

# Flow Factors and Choreography Teaching Stages: A Correspondence Study

Yi Gang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lingnan Normal University, Zhanjiang, Guangdong 524048, China

Correspondence: Yi Gang, Lingnan Normal University, Zhanjiang, Guangdong 524048, China.

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## Abstract

Choreography teaching has long been organized around technique training and the production of finished works, while students' motivational states and the quality of their experience rarely enter instructional design. Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory and employing literature review and case analysis, this study examines the correspondence between flow factors and the stages of choreography teaching. Flow is characterized by three preconditions (clear goals, immediate feedback, and challenge–skill balance) and six experiential characteristics. Based on the conventional organization of Chinese choreography textbooks, choreography teaching is summarized into four stages: establishing motive and theme, organizing material and training technique, rehearsal feedback and self-observation, and role immersion and stage presentation. These stages are shown to correspond respectively to four groups of flow factors: clear goals together with presentation effects, challenge–skill balance, immediate feedback, and the loss of reflective self-consciousness. A logic of “condition supply–state emergence” is proposed: teachers cannot directly manufacture flow; they can only supply, through the design of each stage, the conditions under which flow becomes possible. Three cases—Wang Mei's modern dance drama *Thunder and Rain*, Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*, and motive-development exercises in choreography classes—are used to illustrate the correspondence.

**Keywords:** flow, choreography teaching, dance composition, challenge–skill balance, teaching stages

## 1. Introduction

Choreography teaching is among the most comprehensive courses in professional dance education. It must train bodily technique, deal with conception, structure, movement language and stage presentation, and at the same time attend to the formation and maintenance of students' creative motivation. For a long time, however, the evaluation of choreography teaching has focused on two visible endpoints: the degree to which students have mastered the techniques (motive development, phrase and

segment construction, canon, polyphony, stage spacing, and the like), and the completion quality of the final work. Whether students are genuinely engaged in the creative process, and whether they acquire sustained intrinsic motivation, has usually been treated as a matter of “personal feeling” and kept outside the scope of teaching.

This evaluative structure produces a familiar predicament: technique is transmitted, but the experience and the drive of creation are never designed. Students can reproduce given patterns after demonstration in class, yet their works are

often “correct but lifeless”; once the teacher’s instructions are removed, they lose the will to continue creating. The technical reason for this predicament is that choreography teaching lacks a middle layer between the “inventory of techniques” and the “evaluation of works” — an operational framework specifying in which teaching stage, and by supplying which psychological conditions, students can be made more likely to enter a state of deep engagement.

Flow theory may serve precisely as such a middle layer. Csikszentmihalyi proposed the concept of flow in 1975 and systematized it in 1990 (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; Ren et al., 2009). Flow refers to the optimal experience in which a person is so completely absorbed in an activity that time, fatigue and even the self are forgotten. The theoretical value of the concept lies not in describing a pleasant feeling but in specifying the conditions under which that feeling occurs: when an activity has clear goals, provides immediate feedback, and matches the perceived challenge to the person’s skills, flow becomes possible (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2005). It is precisely this “condition–state” structure that makes an otherwise subjective experience amenable to instructional design.

Attention to flow in the Chinese dance literature has grown markedly in recent years. Ye (2021) studied the “flow state” of six professional Chinese dancers and found that “the balance between skill and challenge” and “the pleasure inherent in dancing itself” were the two most salient characteristics, whereas “the disappearance of self-consciousness” and “the transformation of time,” commonly regarded as hallmarks of flow, were rarely reported. Wu (2019) examined the structure of flow states among Chinese classical dance students; Zeng (2020) found that flow experience was not widespread in Latin dance classes and that methods for facilitating it were scarce; Wang (2019) discussed how flow can be elicited in dance teaching from the perspective of “body–mind unity.” On the side of creation and curriculum, Gang (2021) built a model of the influence of Dance Flow factors on learning outcomes and developed a measurement instrument, extending flow factors to course-level learning outcomes. In the wider literature, the Flow State Scale developed by Jackson and Marsh (1996) and Jackson and Eklund (2002) provided standardized tools for measuring flow,

and Wrigley and Emmerson (2013) verified the reliability and validity of the model in live music performance.

Taken together, these studies establish one fact: dance and music performance are fertile sites of flow. But they also leave a gap: their subjects are mostly performers or students whose states are measured, with little return to the teaching process to discuss the supply of conditions; the discussion largely remains at the macro level of courses and evaluation, with little connection to specific teaching stages; and no directly usable correspondence list yet exists between the conditional dimensions of flow and the stages of choreography teaching. Addressing this gap, this paper answers three questions: How should the stages of choreography teaching be divided? Which flow factors correspond to which stages? And what does this correspondence mean for teaching? The study employs literature review and case analysis: the former to delineate the theoretical core of flow and the stage structure of choreography teaching, the latter to test the explanatory power of the proposed correspondence.

## 2. The Theoretical Core of Flow and Its Teachability

Applying flow to teaching requires first clarifying what it is in theory, of what parts it consists, and which of those parts fall within the teachable scope. This section addresses the three questions in turn.

### 2.1 The Concept of Flow

The concept of flow was distilled by Csikszentmihalyi from his observations of artists’ creative processes in the 1960s. He noticed that painters, when a painting was going well, would forget food and sleep and become fully absorbed, while their interest faded quickly once the work was finished. This suggested that behavior is driven not by external rewards but by the activity process itself (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defined flow as the holistic experience a person feels when totally engaged in action, and in his 1990 work systematized it as a theory of “optimal experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4). Chinese literature renders flow variously as *xinliu*, *liuchang zhuangtai* (flow state) or immersion experience. This paper uses “flow” throughout, but retains the original wording when citing studies such as Ye (2021) that use “flow state.” The terminological differences do

not constitute theoretical disagreement; the terms refer to the same psychological construct.

## 2.2 Three Preconditions and Six Experiential Characteristics

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) synthesized more than two decades of flow research, distinguishing three preconditions from six experiential characteristics. The three conditions are: clear goals, meaning that the person knows what to do next at every moment; immediate feedback, meaning that the activity itself continuously informs the person whether progress is smooth; and the balance of challenge and skill, meaning that the perceived challenge neither greatly exceeds nor falls significantly below one's skills. The six characteristics are: action–awareness merging, concentration on the task at hand, a sense of control, the loss of reflective self-consciousness, the transformation of time, and the autotelic experience of the activity as its own end. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (2005) further clarified that the three conditions are not parallel “elements” but an “opportunity structure” that can be designed from outside; the six characteristics are experiential outcomes that emerge once the conditions are met.

The pedagogical import of this distinction deserves emphasis. Researchers have accordingly shifted the focus of intervention from “asking students to concentrate” to “designing tasks that make concentration possible.” The Flow State Scale (FSS/FSS-2) and the Dispositional Flow Scale (DFS-2) developed by Jackson and Marsh (1996) and Jackson and Eklund (2002) provide measurable means of testing whether the design of conditions is effective. Wrigley and Emmerson (2013) administered the FSS-2 to 236 students after performance examinations and found not only that the scale was applicable but also that most students’ difficulty was not “lack of concentration” but the belief that their skills were insufficient for the challenge — condition imbalance precedes the absence of the state, and conditions can be adjusted by teachers.

## 2.3 From States to Conditions: The Teachability of Flow

To introduce flow into teaching, one boundary must first be acknowledged: flow is an emergent state that comes unbidden; teachers cannot issue the instruction “enter flow,” and what is teachable is only the conditions. Making this explicit avoids two errors: treating flow as

classroom decoration, substituting liveliness for engagement; and treating it as a quantifiable assessment indicator, substituting self-report scores for genuine experiential description.

On this premise, the most operational entry points in choreography teaching are four: whether goals can be clearly articulated by students; whether task difficulty matches their current level; whether feedback is timely and specific; and whether evaluation pressure can be reduced enough not to block the withdrawal of the reflective self. The following sections build the correspondence with the stages of choreography teaching along these four threads.

## 3. The Stage Structure of Choreography Teaching and the State of Flow Research

To establish the correspondence between flow factors and the stages of choreography teaching, coordinates must first be fixed at both ends: one end is the stages into which choreography teaching can be decomposed; the other is how far flow research in dance has progressed and what questions remain unanswered.

### 3.1 The Stage Structure of Choreography Teaching

Chinese choreography textbooks offer several conventional divisions. *The Chinese Dance Choreography Course* edited by Sun (2004) organizes its content as “introduction — basic choreographic training — dance conception — dance etude creation — dance drama creation,” moving pedagogically from technique toward complete works. Jin’s (2006) *Dance Choreography* takes “the choreographer’s responsibilities — dance structure — choreographic techniques — stage space — dance time — dance expression — collaboration with other arts — work analysis” as its framework, emphasizing the classification of creative elements. Xiao’s (2012) *Contemporary Choreography Theory and Technique* is organized by technical units, proceeding from dance motives and their development through phrases, segments, theme and variation, and canon to solo, duet and dance drama, and concluding with case analyses of three Chinese and foreign dance dramas. Their arrangements differ, but all imply one common sequence: material selection and conception — technical realization — rehearsal adjustment — stage presentation. This sequence is also consistent with Long and Xu’s (2009) basic account of the relation between content and form in dance works.

Building on this consensus, this paper summarizes choreography teaching into four

stages. The first, establishing motive and theme, addresses “what to choreograph and why,” and translates abstract conception into a presentation goal perceivable by an audience. The second, organizing material and training technique, completes the selection and transformation of everyday movements and forms dance language through motive development, phrases and segments, canon, polyphony and other devices. The third, rehearsal feedback and self-observation, revises movement choices and structural arrangements through teacher guidance, video playback, peer observation and self-awareness. The fourth, role immersion and stage presentation, addresses the transition from “executing movements” to “becoming the character,” completing the work’s final form within the performer–spectator relation.

It should be noted that the four-stage division is analytical; in actual teaching the stages often overlap, and rehearsal in particular runs throughout. The purpose of the division is to obtain minimal units for which the supply of conditions can be discussed separately, not to claim that teaching must proceed linearly. This division does not conflict with Hu’s (2016) description of the psychological process of dance creation (dance thinking — subject matter — structure — language — performance — appreciation) or with Ping’s (2004) analysis of dance feeling and proprioception; they differ only in level: the latter divide psychological processes, the former operational teaching stages.

### 3.2 Research on Flow in Dance

Research intersecting flow with dance in China has proceeded along three lines.

The first is state measurement and characteristic description. Ye (2021), using a qualitative method based on “lived experience,” studied six professional Chinese dancers and found that their flow states did not fully match the nine-dimensional model derived from sport psychology: dimensions such as the balance of skill and challenge, the pleasure of dance itself, total investment in performance and role, and the sense of control over stage and audience were confirmed, whereas “loss of self-consciousness” and “transformation of time” were rarely reported. This suggests that flow in dance is domain-specific and cannot simply copy the dimensional inventory of sport. Wu (2019) studied the structure and characteristics of flow states among Chinese classical dance students,

and Zeng (2020) found in Latin dance classes that flow experience was not widespread, methods for facilitating flow were scarce, and attention to students’ emotional experience was insufficient.

International empirical studies of the last three years have further enriched this line. Costa et al. (2026) measured 152 ballet students aged 15–18 and showed that trait emotional intelligence positively predicts dispositional flow and that flow levels differ with training experience. Thomson and Jaque (2023), in a quasi-experimental study of 288 professional and pre-professional dancers engaged in creating, rehearsing and premiering new works, found that several dimensions of movement-based creative processing predicted state flow, the most prominent predictors being “Clarity and Preparation.” These findings suggest that flow is not ineffable inspiration but a state that can be shaped by prior conditions — precisely the empirical premise of this paper’s argument.

The second line is teaching intervention and elicitation. Wang (2019) discussed how to elicit flow states in dance teaching from the standpoint of “body–mind unity,” regarding the integration of bodily perception as preparatory work for entering flow; this approach can mutually support Ping’s (2004) account of the relations among dance feeling, proprioception and psychological training.

The third line links flow with learning outcomes and curriculum evaluation. Gang (2021) demonstrated through an empirical model that Dance Flow factors influence the learning outcomes of university dance majors and developed a 24-item Dance Flow measurement instrument, providing a tool basis for bringing flow states into course-level evaluation. This line advanced flow from “experience description” to “teaching evaluation,” but the object of evaluation remains the student, and condition design on the teacher’s side is not yet addressed.

### 3.3 Research Gaps

The gaps can be summarized in three points. First, condition design is absent: existing studies mostly describe whether students “are in flow” and “at what level,” seldom answering “in which stage the teacher should supply which conditions”; measurement has replaced design. Second, stage connection is absent: discussions at the level of curriculum evaluation have brought flow into the teaching field, but they target the whole course and cannot answer how a specific

stage should be adjusted. Third, a mapping tool is absent: no directly usable correspondence has been formed between the conditional dimensions of flow and the stages of choreography teaching; even teachers who accept the value of flow lack a point of operational leverage.

#### 4. The Correspondence Between Flow Factors and Choreography Teaching Stages

This section establishes, stage by stage, the correspondence between the four teaching stages and four groups of flow factors; an overview is given in Table 1.

##### 4.1 Clear Goals: Establishing the Theme and Its Presentation Effect

The first condition of flow is a clear goal, corresponding in choreography teaching to the stage of establishing motive and theme, whose core operation is to translate “conception” into “presentation effect.”

Students’ common problem is not the absence of ideas but ideas that are too large and too abstract. Statements such as “expressing loneliness” or “presenting the contemporary situation of traditional culture” appear frequently in class but cannot guide concrete movement choices: loneliness can be expressed by curling up, by running, or by long stillness. When the goal cannot be concretized, what the student faces is not a manageable challenge but a vague task in which advance and retreat cannot be judged; in flow terms this corresponds to anxiety rather than boredom, because the challenge is perceived as indefinable.

The teaching focus of this stage should therefore be to translate the abstract theme into a statement of effect perceivable by the audience. Following the creative phases and structural elements proposed in Xiao (2012) for dance drama, the translation can proceed in three steps: first determine the final image of the ending (what the audience sees last), then determine the relation that runs through the whole (what changes between whom), and finally work backward to the middle structure (which sections are needed to accomplish this change). This “backward design” shifts the goal from “what I want to express” to “what the audience will see,” thereby attaining the clarity that flow requires. Jin’s (2006) distinction among dramatic, psychological, poetic and symphonic dance structures can serve as a reference when students choose structural paths. The finding of Thomson and Jaque (2023) that “Clarity and Preparation”

were the most prominent predictors of state flow is consistent with this analysis.

##### 4.2 Challenge–Skill Balance: Organizing Material and Training Technique

The second condition of flow — the balance of challenge and skill — corresponds to the stage of organizing material and training technique.

The task of this stage is to select everyday movements and refine them into dance material, then organize them into dance language through motive development, phrase and segment construction, theme and variation, canon, polyphony and other devices. The difficulty of technical training lies in its inherent monotony: a single motive may require dozens of variants, and the differences between variants are often minute. If task difficulty remains below the student’s level for long, the student enters the boredom zone; if the teacher directly assigns tasks far beyond the student’s level, the student enters the anxiety zone. Neither produces flow.

The “six criteria for selecting motives” and the training sequence of “the motive and its development” proposed by Xiao (2012) in effect provide a layered structure: the same motive can be accomplished at the level of “repetition and simple variation” or at the level of “theme and variation and polyphony.” If the teacher accordingly sets three difficulty tiers for the same task — the basic tier requiring changes at the movement level, the intermediate tier requiring changes at the syntactic and structural level, and the advanced tier requiring changes at the level of style and meaning — students can choose tasks near the boundary of their own skills. This echoes the finding of Wrigley and Emmerson (2013): students’ difficulty is often not unwillingness to engage but the belief that their skills are insufficient for the challenge; once tasks are tiered, students can remain in the zone “slightly above their current level.” The exercise designs of Sun (2004) on “the decomposition and variation of movements” and Jin (2006) on “choreographic training of movement elements” can serve as technical resources for such tiering.

It must be emphasized that the balance of challenge and skill is not a one-time match but a continuous reconstruction. Once skill improves, a previously suitable challenge no longer constitutes a challenge. Gang (2008) already noted, in discussing movement motifs in choreography courses, that motive training should not stop at “making variations” but

should aim at “making meaningful variations” — a requirement that itself constitutes a challenge standard rising with skill. Incorporating “whether rising skill is met by a corresponding challenge” into curriculum evaluation would provide an institutional means of maintaining this dynamic balance.

#### 4.3 Immediate Feedback: Rehearsal Feedback and Self-Observation

The third condition of flow is immediate feedback, corresponding to the stage of rehearsal feedback and self-observation.

The feedback structure of dance teaching has a peculiarity: two channels operate simultaneously. The external channel comes from the teacher’s language, video playback and peer observation; the internal channel comes from proprioception, movement quality and the rhythm of breathing (Ping, 2004). Ideally the two channels corroborate each other; in actual classrooms they are often disconnected — the teacher says “softer,” and the student hears an adjective devoid of movement information; video playback presents only appearance, not the way force was exerted at the time.

Making feedback immediate and operable is the core task of this stage, which can be pursued in three ways. First, replace outcome feedback with process feedback: not ending with “this passage does not look good,” but pointing out that “the weight shifted early at the transition of the third bar, which is why it looks broken.” Second, build a feedback chain of “problem — evidence — adjustment”: the weight trajectory visible in the video is the evidence, the weight adjustment is the response, and the inference between the two is completed by the student. Third, control the amount of feedback: one rehearsal addresses only one or two problems that most affect the effect, so that multiple lines of feedback do not arrive simultaneously and re-transform the task into a vague task.

Hu’s (2016) analysis of dance thinking and stage presentation provides the psychological basis: the choreographer’s thought is a process of constant return from material to outcome; if feedback does not return in time, the thought process is interrupted. What Wang (2019) emphasizes as “body–mind unity” means, at the level of feedback, the establishment of the internal channel — the student must, through repeated awareness, gradually map “what I did” onto “what I felt.” The “total investment in

performance and role” and the sense of control over stage and audience reported by Ye (2021) can be seen as experiential outcomes that appear once the feedback channels are unobstructed.

#### 4.4 Loss of Reflective Self-Consciousness: Role Immersion and Stage Presentation

Among the six experiential characteristics of flow, “the loss of reflective self-consciousness” is the most distinctive in dance, corresponding to the stage of role immersion and stage presentation.

A terminological misunderstanding must first be clarified. “Loss of self-consciousness” is popularly understood as a mindless state of self-forgetting, but Ye’s (2021) research shows that among the flow states of professional Chinese dancers, “loss of self-consciousness” and “transformation of time” were rarely reported. This does not negate the characteristic but suggests that its manifestation in dance differs: what disappears is not consciousness but the “reflective self” that stands aside judging oneself. The dancer in absorption has not lost consciousness but has handed it over to the body and the situation — in phenomenological terms, the “body-subject” replaces the “objectified body.”

This distinction has direct pedagogical significance. “Loss of self-consciousness” cannot be pursued directly as a teaching goal: the more the student is told to “forget yourself,” the more the student notices the self. What the teacher can do is reduce evaluation anxiety, thereby reducing the activity of the reflective self. Feasible measures include: structured improvisation that directs attention to the situation rather than the performance (giving identity, relation and circumstance so that the student need only respond within the relation); duet training that cultivates relational attention (the object of attention shifts from self to partner, objectively compressing the space of self-observation); and, at first presentation, removing audience evaluation by splitting stage presentation into two passes, “doing” and “viewing.” Liu et al. (2023) provide direct evidence from the performance setting: in traditional stage performance, public self-consciousness had a negative effect on flow experience, an effect partially mediated by emotional labor strategies. The activation of public self-consciousness is precisely the activation of the “reflective self” in evaluative situations; reducing evaluation

pressure is, in effect, weakening the blockage of flow by public self-consciousness.

The boundary of role immersion also requires attention. Ye (2021) points out that “total investment in performance and role” is a manifestation of action–awareness merging, which means that the criterion of immersion is not “the student says he or she felt it” but “the investment is visible at the level of movement” — movements no longer show pause-like self-

confirmation, and connections become continuous. This externally observable criterion makes the teaching outcome of this stage open to examination, and prevents flow from being reduced to self-report.

#### 4.5 Overview of the Correspondence and Its Underlying Logic

Synthesizing the four sections above yields the correspondence shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Correspondence between choreography teaching stages and flow factors

| Stage of choreography teaching             | Corresponding flow factors            | Conditions the teacher can design                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Establishing motive and theme              | Clear goals                           | Translate abstract conception into presentation effect: set the final image, set the through-relation, work backward to structure      |
| Organizing material and training technique | Challenge–skill balance               | Set three difficulty tiers for the same motive, kept near the skill boundary and continuously reconstructed                            |
| Rehearsal feedback and self-observation    | Immediate feedback                    | Replace outcome feedback with process feedback; build a “problem–evidence–adjustment” chain; a single focus per rehearsal              |
| Role immersion and stage presentation      | Loss of reflective self-consciousness | Reduce evaluation anxiety; structured improvisation and relational training; movement continuity as the observable index of engagement |

This correspondence embodies three logics. The first is sequentiality: the four groups of factors are arranged in the temporal order of the work’s generation — the goal is established first, then challenge is matched to skill, then feedback corrects movement and structure, and finally immersion and presentation complete the work. Its significance is that a missing condition in an earlier stage propagates to later stages: when the goal is unclear, skill training has nothing to anchor on; when feedback is not timely, immersion lacks the basis for correction. The second is circularity: feedback brings skill growth, and skill growth demands new challenges, returning to the second stage for re-matching; choreography teaching is therefore not a straight line but a spiral shuttling repeatedly between technique and feedback, consistent with the return process of dance thinking described by Hu (2016). The third is indirectness: all four groups of factors are conditions, not states; the teacher supplies the conditions, and the state emerges on the student’s side. Clarifying this clarifies the boundary of the teacher’s

responsibility — the teacher does not guarantee that students enter flow, but is responsible for whether students have the opportunity to enter it.

### 5. Case Analysis

The following uses two publicly available works and one type of classroom situation to test the explanatory power of the correspondence above. The three cases focus on different correspondence groups and together cover all four.

#### 5.1 Thunder and Rain: Goal Clarity and the Translation into Presentation Effects

Thunder and Rain, choreographed by Wang Mei and adapted from Cao Yu’s play *Thunderstorm*, was premiered in June 2002 by the Experimental Modern Dance Troupe of the Beijing Dance Academy. The work consists of six sections — “Suffocation,” “Lightning,” “Struggle,” “Shattering,” “Release” and “Final Wish” — unfolding through five groups of relations among six characters, and is explicitly framed as an analysis of the characters’ inner emotional

world from a female perspective. Xiao (2012) includes it among the dance drama case analyses in the third part of the textbook, making it a widely circulated teaching case in choreography education.

Viewed through the condition of “clear goals,” the work offers a noteworthy treatment: it does not retell the plot through dance but compresses the original into several groups of relations that can be directly handled by the body. The names of the six sections are not plot titles but state names — “suffocation,” “struggle” and “shattering” describe the psychological situations of the characters, not the events that occur. The choreographer thus translated the goal “what story to tell” into the goal “what psychological relations the audience will see,” thereby attaining the clarity required for structural operation.

The corresponding pedagogical implication is that in the theme-establishing stage, students should be guided to formulate goals in “structure–relation” terms rather than “plot–narration” terms. “I want to show how a family disintegrates under repression” leads to the predicament of not knowing where to begin, whereas “I want the audience to see a set of relations in which the members hurt each other in mutual dependence, and to see this set of relations collapse in the final section” immediately yields operable structural clues. This is precisely an instance of the “presentation–effect statement” described above.

## 5.2 Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake: The Continuous Reconstruction of Challenge and Skill*

Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake* premiered at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre in London on 9 November 1995. Its most noted adaptation replaced the traditionally female swan corps with an all-male cast and shifted the narrative focus from the prince’s love to the prince’s own situation. The production won the 1996 Olivier Award, the 1999 Tony Award and more than forty international awards in total, has become one of the longest-running ballet works in the West End and on Broadway, and is included among the dance drama analysis cases in the third part of Xiao (2012).

Bourne’s own creative statements supply a detail directly relevant to choreography teaching: he has repeatedly explained that all choreographic decisions derive from the single idea “the swans are danced by men.” This coincides exactly with

the technical logic of choreography teaching — once the motive is established, phrases, segments, theme and variation, and polyphony all become ways of developing that motive. Viewed through the “challenge–skill balance” condition, this structure keeps the dancers in the high-challenge zone: the lead swan must switch between ferocity and docility, and the prince is on stage for almost the entire work, with high physical and emotional intensity. One of the company’s responses is a training system through which new dancers gradually enter their roles — pedagogically, the actual practice of “task tiering” and “raising the challenge as skill grows.”

The corresponding pedagogical implication is that technique training should be organized around a developable core motive rather than an inventory of techniques. Xiao (2012) places “the dance motive and its development” at the head of the first part, consistent with this approach; the exercise designs of Sun (2004) on “the decomposition and variation of movements” and Jin (2006) on “choreographic training of movement elements” also implement, in different degrees, the principle of deepening a single point.

## 5.3 Motive-Development Exercises in the Choreography Class: Feedback Chains and Role Immersion

The third case is not a single work but a type of teaching situation that recurs in choreography classes, whose skeleton can be seen in the exercises on “the motive and its development” in the first unit of Xiao (2012) and in the arrangement of “training in improvisational dance” in Sun (2004). A typical progression runs: the teacher gives an everyday action (for example, “holding a chair that is about to fall”); the student develops three or more variants; peers and observers in the front rows give immediate feedback; the teacher, instead of giving answers, poses questions (“In the third variant, your hand arrived half a beat before your body — is that what you wanted?”); the student adjusts accordingly and presents again. Several rounds can be completed within one class, each round containing presentation and response.

Viewed through the “immediate feedback” condition, the value of this chain lies in compressing feedback into the classroom present. The short cycle of “present — respond — present again” allows students to obtain evidence

about the effect of an adjustment while attention has not yet shifted, thereby forming the capacity for “choice–effect” self-observation; by substituting questions for answers, the teacher preserves the student’s ownership of the movement, in keeping with flow theory’s requirement of a sense of control.

Viewed through the “loss of reflective self-consciousness” condition, the handling of the later phase is decisive. When the teacher shifts from “evaluator” to “questioner,” evaluation pressure in the classroom falls, and attention can turn from “did I do it right” to “what will this movement become next.” If structured improvisation is further introduced (specifying the identity or relation from which the movement originates), attention can settle more stably on the situation. This agrees with the direction of “body–mind unity” training described by Wang (2019) and supports the finding of Ye (2021) on “total investment in performance and role.”

It should be noted that this case is a synthesis of teaching designs recorded in textbooks and of common classroom progressions, not a complete record of any particular lesson; its function is to show the feasibility of condition design in ordinary classes, not to provide replicable experimental evidence.

## 6. Conclusions

Taking flow theory as its framework and employing literature review and case analysis, this paper examined the correspondence between flow factors and the stages of choreography teaching. The main conclusions are as follows.

First, the teachable part of flow is not the state but the conditions. Flow cannot be directly commanded into being; what teachers can design are clear goals, immediate and specific feedback, and challenges matched to skill levels. Replacing “requiring students to be engaged” with “designing tasks that make engagement possible” is the key step for choreography teaching to absorb flow theory.

Second, choreography teaching can be summarized into four stages — establishing motive and theme, organizing material and training technique, rehearsal feedback and self-observation, and role immersion and stage presentation — which correspond respectively to the four groups of flow factors: clear goals, challenge–skill balance, immediate feedback, and the loss of reflective self-consciousness.

Third, the correspondences embody three logics: sequentiality, circularity and indirectness. A missing condition in an earlier stage propagates to later stages; the cycle between technique and feedback constitutes the actual rhythm of teaching; and the teacher’s responsibility ends at the supply of conditions, without crossing into a promise of states.

Five teaching suggestions follow. (1) Add a training unit of “presentation–effect statements” at the theme-establishing stage, requiring students to articulate their conception through the final image and the through-relation. (2) Set three difficulty tiers for the same motive in technique training, and raise the floor of difficulty as skill improves. (3) Replace outcome evaluation with process description in feedback, and limit each rehearsal to one or two focuses. (4) In role-immersion training, prioritize reducing evaluation anxiety through structured improvisation and relational training, and use the continuity of movement rather than self-report scores as the observable index of engagement. (5) Incorporate “whether rising skill is met by a corresponding challenge” into curriculum evaluation, so that the balance of challenge and skill has an institutional mechanism of maintenance.

This study has three limitations. First, it employs literature review and case analysis without classroom experimentation, and the proposed correspondence has not yet been tested by teaching experiments. Second, the four-stage division is analytical and remains distant from the overlapping reality of actual teaching. Third, the publicly available works and textbook cases used in the case analyses differ considerably from ordinary classrooms in group size, class hours and teaching conditions, and their transferability requires further examination. Future research may conduct small-scale teaching interventions in the choreography courses of dance teacher-education programs, combining the Flow State Scale (Jackson & Marsh, 1996; Jackson & Eklund, 2002) with classroom observation, to test whether supplying conditions stage by stage can improve students’ engagement and the completion quality of their works.

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