

Dance in New Zealand primary schools: Moving forward toward a realisation of UNESCO's aims for the arts

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Abstract

UNESCO has developed aims for the arts in education that are held within two documents: the Road Map and the Seoul Agenda. With these policies in place, they, in effect, open the door for member countries to act upon this global call to arts education; there has been a global realisation of UNESCO's aims for the arts within school curriculums in many countries. An awareness of the importance of the arts is evident as governments discuss the importance of creativity in classrooms. There is much to celebrate in the development of dance education, and yet dance continues to be missing in the majority of primary school classrooms, not only in New Zealand, but in other OECD countries. In order to place New Zealand primary school dance education within a broad global framework, the situations of several OECD countries were examined in relation to UNESCO's aims for the arts, and research identified the existence of similar problems.

A constructivist methodology offered a philosophical view and methodology with which to examine teachers' meanings of dance with my personal voice informing the research in the role of connoisseur. Through my study, I listened to New Zealand teachers' voices, and in doing so, uncovered deeper meanings that inform the delivery of dance in New Zealand primary classrooms. The dance curriculum cannot inform teachers how to teach dance when it has not been a part of their experience, either as a student or a teacher. Much has been written about teachers' lack of confidence in teaching dance. I propose, however, that it is the experience of dance teaching that is absent in primary classrooms simply because teachers cannot teach what they themselves have not learned. My study examined why dance education generally stops at the point of implementation and offers a suggestion to remedy the situation.

Keywords: education, dance, schools, UNESCO

Here we are at, arguably, the world's most important dance conference for 2012. Through keynote addresses, master classes, workshops, performances, and presentations, we share our understandings and build upon our personal knowledge of dance. All conference participants have a specialist's interest in dance and most of us would be strong advocates for our art form. There is much to be thankful for and yet dance continues to be missing in the majority of primary school classrooms, not only in New Zealand schools, but in the classrooms of other OECD countries. A New Zealand dance curriculum exists, but currently many schools are realising their obligations to the dance curriculum through a bi-annual musical or the inclusion of Jump Jam activities, an aerobic dance program where children follow the instructions on a screen. My research examined the possibility of dance being an everyday activity conducted by the generalist classroom teacher, where creative development in children is fostered and valued. When dance is implemented in classrooms, then countries may start moving toward a fulfilment of UNESCO's aims for the arts. It is time for dance to take its place alongside literacy and numeracy and come in from the extra-curricular performance periphery.

My research identified a lack of experience in teaching dance as one reason why teachers believe they don't have the confidence to teach it. Teachers instruct in the manner in which they themselves were taught, and if classroom dance was not experienced as a student, then it is unlikely that teachers will teach dance in their classrooms. This unconscious awareness combines with a lack of professional development, a lack of resources, problems of time and space, and the hierarchical nature of other curriculum subjects, driving dance from classrooms. When teachers who have knowledge, support, and even a will to teach dance do not teach dance in their classrooms, a lack of confidence is identified. However, it is a lack of experience that causes teachers to believe that they lack this confidence.

UNESCO's aims for the arts in schools have been realised in the curriculums of many countries. It would appear, however, that unless the policy rhetoric is followed up by action, dance may dwindle and disappear from primary schools.

UNESCO's aims for the arts

UNESCO's aims for arts education are by and large held within two documents: the Road Map and the Seoul Agenda. With these policies in place, they, in effect, open the door for member countries to act upon this global call to arts education. The challenge now may be seen as why, and how, will individual countries enact this vision and make the next move to implement arts education in a coherent, long-term manner.

At the first UNESCO World Conference for Arts Education in 2006, UNESCO delegates proposed a Road Map for Arts Education. In 2010, the Seoul Agenda took the road map a step further by creating a concrete plan of action:

GOAL 1: To ensure that arts education is accessible as a fundamental and sustainable component of a high quality renewal of education.

GOAL 2: To assure that arts education activities and programmes are of a high quality in conception and delivery.

GOAL 3: To apply arts education principles and practices to contribute to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing today's world. (pp. 3-10)

In order to benefit all learners, the Seoul Agenda (2010) called upon,

UNESCO Member States, civil society, professional organisations and communities to recognise its governing goals, to employ the proposed strategies, and to implement the action items in a concerted effort to realise the full potential of high quality arts education. (p. 2)

"Implementing the action items" would appear to be a stumbling point for many UNESCO Member States.

Working toward UNESCO's goals – United Kingdom

In order to place New Zealand primary school arts education within a broad global framework, the situations of several OECD countries with similar policies and values have been examined in

relation to UNESCO's aims for the arts. Similar problems have been identified in each of the countries in this study, with the U.K. further away from UNESCO's goals than others surveyed.

In the U.K., the National Curriculum online (2011) website stated that,

The DfE is conducting a review of the primary and secondary National Curriculum. This site contains the statutory programmes for study for National Curriculum subjects which maintained schools must follow until a new curriculum is in place.

An International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (2000) conducted on behalf of the U.K. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority stated,

There are widespread concerns about the status and value of the arts in practice. All the representatives attending the seminar agreed that the arts appeared to be undervalued within their education systems. (p. 5)

Sanderson's (2008) research proposed that,

Dance and the arts should be more widely available in schools so that all children and young people can have access to aesthetic experiences that have the potential to improve the quality of life. (p. 2)

Although Sanderson's research regarding dance in U.K. schools made positive suggestions, it appears that four years on, her recommendations have not been acted upon.

Currently, a music and dance scheme operates in the U.K., which aims to benefit children with exceptional potential in either music or dance. Four schools are involved in the dance scheme, and children compete for the few available places (Department for Education, 2012). It appears that there is much work to be done in the U.K. to bring every school to a point where dance not only exists in a curriculum, but is implemented in classrooms across the country.

Working toward UNESCO's goals – Australia

Dance is featured in the Australian primary schools' curriculums throughout each state and territory. Individual curriculums are being moved into line with a Draft National Curriculum, which is currently under development (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). Fox (2010), a former Queensland State Panel Chair of Dance in Education and currently Acting Manager of the Assessment Bank for the Queensland Studies Authority, discussed the implementation of dance in primary schools:

Not every week, or term, or even year, but definitely not as missing as it was [dance]. Unfortunately it is still random, often included in lessons but usually working toward a bigger arts event for the school.

Dance in Australian schools appears to be following a pattern similar to New Zealand's. Australia is about to implement a national curriculum with specific reference to dance and yet, at the stage of implementation, most teachers avoid teaching dance in the classroom. Instead, they

defer to arts events such as a musical, rock eisteddfod, or major school event. Australian arts academic, Russell-Bowie (2011) states,

Despite continued changes in arts policies, practices, and governments, the same problems remain in classrooms all over Australia. In general the arts are marginalised and not valued as part of the core curriculum. (p. 169)

Working toward UNESCO's goals – United States of America

Dance in elementary schools in the United States operates in a similar manner to the current situation in Australia, where each state is responsible for its own dance curriculum. Classroom implementation varies from state to state and from school to school. Although America has introduced arts as a basic right for all children through the 2000 Educate America Act, the inclusion of arts alongside national standards has created similar problems to those experienced in other countries. Gelineau (2011) reflects,

Implementation of all national standards has placed a major burden, not only on administrators, but even more heavily on classroom teachers, “we’re teaching to the test. No time for Arts.” (p. vii)

President Obama’s committee on the Arts and the Humanities has released a paper, “Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future through Creative Schools.” Obama (2011) stated,

Now more than ever we need solutions that keep students excited, motivated and in school, and we must provide them with the tools to succeed in the workforce after they graduate. (p. 47)

America’s size and population may present difficulties in a uniformity of implementation of dance across all states, and although an Arts Impact organisation has been set up to empower teachers to teach the arts, it reaches a limited number of teachers in some states.

Parsad and Coopersmith (2012) state, “In the 2009-2010 school year, 3 percent of elementary schools offered instruction that was designated specifically for dance during regular school hours” (p. 40). Of the 3 percent of American schools that offered dance, the characteristics of instruction varied between the “frequency of instruction, the primary space used for instruction, the availability of arts specialists to teach the subject, and whether there were district curriculum guides” (Parsad & Coopersmith, 2012, p. 41). The language used to describe the teaching of dance, such as instruction rather than facilitation, and the images chosen to illustrate the report, suggest that creative dance has a limited presence in American elementary schools, and that when dance is taught, the focus is on the learning and performing of dances. Parsad and Coopersmith’s (2012) examination of dance education in American elementary schools indicated that where dance was taught, it was generally located within a physical education, music, or in other curriculum area programmes.

Working toward UNESCO's goals – Singapore

The Singapore Ministry of Education has recently overhauled old educational methods with a focus on the development of creativity. The desired “Outcomes of Education” are listed on the

Ministry of Education website (2011) as follows: a confident person, a self-directed learner, an active contributor, and a concerned citizen. Keun and Hunt (2006) state, “Singapore’s Ministry of Education (MOE) aims to help students to discover their own talents, recognise their full potential and develop a passion for learning that lasts through life” (p. 35). Such aims are similar to those of the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The addition of dance into the primary curriculum is designed to foster creativity in Singapore, as in New Zealand. Singapore’s “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” vision was launched in 1997, and similarly in New Zealand in 2000, dance took its place in the New Zealand arts curriculum. It would appear 12 years on that similar implementation problems exist in both countries (Ashley, 2010; Buck, 2003a; Burridge, 2010; Hong-Joe, 2002).

As in New Zealand, Australia, the U.K., and America, the focus in Singapore is on literacy and numeracy within the school system, and recent research of what is actually occurring in classrooms suggests:

Many dichotomies and misnomers about the concept of “creativity” in dance education ... pedagogy, teaching methodology, curriculum, exam/performance frameworks and parent/teacher/student expectations all impinge on opportunities for creative dance in Singapore. (Burridge, 2010, p. 94)

Keun and Hunt (2006) concur, “Although dance is included as a curricular subject in the physical education syllabus, little attempt has been made to teach it in schools” (p. 36). Singapore’s education system has been historically structured along the lines of rote learning and examinations within a competitive environment. According to world measurements (OECD, 2010), Singapore has been successful in educating students to a high standard. While Singapore proposes the inclusion of creative practices in schools, their past educational successes were successfully achieved without dance, adding to the difficulties of implementing change.

Working toward UNESCO’s goals – Finland

The development in Finnish education points toward success in education generally (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Hargreaves, 2010; Hargreaves, Halasz, & Pont, 2007; Sahlberg, 2007), and although writers examining the reasons for this success do not necessarily highlight the importance of the arts in the curriculum, they do acknowledge its existence. Hargreaves (2010) states,

There are more composers and orchestral conductors per capita in Finland than in any other developed country, and all young people engage in creative and performing arts until the end of their secondary education. (p. 109)

Dance was offered in Finnish schools in 1999 when Neiminen (1999) stated, “Younger children in the lower grades are usually taught by regular classroom teachers who have little dance in their studies” (p. 129). Anttila (2010) highlighted inconsistencies, however: “As part of a basic education in the arts, dance education has developed qualitatively and quantitatively, but not all children have equal access to dance education” (p. 61). Dance is offered to a small percentage of children who display special talents. Anttila (2010) writes of a steady decline of the status of arts within education over the past 30 years and makes the point that dance has become an exclusive

programme for talented students. She states, “Dance, which never had a place in the national curriculum to begin with, has become more of an exclusive, rather than an inclusive activity” (p. 63). Anttila (2010, p. 63) also makes the point that,

This kind of development conflicts with the Nordic ideals of equality, democracy and accessibility of culture, education and the arts, and it also conflicts with the UN declaration of children’s rights.

A suggestion for a way forward toward the implementation of dance in New Zealand primary schools

It is time to acknowledge that dance is not taking its place in New Zealand primary classrooms in meaningful and creative ways that celebrate real learning. It is suggested that discussions take place around the reality of a practical implementation of dance. New Zealand education has an arts curriculum and UNESCO has offered a Road Map to follow. The New Zealand Government, via their UNESCO Commissioner, voted on the resolution supporting the Seoul Agenda and therefore it may be assumed that the New Zealand Ministry of Education would welcome an implementation of dance in primary classrooms. Rather than continuing to move in ever-diminishing circles, it is important to address the real and important issue of the implementation of dance in New Zealand primary classrooms.

It is proposed that a research project is established in a primary school where dance is introduced across the curriculum. The project could initially involve one school whose community agrees to the immersion of dance in their school during the research period, with a view to offering it to other schools once established. A control school would be identified, with which study comparisons could be made.

It is proposed that resources are designed and developed alongside and in cooperation with individual teachers involved in the undertaking. Dance activities could be created for each unit of work or theme due for implementation alongside professional development for staff. As the research suggested, teachers will gain greater benefit from the support of teaching colleagues with dance expertise than they would from introducing a dance expert. Teachers will defer to the expert and believe that they themselves are not capable of teaching in a similar manner. Care needs to be taken in the selection of colleagues who could model the use of dance to teach concepts and content, with the teacher gradually becoming involved and eventually teaching dance with support from their dance colleague. Dance teaching colleagues could be based in the school and available to all staff throughout every week of the year. As measurements and proof dominate the current thinking in most educational systems in OECD countries, now is the time to view this requirement as an opportunity to examine the benefits of teaching through dance for all children.

This proposed school would be different in that children would be learning through the making of dance rather than focusing on dance performance. The school would also be different in that it would be a dance school rather than an arts school. While all subjects and methods of teaching would be valued, including the arts, the making of dance would dominate the school day. The school would be set up with a clear purpose of leading the way for other public schools to follow, creating creative opportunities for development for New Zealand children.

Conclusion

Although the nations discussed are all working toward the values and goals espoused in the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education and the Seoul Agenda, there still remains some distance between the vision and the reality. New Zealand is viewed globally as a leader in education with Shepherd (2010) quoting PISA rankings, which places New Zealand fourth on the world education stage (p. 1). In respect to dance education, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has an opportunity to lead the way, as to a certain extent much of the infrastructure in terms of curriculum is already in place. The next step, arguably, is to take rhetoric forward into action and implement specific steps to meet the goals as outlined by the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education. During 2011, national seminars on Innovation and Education were held in Finland and Hungary, where the CERI (2011) announced,

The Centre for Educational Research and Development co-lead the human capital pillar of the OECD Innovation Strategy, a major policy initiative offering a cross-government approach to help countries capture the social benefits of innovation in a new era. (p. 1)

The CERI's Innovation Strategy newsletter (2011) poses the question, "Does your country have a plan to develop a national innovation strategy for education?" (p. 1). Now would be a good time for New Zealand Education to capitalise on this offer and dance their way to change so that the first goal of UNESCO's Road Map may be met, ensuring that "arts education is accessible as a fundamental and sustainable component of a high quality renewal of education" (UNESCO, 2010). With dance implemented in New Zealand classrooms, success in meeting UNESCO's second and third goals would follow. It is necessary to look more closely at teachers and teaching, rhetoric, and reality, and make the changes necessary in primary classrooms for dance to take its place in a creative community.

Dance may be successfully implemented in all New Zealand primary classrooms, when teachers access on-going support through professional development and resources at a level greater than the support offered for literacy and numeracy. This research proposed that dance be taught alongside other subjects in a cross-curricular manner that values both the integrity of the art form and specific pedagogical information. This proposition is offered as a suggested way forward for all countries interested in realizing creative opportunities for the development of their children.

*UNESCO Member States

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Columbia, Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya,

Kiribati, Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Palestine, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

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