

Farther, higher, faster — it's ballet, not the Olympics

May 8, 2001

Boys don't wear tutus, but they do dance on tippy-toes — and it hurts.

The image of a male ballet dancer as a mincing, twirling wimp came crashing down for kids at Gordon Denny Community School recently, as they learned just how hard being a dancer can be.

"They're good," laughed Gr. 5 student John McKay, after nearly an hour spent hoofing it around the school's gym under the tutelage of local dance teacher Lorall Goebel. "They move a lot better than me!"

Goebel, now 38, was a mere toddler she first tapped and tumbled her way across a stage. She began ballet lessons at age two, and continued formal training until she was 17. Six years ago, Goebel began offering dance classes in La Ronge.

That's when she came face to face with an ugly reality: boys who dance are seen as "unmanly". In six years, Goebel has had two boys in her classes. One dropped out; the other was pulled out after two weeks because his father found out.

Such prejudice makes Goebel's blood boil, and it's part of why she jumped at the opportunity to talk to students at Gordon Denny's arts fair on April 27.

"The ballet dancer can jump higher, run further, he has a way nicer build, and yet he's gay?" she asked indignantly in an interview with *The Northerner*. "People go, 'Oh, you're going to ballet,' and right away their hand goes to their head and they do a little twirl. That's not what it's about."

As Goebel explained to a class of Gr. 5 and 6 students, "A lot of people think that ballet means dancing on your tippy-toes. ... It takes years and years of strengthening your muscles to be able to dance on your tippy-toes."

That's something Alysha Lederhouse can attest to. The 16-year-old has been dancing with Goebel for years, and her first attempt at going "en pointe" was less than six months ago. She soon had bruised, black toenails to prove it.



Photo by Carmen Pauls

A student examines a "pointe" slipper, one of the few pieces of equipment used by dancers. But don't let the clothing fool you: dancing is tough, as Air Ronge students can attest to.

That self-martyrdom impressed the boys in the class, as did hearing that many professional athletes take ballet to develop grace, co-ordination and sheer muscle power.

"I can't believe (Olympic skater) Elvis Stojko does ballet," said an admiring Kendall Mirasty.

In La Ronge, the sport of choice for boys is hockey, but dancing takes even more out of its "players" than hockey does, Goebel said.

"In ballet, you *can't* get tired," she said. "You can't run off into the sidelines and think that somebody's going to do it for you."

Dancing also teaches you self-discipline, and gives you inner drive,

she said. Rather than competing against an opponent, "you're dancing for yourself.... It's, 'how can I jump?'"

Before this, the boys at Gordon Denny "were kind of too macho to do something like ballet," said teacher Darcy Hubka. "They seemed to do a lot of mimicking of the head gestures, and not realizing the endurance (that's required)."

"I was really impressed with what she (Goebel) said, that it might change the stereotypes," Hubka added. "They were huffing and puffing pretty good!"

Carmen Pauls

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