private dance studios bring students to experience the high-drama that is depicted on television screens (Feidelson, 2017).

### **Dance Competitions and the Private Sector Dance Studio**

One television program in particular, *Dance Moms*, follows a group of young dancers aged 13 – 20 as they train and compete in dance competitions. Now in its eighth season, *Dance Moms* is greatly influencing participation in competitions. According to Abby Lee Miller, “Competitions are a business, first and foremost” (Lee, as cited in LaRocco, 2012, para. 3). Miller is the founder of the Abby Lee Dance Company and has starred on the reality television drama, *Dance Moms*, for eight seasons, starting in 2011. The Dance Masters of America (DMA) organization terminated Ms. Miller’s membership with this comment: “Miller's reality television show, *Dance Moms* “ [is] a total misrepresentation of our dance educators and their students and is detrimental to the dance profession”(DSL, 2012, para. 1). Miller recently encountered legal and financial battles including an assault charge by one of her dancers. Despite this negative publicity, *Dance Moms* continues to inspire students and teachers, and inform parents and society about what dance is, with 3.7 million Instagram followers and a new season which aired

in June 2019 on Lifetime ([www.mylifetime.com/shows/dance-moms](http://www.mylifetime.com/shows/dance-moms)). Russell, Schaefer, and Reilly (2018) criticized *Dance Moms* for presenting young girls in nude costumes in “Topless Showgirls”, an explicit burlesque-style competition dance that was eventually pulled from *Dance Moms*. Given the continued popularity of this program, one must ask whether *Dance Moms* is “a total misrepresentation” of what is happening in dance education today.

Tap dance has also been influenced by the popular television reality dance show, *So You Think You Can Dance* (SYTYCD). While this show has brought attention to the status of dance in the U.S., it has arguably marginalized tap when influential celebrities such as creator Nigel Lythgoe make comments such as, “Tap dancers find it very difficult to do anything other than tap if that is all they have been trained in because, again, it's a whole different ballgame that you're constantly working on - bent legs, loose ankles - which you cannot afford to do when you're doing jumps or anything else” (Lythgoe, n.d.).

*Dance Moms* and other television dance competition programs such as *SYTYCD* influence America’s perception of dance education. The line between dance as art and dance as sport is becoming blurred as studios strive to duplicate the commercial dance performances seen on television and in social media. Dance is becoming framed by these images, and tap dance is often missing from this contemporary scene.

### **The Business of Dance Competitions**

Within the past ten years, dance scholars have begun to look more closely at this \$486.6 million dollar industry that is greatly impacting the field of dance education (Schupp, 2018a, 2019; Weisbrod, 2010). The first dance competition was held in 1963 through DMA, a national dance teacher organization. The Summer Dance Festival, the first private dance competition, founded by Michael Valentic, was formed in 1970 (Guarino, 2014). It wasn’t long before other

private dance competition companies saw the business-potential of bringing studios together to compete. For many years, the scene was low-tech with no scenery or lighting, with a panel of judges sitting in the front of the stage and family and other contestants sitting in the audience. That changed in 1978 when Showstopper, one of the oldest competition businesses, started offering an experience with professional lighting and sound, glitzy backdrops, and large stages, providing a classy, top-notch venue in which to “sell dance.” The industry grew rapidly when leaders such as Joe Tremaine in 1981 expanded his company, Tremaine Dance Conventions and Competitions, to include multiple cities and weekend workshops. His faculty now travels to twenty-five cities a year. Another leader in the industry is Joe Lanteri, Executive Director of New York City Dance Alliance (NYCDA), which tours approximately twenty-three cities a year. There are now over 150 for-profit corporations sponsoring multi-day dance competitions (Foster, 2019).

Dancers perform in categories grouped by age, size of group and genre (Foster, 2019, Guarino, 2014; Schupp, 2018a). Genres include tap, jazz, hip-hop, contemporary, and musical theatre and the size ranges from solos to duos, trios, small and large groups, lines and productions. A typical weekend starts at 4:00 pm on Friday with solo and duo teen categories and ends with award presentations. Saturday starts as early as 8:00 am with the young 5 - 7 year old groups, followed by 9 – 12 year old solo jazz or tap routines, junior teens and then senior teens. Each routine gets two and a half minutes on stage. Awards are given at two or three different breaks, and the day ends at 11:00 pm. Sunday starts at 8:00 am with teen solos and duos and ends after all awards are presented. A typical dance competition will have 400 - 600 entries over a weekend.

Trophies and prizes are usually awarded based on a 100-point system, but no standard scoring measurement regulates the industry. Dance routines that achieve a certain score are invited to nationals. Every dance school goes home with an award for each routine, based on the number of points it receives; the value of awards differs from competition to competition. For instance, one company may distribute Gold Awards to their highest scorers while another may call their highest award, Platinum. The NYCDA started awarding college scholarships in 2009 and continues to work toward developing relationships with higher education (Guarino, 2014). Other competition companies are beginning to offer cash prizes. Trophies and scholarships provide marketing opportunities to attract new students, which results in financial gain for the studios.

**Economics.** The cost of entering competitions is passed on to students and is in addition to regular tuition for classes. Each routine is charged a separate fee that can range from \$40-\$50 per person for a group, \$50-\$55 for duos and trios, and \$100-\$110 for solos (Schupp, 2017). It is estimated that participants spend from \$1000 a month to \$30,000 a year, when including the cost of costumes, props, choreographer fees, team gear, travel, hotel, and fees paid to the studio owner for costs incurred in managing a competition team (Foster, 2019; Schupp, 2017). There is no charge to view the competition, but program books can cost from \$5 – \$10. Competition teams are an income source for private studios, offering additional teaching and administrative hours for staff and faculty, in addition to profits made on costuming and registration fees, etc. (Foster, 2019).

Schupp (2018a) has studied the dance competition phenomenon extensively and points to a limited National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) budget as one of the reasons that families are looking at dance competition studios for dance training. With limited public funds, many public

schools and community centers cannot maintain dance programs, resulting in the fact that most dance training in the United States takes place in the private-sector studio (Gilbert, 2005).

Reality television dance programs offer talented young dancers an opportunity to showcase their talent, and to gain financial and/or social capital from a winning performance. Parents are willing to make a financial investment in their child's dance education because they view the competition experience as training ground for reality television competitions and as a gateway to careers in commercial dance as performers, teachers, and judges (Schupp, 2019). Dance competition is a complex exchange of capital between the families who participate, the studio owners, the competition corporations, and the companies that provide the costumes, venues, and trophies, etc. (Schupp, 2018a; Weisbrod, 2010).

### **Competition or Non-Competition Studio?**

It is estimated that there are from 32,000 (Schupp, 2018a) to 49,000 (Austin et al., 2019) private sector dance studios in the United States. Although the data is not definitive, what *is* clear is that studio owners are identifying their schools as competition or non-competition studios (Guarino, 2014). Although both kinds of studios are likely to have teams or companies, the non-competition studio promotes a recreational performing program vs. a competition program. Both are likely to offer a pre-professional experience, multiple days of training in several genres, for the serious student. Whereas a competition student may participate in anywhere from one to six competitions a year, a non-competition student on a private studio team may perform in one to six community events during a year. Both studios will produce an annual recital where dancers join other members of their studios to showcase choreography. The decision to compete is up to the studio owner and is an important factor in identifying a studio's mission and programming.



**Who competes?** In 2016, 52,000 dancers participated in Showstopper competitions (Feidelson, 2017). Although there are some variations, most competition companies cater to children ages five to eighteen, with some open to preschoolers and adults. Each of the 150 competition companies presents 25 to 45 events a year, including regional and national events, totaling approximately 5000 dance competitions yearly, welcoming from 15 to 50 teams that are based in privately-owned studios across the U.S. and Canada (Foster, 2019; Schupp, 2019). There is no data identifying the total number of students nor what percentage of entries is tap dance.

**Why compete?** Shannon (2016) explored factors that influenced girls' continued participation in competition dance through high school (as girls constitute the vast majority of participants). She conducted 17 semi-structured interviews of girls in one studio and found that three essential themes contributed to the girls' participation. In their studio, the instructor was willing to accommodate other non-dance activities and offered flexible participation. This flexibility contrasts sharply with the rules normally associated with dance competition schools, where attendance is closely monitored, and consequences are strictly enforced. Shannon's second and third factors - a love of performing and a supportive studio family environment - are often cited as benefits of competing (Feidelson, 2017; Shannon, 2016). Other benefits include intangible character traits: resilience, perseverance, time-management and self-awareness (Schupp, 2018c).

Schupp (2018c, 2019) suggests that Generation Z youth, born mid-1990s to early 2010s, who comprise most of the competition participants, seek feedback and criticism and embrace the opportunity to improve through hard work. Foster (2019) adds that a focus on routines provides dancers with a sense of accomplishment when they "hit" poses or pirouettes and "offers a deep

sense of individual satisfaction and empowerment during and after the performance” (p. 119). “For competitors, the hard work pays off in the moment of performance, their chance to sell their dancing to the audience and themselves, and that moment is perhaps the emotional axis around which the acquisition of performance abilities, transferable proficiencies, and community revolve” (Schupp, 2019, p. 60).

Studio owners compete in order to maintain enrollment and attract new students (Guarino, 2014). By promoting their winning dancers and teams, they present a successful marketing image and, for parents, the possibility that their child can be part of this winning experience. Competitions, although a costly enterprise, “...also generate revenues for the studios through the markups for convention registration fees, as well as housing, travel, and costumes” (Foster, 2019, p. 115). Socially, competitions offer studio owners and their dancers the opportunity to connect with each other and with other members of the dance community.

Although some dance educators may have graduated with advanced dance education degrees, it is often the status as a competition or non-competition studio that has more weight in parents' decisions about enrollment. This reality raises further questions about the importance of formal dance teacher training – if parents base enrollment decisions on the number of trophies a studio wins, then where is the motivation for studio teachers to obtain advanced training or college dance education degrees?

**Why not compete?** The non-competition experience and the reasons some studios decide against competing have not been documented although several authors have pointed out some negative aspects of the competition culture. Guarino (2014) discusses several controversies: the emphasis on tricks over artistry, the lack of entertainment value and individual expression, and the absence of a standard award and scoring system. “Some competitions base the scores on the

number of students and routines that a particular studio brings to the competition, rather than on the dancing itself” (anonymous teacher, as cited in Guarino, 2014, p. 202). Guarino worries that the prizes give dancers an unrealistic perception of their talent and an unrealistic expectation for placement in college dance classes. “Treating dance as a sport may be creating a generation of dancers who go through the motions without intent or creative impulse” (p. 203).

I made the decision not to compete after five years with a competition team during my early years of owning a private sector studio. Competing left me uncomfortable and at odds with my mission, which was to welcome dancers of all ability levels to share the joy of dance with others in our community. Dance competitions were not joyful for me and the community we were performing for consisted of parents and students from other competition schools, not the diverse community I desired. My pre-professional company now consists of 70 young dancers who perform in five or six community events a year in addition to the annual recital. Some of my closest colleagues have competition studios. We might differ on our approach, but we both seek opportunities for our students that offer occasions for personal and professional growth.

LaPointe-Crump (2007) calls on dance educators “to reconsider the long-held antagonism about this issue” (p. 4). LaRocco argues for the non-competition studios when she states, “The industry is unregulated, and there is no single set of accepted guidelines or standards” (LaRocco, 2012, para. 1). With no accountability or oversight, the dance competition business is “shifting practices within the dance world, further muddying the class divide between entertainment and art” (LaRocco, 2012, para. 6). Just as there are no licensing requirements for dance studios, there are no regulations in the dance competition industry, which leaves the worth of a competition experience up to the consumer.

In my personal experience and in conversation with other non-competition schools, I have identified several factors that contribute to the reason some studios choose not to compete: selecting one dancer over another for a spot on the team; choreographing for a prize rather than for artistic inquiry; responding to trends and parent/student expectations, rather than focusing on the process of learning and teaching dance; and investing large amounts of money that could be directed toward teacher and student training.

**Judging.** The lack of consistent judging is a frequent issue among competition teachers who complain that judges rarely have a background in all the genres they are judging, that there is no set rubric, and that decisions are highly subjective (Schupp, 2018c). Participants in my pilot study of 19 tap dance educators cited judges' lack of training in tap dance as a reason for their dissatisfaction with dance competitions. There is no established training program for judging in dance competitions and tensions around qualifications are common. Typically, a competition will have three judges who are either popular, master dance educators; current winners of *SYTYCD* or *World of Dance*; or social media celebrities. Studio owners receive inconsistent feedback in the form of a recording that is available online within a few days of the competition. In the past, a written form with notes was provided. I have personally seen evaluation forms with nothing checked except a comment, "Good job!" and I have listened to a two and a half-minute "feedback" cassette tape that had no comments.

In her study of dance competition culture and gender, Schupp (2017) asked her participants about judging. She used a mixed-methods approach employing a survey and individual interviews aiming to elaborate on survey answers. Her participants were in the 13 – 18 year range. Three out of 111 survey respondents were boys. Seven females participated in the interviews. The student respondents believed that boys are judged less stringently than girls

because there are fewer boys and fewer comparisons can be made. On the subject of judging, Schupp (2019) points out “... because objective technical and artistic criteria do not exist for most dance competitions, [these] standards stem from what competitors offer judges in performance. ... Teachers often strategize on how to highlight students’ strengths ... which perhaps explains the prevalence of ‘tricks’ within dance competitions” (p. 50). With no set standards, students and teachers learn what is expected by watching other competitors that are better than themselves (Schupp, 2019).

**Age-appropriateness.** One of the most controversial aspects of dance competitions is age-appropriateness in costumes, choreography and music choices. Several authors have addressed this widespread objectification of young girls (Guarino, 2014; Russell et al., 2014; Weisbrod, 2010).

Ultimately, I see more negatives than positives in commercial [dance] competitions. The commonly accepted objectification of the female image, the “us versus them” mentality, and the product-oriented emphasis are just a few of the philosophical problems inherent in commercial competitions. (James Robey, as cited in Guarino, p. 204).<sup>1</sup>

Parents and students want dancers to look like the latest pop star, and many teachers, although lobbying for age-appropriate costumes and choreography, cave into the pressure to please their customers (Risner et al., 2004). This rush to look and dance like the adults seen on MTV and YouTube results in sexualized costumes and movements that are deemed not appropriate for young girls (Russell et al., 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> James Robey is the director of the Ridgefield Conservatory of Dance in Ridgefield, CT.

Schupp (2017) discusses the term “industrial body”<sup>2</sup> as the body that works in the commercial dance industry and that represents the image sought by young competitive dancers. This body is concerned with the external frontal perspective, reinforced by the camera work in television dance competitions and by the placement of the judges in studio dance competitions. “Another key attribute of the industrial body seen in televised dance competitions is that every movement attempts to demonstrate the dancer’s heterosexual desirability as central to their identities and reasons for dancing” (Foster, 2013, as cited in Schupp, 2017, p. 79). An implicit message directed toward young female dancers is that their value is determined by their sexuality and physical appearance. Russell et al. (2018) argue that competition performances do not protect young dancers from predators, anyone can walk in and observe; it is the responsibility of the instructors to promote a healthy and safe environment for their young dancers through age-appropriate choreography and costumes.

### **Impact of the Media**

In 2004, Risner, Godfrey, and Simmons interviewed seven private sector dance teachers and owners about how they perceive the impact of sexuality in contemporary media culture influences the music, costuming and choreography choices for their studios (Risner, Godfrey, & Simmons, 2004). They found that individual value systems dictated some music and costume choices but that the necessity of pleasing the parent consumer forced the teachers to consider the economics of staying in business rather than educational or artistic factors. Studio owners face constant compromises between parent/student expectations and teacher goals. Other researchers (Schupp, 2018a; Weisbrod, 2010) acknowledge the complex economic and cultural influences of

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Foster coined this term “industrial body” in 2013 in the article, “Performing authenticity and the gendered labor of dance. In *Choreographie, medien, gender*, edited by Y. Hardt, L. Angerer, and A. Weber, 125 – 138. Zurich: Diaphanes.

media, parents, and popular trends that impact decisions about costumes, music and choreography.

Schupp (2018a) studied the connection between competition culture and commercial dance by interviewing nine competition teachers/choreographers. Commercial dance is defined as dance that is seen on video, stage, and in social media, and that markets such things as a television program, a sports drink, or a celebrity. The teachers and choreographers interviewed in her study acknowledged that commercial dance sells dance to students, and that today's dance studio needs to offer a competition team, because of the popularity of programs such as *Dance Moms* and *SYTYCD* (Schupp, 2018a, p. 7). Trends in commercial dance "...infiltrate the content and approaches used in dance studios" (Schupp, 2018a, p. 7). These trends include choreography that tells a story, is performed by dancers with a specific look, has an emotional element, is clearly connected to the music, is well-rehearsed, demonstrates strong technique, and has audience appeal (Schupp, 2018a).

### **Pedagogical Concerns**

The debate over pedagogy in dance education has a long history. In her study of competition teachers, Schupp (2018a) found that her participants often gear lessons toward perfecting and preparing competition routines, only including technique classes as needed, to build new skills related to the competition dance. This approach contrasts with the emphasis in some non-competition studios and in higher education on teaching technique, introducing students to other forms of dance, and focusing on the process of learning rather than the mastery of a routine.

As discussed in the literature review of dance teacher training, many dance education researchers (Stinson, Blumenfeld-Jones, and Van Dyke, 1990; Warburton, 2003) express concern

that traditional dance schools emphasize students' silent reproduction of what their teachers teach, creating passive followers who are not encouraged to question or debate what they are learning. If dance educators adopt the need to teach 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in their dance classrooms, it will be necessary for teachers to engage students in the creative process (Gilbert, 2005). In competition studios, outside choreographers are often hired to come in and teach competition routines over a brief one- or two-day workshop. This leaves little time to invite critical thinking, increase collaboration, and strengthen communication. To win dance competitions, the focus is on perfecting the images - the spectacle - as seen by the judges, including appearance, emotional presentation and performance skills, tangible qualities that can be seen and scored.

Schupp and Clemente (2010) studied students from competitive dance training backgrounds as they transitioned to college dance programs, acknowledging that the differences in dance styles and teaching methods can challenge a dancer's college dance experience. In most competitive studios, dance is viewed from an external point, in postsecondary dance, students assess their dancing from an internal perspective (Foster, 2019). The authors recommend that colleges value the competitive dancers' previous experiences, continue to provide performance opportunities, acknowledge that dance majors come from a variety of backgrounds, and help students expand on their movement vocabulary and knowledge of dance.

### **Gender, Race, and Class**

**Gender.** Dance competition culture reinforces ideas about how dance should be represented by gender. "While competitive dance training can lead to a high caliber of technique and artistry, it is achieved through teaching methods that implicitly reinforce specific ideas about gender with little room for critical examination of those constructs" (Schupp, 2017, p. 80). Males are expected to be athletic and solid, and their movements should be hard-hitting, featuring



lower-body strength, muscularity and flexibility. Female bodies must be long, lean and athletic, and their movements controlled, yet flowy and fluid, demonstrating strength and flexibility (Schupp, 2017; Weisbrod, 2010). When dancing together, “females are expected to yield to their male partner’s dominance” (Schupp, 2017, p. 79). Costumes for girls are often two pieces and form fitting to bring attention to the choreography and movement while boys are often costumed in masculine wear that features muscularity and physique. There are fewer boys in the private sector dance studios and thus, fewer boys in dance competitions (Hebert, 2017; Schupp, 2017). “Boys have a competitive advantage due to their scarcity in dance competition culture” (Schupp, p. 90). The participants in Schupp’s study (2017) also felt that fewer boys mean they stand out and thus receive more attention and opportunities for prizes and scholarships, and, ultimately, more job opportunities.

**Race.** Competition dancers are primarily white, middle and upper class females (Schupp, 2018b, 2018c). Based on observations at dance teacher conventions and student workshops, most private sector dance teachers and students are also female and white. This “whiteness” is further seen in the popular dance style, contemporary, a fusion of ballet and commercial jazz, both “white” dance styles represented through an upright posture with clean and distinct lines, rather than a relaxed pelvis that defines both tap, hip hop, and vernacular forms of jazz, styles associated with African-American aesthetics. I’ve observed that, based on personal conversations and feedback in my pilot study, the most popular genre in competitions is contemporary with tap and hip-hop being significantly less represented. I hypothesize that this is partly due to the judges’ lack of expertise in historically African American dance forms or a preference – conscious or not - for “white” dance forms.

**Class.** Only studio owners can register participants for dance competitions. This discriminates against the dancer who is self-taught or cannot afford to pay tuition fees and other costs associated with training in a competition school. This disparity results in a social and financial hierarchy that preferences middle- and upper-class families who can afford multiple classes, private lessons, guest choreographers, and extra expenses for costumes and solo competition fees (Schupp, 2019).

In her article, “Dancing the ‘American Dream’: Dance Competition Culture in Times of Shifting Values,” Schupp (2018b) raises important issues around economics, class and race. The current competition participant believes in the American Dream, that if you work hard you can succeed. According to Schupp, Generation Z acknowledges the inequities around economics, race, and gender that challenge this dream to be accessible to all. Their parents have the financial capital required to buy the chance to compete and pursue the ideals of the American Dream. If Generation Z maintains their shift away from traditional gender and sexual identities, and if they continue to embrace diversity and multiculturalism, “... it is predicted that they will want social progress that reflects the diversity that is present in their daily lives” (Schupp, 2018b, p. 39). Schupp reminds us dance is ever evolving, and emerging social and cultural factors will influence the future of dance competition culture.

### **Other Dance Competition Models**

The world of dance competitions extends beyond the genres of tap, jazz, hip hop, contemporary and musical theatre, as described in this review of dance competitions. One example is the Youth American Grand Prix (YAGP), started in 1999 in response to today’s private studio dance competitions. “Ballet professionals associated youth dance competitions with vulgarity and amateurism, not excellence” reports dance journalist Brian Seibert (2019). In

May 2019, approximately 12,000 students representing different ethnic, economic and geographic backgrounds participated in the YAGP's semi-finals. In the past 20 years, the YAGP has given more than four million dollars in scholarships and has connected hundreds of young dancers with professional dance troupes across the world (Seibert, 2019). Unlike the current for-profit dance competition companies, the YAGP advisory body established standards that govern the awarding of medals and scholarships. Boys are seen more often than in the studio dance competitions but are still under-represented. As with all competitions, a serious emotional and physical commitment is needed. In the YAGP, economic support is available, through scholarships and sponsors, for students with talent.

The traditional ballroom dance competition community is widespread with several governing organizations that promote and support ballroom dance programs for young boys and girls. They differ from today's competition companies in that, as non-profit organizations, they uphold strict regulations that cover content, costuming, music and judging. They are similar to today's private studio competition scene in that participation can require significant financial, emotional and physical commitment.

As discussed in the early history of dance competitions, lindy hop contests date back to the 1920s and 30s at the Savoy Ballroom (Stearns & Stearns, 1994). As with jiggling and tap dance contests, these competitions started informally in jam circles and on the social dance floor. The current lindy hop culture is split between "showcase" competitions that have standard performance regulations to "no rules" competitions, a response to the codified structure that limits the freedom and spontaneity that epitomizes vernacular jazz dancing, seen in the lindy hop and tap dance. This resistance to set routines that emphasize uniformity and precision may be

responsible for the ambivalence in the tap community to engage fully in the private studio dance competition scene, where improvisation is not rewarded.

## **Discussion**

In considering today's dance competition culture from an historical perspective, it's understandable that economics and commercialism have driven the growth of this industry. The U.S. runs on capitalism and there is money to be made in providing an outlet for young dancers to showcase their talents, whether in ballet, ballroom or in the traditional dancing school genres. The popularity of reality television shows, itself a profitable enterprise, glamorizes the competition experience, increasing its appeal to impressionable young dancers and parents who share a belief in the American Dream.

Although I agree with the Dance Masters of America that *Dance Moms* is a total misrepresentation of what's happening in today's private sector dance studio, I do have concerns about the influence of dance competitions and the media on dance education. Young girls are growing up believing that to be a dancer, they have to look like the images they see in social media and on television. They enter classrooms wanting to learn how to do multiple pirouettes and hold their leg at 180 degrees before they can even do simple, foundational exercises like chassés across the dance floor. I believe that dance is an art form that lives in each student and that should be accessible to all. How each student expresses dance will evolve as the student experiences life, acquires technical skills, and opens her/himself to embodying movement on emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels.

Whether in a competition school or not, it is clear that the media is impacting dance education and that dance educators need to be vigilant in establishing policies and mission statements that reflect their expertise as dance professionals. There are studios, both competition

and non-competition, that provide dance education with integrity, honesty, and a commitment to engaging all students, regardless of their financial status, gender or ethnicity.

This literature review has raised important topics for everyone in the dance studio profession, regardless of one's philosophy about competitions. As teachers, mentors, and role models, we can reflect on our own dance programs by asking ourselves the following questions:

- Are my students being taught to “sell” their bodies and sexuality or are they being trained to demonstrate technical expertise and skills?
- Am I judging my dancers based on their body type?
- Am I preferencing my male dancers over my female dancers and do I welcome other gender identities?
- Am I focused on the process of learning about dance or on the product of a perfected routine?
- Do I select age-appropriate costumes and music?
- In tap, do I care more about how the dance looks than how it sounds?
- Do I care about judging standards and, if so, will I take action to inform competition corporations that I want explicit standards and qualifications for judges?
- Will I try to increase diversity in my own dance school and/or team?

It is up to dance educators to expect more from the competition companies. If the Youth American Grand Prix and the New York City Dance Alliance can award college scholarships and host auditions, then other dance competition companies can be pressured to do the same. As consumers, parents and teachers can ask for more benefits, given the high financial and personal investment being made in dance competitions.

**What's next?** As more teachers graduate from accredited dance education programs and open private sector dance studios, it is possible that the dance competition scene will be

examined with a more critical lens that considers social justice issues and the actual pros and cons of participation. This will not be easy given the media's powerful force over the perception of dance. Research is needed to compare the experiences of dancers and teachers in competition studios with the experience of dancers and teachers in non-competition studios. I believe that the same intangible benefits of resilience, self-awareness, and self-discipline that were found in Schupp's (2017) and Shannon's (2018) studies of competition dancers will be found in dance students who participate in pre-professional dance programs at non-competition schools.

My personal interest is the influence of dance competitions on tap dance programming. The literature strongly suggests that ballet and jazz dance training, fused as contemporary, is becoming focused on tricks which include multiple turns, leaps, and poses that demand extreme flexibility and strength. The results of my pilot study support the likelihood that tap dance education is also becoming focused on tricks and flashy footwork. It is evident that improvisation, a key element in tap dance, is not supported in dance competition choreography.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review traces the history of dance competitions and presents compelling opinions of the benefits and detriments of this cultural dance phenomenon. The theories represented in the literature, that private studio dance competitions are greatly impacting dance education in the private sector studio, and that tap dance competition choreography is likely to focus on tricks and flashy footwork, serve to highlight the significance of my study. The data generated by my mixed methods approach will confirm or refute these theories and add new information to ongoing conversations about the influence of dance competitions on tap dance programming.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction and Overview**

This chapter discusses the methodology I used to explore my primary research question: What is the experience of teaching tap dance in the private sector dance studio? My specific research questions focused on the following topics:

#### **Enrollment and Hiring**

- Is tap dance enrollment increasing or decreasing?
- How difficult is it for private studio owners to hire qualified tap dance teachers?

#### **Training, Curriculum, and Resources**

- How are private sector tap dance educators trained and what professional development opportunities do they value?
- How often do tap dance teachers include tap history, music theory, vocabulary, technique, choreography, and improvisation in their curricular and, if so, how?
- Are there relationships between variables such as age, years of teaching experience, location of studio, and decisions teachers make about training, class content, and competition participation?
- What resources are needed to support tap dance education in the private sector?

#### **Dance Competitions and Social Media**

- What influence is the dance competition culture having on tap dance education today?
- How is commercial dance, as presented on social media, television and films, influencing teachers' experiences of teaching tap in private dance studios?

#### **Challenges and Benefits**

- What do teachers believe are the greatest challenges and benefits to teaching tap?

- What trends are teachers themselves seeing in tap dance education today?

I discuss mixed methods research and my rationale for using this methodological approach. Also included is an explanation of interview methodology and survey methodology, as well as an overview of my research plan, including the research sample, design, and data collection methods. In addition, I address ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

### **Rationale**

This Mixed Methods Research study combined quantitative data I collected through an online survey (Appendix A) with qualitative data I collected in interviews. Since the late 1980s, researchers have found that complex social research questions can best be answered by mixing methods of data collection and analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell, 2018). Greene (2007), a scholar-practitioner of mixed methods social inquiry states, “ A mixed methods way of thinking involves an openness to multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished” (p. xii). To the best of my knowledge, the experience of tap dance educators in the private studio sector has not been researched and little is known about who teaches tap, what they teach, where they teach it, how they teach it, how they were trained, and what influences their teaching decisions. No one methodology would be able to address these questions and allow me to make meaningful interpretations of the experiences of tap dance educators.

**Pilot study.** I conducted four, small group, one-hour interviews as part of a pilot study, approved by the Lesley University IRB, in the summer of 2017. A total of 19 tap dance educators who attended three different tap dance festivals participated in guided conversations around topics relevant to the essence of their tap teaching experience in the private sector studio.



I was aware that my personal role as a master tap teacher at these festivals extended my identity beyond researcher and further embedded me in the culture that I was exploring. The issue of bias was always on my mind, especially as I listened multiple times to the interview tapes. A memo I wrote to myself during my efforts to interpret the pilot study data continues to remind me of my ongoing subjectivity and its dangers.

As the teachers respond to this next question, "Tell me your favorite thing about teaching tap," I'm particularly reminded that I have my own personal answers to all of these questions. The memories of last night's tap class are fresh in my mind. What was my favorite part? When Katy shifted her weight and found she was ready for what was next? Or maybe when Ava self-corrected a flexed foot? It's interesting that I'm just now thinking, "I wonder what I would say." I was so intent on listening to these teachers that I lost my identity as a teacher and assumed the role of researcher. I value the importance of hearing their voices. I am curious. How DO teachers feel about these questions and topics? Am I on the wrong track? What should I study to advance the field? Can anything I do help the field of tap dance education? (Personal memo, 4/21/18)

This question continues to guide my inquiry and I have come to understand that to help the field, I need to understand the needs of the teachers. The results of the pilot study highlighted four themes: lack of support from directors, parents, and other staff; inconsistent teacher training; dance competitions; and the satisfaction teachers get when students succeed. This current research explores these themes further through a survey and through individual interviews. I decided on the shift to individual interviews because, in the focus group interviews, the interaction between members of the group became an integral part of my analysis (Kitzinger, 2005). In the pilot study, participants often conversed with each other more than with me. The

results from my pilot study emphasized the need for private sector tap teachers to express their concerns with others who share the same experiences.

However, a limitation of my pilot study was the small sample of teachers and the possibility that the more dominant teachers influenced the conversations. In this current study, by listening to one teacher at a time, I aimed to provide a safe environment for teachers to discuss the topics of teaching, support, training, competitions, and their personal teaching challenges, joys and triumphs. An online survey tool added important empirical data about enrollment, teacher training, influences, and competition participation by a large sample of teachers across the United States who might not attend the festivals where the interviews took place. My survey offered more teachers the opportunity to share their stories.

### **Research Methodology**

In my study I utilized a dynamic research approach where the design of a mixed methods study underscored methodological synergy (Hall and Howard, 2008). Creswell (2018), a pioneer in mixed methods research, uses a mandala, a Hindu or Buddhist symbol of the universe, to represent the interrelatedness of the elements that shape a mixed methods approach.

My methods included survey research, which provided a numeric description of the opinions, trends and attitudes of a cross-sectional sample of the tap teacher population, and one-on-one interviews of a selected sample, providing me with an understanding of the experience of a small group of teachers who represented diversity in age, gender, size of student population, location of studios, and competition participation. A diverse sample guaranteed that different voices were represented. Interviewing teachers of varied ages and years of experience shed light on whether there were relationships between variables such as age, years teaching experience,

location of studio, competition participation, class content, and challenges. I particularly sought teachers who compete to bring increased understanding of the competition phenomenon.

Through the survey I collected demographic information about teacher training, pedagogy, age of students, participation in competitions, teaching resources, influences, location of studio, etc. and examined the relationship between variables, such as experience and curricular choices. This data provided basic descriptive information about teaching tap in the private sector but was not intended to illuminate understanding of the experience of teaching tap. To gather that information, I used interviews to collect narrative data that explored the phenomenon of teaching tap dance, for I sought in-depth understandings of others' experiences. The interview guide used during the pilot study was revised to align with survey questions (Appendix B).

I acknowledge my biases in the development of survey and interview questions - topics of teacher training, curricula, and dance competitions. I welcomed the opportunity to listen to the concerns of the interviewee educators which sometimes veered from my questions. An open-ended interview approach encouraged a natural discourse to allow the interviewees' ideas and stories to come forth. Capitalizing on the strengths of each quantitative and qualitative method is a fundamental principle of mixed methods research and resulted in a study that produced complementary and corroborating evidence (Johnson & Turner, 2003, p. 299). Another feature of mixing methods of inquiry was the opportunity it provided for surprising and divergent data to emerge and for new questions to be raised (Greene, 2007). I found both surprising and divergent data between the pilot study findings and this study's findings, and between the survey and the interview findings, leading to my recommendations for future areas for research.

## Research Sample

**Survey population.** Individuals who teach tap dance in private sector studios in the United States were invited to complete the web-based Tap Teacher Survey after it was tested on six teachers. Their feedback on the survey design and a consultation with a Statistics professor aided me in making revisions. Once finalized, the survey was distributed through posts on tap dance teacher networks, dance teacher Facebook groups, online communities associated with tap dance events/programs, and dance teacher organizations during the first two weeks of June. A total of 379 participants opened the link that was included in the online post. In addition, 250 individual teachers who voluntarily provided their emails to receive tap dance related news were invited to participate. Of these email invitations, 150 opened the link. Key informants who have large followers in the tap community were asked to share the survey and promote its importance. Typical case sampling, a strategy that seeks participants who represent a typical experience with the phenomenon and a snowball, network, or chain sampling approach were used to engage participants who might not otherwise be reached through online communication. The common criterion was employment as a tap dance teacher of private sector students. It was impossible to predict the number of possible respondents, given that there is no data about the number of tap dance educators in the United States.

A total of 535 teachers opened the survey but only 338 completed it. These 338 individuals answered 25 questions about the experience of teaching tap dance and, in several instances, wrote-in responses when checking the category of "Other." The survey respondents represented 42 states in studios located in suburban, urban and rural communities. Their ages ranged from 17 to 81, they had from one to 40+ years of experience, and their studios teach 50 to more than 450 students aged 3 to 55+.

**Interview population.** I invited all survey participants to schedule a one-on-one interview by contacting me personally. Specific individuals who represent an information-rich case were also sought. Such cases included teachers who teach an unusually large studio population, have forty+ years of experience, or teach at three or more studios. I made efforts to include diversity in location, age, gender, and competition participation. I selected five interviewees to participate in a one-hour guided interview. The four women and one man teach tap in one or more private studios, range in age from 27 to 65, and have from three to 35 years teaching experience in a suburban, urban, or rural location. Two own their studios, and four of them participate or at one time participated in dance competitions.

A subset of tap teachers exist who do not exclusively teach in the private studio space but primarily work with private sector students in large, conference-like settings with enrollment from 25 to 200 in a class. Five master teachers were purposely invited to share their experience of teaching tap to the private sector population. A total of four were interviewed; a scheduling conflict prevented the fifth interview from happening. The four master teachers range from 30 to 62 years old and have from 10 to almost 50 years of experience as performers, choreographers, judges, producers, studio owners, and educators.

**Setting.** I conducted interviews in quiet corners, private offices, restaurants and in hotel rooms during the course of five different multi-day dance events during the months of July and August 2019. I recorded interviews on either my computer, using Garage Band, or on my iPhone, using the Voice Memo app. I wrote personal memos before and after interviews.

### **Overview of Information Collected**

**Survey.** I collected basic demographic information to provide personal data such as age and experience. I asked specific questions about the following topics: enrollment and hiring;

training, curriculum, and resources; dance competitions and social media; and challenges and benefits of teaching tap in the private sector dance studio (Appendix A).

**Interviews.** According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), four areas of information are needed in qualitative studies. First, contextual information yielded descriptions of the culture and environment where these interviewees practiced tap education. Interviews provided context-rich personal perceptions and perspectives. Although much demographic information was collected through the survey instrument, individual experiences of interview participants provided a more in-depth understanding of the interview participant's story – the second type of information. A third type of information was perceptual. This related to the participant's descriptions of their experiences and the elements that influenced their practice. Their perceptions were neither right nor wrong and reflected their assumptions and personal frames of reference. The fourth type of information I gathered was theoretical information that guided me in forming the conceptual framework and rationale for using a mixed-methods approach.

My goal for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of each participant while they engaged in teaching tap dance in the private sector studio. The interviews addressed the same topics as the survey but expanded to “why” and “how” descriptions of the experiences in the eyes of the interviewees. I invited interviewees to:

- Tell me about your tap program.
- Tell me about your training.
- How would you describe your teaching method?
- How does the influence of social media impact your teaching choices?
- If you compete, describe your experience of teaching competition vs. non-competition students. Are there differences in your approach or goals? Why do you compete?

- Give me an example of a challenge you face in a typical tap class.
- Describe your favorite part of a tap class.
- What trends are you seeing in tap dance education today?

### **Research Design**

My research design emerged over the course of several years of observations, literature reviews, reflections, discussions with stakeholders, and the pilot study discussed earlier. Prior to the pilot study, I held an in-depth interview with a key informant. After analysis of this first interview, including coding and the naming of categories, I identified themes and revised interview questions for the pilot study. In the interlude between the pilot study and this study, I practiced regular journal writing and engaged in literature reviews. I held ongoing conversations and informal discussions with stakeholders, and I developed a specific plan for conducting this study. I made the decision to do a mixed methods research design after exhaustive searches for valid, empirical data about tap dance education revealed a void in the literature. By combining the quantitative data collected in a web-based survey with the qualitative data from the interviews, I grounded my inferences in both sets of results. I considered the following methodological decisions:

- Timing of the data collection and analysis: concurrent, variable, or sequential? The survey was available online, and the interviews were held concurrently during the summer of 2019. Analysis occurred sequentially during the following six months.
- Mixing: at result's interpretation, when transforming data, or at specific phases? I started analyzing the survey data first so that I could approach the interview data with specific questions related to the survey findings. Due to some temporary problems I encountered in

using the software, Qualtrics, I started analyzing the interview data. Once I identified key themes in the interviews, I mixed the qualitative findings with the quantitative results.

- Priority: qualitative or quantitative or equal? The survey and interviews had equal priority in this study. The responses collected in the survey required an interest in the topics and provided information volunteered by 338 tap educators. The voices of the nine interviewees were equally important in answering the research questions.

### **Data Collection Methods**

**Survey.** Survey methodology is a popular form of collecting data because of its ease of distribution and low profile. A professional survey instrument was available through Lesley University and online tutorials guided me in designing the questions, the presentation, and the distribution. The software, Qualtrics, included tools for analysis and reports (qualtrics.com).

I found several advantages to using an online questionnaire: 1) there was a small amount of error in recording the data because the responses were saved electronically and immediately; 2) the internet's accessibility expanded the targeted sample that could be reached; and 3) data analysis and collection processes were simplified (Albaum et al., 2010).

The quality of survey data depends on the quality of the questions. The three most commonly used survey questions are open-ended, ranking, and rating, and I used each in this survey. Open-ended questions resulted in precise and specific data, such as age, years of teaching experience, and the state where the respondent's studio was located. Rating questions assessed one subject, such as effectiveness of training options. These were easy to use but a drawback of rating questions is that they can result in lower quality responses because they require less cognitive effort. Ranking questions asked for ONE singular response from a list of possible answers. This type of question forced differentiation, which led to quality responses, but the



disadvantage was that ranking questions required more time. The average amount of time it took to complete this survey was 14 minutes. There is no way to know why some individuals did not finish the survey, but it is possible that the time involved in answering the ranking questions might have dissuaded some teachers from completing the entire survey.

Two dimensions of data quality are reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the extent that a response will remain consistent if a question is rephrased and asked multiple times. Validity is evaluated by assessing whether the question measures what it is intended to measure, asking how closely it “behaves” like it should and how well the question reflects the domain of possible questions and reaches the gold standard (Vannette, 2019, p.7). This gold standard is described in a quote from the National Research Center (NRC) in the article, “How Can You Be So Sure? Seeking the Gold Standard of Survey Accuracy.”

The value of an accurate survey is not in the opinions collected from the few hundred or so who respond. The value comes only from the extent to which those hundreds report perspectives or behaviors that reflect the thinking or activities of the rest of the community for which they are only proxies. (NRC, 2015, para. 6)

To reach this gold standard, I designed questions that were clear, easy to answer, and engaging because they were relevant to the respondent. Reliability and validity are the basis for evaluating “data quality” in the context of survey question design (Vannette, 2019, p. 7). I sought internal validity, the ability to make correct inferences from the data, by consulting with colleagues who are experienced statisticians and survey developers, including Qualtrics support staff and a university staff person who uses Qualtrics. External validity relates to the generalizability of the data. The survey sample is too small to generalize the findings across a broader population, but the data does provide information that contributes to understanding the experience of teaching

tap dance in the private sector studio. The survey reached 42 states in suburban, urban, and rural locations; and it collected data from competition and non-competition teachers that represent a broad range of ages and years of experience.

Survey researchers use the term “satisficing”, a combination of “satisfactory” and “sufficient” to describe the practice of taking cognitive shortcuts while answering questions (Krosnick, 1999). To avoid satisficing, which would result in lower quality data, I used the following guidelines suggested by Krosnick:

- Use familiar words with clear meanings;
- Ask questions about the present, not the past;
- Focus on a single subject;
- Use verbal labels rather than numeric when using response scales;
- Limit the number of questions to avoid fatigue;
- Avoid using generic response scales and use terms specific to the subject that the question is asking about. Respondents want to agree so be careful of scales agree/disagree, or yes/no, or true/false; and
- Randomize response alternatives.

I designed this survey to consider the above recommendations by making questions easy to understand and keeping the survey short. I sent frequent reminders and notes of appreciation through posts on social media so that the importance of the survey was highlighted, and participants knew that their responses mattered.

I analyzed the survey data using tools that support the Qualtrics survey software. In some cases, I imported data from Qualtrics to an Excel document for initial analysis and reporting. Salkind (2017), an author who promotes a non-intimidating approach to statistics, provided

helpful information about understanding key concepts such as variability, reliability, validity and other statistical procedures that were used in processing the descriptive data. As mentioned, I consulted with colleagues familiar with survey data and Excel spreadsheets. Hall and Howard (2008), mixed methods researchers who promote a synergistic approach, recommend collaboration in mixed methods research because few researchers are experts in both quantitative and qualitative paradigms (p. 252).

**Interviews.** Interviewing is an essential tool of inquiry in the social and behavioral sciences and numerous qualitative research studies base their findings on the interpretation of interviewees' responses (Patton, 2015). There are many limitations to analyzing verbal answers to questions posed by an interviewer (Mishler, 1986). As the researcher, I was the instrument of research and was influenced by my own set of philosophical principles. Mishler (1986) urges that interviewees be considered participants and collaborators in constructing meaning through the interview process and, as such, that they be empowered to express their own voices in ways that strengthen their own contextual understanding of their experience(s).

Tap dance festivals and dance teacher conferences provided a natural setting for one-on-one interviews to take place because the participants and I were attendees and/or presenters at these events. Guba and Lincoln (1982), social scientists, theorists, and researchers, describe "naturalistic inquiry" as better serving the social/behavioral sciences by minimizing investigator manipulation of the study setting and taking advantage of the "human-as-instrument" approach (p. 235). "The presence of [inquirer-respondent] interactivity makes it possible for the inquirer to be a 'smart' instrument, honing in on relevant facts and ideas by virtue of his or her sensitivity, responsiveness, and adaptability" (p. 240). Qualitative research seeks to understand, describe, and interpret the phenomena being studied. Grounded theory is a form of qualitative analysis

with the purpose of constructing theory grounded in data collected during the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The concepts and theories developed during analysis form the basis for future data collection. Unique to grounded theory methodology is the process termed *constant comparisons*, which breaks down the data into codes that are then grouped based on similarities and differences. Concepts are then developed which, after more analysis, form tentative themes or categories. After more data collection and analysis, a core category is identified as the major theme of the study. I used this systematic and comprehensive procedure of coding, concept and theme development to analyze the data in the pilot study and during the interview process of this study.

I organized questions into an interview guide that ensured that the same lines of inquiry would be asked of each participant (Appendix B). According to Patton (2015), the advantage of an interview guide is that “the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (p. 439).

As recommended by Corbin & Strauss (2015), Saldaña (2016), and others, the actual words of the participants, *in vivo* coding, my reflections and field notes taken at the time of the interview process, and my analytic memos written during the coding contribute important insights about the data and the process. My researcher reflections were particularly valuable to maintain openness to new knowledge and to bracket existing biases and opinions. In her article about mixed methods and arts-based research, Watson (2019), an arts-based researcher, highlighted the need for continual written reflection in a research journal to facilitate “methods braiding” within a project (p. 1).

During my studies at Lesley, I had the opportunity to study with leaders in the field of arts-based research. This has helped me embrace my dance life as a tool for communicating, a subject of scholarly interest, and a methodology for inquiry. Shaun McNiff, a founder and leader in expressive therapies and arts-based research, visited one of my “Nature of Inquiry” classes last year (10/30/2018). In his discussion of alternative ways of knowing, Shaun McNiff’s comments helped me accept myself and “own” the area of my studies. Shaun’s message that arts-based research was an “alternative to linear logical thought – words can only go so far” was a refreshing shift from the scientific approach I was studying in other classes. He encouraged us to “believe in artistic evidence... and to trust with a vulnerable heart.” This deep inquiry into ways of knowing another or understanding a phenomenon raised many possibilities and gave me confidence to explore alternative ways to reflect on the meaning of my data.

I found it more reflective to choreograph after periods of analyzing and writing. The process of moving to music and creating a piece of work was very satisfying and contemplative. At one point, as I was finishing the dance, I realized there were similarities in choreographing and in analyzing data. In both cases, I had to find the essence of the story/dance and decide how best to tell it. What should come first, who should be up front? The characters in my dance are not unlike the participants in my study. Each is unique, with different needs, abilities, motivations, traits, and experiences. The rhythm of research is like the making of a dance. There were hours when I listened to the same interview countless times before finding the meaning, and days when I listened over and over again to eight bars of music, trying to choreograph a movement that would work with my mixed level adult dancers. Both activities involved critical and creative thinking. My reflective dance practice helped me “braid” the elements of research

and dissertation writing, as I tried to balance my physical, mental and emotional needs, best met by moving rhythmically.

### **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

**Survey.** Managing, organizing, and analyzing the data was a multi-step process and each research tradition required a different approach. The first step in managing the survey data was to export all of the data to an Excel spreadsheet to assure that the information was saved in two places. Once on the spreadsheet, and with the help of a colleague, I analyzed basic demographic information, gathering means and medians and other numeric summaries of responses, eliminating responses from those who did not finish the survey. I encountered a problem analyzing the data from three open-ended questions: age, years of teaching experience, and state. Due to the nature of open-ended questions, responses did not fit an easily analyzed format. For instance, some responses were text “more than 30,” some answers were abbreviations “MA” and others were completely spelled out “Connecticut.” Using the Qualtrics tools I was able to “bucket” the age groups, which easily fit into five distinct groupings. There were too many unique responses to the years of teaching experience item, and I had to individually assign each answer to one of five categories. I followed the same procedure to analyze the distribution of states. I analyzed data in the Qualtrics platform which provided a crosstab function, enabling me to test for relationships between variables. I tested for relationships between many different variables - age and hiring, training, significant influences, competition participation, resources, and challenges. I did the same crosstab analysis for years of teaching experience, location of studio, and competition participation. I found several statistically significant relationships ranging from  $p < .01$  to  $p < .05$ . To better understand the data and how to present it, I reviewed Salkind’s book, “Statistics for People who (Think They) Hate Statistics,” and I referred to

several journal articles and dissertations that discussed survey data. Once I exhausted the survey data analysis, I met with an advisor who helped me review and prioritize the data.

Chapter Four presents the summaries and analysis of all the survey findings. I decided to include all of the data produced by the survey for two reasons. First, there have been no studies that have produced any numeric description of the private sector tap dance educator and each piece of information contributes to the field. Second, the individuals who took the time to complete the data did so believing that their opinions mattered. Their stories are important and each question they answered deserves to be discussed within the pages of this dissertation.

**Interviews.** I recorded the interviews on either my iPhone or my computer and saved them to a flash drive which is stored in a locked drawer in my office. I then transferred data from the iPhone to my computer and then erased the interview from my phone. Initially, I used the software “Transcribe” to begin the transcription process. This software transfers the voice memo to a text file which I used as a starting point for transcribing the interviews and which served as an immediate extra backup of the data. After numerous hours listening and typing one of the interviews, I decided to use a professional transcription service for the remaining interviews. Once I had the nine hours of interviews in Word documents, I began a process I repeated for each of the interviews. First, I listened with a hard copy of the transcription by my side, made corrections to the text, and jotted notes in the margins. Second, I read all of the interview texts and made additional notes, underlining *in vivo* codes, and circling phrases and words that were especially descriptive. Third, I transferred notes to a hand-written template that organized data by categories. I also cross-checked data by creating a hand-written template for each individual, based on the categories that were emerging. Competitions was one such category and, within the transcription texts, was color-coded lime green. Under the category of competitions, came

several concepts supported by *in vivo* codes: “judging is poor, choreography is flashy, choreography is limited to one style.” Other categories were similarly identified: training, teaching methods, classroom challenges, trends, social media, music, benefits. The fourth step occurred as I began to see patterns in the data. I furthered the analysis by reviewing the hand-written templates and moving the information to a word document and to tables. The creation of tables required that I clearly represent the categories, concepts and themes that were emerging. I then returned to the audio files and listened to the recordings, making additional notes that clarified my understanding of each individual’s experience. The next stage was focused on only the studio teacher interview data to separate their opinions from each other and from the master teacher interviews. I identified areas where the studio teachers had similar or different experiences and wrote my interpretations in short vignettes.

I decided to collectively represent the master teachers for several reasons. First, these master teachers are well-known in the industry and the opinions they shared with me have been shared with teachers around the country during workshops and presentations. The only way to protect their anonymity was to discuss their interviews as a group, with similarities and differences highlighted when appropriate. Secondly, I felt that the story of the tap dance educator in the private sector was situated in the private sector studio, where the studio teacher interviewees worked. The data from the master teachers was very important to this study but my focus was on the individual experience of teaching tap dance in a private studio.

After listening to the master interviews again and reviewing my notes, I wrote a collective summary of my findings from the master interviews. It was at the conclusion of this phase of the analysis, after numerous hours of reflections, both written and movement, and reviews of the data, that I made a surprising discovery. **The trends all the teachers were**



**discussing were grounded in tap history.** I had never linked the current happenings in tap dance education with traditions that evolved during tap's colorful and complex history, despite my commitment to include tap history in all of my writing. The relationship was always there, but I didn't see it until I went through the process of synthesizing the data from my study. Once I made the connection, I constructed a table that linked each current trend with a tradition from the past (Table 10, p. 139).

I sought to understand the experience of the private sector tap dance educator. By recognizing the current trends influencing tap dance education as historical traditions, I can better understand, given that tap history is not taught, the frustration teachers experience in trying to accommodate changes in the field. A better understanding and appreciation for tap history may ease a tap teacher's acceptance of new trends in music, styles, and choreography.

Throughout this period of analysis, I spoke regularly with colleagues and cohort members about the process of interpretation and representation. The question "How can I represent another?" was always on my mind. I struggled with knowing how to discuss the socioeconomic forces that were present in one of my interviewee's stories without inferring a blanket statement about the individuals who lived in her neighborhood. The people in my study are complex individuals, and it is impossible for me to know their motivations, flaws and doubts. I care about them and tried to capture the essence of their characters with honesty and sensitivity, honoring their individual experiences and celebrating their common passion for tap dance education.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It was natural that my "self" would enter into data collection and analysis in qualitative research, where my biases, assumptions and perspectives would inevitably influence my decisions about questions, coding, and concept development. I made efforts to remain aware of

biases by journal writing throughout the development of this study, by being aware of personal opinions, and by practicing reflexivity. “Reflexivity calls on us to think about how we think and inquire into our thinking patterns even as we apply thinking to making sense of the patterns we observe around us” (Patton, 2015, p. 604). As the instrument of inquiry, I was an integral part of the investigation and it was impossible to separate my own sociocultural history, perspective, and understanding from the experience of data collection and analysis. My position on the continuum of insider/outsider required that I especially needed to accept being “good enough,” a phrase Wendy Luttrell, a sociologist committed to social justice research, advises researchers to consider when faced with the demand to bracket personal experiences, biases, and preconceived ideas about their research (Luttrell, 2010, p. 273). Through reflexivity, the tensions often ignited, inspiring a deeper quest and an openness to alternative ways of knowing. Dancing with my interviewees at the festivals and conventions, and personal movement reflections during analysis contributed to my data. Through my 38-year experience of being an “insider,” I formed particular opinions about three distinct topics included in this study: teacher training, private sector studios, and dance competitions.

**Researcher biases in teacher training/curriculum.** As stated at the beginning of this chapter, I have a passionate interest in the field of tap dance education and have dedicated almost forty years to developing my own rhythm-first, holistic approach to teaching tap dance history, music theory, technique, skills, choreography, improvisation and vocabulary (Goldberg, 2018). I have a bias toward teachers who do not pursue continuing education and am frustrated with higher education dance education programs that do not include tap dance. My primary concern is the lack of training directed to tap educators in the following topics: child development, tap dance history, music theory, tap pedagogy and different learning abilities. Festivals, dance

teacher conventions, tap teacher training programs and online programs make continuing education available for all, with opportunities to study the above areas of education.

**Researcher biases related to private sector studios.** There are approximately 49,000 (Austin, Houck-Cox, & Rogoski-Rutta, 2019) private sector studios in the United States. As a private studio owner for 38 years, I have empathy for the challenges and joys that the private sector teacher experiences in teaching tap dance. I can relate to the problem of low enrollment and the need to mix levels but believe if tap dance was more visible in higher education and in the social media dance scene, then teachers would seek training, parents and students would seek more tap instruction, and both students and teachers would experience satisfaction and success.

Dance education is a private business, requiring no certification or licensing. Anyone can open a dance studio. Membership in dance teacher organizations provides some basic certification guidelines and standards for ethical behavior, but organizations vary in their rules and practices, with no governing power in place to advocate for, monitor, or do research about private sector dance education. I believe that studio owners can establish standards and offer training programs to raise the professionalism of private sector dance education.

**Researcher biases about dance competitions.** There is no data about the number of private sector studios that compete. Dance competition is a complex exchange of capital. This need for capital limits participants to those who have money, talent and other personal resources to provide private lessons, special costumes, and a parent who can drive and chaperone during weekend competition trips. I agree with La Rocco (2012), a NY Times dance critic who wrote, "With no accountability or oversight, the dance competition business is 'shifting practices within the dance world, further muddying the class divide between entertainment and art'" (para. 6). The emphasis on winning and on perfection and tricks limits access to those who fit a specific body

type of being lean, strong and flexible, and is counter to my belief that dance is for all. The lack of standards for judges and absence of criteria for scoring raise concerns that the dance competition business lacks credibility and professionalism.

The popularity of competitions and the opportunity they provide for revenue makes it difficult for the small business owner to NOT compete, but I feel strongly that studio owners can find other revenue sources and other means of providing inclusive and unique performance opportunities that equal the excitement of competing and winning trophies.

By reflecting on these biases, I place myself in the community of individuals I seek to understand. My commitment is to remain vulnerable and to practice empathic neutrality, “understanding a person’s situation and perspective without judging the person – and communicating that understanding with authenticity to build rapport, trust, and openness” (Patton, 2015, p. 57).

### **Trustworthiness**

I sought trustworthiness in several ways. The use of mixed methods produced a rich and diverse set of data and the opportunity for cross-data consistency checks, called triangulation. Guba (1981, p. 80) suggests the following chart when measuring trustworthiness in a mixed methods study. In Table 1, analysis of the quantitative data leads to measurement of validity, reliability, and objectivity. The criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of the qualitative data includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility is the degree that findings accurately convey the participant’s experience(s). To assess credibility, I shared each individual story with the studio teacher interviewee. Member checking corrected my misunderstandings, confirmed that I correctly represented the interviewee, and determined that no key points were missed in my interpretation of the interviews.

Table 1

*Scientific and Naturalistic Terms Appropriate to the Four Aspects of Trustworthiness*

Aspect	Quantitative/Scientific Term	Qualitative/Naturalistic Term
Truth value	Internal Validity	Credibility
Applicability	External Validity/Generalizability	Transferability
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability

*Figure 1.* This chart was presented by Egon Guba in the article, “Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries” (1981), *Educational Communication and Technology*, p. 80).

My second step was to have colleagues in the field of tap dance education read a draft of my findings and discussion. Their endorsement validated my conclusions. In addition, other analysts reviewed the survey results, which provided alternate perspectives to the interpretation of the data. Thirdly, I sought corroboration and confirmability through triangulation, a convergence of data from multiple data sources (Denzin, 1978). “Triangulation is most powerful when mixed-methods studies are designed for integration, which begins by asking the same questions of both methods and gathering both qualitative and quantitative data on those questions” (Patton, 2015, p. 666). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), mixed methods researchers, use the terms *inference quality* and *inference transferability* as criteria that account for the quality of the conclusions reached in a mixed methods study and the degree that inferences can be applied to similar situations (p. 813). I considered multiple perspectives by validating each step in the research process to produce an integrated analysis that brought meaning to the complex nature of teaching tap dance in the private sector dance studio.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of this study included the individual limitations of survey and interview methodology, the challenge of integrating multiple sets of data, and the lack of previous research in the field of tap dance education. An online survey limited the participants to those who were comfortable using an online platform, belonged to the targeted Facebook groups, or attended the specific dance teacher/tap events where I held interviews. In addition, it is possible that responses might have varied if the questionnaire had been completed with paper and pencil. Survey methodology sought to measure experiences that do not fit into neat empirical formulas and numerical data, which is why it was important to include qualitative methods.

The shortcoming of the interview domain was that participants were limited to those who attended dance events that required funds and time, issues that might have prevented someone from attending and thus volunteering to be interviewed, although I was open to interviewing through Skype or Facetime. I offset the limitations of researcher bias that is present in all interview methodology by empowering the interviewee's voice with careful listening, acknowledgement of their opinions, and respectful discourse.

Mixed methods research is considered the "third research paradigm" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), the "third methodological movement" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), the "third research community" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), and the "third research approach" (Creswell, 2014) and, as such, techniques for measuring quality are still emerging, which can be a limitation. I practiced the perspective promoted by Greene (2007) who suggested a "multiplistic stance" to assess the quality of the inferences, conclusions and interpretations made. This multiple approach focused on the support from the available empirical data, criteria from different methodological traditions, dialogues among stakeholders, and reflections on how a

mixed methods design contributed to a better understanding of the question. I acknowledged the limitations and rigorously and transparently assessed the quality of each step throughout the research design, collection, analysis and interpretation.

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation of this study was the timing. The best time to distribute the survey and schedule interviews was the summer of 2019, when I was scheduled to present at five different dance teacher events. My attendance at these events maximized the population of dance educators who could be encouraged to complete the survey and be interviewed. The drawback to this timing was that I might have decided to time the interviews after the survey data was analyzed rather than conduct them simultaneously. I had a follow-up phone or email discussion with each of the studio teacher interviewees to corroborate my interpretation of their interview and to invite other comments to be shared.

### **Summary**

This chapter described my mixed methods research approach to answering the study question: What are the experiences of tap dance educators in the private sector dance studio? The literature presented several approaches to conducting this study, which included a survey instrument and one-on-one interviews. I gained experience through a pilot study which provided me the opportunity to analyze data and form new interview questions that provided richer, more detailed descriptions of tap teacher experiences. Survey questions and interview questions addressed the same topics. I sought complementary and corroborating evidence (Johnson and Turner, 2003, p. 299) while also trying to be open to the opportunity for surprising and divergent data to emerge (Greene, 2007). What constitutes quality in mixed methods research is debatable and I followed the “multiplistic stance” advocated by Greene (2007), who promotes using

different methodological traditions, engaging stakeholders in dialogues, and focusing on the data to support the *inference quality*, a term introduced by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) to assess the quality of conclusions in a mixed methods study.

I sought trustworthiness through triangulation and multiple reviews of the data by interviewees and colleagues, especially in the analysis of the survey data. Ethical considerations included researcher bias in the areas of tap teacher training, private sector dance studio business, and dance competitions. Limitations included a lack of existing research on tap dance education and tap teacher experience, and the challenges associated with mixed methods research. I hope that this study will lead to a greater understanding of the experience of teaching tap dance in the private sector and inspire those in the field of tap dance education to consider the influences that guide teachers in decisions about training, competition participation, and curricula. It is time for dance teacher education programs and dance-related businesses to respond to the concerns of tap dance educators in the private sector studios. This research will fill a void in the literature about dance education.



## **Chapter Four: Findings**

This chapter presents the findings of my Tap Teacher Survey and my interviews with nine tap dance educators. In Section One, I introduce empirical data that identifies the 338 tap dance educators who finished the survey. In Section Two, I share my interpretations of the interviews. Within this chapter are summaries of the findings of each participant group as well as a final summary that presents the key findings and questions that emerge from the data. The survey instrument (Appendix A) and the interview guide (Appendix B) addressed the following topics:

### **Enrollment and Hiring**

- Is tap dance enrollment increasing or decreasing?
- How difficult is it for private studio owners to hire qualified tap dance teachers?

### **Training, Curriculum, and Resources**

- How are private sector tap dance educators trained and what professional development opportunities do they value?
- How often do tap dance teachers include tap history, music theory, vocabulary, technique, choreography, and improvisation in their curricular and, if so, how?
- Are there relationships between variables such as age, years of teaching experience, location of studio, and decisions teachers make about training, class content, and competition participation?
- What resources are needed to support tap dance education in the private sector?

### **Dance Competitions and Social Media**

- What influence is the dance competition culture having on tap dance education today?

- How is commercial dance, as presented on social media, television and films, influencing teachers' experiences of teaching tap in private dance studios?

### **Challenges and Benefits**

- What do teachers believe are the greatest challenges and benefits to teaching tap?
- What trends are teachers themselves seeing in tap dance education today?

### **Section One: Survey Results**

Inferential statistics examined relationships between variables such as age and training, years of teaching experience and influences, location and competitions, and studio ownership and hiring. Write-in responses captured personal opinions of the survey respondents not visible in the empirical data and provided further information to answer the research questions.

#### **Who are the survey participants?**

The online survey collected data from a total of 535 participants but only 338 finished the survey. The data analyzed for the purpose of this study includes only the finished surveys. In some cases, respondents chose to leave a few questions blank. The participants represent a diverse demographic community of tap dance educators. Their ages ranged from 17 to 81 with an average age of 46. Table 2 shows their distribution across age groups.

Table 2

#### *Age Distribution of Survey Participants*

Age of Respondents	Percent
<24	3.5%
25 - 36	19.8%
37 – 48	28.9%
49 – 60	23.9%
>61	14.2%
No Response	9.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>

There were significantly more female respondents (91%) than male (9%), which is not surprising, given that males are underrepresented in dance teacher organizations (and dance in general); for example, 6% of Independent Dance Entrepreneurs Association (I.D.E.A.) members, a national dance teacher organization, identify as male. Due to the small percentage of male respondents, I did not test for relationships between gender and other variables.

The survey participants have from less than one year to 60 years of experience with a median of 21 years teaching experience. When recoded, the following groupings were identified (Table 3).

Table 3

*Years of Teaching Experience*

Yrs. Experience	Percent of Respondents
0 - 10 years	21.4%
11 – 20 years	26.8%
21 – 30 years	23.6%
31 – 40 years	16.8%
41+	11.4%

### **Where do they teach?**

Respondents come from 42 states, including the District of Columbia, with a majority from Massachusetts ( $n = 62$ ), not surprising given that I am based in Massachusetts. The majority of respondents teach in private sector dance studios in suburban locations (66%); 22% teach in urban and 12% in rural communities. The majority of respondents (63%) do not own their own studios and teach at only one studio (66%).

### **Who are their students?**

Students of the survey respondents range in age from 3 to 55+ with the majority in the 5 to 18 year old population. A minority of respondents teach tap to 3-4 year olders (41%) and

adults over 55 (37%). Total student population during prime season ranged from 50 students to more than 450, with the most responses (233 out of 324) in the 51-250 student range. There is a wide range in the proportion of students at the respondents' studios who participate in tap classes (as opposed to ballet and other genres), with only 7% of the studios indicating 100% participation in tap classes and 30% indicating that 25% or less of their total enrollment take tap.

### What do they say about...?

**Hiring.** *It is challenging to hire qualified tap teachers.* Overall, 86% of respondents selected the options of *extremely* or *slightly challenging* when asked to rate the difficulty of hiring qualified tap dance teachers. 100% of respondents whose enrollment decreased selected *extremely* or *slightly challenging*. There is a statistically significant relationship between the response of studio owners and non-studio owners to this question: 56% of non-owners selected *extremely challenging* compared with 49.6% of owners ( $p < .05$ ). There was no relationship between the location of a studio and difficulty in hiring qualified teachers.

**Enrollment.** *Enrollment increased or stayed the same.* Table 4 shows the response to the statement "During this past year, my tap enrollment..."

Table 4

#### *Teachers' Responses to Enrollment Change*

Change in enrollment	Number	Percentage
Increased	149	47.9%
Decreased	23	7.4%
Stayed the same	139	44.7%
TOTAL	311	

More than half (60%) of teachers with fewer than 10 years teaching experience reported that their enrollment increased while less than a third (30.3%) of teachers with greater than 40 years

teaching experience reported an increase. There is no relationship between enrollment changes and location or size of studio.

**Training.** *The most significant influence in training is one's teacher when growing up. Higher education was generally rated as not an effective source of training.* There are many overlapping paths to becoming a tap dance educator. When asked what the singular most important influence was in their training, respondents overwhelmingly credited their “teacher when growing up” (40%). Other important influences were “workshops at conventions, retreat centers and tap festivals” (28%). Only 5% of the respondents identified a “higher education degree in dance education that did include tap” as being influential. I tested for a relationship between both age and years of teaching experience and most significant influence. There was no significant relationship between years of experience and training influence, but a statistically significant relationship was found between age and training influence ( $p < .05$ ). 76% of the younger teachers, under the age of 24, had the largest percentage of respondents who credited their teacher when growing up and this population had the smallest percentage of respondents who credited workshops. Teachers aged 49 – 60 credited “certification through a dance teacher organization” (13%) significantly more than other age groups, after teacher when growing up (36%) and workshops (25%).

When asked to further rate the effectiveness of factors, “books, DVDs, or other home video sources;” and “online sites, including courses, tutorials, YouTube, etc.” were identified as *somewhat* and *very effective* after “teacher when growing up” and “workshops”, although they received few votes for singular importance. The two factors most frequently rated *not effective* were higher education degrees in dance education with and without tap.

**What influences the content of tap dance classes.** *Other tap dance educators and students influence the content in tap classes.* Teachers were asked to identify the ONE most important influence that guides the content of their tap classes. The most popular response was “other tap dance educators” (42%) followed closely by “students”(33%). “Parents” (less than 1%), “television” (0%), “studio dance competitions” (2%), and “magazines/catalogs” (0%) had the least influence on teachers’ decisions about programming.

When analyzed by both age and experience, respondents indicated that “television dance competitions” (0%) had no influence on programming. When combining responses *somewhat* and *a lot*, teachers noted the top five influences as: other tap dance educators (95%), students (87%), Broadway shows (80%), movie musicals (77%), and online tap sites (71%). There is a significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) between years of experience and factors that influence teaching tap. Teachers with more than 40 years of teaching experience placed no significance on online sites and rated professional tap concerts equal to movie musicals in influence.

Table 5

*Frequency of Curriculum Topics Covered in a Weekly Tap Class*

Curriculum topics in a tap class	Never	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes + Always
Choreography/combinations	0	90	222	312
Vocabulary	1	49	260	309
Tap turns	13	192	115	307
Warm-Up	1	21	286	307
Across the floor	4	58	249	307
Technique	1	15	289	304
Classic Repertoire	25	185	107	292
History	43	201	79	280
Music Theory	50	160	106	266
Improvisation	61	195	64	259
Flash tricks	67	241	12	253

**Curriculum.** *Choreography/combinations is the most frequently covered topic in a weekly tap class. Tap history, music theory, improvisation and flash tricks are taught less frequently.* Table 5 shows the frequency, on a weekly basis, that the respondents spend on each of the tap dance areas listed. No significant relationship was found between whether studios compete, years of teaching experience, or training with content of tap classes.

**Resources.** *Teachers would like resources and more opportunities for training.* The final question in the survey was completed by 318 respondents and asked teachers to select from a list of possible tap-teaching resources or to write-in their own response. As noted in Table 6, the three most popular listed items were “resources for teaching tap vocabulary, etc.”; “more opportunities for tap teacher training”; and “activities for mixed-level dancers”.

Table 6

*Desired Resources for the Tap Classroom*

Number of Responses	What resources would you like to see in the tap classroom?
187	Resources for teaching tap vocabulary, history, music theory, etc.
168	More opportunities for tap teacher training
161	Activities for mixed-level dancers
140	A common tap syllabus
112	Resources for choreography
29	Other
318	TOTAL RESPONDENTS

Write-in responses included: Upper level teachers, live music in the classroom, better judges in competitions, more tap education in higher education, affordable resources, teacher training for high school students, and more opportunities for beginners at tap festivals.

**Dance competitions.** *The majority of tap dance educators participate in dance competition, despite the fact that teachers responded that qualified tap judges, good flooring and microphones are not always available. Urban studios compete significantly less than suburban*

*studios*. Of 322 total responses, 64% participate in dance competitions. Table 7 shows the frequency that the following factors are present in the respondents' tap dance competition experience.

Table 7

*Frequency that Factors are Present in Dance Competitions*

Factors present in dance competitions	Never	Sometimes	Always
Judges are knowledgeable about tap	14	152	15
Stage flooring is appropriate for tap	66	95	20
Tap microphones are available	57	114	10
Total Respondents = 181 (of 199 that compete)			

I looked to see if there was a relationship between participation in competitions and location of studio (Table 8). A statistically significant relationship ( $p < .001$ ) was found between these two variables. Urban studios participate in competitions significantly less than suburban locations.

Table 8

*Competition Participation and Location of Studio*

Location of studio	Respondents who do not participate in competitions	Respondents who participate in competitions	Percent who participate in competitions
Suburban	59	146	70.5%
Urban	42	30	41.1%
Rural	16	23	57.1%
TOTAL	117	199	

**The challenges of teaching tap.** *Teaching mixed levels is a challenge.* The greatest single challenge that the respondents ( $n = 289$ ) experienced was in “teaching mixed-levels” (33%), followed by “inconsistent training across levels” (18%). Only 1% of the respondents



identified “lack of student interest” and only 2% cited a “lack of resources” when asked to select the ONE greatest challenge in teaching tap. A statistically significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) was found between years of teaching experience and challenges. Teachers with more than 40 years of teaching experience are particularly more challenged with “finding appropriate music” and the “lack of representation in today’s media/society” than teachers with less than 20 years teaching experience. But teachers with more than 40 years teaching experience were less challenged by inconsistent training across levels than all other experience groups.

Twenty-four percent of the respondents wrote in another challenge that was not listed. Some common topics were “frustration with students who prefer other genres”, “conflicts with a school dance team”, “a lack of understanding that skill development takes time”, and “student restlessness.” One teacher mentioned “a lack of appreciation for tap at dance competitions.” Several other comments confirmed the frustration of teaching mixed ability levels.

**The benefits of teaching tap.** *Teachers benefit from seeing their students develop new skills.* Teachers were asked to identify the singular most satisfying benefit to teaching tap and were invited to write-in their own response. Of the suggested responses, the two most popular selections were “seeing students develop new skills” (29%) and “teaching and interacting with students” (27%). There was no relationship between the most satisfying benefit and age, years of experience, or location of studio.

Fifteen teachers wrote in responses, which included, “closing my eyes & listening to a crisp & clean routine.” Other comments also addressed the joy of exploring musical ideas through choreography and improvisation. Overall, the comments referenced the teachers’ pleasure and satisfaction in watching students “come to get it, appreciate it and grow and improve as rhythm tap artists.”

## Summary

The results of this survey reflect the opinions and experiences of 338 tap dance educators who finished the tap teacher survey. Key findings are:

**Enrollment and hiring.** Enrollment stayed the same (44.7%) or increased (47.9%) with only 7.4% reporting a decrease during the school year 2018-2019. There is no relationship between a decrease in enrollment and location, age, experience or size of studio. Teachers find it extremely challenging (56%) to hire qualified tap teachers, an opinion especially held by non-owners (66%). Thirty-four percent teach at more than one studio.

**Training, curriculum, and resources.** The most important influence in training is one's teacher when growing up (40%), followed by workshops at conventions and tap festivals (28%). A dance degree in higher education, with or without tap, was ineffective (5%) at influencing respondents' training. The most important influence that guides the content of tap classes is other tap dance educators followed closely by students. Television and studio dance competitions have little to no influence on content in tap classes. Teachers would like to see resources for teaching tap vocabulary, history, music theory, etc.; more opportunities for tap teacher training; and activities for mixed-level dancers. This request is not surprising, given that the content areas taught least often include history, music theory, improvisation, and flash tricks.

**Dance competitions and social media.** Sixty-four percent of respondents ( $n = 322$ ) participate in dance competitions though urban studios (41.1%) participate significantly less than suburban locations (70.5%). A minority of participants selected *always* when asked about the presence of judges who are knowledgeable about tap (9%), stage flooring that is appropriate (12%), and availability of microphones (6%).

**Challenges and benefits.** The greatest challenge the respondents face is teaching mixed-levels (33%) followed by inconsistent training across levels (18%). Write-in responses addressed the frustration with judging and floors in dance competitions (4), the importance and value of studying music and growing rhythmically (7), and the satisfaction and joy a teacher experiences when their students “get it” (10). Five comments included the word “love” in write-in responses to the question of the most satisfying benefit of teaching tap dance: “Inspiring a love for this American tradition and dance form that I love!”

**Surprising results.** In several cases, teachers with more than 40 years of teaching experience differed significantly from less experienced teachers in their responses: they considered certification from a dance teacher organization to have an influence on their training; they placed no significance on online sites and rated professional tap concerts equal to movie musicals in influencing the content of tap classes; they were particularly more challenged with finding appropriate music and the lack of tap representation in today’s media/society; and they were less challenged by inconsistent training across levels than all other experience groups. Less than a third (30%) of this experience group saw an increase in enrollment.

Another surprising finding was the extent that survey respondents claimed that studio and television dance competitions do not influence the content of tap programming. This finding contradicts the literature, which claims that dance educators are strongly influenced by the images and choreography seen on the competition stage (Guarino, 2014; Risner et al., 2004; Schupp, 2018; Foster, 2019).

The numeric data yields important information about the experiences of the 338 survey respondents and the write-in responses provide thought-provoking feedback that contributes to the story of the tap dance educator in the private sector studio. Many of the write-in responses

reflect the opinions shared by the interviewees. Numeric data alone cannot bring understanding to the experience of teaching tap. In the next section, I share the results of the nine interviews and discuss themes that support or question the survey findings. The results will answer “how” and “why” questions that cannot be adequately addressed in a survey.

### **Section Two: Interview Findings**

In Section Two, I introduce the interview participants and their stories. Data I collected in the nine interviews raised other themes not addressed in the survey, including self-doubt and the relationship between trends and traditions. Together, the survey and interview data offer a deeper understanding of the experience of teaching tap dance in the private sector dance studio.

I interviewed nine tap dance teachers from private sector studios while I attended five different dance events during the summer of 2019. These events, which ranged from 50 to 850 attendees, attracted dance educators from across the United States, and provided me with a diverse sample of interviewees. One set of individual interviews were held with four women and one man who ranged in age from 27 to 65, have from three to 35 years teaching experience, and teach at studios in urban, suburban and rural communities. Two own their studios. Their stories expand on many of the topics covered in the survey data and differ in length due to the interest of some interviewees to share experiences that extended our conversations beyond the interview guide.

I also interviewed four “master” tap educators who teach private sector students and teachers at dance teacher conventions and tap festivals. I was curious to compare the experiences of the studio tap teacher with the master. The data from this second group of interviewees follows the stories of the studio teachers. In all cases, names have been changed and identifiable characteristics have been modified to assure anonymity.

## Studio Teachers

*Lily.* Lily and I had lunch across from the theatre, in a diner filled with audience members, performers and tourists, all seeming to buzz with anticipation of the student tap showcase, which was the culmination of the four-day intensive that brought us to this urban epicenter of tap dance. I met Lily at this event several years ago in a teachers' class but knew little about her experience as a tap educator. Lily started tap dancing in college and returned to it in her late 30s. After assisting for a short while, she was invited to take over a class when her own teacher semi-retired seven years ago. The mentorship of her teacher has continued to guide Lily and help her improve her teaching skills. To gain more confidence, she attends tap festivals, participates in a tap teacher course, and watches short teaching videos, which she can slow down and rewind to help her learn choreography. She teaches at three studios and also teaches jazz dance. "I'm kind of like a vagabond going here, there and everywhere." Lily credits her teacher, and the "really cool old school music" she played, for influencing her approach to teaching the adults and beginner teens she works with in a suburb of a large city in the Northwest. "I love making music with not only my feet, but my whole body."

The studio where she teaches the teens is "really more of a contemporary, modern-based studio, so tap is not their strength... I so enjoy them because they are willing to try anything." The students in her three classes want to focus on choreography and "dive into routines" although Lily would like to teach history if she had more resources, and improvisation if she had more confidence. She tries to mix up her classes with different styles of music and tap. A full-time job and caring for an aging parent leave her wishing she had the energy to do more dancing and training. Other challenges include sporadic adult attendance, especially before a

performance, and teenagers' lack of attention and their distracting focus on cell phones. Being able to continue working with her teacher and dancing are her greatest joys.

Lily's adult students, who are mostly in their 60s, love to compete, and despite dancing on hotel floors with metal connectors and judges that don't know about tap, Lily finds the competition scene to be a fun bonding experience. She bemoans the lack of "classic styles" and the fact that flash and speed get applause when she watches the younger groups. "I feel that there is a focus on one style of tap that kind of shuts the door on other styles. And I think that's not a good thing. I would like to see a little more grace and class." She also observes that, although "there's some not so good tap," which she describes as a lot of tricks, flash, pounding and noise, "there's a lot of good tap," which she identifies as being musical and rhythmic. Overall, she feels that enrollment in tap classes has increased. She believes tap can continue to grow if we "hook them in with some cool music and talk about the history ... how cool people were...promoting tap as being really cool."

**Nick.** Nick, in his late 20s, credits his "hoofing" style for his popularity with the children, teens, and adults he teaches in both an urban after-school program and in four private suburban studios. Unlike Lily, Nick prefers to teach technique and emphasizes improvisation as a tool to gain confidence and self-awareness "through the craft of tap dancing." Sound quality is the driving factor behind every exercise he teaches, whether to preschoolers or teens. Nick learned to approach tap as music by studying with some of the young male and female tap artists that were in *Bring in 'da Noise, bring in 'da Funk*, a 1996 musical that introduced "hoofing" to the Broadway stage and brought attention to the history of African-Americans through tap dance. Currently in a college dance program where he is studying ballet and modern, Nick appreciates

the opportunity he has to work in a K-12 setting in after-school programs and thinks more tap teachers should get certified to teach dance in the public schools.

The private studios where he teaches do competitions, although he rarely attends. He feels his students realize that the awards have no value. When asked why they do competitions, he believes that “it’s a suburban dance studio cultural phenomenon to compete and offer a team experience similar to soccer, and parents with money push the competitions...and it’s a promotion for the studios.” Like Lily, he finds fault with the lack of knowledgeable judges and the fact that “everyone gets a cookie for no reason.”

Nick prides himself on his ability to connect tap with math and physics and believes his college training in dance education increases his reputation and enables him to earn the trust of his clientele and a minimum of \$150 a night to teach three group classes. He is very tuned-in to the economic realities of being a part-time employee and seeks out studios with established reputations and educated directors in order to ensure long-time employment. He believes his academic approach helps solidify his role in private dance studios. He incorporates tap history into his lessons by referencing hoofers such as Lon Chaney, one of the Original Hoofers in the late 1960s and 1970s, when teaching a paddle and roll combination. He structures his lessons around classic Copasetic routines like the Shim Sham and the BS Chorus and, rather than teach a 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Broadway-style single, double and triple time step, teaches rhythm time steps to help the students learn to keep time. Nick is very clear that his work is not in the musical theatre or Broadway realm. “If I was only introduced to musical theater tap, I would have never picked up tap shoes.” Broadway or musical theatre tap is a style focused on presentation and light, stylized tap movements. He is grateful that his studios have other dance educators on staff who can focus on performance and presentational skills such as formations and upper body coordination. He is

confident that his style serves a unique population that wants an emphasis on footwork and technique.

Nick uses social media to strengthen his identity in the field. As a male, he takes pride in being a role model for boys to do tap and feels his musical approach, hip hop instrumentals, is unisex, and the expertise he has developed in teaching a “hoofing” style of tap “can make kid’s lives better” by empowering them with confidence and self-knowledge. “Tap dancing is just being comfortable and confident in yourself and understanding who you are.”

**Brittany.** Brittany also has college dance experience in ballet and modern and earns \$27/hour teaching at four different studios in suburban and rural communities in the mid-West. She feels isolated and struggles with having enough money to attend festivals and enroll in tap teaching courses. She tried an online tap course but disagreed with some of the online lessons. Unlike the majority of survey respondents, her training was not influenced by her teacher when growing up but from a college teacher who taught a very “Broadway” style. That teacher introduced her to the technique of lifting the knee and relaxing the ankles. The ballet and modern teachers introduced her to different teaching approaches and taught her how to think about choreography. Like Lily, she was thrust into teaching after assisting for a short while. “I didn’t feel like I was ready at all and just kind of jumped in.” By volunteering as an intern, she attended festivals and learned material she could adapt for her students. At one point she traveled five hours a day to rehearse and train as a member of a tap company in a major mid-Western city. Brittany feels that taking class with great teachers has been the biggest influence in her training as a tap teacher. “You just naturally have a good time because you’re with someone that loves what they are doing. When I teach, I want people to laugh and to have fun in class.”



Brittany grew up competing in another form of dance but now avoids competitions if she can. “I think competitions are stressful and I don’t like the politics involved.” In a noncompetition studio, “you have so much more freedom to be artistic and creative.” Although Brittany does not own a studio, she often has to respond to parents and their complaints - about placement, about having to take ballet in order to progress in tap, and about the cost of costumes and other money matters. She is also in an uncomfortable position of being the lead tap teacher and thus has to deal with other faculty who “are not teaching good technique and musicality. I’m getting these students and I’m having to start from the very beginning,” an issue of inconsistent training that some survey respondents also experience. Brittany is further frustrated because teachers ignored video footage she posted to help them know what to teach. She wants more availability of good tap near her and wishes there were better online resources for tap education.

**Maryann.** Maryann believes that dance competitions are a necessary component of running a dance studio. As an owner for more than 30 years, she realizes their money-making potential and, after stopping for 10 years, has recently returned with hip hop entries only. “I didn’t like the tap I saw – banging – I didn’t enjoy looking at it or listening to it. I pulled out because it got a little snitty and a little dance-momish and I’m like no, no, no - we’re not doing that.” Her new location is in an affluent suburban community and she is willing to try competitions again, but primarily in hip hop. By participating in competitions, she can require students to take more classes, another way to increase revenue. She hopes to enter tap again when her students show more advanced skills. Like Brittany, Maryann has had to confront inconsistency in tap teaching approaches. “I couldn’t believe what they couldn’t do” she responded when describing a recent guest teaching gig. Maryann believes that standardizing skill levels would be great but wonders how that could happen. She is the only teacher I interviewed

who has certification through Dance Educators of American (DEA), a national dance teacher organization, but she feels “that it was ridiculous” and that the test did not measure teaching ability or knowledge.

Maryann received her early training from a teacher that emphasized musicality. In college she studied ballet and modern and left tap for a while. Shortly after college she moved to an urban city that had a large tap community. Tap was experiencing a resurgence and she benefitted from the “brilliant” teachers she met in classes and at tap festivals. Maryann received teaching and choreography awards and was often recognized for her teaching excellence.

Due to circumstances beyond her control, Maryann had to move her studio several times over the past 10 years and subsequently feels like she is rebuilding and reclaiming her identity as a studio with a strong tap program. As new students join her school, Maryann identifies “teaching mixed levels” as her greatest challenge, the same factor identified by a majority of survey respondents. She is frustrated that parents don’t understand that tap dance has progressive levels and students can’t skip a level to dance with their friends. “Students jump around to different classes. Mixed levels don’t work.” Communicating with parents is more difficult in her new location where she only sees nannies. To assure that her students get to class every day she picks dancers up from school and brings them to her studio where students are supervised during homework and snack time for \$10/hr. “Children need somewhere to be every day and I want them here.”

**Roberta.** Roberta also welcomes students to stay at her studio before and/or after dance class to do homework and, like Maryann, to assure that kids attend their lessons. In Roberta’s instance, it’s also to provide a safe place away from the crime and violence that is present in the housing projects where many of her students reside. Roberta’s story differs markedly from the

others. She is a new studio owner, her location is, in her words, in a "ghetto-like" environment, and her students have economic challenges not present in the other interviewees' studio populations. Despite these obstacles, she is tenacious and dedicated to teaching dance in her neighborhood.

This is Roberta's third year as a studio owner. She recently retired from public service and, at 55 years old, "wanted to do something purposeful in my community." It was always a "burning desire of mine because I didn't learn tap dance until I was 35 years old. I always had it inside of me - this need for rhythm and tap and music and putting those things together."

Roberta's community is in a Southern inner city with "a lot of poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse and violence. It's indicative of what a ghetto would be." After repeated efforts, she received a small grant and opened her studio despite a lack of acceptance by the other dance studios in the area. Her studio is located in a neighborhood "where a lot of people hang on the corner. It's next to a liquor store and a grocery store selling cigarettes and vapes."

Roberta is very community-minded, invites the whole neighborhood to her frequent open houses, and brings students to perform at community events. "Tap is cool" she proudly announces. She rents her studio to local dance groups to help with her overhead. However, she vehemently disagrees with some of the "provocative music and inappropriate movements" she has observed. "Little girls are doing this kind of dance and, when parents and kids visit, they ask, 'Do you do this kind of dance?' I say, 'No,' and they promptly leave. It's unfortunate that's what I'm fighting against. I want them to have pride and respect of the dance."

Roberta also fights against the labeling of kids as "awful or bad," something she feels happens when some school teachers are biased based on looks or actions. Some of her students can be disruptive and she often communicates with parents to help provide "attitude

adjustments.” Roberta emphasizes the role of dance to help children acquire self-discipline and confidence. She shared a touching story of a young student who “has no rhythm to save her life ... but she grins the whole time... and keeps hugging” the student who lacked confidence and was troubled. That “seemed to be the healing that little girl needed” and suddenly “all the kids start hugging each other. It was infectious.” The biggest benefits for Roberta are the connections that her students make with her and each other, and the relationships that she is forming with parents and with the community, all based on trust. Roberta had a parent who suffered addiction problems. She was able to arrange support for the parent and a scholarship for the student to attend dance classes.

Roberta’s location presents unique economic challenges that effect enrollment, but her dedication inspires her to reach each student with personalized instruction and attention. She credits her own teachers, especially her music and theatre teachers in school, with instilling in her a love of music and movement. On National Tap Dance Day, she welcomed everyone to her studio for food and tap dance movies as one way to teach tap dance history. She attends tap dance festivals to advance her teaching skills, and she appreciates the camaraderie and support she receives from other teachers who share her love of tap dance. Maintaining her positive outlook can be “really rough when you’re in the studio all by yourself and there’s no revenue coming in. Sometimes I have to take my own advice and dance because happiness happens when you’re dancing.”

## **Summary**

### **What do the studio teacher interviewees say about...?**

**Enrollment and hiring.** All of the teachers interviewed agree that enrollment is increasing or staying the same, and that it fluctuates based on student interest, scheduling,

economics, and social connections. Children and teens want to dance with their friends. Maryann is rebuilding and hoping to return to a strong tap program and Roberta is also trying to grow a program while encountering economic challenges. Lily, Nick, and Brittany realize that they need to help advertise and strengthen their own classes to maintain their enrollment, and subsequently, their jobs. Maryann and Roberta teach all their tap classes and they didn't express concern about hiring teachers. Nick, Lily and Brittany, who represent urban, suburban, and rural communities, agree with the survey respondents that hiring qualified teachers is extremely challenging. Given the shortage of teachers, Brittany is aware that she is underpaid but lacks the confidence to ask for more money.

**Training, curriculum, and resources.** Each of the interviewees credited a teacher when growing up or a teacher met at a festival with having the most influence on their training. As mentioned in the individual vignettes, they vary in the frequency that they include history, music theory, improvisation, etc. in their classes. Maryann and Nick are very confident in their knowledge about tap history, so they include it regularly. They all believe music is a primary factor in tap dance and their tastes range from old-school, to hip-hop, to contemporary, and each of them approach tap from a rhythm-base, emphasizing how tap sounds, more than how it looks. Their inclusion of history, music theory, and improvisation contradicts the survey respondents who listed history, music theory, and improvisation as topics taught the least, next to flash tricks. Both survey respondents and interviewees, except for Nick, include choreography/combinations most often which is not surprising given the need to present a "product," as discussed in the literature (Warburton, 2004; Schupp, 2018a).

Brittany, Roberta, and Lily found the cost and accessibility of attending festivals or conventions to be an obstacle to their training. Maryann, Lily and Brittany have each used online

resources with mixed results and the survey respondents agreed that online resources were somewhat effective at training. When prompted to tell more about online learning, Lily mentioned that the videos need to be short and able to be slowed down. Brittany found that she disagreed with the online teacher and wanted better online options. Maryann found video footage of exercises to be invaluable in her effort to acquire more training in a master teacher's technique and she plans on using video more frequently to help students practice at home.

**Dance competitions and social media.** As discussed in their individual stories, each of the interviewees has a different experience with competitions, ranging from Maryann who feels it's a necessary part of owning a dance studio, to Lily who appreciates the benefit of bonding it provides her adult students, even if the judges and flooring are inappropriate. Nick, who occasionally choreographs for competitions, doesn't place any value on awards, and, like the survey respondents, none of the interviewees were particularly influenced by television dance competitions. Brittany does not compete because of the politics and drama. Roberta disagrees with the inappropriate movements. Nick was the only interviewee who used social media and found it to be influential with his students.

**Challenges and benefits.** The most significant teaching challenge cited by both survey respondents and studio interviewees was teaching mixed levels, followed by inconsistent training. The interviewees were unanimous in their explanation of why this has become a problem. Students jump around from one type of class to another, depending on what their friends sign up for, what day the class is offered, whether they had fun in the class, and whether their parent will pay for the lessons. This "jumping around" leads to inconsistency in their training, resulting in mixed levels.

Maryann offered another reason for this phenomenon of mixed levels. Some studios group students by school grade rather than by ability level. Further study as to whether this occurs in other genres such as ballet may shed more light on whether a common tap syllabus would resolve this problem. Ballet students generally must reach certain standards before advancing to other levels. Few tap programs are standardized. Each of these teachers follows his/her own instincts based on their personal experience, the influence of previous teachers, and training programs they have participated in. A common tap syllabus was listed fourth in resources survey respondents would like to see, behind resources for vocabulary, history, music theory, etc., more training options, and resources for teaching mixed-levels. The interviewees would also like more resources and more options for teacher training. Maryann was the only interviewee who thought a common tap syllabus would help resolve the issue of inconsistent training.

### **“Master” Teachers**

The master teachers I interviewed for this study share many common experiences and opinions, and, to avoid issues of confidentiality, their responses are presented collectively. I interviewed three men and one woman at one of the five dance teacher events I attended in the summer of 2019. Interviews took place in quiet corners and offices, away from the hustle and bustle of the vendors and the other teachers participating in the events.

This group of interviewees range from 30 to 62 years old and have from 10 to almost 50 years of experience in the field of tap dance - as performers, choreographers, judges, producers, studio owners, and educators. They have past or present affiliations with private studios but none of these teachers is responsible for managing any day-to-day studio dance programming. They travel across the country teaching and presenting workshops at tap dance events and private

studios, which affords them a unique perspective about the status of tap dance education. Interview questions were open-ended and addressed the same topics covered in the studio teacher interviews, including training, social media, and dance competitions. This second set of interviews also addressed the trends these educators were seeing as a result of their travels across the country, including their observations about changes in style.

### **What do master teachers say about...**

**Training.** Like many of the interviewees and survey respondents, the most important influence in their personal training was often their teacher growing up or a mentor they met along the way or, in one case, a personal “quest to find the steps.” Several referred to their training as “classic tap” and only one of the master teachers credited a college dance experience as having much influence on his current work in tap dance. Like Lily and Brittany, two of them were “thrust into teaching,” and “you’re learning as you go.” They do not experience the same teaching and business challenges as studio teachers experience, but, to be a master teacher also demands some sacrifices, such as living out of a suitcase many weekends while flying from one dance event to another, and the possibility that you may be teaching on a hotel parquet floor or on a raised platform covered with a rug.

When I asked about enrollment, they observed that “students might be less interested than they were 20 years ago and [teachers] are struggling to get them to realize the value of taking the tap class.” Each of the master teachers understands this struggle and makes efforts to emphasize the unique and valuable lessons of timing, shading, music and rhythm in their student and teacher tap classes. “You need tap dance if you want to be the dancer.”

They acknowledge that some of the teachers they work with “lack a foundation,” are not strong at tap, and “don’t know how to take a really exceptional tap dancer to the next level.” The



“need for upper level teachers” was mentioned in a survey write-in response but wasn’t an issue in the studio teacher interviews. The idea of a foundation or foundational training was mentioned in each of these master interviews. When prompted to define this term, masters spoke of “connecting content to process,” “rooted in the traditions,” “rhythm tap,” and musicality as “a missing chunk.” “Teachers focus on content and lack the breadth of understanding.” This emphasis on a product was discussed by Gilbert (2005) and Risner and Barr (2015) in their dance education research.

When asked how to provide that foundation, the four masters I interviewed agreed that the focus should be on “how to teach, why to teach it, and how to fix [technique].” It’s important not to intimidate and not overwhelm the people who are not strong. Teacher training needs to be “non-judgmental.” They acknowledge that the skill set tends to be higher at tap festivals than at dance teacher conventions, not surprising given that a tap festival attracts only tap dancers and tap teachers, and conventions appeal to teachers who teach multiple styles of dance. Welcoming all levels of teachers to a safe learning environment is critical to form the trust necessary for teachers to be open to new ideas.

**Social media.** When asked to comment on the influence of social media on tap dance education, the master teachers were united in lauding the positive benefit of exposure social media gave to tap dance. One educator responded, “YouTube was great for accessing tons of historical footage but now has become focused on delivering content through videos.” As a whole, they agree that there is good and bad information available and teachers need to exercise common sense when accessing online lessons. The master teachers agreed with the studio interviewees that some online tools can be a “rich resource of material” and can expose teachers to successful teaching methods that deliver content and process.

You can't use [online tools] as your only motivation. You need to know why the person is doing that, and how do you get a kid to this level to be able to accomplish what you are watching on this video. We see so much contemporary, even in tap dance, sometimes kids will think that tap basics and a good old shuffle ball change are old-fashioned, and, to them, it's not cool tap (master teacher).

They all agree that it's good that tap dance is in front of a million eyes but the presentation of tap dance on television is really challenging to do well.

“Floors are plastic and it's not going to sound right and you're not going to get the full spectrum of tone or dynamics that the dances are built for – where the nuance and artistry land. The viewers won't see it or hear it – the dancers can't communicate it through television – and the craft changes.”

They regret the message that *So You Think You Can Dance (SYTYCD)* sends to its audience that “tap dance is too hard – do the other thing if you want to dance on TV.” As discussed in Chapter One, Nigel Lythgoe, the creator of *SYTYCD* considers it difficult for tap dancers to do anything other than tap. This discourages young people from pursuing training in tap if they have aspirations to enter the commercial dance world.

**Dance competitions.** Although these master teachers are often hired to judge and teach choreography for competitions, they unanimously agree that process and understanding the “how” and “why” is more important than memorizing a specific routine. They see a trend toward flash tricks and speed, yet these choreographers are making an effort to “remix the foundation and focus on what you're hearing rather than overpopulating footwork and fitting as many sounds as possible in a 2.5 minute routine.”

“I see good tap and I see not so good tap” was a comment shared by three of the master teachers when asked about the influence of dance competitions on tap dance education, an observation also shared by Lily, Maryann, Brittany, and Nick.

“I see a lot of exploration into contemporary, which can be good because they are exploring rhythms and things you might not have gone at if you approached it in a traditional way, and I’m seeing good old traditional tap with formations and patterns and energy and kids moving and entertaining.”

Another master shared, “Routines should push the dancer to progress – have an element of variation and dynamics, use the space and make it a full body experience.”

The quality of dance competitions varies widely, and these teachers share the same frustrations as the survey respondents and interviewees. At best, there is usually only one judge that is knowledgeable, wood floors are never available and none of the floors are mic’d. One master commented that “producers should hire teachers with quality, not with glossy websites.”

“Tap is alive and well, depending on where you are.” Some competitions have no tap, and some studios bring no tap to competitions. The masters were in agreement that the industry is saturated with many subsets of competitions and teachers need to research the competitions they attend.

**Style labels.** The topic of a split or a separation between tap communities, hoofers and Broadway, was brought up several times and the master teachers all hoped that “teachers would work together, to be open to variations, and teach multiple styles of tap dance so that students would benefit from both an emphasis on rhythm, shading and tonality, as well as learning how to entertain and bring audiences into the experience.” These masters are seeing tap become a fusion with other subjects, especially contemporary.

One described “real” tap in this way: “It’s not just a step – it’s a feeling to the rhythm you’re creating. The person tapping is a musician, regardless of whether she/he is a Rockette or a hooper.”

Another master is concerned that there is no pipeline between the people who are the source of information and the tap educators who want the information. He finds the lack of a common language and access to the right people who have the information to be obstacles. The community needs to build a “web of trusted relationships” for the transfer of information to occur.

The comments of these masters demonstrate a commitment to the craft of tap dance and to teacher training. Their goal is to provide a safe environment where teachers of all ability levels can feel safe and open to new ideas. They are ready to form trusting relationships which they feel are necessary to build a foundation which they see is lacking in some teachers. Although this sample is small, I feel, through my experience, that they represent the hundreds of master teachers who share a passion for tap dance education, and they want to share their knowledge in a non-judgmental way so that teachers of all levels can benefit and experience the value that tap dance offers.

## **Summary**

The teachers who participated in this research represent a diverse community of tap dance educators whose common attribute is a love of tap dance and a dedication to ongoing education. The responses from the survey and both sets of interviews support the following key findings:

**Enrollment and hiring.** The interviewees, except for Maryann, who is reclaiming her tap program after an unforeseen interruption, and Roberta, who is still building a base after only

three years, agree that tap enrollment is stable or growing. Maryann and Roberta own their own studios and teach all the tap classes. Lily, Brittany and Nick join the 34% of survey respondents who have to teach at more than one studio in order to make a living. Interest in tap appears to be strong, but, although the availability of qualified teachers is limited, making a living as a tap teacher is challenging.

**Training, curriculum, and resources.** Teachers encountered when growing up or teachers met at a festival or in classes are the biggest influences in training for tap dance educators. A personal desire for knowledge motivates teachers to seek out information. Higher education, with or without tap dance, has little influence on tap dance teachers, except in introducing ballet and modern teaching styles, and in providing certification for teaching positions in public schools. Teachers most value the relationships they form with mentor teachers they meet at tap festivals or conventions.

Survey respondents and interviewees differ greatly in their understanding of music theory and tap history as vital components of strong foundational training. The survey data indicates that music theory was selected 9<sup>th</sup> in the list of topics covered in a weekly tap class, behind tap history, which was 8<sup>th</sup>. One master called musicality the “missing chunk” and all the interviewees commented on their musical approach to teaching. Likewise, all interviewees believe that tap history should be taught. One master’s comments echoed the opinions of the others. “Make them heroes, because they’re heroes. Focus in on the black culture of the history and how strong those people were, and that they entertained and broke barriers. That’s what I think this generation would be able to relate to.”

**Dance competitions and social media.** The survey participants indicated that studio and television dance competitions had no influence on their programming, yet a majority of

respondents take part in dance competitions, including interviewees Lily, Nick, and Maryann. Both survey respondents and interviewees, including master teachers, criticized competitions for the lack of qualified judges, bad flooring, and no microphones. Unlike the survey respondents, the interviewees thought that social media and competitions were greatly influencing the craft, a belief supported by the literature on the topic. This ambiguity highlights the paradox of competitions, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

**Challenges and benefits.** Teaching mixed levels and inconsistency in teaching expectations are common challenges for the studio teachers. The master tap teacher does not experience the challenge of decreased income due to low enrollment, inconsistent training of faculty and students, difficulties in teaching mixed levels, and/or the drama and politics of dance competitions.

All of the participants agreed that seeing students and/or teachers acquire new skills was the most important benefit of teaching. When comparing write-in responses with interview data, it was also clear that the relationships formed with students, parents and community members are meaningful and significant. Pride, although not mentioned specifically, was a powerful theme that was evident in each of the interviews as teachers talked about their students and their class content.

### **Surprising Findings**

**Self-doubt and insecurity.** A theme emerged that was not specifically explored through the survey or interview questions. Table 9 includes *in vivo* phrases and the concepts that led to the identification of self-doubt as a reoccurring theme expressed in both sets of interviews.

Master teacher comments are designated with the letters MT.

Table 9

*Interviewee Responses that Identified Self-Doubt as a Theme*

<i>In vivo</i> codes	Concept	Theme
“Worried someone would figure me out” (MT)	Lack of training	Self-doubt
“I didn’t know what I was doing” (MT)	Lack of training	Self-doubt
“Would go home so confused after classes” (MT)	Tap can be hard	Self-doubt
“Why and how do you do this” (MT)	Tap is hard	Self-doubt
“What am I doing” (Lily)	Lack of training	Self-doubt
“I was thrust into it” (MT)	Lack of preparation	Self-doubt
“I’m not doing this right” (Lily)	Lack of training	Self-doubt
“I didn’t feel like I was ready” (Brittany)	Lack of preparation	Self-doubt
“I just kind of jumped in and did the best I could” (Brittany)	Lack of preparation	Self-doubt
“I was afraid to ask for more money” (Brittany)	Lack of confidence	Self-doubt
“I was timid” (Roberta)	Lack of confidence	Self-doubt

I was surprised how often the master teachers reflected on their early insecurities, although it makes sense when I consider that each of these masters was a studio teacher at one time. The lack of training options affects many tap dance educators, even those who are significantly influenced by their teacher when growing up. Without a clear roadmap, teachers are forced to improvise lessons and jump in to teaching without guidelines. The master teachers I interviewed are empathetic and can relate to the self-doubt the studio teachers experience. They appreciate the teachers’ efforts to become better tap dance educators.

**Support from parents and directors.** A primary finding of the pilot study was that teachers did not feel support from studio directors and parents. The interviewees did not mention parent or management support as being a problem and, in fact, Lily and Nick spoke positively about the support they received from the studio owners. Brittany did express frustration with her owner when she tried to help the other tap teachers, a similar feeling expressed in the pilot study

interviews held in 2017. In other areas, the findings of this research support the results of the pilot study, which criticized dance competition judging and floors, identified inconsistent training as a major challenge, and highlighted the joy and satisfaction teachers gain from seeing students succeed.

### **New Questions**

The findings discussed in this chapter go beyond any available research on the experience of teaching tap dance in the private sector studio, and they provide some interesting data to springboard future conversations about tap dance education. The next chapter will discuss the findings and explore the following key questions:

1. Is tap dance dying?
2. How are tap teachers trained and why are core components of tap dance education, including tap history and music theory, taught less frequently than other topics in a weekly tap class?
3. Is there a relationship between music, style, and media trends and traditions rooted in tap history?
4. Why is it so challenging to hire qualified tap teachers despite consistent or growing student enrollment?
5. Why do tap teachers continue to participate in dance competitions despite an overwhelming dissatisfaction with judging, flooring and amplification?



## Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the findings from my mixed methods study that explored the experiences of tap dance educators in the private sector dance studio. Little is known about who teaches tap, what they teach, where they teach it, how they teach it, how they were trained, and what influences their teaching decisions. I utilized a mixed methods approach because no one methodology would be able to respond to these questions and allow meaningful interpretations of the experiences of tap dance educators.

I collected survey responses from 338 teachers and held interviews with five private sector teachers and four master teachers who work with private sector teachers and students. Five key questions were identified at the end of Chapter Four. My responses are a result of an in-depth review of the findings, constant reflection, and multiple ways of looking at the data. Below is my brief reply (in bold italics) to each of the five key questions that emerged from the results of this study. Following this introduction, I discuss each topic more fully, and I present recommendations for future action and research.

1. Is tap dance dying?

***No, tap dance is alive and well.*** Based on the data, tap dance never left.

2. How are tap teachers trained and why are core components of tap dance education, including tap history and music theory, taught less frequently than other topics in a weekly tap class?

***The most significant influence in training is a teacher when growing up.*** If tap history and music theory are not part of the early training, those components are taught less frequently than other topics. A lack of knowledge contributes to a lack of

understanding about the value of tap history and music theory as essential elements in tap dance education.

3. Is there a relationship between music, style, and media trends and traditions rooted in tap history?

*Trends in tap dance education* –changes in music, fusion with other styles, and the influence of social media- *can best be understood by studying tap history and its traditions and artistry.*

4. Why is it so challenging to hire qualified tap teachers?

*Teaching tap dance is precarious due to inconsistency in teacher training and the absence of standards to guide teaching decisions.* Job security and pay depend on student enrollment, which varies. Due to inconsistent enrollment, student levels are mixed which creates a teaching challenge. Teachers have mixed opinions on the value of a common tap syllabus.

5. Why do tap teachers continue to participate in dance competitions despite an overwhelming dissatisfaction with judging, flooring and amplification?

*Tap teachers' participation in dance competitions raises a paradox:* Why continue to spend large amounts of money and time on experiences that do not provide a quality, professional, and educational experience? The absence of consistent judging, tap-appropriate flooring, and amplification raise important issues that should be addressed by those who compete in tap dance.

## Discussion of Key Questions

**1. Is tap dance dying? *Tap dance is alive and well.*** “Tap will make a major comeback,” announced Jennifer Stahl in the article, “Calling It: The Dance Trends We're Predicting for the

'20s” (January 6, 2020). “After years of feeling like dance's ignored stepchild, tap seems poised for a renaissance,” (Stahl, para 1). She attributes this comeback to the work of performers Michelle Dorrance, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Ayodele Casel, and Caleb Teicher who are pushing boundaries with experimentation and exploration in tap concerts in New York City and other metropolitan hubs.

This headline is in stark contrast to the question that inspired this project, “Is tap dance dying?” What has changed in four years to transform this “dying” art form into a dance trend? My study sought to understand the experience of private sector tap dance educators – did they think tap dance was dying? Other research questions asked about training, class content, their greatest challenges and biggest rewards. Did they forecast this “trend” in their survey responses and during interviews?

I begin this discussion by arguing that, according to the teachers in my study, tap never left. More than half of the survey respondents have been teaching tap for more than 21 years. Tap teachers have kept this form alive through their ongoing quest for knowledge and dedication to tap dance education. It is exciting and inspiring to see each of the above-named performers in a live tap concert but, according to the tap teacher survey data, which collected responses from 338 teachers, professional tap concerts are only the fourth most significant influence in a teacher’s decisions about classroom content. I know from personal experience and feedback from interview participants that each of the performers mentioned in Stahl’s article is also a phenomenal teacher, and I wonder if it might be the teaching they do at festivals and private studios that is influencing and confirming Stahl’s prediction. Survey and interview participants are dedicated to exploring training opportunities at festivals, conferences, and through online learning.

Saldaña recommends searching for the “buried treasure” that can be found in research reports (2016, p. 289). As I made copious lists and markings on transcripts and data tables and reread and relistened to nine hours of interviews with five private sector teachers and four master teachers, I began to see a pattern in comments about trends in tap dance, and their relationship to traditions. As I thought about the intersection between traditions and trends, I realized that tap dance was experiencing another transition in its history. **I argue that the current trends characterizing tap dance education today are borne of the rich traditions that define tap dance as a vernacular dance form that maintains its artistic and creative life by responding to an ever-changing culture and by challenging societal norms.**

Tap dance has always responded to changes in the sociocultural climate and to ever-changing pop-cultural trends, as discussed in the section on tap history in Chapter One. The gender-bending performances of cross-dressers Alberta Whitman and Ada Overton Walker in the early 1900s wowed audiences with their stylized buck-and-wing and cakewalk choreography. One hundred years later, Caleb Teicher is being applauded for experimenting with gender roles (Stahl, 2020). Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards is receiving well-earned admiration for “dominating stages by showing off how stylish feminine tap can be” (Stahl, para 1). When I watch Dormeshia, I see the spirits of beautiful, talented, black women tap artists of the 1900s, such as Jeni LeGon and Alice Whitman, who epitomized style and grace, without the recognition they deserved. Michelle, Dormeshia, Ayodele, Caleb, and others are producing tap dance performances that are moving the field forward, much as the tap artists before them rallied during a time in the 1950s that Honi Coles referred to as “the lull” (Hill, 2013, p. 20). In addition to performance trends, other trends in training, curriculum, music, styles, media and dance competitions are impacting the field of tap dance education.

**2. How are tap teachers trained?** *The most significant influence in training is a teacher when growing up.* Historically, tap dance was passed down by watching, listening, and embodying the rhythms performed by others in tap challenges and in places like the Hooper's Club in Harlem, where mimicry was encouraged, but not exactly. Given tap's "oral" tradition, it is not surprising that the majority of survey respondents and interviewees credited their teacher when growing up as being the most significant influence in their training. Brittany remembered learning to "lift my knee and relax my ankle" and continues to apply this method in her classrooms. My teacher used a ballet barre for shuffle exercises, and I continue to do the same, sixty years later, in all my classes.

Second in influence for survey respondents were workshops at conventions and tap festivals. Based on my personal experience as a teacher at these events and based on the comments from the other master teachers, tap festivals are growing in popularity. This is not surprising, given tap's identity as a folk art and its deep connection to the people who practice the art. The first official tap festival, organized by Jane Goldberg and her Changing Times Dance company, happened in 1980. Other tap festivals were organized to celebrate National Tap Dance Day on May 25, Bill Robinson's birthday, proclaimed a national holiday by President George H. W. Bush in 1989. Since then, tap festivals have expanded across the country and the world. In the United States, there were 41 weeklong or weekend tap festivals held in 2019. Tap festivals tend to attract the serious tap dancer and tap teacher. One of the write-in responses in the survey wanted "more opportunities for beginning level tappers at tap festivals."

In Roberta's experience, "the camaraderie within tap dancing ... and connecting with people... is very heartwarming for me because you all have the same love of something that I do." Later in the interview, Roberta shared her newcomer's doubt about attending. "Are they

going to accept me? Am I going to be able to learn?” Each of the studio interviewees spoke of the inspiring and welcoming environment of a tap festival and both survey respondents and interviewees value the relationships they form with teachers at both festivals and conventions.

Write-in responses and interview comments underline the significance that these relationships have on training. Oftentimes, a mentor-mentee rapport forms and the master teacher visits the private studio or the teacher studies privately with the master, not unlike the traditional “oral” exchange that happened backstage during vaudeville shows. Several of the survey respondents shared write-in responses that identified specific teachers in the New York tap community, and all of the interviewees credited such a relationship with having a significant influence on their training. The relationships I formed with Billy Siegenfeld in Chicago, and Brenda Bufalino in New York, continue to influence my teaching approach and my role as an advocate for tap dance education.

***Music theory.*** When asked to comment on the role of significant teachers, Maryann responded, “I breathed rhythm – my teachers would teach by singing the rhythm of the steps.” Today, she practices that same rhythm approach, encouraging her students to sing it, clap it, say it, do it. This method is widely recognized for its multi-sensory approach that reaches all ability levels and ignites multiple brain activity. Are teachers incorporating this technique in their lessons? Not according to the survey respondents who listed music theory as 9<sup>th</sup> when asked how frequently topics are covered in a tap class. This finding differs markedly from the experience of all the interviewees.

A core component in the foundational training recommended by the master teachers was music theory, which they recognized as a “missing chunk” in some of the teachers’ training. The phrase *musicality* refers to a dancer’s ability to move as a musician. Several interviewees

observed the importance of musicality and the trend toward musicianship with comments such as “In real tap, the person tapping is a musician.” I wonder if they were aware that Baby Laurence was called a jazz musician for his rhythmic virtuosity in the 1940s and that Brenda Bufalino conceived the American Tap Dance Orchestra as a tap dancing orchestra in 1986? The trend to be seen as a musician is the ultimate goal of every tap dancer, whether professional or student. Teaching students to understand the relationship between the rhythms being made with their taps and the notes that each sound represents is a special skill unique to tap dance education.

I was first introduced to music training through the DTCTB Teacher Training Program, where I learned about the value of different notes. My studies with educators such as Billy Siegenfeld and Heather Cornell helped me to understand the concept of “swing,” and Brenda Bufalino taught me about polyrhythms and counterpoint. I was fortunate to study with individuals who incorporated music theory in their classes. I hope this trend and interest in musicality results in more workshops being offered at festivals and conferences to help teachers acquire the music skills and resources they desire to support tap education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Tap history.** According to the survey data, tap history is listed eighth in response to the question of how frequently certain topics are covered in a tap class. A recent interview with professional tap dancers confirmed this finding. Brian Schaefer (2018) interviewed Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Jason Samuels Smith, and Derick Grant about the state of tap dance. They cited two factors in their concern that the link between tap and its roots is weakening: the history of tap is not being taught, and tap is being fused with other forms such as modern, hip hop and “contemporary” (Schaefer, para 6). “We just have to stay true to who we are,” Sumbry-Edwards explained in describing their resistance to the trend toward fusing with other forms (para 7). My interview findings show that teachers agree that there is a trend toward fusing tap with other

forms, but I had to dig deeper into the interview data to understand what teachers say about teaching tap history.

Interview data presents an interesting perspective. Nick and Maryann teach classic Copasetic repertoire as their way to include history, although one of the master teachers pointed out that learning a dance routine is not the same as understanding the challenges and sociocultural climate of the time. He is right, but for Nick and Maryann and others who share classic repertoire, learning an historical dance opens the door for further discussion about the stories behind the choreography. For Lily, the issue is a lack of confidence about tap history knowledge. She wishes there were flash cards or snippets of information that she could easily access. The master teachers all agreed that history should be a part of all tap classes, but their confidence and knowledge also vary, leading me to wonder how often they share history lessons with their students. The survey respondents, like Lily, want resources for teaching tap history and music theory.

One reason for this lack of knowledge might stem from the lack of training options available to tap teachers. If the most significant influence in training is a teacher when growing up, and that teacher does not discuss tap history, it is not surprising that teachers do not include tap history in weekly lessons. Tap teacher workshops at festivals and conferences focus on sharing movement techniques and routines. In reflecting on my own path to learning about tap dance history, I credit the “oral” tradition and stories shared by master teachers such as Dianne Walker and Brenda Bufalino, and the tap history workshops taught by Margaret Morrison in the ATDF Tap Teacher Training program. Inspired by the stories, I searched for more information by reading scholarly books on the topic and engaging in a deeper study of women in tap dance history. One outcome of my study was a *Tap into History* poster I created based on a timeline



and photos of important characters from 1600 to the present day. This poster is available for purchase through the ATDF and through my website and I share it with teachers when I teach at festivals and conferences. Despite its easy accessibility, teachers' responses to using it vary from, "I have your poster and it helps so much," to "I don't have room for it in my studio" (personal conversations). If resources are available, how valid is the complaint that there isn't enough information?

*Could it be that some teachers don't think tap history is important?* My early tap teachers did not discuss history and it wasn't until I sought more training at tap festivals that I understood its value. As I discussed in Chapter One, learning about tap history provides a unique and compelling story of the individuals, what Lily and one master teacher called the "heroes," that responded to discrimination by maintaining, as the Whitman Sisters did, high standards of professional conduct and integrity, in both performance and in life. Would tap students respond with enthusiasm if they learned about Jeni LeGon's fight to be treated equally with her white peers or about Peg "Leg" Bates and his ability to rise above a disability? Would knowing the story of Leonard Reed, Willie Bryant and the Chorus Girls of the Vaudeville years bring a deeper satisfaction and respect when dancing the Shim Sham Shimmy, the National Anthem of tap dancers around the world? The survey indicated that the Shim Sham, a classic piece of tap dance repertoire, is listed seventh, just before tap history in the question about content in tap classes.

**3. Is there a relationship between trends and traditions? *Trends in tap dance education*** –changes in music, fusion with other styles, and the influence of social media - *can best be understood by studying tap history and its traditions and artistry.*

*Music trends.* The teachers and master teachers I interviewed often commented on the influence of music in their teaching. Lily appreciated the “cool, old-school music” of her teacher, Nick depended on hip hop instrumentals to inspire improvisation in his students, and both masters and studio teachers noted that tap dance in competitions was being done to contemporary music. I believe these trends in musical accompaniment for tap dance reflect a long history of accommodations that fueled some of tap’s greatest innovations.

Ragtime music in the early 1900s gave birth to jazz tap dance, a style that included syncopation, swing, and polyrhythms. 1940s bebop changed the character of tap dance to improvisation and speed, with dancers like Baby Laurence Jackson shifting their styles to accommodate the dissonance and complexity characteristic of bebop. The 1950s saw a decline in tap due to many factors, among them the federal tax on dance floors that caused ballrooms to close, forcing big bands to evolve into jazz combos that played in small, intimate settings with no room for tap dancers. Unlike the response to other musical trends, tap was unable to connect with rock and roll’s drum-heavy music, which left no room for tap’s intricate rhythms and sounds. As opportunities for live performances with musicians decreased for some tap artists, teachers looked to soundtracks and albums for inspiration.

In the private sector dance studios, movie musicals with Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly provided classic tap dancing tunes and the music from Broadway shows *No No Nanette* and *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* inspired young students to learn time steps and the soft shoe. Anyone who has ever tap danced can remember learning the “front essence” to “Tea for Two.” Music by the Gershwin Brothers, Cole Porter, and jazz greats like Oscar Peterson were heard in dance recitals where a tap kick-line ended every show. Several tap dance educators, sensing a void, recorded music

especially made for tap classes. Both studio and master teachers over the age of 50 remembered dancing to Al Gilbert and Danny Daniel albums during their tap dance lessons.

Hip hop music, with its propulsive, percussive energy was welcomed by a new generation of tap artists, led by Savion Glover, whose soundtrack to *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* (1996) was a staple in dance studios across the country. As tap dancing fused with hip hop and other forms, it was not surprising that alternative music would be brought into studio classrooms. Many tap artists turned to international rhythms, where innovators such as Max Pollak combined tap with Afro-Cuban rhythms. *Riverdance* brought contemporary Irish music and Flamenco music to audiences around the world while other tap performers and teachers explored the sensuality in Latin and Brazilian music and the percussion in Kathak dancing, a form of Indian classical dance. There is no limit to the music choices being made by tap artists and teachers today. As Brittany commented, “I have the kids bring in their own music that they love to dance to for improvisation exercises.”

***Style trends.*** It is not surprising, given the change in musical trends, that tap dance movements would fuse with other dance genres. In its earliest form, tap dance was a fusion of British and West African musical and step-dance styles. Table 10 includes actual comments made by interviewees that prompted my exploration of a connection between stylistic trends and traditions. As noted, each of the observations made by an interviewee aligns with a shift in style that occurred in the past.

Table 10

*The Relationship between Current Style Trends and Historical Traditions in Tap Dance*

<b>TRENDS</b> <i>In vivo</i> phrases by teachers in response to interview discussions about trends.	<b>TRADITIONS</b> The following historical “trends” represent an event, person or tradition. Dates are an approximation.
<b>Tap is a fusion with other styles</b>	
“more into the ground like hip hop” (MT)	1880s – Flat-footed buck dancing was close to the ground. 1920s – John Bubbles dropped his heels with complex syncopation and accents.
“more athletic and acrobatic” (MT) “more flash tricks” (Maryann)	1930s-40s – Nicholas Brothers stair dance in <i>Stormy Weather</i> 1950s – Gene Kelly in <i>Anchors Aweigh</i>
“more stylized” (MT)	mid 1800s - The Cakewalk engaged the whole body with fluid and graceful struts. 1870s – The Soft Shoe became an elegant, stylized dance. 1913 - Eddie Rector was known for his stage dancing which made beautiful pictures. 1930s – Movie musical, balletic, story-driven choreography dominated film dance. 1930s-40s - Nicholas Brothers were known for full-bodied expression, rhythmic genius, and dazzling feats. 1940s-50s - Coles and Atkins, the Class Act, known for smooth, precise dancing and impeccable style.
“I see more rhythm tap dancing” (MT) (Maryann)	1844 – William Henry Lane was hailed “King of all dancers” due to his ability to blend African percussive rhythms and a relaxed style and jiggling techniques – giving way to what we now call American tap dance. 1900s – Ada Overton Walker choreographed both solo and ensemble tap rhythm dancing for professional stages. 1920s – Jazz Age gave way to complex rhythmic phrasing called jazz tap dance. 1921 – <i>Shuffle Along</i> led the way for new musical rhythms on a Broadway stage. 1928 – <i>Blackbirds of 1928</i> – Bill Robinson appeared on Broadway in his famous Stair Dance.
“a fusion with other styles like contemporary”(Lily) (MT) (Maryann)	1700s- Irish jig and West African <i>gioube</i> (later known as juba) fused to become jiggling in the 1800s and became tap in minstrel shows. 1829 – Jump Jim Crow, black version of the Irish jig, was done in blackface. More Irish American and African American styles blended during this minstrel period. 1840s – Lancashire Clog became the Waltz Clog. 1930s - Paul Draper fused ballet and tap. 1940s – Acrobatics fused with tap to become flash steps. 1980s - Glover’s “hitting” style combined jazz and hip hop.

**Media trends.** The survey findings contradict the literature and the opinions of the master teachers about the influence of television dance competitions on decisions about programming. I attribute this finding to the lack of tap representation in programs such as *SYTYCD* and *Dance Moms*. This is not the first time in U.S. history that tap is absent or is misrepresented in the images we see in our daily lives. African American women are largely invisible in tap history. In 1930s movie musicals, African American dancers were denied the same opportunities as white tap dancers and were often portrayed as maids or butlers. This representation of tap as primarily a white male's dance form was not accurate and is another reason why teaching tap history is important.

**4. Why is it so hard to hire qualified tap teachers? *Teaching tap dance is precarious due to inconsistency in teacher training and the absence of standards to guide teaching decisions.*** Teachers rated hiring qualified tap teachers as extremely challenging. Why? Opportunities for tap teacher training are lacking, and most teachers learn how to teach from a teacher when growing up. Job security and pay depend on student enrollment. Although enrollment data indicates that tap classes are stable or growing, the issue of students jumping around leaves some classes under-enrolled, requiring the mixing of levels, which was identified as teachers' greatest challenge. Thirty-four percent of the survey respondents and three out of five studio interviewees teach at more than one studio, with several traveling to four different studios in a week. Despite data that shows the qualified tap teacher is in demand, pay rates vary greatly, from \$26 to \$50 for a one-hour class that will *hopefully* run from September to June, a normal dance studio season. Summer work is sporadic and undependable.

Determination as an Independent Contractor or Employee can further complicate the tap dance teacher's financial security in this ever-growing "gig" economy. California recently

clamped down on their regulations concerning part-time employees. Several young teachers I know are dealing with uncertainty as studio owners adjust their budgets to reflect the increased cost of covering employee benefits (personal conversations, January 2020).

Only 5% of the survey respondents and only three of the nine interviewees credited a college degree in dance as having influence on their teaching. The lack of tap programming in higher education contributes to the lack of training that challenges the field. I hope this data alerts those in academia to the importance of including tap dance in their course offerings. Tap should be a requirement for obtaining a degree in dance education.

***Mentorship.*** Can we utilize our teachers with 40+ years of teaching experience to help novice tap educators in some challenges that take years to conquer? The survey data indicates that teachers with more than 40 years of experience are less challenged by inconsistent training than less experienced teachers. Let's connect experienced teachers with new teachers. Dance teacher organizations such as DTCB, DMA, or DEA might consider mentorship programs, where a new member gets to have the support of an experienced teacher during his/her first year. The influence of a single teacher can be significant, and more mentorship programs would provide unique training opportunities while also paying homage to experienced teachers.

***A common syllabus.*** Although it was only the fourth most important resource requested by survey respondents, a common syllabus was mentioned in all of the interviews as an idea with merit. I believe it is unlikely to happen due to the "oral" tradition that is at the core of mentor relationships most valued by teachers. Master interviewees spoke of the need for different tap communities to come together. I think there is movement toward a united appreciation and respect for differences, but I think it's unlikely that mutual respect will extend to agreement over vocabulary, pedagogy, and choreography. For now, I think we need to work toward a holistic

approach to teaching that embraces multiple styles, offers alternative vocabulary options, and recognizes our similarities more than our differences.

**5. Why do tap teachers participate in dance competitions? *Tap teachers' participation in dance competitions raises a paradox.*** “I see good tap and I see bad tap,” was a comment shared by seven of the nine interviewees in responding to the question of whether dance competitions are having an influence on tap dance education. Good tap is described as “not all stomp stomp stomp,” “done to old school music,” “more open rhythms,” and “more choreography.” Bad tap is “lots of stomping, flash steps, and noise” and “no connection to the music.”

The data from the survey and the interviews overwhelmingly suggest that the tap dance competition experience lacks qualified judges, appropriate flooring and proper amplification. **Why then, do studios continue to dedicate important training time, and financial and personal resources to this activity?** Maryann cited the financial benefit of competitions, as Schupp (2017), Foster (2019), and other researchers found in their dance competition research. Lily was the only interviewee who acknowledged the benefit of bonding, also identified by Schupp (2018b) and Shannon (2016) when discussing dance competitions and culture. No write-in responses referred to any benefits of competing.

Nick suggested that competitions were part of the “suburban studio culture.” Are they so ingrained in the dance studio experience that teachers, especially in suburban locations, feel it necessary to participate? I can understand the dilemma teachers who are already deeply connected and committed to the competition experience face. Students love to perform and the bonding that occurs during these intense competitions brings a unique camaraderie to the environment of a dance studio.

As discussed in Chapter Two, competition is part of tap dance's history. As dancers moved from Vaudeville to the Broadway stage, it was necessary to prove oneself by competing in buck-and-wing and cakewalk contests. In 1900, Bill Robinson won with his light-footed, upright style versus the flat-footed Buck dancing style that was close to the floor. His success led to fame on Broadway and in movie musicals. The contests that occurred during the early days of tap encouraged improvisation and innovation, two qualities not celebrated on today's dance competition stages where tap soloists try their best to wow the judges with flashy footwork, and ensemble dance is characterized by formations and stylized movements. Despite the effort and ingenuity of competition choreographers and teachers, I believe that tap dance will never be as popular or successful in dance competitions as contemporary, hip hop, musical theatre, jazz or ballet due to several reasons:

1. Good tap depends on sound more than looks, and until competition companies dedicate their profits to providing professional flooring and amplification, and teachers focus on how a dance sounds rather than how it looks, tap dance will suffer.
2. Improvisation ignited innovation, exploration, and experimentation. Improvisation is not done in the traditional studio dance competition. Survey respondents listed improvisation as 9<sup>th</sup> in content covered in a weekly tap class and, except for Nick and one of the masters, most of the interviewees do not emphasize improvisation in their classes and it was not mentioned in write-in survey responses.
3. The tap "battle" or "contest" was framed around two individual dancers who competed in live interaction. Today's studio competitions do not provide this opportunity.



There are some options if teachers want to see changes. As consumers, parents, students, and teachers should boycott competition companies that show no respect for tap. As one of the master teachers mentioned, “The industry is saturated.” Studio owners can choose what competitions they support. The financial investment is great, and students deserve an environment that rewards their hard work.

I hope that Schupp (2019) is correct that dance will continue to change and that a new generation of dancers who value diversity will demand more opportunities for students regardless of body type, financial status, gender or race. My hope is that they will use their voices, and their power as consumers, for the good of dance education.

### **Conclusion**

This study presents some common understandings about the experience of the tap dance educator in the private sector studio. The tap dance teacher is passionate about tap dance education, as demonstrated by her attendance at festivals and conventions and her desire for resources and more training opportunities. She most values the training she has received from a teacher she met when growing up or at a tap festival. Unfortunately, gaps in training, especially in how to incorporate tap history and music theory are present. The tap dance educator in this study does not see the need for a common tap syllabus, despite the problems she encounters due to inconsistent training across levels and the challenges she faces when forced to mix levels. Her students participate in dance competitions even though she is unhappy with the judging, flooring and amplification available for tap routines. There is not enough data to make any conclusions about why she continues to compete despite her dissatisfaction, but this is a topic ripe for further investigation – and an important one, given its economic, artistic, and social implications. The disagreement between survey respondents and the literature over the influence of television and

studio dance competitions is likely due to the lack of tap representation in these media outlets. The literature did not focus exclusively on the impact on tap programming.

The tap dance teacher's greatest joy is in interacting with her students and observing them acquire new skills. The word "love" was mentioned more than 40 times in the interviews and in write-in responses by the survey respondents. In discussing my assumptions in Chapter One, I mentioned that loving tap dance was not enough. Deep appreciation for the artistry and a respect for the traditions and history are necessary and, based on this research, is slowly spreading. For the studio teacher, it is this love and dedication for tap dance that drives the passion and effort necessary to seek training and sustain and build strong tap programs. For the master teacher, it is that same dedication and passion that renews their energy and enthusiasm with every new stop in their travels, as they strive to reach all tap teachers with acceptance and empathy. All of the teachers want tap to be appreciated and respected and are searching for ways to make tap dance valuable to the parents and students in their communities. One important way to accomplish this goal is to acquire more knowledge about tap dance history.

As a uniquely American art form, tap always has and will continue to provide 1) an outlet for creative expression; 2) a source of entertainment and inspiration for audiences young and old; 3) a vital link to the history of dance, the history of early immigrants to the U.S., and the African-American fight for freedom; and 4) a movement experience that engages the mind, the body and the spirit and is available to all ages and ability levels.

### **Recommendations**

My study provides a greater understanding about the experience of the tap dance educator in the private studio sector. I hope that the findings invite others to join the conversation. There

were many topics not addressed that deserve attention. Questions that arose during the analysis phase of this study include:

- What kind of programming at tap festivals and dance teacher conventions is most valuable to tap teachers?
- Do teachers who include tap in a combo program that combines tap with other subjects experience more retention and less jumping around in their tap enrollment?
- How can the value of teaching tap history and music theory be conveyed to private sector tap dance teachers? How can resources be designed to provide the training teachers desire?
- What online platforms are most successful in training tap dance educators, not just to teach new steps, but to increase understanding about the technique and history behind the movement?
- What higher education dance degree programs include tap dance and/or tap teacher training?
- How does the experience of learning tap in a competition studio differ from the experience in a non-competition studio?
- What do students say about the experience of tap dancing?

This study is a small step toward understanding the experience of the tap dance educator in the private sector studio. It is a small contribution that I hope will attract the interest of dance educators and teacher training institutes to the field of tap dance teacher education. A tap dance educator teaches music, vocabulary, math, history, rhythm, and shading, as she/he challenges students to be creative thinkers and problem solvers.

“How can we sound as one?” my students ask themselves.

“How do we teach students to listen?” I ask myself.

I look forward to continuing my research and collaborating with other tap dance educators to develop resources that teachers are requesting, especially in the area of tap history and music theory. I believe the issue of mixed levels is a result of inconsistent enrollment. I predict that tap will grow stronger and will re-establish itself as a staple in the private sector dance studio. As enrollment grows, teachers will be able to establish and maintain tap programs that accommodate different levels and styles of tap dance. For tap dance to continue to thrive, we must accept different approaches and interpretations without judgement. We must remain open to tap’s fusion with other forms while also respecting traditional styles. Tap dance has been around for more than a hundred years, and it will continue to adapt to new trends and reach new audiences and students with the innovation, dedication, and exploration characterizing today’s vibrant tap dance scene.

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## Appendix A Tap Teacher Survey

***Thank you for taking this brief 10 minute confidential survey. Your answers will contribute to understanding the experience of teaching tap in the private sector dance studio. Your feedback will be analyzed as part of a mixed methods study on tap dance education. All comments are completely confidential.***

***This survey will be live through August. Thank you! Your voice is important.***

***Thelma Goldberg, Lesley University***

### Personal Information/Training & Experience

Q2 Age

\_\_\_\_\_

Q3 What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- I prefer not to answer
- Other

Q4 # of Years Teaching Tap

\_\_\_\_\_

Q5 What is the single most important influence in your training as a tap dance teacher? Select ONE:

- Higher Education degree in dance education that included tap
- Higher Education degree in dance education that did not include tap
- Workshops/intensives at conventions, retreat centers, tap festivals
- Weekly teacher classes in local community
- Books, DVDs, or other home video sources
- Online Sites, including courses, tutorials, YouTube, etc.
- Certification through dance teacher organizations
- Teacher(s) when growing up
- Self-taught
- Tap Teacher Course
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 Please rate the effectiveness of other sources of tap teacher training that influence your teaching.

Not effective                  Somewhat effective                  Very effective

Higher Education degree in  
dance education that  
included tap

Higher Education degree in  
dance education that did  
not include tap

Workshops/intensives at  
conventions, retreat  
centers, tap festivals

Weekly teacher classes in  
local community

Books, DVDs, or other  
home video sources

Online Sites, including  
courses, tutorials, YouTube,  
etc.



Certification through  
dance teacher organizations

Teacher(s) when growing  
up

Self-taught

Tap Teacher Course

Other (please specify):

### Private Sector Studio Information

- Q7 Do you currently own your own studio? (for those who answer 'No', please complete the rest of this survey with your primary studio of employment in mind.)
- Yes
  - No
- Q8 Based on your experience as a tap educator, how difficult is it to hire qualified tap dance teachers?
- Extremely challenging
  - Slightly challenging
  - Not challenging
  - N/A
- Q9 For how many studios do you currently teach tap?
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
- Q10 In what state is your primary studio located?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Q11 What best describes the area your studio is located?
- Urban
  - Suburban
  - Rural
- Q12 Approximate size of primary studio's total student population during prime season:
- 50 or less
  - 51-150
  - 151-250
  - 251-350
  - 351-450
  - 451+
  - Not sure
- Q13 Approximate percentage of tap students at primary studio during prime season:
- very few
  - about 25%
  - about 50%
  - more than half
  - 100%
- Q14 Please complete the statement: During this past year, my tap enrollment:
- Increased
  - Decreased
  - Stayed the same
- Q15 Age range of tap students you teach (check all that apply):
- 3-4
  - 5-12
  - 13-18
  - 19-25



Music Theory  
 Technique  
 Choreography/combinations  
 Flash tricks  
 Tap turns  
 Warm-Up  
 Across the floor  
 Other

### Issues in Tap Dance Education

Q23 What is the most satisfying benefit of teaching tap? (Select ONE):

- Seeing students develop new skills
- Seeing students develop confidence
- Preparing lesson plans
- Being part of a tap community
- Challenging yourself to develop new skills as your students grow
- Creating choreography
- Teaching and interacting with students
- Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Q24 What is the greatest challenge you face in teaching tap? (Select ONE):

- Lack of student interest
- Lack of parent interest
- Lack of studio management interest
- Lack of representation in today's media/society
- Lack of appropriate studio conditions (bad floors, etc.)
- Lack of training with teaching tap skills
- Teaching mixed-levels
- Finding appropriate music
- Lack of resources
- Inconsistent training across levels

Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Q25 What resources would you like to see in the field of tap dance education? (select all that apply):

- A common tap syllabus
- More opportunities for tap teacher training
- Resources for choreography
- Resources for teaching tap vocabulary, history, music theory, etc.
- Activities for mixed-level dancers
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you would like to further discuss the topics included in this survey, please contact Thelma Goldberg at 781-883-6635 or [tgolber@lesley.edu](mailto:tgolber@lesley.edu) to arrange an interview. Your input is important to understanding the experience of teaching tap in the private dance studio.

*Appendix B*

## Interview Guide

- Tell me about your tap program.
- How did you learn to tap dance?
- How did you learn to teach?
- What teachers do you admire most? Why?
- How would you describe your teaching method?
- Describe your tap curriculum and what components are most important to you.
- Give me an example of when you felt great about your teaching.
- Give me an example of when you questioned your teaching.
- How does the influence of social media impact your teaching choices?
- If you compete, describe your experience of teaching competition vs. non-competition students. Are there differences in your approach or goals? Why do you compete?
- What obstacles and challenges do you face in teaching tap?
- Describe your favorite part of a tap class.
- What trends are you seeing in tap dance education today?
- Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that would help me to understand your tap dance teaching experience?

*Appendix C*

## IRB Approval



29 Everett Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Tel 617 349 8234  
Fax 617 349 8190  
irb@lesley.edu

**Institutional Review Board**

DATE: May 23, 2019

To: Thelma Goldberg

From: Robyn Cruz and Ulas Kaplan, Co-Chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: **IRB Number: 18/19-056**

The application for the research project, "**The Perceptions of Tap Dance Educators in Private Sector Studios**" provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

**Date of approval of application: May 23, 2019**

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.