

# **Booting the Tutu: Teachers and Dance in the Classroom**

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## **Introduction**

Sustainability has been identified as a driving focus behind the Dance Rebooted conference. My particular interest is in developing sustainable dance education practice in the primary school classroom, and this is the focus of this paper. My thesis contends that, dance education will be best sustained in the primary school classrooms when generalist teachers reflect on personal practice and foster relationships ‘nested’ in the classroom. I argue that when one accepts that the meaning of dance dwells in negotiated classroom relationships and not singularly in the curriculum, the children, the teacher, or the dance, the locus of meaning is shifted from outside the classroom to inside the classroom. This shift reinforces the vital role of the teacher in creating learning and teaching situations where meanings and subsequent barriers and opportunities are made.

I contend that the performative assumptions of dance, as inferred in the image of the ‘tutu’ and its associations with femininity, ability, performance, mastery of skill and elitism need to be ‘booted’. I propose that participatory meanings of dance emerging from the classrooms may be more educationally sound and maintain dance’s sustained presence in the classroom.

This paper draws upon my PhD research titled: Teachers and Dance in the Classroom. The questions: ‘What are primary school teachers’ meanings of dance in their classroom?’ and ‘Do these meanings create barriers or opportunities for teaching dance?’ directed this research, which took the form of a constructivist study of nine primary school teachers’ meanings of dance in their classrooms. The data arose from

co-structured interviews, classroom observations and reflections upon a shared dance activity.

Here I briefly scan the NZ dance curriculum context, dance education literature and the research methodology, and then discuss the study's findings which are described as six relationships.

### **Dance in the New Zealand Curriculum**

Dance is not new in New Zealand primary schools. It has a history of marginalised inclusion in the physical education programme (Bolwell, 1995; Hong, 2001), and has been predominantly taught by non-specialist classroom teachers. Over the duration of this research (1999-2003) a building ground swell of interest and concern has emerged as dance has become redefined within a new national arts curriculum and moved away from the aegis of physical education. In 2003, dance education was given the mandate to be taught in its own right within all New Zealand schools via the document entitled The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2000). The study of dance as an arts discipline is directed by four 'strands' (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 20), those being:

- Developing practical knowledge in dance (use and explore dance styles, dance elements, and practices).
- Developing ideas in dance (explore and create choreographic processes).
- Communicating and interpreting in dance (share and perform dances in formal and informal settings and interpret dances meanings).
- Understanding dance in context (understand dance's functions and contexts).

The curriculum provides 'achievement objectives' for 8 levels that span over the child's 13 years of education in New Zealand. The achievement objectives indicate the learning expected at each level and provide an assessment and reporting framework against which to align/evaluate students' work. When seen as a whole, these are said to constitute an education in dance, albeit at various levels of understanding.

For the first time in New Zealand the arts are unified through their commonalities and argued for as one of the seven essential learning areas for all children. This document represents a landmark in New Zealand's dance education history, being the first of its kind to enter schools with the mandate that, "In years 1-8, students must study, and have opportunities to meet achievement objectives in, all four disciplines" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 90.). However, just how much work in any one discipline of dance, drama, music and visual art is at the discretion of each school (Ministry of Education, 2000). The curriculum has outlined a vision for the scope of implementing dance and, in light of other curriculum demands, could be said to be idealistic. How much is taught, how and when it is taught, is dependent upon the teacher's personal vision of education and the place of dance in that vision.

## **Review of Literature**

Historians, anthropologists, philosophers, dancers, educators, psychologists, and children have asked 'what is dance?' and the question remains a source of much writing and debate. Copeland and Cohen (1983) acknowledged the key dilemma in defining dance when they asked, "Can we formulate a definition comprehensive enough to cover the wide variety of activities routinely referred to as dance?" (p. 1). The establishment of "mutual understanding" (Sparshott, 1999, p. 67) was proposed by way of resolution, where shared, common yet flexible understandings of dance making procedures, customs, histories and institutions might be agreed upon. However, Sparshott was aware of the improbability of establishing a global notion of what dance is. He referred to Wittgenstein's (1953) metaphor of 'family resemblance', where there is no one defining resembling feature as a more likely solution.

Janet Adshead in her influential text The Study of Dance (1981) stated, "Since the arguments put forward in this book relate initially to any and all forms of dance no attempt is made to define. It is sufficient to say that whatever is labelled 'dance', and accepted as such by those who do it and watch it, is regarded as 'dance'" (Adshead, 1981, p.4). I find myself returning to Sparshott (1999), who emphasised the necessity

to recognise each individual's experience of dance and its educational potential, "an important part of what we learn is how to allow for the different ways our fellow dancers, with their different backgrounds and behaviour patterns and histories of learning, do and understand the things we share in" (p.75). Sparshott went on, "We can all know what dancing is, and we all do know it. ...No two of us know quite the same thing, and it is always good to learn what somebody else knows" (p.82).

Dance exists in a myriad of forms, contexts, cultures and histories. It is undisputed that humans dance and that throughout history peoples all over the world have valued it (Adshead, 1981; Alter, 1996; Brinson, 1991; Copeland and Cohen, 1983; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1998; Fraleigh, 1987; Hanna, 1999; Jonas, 1992; Kraus et al. 1991; Williams, 1989). Yet, when we move dance into an education arena characterised by structures such as schools, curriculum and teachers, the question arises, "Is dance a distinct body of knowledge?" (Hanna, 1999, p.9). Leaving historical (moral) charges against the propriety of dance to one side (Kraus et al. 1991), can dance claim time and resources comparable to other areas of the curriculum, other areas of knowledge? More importantly, does dance claim uniqueness and value in its contribution to a child's education? Like all domains of knowledge, dance, in claiming membership to the 'key learning areas', must articulate its theoretical foundations and also the uniqueness of its offerings. As Williams (1989) stated, "Dance in education must be seen as possessing a theoretical basis from which any manifestation of dance could be approached" (p.182).

Of particular interest to this study is the inclusion of dance within education curricula and the meanings of dance that teachers bring to that context. If one accepts that the curriculum has a degree of influence over what and how dance is taught (Doyle, 1992; Willis and Schubert, 1991), it is useful to review how dance has been theorised as knowledge and argued for in the curriculum. This may also provide insights and background to the question: 'What is dance for primary school teachers?'

The theories and models that I regard as being influential, as determined by their use, longevity and impact, are Rudolf Laban's Modern Educational Dance model, Janet

Adshead's Study of Dance model, Jacqueline Smith Autard's Midway model, Getty Foundation's Discipline Based Arts Education model, Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, and Somatic Education.

Further to curriculum structures and visions, classroom pedagogies and issues equally inform and describe dance for primary school teachers. Fortin (1993) differentiated between dance content knowledge and dance content pedagogy knowledge, highlighting the importance of the teachers teaching knowledge. Yet, cognitive apprenticeship has a considerable history in dance pedagogy. Learning from the 'masters' was and remains today a powerful means for what many regard as learning the 'best technique' or the 'practice of the experts'. Cultures and traditions are passed on, both the good and the bad. "The model for the traditional dance pedagogue seems to be the authoritarian father" (Stinson, 1998, p.27), however, the research literature that focused upon dance pedagogy revealed a growing diversity of practice (Shapiro, 1998). Stinson found the theme of control was a common theme in education literature generally, and particularly in the dance literature. "Control is as much an issue in curriculum as it is in dance: we fear that institutions, as well as bodies, will not work without control" (Stinson, 1991, p. 190). Reflecting upon her own practice and philosophy for teaching dance, Stinson saw the alternative to control as flow and release (Stinson, 1991). She envisaged the relationship between the teacher and the child as being one relying upon teamwork rather than control and power, interaction rather than domination. In seeking a dance metaphor that best described her pedagogical philosophy, Stinson likened her teaching to dance improvisation where one is "creating as one goes along" (Stinson, 1991, p.191). Dance improvisation also implies qualities of giving and taking, shared responsibility, risk, respect, acute perception and fun. This metaphor for teaching dance is one I appreciate, as it values the individual qualities that the teacher, the child and the dance bring to the teaching/learning moment, which can be serendipitous, ephemeral and full of meaning.

Regarding dance in the classroom in a critical and 'personalised' way questions traditional dance pedagogy, where the teacher was seen as a 'translator' or 'funnel' of

dance techniques or experiences, which as Stinson (1991) referred to earlier is based upon values of control and tradition. As Shapiro (1998) described, “This shift from disembodied knowing to embodied knowing calls into question traditional dance pedagogy” (p.15), which in turn impacts upon intent and outcomes of dance programmes, so that “the learning experience moves from one of learning movement vocabulary for the sake of creating a dance to gaining an understanding of the self, others, and the larger world for the possibility of change” (p.15). Teachers may find that their own as well as the children’s concerns around body (Arkin, 1994, Brown, C. 1999; Green, 2001), gender (Bond, 1994; Brown, A. 1986; Burt, 1995; Cesan, 2003; Crawford, 1994; Lloyd and West, 1988; MacDonald, 1991; Thomas, 1993), sexuality (Keyworth, 2001; Risner, 2002; Risner, 2002a) and ability (Cooper Albright, 1997; Hong, 2000), become less of an issue when dance is taught from this pedagogical standpoint.

There is little evidence in the literature of research into how primary school teachers experience the teaching of dance in their classrooms (Hanna, 2001; Moore, 1997).

Moore (1997) completed a study in England that explored five primary school teachers’ experience of teaching dance as a component of the physical education curriculum. Stake, Bresler and Mabry (1991) took a broader look at the “reality of arts education in American public schools” (p. 1). The latter study looked at eight schools and discussed issues surrounding all of the arts, including dance. Both studies described the teachers’ experience as they came to grips with teaching dance, and as one would expect, the stories were diverse and unique. The teachers’ sense of ‘inability’ or lack of confidence to teach dance surfaced in these and in most other studies (Hennesy et al. 2001; Jobbins, 1998; MacDonald, 1991; McBride, 1988; Moore, 1997; Paul, 1998).

## **Research Method**

The ontological stance of this research is that there is no single way of knowing and, furthermore, that knowledge is always mediated (Eisner, 1993, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Eisner’s position that “the roads to knowing are many” (Eisner, 1985, p.24) is intrinsic to this study. This epistemology corresponds with my

belief in dance as a means for exploring and creating ways of being (Bond and Stinson, 2001; Hanstein, 1999; Shapiro, 1998; Stinson, 1991, 1995; Warburton, 2003). I question the hegemonic realist knowledge traditions in education that distance and objectify children's relationships with knowledge and the activity of thinking (Gardner, 1983; McLaren, 1998). My constructivist orientation towards education, dance and research places emphasis on an active construction of knowledge, meaning that the participants in the process have views, ideas, biases, traditions and bodies that are integral to the dialogue. Such dialogue does not occur in isolation but within social, cultural, historical contexts, where shared understandings, practices, languages and dances provide conceptual frameworks through which the world may be described and interpreted (Eisner, 1998; Schwandt, 2000).

An epistemological concern underpinning the methodology within the constructivist study is that of valuing personal practice knowledge (Carter, 1993; Connelly and Clandinin, 1985; Connelly et al. 1997; Elbaz, 1991). The research methods of narrative inquiry and educational connoisseurship allowed for the teachers to reveal their personal experiences and beliefs, and allowed for the teachers' and my observations of classroom interactions and our reflection upon a shared dance activity. The methods value the teachers' experience as the starting place for constructing understanding. Johnson (1987a) noted that, "personal practice knowledge...encompasses every dimension of understanding by which a person organises and interprets experience in ways that make more or less sense to him or her. ...It is a knowledge embodied in and manifested through practices, routines, spatial orderings and aesthetic dimensions of experience" (pp.466-467).

Access to teachers and schools was achieved by utilising a case study design. Carter (1990), Donmoyer (1990) and Stake (1994) all stated that a key strength of case studies is that they can capture a richness of information from various sources, such as documents, participant observation, interviews, artefacts, and archives. Further features of a case study were outlined by Merriam (1988) "A case study is an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life

context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p.23).

This research was directed by the questions, 'what are nine primary school teachers' meanings of dance in their classrooms?' and 'do these meanings support or hinder their teaching of dance?' By way of answering these questions, the teachers' views, stories, dances and teaching provided the data collected through co-structured interviews, shared dances, and participant observations. Analysis of the collected quantity of data required systematic and rigorous analysis that did not impose pre-determined hypotheses and that also respected inherent qualities in the data. An inductive analysis process accepts such diversity and breadth of data from the field and welcomes the emergence of meaning rather than the testing of given and pre-determined meanings. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stated: "What becomes important to analyse emerges from the data itself, out of a process of inductive reasoning" (p.127). With an emphasis placed upon the teachers' and my constructions of meaning and the need to 'stay close' to the teachers' feelings, words and actions, the constant comparative method of data analysis as refined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) was utilised in this study. The constant comparative method provided a clear procedural pathway for the analysis of a substantial quantity of data collected from a variety of sources.

An implicit phase within data analysis, that in itself is also a form of analysis, is communicating or 'writing' the data (Richardson, 1994). In the present study, meaning categories found from the constant comparative analyses were woven with my interpretations into nine narratives. These narratives evoke the individuality of the teachers in this study and invite the reader into their classrooms.

### **Teachers' Narratives**

The nine teachers and my interactions were 'conversational', prompting and responding to each other's interests and ideas equally. Joint ownership (Mishler, 1986) of our conversations and dances encouraged trust and comfort, which in turn



nurtured genuine discussions and sharing of personal experiences. After a process of describing, interpreting and analysing the data, I re-told our stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991) and experiences (Eisner, 1993) as closely as possible to the way they emerged during the interviews, observations and shared dances. The narratives presented the journeys of the teachers and myself as we came to know each other and understand dance in their classrooms.

Prior to writing the case study narratives, I completed a cross case analysis utilising Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) constant comparative method. Approximately 1260 pages of transcripts collected from almost 50 hours of interviews, 18 hours of creating 'shared dances' and 54 hours of observations were unitised onto data cards. Throughout this data categorising process I sifted and sorted 2700 'units of meaning' (data cards) six times, finally settling upon 31 meaning categories, each characterised with a propositional statement. The meaning categories were further grouped into four larger categories of teachers, children, dance and curriculum.

The teachers have been introduced in the same order as I met them. All teachers' names are pseudonyms and were selected in order to protect themselves, students and schools. These teachers presented a range of interests and experience in teaching dance, and were accessible in terms of travel and time. The following snippets of the narratives introduce the teachers and also introduce many issues within this study that are further discussed further in this paper.

### **Lola**

*"The best way to learn is to do it."*

*"Dance education ... to think through movement, allows participation all the way through from idea to process to product."*

Lola was enthusiastic about being a part of this study. As soon as she knew of it, she wanted to participate. As a very experienced 'leading' teacher with a passion for education in general and a new-found interest in dance, Lola saw her involvement as a way to "self educate" and share her developing views about dance in the classroom.

Lola had been trialling the implementation of the dance strand in the new Arts curriculum, and consequently was quite familiar with the document and the realities of teaching dance in her classroom at Oyster Bay School. Lola was also quite experienced in teaching art and drama.

### **Ethel**

*"I do not think you have to make them (the children) good at it (dance). I think you have to make them feel good about it."*

*"You never know (what you need) until you've tried it."*

Of all the teachers in this study Ethel had been teaching for the longest period of time. Ethel was pragmatic in streamlining classroom planning and had learned what the "system wanted". Ethel had a wealth of local knowledge, and she noted, "I'm now teaching the children of some of my first students". She was certainly an identifiable personality at Oyster Bay School and understood the local socio-economic mix and issues that informed the school. Ethel taught years 1,2 and 3 (6 –8 year olds). This composite class had 20 boys and girls.

### **Gessie**

*"Where do I start?"*

*"It allows children to think. Think creatively."*

*"I've got some really hyperactive kids in my class and I was thinking 'imagine teaching dance to them, they are going to be all over the place.'"*

Gessie was young, had only been teaching for two years, was open to advice and keen to gain experience in as many things as possible. Gessie was an animated teacher and enthusiastic about dance, yet as she stated, "I've never taught dance and really know nothing about it." Irrespective, she valued the arts in education and believed in dance's potential – though without having a clear sense what that might be. Gessie taught a composite class of 20 year 1,2 and 3 boys and girls alongside Ethel and Lola's classrooms. Gessie, Lola and Ethel's classrooms were average in size, with most chairs and tables arranged in clusters of 4 to 6.

### **Kate**

*“I think that’s the thing with me, I worry about what others are thinking or seeing or doing.”*

Kate seemed nervous when we commenced our interviews. She claimed that she knew nothing about dance and that she did not like dancing “even when I’m out drinking.” Kate initially hedged around questions about her ideas on dance and I felt was quick to place me in the role of the expert and herself in the role of the novice. As Kate said, “I’m a nod girl” implying a sense of going along with things and not rocking the boat.

### **Joe**

*“When we changed the curriculum from an input thing, into an output driven curriculum, it just stopped creativity. It stopped the enthusiasm and enjoyment of it all.”*

When I met Joe during the initial phase of this study, I mentioned that I would provide a dance in-service for the teachers. His quip, “So, will I need my tutu?” caught my attention and hinted at a raft of issues that I hoped we could talk about. Joe was the teaching principal at Oyster Bay School. During the study Joe tended to be in the role of the principal more than that of the teacher. Nonetheless, Joe reflected on dance both as a teacher and as a principal. Our conversations occurred in his office and were arranged around a timetable of meetings and frequent interruptions.

### **Paul**

*“Maybe knowing about it and doing it are different things, and that is possibly the thing that scares me away a bit.”*

Paul was a teaching principal whose job included fulltime teaching. Over the four weeks of our discussions we focused on his teaching role. Paul taught 15 boys and girls, in years 4, 5 and 6 (8-11 year olds) within a small two-teacher school. Paul described himself as having virtually no experience in dance and it was apparent that Paul was more than a little concerned about teaching dance to his students. A particular concern centered upon issues around balancing the expressive nature of dance with the pragmatics of classroom management. We spoke a lot about the actual

dance content in the curriculum and also about pedagogical strategies that translate dance from the page to the floor.

### **Mick**

*“They will learn about themselves as they are using their bodies to dance.”*

Mick was a part-time teacher, working with Paul and another teacher at Sandy track School. Mick came to the first interview with a belief in dance as being a very important part of the curriculum; yet, Mick had very little experience in teaching dance in the classroom. She was upfront in saying “I have very little knowledge, resources and confidence and I’ll only be one step ahead of the children.” Ironically, Mick went on to say “I’ve already started teaching dance to the senior kids (Paul’s class), and I’ve been to the town library looking for resources.” Mick was a ‘self-starter’, and was not afraid of working with the children as a co-explorer. She made the comment “usually when I commence any new unit or topic I always start with the kids – who they are and how they relate to the topic.”

### **Helene**

*“It’s good. I think every teacher that is going to teach dance, should go through that process of actually doing it themselves.”*

Helene was an experienced teacher and highly respected by her principal and peers. When I met Helene she was teaching a composite class of 27 boys and girls, 9-11 years old. This upper primary classroom was one of three that worked closely together, with the students moving quickly between classrooms for different curriculum areas. Helene was an experienced teacher, and an experienced dancer, yet had ongoing issues about teaching dance, especially expressive dance to boys of this age. More precisely, Helene identified the issues of ‘starting’ the lesson and then stimulating ongoing enthusiasm “to want to move”.

### **Bella**

*“Our own perception of our body image and that kind of thing, because we see dancers as, and that might put people off, we see dancers as being well formed, they look beautiful on stage and there’s that whole thing that goes with it. I think children are more free to not feel those barriers, but teachers definitely will.”*

*“Your input is as important as the other person’s input no matter what experience you bring to the dance.”*

Bella, with considerable teaching experience, presented as a quiet, strong teacher. In Bella’s lower primary classroom (years 1,2 and 3) the children were drawn to attention not by the usual chorus of ‘follow the teacher’s rhythmic clapping’, but by a very soft music box tune. Bella had a variety of music boxes and they, in their soft clarity, demanded the twenty, 6-7year old children’s attention in a calm, subtle and firm manner. These were the qualities that distinguished Bella’s teaching for me – calmness, subtlety and precision.

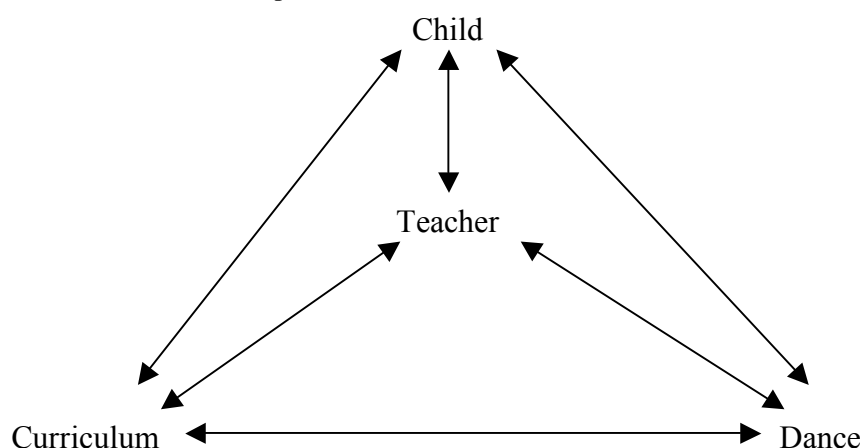
### **Discussion of Findings: Relationships**

This discussion articulates the major findings of this study as a set of relationships between dominant meaning categories of teachers, children, dance and curriculum that emerged from a constant comparative analysis and teacher narratives.

I chose to discuss the findings of this study in terms of relationships in the hope of preserving a true sense of the dialogue between the teachers and myself and to capture as accurately as possible the interaction between teachers and dance in their classroom. It was intended to also communicate a sense of the tensions behind themes and issues that create barriers and opportunities for teaching dance in the classroom (Scheurich, 1995). Six relationships emerged out of the data as pivotal points of focus and they are: teachers and children; teachers and dance; teachers and curriculum; children and dance; children and curriculum; and, dance and curriculum.

It is important to highlight that these relationships overlap and are not distinct from each other. Nevertheless, there is value in describing them separately as each relationship presents specific issues and perspectives that may provide teachers with a way to understand their practice. Figure one below, presents the relationships as an interrelated structure wherein the teacher is seen to be central to the development and place of dance in the classroom.

**Figure 1. Classroom Relationships**



The data collection did not occur within the tidy focus of these six relationships. They emerged out of the data and out of my analysis of the teachers' stories. While the classroom is a maze of complex evolving relationships that researchers can never hope to fully translate on to the page (Eisner, 1998), the above framework guided my awareness of the diverse relationships and their subsequent issues. The articulation of these dynamic and fluid (Gallego et al. 2001) relationships (indicated by the two way arrows) raises consciousness of the ongoing dialogue that is in play in the lesson, and of the role played by the teacher in fostering and directing the dynamic creation of meanings. Placing the teachers' practice in the contexts of the relationships enabled my interpretation of meanings. The specifics of these relationships as they emerged from this study are now discussed.

## **1. Teachers and Children**

*"a little community of learning." (Lola)*

I observed during this study that the way in which the teacher/child relationships were constructed and perceived had an influence on the dance experiences offered and created in the classroom. A significant determinant was the teacher's personal teaching practice, which reflected how they regarded, included and flexed with the children in their dance lessons. The teachers increasingly 'saw' and valued the children in the dance lesson as they reflected on their teaching practice (in our discussions, shared dance and lessons), and began to articulate their personal beliefs

about education. For example, Bella, “the children’s movement is the prime stimulus”; and Helene, “They come up with things I wouldn’t even think of”. Paul found the children were not always “barriers” as he expected, but emerged as “diverse individuals”. The experience and value of dance in the classroom is not fixed by the possibilities offered in the dance curriculum. The teachers’ comments suggested that meanings and values for dance in the classroom are significantly reliant upon relationships between teachers and children.

Lola’s sums up her vision for a democratic (Dewey, 1934), inclusive (Mussil, 1999) and empowered (Ottey, 1996) classroom when she described it as “...a little community of learning.” Key to this position is ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing’ the children, which as Marques (1994) noted requires that “Perhaps we should...stop and look straight into the students before us (not the ones described in the books) and WITH them seek alternatives” (p. 17).

The relationship between teacher and learner is mostly discussed in pedagogical theory in conjunction with the curriculum content taught. Lusted (1986) described pedagogy as “the process through which knowledge is produced” (p.2) and asserted, “How one teaches is...inseparable from what is being taught” (p. 3). Shulman (1986) affirmed this stance and warned of separating what we teach from how we teach. While Grossman (1990) and Connelly and Clandinin (1985) agreed with this inter-connection, they both commenced their discussion of the teaching and learning process by attending to the learner, “Teachers are concerned with the child, and the best teachers are sensitive to the child as a person and not only a carrier for the subject matter taught” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1985, p.178). The findings in the present study support the importance of prioritising the teacher-learner relationship within the context of other relationships such as teacher-curriculum, teacher-dance, and children-dance.

Interactive rather than transmission pedagogies (Lusted, 1986; Stinson, 1998) provide for the teacher and the children to be active participants in creating knowledge. Constructivist pedagogy takes as its starting point children's understanding, "and what they are likely to find puzzling" (Grossman, 1990, p.8). The characteristics of constructivist pedagogy have been enumerated in the literature (Chen and Rovegno, 2000; Dougiamas, 1998; Howe and Berv, 2000; Mayers and Britt, 1995). Howe and Berv (2000) presented the core premises as:

1) instruction must take as its starting point the knowledge, attitudes, and interests students bring to the learning situation, and 2) instruction must be designed so as to provide experiences that effectively interact with these characteristics of students so that they may construct their own understanding (p.31).

Applied to dance, constructivist pedagogy acknowledges the individuality of children in terms of their ideas, their creativity and their bodies. Individuality thus applied, refers to inclusion and acceptance of a diversity of individuals, not in terms of the dancer maintaining notions of otherness such as the gifted individual. Constructivist pedagogy allows for difference and actively works against perpetuation of stereotypes associated with gender, body types, dance hierarchies, and abilities.

The practicalities of the classroom, which include time constraints, parental and systemic expectations, diverse curriculum content, children's learning preferences, and teaching preferences, would indicate that some information may best be taught in an instructive manner (Matthews, 1997). Constructivist pedagogy as detailed by Howe and Berv (2000) recognised that it is impractical and philosophically misleading to be totally child centred. They deferred to classroom reality and proposed a conceptualisation of constructivist pedagogy that takes constructivist-learning theory and supports it by "mixing ostensibly constructivist and non-constructivist teaching techniques as appropriate" (p. 32). Dewey (1938), who disagreed with the exaggerated swings to and from child centred or teacher centred approaches, would most likely have supported such a view. As Kate and Mick demonstrated in their teaching, teachers have to arrange their teaching to cater for



their personal experiences and those of the children. These teachers shared their meanings of teaching dance within their classroom community, and created the opportunity for the (individual) children to construct and nurture the shared meanings in the classroom. Mick did this initially through discussion and the creation of a scrapbook of newspaper clippings. Kate openly spoke of her feelings in respect to dance and asked for similar candour from the children as they worked in their buzz groups.

Dewey (1938) and the teachers in this study concurred that a democratic classroom is not easy as it not only shifts power and control, but also invites critical perspective and a fallible view of knowledge (Howe and Berv, 2000). Nonetheless the benefits are immense in terms of the personal relevance new understandings have for teachers and children.

Sustainable dance programmes are more likely when the children have an investment in them and when teachers know that they do not have to know everything. How teachers relate to and include the children in the lesson matters. This relationship relies on the teacher and the children “knowing” each other, and allowing time and space for secure participation. In the course of this study it was found that as the teachers reflected upon their personal practices and beliefs, they revealed and sought strategies that they were comfortable with, and that allowed the teacher and children a sense of safety and authenticity congruent with the way in which they had learned to work together.

Once the teachers ‘saw’ the children in the context of their personal teaching practice, they could devise strategies that they believed met the needs of the children and that also invited disclosure and engagement. The strategies the teachers drew upon were informed by the teaching practice and beliefs they already had, their experience of working across the curriculum, and their specific dance knowledge and confidence.

Lola's conception of the classroom as "a little community of learning" presented a particular relationship with the children, that, as Lola said, were about "support" and "encouragement". The term community suggested that the children were members of the classroom, owners of their space and their individual experience within a social context.

## **2. Teachers and Dance**

*"My body does not feel like a dancer's body" (Bella)*

Teachers' meanings of dance in their classrooms originated in formative experiences, watching, experiencing and interpreting dance, frequently through pervasive cultural stereotypes. Teachers' lived meanings of dance proved to be powerful filters for their understanding of dance in the classroom, and served both to motivate and deter the inclusion of dance in the classroom. Teacher reflection upon such experiences within this study prompted the realisation that they were already in possession of some knowledge of dance, which in fact represented a beginning point for teaching rather than a reason for not teaching dance.

The teachers in this study sought and valued the importance of content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). As Bella stated several times, "Knowing about dance is important". Bella and many of the other teachers considered knowledge of dance would be sourced from literature and their own theory driven teacher education. Kate, Joe, Paul, Helene, Ethel, Gessie, and Mick all spoke of activity books, web sites, music resources, video kits, dance steps and technique vocabulary as sources of knowledge for teaching dance. What I observed in this study was the way that the teachers talked of these sources as objective 'things to get', possessions that would make the teaching of dance happen. Many of the teachers continually looked beyond themselves, and beyond the children too, for knowledge that would enable them to teach dance. Regarding this kind of conditioning received in pre-service teacher training where knowledge is something you acquire to enable teaching, Connelly and Clandinin, (2000) commented, "knowledge comes from books, teachers, and professors" (p.103). Teachers learn that knowledge is external to their embodied and lived experience

(Johnson, 1987) rather than “listening to their practices” (Russell, 1997, p.33). Schön (1983) described the knowledge flow from theory down to practice as “Technical rationalism...that fosters a selective inattention to practical competence and professional artistry” (p.vii). In this sense knowing is a pre-condition of doing.

Maintaining sustained dance education practice requires personal connections made through ‘doing’. As Holt (1964) said, “knowledge which is not genuinely discovered by children will very likely prove useless and will be soon forgotten” (p.125). It is important to reiterate that like Connelly and Clandinin (2000), I do not dismiss the value of theoretical knowledge. My issue concerns the timing of the introduction of theoretical knowledge (Grossman, 1992). I suggest this study supports personal histories and narratives as sources of knowledge that complement and enliven content knowledge. Given the lived and tacit nature of these personal experiences, they are often overlooked as an initial source of knowledge informing teacher practice (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000).

Bella noted that diverse dance experiences “broaden your perspective of what dance is.” Bella enjoyed dance and despite being aware of its potential in education, she perceived social values surrounding dance that could create barriers for children and for other teachers. My observation was that Bella gave meaning to dance in her classroom because it fulfilled her holistic educational philosophies. Dance complemented Bella’s aims in education, which were about expanding opportunities for the children to learn. Bella consequently emphasised classroom dance experiences that allowed for children’s individual movement and ideas, and explicitly focussed upon developing process and product skills, much in the same way that I observed Bella teach maths, writing and how to use the library.

A synthesis existed between Bella’s philosophy of teaching, her experiences of dance and her teaching practice. At the commencement of this study such synergy was not as apparent in most of the teachers’ classrooms. However, as we talked, observed and danced, the teachers’ ongoing reflections revealed their values about who danced,

what dance was, and the purpose dance had in their classroom. The opportunity to reflect served to help the teachers reveal their own construction of dance, and consequently their personal contexts that informed this construction. I found that the teachers were more able to critically reflect upon their teaching of dance when they recognised their personal experience of dance as situated in their social, historical, cultural and physical ‘landscapes’ (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000; Ernest, 1995; Gallego, Hollingsworth and Whitenack, 2001; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Ottey, 1996; Schwandt, 1994).

Personal experience of dance, typically characterised by ‘doing types of dance’, influenced the character and shape of content knowledge. Attitudes and beliefs gained through such structured experiences influenced the nature of dance taught in these teachers’ classrooms. However, as Paul noted, “encouraging them, getting them to think about what they are doing and what’s to follow. That’s the real teaching isn’t it, it is not the type of dance.”

### **3. Teachers and Curriculum**

*“Where do I begin” (Gessie, Helene, Kate, Joe, Paul).*

Discussion about the teacher’s experience revealed that they certainly knew something of dance. However, knowing what and how to teach the dance curriculum in their classroom presented many other issues. This study found macro and micro curriculum issues, in and out of the teacher’s control, that had an impact upon their teaching of dance in their classroom. Even though all teachers in this study agreed that dance was a valuable addition to the curriculum, many were unsure about how to reconcile personal teaching practice, informed by dance experience, with the curriculum. In this study, reconciliation of classroom practice and curriculum theory was advanced through processes of personal reflection and ‘feeling’ dance education first hand.

Helene and most of the other teachers reflected upon their teaching within the current climate of educational accountability, the new arts curriculum achievement objectives, and their own teacher training. In doing so they outlined the shaping influences of the social context, the professional knowledge landscapes (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) that impacted upon their teaching in the classroom. Teachers' accounts of their personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) described the personal and often tacit knowledge formed through experience. Within the classroom, personal practice knowledge can override formal and policy driven professional knowledge. When Helene spoke of her personal teaching style and strengths as being more related to performing than choreographing, she was reflecting upon and acknowledging her personal life history and her personal practice knowledge as it shaped her teaching. Helene's and the other teachers' narratives were indicative of the interrelationship between personal practice and professional context, and reinforced the claim that teaching in any one moment is idiosyncratic (Eisner, 1994).

The teachers in this study were active in constructing their meaning of teaching dance. They were not, as Connelly et al. (1997) pointed out, "mere screens who translate others' intentions and ideologies into practice" (p.674). They played a defining role. As Joe commented, "The teacher really has an impact on what kids take out of school everyday...it's the sort of person you are, and the way you are with the kids." Eisner (1994) suggested that "educational reality resides in the school as it is" (p. 7), which simply and deceptively implies the ongoing complexity of interrelationships found within the school. To take this further, I perceive that educational reality resides in the moments of the lesson, where the teacher is most active in negotiating and reconciling personal practice with the professional knowledge landscape.

Sustainable dance education in the classroom is informed by political and policy decisions outside of the classroom. In this study 'outcomes derived' curriculum was noted as imposing accountability pressures upon the teachers that confined rather than refined their teaching. Given the immediate concerns of knowing the new dance curriculum, what was also apparent was the competing influence of past curriculum

documents and resources in shaping teachers' expectations for dance in the classroom. In particular, past physical education curriculum emphasis upon skill development, as typified by learning select folk dances, established dominant expectations for dance in the classroom. Kate, Paul, Ethel, and Joe mentioned this type of experience. Helene referred to music resources, Mick looked on the internet and in the library, and Gessie referred to dance companies in the theatre. Each teacher's professional knowledge landscape included the political reforms of the times as well as the influences of past and current curriculum.

The professional knowledge landscape has been described in terms of people, policies, curriculum and events outside of the classroom that directly impact upon the classroom (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). The dance curriculum was seen as a component of the teacher's professional landscape, and epistemologically regarded as a theoretical document intended to guide practice. Connelly and Clandinin spoke of the epistemological dilemma, "they [teachers] are expected to know things theoretically while, at the same time their job is to know things practically" (p. 97). As the teachers in this study revealed, teachers knew their classrooms and their children. They knew their personal practice through experience. The epistemological tension arose from the perceived disjunction between 'out of the classroom theory' in terms of policies and curriculum, and the teachers' personal practice knowledge within that classroom. As Lola mentioned, the curriculum contains "really good things", and "knowing the curriculum is powerful" as it "provides direction", but at the end of the day "they are just words on the page." Lola emphasised that while having the curriculum is important, its translation off the page and onto the floor and into the body, so to speak, requires a curriculum implementation process that reconciles the theory with the practice.

While I had an intimate understanding of the terms and concepts in dance education, the teachers found the curriculum language for dance alien and at times intimidating, and they sought my assistance and advice during our conversations. Exploring beginning points for the dance lessons and programmes, the teachers and I talked

about personal dance experience, the dance experience that the children might have, the topics or themes being studied in the classroom and the elements of dance. These conversations revolved around the classroom context that the teachers knew, where they were the “connoisseur” (Eisner, 1998). I brought to the conversations my dance connoisseurship regarding the dance elements and we constructed dance lessons with starting points that each teacher owned, felt comfortable with and were relevant to their children and classroom programme. This study found that the reconciliation process between teacher’s personal practice and their professional knowledge landscape most successfully began with reflection upon and consideration of the teacher’s own personal practice in that classroom. Situating this reconciliation within the ‘personal’ was strongly affirmed by Gessie in her reflections about this process:

I feel like I’ve got a lot out of this (study). When you go to one of those (in-service programmes) like you’ve got all of this knowledge but you don’t know where you fit it in. Here, I’ve told you exactly what I need, and I’ve got what I need, so now I know where to go...after this it makes me realise how important it is to almost have like one on one.

This process does not discount the need for knowledge input from experts or peers. However, what the teachers in this study emphasised was the value in ‘owning’ or personalising the reconciliation process between the teachers’ professional knowledge landscape and their personal practice.

Allowing for teachers to make personal meaning is seen to be crucial for developing sustained practice. The dance curriculum is invaluable, yet care that the curriculum doesn’t ‘bully’ the teacher must be taken.

Central to this discussion of teachers and curriculum is the epistemological acknowledgement of dance as a medium that teachers can use to prompt and improve children’s access to seeing and saying what they know in the classroom. Dance has been described as a way of knowing the self and the world (Eisner, 1998; Ministry of

Education, 2000). Dance invites particular experiences that require intelligence. Making dance, presenting dance and appreciating dance requires problem solving and analytical skills, sensibilities and awareness to qualities of space and time, and a willingness to commit the subjectivity of the body and spirit to movement. While the intent of the methodology in this study was not explicitly to offer the teachers an in-service experience that encapsulated the aforementioned knowing, the shared dance activity did give each teacher a felt experience of making, presenting and critiquing their own dance. This experience required the teachers to think, see and say through dance. Each teacher commented that participating in this activity ‘opened their eyes’ to the scope and nature of dance for their children. I also observed that this experience helped teachers reconcile personal teaching practice with the arts curriculum. This dance experience commenced with valuing the teachers’ own movement ideas and then manipulating them using the elements of dance as outlined in the curriculum. The experience modelled particular content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and specific teaching idiosyncrasies such as ‘silliness’ and the ‘ask, use, pattern’ process that Lola observed. I felt that the exploration of personal idiosyncrasies allowed the teachers to relax and see that there was no ‘right and wrong’ way to connect with the curriculum. By noting how I personally related to the curriculum, the teachers felt comfortable to find and expose their own way of relating to the curriculum.

The felt experience, in combination with the critical reflection of personal practice and experience prompted these teachers to look to themselves and their own context, inclusive of the children in the classroom, as the place to ‘start’. Once they’d started, the teachers found what they needed to know next. As Ethel stated, “You never know (what you need) until you’ve tried it”, and there is no “right or wrong” way. Each teacher commented that the shared dance activity increased their confidence to teach dance and gave them an experiential understanding of dance as a way of knowing.

#### **4. Children and Dance**

*“I don’t like dance...I like boogying” (Sam, 10 year-old boy, Helene’s class).*



Children's views were not purposefully sought in this study and comment on their perspective is therefore limited. However, the teachers observed children's relationship with dance during the research process, further illuminating their own relationships with dance, and contributing to the re-construction of their understanding of dance in the education and curricular context. Teachers' experience, beliefs and values locate dance in the classroom curriculum in ways that are particular to themselves and to the children they teach. Given this situated classroom practice (Schwab, 1978), the teachers in this study talked of dominant socio/cultural assumptions and expectations of dance that they and the children observed. Informing the teachers' and children's personal perceptions of dance were societal constructions of gender, body and dancing ability that impacted upon dance pedagogy in the classroom.

The children's relationships with dance appeared to be based upon dance experiences gained in after-school dance classes (predominantly ballet), dance they saw on TV (MTV dance clips), previous dance experiences gained at school (usually folk dance within PE programmes), or dance they experienced in the family context. Children associated dance with dancers, that is, they were mostly familiar with dance as a 'product', an outcome of skill, practice and mastery. Emphasis was upon the competencies needed to place the dance in the public arena, to perform dance (Hong, 2000; McSwain, 1994; Williams, 1989).

When teachers accept and teach towards limited and limiting gender and skill based constructions of dance, they surely cannot be surprised when they hear the boys' and the girls' comments "I can't dance" or "I do not like dance". These comments, as heard during this study, are at once both false and true. Given that we can all know dance (Sparshott, 1999), and as evidenced in this study, every child danced, these statements are false. However, considering the codified stereotypes of dance and exposure mainly to the products of dance rather than the processes, one can also see that the children's comments are accurate and honest views of themselves as dancers.

It is all the more important therefore to distinguish these received perceptions from the ideals of dance education.

For each teacher in this study, maximising children's participation in learning was an ongoing aim. This ambition was maintained within the dance lessons in this study, and provided the context in which every teacher made a comment similar to Helene's, "I'm a bit concerned about the boys (and dance)".

Within the present study the teachers noticed and talked of the boys' participation more than the girls'. In the main this was in regard to managing behaviour issues so as the whole class could gain maximum participation. Helene, Kate, and Paul commented on the impact that boys' behaviour can have upon the class environment, and the difficulties they had in finding ways to help the boys relate to dance. Once the teachers were able to find a relationship between the boys and dance, the teachers noticed how well the boys participated. The keenness they showed for dance minimised behaviour problems and also had the effect of improving participation for all children.

This study revealed that socio-cultural norms of boys dancing informed the teachers' attitudes to teaching dance. These norms presented barriers to teaching dance irrespective of the particular boys and girls in the classroom, and irrespective of the benefits and rationales articulated in the curriculum. The teachers assumed, expected and in part created classroom tension around boys and dance

Joe's comment "do I need my tutu" at the beginning of the study was indicative of his personal construction of meaning. Similarly, Ethel made a comment to Gessie during a shared dance activity to the effect that Gessie would be a better dancer than she would because Gessie "looked more like a dancer." Ethel thus indicated her personal meaning of dance interconnected with a particular cultural and social meaning of dance related to body type (Wolff, 1997). Within this comment are several assumptions: firstly, participation in dance relies upon having a specific body type;

secondly, participation in dance relies more on 'looks' than expression, movement, thinking and creativity (Arkin, 1994; Sluder, 1998). A girl with great ideas and diverse movement explorations, if not having the 'in vogue' body type, risks being derided for her abilities. Yet, the girl who looks like a dancer (Cooper-Albright, 1997)(read ballerina) and can 'lip sync' Britney Spears pop dance routines, will be applauded as the 'good dancer' (McSwain, 1994), complying as she does with peer/society's expectations of how a girl dancer looks (Adair, 1992; Burt, 1995). Such type casting is apparent for boys as well, and explicitly evidenced within several classrooms in this study.

Boys and girls in all classrooms need to be seen as diverse individuals. I agree with Bond (1994) and Crawford (1994), who noted in regard to pedagogy and gender research, the important issue is to use "explicit teaching strategies that recognise and value individual learners and the particularity of life experience" (Bond, 1994, p. 32). I support Bond's recognition of children and their individual dance, acknowledging diversity of children, thinking and expression.

Teachers and children alike, as evidenced in this study, wanted to dance their own dance in a secure environment, a classroom where other learning occurred, a classroom where everyone was accepted, a classroom where dance was 'not for experts', but for people like themselves. Social constructions of bodies and dance pervade dance in the classroom. This study discovered relationships with dance beyond the classroom that impacted upon the children and teachers in the classroom. Dance as constructed within social discourse presented incentives and disincentives for teachers and children to participate in dance. The study also indicated that socially powerful constructions of dance can be reconstructed in the classroom when the teacher is conscious of the relationships shaping those constructions in the classroom. The next section focuses upon how the teachers in this study addressed the issue of dancing ability in the relationship between dance and the curriculum.

## 5. Dance and Curriculum

*“How am I going to teach dance? I can’t even dance myself” (Kate).*

Over the course of the research process, each teacher enjoyed some degree of success teaching dance. Personal meanings of teaching dance were transformed from a preoccupation with learning specific dance steps towards a deeper engagement with the new dance curriculum, and an energising of the teachers’ educative role.

Gessie and Kate were convinced from the outset that they did not know ‘how to dance’. Hence, they did not possess ‘the steps’ to teach the children, even though Gessie loved dance and Kate expressed some comfort about teaching folk dance. These teachers knew dance from their experience of dance as product, as “performance discourse” (Hong, 2000, p.246) associated with mastering steps, techniques and expectations for replicating dance. They had had very little exposure to or experience of dance as process or “participatory discourse” (Hong, 2000, p. 246), which places the emphasis upon participation, inclusion, diversity, ownership, and creativity. Not knowing the steps translated to not being able to teach dance. As Kate said, “How am I going to teach dance? I can’t even dance myself.” Given past articulations and expectations of dance in curriculum, such as mastery oriented Physical education programmes (Williams, 1989) I can understand the teachers’ hesitations.

As each teacher brought their own meaning of dance to the classroom context, they found that the curriculum presented educational meanings of dance. The teachers spoke of doing types of dance, such as folk, haka, ballroom, modern, ballet, while the curriculum introduced a raft of concepts such as “Developing Practical Knowledge in Dance”, “Developing Ideas in Dance”, “Communicating and Interpreting in Dance” and “Understanding Dance in Context” (Ministry of Education, 2000). Terms such as choreograph, perform, and appreciate dance were also introduced.

What became apparent was the need to reconcile the personal, societal and curricular meanings of dance within the classroom. This began to occur during the study as we discussed the above concepts and especially the dance elements of space, time, body, relationships and energy (Ministry of Education, 2000). These elements became my building blocks for dance and for helping the teachers come to understand the dance curriculum and dance in general. When the teachers and I discussed movement ideas in terms of these elements they began to see how they could value children's and their own movement ideas

The teachers' (albeit tentative) use of the dance curriculum in this study enabled their children to participate in dance in the classroom as creators, performers and spectators, and thereby placed the children in a different relationship with dance. The new relationships had greater resonance with broader curriculum and educational goals, where diverse opportunities to learn, to know self and others was what teachers aspired for. In respect to the broader curriculum context, Bella commented, "Dance develops personal infrastructures that help the child in their creation of knowledge across the curriculum." Bella had become alert to the place of dance in the curriculum, not only for dance specific knowledge, but also the development of "infrastructures" or life long learning skills. In fostering children's relationship with the dance curriculum, Bella noted flow-on benefits for children in respect to the wider curriculum. Lola, Kate, Gessie, Ethel, Helene, and Mick also saw dance as being beneficial for its ability to connect children with other curriculum areas. Helene used dance to reinforce and evaluate children's understanding of mathematics; Ethel spoke of dance as the entry point for the study of other cultures; Mick and Paul agreed that they would in the future value dance as a way to help specific students connect to other curriculum areas in which they struggled.

Both performative and participatory engagement with dance is necessary for children to develop their dance literacy (Hong, 2000) or discipline knowledge (Fortin, 1993). However, this study found that dance education with a focus upon participatory processes dovetailed with teachers' larger rationales for education. Once the teachers found a way to develop shared classroom meanings of dance, the scope for dance and

the learning opportunities were realised. This was in spite of immediate pedagogical barriers that dwelled in stereotypes of gender, ability and behaviour. When the emphasis was placed upon the pedagogical practice of constructing knowledge, then dialogue and negotiation of meanings and actions became evident.

## **6. Children and Curriculum**

*“They got immersed in what they had to do. They got into it. I found that really good, there was pure thinking” (Paul).*

This discussion offers further constructivist analysis of the relationship between children and the curriculum. The children’s social contexts provided by their peers, family and cultural milieu influenced how the children in this study related to dance in the classroom and the construction of the classroom’s culture. The childrens’ dialogue with the curriculum informed the teachers’ meanings of dance and their classroom practice, and vice versa. Following this is an exploration of the teachers’ perspective of the children’s relationship with the dance curriculum and their perceptions of the benefits to children from participation in dance education.

Children’s perceptions of the dance curriculum were strongly informed by their dance experiences outside of the curriculum. Mick noted the children’s positive associations with the Haka and with hip-hop, commenting that these forms of dance would be most common in the children’s world of TV and sport. Negative associations were however held towards ballet, and interestingly these were of such a powerful nature to interfere with curriculum participation.

As Mick found, different dances and their contexts allowed for different relationships to be established with the children, contributing to a specific classroom culture (Bauersfeld, 1995). The children have contexts that shape them and so do the dances they share and value. Mick found that understanding these relationships helped her to connect and to establish a dialogue with the children, “You’ve got to make it interesting for the children.” The dialogue prompted questioning, reflection and

debate, opening up interest in each other's experience of dance. Such a process orientation is epistemologically foundational to constructivist perspectives. Freire (1972), Howe and Berv (2000), Musil (1999), Shapiro (1998), Stinson (1998) and Wertsch and Toma (1995), described this dialogue as characteristic of active learning where the learner is actively engaged in the learning process rather than being a passive recipient of the teacher's knowledge. Mick found that the children showed an interest when she valued what they knew, validated their experience as interesting and invited questioning.

In this and many other discussions I am cognisant of attending to the boys. Teachers always spoke of the boys as a dominating classroom influence upon all children's participation in dance. It was this context that made Gary's participation in Mick and Paul's dance classes so worthy of comment, and also reminded the teacher and myself that there are many institutional and social forces that shape classroom practices (Bauersfeld, 1995).

Gary was a boy who immediately took to the creative "free" dance that Mick initiated in the classroom. Both Mick and Paul were extremely surprised by Gary's dance work. They noticed his concentration, creativity, enthusiasm, problem solving and explanations, all features that were less than evident in other class work. Gary discovered that he liked dance and that he achieved success, something eluding him in other curriculum areas. When I taught Mick and Paul's class I was also taken by Gary's exploration of movement, though I was alert to the monitoring gaze of Gary's peers.

Gary, like the rest of the class, still required considerable direction in the dance lesson, and when Mick, Paul or I did not offer it fast enough, Gary and other children quickly resumed their attention-seeking antics, characteristic of how I saw them behave in other curriculum areas. Often Gary was clearly more absorbed in the dance activity than others. While some of the class were attentive to the teacher's instructions, several 'leading' children turned their gaze towards the participating

students, and indeed the teacher, and taunted them through subtle eye movements, facial expressions and demonstrative laughter. Suddenly, the creative ideas and the bodies holding them were ridiculed, quickly dampening most work and Gary's work in particular. As a consequence, his behaviour swung to an extreme, which I interpreted as an attempt to regain his credibility within the peer group. The dominant 'school sucks' values of the peer group overrode everything that was being achieved in the dance lesson. Gary, acutely aware of the gaze of his peers and the crucial importance of remaining a part of the playground peer group, ridiculed the dance that he was so successfully achieving in the classroom.

In my teaching experience across the curriculum and across age groups, the monitoring effect of peers on the individual in any school activity is powerful, especially amongst early adolescents. From a constructivist perspective, the negotiation of the behaviour or thinking of the group and the individual is in constant interplay and demands the teacher's dedicated alertness in order to foster and protect the children's learning. Gary and his peers above illustrated the point made by Richards (1995), that there are inherent difficulties in learning or accepting others' perspectives, particularly when they are new.

Gary constructed his understanding of dance in collaboration with others in the classroom. In the first instance, Mick and Paul's direction informed and supported the classroom's culture, but then as Gary progressed faster than the norm, other social forces came into play in order to 'check' his participation. Social values that may or may not have anything to do with dance contextualise the classroom, requiring alert and sensitive management of every lesson. Classroom discourse is in constant flux where different and contrasting thinking and behaviour creates active (positive and negative) dialogue. As Bruner (1986) observed, "I have come increasingly to recognise that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of culture" (p.127). Given the issues that sharing and dialogue invites into the classroom, it is nonetheless argued that active learning is what stimulates understanding, albeit requiring sensitive management and direction. The dance lesson can most superbly



enable creativity, thinking, enjoyment, and social skills, yet can also quickly present a riot (literally) of confusion, stereotype, myths, jealousies, and fears if the dialogue is prompted but then not protected and managed by the teacher. This is what Dewey (1938) and Howe and Berv (2000) alluded to when they acknowledged the realities of teaching and the need for constructivist pedagogy that is flexible to the ongoing classroom interactions. It is even more important in a dance lesson where social discourse regarding dance is quite often shrouded in gender and physical stereotypes that may repress the individual's exploration.

Taking a social constructivist perspective helps finetune understanding of how personal and social experiences interact and become internalised by the individual (Mishler, 1986; Schwandt, 1994). Like Gary above, individuals learn and develop through social encounters and through community influences, yet their uniqueness in respect to their lifetime experience, age, development, and gender means that the construction of meaning, notwithstanding social discourse, always remains personal. In Mick and Paul's classroom the group of children represented the norms of the social community of which Gary was a member. As social constructivists have argued, the act of learning is socially situated, and in Gary's case the effect was prohibitive on this occasion. Learning potential becomes as constrained as the individual in such cases.

Given that teachers play an important role in determining what is taught and valued in the classroom, I was interested in what they thought was the value of teaching dance. Especially since several teachers indicated that the curriculum was 'crowded', resources loomed as an issue, and so many thought that teaching the boys would be problematic, it seemed that without their firm commitment, the place of dance in the children's curriculum and education was fragile at best.

Teachers' rationales for dance in the curriculum were consistently articulated in terms of what children gained from participating in dance in the classroom. Analysis of the teachers' responses indicated that they valued dance in terms of having fun; exploring

individuality through creative expression; developing personal confidence; exploring ideas, feelings and risks; developing thinking skills; learning physical vocabulary and being physically experimental; and, developing essential life skills, such as problem solving and communication. These rationales are listed here in rank order and account for the dominant rationales discussed by these teachers.

The above rationales as stated by these teachers concur with rationales within the dance literature (Best, 1985; Brinson, 1991; Fiske, n.d.; Fox and Gardiner, 1997; Hanna, 1999; Harrison, 1993; Musil, 1999; Smith-Autard, 1994; Stake et al. 1991; Stinson, 1997; Williams, 1989), and with most of the rationale within The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (2000). The teachers accounted for children's relationship with dance in the curriculum through these rationales. Moreover, the relationship between dance and the curriculum in terms of its value for children's learning was most powerfully understood once the teachers themselves had participated in a classroom dance activity, and also, when they stood back and watched the children they knew participate in a dance lesson. Again, when the teachers made a personal connection with dance situated in their classroom they were able to reconcile its value in terms of curriculum time and aims. More specifically, all the teachers acknowledged the power of learning by doing dance and this informed their self-perception.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study are summed up by Lola's comment, "A narrowly defined concept of dance can be the greatest barrier to teaching dance, while dance education is the enabler." This comment succinctly illustrated the paradox that dance itself appears to create both barriers and opportunities for dance in the classroom. Most importantly, this comment revealed the word 'education' as a distinguishing context and action that prompted these teachers to reflect upon their lifetime experience of dance and make meaning of their classroom practice. Teachers' meanings of dance in the classroom were predominantly informed by performative assumptions of dance, and yet as the study progressed, the teachers' meanings were increasingly

participatory. Their educative roles emerged as they included and negotiated their own, the children's and curricular expectations of dance in the classroom.

I believe that the study demonstrated that meanings of dance can emerge from the classroom rather than be imposed or directed by external expectations and assumptions. When one accepts that the meaning of dance dwells in negotiated classroom relationships and not singularly in the curriculum, the children, the teacher, or the dance, the locus of meaning is shifted from outside the classroom to inside the classroom. This shift reinforces the vital role of the teacher in creating learning and teaching situations where meanings and subsequent barriers and opportunities are made.

The articulation of the findings in this research through six relationships: Teachers and Children; Teachers and Dance; Teachers and Curriculum; Children and Dance; Children and Curriculum; and, Dance and Curriculum drew attention to issues that may create barriers and/or possibilities within the classroom. Initially, teachers spoke of dance in the classroom as being variously: pedagogically threatening; inaccessible and mysterious for 'non-dancers'; the mastery of skills to perform; gendered and problematic for boys; and /or dominated by curriculum ideology and terminology. As the study progressed, the teachers increasingly saw dance in respect to: processes of exploration; communication; expression; diversity of ideas, bodies, and movement; thinking; integration across curriculum; fun; and inclusive of boys and girls. In this way the meanings of dance changed as the teachers and I reflected upon practice and took the epistemological stance of creating a shared understanding inclusive of our own, the children's, and the curriculum's expectations of dance. Through the process of talking, observing, and dancing, we called into question dominant stereotypes as we tested and adjusted assumptions about what is dance, who is a dancer, and dancing ability.

It is the contention of this research that participatory meanings of dance emerging from classrooms will differ from those imposed by dominant performative assumptions borrowed from professional dance discourse, and may prove to be more educationally sound. Assumptions arising from professional western theatre dance discourse are exemplified by Joe's quip "So, do I need my tutu?" – his first response to my suggestion that we share ideas through creating dance. It is a telling, if flippant, quip that I have heard in many different contexts, both here and overseas.

In order to play their role in defining dance's educative possibilities, teachers need to take responsibility for their professional ability as classroom teachers to create dialogue and understanding, justified in terms of their responsibilities to the children and to the curriculum. The teacher's craft is not a skill or a product that they will be given, it is a process that they can take responsibility for and construct within the classroom context with the children and the curriculum. When these relationships are negotiated time and again, as the curriculum for dance is enacted in schools, the meanings of dance will grow. Dance in the classroom is but one of many dance discourses; it does not exist in a vacuum. I appeal to teachers to grasp their role in the construction of dance's meaning in their classroom and in our society.

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