

Pilates & Client Feedback *by Emily Berreth*

From 1999-2001, I was in the Masters program at the University of Georgia studying magazine journalism. In my first semester, I immersed myself in media theories while adjusting to a new environment. I fit in exercise when I could, but I had no routine. By my second semester, I was physically and emotionally tired and wondered, “What about me? What can I do that is just fun for me?” Then I remembered an article about Pilates and dancers. As a former dancer, I was intrigued and signed up for Pilates at the University. I was instantly hooked.



Discovering Pilates

Pilates gave me more than an exercise routine. My Pilates teacher encouraged us to put away negative thoughts about our bodies, our abilities and our past experiences with exercise. Instead of comparing

ourselves with others, we were asked to listen to our own bodies. In a few short weeks, I noticed a big difference in both my core strength and my ability to cope with my workload at school. As I became stronger, I felt better and I remembered how to be happy with my body. In the process, I discovered something else – a topic for my graduate thesis project!! I wrote my thesis on the definition and impact of dance and movement therapy, which included interviews with dance and movement therapists and clients. Parts of this thesis were published in two national magazines.



Rediscovering Pilates as an Instructor

After six years as a Pilates client, my decision to become a Pilates instructor had as much to do with sharing my good experience with others as it did with finding a way to do what I love. When I began teaching, I defined certain goals for my class. I wanted to create a fun and engaging atmosphere to foster my students' exploration of Pilates.

After a few months of teaching, I began to ask the questions that my training in journalism had taught me to ask. I wanted to know more about my students' experience with learning a new exercise. I wondered how it compared to my own experience as a student. My curiosity led me to develop a survey of seven questions to determine my students' satisfaction with my classes and their experience prior to my class.

My survey included the following questions:

1. If Pilates is new for you, is it what you expected?
_____ Yes _____ No
2. If Pilates is not new, did you enjoy your previous Pilates experience? _____ Yes _____ No
3. What do you like about Pilates? (Exercises, Social Contact, results, etc.)
4. Why did you return to MY Pilates class?
5. Where have you improved since you began?
7. What do you like about my teaching style? What do you not like?

Survey Results

Marcus Berquist, who had never taken a Pilates class before mine, said *“having a regular class increases discipline and ensures accountability for really following an exercise program.”* In addition, he said that attending class weekly encouraged him *“to follow a regular practice of other exercises outside of class so that [he] can perform better at Pilates each week.”* Deb Huwaldt, said *“It’s as if Emily can envision what we may look like if we applied Pilates to our body, before we can visualize it ourselves.”*

Rebecca Rodgers, who had never attended a Pilates class prior to mine, said she was *“pleasantly surprised with the way different skills were integrated into the teaching.”* She felt more centered emotionally as well as physically. Marcus Berquist said he was *“working out muscles in different ways”* and it took time to get used to a new routine. Bill McMenamin felt challenged by exercises he had never done before but *“motivated to go beyond [his] perceived limitations.”* Sarah Brennan liked the class precisely because she could *“go at [her] own speed.”* After only a few months, she reported a difference in her blood pressure, weight and stress level. Cristy Varela like the feeling of Pilates.

My survey also showed that some of my students' favorite moments in class were mastering exercises. For Bill McMEnamin, his favorite moment came when he figured out "*how all of the exercises worked together.*" For Deb Huwaldt, a "*feeling of empowerment*" came over her as she was able to do exercises she previously thought she could not do. For Marcus Berquist, knowing the correct form allowed him to "*concentrate on [his] own form and performing the exercise better rather than having to look to see what others are doing all the time.*" Finally, Tom Richard's overall experience was so significant that he has become more "*open-minded about exercise*" since beginning Pilates. "*Most men in America, myself included,*" he said, "*have a narrow idea of exercise that Pilates usefully challenges.*"

Some also benefited from the group and social interactions that took place during Pilates. Bill McMEnamin enjoyed "*the instruction and motivational support from classmates,*" while Brad Schinstock appreciated that he had fun while getting "*a good workout at the same time.*" Similarly, Emily Bielawski loved being able to laugh "*at how silly [she] looked while doing the moves*" while "*gaining flexibility and strength.*" Comments like these encouraged me to continue teaching

and finding the right balance between fun and fitness, but it was Rebecca Rodgers' comment that convinced me I was on the right track in my journey as an instructor. She said, *"I liked the idea of hanging out with friends and getting a workout at the same time. There is a great balance between having fun and working out. We laugh, but we always keep on track because Emily helps us."*

Mary Kathryn McCrary said of my class: *"Emily Berreth's classes have been very personable with individual attention to correct form, posture and alignment. She is a great mentor and should continue teaching so she can motivate others toward a healthier lifestyle."*

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