

Roundtable: Dance education research methodologies — New ways?

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Introduction

Following the keynote session, *The Art of Stepping Aside — Chances, Potentials and Deficits in Arts Education Research*, presented by arts and policy researchers Susanne Keuchel and Michael Wimmer, participants were invited to attend roundtables in order to have a chance to discuss the key issues that were presented during the keynote. The aim was to consider what significant new ways researchers in dance education could take their research in dance education and what each participant might be able to take away from these discussions.

Eeva Anttila welcomed everyone to the roundtable and invited people to introduce themselves and their research interests. The notes that follow are a summary of the discussion.

It was evident that the group was concerned about the position of arts education, particularly dance education, in schools, colleges, and universities, and the implications for research, pedagogy, and advocacy.

Dance Curriculum and Pedagogy

In education, it seems that many governments are panicking and focusing on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA 2012 is the fifth survey of the program, assessing the competencies of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science (with a focus on mathematics). It was noted that no cultural competencies are itemized in the assessment procedures outlined by PISA. These tests overshadow arts education in the curriculum, leading to the abandonment of arts programs. As a result,

there are negative effects on programs in colleges and universities, some being reduced, and in some cases, removed completely.

It was acknowledged that there is a distinction between what happens in discourse, policy, and practice in quality dance education. While there may be discussion and agreement about the appropriateness of teaching methods, the role of competition, and the selection of dance genres and expressions for age groups and abilities, it seems that many recommendations are not put into practice. There was also a concern about the appropriateness of assessment and that both formative and summative assessments should be applied. Formative assessment was recommended as a tool that supports dance learning. The media's promotion of certain programs also has an adverse effect on those recommendations. Additionally, programs are often compromised because of who is teaching. The importance of understanding and implementing the appropriate dance curriculum and providing good learning experiences for students is of paramount importance and demands that there is appropriate training for those teaching dance.

Research

It was acknowledged that there needed to be more advocacy and research in the field of dance and dance education, and evidence that dance is relevant and thriving. Our attention was drawn to consider Gee's (2007) concerns that advocacy and research has become "conflated" and developed into what she terms "advo-search." It was emphasized that a balance between advocacy and research should be maintained. Certainly there should be a focus on improving the pedagogical practices through research.

Some governments have requested more research in dance and have asked universities to develop the research, such as in Brazil. Additionally, in the United Kingdom, the British Council made a call for research projects, only 10 of which were funded. It was identified that historically, partnerships have had great impact on research and that countries could work together to build connections without being contradictory. It was recognized that there is an ethical imperative to work with different fields.

Disappointment was expressed that there is limited funding for research from governments and universities. It was suggested that we clear the responsibility from the governments and look to other actors who are changing research, such as foundations, private initiatives, etc.

In the following points, these questions were discussed: To what end was more research needed?; What is good research?; What do we do with the knowledge?; Who are the researchers?; How is the research funded?

The group was reminded of Jonathan Haidt's (2013) book, *The Righteous Mind*, in which he argues that we were not designed to listen to reason and quickly shape our arguments to questions that support our beliefs. In the review of Haidt's work, William Saletan outlines Haidt's argument that "people are fundamentally intuitive, not rational. If you want to persuade others, you have to appeal to their sentiments"¹. Therefore, the research needs to focus on the human condition and listen to the point of view of its participants; for instance, why do parents support their children in specific endeavors?

If as artists we bring the ability to think differently, we should approach research in diverse ways, focusing on the human condition and how dance contributes to social justice and peace. One member of the group suggested that we reflect on certain changes in society and consider what our observations may mean for the arts; for instance, the different trends and positions both politically and in our own field, the changes in social circumstances, the considerable demographic gaps, and the advocacy needs of society. There is a need to be critical, to look deeper when the demands are made on our area, and to identify clearly the strength of arts education.

The conflicts between research paradigms (i.e., quantitative versus qualitative debate) were introduced and it was quickly summarized that both were needed. The importance of systematic generation of theory from systematic research would lead to some answers and, consequently, more research.

Also, a demand was voiced for practice-based research that explores literacy in dance and the arts and information about why some people participate in dance and others do not.

Many surveys have been launched to identify that dance is worthwhile; however, the question is more complex and subjective than can be revealed in a survey. Where are the statistics and evidence that will help to answer this question?

Suggested links for research were identified: The role of dance in sustainable development, and the role of dance and nature.

¹ <https://themuslimtimes.info/2016/10/02/why-wont-they-listen-the-righteous-mind-by-jonathan-haidt>

The Institute for Sustainable Development has defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Everyone needs to do their part, including governments, the private sector, and society. In dance research, there is the opportunity to address the problems we face and to contribute to one of the tenets of sustainable development of understanding our world and ourselves, and significantly, how humans relate to nature and the link between dance and nature (e.g., indigenous dance).

The important Copenhagen Declaration at this conference, the 13th World Congress of Dance and the Child International (daCi), calls on decision makers and dance educators to acknowledge the important role of dance and arts education in delivering the new global education agenda, identified by UNESCO as education for sustainable development and global citizenship.