

Primary teachers' efficacy beliefs in dance education

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Abstract

Dance was introduced into the New Zealand national curriculum as a core dimension of compulsory arts education in 2000. In the early years of arts curriculum implementation, centrally-funded professional development, new resources, and teacher education programmes helped to prepare and support teachers for teaching dance in the classroom. However, recent changes in Ministry of Education priorities threaten the sustainability of any gains that may have been made in securing a comprehensive dance education presence in classrooms. In the face of diminishing opportunities for training or support, more than ever, generalist teachers' perceptions of their skills and abilities to teach dance have implications for how children will regard themselves in dance, as well as for shaping the competence and confidence of the pre-service teachers they mentor. With a pragmatic view toward providing recommendations for future teacher education, a mixed-methods investigation was initiated in 2011, exploring generalist teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for teaching dance in the curriculum and how these may be related to their classroom practice, knowledge, and context. In Phase 1, 140 teachers of children aged 5-11 years old in two urban areas completed a questionnaire that included the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001; adapted for dance with permission). Initial analyses of the questionnaire's data indicated trends in how teachers have responded to the challenge of teaching dance, their perceived capabilities, and the factors that support or inhibit their dance teaching. This paper will present selected findings from the data, suggesting that after 10 years of dance in the national curriculum, teachers have progressed in their confidence and efficacy beliefs for teaching dance, but still require some development of specific knowledge to extend children's learning.

Keywords: teachers, beliefs, schools, curriculum, quantitative

In 2000, dance was launched as a core dimension of compulsory arts education in New Zealand. In the early years of arts curriculum implementation, centrally-funded professional development, new resources, and teacher education programmes helped to prepare and support teachers for teaching dance in the classroom. However, diminishing opportunities for teacher education or support in the arts, as well as renewed emphasis on literacy and numeracy achievement in schools and universities, have threatened the sustainability of any gains that may have been made in securing a place for dance in primary classrooms. More than ever, generalist teachers' perceptions of their skills and abilities to teach dance have implications for how children they teach will regard themselves in dance, as well as for shaping the competence and confidence of the pre-service teachers they mentor (Hennessy, Rolfe, & Chedzoy, 2001).

With a pragmatic view toward providing recommendations for dance teacher education, a mixed-methods investigation was initiated to examine generalist teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for teaching dance in the curriculum, and how these may be related to their classroom practice, knowledge, and context. This paper will present selected findings from the study and their possible implications for future teacher development.

Theoretical framework

Within Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), self-efficacy beliefs are the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3), affecting how we think, behave, and respond in particular contexts. While they vary in strength, teachers' beliefs in their abilities to carry out teaching tasks or actions to achieve goals help to dictate their motivation, perseverance, and expectations. A teacher's sense of efficacy is related to effective teaching (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Therefore, it can be assumed that classroom teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy for teaching dance will have implications for children's learning opportunities and for quality of instruction. For instance, dance is more likely to be taught if a teacher has a high sense of self-efficacy in this curriculum area, than if they have a weak sense of personal efficacy.

The primary research question was this: *What are the perceived self-efficacy beliefs of generalist teachers for teaching dance in the curriculum, and how are these related to their classroom practice, subject knowledge, and school context?*

Methodology

A pragmatic philosophical position underpinned the research, and a mixed methods, two-phase sequential explanatory model was adopted for gathering data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For Phase 1, a questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data that would inform trends in the teachers' beliefs and practices. The data were collected from a sample of primary generalist teachers in early 2011 and analysed using SPSS software. Interviews were used in Phase 2 with a smaller group of teachers from the sample to gather qualitative data that could further explain the statistical results. This paper will report on results from Phase 1 of the study.

Participants

The participants were a convenience sample of 140 teachers of Year 1-8 classes from primary schools in two urban areas. Among them, 85% were female, 86% were aged 30-59, and 84% taught in decile 5-10 schools. Note that New Zealand schools are designated a decile number from 1 (low) to 10 (high) depending on the socio-economic status of their area. Most of the teachers (70%) had from 6-25 years of teaching experience. Only experienced teachers were invited to participate; thus, there were no teachers currently in their first year of teaching.

In the sample, 71% of teachers remembered having dance in their pre-service training and 64% had had some professional dance development during their career. Most of the teachers were moderately satisfied with their abilities to plan (65%), teach (61%), and assess (69%) dance.

Materials

A questionnaire was developed to examine when and how dance was being taught in primary schools, what factors supported or limited teachers' teaching of dance, how confident the teachers were in teaching towards the achievement objectives, and how strong their dance self-efficacy beliefs were.

The questionnaire was made up of checklists, rating scales, and open and closed questions. It was divided into four sections:

- Section A: Dance Implementation (9 items);
- Section B: Dance Skills and Knowledge Scale (13 items);
- Section C: Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale adapted for dance (24 items);
- Section D: Teachers' Demographic Information (12 items).

The items were based on personal experience, the literature (e.g., *The New Zealand Curriculum*, 2007), and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001; adapted for dance with permission).

Procedure

To ensure internal validity and ease of answering, the questionnaire content and format were reviewed by a tertiary dance colleague and groups of primary school teachers not in the target sample. Ethical approvals were obtained. Teachers who taught dance in 2010 were asked to answer Section A. All participants were asked to answer Sections B, C, and D.

Results

Classroom programme

A participant subgroup consisted of teachers who indicated that they taught dance in 2010 (84%). They were asked to indicate how dance had been a part of their classroom programme by checking as many of the listed options that were applicable.

How dance was taught in 2010	% Teachers
As preparation for a school or community event	62
In an integrated way with the other arts discipline(s)	55
As a separate arts subject, with its own learning outcomes	43
As a major component in a unit with other learning areas	27
As a minor component in unit with other learning areas	15

Half of these teachers indicated that they taught dance-focused lessons of 15-30 minutes, and up to 71% of them had taught dance in a series of linked lessons in the middle two terms of the year.

Planning/Teaching resources

In the past, teachers have mentioned the lack of resources as a barrier to teaching dance (McGee, et al., 2003). During the implementation stage of the arts curriculum, several hard-copy and online dance resources were specifically produced to support teachers' planning and teaching of

dance. Participants were given a list of 16 resource items and asked to check all of the items that applied to their 2010 dance teaching. Results are shown below for the top 10 resources used.

Resources used for teaching/planning	% Teachers
Your own ideas or interests	57
Syndicate or school-wide themes	43
Students' ideas or interests	43
Other dance books/resources	37
Arts Online website	29
Internet (other than Arts Online)	27
Ideas from other generalist teachers	27
Videos/DVDs (other than Ministry of Education resources)	25
<i>The New Zealand Curriculum</i> (2007) document	24
Ministry of Education hard-copy resources e.g., <i>Discovering Dance</i> ; <i>Dancing the Long White Cloud</i> .	23

It was disappointing to see that many of the resources created especially for dance and sent freely to schools were not being used by the majority of teachers.

Supporting and limiting factors

Teachers were also asked to identify what supported or limited their dance teaching in 2010. They could check any number of the 29 listed items that applied. This chart shows the four most commonly-selected items:

Supporting factors	% Teachers	Limiting factors	% Teachers
A dance event to work towards	62	Time allotted for teaching dance	48
Students' responses and interest in dance	59	Personal dance confidence	37
Personal enthusiasm for dance	48	Personal dance knowledge and skills	36
Time allotted for teaching dance	47	Resource materials for dance	27

It was interesting to see that the teacher numbers were comparatively higher for supporting factors than limiting factors. In the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Stocktake report (McGee, et al., 2003), in which time was perceived to be a barrier in dance, a survey showed that almost the same proportion of teachers indicated that the time allotted for dance could be both a support *and* a limitation. If the supporting factors can be built upon in teacher education, it should be possible for the limiting factors to diminish.

All participant teachers were asked to answer the following sections of the questionnaire.

Teachers' self efficacy beliefs

Section C of the questionnaire was modelled on the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The scale has been widely tested for validity and produces high ratings for reliability (e.g. Klassen, et al., 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

The TSES scale consists of a series of statements concerning different teaching tasks, and uses a 1 (Nothing) to 9 (A Great Deal) Likert-type format. The 24-item form of this instrument was used. The statement items are related to one of three factors or subscales: *efficacy for student engagement*, *efficacy for instructional strategies*, and *efficacy for classroom management*. With permission from the developers, the TSES was adapted for dance (TSES-d) by adding the context "in dance" to all of the statements. The TSES-d scores were grouped low, medium, and high to gauge the teachers' overall perceived self-efficacy in dance.

TSES-d

When compared to the original TSES scale (overall alpha = .94), the adapted-for-dance scale (TSES-d) was found to be very reliable (overall alpha = .96). However, factor analysis of the TSES-d identified two main factors, as compared to the three factors identified by the TSES. Like the TSES, there was a factor related to *efficacy in classroom management* (Factor 2), but a combined factor was found for *efficacy in student engagement and instructional strategies* (Factor 1). This finding could be because New Zealand primary classrooms use a constructivist approach to teaching, where the role of the teacher may be less directive and more facilitative than in other countries. Constructivist approaches are also employed in creative dance contexts.

According to the TSES-d, 67% of the participant teachers had a high sense of self-efficacy in the dance teaching context. The remaining 33% had a medium sense of self-efficacy. These results were a little surprising. Based on research of the dance teaching capabilities of generalist teachers (Gilbert, 2005; Kopytko, 2007; McGee, et al., 2003), some teachers were expected to score in the low self-efficacy band. Alternatively, the result could suggest a response bias. As the questionnaire was voluntary, it may have only attracted teachers who were interested in dance.

The New Zealand teachers had a mean of 6.96, $SD = 1.09$ (6.7, $SD = 1.1$ for TSES) for the *management* factor. A lower mean of 5.69, $SD = 1.0$ for the *student engagement/instructional strategies* factor (7.3, $SD = 1.1$ and 7.3, $SD = 1.1$ for TSES) suggests that there are some issues for the New Zealand teachers with these aspects in the dance teaching context.

Item statements from the TSES-d that received the highest number of teacher responses in the high efficacy columns (i.e., 7, 8, 9) were these:

- How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules in dance? (76% of teachers)
- To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behaviour in dance? (75% of teachers)

Both of these statements were related to the classroom management efficacy factor.

The lowest scoring statements in the TSES-d high efficacy columns were the following:

- How much can you get through to the most difficult students in dance? (15% of teachers)
- How much can you assist families in helping their children to do well in dance? (16% of teachers)

Both of these statements were related to the efficacy in student engagement/instructional strategies factor.

Most teachers (61-76%, depending on the item) rated themselves highly in their self-efficacy in classroom management statements, compared to those (15-61%, depending on the item) who rated themselves as high in student engagement and instructional strategies.

Dance knowledge and skills scale (DSKS)

Cristina Hong, the lead writer of dance in the arts curriculum, commented, “The effectiveness of the new curriculum delivery will obviously be very dependent on the ability of teachers in schools to interpret the curriculum from the printed page” (2001, p. 15). To measure the teachers’ confidence in teaching dance skills and knowledge, a new scale was developed for this study, comprised of 13 statements based on the dance achievement objectives for the primary years (Ministry of Education, 2007). All items were prefaced with, “I am confident in my ability to ... ” and responses were based on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” A judgment of low, medium, or high confidence in teaching dance was determined from each teacher’s overall score.

DSKS data

The highest number of teacher responses to each statement was consistently in the medium confidence ratings columns. Consequently, most teachers in the sample (64%) were judged as having a medium level of confidence in teaching towards the achievement objectives. Only 34% of teachers had an overall high confidence rating score, and 3% of teachers had overall low confidence. These confidence ratings could indicate that there has been some improvement in teachers’ dance teaching confidence in the past 10 years. In a national curriculum evaluation report (McGee, et al., 2003), a single question asked teachers to indicate their degree of dance teaching confidence. Primary teachers reported low (38%), medium (49%), or high (13%) confidence.

In the DSKS, the highest proportion of teacher responses in the high confidence columns (i.e., Mostly Agree/Strongly Agree) was only 36%, with this statement: “I am confident in my ability to facilitate students’ exploration of movement with awareness of the dance elements (i.e., body awareness, space, time, energy, relationships).”

The lowest proportion of teachers showing high confidence (14%) was in response to this statement: “I am confident in my ability to develop students’ personal movement skills and vocabularies in a range of dance genres/styles.”

TSES-d and DSKS

When the teachers' scores for self-efficacy (TSES-d) and confidence (DSKS) were looked at side-by-side, it was found that a high self-efficacy rating for teaching in the dance context did not necessarily mean a high confidence rating for subject-related skills and knowledge. Only 29% of teachers had both high self-efficacy and high confidence in dance; 27% of teachers had both medium self-efficacy and medium confidence in dance; the rest of the teachers had mixed ratings (e.g., high self-efficacy but low confidence).

Discussion

Analysis of the questionnaire's data is still in process, but the current results indicate a fairly positive picture for dance education – in these New Zealand schools at least. Although response bias may be a factor, there was a trend for these participant teachers to have a medium or high level of self-efficacy in the dance teaching context, which is encouraging. There appeared to have been a positive growth in the proportion of teachers who had medium or high confidence in their abilities to teach in the dance strands over recent years. However, the predominance of teachers with medium confidence for subject knowledge, medium self-efficacy for student engagement and instructional strategies, and medium satisfaction in planning, teaching, and evaluating dance, might suggest that teachers are comfortable with where they are in dance, especially now that they are being asked to be ever more accountable for the literacy and numeracy achievement of their students.

As a tertiary dance educator concerned for the quality of dance for children, the data identifies some issues for consideration in dance teacher development. Four of these are described briefly here:

1. The teacher self-efficacy scale showed that most of the teachers were feeling comfortable or satisfied with their ability to manage classes in dance, but were less sure about student engagement and instructional strategies. Reflecting on my own work with teachers, more explicit attention could be given to demonstrating and reflecting on how particular teaching strategies or activities can enhance student engagement and be responsive to students' needs.
2. Most of the teachers are motivated to teach dance because of an upcoming performance event. However, the teachers' lack of confidence to teach particular dance genres or styles may be limiting the opportunities for children to extend their movement vocabularies and performance expressions. Opportunities in teacher education or development programmes to review movement and stylistic characteristics of different dance works and how these characteristics can be explored or adapted sensitively in creative dance-making processes could be relevant.
3. As a distinct arts discipline, dance is recognised as being worthy of separate study (Ministry of Education, 2000, 2007), and so this has been the thrust of my work in dance teacher education. However, it is a dilemma if teachers are tending to teach dance in an integrated way. Without targeted development, there is a danger that the situation is not too different to when dance was marginalised in physical education (Hong, 2002). Looking at how to create integrated units of work without sacrificing in-depth dance learning could be in order with teachers.

4. Few teachers appear to be using the curriculum documents or the dance resources that were developed for their planning and teaching. Instead, teachers are drawing on their own or students' ideas and interests. This could suggest that dance is not being taught with the curriculum achievement objectives in mind, and that the breadth of dance experiences being offered to children is limited. Exploring teachers' personal interests as a starting point for planning dance activities may be useful for building novice teachers' sense of efficacy. Similarly, it might be fitting to examine the purpose, nature, and relevance of online resources that teachers are drawn to for their dance planning and teaching.

Clearly, there is still some work to be done to strengthen teachers' sense of efficacy and confidence in some areas of dance so that their classroom practice maximises outcomes for children. Further analyses of the questionnaire data will no doubt produce findings that suggest more ideas or recommendations for dance teacher education and some directions for future research.

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