Reflexive turning in culturally pluralist pedagogy for dance education: A refractive prism of understanding

Dr Linda Ashley

Independent dance researcher

ABSTRACT

In this article, drawing on data that I collected from teachers during a doctorate inquiry completed in New Zealand in 2010, I explore critically reflexive perspectives that could empower teachers to implement culturally pluralist dance education. Using the imagery of a single beam of light passing through a prism, I locate issues for reflexive examination that arise when considering how to make sense of pedagogy and praxis in teaching culturally diverse dances from contextual perspectives within culturally pluralist pedagogy. The beam captures dance education in a culturally pluralist pedagogical paradigm. In passing through a prism it is refracted, splitting into its spectral component rays, each containing a separate expectation for teachers and requiring its own reflexive turn of thought. Consideration of these expectations is timely in terms of respecting the people who own the traditions we include in dance education and the changing ethnic mosaic of nation states globally.

PREAMBLE

Auto-narrative note: Today I find myself reflecting on the Tertiary Dance Educators' Network New Zealand Aotearoa conference that I just attended and I perform some reflexive turning on two points. First, I observed that there are culturally diverse ways of presenting at conferences that can challenge us to find something of value from within our own cultural bubbles. Second, and perhaps more revealing, that the origins of my research since 2004 onwards, in taking a gradual reflexive bend, could be illusive. When I think about the theoretical areas that have come to interest me since the 1980s in the United Kingdom, I realise that they emerged from many years of practice, as well as from the theories that underpin my explorative practices. My practices have included choreography, performing dance, teaching and lecturing in dance education, working with communities, talking about dance and writing about it. Yes—talking and writing as dance practices could be overlooked, and such an oversight could create a space of denial of the forces of human language, philosophy and concept formation that are, arguably, essential activities when people create cultures. I think that it is easy to overlook the illusive reflexive turns that sometimes people perform.

Linking theory and practice in this way establishes that "theory is a practice frequented by self-awareness" (Chambers, 1994, p. 42). Practice-led research is an important methodology for the arts, one could even say essential, but which comes first—practice or theory—and how they inform each other is like, I believe, the chicken or egg question. We privilege one over the other at our peril, for both seem, to me at least, to be in constant interactive flux. Sometimes the word can be the action and vice versa, depending on your academic and cultural persuasions.

INTRODUCTION[i]

In this article I position reflexivity as in need of greater scrutiny, particularly in relation to how reflexive turns could provide advantageous viewing platforms from which to empower teachers to meet the expectations of culturally pluralist pedagogy for the twenty-first century. Other dance education researchers are also focusing on this topic:

> I have started seeing dances as not just aesthetic objects created by individual artists, but also as cultural artifacts that both define and challenge cultures—a blind spot in my previous perception. (Stinson, 2010, p. 141)

Longstanding American dance educator Sue Stinson takes a reflexive turn here, capturing the direction that my research took in a journey that began in 2004. In this paper I am interested in exploring further the blind spot of culturally pluralist pedagogy for dance education that Stinson identifies. I scrutinise this blind spot using the image of a prism through which a beam of light passes and is refracted into its spectral components—rainbow like. The beam represents the implementation of dance education from within a culturally pluralist pedagogical paradigm and the expectations that such teaching can bring. In splitting the light into different rays this single lens reveals multiple expectations, each of which, although part of the original beam, requires its own critically reflexive turn in order that some less obvious nuanced assumptions can be considered more deeply.

I also briefly consider consequences that a lack of reflexivity may have in the form of the current emphasis in dance education on Western creative/contemporary dance and intercultural fusion. These considerations are timely in terms of respecting the dance traditions we include in dance education,

as appropriate for present day ethnic diversity within nation states both here and overseas, and for engaging with the vicissitudes of striving for social justice.

Following this introduction a brief methodology section is provided. After examining some key terms, the discussion section of this article examines three of the beam's spectral rays using the research data from my ethnographic inquiry as a means of placing my thoughts about praxis into the everyday world as teachers experience it. Each of the rays relates to a different expectation that a culturally responsive pedagogy can entail, and by interrogating its less obvious nuances a reflexive turn is identified for each of the expectations that the dance component of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007) brings. Research literature is synthesised into the discussion. A reflexive summary brings the article to a close.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS

In this article, in making sense of pedagogy and praxis when teaching dances from within culturally pluralist pedagogy, I draw on data that I collected from teachers during doctorate research completed in New Zealand in 2010. My ethnographic inquiry investigated the concerns, dilemmas and opportunities that teachers were experiencing in meeting the expectations of *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (ANZC; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2000) that was current at the time of my research. The ANZC had introduced an expectation for dance teachers in New Zealand schools to teach about a range of culturally diverse dances from contextual perspectives.

In 2014 my research could be seen as having increased relevance because in 2007 teaching about culturally diverse dances contextually was moved from being the last in the list of four strands in the ANZC to the position of the first in the revised dance component of NZC. In the arts curriculum, four strands represent key areas of learning as follows: Understanding dance in context (developing awareness of dance's contextual significances—UC); Practical knowledge in dance (extending personal movement vocabulary, exploring the dance elements and various dance forms—PK); Developing ideas in dance (making dances—DI); and Communicating and interpreting in dance (performing and responding to performances—CI). The strands are seen as working in relation to each other.

In the interests of avoiding repetition, I draw the reader's attention to my previous article (Ashley, 2013a) in which they will find a fuller description of my ethnographic research methodology, data collection and analysis. I conducted an

ethnographic investigation into teachers' opinions on teaching about dance contextually, collecting data from three sets of research participants between 2004 and 2006 as follows:

- As participant observer during an in-service dance education course for teachers;
- From a questionnaire distributed to teachers in primary, intermediate and secondary schools across New Zealand;
- During four focus groups that I ran for teachers, tertiary dance educators and dance teachers who were specialists in Samoan, Ma ori and Tongan dances.

In this article I am presenting data selected from all three sets of research participants.

The teachers on the in-service course were participating in a two-part learning experience consisting of a video critique exercise followed by a peer teaching presentation assessment. The teachers critiqued a video (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2002) of teaching about dance from contextual perspectives to a primary school class (Ashley, 2013b). They then proceeded to apply the understandings that they had developed during the video critique in a group discovery-based learning experience to plan a unit of dance. In a peer-assessed teaching presentation they taught each other selected aspects of the unit.

KEY TERMS

In this section I provide a brief examination of reflexivity and culturally pluralist pedagogy, being two terms that are key to this article.

Reflexivity

If we bring to mind examples of different dances such as *sasa*, *Bharatha Natyam*, kapa haka, contact improvisation, contemporary dance, children's creative dance and classical ballet, we can then consider which of the words in the following list could be associated with each of the different dances.

1. Creativity.
2. Choreography.
3. Culture.
4. Education.
5. Innovation.

6. Improvisation.

7. Set dance vocabulary.

8. Tradition.

These words are in common use but they are loaded with culturally formed concepts that are easily taken for granted. However, these conceptual underpinnings can be revealed via a critically reflexive turn. If you chose all or most of the eight words for each of the dances you selected, then it is likely that you just took a reflexive turn. This critical examination in many ways reflects my own research journey in which I developed a heightened political awareness of the hegemonic effects of Western dance in the praxis of dance education, at all levels from kindergarten to tertiary settings.

Clifford Geertz (1983), the noted early 1950s catalyst of what became known as 'postmodern ethnography', suggested that reflexivity can facilitate the seeing of others as an example of the forms that human life has taken locally. Kathy Charmaz (2006) regards reflexivity as being informative for researchers because "what they see—and don't see—rests on values" (p. 131). Charles Varela (1994) advises that adopting a reflexive approach retains "an objective interest in the relation between the person and his or her role" (p. 63). All of these theorists' views on reflexivity are captured by Ludwig Wittgenstein's perspective from 1953 that making sense of human action and interaction requires understanding that

> not what one man is doing now, but the whole hurly burly, is the background against which we can see an action, and it determines our judgement, our concepts, and our reactions. (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 97)

In contemplating the pros and cons of multiculturalism, as it plays out in the 'hurly burly', sociologist Anthony Giddens (2006) raises hopes that cross-cultural social interaction can produce understanding across cultures "because it implies the acceptance of interrogation from others—it is the condition of producing mutual respect, rather than undermining it" (p. 2). Integrating a reflexive view of dance education could empower both learners and teachers to 'interrogate' their own and each other's cultural identities as embodied in culturally different dances. A reflexive perspective recognised by Sue Stinson (2010) when she writes about the advantages of group dialogue and discovery learning in teacher education:

> I hope that this process is developing future educators who will be able
> to engage in the kind of reflexivity—thinking critically about their own

ideas and those of others—that I believe will help move the field forward. (p. 139)

Interrogation is, possibly, a harsh-sounding word in a time when dance education is engaged with both creating dance and fostering understanding between different cultures. However, being self-confrontational and self-interrogatory are, I suggest, essential parts of building culturally pluralist pedagogical praxis. Moreover, interrogation could also lead to deeper reflexive examination of associated issues such as social justice for the people whose dance heritages we study in dance education. Such interrogations are not a foregone conclusion in current dance education pedagogy. Risner and Stinson (2010) draw attention to the limitations of well-intentioned multiculturally focused dance education, in that

> so much is left out: access, representation, historical and cultural context, and the systemic biases that lie beneath continued social inequity and injustice. Simultaneously, those faculty who do this kind of challenging may, in fact, be regarded as "difficult," "political," or "activist." (p. 7)

In considering how, or if, reflexivity could play a meaningful part in dance education, I endeavour to open up the need for more critical discourse about associated issues that may be in our blind spot.

Culturally (responsive or relevant) pluralist pedagogy

Internationally an assumption has been growing over several decades that dances from a range of cultures should be studied for their contribution to both dance and education that responds to increasing migration across the globe (Ashley, 2010, 2012a, 2013a). Pedagogically, however, the challenges run deeper. Culturally pluralist pedagogy underpins dance education as it appears in the NZC, which expects teachers to teach

- about culturally different dances from contextual perspectives;
- inclusive of individual learner's identities;
- respectful of the cultural differences of dance as a concept.

As such expectations can be "complicated and problematic" (Earl, Timperley, & Stewart, 2009, p. 3), all the more reason to explore them fully. In their report on the difficulties of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy for New Zealand

teachers, Earl et al. highlight the need for teachers to confront their own personal beliefs, and learn new customs and languages. Along with the responsibilities of providing culturally diverse content, ways of teaching that motivate learners also require "a sense of power sharing" (Melchior, 2011, p. 130). For dance educators, I suggest that such expectations could lead to making reflexive turns in which the ideology that underpins Western, progressive liberal education is interrogated from within.

In the discussion section that follows, the bullet points above are unpacked as refracted spectral rays emerging from the prism. In exploring these rays, various reflexive turns interrogate our current and possible future praxis. I attempt to seek out ideas that could inform teachers as they develop their praxis to implement culturally pluralist pedagogy, and to address social issues as associated with culture, ethnicity, identity and social justice within a larger context of the 'hurly burly'.

THE REFRACTED SPECTRAL RAYS

In this discussion section the data from my ethnographic investigation acts to initially locate the blind spot referred to earlier. The spectral rays emanate from within this blind spot. I synthesise a snapshot of the data into the discussion as representative of how the teachers in my study were grappling with implementing the culturally pluralist expectations of the dance component of the ANZC.

From the findings of my study it emerged that some teachers were not teaching about a culturally diverse range of dances contextually. Their main concerns about such teaching were that it

- was too theoretical;
- needed too much time, money and resources for preparation and teaching;
- required specialist skills and knowledge that the teachers did not think they were able to offer.

Teachers' concerns about their lack of physical and theoretical dance expertise are significant if we accept, as Warburton (2008) suggests, that effective dance education needs both content and pedagogical knowledge. Therefore, it is understandable that the teachers in my study who were challenged by the perception of their own lack of skills and knowledge chose to overlook teaching dance contextually, and instead chose to teach creative dance.

The refracted rays that are explored in the following three sections could support praxis in which teachers are empowered to implement culturally pluralist pedagogy that is possibly more suited to their own knowledge and skills. Based on the bullet list from the previous section, each section of the discussion below focuses on one of the refracted rays. Each ray carries within it an expectation that teachers face when implementing culturally pluralist pedagogy in dance education; each of them requires its own reflexive turn.

Refraction one—teaching creative dance contextually

In this section I explore the expectation from within culturally responsive pedagogy to teach about culturally different dances from contextual perspectives. I indicate a gap in how creative dance was taught by some of my research participants, insofar as even though it dominated their praxis they were not teaching it contextually.

All of the teachers in my study were teaching creative dance because they viewed it as

- more practical;
- requiring less time to prepare for or to teach;
- within their skill set;
- in keeping with their pedagogical values;
- maintaining the learners' interest.

Insofar as all the teachers in my study were teaching creative dance and many of them were not teaching a culturally diverse range of dances, these findings reveal that a lack of physical and theoretical knowledge was marginalising teaching about dances that were culturally different from creative dance. Also, and this is a point that I have made before but that bears repetition, the time saved could be explained because creative dance was not being taught about contextually.

In a focus group from my study, tertiary dance educators discussed why teaching about culturally diverse dances contextually had been moved from being the last in the list of the four strands in the ANZC to the position of the first of the strands in the NZC. One of the focus group, a tertiary dance educator and professional developer for the dance component of the NZC observed:

> So to ensure that people weren't getting carried away with PK, DI and
> CI, put [UC] up to the top of the page so that it's not an afterthought—

which I kind of think that it's been a little bit up to now in some areas of education in particular, but it's the basis of what you do. It's what it's all about.

This observation was based on discussions between curriculum developers that had occurred during the redevelopment of the ANZC. It reinforced the findings of my ethnographic research, in that teaching the making of dances in a Eurocentric pedagogy from within the PK and DI curriculum strands was dominating the teachers' praxis and was disconnected from its context. My findings showed that in praxis, creative dance was separated from its contextual theory, leaving creative dance context*less*.

Two distinct possibilities arise if creative dance is not taught about contextually. First, as I mentioned above, it could marginalise dances from other cultures in dance education because of the illusion of saving on time, money and expertise. Second, creative dance itself could be marginalised if teaching contextually is "what it's all about". My premise is that when teachers choose which dances to teach contextually, they have a myriad of possibilities, and one of these could be the creative dance that is historically embedded and embodied in the context of dance education itself. This critically reflexive turn could help teachers to find some solution to their problem—to teach about dance education itself contextually. A contentious notion worthy of further research is whether the Eurocentric model of dance education is a necessary default setting for some educational contexts and learners.

To highlight how a critically reflexive turn can be illusive in relation to our 'own' dance, I turn to Kathy Stark's (2009) description of a challenge that she faced as she went about developing appreciation of Yvonne Rainer's postmodern dance *Trio A* (1966) for undergraduate students in the United States. In her teaching, Stark had included a comprehensive range of learning activities including background information on postmodern minimalism, video viewing, written responses and dancing extracts of the piece. Some of the students' reflections on what they thought about the dance drew attention to the lack of smiling, energy, "emotion, music and entertainment" (p. 63). One student commented on the apparent lack of technique, describing the dance as "hard for me to appreciate something like my 6-year-old godson could do" (p. 65). Stark interpreted these comments to mean that the students were "not connecting to the work on a deep level" (p. 63). The students' lack of understanding seemed to result from their worldview of dance being media-driven entertainment, or as performative dance

that is overtly virtuosic and/or packaged in a recognisable, codified technique. Reflecting on how the teaching had overlooked socio-political contextual background, Stark observed: "In addition, this particular dance feels personal and therefore some of the cultural aspects of it were so easy for me to initially overlook" (p. 66). Stark realised that in her teaching she "did not delve into issues of her [Rainer's] race or the privilege associated with her career in the arts" (p. 66). In this spectral ray, therefore, the possibility arises that a fully culturally responsive pedagogy could bring into view socio-economic, political, cultural and ideological privileges as embodied in 'our' dance, and by return injustices that others could experience. This reflexive turn could also be indicative of how learning about, in and through dance as a platform of knowledge can open up interrogations into how some dances, seen as carriers of cultural knowledge and values as related to social justice in people's lives, are or are not included for study in dance education, and also *how* they are taught.

In many ways, Stark's story is informative of the need for reflexive turning in order that we, as teachers, can confront and interrogate our own cultural identity as we experience it in dance education. Without a shift in our thinking it is unlikely that learners would take their own reflexive routes. I suggest that a challenge for dance educators is how to include a critically reflexive understanding in interrogating 'our' dance and confronting ourselves, as well as others and their cultures. In the concerns often raised about avoiding superficial treatment of the dances of others, we are overlooking that we are doing the same to 'our' dance.

There are a plethora of contextual factors about dance education that teaching could include, and I can only touch on some possibilities. Pioneer dance educators Rudolf Laban (1879–1958) and American Margaret H'Doubler (1899–1982) prioritised a Western, modern, creative individual iconography in their implementation of progressive, liberal educational ideology. H'Doubler stated that "the concept of contemporary dance is not a prescribed system" (1974, p. xxiv–xxv). I identify creative dance very much as a prescribed system. Fostering awareness of the background of European Rudolf Laban's early twentieth century movement concepts of the Dance Elements (in the form of body, space, time, dynamics and relationships), integral to dance education and featured in the NZC, could be included in praxis. In the curriculum the Dance Elements are not referred to as 'theoretical' and their context is not acknowledged. Lepczyk (2009) draws attention to a similar oversight internationally.

In my inquiry some teachers justified the choice of creative dance because it provided "a level playing field as we began to explore the elements of dance". However, it could be possible that some learners have prior learning about the Dance Elements, in which case the playing field is not level. Interrogating creative dance as a, or 'our', dance legacy reveals a pedagogical process that is culturally constructed—a generic, if kaleidoscopic, 'technique'. It is particularly pertinent to highlight parallels drawn between Western, collaborative choreographic practices and educational experiences:

> The rehearsal, as a learning laboratory, can be an open container for intertwining educational and artistic values while pedagogical and learning possibilities expand. (Barr, 2005, p. 8)

There may be no prescribed, recognisable steps such as one may see in an Erick Hawkins[ii] class but, arguably, the creative process itself can be looked on as a generic socio-cultural convention, the purpose of which is to produce 'individual' dance vocabulary.

Biographical backgrounds of early twentieth century dance education pioneers (and more recent ones) could also provide pertinent contextual tapestries. Consider, for instance, Laban's departure from Germany for England in 1938, after what some have criticised as a period of fraternisation with Nazi racist ideology (Kant, 2008). In England, Laban applied his ideas to many different causes, including the analysis of ergonomic movement in the workplace, helping women with manual labour in the war effort. Laban's artistic, analytical and educational activities ignited British physical educationalists, a group of "starry-eyed disciples" (Best, 1999, p. 101), to develop 'Modern Educational Dance', as it was first known. This Western educational ideology in the form of dance education spread all over the world to countries such as Aotearoa, Australia, USA and Canada. Moreover, I am (along with many others), in part at least, a later embodiment of such peripatetic cultural trading in the sense that

> if we are to talk of globalism, it is a globalism which refers not only to powers and movement of capital and the international division of labour, but also to social and cultural forces, institutions, relations and ideas. (Chambers, 1994, p. 109)

As Chambers (1994) further suggests, social, cultural and conceptual views of others are central, as cross co-ordinates indicative of *our* sense of time, place and

identity. I add educational ideological differences to this already rich and complex understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

The opportunity to teach the contextual aspects of creative/contemporary dance alongside making dances also facilitates the chance to pinpoint a theory-practice dichotomy in the praxis of dance education. I suggest that if teachers take a critically reflexive viewing platform from which to think about what and how they teach, they could be empowered to teach contextually about the dance skills that they already possess, thus teaching both theory and practice as well as meeting the curriculum's expectations. However, the provision of professional development about the context of dance education itself is currently lacking. Moreover, in adding contextual substance to teaching of dance education we could strengthen its place as an epistemological field in schools from which to examine social justice and injustices as they have impacted on and been confronted by 'our' own pioneers such as Laban's involvement with the Nazis, although there is insufficient space to discuss such matters fully here.

Refraction two—teaching that affirms individual identity

In culturally responsive pedagogy there is an expectation that teaching is inclusive of individual learners' identities. Identity is recognised as in use in everyday public life "to understand the world we live in as well as imagine other worlds" (Grau, 2007, p. 203). It is especially pertinent to conceptualise individual identity when reconstrued as multiple or "fluid and in the making" (p. 210). In exploring this second spectral component of the refracted light beam, a need arises to dig deeper into the hegemony of Western dance education and to move towards 'rupturing' it (Kerr-Berry, 2012).

Creative dance is often depicted as a site of culturally pluralist or responsive pedagogy in that it is known to provide inclusive teaching that can provide individual learners with benefits such as building a sense of identity, ownership, motivation to learn and confidence (Buck, 2003; Connell, 2009; Hanstein, 1990; Jankovic, 2008; Melchior, 2011; Salvara, Jess, Abbott, & Bognar, 2006; Sansom, 2011; Stinson, 2005). Creative dance can be effective in engaging individual and culturally diverse voices through interrogating issues such as "violence, bodily dialogue, communication, relationships, being a woman and religion" (Marques, 1998, p. 181). The use of 'context' in these teaching episodes prioritises the 'lived' contexts of the students or dancers, so that the dances created embrace the students' own "attitudes, activities, dreams and fantasies" (p. 181).

In my study, teachers on the in-service course were asked to critique video of a primary school teacher teaching a class of mainly Pacific Island children (Ashley, 2013b; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2002). The teachers' comments showed their approval of the inclusive teaching style of the creative dance activities in the video in remarks such as the following:

> Extended children's movements. Each group member performed their movement sequence in a safe environment, where all children felt included. Children were able to explore their own ideas and these were included in the final dance.

An early childhood teacher on the course justified the choice of creative dance because it allowed children to "have … satisfaction in their dance achievements … [and] dance aids self-esteem". Research participants in the two other sets of data that I collected also presented positive evaluations about increasing self-esteem as children developed their own creative dance ideas.

Other participants, however, saw the benefits to learners of learning about culturally diverse dances as overlapping with those they associated with creative dance. As some teachers engaged with the dilemma of which dances to teach, they associated teaching dances that 'matched' the culture of the learners with benefits such as increased well-being, identity building, self-esteem, confidence, enjoyment, belonging and motivation to learn. As a questionnaire respondent put it: "This opportunity also gave many students a chance to shine if they were familiar with the culture or indeed from that ethnic group. It made them feel special." A tertiary educator's focus group comment is pertinent here:

> Embracing the child's world [is] a key factor in education today. Placing dances e.g. hip hop in cultural context, as in hip hop or music video or live street dance. But all cultural dance is tied up with identity, isn't it? Who am I? Where do I stand?

In the dance specialists' focus group, kapa haka specialist Valance Smith also emphasised the importance of learning about Māori performing arts for developing a sense of identity and belonging for Māori youth:

> We need to learn maths and religion and all that, it's true, but our culture shouldn't be regarded as extracurricular activity, something that's done in a club like a sport. Because I know with Māori culture, people tend to hold

themselves a lot better when they have an identity, when they have a connection with their culture.

In Polynesian dance, identity can seem to have more of a collective profile, whereas in the ideology of dance education it seemingly relates more to individual benefit, innovation and discovery. Polynesian primary school teachers on the in-service course made comments such as:

> We feel that teaching their own cultural dance will be helping children to develop their ability to express their own experiences, ideas, beliefs, feelings. Through this, children will be able to know what they are and who they are.

These teachers' saw identity as having more in common with a collective and communal 'hurly burly'. This worldview is crystallised in this next comment about identity that can prioritise the communal over the individual as related to Indian dance:

> The distinction between improvisation and composition that is generally assumed in the United States … is based on cultural differences of perceiving the individual as a more important entity than the whole, in contrast to an Indian view, in which the individual is seen as intimately bound up in the whole society and, indeed, is a kind of expression of the whole. (Puri & Hart-Johnson, 1995, p. 181)

When dances are regarded as carriers of socio-cultural values, vectors by which a people's way of life is maintained and given just respect and support, fostering a learners' sense of identity as symbiotic with a specific and possibly disappearing culture could be seen as an imperative in some contexts. Research into dances of the Alaskan Yup'ik people made a case for taking the time to include study of the learners' own dance identities and narratives (Thomas, 2001). The Yup'ik feared the loss of their dance heritage as communities underwent modernisation. The dances, described as a "nonverbal parallel to the Yup'ik language … Movement metaphors …" (Thomas, 2001, p. 278), had been a traditional source of community cohesion, survival, healing and maintenance of cultural values. An initiative to reignite traditional dance via the Chevak Cultural Heritage Programme had succeeded in reviving the interest in dance and combining the traditional with the new. The words of Yup'ik community leader Ulrick

Nayamin are indicative of why tapping into the learner's own dance is a worthwhile investment:

> By learning the dances, you young people will have weight so that nobody can brush you off the top of this earth. You will be the exciting ones because you have something of your own—your culture! (Thomas, 2001, pp. 279–280)

Indeed, the significance of and interest in a dance for a learner may *be* the sense of place, identity and belonging *in* the world that a dance brings with it, rather than a literal message or creative satisfaction.

My inquiry revealed that some teachers associated teaching about a culturally diverse range of dances contextually as an effective pedagogy in fostering their learners' identities. This is possibly surprising in terms of how Western creative dance dominated their praxis. This interrogation from within the ideology of dance education requires a further reflexive turn.

Refraction three—teaching that honours cultural differences of dance as a concept

In culturally responsive pedagogy there is an expectation to teach about dance as a cultural concept. Being mindful that some cultures do not have a word in their language equivalent to 'dance' as a Western concept (Peterson Royce, 2002), identifying dance as a concept involves consideration of the cultural significance of dance to the people from whose heritage it emanates. The concept of dance brings with it different ideologies from different cultural orders, and to assume that different cultures are working along the same social values as Eurocentric contemporary theatre dance or dance education requires re-examination from a twenty-first century, pluralist perspective.

The findings from my study revealed that every teacher included a creative dance activity when teaching a specific dance genre or style from contextual perspectives. One may ask why teachers did this, considering that it would add time to the teaching. It is by no means to be taken for granted that fusion of creative dance with dances from other cultures leads to furthering understanding of culturally diverse values. The teachers' view on creative dance came across as one in which it made contextual learning experiences more palatable, practical and interesting for the learner. This educational rationale, along with its underpinning ideology, featured regularly in the research participants' comments.

For instance, a group of secondary school teachers on the in-service course who chose to teach jazz dance for their peer assessment teaching presentation commented that their teaching "included giving students the opportunity to create their own movement motifs based around the jazz genre, as we felt it wasn't enough to just teach a jazz sequence". One of the teachers went on to say that

> it was important that students were given the opportunity to create for themselves, in order to give them ownership of their learning, final product and satisfaction in their dance achievements, thus enforcing the idea that dance aids self-esteem.

The claim of 'ownership', commonly acknowledged as resulting from individual creative dance making and associated 'fusion' dance, could raise contentious issues when considered as possibly blurring into individual ownership of a dance from another culture. Overlooking how some traditional dances are choreographed collectively and/or anonymously, unlike ballet and some contemporary dances, and how this can eat into the social, artistic and educational status and support given to them, strikes a further cautionary note (Kraut, 2009; Perpener, 1999).

In my inquiry, the descriptions given by some of the dance specialists in Tongan (Niulala Helu), Samoan (Keneti Muaiava) and Māori (Valance Smith) dances revealed how they approached innovation while being respectful of certain culturally codified dance vocabularies and in collaboration with their elders. Niulala Helu's description of how innovation in Tongan dance operates is representative of such a creative process:

> To introduce a new movement into Tongan dance I usually look for a Samoan movement and I take that … a movement that can be moulded into Tongan. Now the last 10 years I've introduced into Tonga the *fa'ataupati,* the slap dance, slowly let it infiltrate little by little. Tonga has its own slap dance but only one standard style. You have to add more, but … how I did it? In Tonga there's only four basic motifs in our dance, and those four have created so many more. And we've borrowed movements from Fiji, and I've noticed when I was learning from the masters how they borrowed it … they mould it and to make it as a motif. So for example [demonstrates with hand gesture], this is a Tongan motif. So if you borrow something you mould it and make it as a motif. Don't just use it and make it look contemporary … and what I've noticed is that the oldies they like it because it is made as a motif.

The other dance specialists were in agreement with Helu and they went to great lengths to differentiate between contemporary versions of their dance traditions as they see them and those that work in fusion with Western contemporary dance technique or hip-hop. One of the major differences was that the creative process deferred the individual sense of ownership to a larger collective one. In exploring how dances from diverse cultures interface with current creative dance pedagogy, I also draw attention to the threat of dilution, disappearance or acculturation of some cultural dance-making processes and the artists who practise them.

It is worth noting that cultural borrowing is a longstanding and complex practice. In 1888, having worked with Inuit communities in the Arctic region, anthropologist Franz Boas argued:

> It is not too much to say that there is no people whose customs have
> developed uninfluenced by foreign culture, that has not borrowed arts
> and ideas which it has developed in its own way. (1940, p. 631)

As cultural boundaries become permeable and overlap, dancers of one culture often turn to other cultures for their creative inspiration. However, "an outsider's appropriation of a cultural group's dance may be resented, even considered a form of theft or offense" (Hanna, 1999, p. 153). Moreover, if traditional innovators from some cultures work anonymously it could well appear to others as an open invitation for a creative 'free for all', rather than what it actually is, which is borrowing restricted by several parameters of dance vocabulary and form, cultural intention and conditions of performance. It seems likely that meaningful understanding of a dance as a cultural concept may not be possible without some knowledge of each culture's underlying rules. For instance, *Bharatha Natyam* improvisation is described as a negotiation of artistic freedom from within idiomatic traditional parameters. This description could also be applicable to creative dance, but the parameters are quite different. The movement codes, syntax and structures for *Bharatha Natyam* and creative dance run on genre-specific sets of rules, from within which they are "embellished according to the performer's design" (Heffner Hayes, 2003, p. 112). Consideration of how such thinking applies to creative dance brings with it issues of recognition and registration of our lack of knowledge about not only how dance is made in other cultures but how it is conceived of conceptually and valued culturally. Another issue latent within this refracted ray is the possibility of marginalising

some dances as 'cultural' from others as 'art'. In my inquiry, some teachers saw creative dance as separate from 'cultural' dance.

In culturally pluralist dance education when techniques of the creative improvisation process itself are imported into areas where they are not relevant, or welcome, ethical issues of cultural borrowing or appropriation could arise. In current dance education such work is often referred to as 'fusion dance', a concept that is itself worthy of greater scrutiny (Ashley, 2012b). However, for the purposes of this paper, I turn to the legacy of fusing dances from different cultures with creative/modern dance emanating from a long tradition of early twentieth century Western modern dance. Privileging the Western creative dance process over other cultures' approaches to innovation in dance could, arguably, result in a somewhat concerning hegemonic dominance by the creative dance legacy when making dances. Once cultural boundaries are crossed in creating dances, difficulties could emerge, for instance if educational progress and creativity are *assessed* from within Western aesthetic/artistic parameters. In terms of the dance component of the NZC, my argument here also reveals a distinct separation of the DI (making dance) and UC (contextual understanding) strands, and this is a question much deserving of further research. It also raises a question about how in creative dance learning experiences that, for example, fuse with Indian *Bharatha Natyam* the latter is taught contextually but not the former, privileging the dominant Western legacy with an insidious anonymity.

This spectral ray requires its own reflexive turn. In performing the turn, I emphasise that the benefits for learners to learn about culturally diverse dances from conceptual and contextual perspectives, in the fullest interrogatory sense, could be awarded educational value equitable to that awarded to learning to make creative dances.

REFLEXIVE SUMMARY

Mindful of the roles associated with creative dance in education, Warburton (2008) suggests that in bringing attention to "pedagogy as choreography, we might engender new kinds of dance, dances, dancing and dance education" (pp. 11–12). I wonder whether a new kind of dance education could be one which makes a reflexive turn to see itself from within. From this platform, addressing the blind spot that seems to be integral to some praxis in dance education currently, dances from different cultures could be better understood, treated with greater equity in the way that we teach them and less marginalised. Such an understanding could

offer a means of seeing dance education as a culturally pluralist, meaningful, sustainable and ethical option for teachers. It seems possible that this could be the case and is a topic that could be exciting for further research.

In the findings of their New Zealand study, Earl et al. (2009) remind us "culture counts" (p. 3). They report a need for considerably more research and dialogue about what culturally responsive pedagogy might entail in terms of praxis, pitfalls and support. They also draw attention to the need for teachers to always interrogate their own practice in relation to their students and the curriculum. I couldn't agree more, especially in investigating ways to encourage teachers to make reflexive turns, empowering them to make all cultures count. Perhaps, and more importantly, in dispelling an illusion that you can take dance out of the cultural 'hurly burly', issues of social inequity and injustices could emerge from studying dance as a viewing platform of culturally different knowledge.

In 1993, Cornel West (as cited in Perpener, 1999) described the emergence of a new generation of people, naming them the "new cultural workers", whose aim is to generate a more inclusive profile for art and culture, and to blur traditional academic and cultural boundaries in structuring a "new politics of difference". Looking back reflexively on my research journey, in reconceiving my role as a dance educator developing a propensity for wide-ranging intellectual consciousness, and engaging in the politics of difference as it is embodied and discussed within teaching about culturally different dances, I feel that I took on, unknowingly at first, some of the characteristics that West assigns to these cultural workers. Certain aspects of this journey should be mentioned as being special, and one such would be how learning from my research participants was a privilege and helped me to find a way through some complex issues and several serious obstacles. I remain ever grateful for their generous contributions.

REFERENCES

Ashley, L. (2010). Teaching dance from contextual perspectives in the New Zealand Curriculum: Concerns, dilemmas and opportunities in theory and practice (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Ashley, L. (2012a). Culturally different dances in the New Zealand arts curriculum: Understanding about fusion, tradition and making dances in context. *Te Kaharoa: The e-journal on Indigenous Pacific Issues, 1*(2), 96–138. Retrieved December 20, 2012, from http://tekaharoa.com/index.php/tekaharoa/issue/view/17

Ashley, L. (2012b). *Dancing with difference: Culturally diverse dances in education*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Ashley, L. (2013a). Connoisseurs' eyes on teaching dance from contextual perspectives. *New Zealand Journal of Research in Performing Arts and Education: Nga Mahi a Rehia, 4*. Retrieved May 3, 2013 from http://www.drama.org.nz/?cat=280

Ashley, L. (2013b). Dancing with cultural difference: Challenges, transformation and reflexivity in culturally pluralist dance education. *Dance Research Aotearoa, 1*(1), 5–23.

Barr, S. (2005). Reconstructing contemporary dance: An occasion for reflective learning. *Journal of Dance Education, 5(1)*, 5–10.

Best, D. (1999). Dance before you think. In G. McFee (Ed.), *Dance education and philosophy* (pp. 101–121). Oxford, England: Meyer & Meyer Sport.

Boas, F. (1940). *Race, language and culture*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Buck, R. (2003). *Teachers and dance in the classroom: "So do I need my tutu?"* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Chambers. I. (1994). *Migrancy, culture and identity*. London, England: Routledge.

Charmaz, K. (2006). Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis. London, England: Sage.

Connell, J. (2009). Dance education: An examination of practitioners' perceptions in secondary schools and the necessity for teachers skilled in the pedagogy and content of dance. *Research in Dance Education, 10*(2), 115–30.

Earl, L. M., Timperley, H., & Stewart, G. M. (2009). *Learning from QTR&D: Programme: Findings of the External Evaluation*. Toronto, ON: Aporia Consulting.

Geertz, C. (1983). Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Giddens, A. (2006, October 14). Misunderstanding multiculturalism. *Guardian*. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/oct/14/tonygiddens

Grau, A. (2007). Dance, identity, and identification processes in the postcolonial world. In S. Franco & M. Nordera (Eds.), *Dance discourses: Keywords in dance research* (pp. 189–210). London, England: Routledge.

Hanna, J. L. (1999). Partnering dance and education: Intelligent moves for changing times. University of Maryland, IL: Human Kinetics.

Hanstein, P. (1990). Educating for the future: A post-modern paradigm for dance education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 62*(2), 56–58.

H'Doubler, M. N, (1974). *Dance: A creative art experience*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Heffner Hayes, M. (2003). The writing on the wall: Reading improvisation in flamenco and postmodern dance. In A. Cooper Albright & D. Gere (Eds.), *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader* (pp. 105–118). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Jankovic, I. (2008). The quest for preserving and representing national identity. In S. B. Shapiro (Ed.), *Dance in a world of change* (pp. 17–40). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Kant, M. (2008). Practical imperative: German dance, dancers and Nazi politics. In N. Jackson & T. Shapiro-Phim (Eds.), *Dance, human rights and social justice: Dignity in motion* (pp. 5–19). Toronto, Canada: Scarecrow Press.

Kerr-Berry, J.A. (2012). Dance education in an era of racial backlash: Moving forward as we step backwards. *Journal of Dance Education, 12*(2), 48–53.

Kraut, A. (2009). Race-ing choreographic copyright. In S. L. Foster (Ed.), *Worlding dance* (pp. 76–97). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lepczyk, B. (2009). Celebrating the Laban legacy. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 80*(5), 4–5.

Marques, I. (1998). Dance education in/and the postmodern. In S. B. Shapiro (Ed.), *Dance, power and difference* (pp. 171–185). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Melchior, E. (2011). Culturally responsive pedagogy in the primary classroom. *Research in Dance Education, 12*(2), 119–135.

New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2000). *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (12711). Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2002). *Dancing the long white cloud* (10426 & 10428). Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum* (32646). Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Perpener, J. O., III. (1999). Cultural diversity and dance history research. In S. H. Fraleigh & P. Hanstein (Eds.), *Researching dance: Evolving modes of inquiry* (pp. 334–351). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Peterson Royce, A. (2002). *The anthropology of dance.* London, England: Dance Books.

Puri, R., & Hart-Johnson, D. (1995). Thinking with movement: Improvising versus composing? In B. Farnell (Ed.), *Human action signs in cultural context* (pp. 158–184). Metchuen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Risner, D., & Stinson, S. (2010). Moving social justice: Challenges, fears and possibilities in dance education. *International Journal of Education and the Arts, 11*(6), 1–26.

Salvara, M. I., Jess, M., Abbott, A., & Bognar, J. (2006). A preliminary study to investigate the influence of different teaching styles on pupils' goal orientations in physical education. *European Physical Education Review, 12*(1), 51–74.

Sansom, A. (2011). Movement and dance in young children's lives: Crossing the divide. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Stark, K. K. (2009). Connecting to dance: Merging theory with practice. *Journal of Dance Education, 9*(4), 61–8.

Stinson, S. (2005). Why are we doing this? *Journal of Dance Education, 5*(3), 82–89.

Stinson, S. (2010). Questioning our past and building a future: Teacher education in dance for the 21st Century. *Journal of Dance Education, 10*(4), 136–144.

Thomas, D. R. (2001). Yup'ik dance traditions: Innovation and survival. In J. LaPointe-Crump (Ed.), Transmigratory moves: Dance in global circulation. Proceedings of the 34th International Conference, Congress on Research in Dance (pp. 217–280). New York, NY: CORD.

Varela, C. (1994). Pocock, Williams, Gouldner: Initial reactions of three social scientists to the problem of objectivity. *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement, 8*(1), 43–64.

Warburton, E. C. (2008). Beyond steps: The need for pedagogical knowledge in dance. *Journal of Dance Education, 8*(1), 7–12.

Wittgenstein, L. (1980). *Remarks on the philosophy of psychology* (G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.; Vol. 1). Oxford, England: Blackwell.

---

[i] This article develops ideas from a paper that I gave in 2012 at the Contemporary Ethnography Across Disciplines conference (Ashley, 2013). I am positioning the previous paper as a springboard to explore further the application of reflexivity in dance education.

[ii] Erick Hawkins was a dancer and choreographer (1909-1994) whose dance technique is taught all over the world including here in New Zealand.