European Journal of Legal Education
Vol. 7, No. 2, 2026, 135–151

Legal education and ballet: an unexpected pas de deux

Myrto Leivadarou*

Abstract

Legal education has been structured around traditional doctrinal analysis and the case method. However, educating students to "think like a lawyer" requires more than mastering traditional legal skills; it also calls for creativity, adaptability, and imagination. This article reimagines legal pedagogy through the lens of ballet, a discipline that embodies the perfect balance between discipline and expressive artistry. Just as in a *pas de deux*, two dancers maintain distinct identities while moving in harmony, legal education must strike a balance between legal precision and legal creativity.

Building on this analogy, the article introduces pedagogical strategies such as embodied learning, frequency-building combined with improvisation, kinaesthetic empathy, and the educator as choreographer. These methods cultivate both doctrinal mastery and imaginative engagement. By adopting this model, legal education can move beyond rigidity and prepare lawyers who are technically proficient, empathetic, creative, and responsive to the complex realities of law in society.

Keywords: legal education; case method; legal imagination; law and ballet; law teaching methods.

*Faculty of Law, McGill University.

ISSN 1684-1360 print/ISSN 1750-4686 online
© 2026 European Law Faculties Association

I no longer dance
with myself
we are two
not one
the dance is one
– F.R. Scott, quoted by Nicholas Kasirer[1]

Introduction

Legal education has long privileged doctrinal analysis and the case method as primary pathways to professional formation. Yet learning to "think like a lawyer" is not only a matter of mastering technique; it also requires developing creativity, adaptability, and legal imagination. This article reimagines legal pedagogy through the lens of ballet, an art form that pairs rigorous discipline with expressive interpretation. The *pas de deux* offers a guiding metaphor: two dancers retain distinct identities while moving in coordinated relation; likewise, legal education must hold together doctrinal discipline and creative agency without collapsing one into the other.[2] This intervention also speaks to a wider (and welcome) growth of interest in the intersection between the arts and law, including arts-based projects that make legal failure, institutional harm, and professional formation newly legible.[3]

---

[1] Nicholas Kasirer, 'The Dance Is One' (2008) 20 Law & Literature 69, 83 <https://doi.org/10.1525/lal.2008.20.1.69>.

[2] *Pas de deux*, a ballet term for a partnered sequence, has become a natural metaphor in writing that draws on dance to think about relational dynamics, coordination, and mutual responsiveness. For example, Miriam Aziz uses "*Law as Ballet: a global pas de deux*" to reflect on global/public law and legal discourse, while my personal webpage "*Ballet and Law: a pas de deux*" offers a brief account of my own background at the intersection of law and dance. See Miriam Aziz, 'Law as Ballet: A Global Pas de Deux' [2015] Völkerrechtsblog <https://doi.org/10.17176/20170202-102706>; 'leivadarou.com - Ballet and Law: a pas de deux' <leivadarou.com/ballet-and-law-a-pas-de-deux>. These uses are distinct in genre and focus from the present article's concern with legal education pedagogy and course design.

[3] For example, *Glitch*, a theatre project on the Post Office Horizon scandal developed with RABBLE Theatre and commissioned by the University of Reading's School of Law, uses performance to render legibility, evidence, and institutional harm in ways that resonate with questions of legal training and professional responsibility; see 'Post Office Scandal Retold in New Play Backed by University - University of Reading' <reading.ac.uk/news/2024/University-News/Post-Office-scandal-retold-in-new-play-backed-by-University>. For a further example of dance and law collaboration, see Central Saint Martins, 'Choreography of Consent: Experiments in Dance/Law Research' (*Central Saint Martins*, 29 January 2025) <arts.ac.uk/colleges/central-saint-martins/research-at-csm/choreography-of-consent>.

Building on this, I argue that much like ballet dancers train through repetition yet ultimately perform with interpretative freedom, law students must be educated in legal reasoning while engaging in experiential learning. By embracing structured creativity, future legal education can cultivate jurists[4] with technical competence and the agility and legal imagination necessary in an evolving legal profession.

First, I critique traditional legal education, highlighting its rigidity, psychological effects, and lack of creativity. I then introduce ballet as a metaphor for reforming legal education, emphasising how structured discipline, together with creative expression, can enrich learning. Next, I suggest practical ballet-inspired methods, and I conclude by advocating a balanced, collaborative legal education model inspired by the ballet *pas de deux*.

Although the critique is anchored primarily in North American debates about doctrinal teaching and the case/Socratic method, the ballet-informed pedagogical framework developed in what unfolds is intended to be transferable across legal education traditions, including European contexts, because it targets a shared problem of professional formation: how to pair technical precision with interpretative judgment.

A critique of traditional legal education

Traditional legal education emphasises analytical rigour but often neglects creativity, empathy, and emotional intelligence. This section critiques its historical rigidity, psychological impacts, and pedagogical stagnation.

The hegemony of the case method, the Socratic tradition, and "thinking like a lawyer"

Traditional legal education is deeply rooted in the legacy of Langdell, whose introduction of the case method at Harvard in the late 19th century marked a dramatic shift from passive textbook memorisation to active student

[4] "Those who learn more than the mechanics of law". See Rosalie Jukier and Kate Glover, 'Forgotten? The Role of Graduate Legal Education in the Future of the Law Faculty' (2014) 51 ALR 761, 770–771 <https://doi.org/10.29173/alr36>.

engagement with judicial opinions.[5] Langdell envisioned law students as active learners, engaging in rigorous analytical dialogues to extract general principles from specific cases.[6] Proposed as a revolutionary approach to stimulate independent thought, the Langdell method quickly became the universal standard across law schools in North America and beyond, creating a new orthodoxy.[7]

However, over time, this innovative method transformed into a rigid ritual of intellectual hierarchy. Kennedy famously described the Socratic method as practiced in legal classrooms as "an assault," asserting that students respond emotionally and physically to this questioning with fear and anxiety rather than curiosity and engagement.[8] Rather than empowering students, the case method manifestation of Socratic questioning often reinforces existing power dynamics, positioning the professor as an authoritarian figure[9] and reducing students to passive recipients of knowledge disguised as active participants.[10]

The case method is central to the pedagogical goal of "thinking like a lawyer," an approach emphasising analytical rigour, objective detachment, and the critical evaluation of multiple perspectives.[11] Yet critics argue that "thinking like a lawyer," while developing doctrinal understanding and analytical skills,

---

[5] Robert Stevens, 'Harvard Decrees the Structure and Content' *Law school: legal education in America from the 1850s to the 1980s* (University of North Carolina press 1983) 36.

[6] Jeannie Suk Gersen, 'The Socratic Method in the Age of Trauma' (2017) 130 Harvard Law Review 2320, 2321; Bruce A Kimball, 'Teacher, 1870–1881' in Bruce A Kimball (ed), *The Inception of Modern Professional Education: C. C. Langdell, 1826-1906* (University of North Carolina Press 2009) 141 ff.

[7] Gersen (n 7) 2323–2324; "The US most famous legal export may well be the case method" see Han-Ru Zhou, 'International Legacies of a Century and a Half of the Case Method' (Social Science Research Network, 20 October 2023) <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4612913>.

[8] Duncan Kennedy, 'How the Law School Fails: A Polemic' (1970) 1 Yale Review of Law and Social Action 71, 73; Duncan Kennedy, 'Legal Education as Training for Hierarchy' in David Kairys (ed), *The politics of law: a progressive critique* (2nd edn, Pantheon Books 1990) 68; Gersen (n 7) 2325.

[9] Kennedy, 'Legal Education as Training for Hierarchy' (n 9); Gersen (n 7) 2326.

[10] Kennedy, 'Legal Education as Training for Hierarchy' (n 9); Gersen (n 7) 2326–2327.

[11] Matt Hlinak, 'The Socratic Method 2.0' (2014) 31 Journal of Legal Studies Education 1, 5 <https://doi.org/10.1111/jlse.12007>; James Maxeiner, 'Educating Lawyers Now and Then: Two Carnegie Critiques of the Common Law and the Case Method' (2007) 35 International Journal of Legal Information 16–19.

often does so at the expense of broader competencies necessary for effective law practice, such as genuine curiosity and creative engagement.[12]

The psychological toll: anxiety, alienation, and inequality

Beyond methodological rigidity, the prevalent atmosphere of intimidation and anxiety in a traditional case method classroom has significant psychological implications for students. Kennedy argues the Socratic method teaches students to conform passively to hierarchical authority and accept legal doctrines without meaningful critique.[13] Such experiences can alienate students from diverse backgrounds, intensifying the isolation and discomfort felt in a traditionally homogeneous environment.[14]

Historical examples such as Harvard Law School's "ladies' days," when female students were selectively questioned on trivial or gender-stereotyped topics, stress the problematic intersection of gender and the Socratic method.[15] Contemporary critiques from student groups like "Shatter the Ceiling" further

[12] Hlinak (n 12) 5–6 where he explains how using the Socratic method "imbues students with a craftsman skill in handling materials of case law but this skills comes at the expense of others"; Gersen (n 7) where she explains how the Socratic method could be employed to train students to "engage in cooperative effort"; David Sandomierski, 'Transcending Langdell?' *Aspiration and Reality in Legal Education* (University of Toronto Press 2020) where he shows that "what it means to 'think like a lawyer' is largely presented as the limited task of determining relevance through analogical reasoning and issue spotting" and that "other qualities, however, are at play when lawyers think and practice. Teasing out these diverse elements of human thinking and judging – the affective qualities, the attention to social context and reality, the impact of distributional preferences (however implicit), the ability to listen empathetically, the purposive, facilitative, and prospective modes of problem solving, to name just a few – allows a more complete and more accurate picture to emerge of what it means to think like a lawyer."
[13] Kennedy, 'Legal Education as Training for Hierarchy' (n 9); Gersen (n 7) 2327.
[14] Gersen (n 7) 2327 referencing; Lani Guinier, Michelle Fine and Jane Balin, 'Becoming Gentlemen: Women's Experiences at One Ivy League Law School' (1994) 143 University of Pennsylvania Law Review 1, 3 ff; Tanisha Bailey, 'The Master's Tools: Deconstructing the Socratic Method and Its Disparate Impact on Women Through the Prism of the Equal Protection Doctrine' (2003) 3 University of Maryland Law Journal of Race, Religion, Gender and Class 125, 127 ff.
[15] Gersen (n 7) 2329.

highlight ongoing concerns.[16] These critiques emphasise that the Socratic method disproportionately disadvantages women and students from minority backgrounds, reinforcing styles of argumentation and presentation that align closely with white male norms.[17] Scholars like Guinier et al. have argued that the traditional case method and Socratic questioning silence diverse voices and inhibit authentic participation, thereby preserving cycles of exclusion and marginalisation within legal education.[18]

Moreover, traditional legal pedagogy frequently neglects the emotive and experiential dimensions of learning. Students often confront emotionally challenging topics such as violence, trauma, and systemic injustices without sufficient preparation or contextualization.

Jochelson et al. emphasise that the lack of emotional preparation reinforces harmful expectations of neutrality and objectivity, intensifying feelings of alienation and psychological distress, particularly among marginalised student groups.[19] Van Praagh extends this critique by highlighting how the established expectation of neutrality and objectivity inherent in traditional legal education methods suppresses personal narratives and relational insights, essential components for appreciating law's societal and human implications.[20] Her perspective aligns with Elkins' reflections in "Rites de Passage," stressing the

[16] The "Shatter the Ceiling" coalition aims to highlight systemic gender inequalities at Harvard Law. The Record, 'Do You Accept the Status Quo? It's About Time to Shatter the Ceiling' (*The Harvard Law Record*, 11 March 2013) <hlrecord.org/do-you-accept-the-status-quo-its-about-time-to-shatter-the-ceiling/>; See also Terry Nagel, 'Stanford Law School Students Want to Break "Impenetrable Concrete" Ceiling for Women Lawyers' (*Stanford Law School*, 1 June 2016) <law.stanford.edu/press/stanford-law-school-students-want-break-impenetrable-concrete-ceiling-women-lawyers/>.
[17] Gersen (n 7) 2330–2331.
[18] Guinier, Fine and Balin (n 15) 46–47, 68 ff.
[19] Richard Jochelson, James Gacek and David Ireland, 'Reconsidering Legal Pedagogy: Assessing Trigger Warnings, Evaluative Instruments, and Articling Integration in Canada's Modern Law School Curricula' 44 Manitoba Law Journal 87, 89 ff; See also Kim Chanbonpin, 'Crisis and Trigger Warnings: Reflections on Legal Education and the Social Value of the Law' (2015) 90 Chicago-Kent Law Review 615.
[20] See Shauna Van Praagh, 'Stories in Law School: An Essay on Language, Participation and the Power of Legal Education' (1992) 2 Columbia Journal of Gender and Law 111.

marginalisation of students' lived experiences in favour of abstract doctrinal analysis, thus obstructing a more holistic and humane engagement with law.[21]

Pedagogical stagnation and lack of creativity

In addition to its psychological consequences, the traditional case method and Socratic questioning leave little space for pedagogical creativity or innovation. Hlinak acknowledges that while the Socratic method can develop critical thinking skills effectively, its inflexible implementation often stifles genuine curiosity, creativity, and imaginative exploration.[22] Legal education, under the weight of its historical traditions, often undervalues or entirely ignores the importance of improvisation, interpretative flexibility, and experiential engagement, all qualities crucial to navigating the complexities of legal practice.[23]

Sandomierski observes that law professors frequently adhere to conventional pedagogical structures due not only to external institutional pressures but also internalised norms and subconscious beliefs regarding effective legal instruction.[24] This leads to pedagogical stagnation, where deep-rooted teaching methods continue to dominate, severely restricting innovation and experimentation within the classroom. Similarly, Toope critiques the traditional legal education paradigm for reducing "thinking like a lawyer" to a "monolithic construct," excessively emphasising analytical reasoning and doctrinal mastery at the expense of broader cognitive capacities.[25] According to Toope, such an approach "domesticates doubt," artificially reducing life's uncertainties and complexities to a narrowly defined rules-based exercise.[26] This instrumentalisation of legal thinking prioritises rule application and

[21] James R Elkins, 'Rites of Passage: Law Students "Telling Their Lives"' (1985) 35 J Legal Educ 27 where she makes the argument that "While [legal education] literature is associated with information on how legal education got to be what it is, it fails in one important respect-it ignores students, their experience, hopes, and dreams, fears and failures, their experience of profound personal change" .
[22] Hlinak (n 12) 5–6.
[23] Sandomierski (n 13) 327–328, 339.
[24] ibid 328–330.
[25] Stephen J Toope (ed), 'Lawyers, Practice and Legal Education' *A Rule of Law for Our New Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge University Press 2023) 225; Maxeiner (n 12) 16, 19, 21, 30, 46.
[26] Toope (n 26) 225.

dispute resolution while neglecting law's richer social, ethical, and imaginative dimensions.[27]

Toope argues for a broader interpretation of "thinking like a lawyer," which would integrate what he describes as "moral imagination" and "practical wisdom."[28] For him, the true vocation of legal education is to nurture empathy, creativity, and responsiveness to social realities alongside rigorous doctrinal training.[29] By narrowly defining legal thought, traditional pedagogy risks producing lawyers adept at mechanical reasoning yet deficient in the pragmatic, ethical, and imaginative competencies required to grapple meaningfully with real-world dilemmas.[30]

Ultimately, while initially revolutionary, the Socratic and case methods in their traditional forms limit law students' broader cognitive, emotional, and social development. Toope's vision aligns with the metaphor of ballet dancers, who rely on disciplined technique but ultimately thrive on expressive freedom and interpretative creativity. Just like ballet, legal education must evolve beyond strict adherence to tradition, integrating structured creativity and legal imagination to meaningfully cultivate future jurists.

Ballet as an analogy for pedagogical reform of legal education

Introduction to ballet as pedagogy

Ballet, often perceived as an art of elegance and discipline, is also a pedagogical system rooted in repetition, refinement, and interpretative engagement. It combines physical training with aesthetic development, producing dancers who are not merely technicians but expressive artists. In this dual emphasis on technical mastery and interpretative freedom, ballet offers a compelling metaphor for reimagining legal education. Much like law, ballet operates within a codified structure: an inherited tradition of positions, forms, and expectations. Yet, what distinguishes the exceptional dancer is not only their devotion to the form but their ability to interpret, adapt, and communicate meaning through movement. The analogy thus invites legal pedagogues to reflect on their pedagogical practices: What kind of "performers" are we

[27] *ibid.*
[28] ibid 225–230.
[29] *ibid 226.*
[30] *ibid 233.*

training, and how might we structure legal education to cultivate both legal precision and legal imagination?

Discipline and technique: the ballet classroom

At its foundation, ballet pedagogy is synonymous with rigorous technical training. Dancers spend years refining precise movements at the barre, engaging in systematic and repetitive practice designed to develop strength, balance, and muscle memory. Lokke et al. describe this training as a form of "precision teaching," a method rooted in repetition and frequency-building to achieve mastery.[31] In legal education, the case method plays a similar role: students are trained to identify legal principles, distinguish precedents, and apply legal doctrine through questioning, repetition, and detailed analysis.

This emphasis on discipline mirrors the goal of teaching students to "think like a lawyer." As Sandomierski notes, this objective often narrows legal education to a form of intellectual gatekeeping, rewarding conformity over creativity.[32] Nordin-Bates similarly critiques the ballet world for creating environments where the pursuit of perfection eclipses the development of individuality.[33] Dancers, like law students, often internalise the belief that deviation from form is failure. The psychological toll is notable: stress, self-doubt, and a reluctance to take interpretative risks.

Thus, while technical mastery is essential in both ballet and law, it is not sufficient. A pedagogy focused exclusively on discipline may produce competent technicians, but not compelling performers or creative jurists. The real challenge lies in what comes after precision: the space for interpretation, expressive agency, creativity, and imagination.

Interpretative freedom and creative expression: the performance stage

If the ballet barre is where technique is forged, the stage is where artistry comes alive. In performance, dancers must translate their technical training into movement that expresses emotion, intention, and narrative. This transition

[31] Gunn EH Lokke, Jon A Lokke and Erick Arntzen, 'Precision Teaching, Frequency-Building, and Ballet Dancing' (2008) 24 Journal of Precision Teaching and Celeration 21.
[32] Sandomierski (n 13).
[33] Sanna M Nordin-Bates, 'Striving for Perfection or for Creativity?: A Dancer's Dilemma' (2020) 20 Journal of Dance Education 23 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2018.1546050>.

from rote mastery to interpretative freedom is where creativity flourishes. Yoshimi and Machiko describe this phenomenon as the cultivation of "creative consciousness," a process by which dancers develop self-awareness and expressive autonomy even within the constraints of classical form.[34]

Clements and Nordin-Bates argue that the best ballet pedagogy nurtures this tension: structure provides the safety and foundation for creativity to emerge.[35] The same principle applies to legal education. To prepare students for the complexities of practice, whether drafting novel arguments, engaging diverse clients, or responding to unprecedented legal challenges, legal educators must move beyond rigid instruction and create spaces for imaginative exploration. Scholars advocate for legal pedagogy that encourages curiosity and experimentation, emphasising that the practice of law increasingly demands skills outside conventional analytical reasoning.[36]

Creative engagement in legal education could take many forms: role-playing, storytelling, problem-based learning, or collaborative exercises that allow students to take interpretative risks.[37] Just as a dancer might reinterpret a classical solo, a jurist might approach a legal issue from an unexpected angle, testing not only their understanding of doctrine but their capacity to innovate.[38]

The pas de deux as a pedagogical metaphor

Perhaps the most expressive metaphor for legal pedagogy is the ballet *pas de deux*, a duet in which two dancers perform in harmonious coordination while retaining their distinct identities.[39] Applied to legal education, the *pas de deux*

[34] Eri Yoshimi and Senju Machiko, 'A Study on Creative Consciousness in Dance: Focusing on Perceptions of Creation in Ballet and Contemporary Dance' (2024) 15 Advances in Physical Education 91, 102 ff <https://doi.org/10.4236/ape.2025.151007>.
[35] Lucie Clements and Sanna M Nordin-Bates, 'Inspired or Inhibited? Choreographers' Views on How Classical Ballet Training Shaped Their Creativity' (2022) 22 Journal of Dance Education 1, 4 ff <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2020.1744154>.
[36] Jochelson, Gacek and Ireland (n 20) 118.
[37] Van Praagh (n 21).
[38] See the examples of Holmes and Brandeis in James Boyd White, 'Legal Knowledge' (2002) 115 HRLRev 1396 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1342550>.
[39] For an illustration of the pas de deux metaphor, see these exemplary performances from the Royal Ballet, 'La Bayadère – Act I Pas de Deux (Marianela Nuñez, Vadim Muntagirov)' (*YouTube*, 2019) <youtube.com/watch?v=jlUmbnWaTs4>; Royal Ballet, 'Swan Lake – Entrée and Adage from the Black Swan Pas de Deux (Zenaida Yanowsky, Nehemiah Kish)' (*YouTube*, 2015) <youtube.com/watch?v=p21n1xorjEs>; Royal Ballet, 'Giselle - Act II Pas de Deux (Natalia Osipova, Carlos Acosta)' (*YouTube*, 2015) <youtube.com/watch?v=ql3o-1eSdbQ>.

captures the necessary *équilibre* between legal precision and legal creativity. Within the *pas de deux*, disciplined technical precision does not suppress interpretative freedom; instead, each dancer's mastery supports and enhances the other's artistic expression. Similarly, legal doctrine provides essential structure and clarity, much like choreography, but true mastery emerges when students are empowered to creatively interpret, adapt, and engage with the law.

In reimagining legal education as a *pas de deux*, we begin to understand legal education not as the unilateral imposition of form, but as the co-creation of movement. Legal educators and law students thus become partners in a shared interpretative endeavour. Davidson's conception of the ballet classroom as a "cycle of creativity," involving continuous interpretative exchange among the dance teacher, the pianist, and the dancer, highlights this approach.[40] This collaborative, responsive model challenges the rigid hierarchies of the Socratic method and offers a more humane, imaginative framework for learning. Van Praagh and Elkins similarly emphasise the importance of dialogue, storytelling, and relationality in legal classrooms, advocating for pedagogies that foreground human experience rather than abstract logic.[41]

Ultimately, by viewing legal education through the lens of the *pas de deux*, educators become choreographers who guide students toward a balanced blend of disciplined analytical rigour and imaginative freedom. Such an approach promises to produce competent, expressive, creative, and adaptable jurists capable of navigating the nuanced demands of contemporary legal practice with precision and creativity.

Ballet-inspired methods in legal education

Building upon earlier critiques of rigidity, emotional alienation, and pedagogical stagnation in traditional legal education, this section moves from theoretical metaphor to practical implementation. By employing ballet-inspired methodologies, educators can effectively cultivate the agility, creativity, and empathetic imagination essential to contemporary legal practice.

---

[40] Andrew Davidson, '"The Cycle of Creativity": A Case Study of the Working Relationship between a Dance Teacher and a Dance Musician in a Ballet Class' (2023) 24 Research in Dance Education 323 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2021.1971645>.
[41] Van Praagh (n 21); Elkins (n 22).

Embodied learning, physical literacy, and legal imagination

Traditional legal education, focused heavily on analytical abstraction, often neglects embodied and emotional experiences, resulting in what Abramson calls "anesthetizing students to the full force of the law."[42] Ballet pedagogy, in contrast, embraces "physical literacy," defined by Lycouris and Timmons as heightened bodily awareness and kinaesthetic empathy.[43] This physical literacy allows dancers to intuitively interpret and respond to their surroundings through embodied understanding. Kasirer reinforces the value of embodied metaphors,[44] arguing that they can enrich the law's imaginative and humane potential, especially when legal language fails to capture the "great mystery" and the full reality of human relationships.[45] Kasirer suggests that the law needs "the full range of human imagination to give voice and image to its fundamental ideas."[46]

To integrate embodied learning into legal education, educators could use physicalization exercises and sensory reflection to deepen doctrinal comprehension. Imagine, for instance, teaching family law's unity and duality in marriage through togetherness and apartness in a dance, as Kasirer describes.[47] Students internalise legal principles not merely as abstract concepts but as physically and emotionally experienced realities. This pedagogical shift directly responds to critiques addressing the neglected embodied dimensions crucial to legal imagination.[48]

---

[42] Kara Abramson, '"Art for a Better Life:" A New Image of American Legal Education' (2006) 2006 BYU Educ & LJ 227, 257.
[43] Sophia Lycouris and Wendy Timmons, 'Physical Literacy in Legal Education: Understanding Physical Bodily Experiences in the Dance Environment to Inform Thinking Processes within Legal Education' *The Arts and the Legal Academy* (Routledge 2013) 54.
[44] In his article "The Dance is One" Kasirer discusses at length how legal language often employs metaphors –such as "one flesh," "at arm's length," or "bound up" – to describe relationships and obligations. He argues that these metaphors have expressive power that ordinary legal language often lacks. See Kasirer (n 2) 69 ff.
[45] ibid 69–71.
[46] *ibid 72.*
[47] ibid; See also Abramson's discussion of "Art as Communicator of Legal Ideas" in Abramson (n 43) 258 ff.
[48] Julian Webb, 'The Body in (E)Motion: Thinking through Embodiment in Legal Education' *Affect and Legal Education* (Routledge 2011) 212–214; Abramson (n 43) 257.

Frequency-building to creative consciousness: habitualising precision, unlocking legal creativity

Another teaching method inspired by ballet is frequency-building: the systematic breakdown and disciplined repetition of choreography to embed complex movements deeply into muscle memory.[49] Ballet dancers meticulously rehearse movements, timing, and technique, making choreography second nature. By the time dancers perform, they have internalised precision and musicality so thoroughly that performance anxiety often diminishes, and interpretative artistry emerges naturally.[50]

Applied to legal education, frequency-building can encourage students to methodically practice core legal competencies, such as legal precedent identification, precise statutory interpretation, or argument and counterargument construction, in incremental segments. Regular "rehearsal" of these discrete skills allows students to internalise doctrine through sustained repetition, transforming high-stakes performances (e.g., oral pleadings in a moot court, courtroom advocacy, negotiations) into familiar and manageable situations. As a result, legal skills become intuitive habits, reducing anxiety and enabling students to confidently express creativity, adaptability, and interpretative imagination in complex legal scenarios.

However, to move beyond mere technical precision, frequency-building must be coupled with structured improvisation. Ballet pedagogy emphasises structured improvisation, which explicitly leverages disciplined technique as a foundation for creative exploration. In practice, this does not mean improvising without form: it means rehearsing a phrase until placement, timing, and coordination become reliable, and then varying what is interpretatively available within that structure (e.g., musical accent, dynamics, focus, breath, or spatial pathway) while remaining faithful to the choreography's constraints. This concept is what Aziz describes as achieving the "perfect line,"[51] a delicate

[49] See for example Lokke, Lokke and Arntzen (n 32).
[50] Anxiety may, of course, persist and can be heightened in certain conditions, including when time to rehearse is limited. See Janet Karin, *The Art and Science of Ballet Dancing and Teaching: Integrating Mind, Brain and Body* (1st edn, Routledge 2023) 41 ff <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003395188>; Justine Benoit-Piau and others, 'Passion and Performance Anxiety: How It Affects the Incidence of Musculoskeletal Disorders in Dancers' (2024) 73 Psychology of Sport and Exercise 102632 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2024.102632>.
[51] See Miriam Aziz, 'Law as Ballet: A Global Pas de Deux' [2015] Völkerrechtsblog <https://doi.org/10.17176/20170202-102706>.

synthesis between disciplined, frequency-trained form and expressive innovation, paralleling Abramson's call for active engagement and interpretative creativity in legal education.[52]

By integrating frequency-building with structured improvisation, legal educators can encourage students to master technical skills through repetition and subsequently apply this mastery within creatively flexible exercises. Moot court preparation offers a concrete illustration. In coaching a team, students do not practice their pleadings only once or twice; they plead repeatedly across successive mock sessions that function as rehearsal and variation at once. They are interrupted with questions early and often so that responsiveness becomes habitual rather than destabilising; they are exposed to different judging styles, from strict and sceptical to minimalist or indifferent, so that a particular tone in the room does not produce anxiety or derail structure; and they practice both full-length pleadings and compressed pleadings when questioning dominates. Time management, too, is trained explicitly: students learn to recalibrate pace, prioritise issues, and preserve their line of argument even when the tempo shifts. By the time they reach the actual pleading in competition, advocacy is familiar not because it has been memorised mechanically, but because it has been rehearsed across enough variations that students can meet almost any scenario with composure. It is precisely at that point, once technique is reliable and adaptability has been trained, that students can inflect the pleading with personal style, strategic emphasis, and interpretative judgment. This combined method ensures that legal principles are internalised as intuitive frameworks, empowering students to confidently and creatively engage with legal doctrine, directly addressing critiques of pedagogical stagnation.[53]

Kinaesthetic empathy and collaborative pedagogy

"Kinesthetic empathy," defined as the ability to physically comprehend and respond sensitively to another's movements or emotional states,[54] is central to ballet's pedagogical effectiveness. As previously mentioned, ballet classrooms serve as "cycles of creativity," fostering ongoing dialogue among teachers,

[52] Abramson (n 43).
[53] See Pedagogical stagnation and lack of creativity above.
[54] Lycouris and Timmons (n 44) 54–55.

dancers, and musicians.[55] This dynamic sharply contrasts with the hierarchical, emotionally detached environments critiqued earlier.[56]

Translating kinaesthetic empathy into legal education could involve interactive group activities, collaborative storytelling, or journaling designed to foster empathetic responsiveness and emotional intelligence among students. For instance, Professor Fineman's Family Law course at Columbia uses personal journals where students reflect on their emotional responses to the material, deepening their empathy and relational understanding of legal complexities.[57] Similarly, Professor Kennedy at McGill employs an interactive "brick-by-brick" activity in his Legal Ethics class, where students visualise their participation in group discussions using Lego bricks, promoting active engagement and empathetic collaboration in ethical deliberations.[58]

Van Praagh emphasises the importance of relational understanding and compassion in producing ethically attuned legal practitioners.[59] By employing these collaborative, empathy-centered methods, educators can create supportive classroom dynamics, directly countering the psychological toll previously identified.[60]

Choreographing legal imagination: the educator as choreographer of possibility

Finally, reimagining legal educators as choreographers reframes their role from mere knowledge transmitters[61] to facilitators of creative and interpretative exploration. Ballet choreographers like Julyen Hamilton illustrate that meaningful narratives emerge from disciplined yet spontaneous co-creation

---

[55] Davidson (n 41).
[56] See *The psychological toll: anxiety, alienation, and inequality* above esp. Kennedy, 'Legal Education as Training for Hierarchy' (n 9); Gersen (n 7).
[57] Van Praagh (n 21) 130–131.
[58] In McGill's Legal Ethics & Professionalism course (LAW 210), Professor Jeff Kennedy uses Lego bricks as a tool for visualising student participation in small-group ethical deliberations. Each contribution to the discussion is marked by placing a brick, which not only tracks engagement but also makes visible the collective balance of voices. As one student observed, the exercise creates a sense of responsibility: "If you see that you have a full bag and others' are emptying, you feel like you also need to contribute."
[59] Van Praagh (n 21); See also Abramson (n 43).
[60] See The psychological toll: anxiety, alienation, and inequality above.
[61] See Freire's description of the "banking" concept of education in Paulo Freire, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' in Steven Cahn (ed), *Classic and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Education* (Oxford University Press 2012) 379–380.

between choreographer and dancer.[62] This interactive, adaptive dynamic directly informs a powerful model for legal teaching: educators should consciously design interactive learning environments that encourage students to actively interpret, explore, and adapt legal principles creatively to real-world contexts.

White similarly argues for a pedagogical approach emphasising active student engagement, noting that genuine mastery of the law involves interpretative creativity and adaptability, qualities often overshadowed by traditional methods.[63] Legal educators, therefore, should construct classroom "choreographies" using structured improvisation exercises, embodied learning, frequency-building drills, reflective practices, and collaborative problem-solving. An example is clinical legal education, where the educator quite literally choreographs a space of constrained possibility among the educator, students, and client: the "score" is set in advance through client objectives, ethical duties, and doctrinal and procedural constraints, yet the live encounter demands responsive improvisation: listening, reframing, sequencing advice, and adjusting strategy as facts and priorities shift. In this way, the educator does not simply transmit rules, but designs the conditions in which students can practice interpretative judgment responsibly, learning to translate doctrine into action. Within such pedagogical structures, students become active, confident participants, capable of engaging legal doctrine analytically and imaginatively.

The educator-as-choreographer metaphor encapsulates a balanced pedagogical approach: doctrine as foundational choreography, with creative interpretation as the student's expressive contribution. Ballet-inspired pedagogy thus cultivates proficient legal technicians and reflective, ethically responsive practitioners adept at resourcefully navigating the demands of the contemporary legal "stage."

Conclusion

Returning to the poem quoted at the beginning of this article, legal education, like the *pas de deux*, requires harmony between two seemingly contrasting elements: disciplined precision and interpretative creativity.

---

[62] See Lycouris and Timmons (n 44) 57.
[63] See the example of Holmes and Brandeis and the Model Penal Code in White (n 39) 1411–1429.

While legal education varies across jurisdictions, particularly in the relative weight given to case-based reasoning and codified doctrine, the underlying pedagogical tension identified here is not unique to North American classrooms. In more code-centred European settings, the risk may be less the hegemony of the case method than the internalisation of doctrine as static or exhaustive.

Ballet pedagogy nonetheless translates: frequency-building maps onto repeated practice of interpretative moves central to European legal reasoning (methods of interpretation, principled synthesis, and structured argumentation), while structured improvisation maps onto the adaptive application of doctrine when facts, forums, and normative stakes shift. The "score" changes across systems, but the educational aim remains constant: jurists who can perform legal structure with both rigour and responsive judgment. Through the lens of ballet, I have demonstrated the limitations inherent in traditional legal pedagogy, the rigidity of the Socratic method, the emotional alienation it fosters, and the creative stagnation it can produce. Ballet, by contrast, demonstrates how structured discipline can seamlessly blend with creative expression, providing a powerful model for educational reform. The ballet-inspired methodologies proposed: embodied learning, frequency-building, structured improvisation, kinaesthetic empathy, and choreographed legal imagination, offer practical ways to integrate legal imagination and legal creativity within legal education.

My teaching philosophy embraces this balanced duality. As educators, we become choreographers, guiding students not merely to execute legal doctrine but to interpret and imaginatively engage with it, just like a perfect *pas de deux*.

In embracing this pedagogy inspired by ballet, we cease dancing alone. Teacher and students become two distinct voices, yet inseparably linked in a shared, dynamic performance. Indeed, as Kasirer reminds us through Scott's poetry, it is precisely in this collaborative act of teaching and learning that:

"I no longer dance with myself; we are two, not one; the dance is *one*."