

THE INJURY PROJECT:

A COMPARISON

Final report



Lectoraat Excellence and well being in the performing arts

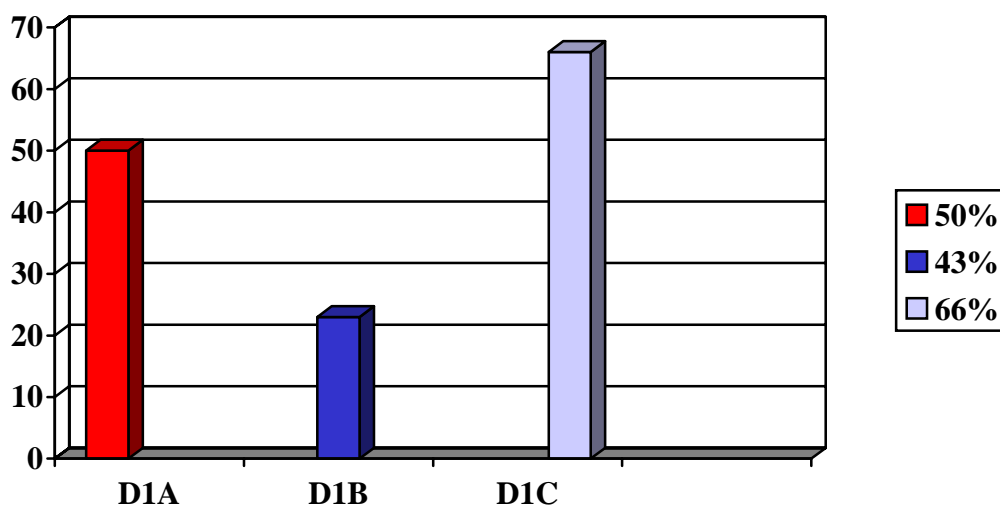
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The injury project: a comparison

In September 2004 the Lectoraat Excellence and well being in the performing arts at Codarts, Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, took the initiative to systematically register the injuries of all 1st year dance students. The registration was done by the health coordinator at the Rotterdam Dance Academy, Gaby Allard, under the supervision of Excellence professor Anna Aalten. This 'Injury Registration Project' was the beginning of several other research projects that were aimed at getting insight in the occurrence of injuries at the RDA. The ultimate goal of all projects is to set up an informed programme of injury prevention.

The results of the Injury Registration Project (Year One) were presented at the staff meeting in December 2005. The registration showed that of all the 64 1st year students 50 had injuries in the first semester and 34 in the second semester. Over the year 50% of the students in the A group suffered from an injury, 43% in de B group and 66% in the C group (see below). Students in the C group not only had the highest percentage of injuries, but a considerable number of them had also more than two.

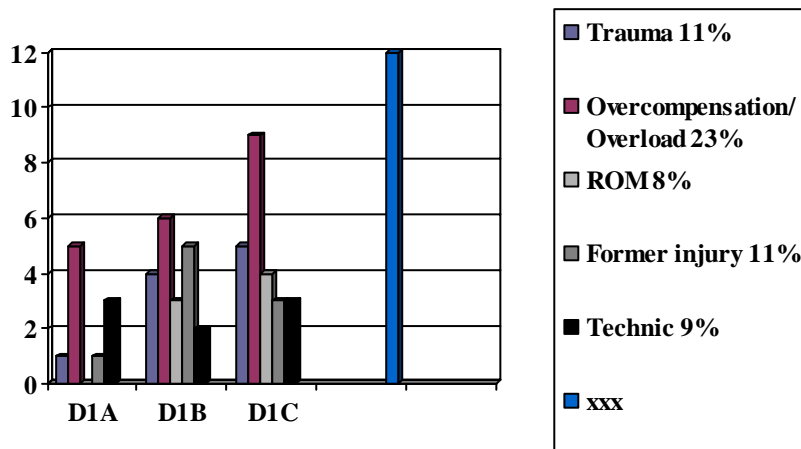


2004-2005 injury percentages in the three 1st year groups

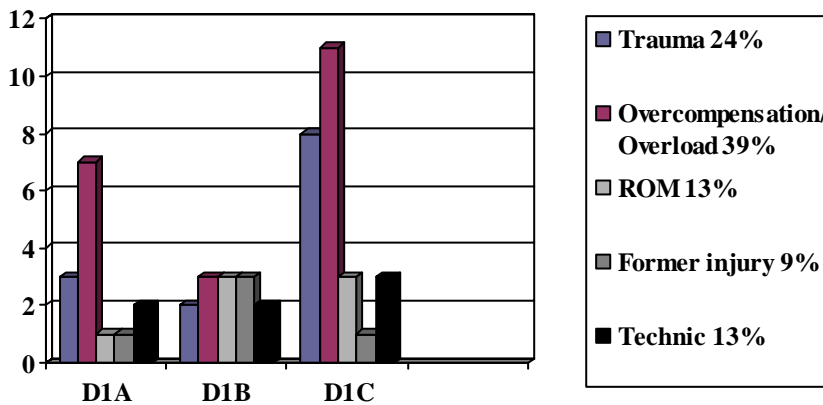
An interesting, and somewhat puzzling, finding of the first year (2004-2005) of the registration was the difference in the injury rates of the groups. At the RDA there are three groups of 1st year students: A, B and C. Generally speaking the A group consists of the least experienced dancers; dancers who show talent, but still lack the physical characteristics and/or the technical training requested for a dance education at this level. There is no official policy towards the different groups, but generally speaking, only part of the A group will make it into the 2nd year. The C group stands at the other end of the spectrum; they are the dance students who have had quite a lot of formal training and master the necessary techniques. The B group's position is somewhere in the middle. Contrary to our expectations, in 2004-2005 the injury rates of the C group, i.e. the students who had the most dance experience and training, were the highest of the three groups.

The information on the causes of the injuries offers another interesting detail. While overload and overcompensation are an important cause of injuries in all groups, the C group suffered remarkably more from this type of injuries than the other two groups. As the tables below show, overcompensation and overload (the purple, and highest, line) were common causes of injuries in all the groups, both in the first and the second

semester. In the second semester overcompensation or overload were the main causes for injuries in both the A and the C group, but considerably more so for the C group.



2004-2005 first semester



2004-2005 second semester

These findings were reason to embark on a research project, focussing on the differences between the groups.

Description of the project

During a presentation of the results of the Injury Registration Project at the staff meeting in December 2005, the teachers suggested several possible explanations for the differences in injury rates. These explanations ranged from more competition, different expectations, higher stress levels, differences in ambition, gender (the A group has more male students, while the C group is almost exclusively female), the impact of the coaching classes (which are unique for the A group) and others. These suggestions were taken up in the proposal for the follow-up project.

The project started by establishing the *structural* differences between the A and the C group. There are two:

- 1) gender: the A group had slightly more male than female students (12 to 10), while the C group had predominantly female students (18 to 3)
- 2) the weekly workload of the A group had 4,5 hours more physical training than that of the C group; these extra hours consist of the coaching classes that students in the A group are obliged to take.

The suggested explanations pointed to *possible* differences. These are:

- teachers, or the school in general, have higher expectations of the C group, which leads to higher stress levels and thus more injuries
- there is more competition between students in the C group, which might lead to them taking more risks
- students in the C group are more ambitious and really 'go for it'
- as a result of the coaching classes, students in the A group are better informed and know how far they can go
- those A group students who know that they are not going to continue in dance are less willing to take risks.

The decision was made to interview students from both groups. The interviews were to be conducted by Caroline Harder and Brigitte Martin, staff members of the RDA. Because Brigitte Martin also acted as a teacher in the C group, which could cause a possible conflict of interest, she only interviewed the students from the A group. Later Noortje van Amsterdam joined the project and conducted several interviews, both in the A and the C group.

To prepare for the interviews some literature on injury and injury prevention in dance was studied.¹ In addition to that the participating RDA staff members received an intensive interview training, both theoretical and practical.

The main goal of the project was to gain more insight in the background of the injuries and in the possible reasons for the differences in the injury rates of the A and the C group.

The interviews with the 1st year students of 2005-2006 were conducted between January-March 2006. All 1st year students received a letter with an explanation of the project and a

¹ Krasnow, Donna et al. 'Psychology of Dealing with the Injured Dancer', *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* (1994): 7-10

Patterson, Elizabeth et al 'Psychological Factors as Predictors of Ballet Injuries: Interactive Effects of Life Stress and Social Support', *Journal of Sport Behavior* (1998), 21, no. 1

Mainwaring, Lynda et al. 'And the Dance Goes On. Psychological Impact of Injury', *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science* (2001), 5, 4: 105-116

Liederbach, Marijeanne et al. 'Psychological Aspects of Fatigue-Related Injuries in Dance', *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science* (2001), 5, 4: 116-121

Aalten, Anna, 'De risico's van het vak. Gezondheid en beroeps cultuur in de Nederlandse balletwereld', *Medische Antropologie* (2003), 15, 1: 27-42

request to participate (see Appendix 1). Seven students of the C group were interviewed; one male and six female. The number of interviewees in the A group was six; three male and three female. The choice of the interviewees was at random, i.e. no specific selection criteria were used. All the interviewees signed consent forms. The interviews were semi-structured and taped; complete transcriptions were made.

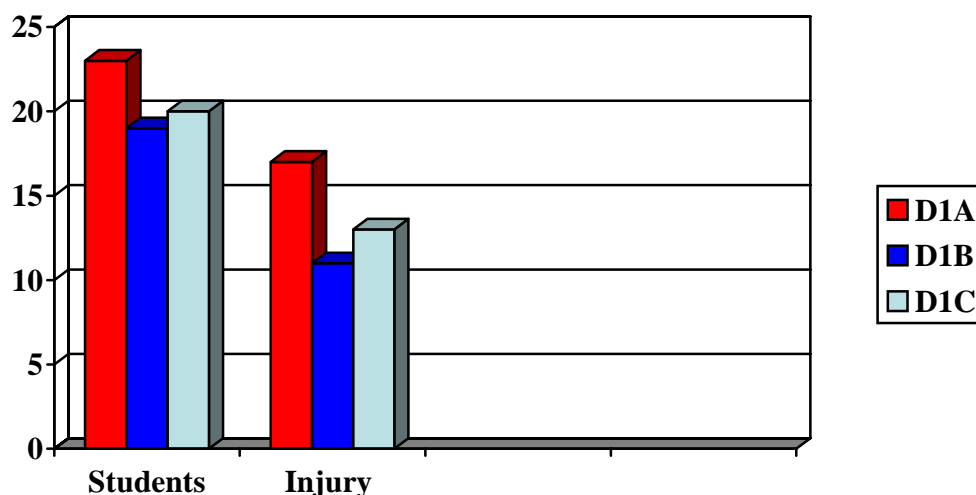
In the interviews a list of questions was used (see Appendix 2). These questions were organised around topics and gave information on:

- personal dance history
- injuries and history of injuries
- general physical condition
- life style (eating habits and rest)
- knowledge about anatomy and injury prevention
- experiences with stress
- perceived differences between the A and the C group

After interviewing the students, the tapes were transcribed by Brigitte Martin and Noortje van Amsterdam. The analysis of the material was done by Noortje van Amsterdam en Anna Aalten.

Presentation of the results

By the time the analysis of the interviews was done, the injury rates (registered up to March 2006) of the 1st year students of 2005-2006 had become available. The puzzling differences of the year 2004-2005 did **not** present itself again in 2005-2006. The figures were: in the A group 17 of the 23 students had injuries, in the B group 11 of the 19 students and in the C group 13 of the 20 students (see below).



2005-2006 (until March '06) injury rates in the three 1st year groups

This throws another light on some of the material. Consequently, the focus of the analysis is less on the comparison between the two groups and more on the actual content of what students said.

Below some general information on the interviewees is presented:

A group: 6 students were interviewed	C group: 7 students were interviewed
3 female students - 3 male students	6 female students - 1 male student
Ages: 17, 19, 19, 20, 20, 22	Ages: 16, 17, 17, 18, 18, 19, 19
Nationality: 3 Dutch, 3 from abroad	Nationality: 4 Dutch, 3 from abroad
Former dance education: 2 female student started before age 10, one at 12, none of the male students had formal training, but 1 male student started dancing before age 10, 2 males at age 14	Former dance education: 5 female students started before age 10, one at 12 and the male student started at 15
Injuries in the 1 st year: 4 of the 6 interviewed students had (had) injuries	Injuries in the 1 st year: all 7 interviewed students had (had) injuries

The answers of the students from both groups offer a lot of information about the student's experiences of the RDA and their views on the school and the education they receive. To make the answers of the students accessible, the material is organised around six themes: the importance of knowledge, life style, their experience of the workload,

stress, the coaching classes and their perceptions of the differences between the A and C group.

The importance of knowledge

When talking about excellence and health, all students stressed the importance of knowledge. They agreed on the necessity to know the needs of their own bodies and to have access to general and specific knowledge on anatomy and injury prevention.

Oh well, I don't think you ever know enough about it. It is always good to learn more. Maybe I know it, but to work with it constantly is quite hard, because of all the stuff you have to work on. (male student A group)

In both groups there were students who are satisfied with the level of knowledge that was presented to them at the RDA.

De anatomielessen zijn erg goed en we krijgen dingen over blessurepreventie, dat is allemaal ruim voldoende, vind ik. (male student A group)

In the school we learn a lot. We have anatomy lessons and also in contact with the physio, when you have an injury, you understand more. For me anatomy was really good and also my friends who talked to me and who know some different things, in theory or with the body. This helped me to know why this is good and why I have to do it this way. (female student C group)

While there were also quite a few students who would like to know more.

Q: En heb je het gevoel dat je genoeg kennis hebt over blessures en blessurepreventie?

A: Ehm... nee, ik denk het eigenlijk niet. We hebben nu drie lectures gehad over anatomie en dat is eigenlijk het enige dat... Ja, we hebben nu dan het boek, maar voor de rest niet echt wekelijkse lessen over dit.

Q: Zou je het wel prettig vinden om daar wat meer over te weten?

A: Ja, zeker.

Q: En hoe zou dat volgens jou het beste kunnen?

A: Ja, door anatomie een les gewoon één keer in de week te doen. Het is toch eigenlijk wel één van de, ja, het belangrijkste ding in je lichaam voor dans. Het is toch wel fijn om het goed te gebruiken. (female student A group)

Q: Do you think you have enough knowledge about injury prevention and health?

A: No.

Q: No? Why?

A: I don't know, because I didn't know anything about the Achilles problems and then I have them and I don't know what I can do. And why I have this problem. Maybe if I knew why I have this problem I could do something before. Sometimes you have an injury and you don't know why.

Q: So you would like to know more about these things?

A: Yeah. Because we know everything about alignment and knees and... I don't know, just the superficial part. We don't know something about feet and Achilles or anything, and back especially. (male student C group)

From the answers the students gave it became clear that some of them felt they had access to knowledge from different sources. They asked their parents, their teachers, their physiotherapist, their friends, and they looked at books or went on the internet to find what they need. Others were less skilled or confident.

Life style

For most of the 1st year students entering the RDA meant leaving their parental homes and often also leaving their home countries. They did not only enter a new school, but also had to look after themselves for the first time in their lives. On the whole they found this a positive experience and enjoyed the freedom and stimulation it offered them.

Developing and maintaining a healthy eating pattern, however, turned out to be not as easy as it seemed. Due to a lack of knowledge and time constraints, many reported problems with their diet.

Ik probeer nou wel op mijn voeding te letten, gewoon in de zin van dat ik niet teveel snoep. Maar ik wil me er wel ergens in de toekomst iets in gaan verdiepen. Gewoon omdat ik wel merk dat voeding heel belangrijk is. Ik merk dat als ik een week of twee weken niet genoeg fruit heb gegeten dat je dan bepaalde verschijnselen krijgt. Je weet, iedereen zegt dan, nee dat komt door te weinig fruit, maar dat weet je natuurlijk niet, dat het vel bij je nagels dat rafelig wordt en het wit, dat soort dingen. Op de een of andere manier verbindt dat wel met elkaar bij mij. En dan bedenk ik wel: oh ja, meer fruit eten, dat dat helpt. Ik wil me er wel wat meer in gaan verdiepen. Ik weet nog niet genoeg. (male student A group)

Q: And do you eat healthy?

A: I think so (hesitatingly). I live with friends so I'm not so good, but I try to.

Q: What you think would be best for you to eat.

A: They say a lot of fruit, and salad, and pasta, meat. Yeah, but here you cannot do like this because we have just sandwich and something strange here in school.

Because we work a lot and just eating fruit and salad is not so good for me.

Because we work a lot and I need power, I don't know. (male student C group)

I think we can really know, in our world, we can really know how it is good to eat. It is difficult sometimes to do it, but the theory it is not difficult (...) Ehmm, sometimes it is difficult because in school we can't... we don't have a micro. I eat all the time cold food, like sandwich. So, I try to have all, but it's cold, it's not too good for the body. You need sometimes a hot meal. For me it's too expensive to buy in cafeteria, so I prefer to take from my house, so it's all the time cold. That and also the evening I can eat a good meal, but sometimes I'm really too tired to cook. So this is a problem to eat again something cold. (female student C group)

The students indicated that more information about food and its relation to health and injury prevention would be helpful. The short lunch break and the long working days made it difficult for them to have a well-prepared hot meal everyday. So they also need to be made aware of the necessity to plan their meals.

Workload at the RDA

When starting their first year at the RDA, students entered a professional dance training. Even those students with a lot of dance experience and a formal training in dance, needed to adjust to a daily schedule in which dance classes are the main ingredient. The interviewees experienced their workload at the RDA as heavy, but not too much so.

Ja, het is zwaar, maar dat is nodig denk ik. Want je moet toch concurreren met andere academies. En ik denk niet dat het te zwaar is. Het neemt een groot deel van je tijd in beslag maar niet alles. Er blijft genoeg tijd over om te eten en te slapen en wat te praten en TV te kijken.

Q: Okay (lacht). Dus het is okay wat jou betreft?

A: Ja, ik denk wel dat het tegen het maximum toelaatbare aan zit, vooral voor de eerstejaars en vooral voor iemand zoals ik die het niet gewend is zo'n leven. Maar het is niet teveel. (male student A group)

I think it's good because we can really improve our level and we don't have too much. Because when you have too much it's just doing, doing, doing and you don't really think about this. I think here at school it's good. (female student C group)

Q: En hoe ervaar je de werkbelasting op de academie?

A: Ehm ja, in het begin vond ik het wel zwaar. Je komt van de HAVO en daar was het vakkenplan normale lessen en dansles. En nu is het de hele dag eigenlijk. Maar op zich, ja, ik ben er nu aan gewend, op zich vind ik het eigenlijk wel meevallen. (female student C group)

Het was wel een beetje zwaarder, omdat je echt constant danst eigenlijk, van 9 tot 6 en dat is wel zwaar. Want in het middelbaar onderwijs heb je ook nog gewone vakken. En hier heb je er wel een paar, maar het is wel zwaarder. Maar eh... ja, okay, het is wel goed. (female student C group)

One of the male students was critical about the workload, because it was not challenging enough for him and for the other male students with regards to his physical condition.

There is no challenge. I feel that I am less healthy now than I was a year ago.

Q. How can that be?

A. Then I had time to go running and work on my condition in my own way. Here I don't have the time to do it. And the condition training we get here is not a training at all. It is not long enough to build up stamina. (male student A group)

Several students remarked on the extra hours that the A group had to do with the coaching classes, even though they acknowledged the need for the coaching classes in itself.

Het is wel zwaar, maar het is ook wel goed. Ja, we hebben best wel lange dagen. Sowieso heb je in de A klas ook drie lessen meer, drie coaching lessen. En het is, denk ik, ook een stuk zwaarder dan de C heeft. Die heeft best wel vaak korte dagen en wij zitten eigenlijk wel elke dag tot minimaal kwart over 4 op school. Dan begin je ook 's morgens vroeg en dan kom je 's avonds pas laat thuis en dan moet je ook nog eten. Maar ja, je hebt het wel nodig. (female student A group)

Others were rather outspoken in their objection to the extra workload for the A group.

I don't understand why the rest of the 1st years do not have the coaching classes. It would be nicer, because then there would not be the conflict that the A group

finishes later, like at 6 pm. And the others are already at home at 4.30! If you put everyone in the coaching class, even with different materials and different levels, but with the same number of hours, it would be fairer for everybody. (male student A group)

In relation to the workload, students pointed out that their experiences were influenced by different factors. Generally speaking they could manage it. But when tests or rehearsals were simply added to the regular schedule, they experienced their workload as too heavy.

No, the classes, I think it's good. But also now, when we have more rehearsals, then we are really tired. We are all so tired, because we have rehearsals until 6 or 7, so we are the whole day in school. I know people who have solo parts, and they are from 9 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night and yeah, it's not... nobody can handle that. Yeah, because we only have always 15 minutes break and that is like 12 hours in school. It's a lot. (female student C group)

A: Ik vind het rooster eigenlijk wel goed, wel meevallen, zeg maar. Ja, het is natuurlijk wel zwaar, maar... ja, ik had het erger verwacht eigenlijk. (...)

Q: Heb je het idee dat er de afgelopen tijd nog een verandering is geweest in die werkdruk?

A: Eh ja. Niet de dansvakken, maar die andere vakken, of bijvoorbeeld bij testlessen, maar ook als je meer huiswerk hebt of dingen die je moet doen. Dan wordt het sowieso wat later enzo. En dan sta je wel anders in de les als je zoveel moet doen. En dan ben je ook moe. (female student C group)

For a well balanced schedule all the classes and the student's other obligations need to be taken into account.

Stress

The interviews offered an impressive amount of information on stress. The 1st year students experienced all sorts of stress, from the daily worries about how to get through a class to the more long-term stress of whether one will be allowed into the 2nd year or where to find the money to pay for the education. How students coped with stress depended on their individual capacities, their social network, their mental health and self-confidence, the support and feedback they received from their teachers and many more factors.

In this report no attempt is made to rank the different kinds of stress or to present the best way to deal with it. In the next section the interviewees are quoted on their experiences with stress.

I have problems with sleeping. I don't know if this is because of Rotterdam, because it is such a big city. I don't know. I think it is also that if I work until 6 p.m. and then I am staying longer to stretch and I am doing my kind of stuff, like improvisation, then I come home and I think the adrenaline is still high. (female student A group)

Wat voor mij heel moeilijk was, was de overgang van de HAVO naar de dansacademie. Je komt al vijf jaar in dit gebouw en dan kom je in hetzelfde gebouw maar je zit op een andere school. En dat is best wel lastig. Ik denk dat als het in een andere omgeving geweest was, dat het misschien makkelijker was om over te schakelen. (...) Je zit gewoon helemaal in hetzelfde, alleen dan verwachten ze wat anders van je en zit het ook allemaal anders in elkaar en dat is wel lastig. (female student C group)

Q: En als je nu terugkijkt op al die drie blessures, heb je dan een idee wat de oorzaak van die blessures was?

A: Ja, stress of een beetje... niet echt oververmoeidheid, maar wel gewoon drukke periodes enzo. Dat er een druk op me gelegd wordt. Net als met die solo's, dan moet je presteren omdat je een cijfer krijgt. En met die eindvoorstelling moet je presteren omdat er 500 man in de zaal zitten. Dat soort dingen. En aan het begin van het schooljaar wil je presteren omdat je gewoon, ja, dan zit je in een nieuwe klas en allemaal mensen van buitenaf. En dan wil je toch wel, ja, je wilt natuurlijk altijd tot één van de besten behoren. En dan krijg je dat je misschien iets te hard werkt. (female student C group)

My goal here in school is to finish, to be able to do my best with my body, with my own body. And to take more secureness in myself, because sometimes when you think about that you're not good enough and then I get insecure. The thing that get you down, because you see that maybe you want something from your body, but you cannot do it yet because it's too early, because your body is not prepared. And then you get a little bit down because you cannot do it. (female student C group)

Q: Heb je wel eens gedanst terwijl je geblesseerd was?

A: Ja.

Q: Waarom?

A: Omdat je niet anders kan. Ja, als je een rol hebt en er is niemand die je kan vervangen. Of dat je zelf niet toelaat dat er iemand je vervangt. Alleen als ik echt niet niet kan dansen, dan doe ik het niet. Maar het ergste dat er kan gebeuren met mij is als ik niet kan dansen.

Q: Het grijpt je emotioneel heel erg aan.

A: Ja, en dan ben ik een wrak en dan nee, dat gaat niet, dat is teveel. (female student C group)

The support of the teachers (or the experience of a lack of it) was often mentioned by the students as an important factor when trying to cope with stress.

When I had this foot injury I stopped and sat in a corner. Then the ballet teacher came up to me and asked: Why are you sitting? You should continue doing something. Then I realized that it did not have to be like that. I could mark the exercises, trying to feel the coordination and use this time for other things. This was really good feedback that this teacher gave me. He said: If you are sitting in the corner, you are going to get depressed. It is better to be active. That really helped me. (male student A group)

Ik heb dan ook gehad op één van mijn rapporten, van klassiek, stond helemaal niets geschreven. Dat is dan wel hard. Want ik had dan wel een 5 ervoor, maar er wordt niets... er wordt alleen gezegd "Not improved, not improved". En daar heb je niets aan. Daar kan je ook niet aan werken. Zo denk ik er dan over, hoor, maar het is wel moeilijk en het is ook hard. Alsof ze niet willen dat jij beter wordt. Zo komt het een beetje over, vind ik dan. Helemaal als ze ook zeg maar, niet dat ze je echt negeren, maar niet dat ze je echt helpen ofzo. (female student C group)

In het begin had ik met bepaalde docenten, ik noem geen namen (lacht), dan was het tijdens de les op de één of andere manier het gevoel dat je het nooit goed doet. En op een gegeven moment denk je, goh zou ze een hekel aan me hebben ofzo. Maar dan ja, achteraf, dan zie je je rapport en dan merk je dat het achteraf allemaal wel meevalt. En dan is dat gevoel weer weg. (female student C group)

There was one stress factor that most students agreed upon: the greater competition for attention, roles and a place in a company among the female students is a source of more stress for the women. This was also an important difference between the A and the C group: there were slightly more male students in the A group, while the C group was predominantly female.

The boys, we have so many more possibilities to find work. The women are more afraid of passing the 1st year. The men can have a lower level than the women and we still get through. (...) We know that we will be chosen for work projects or something. And the women will have a harder time. (male student A group)

I think there is more competition with the girls. They are a lot and some girl can come (stand red.) out of the group, because of some quality of dance. And other girls not. They want the teachers also to look at them and give corrections. We have to show our motivation because we are more. For the men it's different because they are just two, so they don't have to show that you are, that you want to work. (female student C group)

Q: Heb je het gevoel dat meisjes anders behandeld worden dan jongens?

A: Ja.

Q: ... door docenten?

A: Ja, maar dat komt ook omdat er gewoon meer concurrentie is onder de meisjes, omdat er gewoon veel meer meisjes zijn die dansen. En volgens mij willen ze gewoon heel graag jongens in de school hebben. Dat stimuleren ze dan door ze misschien ook sneller aan te nemen. (female student C group)

The coaching classes

Another structural difference between the A and the C group was the coaching class. In 2005-2006 there were three coaching classes, which students in the A group were obliged to take. These coaching classes added to the workload of the A group, but students were positive about the usefulness and unanimous in their praise of the teachers who were responsible for them.

Ik vind het zeker nuttig. Het is soms wat zwaar doordat je toch niet constant bezig bent en soms in de sleur komt van zitten en opstaan en weer wat doen en weer zitten en luisteren. En dat vergt soms wel veel, qua doorzettigvermogen en concentratie. (male student A group)

I find this the best thing of being in the A group. In the beginning I was so frustrated to be in A, but then you realize: this is good, I have three more classes! And these three classes are great! Michele really teaches us how to work with our bodies. He really knows what he is teaching. And Yvonne, in the beginning I was a mess, because it is a really slow class. But Yvonne is a great teacher and you can learn so many things from her. Even if I have to do a tendu for ten minutes I feel great. It is amazing. And Nicki, she is using the class to understand the body. I feel she knows a lot. (male student A group)

The coaching classes were open to the C students, but they hardly ever went to them. One of the C students did go and found it useful.

I took some coaching. I took ballet, because I didn't do ballet for a long time. So it was a bit difficult in my class and I wanted to know more about the ballet, about how to work with the muscles. In ballet coaching they do like really exercise of ballet, but slowly and they speak more about the position and the way to do it. But with my schedule it's not so easy to find time. (female student C group)

The others also indicated that they thought they could use the coaching classes.

Q: And do you think you could use it yourself?

A: Yeah, I think sometimes, maybe I should have taken one. But it's always the problem with time. Because we have also classes ourselves.

Q: And why do you think it would be good for you?

A: Ehm, yeah because sometimes you just move without knowing maybe from which muscles you should do it. (female student C group)

Q: And do you think you could use coaching yourself?

A: Yeah. Especially for ballet I think. Because we are in the C group and they go really really fast, because they have high technique. So maybe go down and try to understand from the beginning every step. That would be good. (female student C group)

For the students in the A group the individual approach in the coaching classes and the opportunity to learn about their own bodies were the most positive aspects of them.

A or C: how do we know the difference?

All students were aware of the fact that the A and the C groups were different, with the C group being somehow 'higher' than the A group. But they were not so clear about the actual nature of the difference. When asked if they knew *why* they were placed in their group, most of the C students did not know.

Q: Weet je waarom je in de C klas bent geplaatst?

A: Nee eigenlijk niet. Ik weet wel, ik heb hiervoor de HAVO gedaan. En ja, daar had ik wel altijd één van de hoogste cijfers. Dus ik heb wel een vermoeden, ja. Want ik zie wel andere mensen van de HAVO die lagere cijfers hadden en die zitten dan nu in de A. Dat is in ieder geval waar ik het uit kan opmaken (...) Maar voor de rest is er nooit echt gezegd waarom je in de C zit of waarom in de A. Ja, misschien wel tegen mensen die in de A zitten, maar tegen mij persoonlijk niet echt. (female student C group)

Q: Weet je waarom je in de c klas geplaatst bent?

A: Ehm, eigenlijk niet. Dat is ons niet echt duidelijk gemaakt eigenlijk, waarom.

Q: Daar heb je nooit iets over gehoord?

A: Nee, want er werd gezegd dat A, B en C wel gewoon gelijk zouden zijn. Maar ja, echt waarom dat eh... (female student C group)

Q: Do you know why you were placed in class 1c?

A: I don't know, maybe because I have a nice body for a dancer? And because I studied a little bit before. Maybe because I have more technique than other boys.

Q: But you were never told by anyone why you were placed in 1c?

A: No no. (male student C group)

For the students in the A group this was different. Their answers to the question were clear and unanimous: they were placed in the A group because their ballet technique was not good enough. One of the female students added that she also had some physical limitations.

The reactions of the students on their placement in one of the groups showed their awareness of a hierarchy between A and C.

I was really happy. Yeah, they told us that this is not something to be happy about or not, it is not a competition of how we dance. But for me I was really happy, because they put me in the class with the best level of technique in ballet. And I made just three years of ballet so I was, yeah it was good, I work well. And also I saw when I started that I had some goal, I had less technique than the others. I had to study really more, maybe sometimes, but I was happy because to see these people in my class, motivate me to improve my level, to know more. I was really happy to be in this class. (female student C group)

I am happy, because they say that they are the....the most... good the dancers from the D1C. So that's nice. And also because I can learn more from my friends, they can help me. Maybe, I don't know, this friend, she's really good in ballet and she can give me advise or tell me something to improve you know, my pirouette or something. It's nice. (male student C group)

There are students in the C group who came to me after knowing that I was in the A group and said: Ah, I am really sorry for you. Why are they sorry? That kind of thing does not make me comfortable. (male student A group)

Q: Dan wil ik tot slot nog even terug komen op die plaatsing in 1A. Hoe voel je je daarover?

A: Ik had niet anders verwacht. Vooral omdat ik weet hoe weinig klassieke ervaring ik heb. Dus ik wist gewoon dat ik hierin zou worden geplaatst. En het was voor mij ook nooit een probleem, omdat ik toch één van de minder goede dansers van de klas ben en dus wel mensen heb om me aan op te trekken. En omdat ik ook de andere klassen zie en me daar ook aan op kan trekken. Maar ik kan me voorstellen dat mensen die beter zijn, die zeg maar bovenaan dat lijstje van de A klas staan, dat het voor hen moeilijker is om met een aantal mensen opgescheept te zitten die eigenlijk slechter zijn dan jij. En dat de mensen die beter zijn dan jij en waar je je aan zou kunnen optrekken, dat die in een andere klas zitten die je nooit ziet. En dat je alleen in de mentorgesprekken hoort, ja de B en de C klas die zijn een stuk beter dan jij. Ik bedoel, daar heb je ook niets aan als je ze niet ziet en niet met ze kan praten. (male student A group)

Q: Om nog even terug te komen op de plaatsing. Je was eerst in de C groep geplaatst en toen terug geplaatst naar de A groep. Hoe voel je je daarover?

A: Ja, in het begin heel rot. Want sowieso, ze kenden mij al hier vanaf de HAVO. En ik had wel zoiets van, yes, ik ben in de C groep, de hoogste groep, en dan word je ineens naar het laagste gezet. En ik dacht, waarom dan niet de B? Maar toen zeiden ze dat tussen de C en de B te weinig verschil zat. Dan word je toch ineens van het hoogste naar het laagste gezet. Totdat ik een mentorgesprek kreeg en daarin werd gezegd dat het juist supergoed ging, toen had ik zoiets van ja, dan ben hiervoor naar de laagste groep gegaan. Gewoon om mijn ontwikkeling beter te krijgen. (female student A group)

Q. How do you feel about being placed in D1A?

A. Good, it was just the right class for me and it still is. I look forward to the 2nd year, though, because then we will be mixed. For me personally it would be better if it was already mixed in the 1st year, because then I could observe other people and learn from them. I know I would go faster if we were mixed. (male student A group)

Ik heb wel het idee dat er tussen de drie eerste klassen wat rivaliteit is. Vooral die A klas die toch indirect wordt gezien als een beetje het uitschot van de school. (...)

Als er dan een stuk is waarvoor een aantal mensen wordt gevraagd en als daar dan iemand bij is van de A klas, dan heb je toch zoiets van, doe maar je best en laat maar zien dat je als A klas danser of danseres helemaal niet slechter bent dan de anderen. (male student A group)

When confronted with the high injury rates in the C group, some students came up with interesting observations. For the students in the A group it was a matter of higher expectations and the willingness to go further that put the C students more at risk.

Maybe it is because students in the C group expect more from themselves. What I heard in the beginning of the year was, that the atmosphere was a lot more competitive. Everyone was trying to be the best. (male student A group)

Ik denk dat er in de C groep een hoger niveau is en dat die mensen toch verder gaan op de één of andere manier. Ze zijn beter, maar ze willen nog beter worden. De mensen in de C klas, die weten al dat dansen hun toekomst zal zijn en doen daar alles voor en die doen daar soms teveel voor. Terwijl mensen in de A klas toch vaak alternatieven hebben en zelfs serieus over andere dingen nadenken en dan minder snel te ver gaan en dan denken, het is me niet waard om nou, weet ik veel, een scheurtje in mijn been te krijgen doordat ik doordans met een blessure, want je moet toch gewoon je hele leven blijven lopen. En dat ja, dat voel ik bij mijzelf ook. Ik weet dat ik andere dingen kan en dat ik ook andere dingen leuk vind, dus

dat dit ook niet alles is voor mij. En dat ik ook niet alles opgeef voor dit. En ik denk dat het voor de C klas, dat het toch sneller is van, nou dit is mijn enige kans, en nu moet ik alles geven en dan teveel geven. (male student A group)

While students in the C group saw their own (longer) history in dance and the lack of knowledge in the A group as possible explanations.

I think it's just because people in the C group have been dancing for many more years than the a group. And when you have danced for many more years you have also had the possibility to have more injuries. And if you had already injuries it's more easy to get injured again. I think it's just because we have had more time dancing and our bodies are more tired. It's also the thing with overworking sometimes or some parts of your body. But it's not because you are in the C group, it's just because you danced more years and you got injured before. (female student C group)

I think maybe in group A they are really on a schedule, because they have three more coaching classes than our group. They are interested to work really in a good way with their body. Also the group A ask more questions, because they don't know everything. (female student C group)

But as we have seen, the higher injury rates of the C group in 2004-2005 did not prove to be a constant. So the most interesting aspect of these explanations is the insight they offer in the images that exist of both groups.

Summary

Between January and April 2006 a small-scale research project was done by members of the Excellence and well being research team, under the supervision of Anna Aalten. Interviews were conducted with thirteen 1st year students from two different groups. The aim of the project was to get more insight into the views of 1st year students on their own excellence and well being in relation to their experiences at the school.

Six students from the A group and seven from the C group were approached and interviewed. The reason behind this comparative set-up was a puzzling outcome of the Injury Registration Project in 2004-2005. The registration had shown that in that year injury rates of the C group were considerably higher than those of the A group.

However, last year's injury rates show a different pattern. So in the final analysis of the interview material the focus is less on a comparison between the two groups. More attention is paid to what the students actually said, their views on health and well being in relation to excellence and their experiences with the educational programme.

When talking about excellence and health, all students stressed the importance of knowledge. They agreed on the necessity to know the needs of their own bodies and to have access to general and specific knowledge on anatomy and injury prevention. In both groups there were students who were satisfied with the level of knowledge that was presented to them at the RDA, while there were also quite a few students who would like to know more. From the answers the students gave it became clear, that some of them felt they had access to knowledge from different sources. They asked their parents, their teachers, their fysiotherapist, their friends, and they looked at books or went on the internet to find what they need. Others were less skilled or confident.

For most of the 1st year students entering the RDA meant leaving their parental homes and often also leaving their home countries. They did not only enter a new school, but also had to look after themselves for the first time in their lives. On the whole they found this a positive experience and enjoyed the freedom and stimulation it offered them. Developing and maintaining a healthy eating pattern, however, turned out to be not as easy as it seemed. Due to a lack of knowledge and time constraints, many reported problems with their diet. The students indicated that more information about food and its relation to health and injury prevention would be helpful. The short lunch break and the long working days made it difficult for them to have a well-prepared hot meal everyday. So they also need to be made aware of the necessity to plan their meals.

When starting their first year at the RDA, students entered a professional dance training. Even those students with a lot of dance experience and a formal training in dance, needed to adjust to a daily schedule in which dance classes are the main ingredient. The interviewees experienced their workload at the RDA as heavy, but not too much so. In relation to the workload, students pointed out that their experiences were influenced by different factors. Generally speaking they could manage it. But when tests or rehearsals were simply added to the regular schedule, they experienced their workload as too heavy. The conclusion could be drawn that for a well balanced schedule all the classes and the student's other obligations need to be taken into account.

The interviews offered an impressive amount of information on stress. The 1st year students experienced all sorts of stress, from the daily worries about how to get through a class to the more long-term stress of whether one will be allowed into the 2nd year or where to find the money to pay for the education. How students coped with stress depended on their individual capacities, their social network, their mental health and self-confidence, the support and feedback they received from their teachers and many more

factors. In this final report no attempt is made to rank the different kinds of stress or to present the best way to deal with it. Instead, a selection of quotes from the interviews is presented.

Students often mentioned the support of the teachers (or the experience of a lack of it) as an important factor when trying to cope with stress.

There was one stress factor that most students agreed upon: the greater competition for attention, roles and a place in a company among the female students is a source of more stress for the women. This was also an important difference between the A and the C group: there were slightly more male students in the A group, while the C group was predominantly female.

At the RDA, one of the 1st year groups, the A group, is offered a coaching class. In 2005-2006 there were three coaching classes, which students in the A group were obliged to take. These coaching classes added to the workload of the A group, but students were positive about the usefulness and unanimous in their praise of the teachers who were responsible for the classes. The individual approach in the coaching classes and the opportunity to learn about their own bodies were the most positive aspects of them.

All students were aware of the fact that the A and the C groups were different, with the C group being somehow 'higher' than the A group. But they were not so clear about the actual nature of the difference. When asked if they knew *why* they were placed in their group, most of the C students did not know. For the students in the A group this was different. Their answers to the question were clear and unanimous: they were placed in the A group because their ballet technique was not good enough.

The reactions of the students on their placement in one of the groups showed their awareness of a hierarchy between A and C. The C group students reported to have been very happy when they heard about their placement, while some of the A group students, particularly those with dance experience, had been disappointed or sad.

Appendix A: Letter to the students

Rotterdam, January 9, 2006

Dear 1st year student,

Please, let me ask your attention for the following. The Rotterdam Dance Adademy strives to educate its students to become excellent dancers as well as professionals who know how to dance with consideration for their health and well being. The lectoraat 'Excellence and well being in the performing arts' supports this by doing research.

In 2004 the RDA has started to register its student's injuries systematically. The information from the injury registration is used to help the RDA to design and implement an active policy with regard to injury prevention. As part of this policy the academy has recently started a project on periodisation.

One of the 'discoveries' of the injury registration is the difference in the number of injuries amongst different groups of 1st year students. To be more precise: students in the 1C class seem to get more injured than students in the 1A class. To get an insight in the reasons behind this difference we will interview students from both classes. These interviews will be held between January-March 2006 by two member of the research team of the lectoraat. I will be supervising the interviews and the project as a whole.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the interviewers. The material from the interviews will be processed **anonymously**, which means that no names will be used and measures will be taken to ensure that the students interviewed can not be recognized.

Students of the 1C class will be approached by Caroline Harder and students 1A class will be approached by Caroline Harder or Brigitte Martin. We expect each interview to last about one hour.

We would like to interview as many students as possible and we kindly ask your cooperation. You are, of course, free to refuse, but I would like to stress the importance of the research and hope for a positive respons. Don not hesitate to email me, if you have any further questions: a.aalten@codarts.nl

With kind regards,

Dr. Anna Aalten
lector Excellence and well being in the performing arts

Appendix 2: Interview questions

General:

- Sex *zelf invullen*
- Class (D1A of D1C) *zelf invullen*
- Age
- Do you know why you were placed in D1A/D1C?

Personal history:

- Where were you born?
- When did you start dancing?
- Can you tell me a bit more about your dance experience prior to the RDA? (facts, years etc.)

Physical condition and injuries:

Injuries:

- Have you been injured in the past?
- When was this?
- What kind of injuries?
- How long did the injuries last?
- What was the cause?
- What was your physical fitness like before the injury?
- What kind of treatment did you get?
- Do you feel you were completely recovered when you started the full program again?
- Are you injured at the moment?
- What is the injury? Since when?
- Do you know what caused it?
- What was your physical fitness like before the injury?
- Have you had this (kind of) injury before?
- What kind of treatment are you getting?
- Do you feel you are given enough time to recover? (self and environment)
- Do you think you have enough knowledge about health and injury prevention?
- What do you think are the most important things to consider?
- Where did you get your knowledge about this?

General fitness

- Do you think your general fitness is sufficient for this education?
- Can you explain why you think so?
- Do you ever experience problems with sleeping?
- Are you a smoker?
- How often do you use alcohol? (And how much)
- Do you use any other kind of drug?
- Do you eat healthy?
- What do you think a healthy diet consists of?
- Do you follow a diet? Or have you ever followed a diet? What diet? Why?
- Do you ever experience a disordered eating pattern?

Workload:

- How do you feel about the workload here?
- Have you experienced any changes in workload lately? If so, what did these changes consist of?

- Can you specify which classes are exceptional in regard to workload?

Coaching:

D1A:

- What is it that you learn in the coaching class?
- Do you find it useful? Why exactly?

D1C

- Do you ever join the coaching class voluntarily?
- If not, do you have an idea of what is done there?
- Do you think you could also use coaching? Why so/not?

Pressure:

- Have you ever danced while you were injured?
- Why did you do this? Internal or external pressure?
- How do you feel about the support you get from the teachers?
- Do you think the teachers are strict (or harsh)?
- Do you ever feel intimidated during class? Can you name examples?
- Do you feel that teachers have a different attitude towards the boys than towards the girls? How do you notice?
- Do you experience competition between you and your colleagues? When and why? Can you name examples?
- Do you have the impression that there is more competition amongst the girls than there is amongst the boys?
- Do you feel openness within the Academy to raise your voice and express your opinion?

Self Image/ mental health

- What are your goals?
- How do you plan to achieve your goals? Do you think you will succeed?
- Do you think you're a perfectionist?
- Do you ever feel you expect too much from yourself?
- Do you believe it's sometimes necessary to work beyond your physical limitations? Why? Do you feel this is harmful for your body?

Social support

- How does your family feel about you doing this dancing school? Are you getting support (financially and/or emotionally)?
- Do you ever experience pressure because of your families' high expectations?
- Are you homesick?
- Do you ever talk to friends about this education? What do they think about what you're doing here?
- How do you deal with all the changes in your life during the first year at the RDA?
- Do you ever experience communication problems?

In closing:

- How do you feel about being placed in Class D1A/D1C?
- Are you comfortable in this class?
- Why do you think there is a difference in injury rate between D1A and D1C?

Closing:

- Do you have any questions or things to add?