

EDCURRIC 622 Dance Assessment Task

The War of Dance

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The national curriculum and national standards (Ministry of Education, 2007) are a direct assault on the teaching profession and human liberties¹ (Maisuria, 2005; Soguel & Jaccard, 2007). The Ministry of Education, left unchallenged, will have teachers turned into technicians (Gray, 2007) and student imagination marginalised (Golding, 1992). This paper explores, and advocates for, dance education in New Zealand schools as a frontier for creative liberty. To illustrate the importance of dance, three sessions, from the EDCURRIC 622 workshop, are explored - (1) Ocean Waves, (2) Tawhirimatea, and (3) Dancing Syllables. Through critical reflection, of the aforementioned sessions, dance is seen to be an invaluable curriculum area that all students have a right to be educated in.

Ocean Waves

The content in this session did not align with my expectations of what I would learn in an educational dance lesson. As with many teachers (see Koff, 2000), I believed dance education was another form of physical education. However, after the workshop, I realise it is quite the contrary. A study by Rehfeld et al. (2017) found that unlike pure physical activities, dancing corresponds to a noticeable difference in behaviour. The workshop reproduced these findings as it required participation, critical engagement, and re-evaluation. We shared three words (e.g. calm, rough, powerful) to describe three different oceanic pictures and then turned these words into related movements. From the activity, I learnt that different moves can be associated with different moods and, by proxy, relate them to my own experiences. This was not an expectation of what I would learn. The language art taught allowed me to use and understand the associated communication skills (Koff, 2000).

Aspects of pedagogy that assisted with learning were the - (1) scaffolded approach and (2) variety of forms of self and peer assessment. The scaffolded approach allows students to develop confidence and technique (Cadzow, n.d.). The pedagogy practice of sequentially scaffolding activities allowed knowledge

¹ A critical reflection requires a critical stance, ergo this presupposition is required.

of the dance elements (see Ministry of Education, 2007) to be taught effectively. This was achieved through lived experiences and by progressively developed specific motor skills (Koff, 2000) through a steady escalation of movement complexity.

There was a wide variety of forms of self and peer assessment used in this workshop². The diversity of assessment created a dynamic array of learning opportunities, reinforced at regular intervals. The inclusion of open-ended objectives ensured every student's opinion was valued, shared, and extended. These assessments focused on the process rather than the product, ensuring fair contribution (Orr, 2010) and, by extension, participation³.

Tawhirimatea

The Tawhirimatea session covered all the strands of the dance curriculum - (1) Understanding dance in context; (2) Developing practical knowledge in dance; (3) Developing ideas in dance; and (4) Communicating and interpreting dance. Using the haka to inspire an original body percussion dance demonstrates how dance is firmly rooted in tradition and can evolve to contemporary interpretations⁴. The practical knowledge in dance was developed through group activities aimed at creating non-locomotor movements to represent words from a song, allowing students to observe their own movements in relation to other people and the environment. Ideas were inspired by the Māori haka and song. Additionally, improvisation was utilised to inspire ideas and allowed students to strengthen their imagination for making sense of their world (O'Connor, 2016; Schiller & Meiners, 2003). These conceptualisations developed into choreography through group collaboration and refined through rehearsal and reflection. The last activity was for each group to perform in front of the class, followed by a discussion that interpreted the chosen moves and their impact.

² Notably - (1) self-reflective worksheet required students to think critically about what they felt was most important aspects of the lesson, (2) exchanging ideas to improve movement, (3) guessing the word based entirely on movement (4) verbal feedback post-presentations, (5) students also described their own and peer's performance and (6) the mirror allowed for constant self-evaluation.

³ This links dance to the key competency - participating and contributing (Ministry of Education, 2014).

⁴ Evidence of understanding dance in context.

Borrowing of movement material from multiple dance styles carries many benefits. New Zealand is a multicultural nation, masquerading as bicultural (Gershon, 2017). As a result, multiple dance styles can be utilised as a platform for celebrating this union of diverse cultures (Schiller & Meiners, 2003) and empower students to relate to others⁵. As students improvise and explore movement ideas from various cultures⁶, they develop their situational awareness and adaptability. Teaching culturally diverse dances from contextual perspectives resembles a culturally pluralist pedagogy (Ashley, 2014). Through dance, students embody physically and mentally, the subject stimuli (O'Connor, 2016), which has significant symbolic value that intermit expressions of individuality and oneself (Schott-Billmann, 1992; Griss, 1998; Purcell, 1994; Stinson, 1988). Through exploring various cultural styles of dance, students challenge their personal beliefs a wide range of context, promoting cultural understanding in this multicultural nation.

Dancing Syllables

In this workshop I felt my lack of experience with dancing resulted in a lack of confidence. A testament shared by many (Renner et al., 2016; Snook & Buck, 2014). However, the effective pedagogical practice in the workshop has strengthened my belief that dance needs to be taught in New Zealand schools.

Dance education has a significant value for children in New Zealand schools. Students strengthen their critical thinking⁷ skills through their movement actions (Chen & Cone, 2003). In fact, dance training has strong, positive effects on the human brain including the development of higher cognitive levels of processing (Giacosa, 2007). Additionally, children think and learn through their bodies (O'Connor, 2016). Exploring movement with awareness of dance elements⁸ then becomes an authentic learning experience. Students also build empathy and self-awareness through this lived experience by reflecting on relationships between their personal perspective and that of the stimuli.

⁵ This links dance to the key competency - Relating to others (Ministry of Education, 2014).

⁶ Linked to the dance curriculum strand - Developing ideas in dance (Ministry of Education, 2007).

⁷ This links dance to the key competency – Thinking (Ministry of Education, 2014).

⁸ This links to the second dance achievement objective (Ministry of Education, 2007)

Criticism towards dance education is the association of certain dance styles and music with increased impulsive behaviour (Leung, Keir, 2010) and gang association (Chang, 2007). However, this may simply be reinterpreted as a resistance to indoctrination and conformity to social norms.

Dance education is more concerned with creation than imitation. Dancers manipulate the movement elements to translate their ideas, just as authors manipulate language to write unique novels (Chen & Cone, 2003). Dance, therefore, is an expression of ideas allowing students to 'write' a unique story through their movements⁹. The association of dance with imagination and creation has been explored previously in this paper. Most notably, improvisation was utilised to inspire ideas and allowed students to strengthen their imagination. The effective of which empowers students to make sense of their world (O'Connor, 2016; Schiller & Meiners, 2003). Whilst dance education may imitate the movements of traditional and contemporary styles, re-enacting them in the present, infuses them with the self of the individual and contemporary world. Thereby, creating new experiences from imitation.

Conclusion

The eventual development of a post-production society (Marx & Engels, 1998) will lead to a global renaissance of creativity (Glenn & Florescu, 2016). Whilst the Ministry of Education enforces capitalist principles, it is the teacher's duty to prepare students for the future. Imagination is the source of all human achievement (Robinson, 2006), and it is within dance (and the arts) that the dreams and future of New Zealand can exist. The national curriculum is a front on human liberties (Maisuria, 2005), however, in this unique situation, it acts a shield from most neo-liberal ideologies and its inherent need for inequality (Klees, 1999). Through self-reflection it is evident dance incorporates all key competencies and enhances human creativity. Thanks to the inclusion of dance in the national curriculum, all students have a right to be educated in the creative dimension (Ministry of Education, 2007). The future of New Zealand is,

⁹ This links dance to the key competency - Using language, symbols, and texts (Ministry of Education, 2014).

therefore, indebted to the contemporary pioneers of art, whom without, liberty in education would surely die.

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