Making Connections: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Dance in the Classroom

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Abstract Bi-cultural perspectives and the development of culturally responsive pedagogy are increasingly acknowledged in teaching and teacher education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur within meaningful contexts where students' contributions are voiced and valued. This chapter explores ways that models and strategies for culturally responsive pedagogy apply to teaching and learning dance in the primary classroom. A brief overview of culturally responsive pedagogy from a Māori worldview provides a framework for the discussion. Observations and stories from classroom teachers and their students demonstrate how collaborative processes that involve critical thinking, teaching from existing strengths, and valuing students' prior knowledge and experience, develop increased connectedness between teachers and their students, students and each other, and students and dance.

Keywords Dance • Education • Culturally responsive • Pedagogy • Learning • Classroom • Culture • Curriculum • Connections

1 Introduction

Teachers in New Zealand primary schools are responsible for implementing the dance curriculum in the classroom and what they do has the potential to impact profoundly on the children they teach (Buck 2003). As a dance educator in initial teacher education, with a background in primary teaching, I believe that dance can play a vital role in developing connectedness in a culturally responsive classroom.

Bi-cultural perspectives and the development of culturally responsive pedagogies are increasingly acknowledged and valued in teaching and teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Government initiatives and educational research focussing

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on ways of improving educational outcomes for Māori students (Bishop et al. 2007; Ministry of Education 2013–2017), highlight the importance of the teacher's role in creating a culturally responsive environment for learning (Hynds et al. 2011; MacFarlane et al. 2007; Bishop and Berryman 2006). For this to happen, teachers need to be aware of and understand their personal biases, their own cultures, and more importantly, the biases and cultures of their students (Baskerville 2009). However, responding to the diverse needs and interests of students whose cultural and language backgrounds differ from their own can be challenging for teachers (Hynds et al. 2011). Acknowledging and understanding these differences encourages a classroom culture where all students feel welcomed and supported, and are provided with rich opportunities to learn (Chepyator-Thomson 1994).

Studies concerned with the impact of teacher expectation on student achievement (Bishop and Berryman 2006; Bishop and Glynn 1999; Hynds et al. 2011; Macfarlane et al. 2007) have found that student achievement is enhanced when students feel acknowledged and valued for their contributions, where, "students safely bring who they are and what they know into the learning relationship, and where what students know, and who they are, forms the foundations of interaction patterns in the classroom" (Bishop and Glynn 1999, pp. 165–166). The Te Kotahitanga Project (Bishop et al. 2007), designed to raise achievement for Māori students in New Zealand secondary schools, identified positive personal relationships as the most important indication of an effective teacher, concluding that students who have positive interactions with their teachers and peers in the classroom develop a sense of connectedness and belonging.

In this chapter I draw on current national and international research to discuss ways that dance experiences in the classroom develop connectedness. Students who are given opportunities to experience dance as participants, creators, viewers and critical inquirers, within social and cultural contexts that are relevant to their own lives, develop confidence in themselves as learners and as contributing members of a group (Melchior 2011). Narratives from three teachers and supporting comments from their students provide insights into how children make connections with their peers, with their learning, and with dance as a means of expression. To provide a framework for the discussion I give a brief overview of culturally responsive pedagogy from a Māori world-view and describe how the key concepts apply to arts education and dance in the New Zealand curriculum.

2 Background

2.1 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Alton-Lee's (2003) investigation into best practice in New Zealand education found that teaching in ways that are responsive to student diversity and cultural identity can have a positive impact on low and high achievers at the same time. As Macfarlane et al. (2007) noted, "All students benefit from being in a culturally inclusive classroom.

However many students from non-dominant cultures are not free to be whom and what they are when they go to school" (p. 71). Teachers who have high expectations of their students and actively engage them in learning increase student achievement. Conversely, teachers who have low expectations and engage in deficit theorising tend to blame their students for underachievement (Hynds et al. 2011). This attitude is commonly associated with negative outcomes for indigenous and other minoritised students (Castagno and Brayboy 2008; cited in Hynds et al. 2011, p. 340). Teachers who make a difference believe in their students' abilities to succeed and use a variety of teaching strategies to engage and challenge their students in learning. This requires a shift from a teacher-driven to a student-centred approach, where interactive discourse is encouraged and students have ownership of their learning (Hynds et al. 2011; Spiller 2013).

According to Darling-Hammond (2003) teacher quality and effectiveness is more consistently related to student achievement than is their subject content knowledge. Hynds et al.'s (2011) evaluation of the Kotahitanga Project highlights the importance of a positive learning environment to create a sense of belonging and whanau (family). *Whakawhanaungatanga* (the process of building relationships) is the key for improving behaviour and learning outcomes for Māori students (Bishop and Glynn 1999). A classroom with an atmosphere based on trust is a safe place to learn, where teachers listen to students and value their perspectives. Reciprocity is important when establishing trusting relationships, with teachers and students sharing their own lives and interests. Baskerville (2011) reported on a process of storytelling to activate student voice and build cross-cultural relationships and understandings in the drama classroom. As the teachers took part in the storytelling with the students all experienced the position of teacher and learner. Students' prior-knowledge and new knowledges were valued, connections between stories were made, and students' cultures were honoured. Collins and Ogier (2013) highlight the importance of the teacher's role in facilitating students' talk for learning by posing open questions that encourage and support students to form and articulate creative ideas and take risks in their learning.

2.2 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the Arts in Education

It is well documented that learning in the arts has the ability to make a positive difference to young people's lives by offering unique opportunities to make connections with other people's stories and experiences, and to imagine, enact and experience their world from different perspectives (Hindle et al. 2011; Baskerville 2009; Donelan 2009; Eisner 2002; Melchior 2006, 2011; Ministry of Education 2000, 2007). The *Champions of Change* (2002) report states:

> When well taught, the arts provide young people with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts and bodies. The learning experiences are real and meaningful for them" (cited in Melchior 2006, p. 12).

According to Donelan (2009), rich learning experiences in the arts promote embodied intercultural understanding, cultural knowledge and respect for differences, "enabling students to imagine, engage with, interpret and express a range of cultural experiences and perspectives – those that are familiar as well as those that are new and challenging" (p. 23). Hindle et al. (2011) concur, endorsing arts education as a vehicle for social change in the classroom through the creation of contemporary cultural knowledge that transforms the learning experience by enabling students to draw on contexts that are meaningful to them. They concluded that teachers who use culturally responsive pedagogies in the arts are more inclined to ask the kinds of open questions that engage students in higher-level thinking and co-construction of knowledge. The following statement in the New Zealand curriculum supports this notion:

> Arts education explores challenges, affirms, and celebrates unique artistic expressions of self, community and culture. It embraces toi Māori, valuing the forms and practices of customary and contemporary Māori performing, musical and visual arts (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 20).

The curriculum vision statement, which promotes the development of young people as, "…lifelong learners who are confident and creative, connected, and actively involved" (p. 4), has significance for dance and how it is taught.

2.3 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Dance in the Classroom

Research highlights two basic approaches to teaching dance in the classroom; a child-centred approach based on interaction and discovery, and a discipline-based approach, based on transmission of specific movement vocabularies by the 'expert' teacher (Bresler 2004, cited in Giguere 2011, p. 9). The transmission model is the way many teachers feel most comfortable teaching dance, as it is also the way they were taught (Melchior 2006). Dance education in the classroom involves much more than the mastery of steps (Buck 2003). There is a strong emphasis on socially constructed learning (Vygotsky 1962). Teaching dance as an active meaning-making process rather than a transmission activity requires an interactive approach where teachers and students co-construct learning through the relationships they develop with each other and with the curriculum. This includes choosing appropriate content or contexts for learning, and teaching in ways that actively motivate and engage all students, creating an emotional response (Zavatto and Gabbei 2008). By recognising student diversity and relating movement vocabulary to their experiences, there is a shift from *disembodied* knowing to *embodied* knowing (Shapiro 1998).

In Aotearoa New Zealand generalist classroom teachers are mostly responsible for teaching dance as they are able to make connections within and across the curriculum to find relevant and meaningful contexts for teaching and learning dance (Melchior 2006). In supporting the notion of teaching dance across the curriculum,

Bolwell (2011) promotes, "…a re-visioning that is filled with new challenges and new possibilities" (p. 13). Integrating relevant dance ideas within the context of other learning allows students to draw on rich concrete experiences and images for movement exploration (Donelan 2009). A culturally responsive learning environment for dance is fostered when movement concepts are related to students' prior knowledge and experiences within structures that encourage creativity through co-operation and collaboration, leading to a sense of achievement and success for all. Keun and Hunt (2006) reinforce the importance of the teacher's role in enabling and nurturing children's creativity, by providing an environment that stimulates students' creative ideas, encourages responses and, most importantly, makes children feel that their ideas are valued. This enables what Craft (2000, cited in Keun and Hunt 2006) defines as "Possibility thinking", which involves being "imaginative, posing questions, and play" (p.37). Students need to be introduced to a broad range of movements and activities in an interactive learning environment. Exploring movement concepts through guided improvisation, open-ended problem solving, sharing, responding and critical reflection enables students to construct their own meanings of dance (Buck 2003; Chappell 2010; Melchior 2011; Renner 2007). Teacher participation and modelling enhances student motivation and engagement and is an important component of an experiential approach to learning (Hindle et al. 2011).

2.4 Dance in the New Zealand Curriculum

The New Zealand curriculum describes dance as "expressive movement that has intent, purpose, and form" (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 20) and defines a concept of dance literacy:

> Students develop literacy in dance as they learn about, and develop skills in, performing, choreographing, and responding to a variety of genres from a range of historical and contemporary contexts (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 20).

Hong (2000) further explains dance literacy as "a process of meaning-making which opens doors to new ways of seeing, new ways of thinking and therefore new ways of knowing the world" (p. 2). Hong regards dance literacy as serving two essential and complementary purposes: the development of literacy in and about dance, and the development of learning through dance, where dance experiences can be used to enhance learning in other areas. The following statement from the curriculum supports this:

> In dance education students engage in ways that integrate thinking, moving and feeling. They explore and use dance elements, vocabularies, processes, and technologies to express personal, group and cultural identities, to convey and interpret artistic ideas, and to strengthen social interaction (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 20).

Students learn in, through and about dance through four interrelated curriculum strands (key aspects of learning): Understanding [dance] in context; Developing practical knowledge; Developing ideas; Communicating and interpreting. Students develop an awareness and understanding of dance in sociocultural contexts past and present, with particular focus on the unique forms of traditional Māori dance and multicultural dance heritages of New Zealand society. They develop practical knowledge in dance and extend their personal movement vocabularies as they explore dance elements (body, space, time, energy and relationships) and other dance genres and styles. They develop ideas in dance as they select and combine dance elements and explore choreographic processes in response to a range of stimuli. They communicate and interpret dance in a variety of informal and formal settings, as they share, perform, interpret and evaluate, responding to their own and others' dance (Ministry of Education 2000, 2007). A spiral process of action and reflection, where students continuously build on and revisit previous learning, "ensures that students' learning is in-depth, relevant and meaningful" (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 20).

Social constructivist and socio-cultural theories highlight the importance of social and cultural contexts in learning. This involves an holistic approach based on collaboration, shared responsibility and shared ownership of the classroom where there are opportunities to do things differently, to admire creativity and allow students to be true to themselves (MacFarlane et al. 2007).

3 A Case Study

3.1 Setting the Scene

In my role as dance educator in the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, I spent 10 years as a dance facilitator providing professional development and support for teachers in their classroom during the implementation phase of the arts [dance] curriculum. As Hill et al. (2002) point out, teacher professional development is most effective when it is negotiated and designed to meet the needs of individual teachers and their students within the context of the classroom over a period of time:

> If teachers are to be able to improve practice they need to be able to take risks, make mistakes, and engage in honest self-reflection. This requires a culture where relationships bind them together in a supportive, enquiring community (Hill et al. 2002, p. 2).

In order to involve teachers in the process of identifying and explaining specific issues and challenges in their practice an action research approach to the teacher professional development was considered appropriate (Merriam 1998).

As a participant researcher I played a dual role in facilitating and interpreting (Stake 1995) the actions and reflections of the teachers through an experiential learning cycle, which emphasises experience, reflection, thought, and action (Kolb

1984, cited in McDonald and Melchior 2007). This involves a process of goal setting, planning, observation, modelling, team teaching, and critical reflection. Semi-structured interviews and journalling were the main data gathering tools, with baseline data emerged from classroom observations and initial interviews with the teachers. Journaling was used to reflect on the impact of teaching on student participation and engagement. Interviews with the teachers towards the end of the professional development period were recorded on digital audio to evaluate the process in relation to their identified goals. Student responses to their dance experiences were also recorded (Melchior 2011).

I decided to focus on three teachers; Alice, Kirsten and Rita (whose names have been changed to protect their identity) with whom I developed an ongoing relationship following the period of professional development. Alice was teaching dance as a performing arts specialist at an intermediate school and Kirsten and Rita were generalist classroom teachers at the same primary school. I visited Alice on a number of occasions to carry out observations and engage in critical reflection, as I wanted to find out what strategies Alice used to create a safe, supportive and stimulating environment for teaching and learning dance. I used insights gained form Alice's practice to inform my interactions with Kirsten and Rita, who were introducing dance into their programmes for the first time and claimed to have little prior knowledge or experience of dance or how to teach it. They had both identified the same goal; to teach dance in ways that would motivate and actively engage all their students in learning by making dance an integral part of their classroom programme.

A Māori world-view of culturally responsive pedagogy provided a framework for the discussion of the teachers' experiences with dance in their classrooms. Macfarlane (2004) identifies factors for culturally responsive pedagogy through five cultural concepts: *whanaungatanga* (reciprocal relationships), *rangitiriatanga* (teacher effectivess), *manaakitanga* (ethos of caring), *kotahitanga* (unity and bonding) and *pumanauratanga* (the beating heart). I have used Macfarlane's 'Educultural Wheel' as a deductive categorising lens for reporting on teaching and learning dance in Alice, Kirsten and Rita's classrooms in the following discussion (Melchior 2011).

4 Findings and Discussion

The first concept, *whanaungatanga*, evident through the reciprocal relationships that teachers develop with their students (Macfarlane 2004) is an essential element of culturally responsive pedagogy. Alice, Kirsten and Rita had already established positive learning environments through the responsive relationships they had with their students. They knew their students well, and considered their interests and learning needs as paramount when planning their teaching programmes. They acknowledged student diversity in their classrooms. As Kirsten elaborated:

> In my class I have Māori, Sāmoan, African, Korean and Pākehā (NZ European) – mostly girls – and the girls dominate. In dance everyone is involved and it equalises them. The boys love dance and they really benefit from working co-operatively in groups. They thrive on problem-solving activities with multiple solutions.

The teachers practised *Ako* (Royal-Tangaere 1997), a concept of reciprocal teaching and learning that provides opportunities for students to share their prior knowledge and participate in learning on an equal level with their teachers, building mutual respect and positive relationships. Alice noted that working in pairs or groups enabled students to contribute ideas and learn from each other, saying: "The students learn to work co-operatively as a group – they don't argue about who's in the group – they negotiate when and how they move." Kirsten and Rita were delighted at their students' willingness to participate in dance activities and contribute to the group process. Kirsten described how her students were reacting:

> There are some children with extreme behaviors in this class. They were unwilling to participate [in dance] at first as they don't like working with others, but now they all join in most of the time. They still find the work a challenge but they are making progress, and they are enjoying dance. [Child] still prefers to work by himself so I let him, because he is participating and that's an achievement.

Rita had a similar response, explaining: "The children have made huge progress with their ability to work co-operatively in a group and their willingness to share their dance with the rest of the class."

For reciprocal relationships to be fostered and developed in the classroom it is also important for students to learn something about their teacher's interests and concerns (Hynds et al. 2011). As a way of recognising and valuing Kirsten and Rita's prior knowledge and experience I encouraged them to identify their strengths and interests and to use these as starting points for teaching dance.

Rita drew on her expertise in Indian dance forms, bringing her cultural identity into the classroom for the first time; something she had never before considered appropriate or even relevant. She told her students stories about her childhood and a special dance performed to celebrate Diwali (New Year). Rita showed them the dance on video and asked them to identify movements they liked. They practised their movements and added rhythm patterns to recreate their own class dance. Rita explained, "We tried out everyone's movements to respect everyone's ideas and see which ones we would keep." The children were so proud of their dance they asked to share it with the rest of the school in assembly. Rita was genuinely surprised at the children's interest in her culture and their enthusiastic responses and she felt acknowledged and appreciated for who she was. This experience was affirming and empowering for Rita, who exclaimed, "I've become more confident to organise dance and talk about it, because I really love it and I'm so excited!"

Kirsten utilised her passion for language and literature by adapting strategies she used for teaching written language (brainstorming ideas, demonstration, individual and group work, reviewing and revising, publishing) as a model for teaching dance. She spoke enthusiastically about how this process worked for her:

> I make links to literacy. We read big books [large size picture books for early readers designed for shared reading] and we find the action words. Dance action words are now in the language the children use in class. Dance is great for language development. So many descriptive words go with dancing and it's such rich language, and there's the instructional language too. It's great for ESOL kids… 'Hear it, do it, remember it.' When dancing children revisit movement ideas and vocabulary and basic words are reinforced, adding more layers and challenges each time.

The second aspect of McFarlane's Educultural Wheel, *rangatiratanga*, is evident in the teacher's assertive presence and awareness that good teaching is culturally inclusive. This includes positive behaviour management strategies, understanding and warmth, clear expectations, knowing what and how to teach and why it is important (Macfarlane 2004). Effective arts teachers set appropriate challenges in the classroom, expect students to be responsible for their own learning, as well as supporting others' learning and behavior, and use co-operative learning strategies so that students learn to work with one another (Hindle et al. 2011).

Alice explained the expectations she had for student achievement in her dance classes and also for herself as a teacher:

> My job is to provide opportunities for students to excel in their learning and to share and present their dance works. It's not about me and my ideas; it's about them and their ideas. I believe that socialisation is the key to learning and social constructivism the best model to learn from.

She talked about the importance of using relevant and meaningful contexts for teaching and learning dance by making links to other learning in the classroom:

> The kids [students] were doing safety and well being and making up speeches in class. They danced their speech topics (prisons, alcohol, drug abuse etc.) and they made a deeper connection with their learning in a physical and emotional way.

Kirsten described how dance opened up new possibilities and ways of learning for her students. As well as teaching language structures and maths concepts through dance she used dance as a way of reinforcing their knowledge and understandings of other learning. She described one of these contexts:

> We're doing '*Me in my environment'* and bringing in a Māori perspective, using Māori movement words for the elements [the guardians of nature] and learning Māori movement patterns that the children can use to create their own dances about the environment. They have such creative ideas; they blow me away!

Kirsten and Rita both discovered the importance of providing appropriate scaffolding for learning in the dance lesson so that children are not frustrated by something that is too hard or bored by something that is too easy:

> I started off by modelling [ways of moving] different body parts and responding to action words, to build up confidence…now I teach dance in a way that connects with other learning (Kirsten).
>
> We work a lot with words; dance language, with lots of scaffolding through individual exploration and discussion. They transfer these skills into creating their own dances. At the moment we're doing water. Dance can make the abstract more real (Rita).

They often brought their classes together to share dance work or to participate in collaborative dance experiences. I was invited to come and watch their students performing a combined class dance they had made in response to their science learning about space and the planets. The children were obviously excited about their dance and were keen to tell me about their particular contributions to the creative process. I captured some of their comments below:

> Our group is showing what's in space. We've got a comet, Hubble and earth – Hubble takes pictures in space (boy, age 6).
>
> We were doing earth spinning round and making day and night, and astronauts bouncing (girl, age 7).
>
> Our dance is about grey earth and the sun flashing light on earth. The earth is spinning round (girl, age 6).
>
> The earth is tilted slightly – we can show it with our bodies. We do moon walking in slow motion' cause there's no gravity (boy, age 7).

Rita explained the process:

> Each child came up with a movement and taught the others in the group. They all know exactly what they're doing and which aspect they're representing…stars, comets, meteors, planets. The children have ownership – they develop confidence with something to share. They know everyone gets a turn and they are all going to learn each other's moves. I can't believe I've done it all myself or rather, they've done it!

The third concept, *manaakitanga* (the ethos of caring), is the foundation for successful and reciprocal teaching and learning experiences. Teachers provide a safe, comfortable learning environment for their students where common ground is established and the students are actively engaged in their learning (Macfarlane 2004). Students are encouraged to be role models for their peers through modelling and assuming leadership roles. This is a way of scaffolding learning by making concepts easily understandable to everyone, including students with other languages and students with special learning needs (LePage et al. 2005). Movement and dance are effective ways for these children to express and communicate their ideas and feelings.

Alice, Kirsten and Rita all talked about students in their class who had special learning needs and found it difficult to socialise with their peers. They noticed how these children developed confidence and were able to connect with others through participating in dance experiences. Rita expressed her delight at the way her students were able engage with dance, explaining the impact on her EAL (English as another language) students and an autistic child:

> Dance is wonderful for EAL students developing language – not just dance words, descriptive language. I was blown away when [child] contributed in the circle! He said 'I feel cold' and made a movement to show how he felt.
>
> [Child] just loves to dance – he goes from group to group joining in – the kids are really supportive.

Kirsten and Alice reported similar observations:

> [Child] has auditory processing problems; she has difficulty socialising in a group as she finds it hard to make decisions, but she loves to dance. She made up a movement so I put

her in a group and the other children copied her movement. For the first time she was like any other kid in the class (Kirsten).

[Child] is physically uncoordinated but he likes dance. He has lots of ideas and because he can choose what and how he wants to dance he succeeds (Alice).

In a culturally responsive environment teachers are encouraged to involve parents/caregivers and families in the classroom, and to engage the support of community people as resources. This creates possibilities for rich learning experiences in dance where the teacher becomes a learner alongside the students. A parent of one of Alice's students came in and taught a Sāmoan sasa to the class. The children learnt a variety of traditional movement patterns and the stories behind them before selecting and combining elements to create movements representing different occupations in their own communities. Alice described the process:

> We learnt the song and the traditional sasa movements first as a class. Then in groups they made up their own actions to represent each line of the song. The children really enjoyed creating their own movements within the familiar structure of the sasa and extending the dance from sitting to standing to travelling.

The fourth concept, *kotahitanga* (unity and bonding), is evident in the teachers' inclusive teaching strategies, behaviour management and positive feed-back (Macfarlane 2004). Teachers who respect cultural differences are more likely to believe that students from non-dominant groups are capable learners (LePage et al. 2005), thus creating *kotahitanga*. Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are encouraged to explore and operate by the underlying principles of partnership, protection and participation as represented within the Treaty of Waitangi (Hindle et al. 2011). In Alice's dance classes these principles are evident through power sharing; reciprocal rights and responsibilities in the classroom:

> I say to my children "You bring your identity and your physicality into this space. You bring who you are as a dancer – hip-hop, crumping, rugby – and we build on these experiences.

Alice described one of the many opportunities she provides for her students to explore and express their identities through dance:

> We looked at the Treaty [of Waitangi] from the children's perspectives and through drama and dance interpreted experiences of early settlers coming to New Zealand. The children made artefacts and had to dance them. Their solo dance artworks were integrated into a drama performance. They showed perspectives of Māori and their gods, the missionaries and their god, traders, whalers, etc. They had to do their own research. Some children chose their ancestors…it was an amazing experience…everyone learnt so much and developed an understanding from both sides. They said things like "I didn't realise…now I know, now I understand.

In her classes there was a blending of the distinction between the teacher and the learner and a strong feeling that everyone wanted to be there. Comments from some of her students elaborate:

We're all bonded because we work together (girl, age 12).

We can tell a story through dance…we communicate well together and we co-operate with each other (boy, age 11).

People give good feedback to each other…it gives us confidence (girl, age 11).

> It's more fun than in class…we're really happy when we're here…we're happy sometimes in class, but not the same sort of happy (boy, age 12).
>
> When I get back to the classroom it feels like a part of me just died (girl, age 12).

The central concept, *pumanauratanga* (the beating heart), extends outwards to the four interconnected concepts in the 'Educultural wheel' (Macfarlane 2004). By making the classroom a culturally responsive place for Māori students, all students benefit, with increased 'connectedness' between the teacher and the students, the students and each other, and the students and their learning. Alice, Kirsten and Rita recognised the potential for dance as an opportunity to involve children in a creative process, which involves working in groups, sharing ideas, feelings, and experiences and connects them with their learning in a different way. With a focus on process and discovery, through clearly structured learning activities and open-ended tasks, enhanced by effective questioning, demonstrations and formative feedback, the teachers were able to co-construct their own meanings of dance with their students. Buck (2003) observed that teachers who see themselves as being actively involved in a creative process feel more confident about teaching dance, and this was certainly the case for Kirsten and Rita. They each exclaimed:

> I'm more confident to teach dance now that I know how much the kids love it and how well they respond. The flow over into the classroom is really obvious (Kirsten).
>
> I just don't want to stop [teaching dance] now – the kids have developed so much confidence and they love it – I'm going to keep doing it. I find it hard to fit it in but it's worth it (Rita).

When reflecting on the value of dance as an embodied way of knowing Kirsten noted that participating in dance helped them to develop confidence and increased their ability to make connections with each other, and with their learning: "Dance enables the children to shine who wouldn't otherwise … children who have difficulty with formal learning in class." She was convinced that making dance an integral part of her classroom programme benefitted all her students, often in ways she did not expect. Alice, Kirsten and Rita continued to find ways to motivate and engage their students in dance by choosing meaningful contexts for learning. Displays of dance terminology, captioned photos and children's written responses to dance experiences on their classroom walls, made dance visible and valued, for all to see.

5 Conclusion

All three teachers co-constructed their own meanings of dance in the classroom with their students through rich contexts for learning that related to the students' lived experiences (Shapiro 1998). This aligns with Craft's (2000) research (cited in Chappell 2010), which highlights the importance of teachers acknowledging children's contributions to the creative process by allowing then to take ownership of the process as well as the product. Dance taught as creative problem-solving

encourages multiple solutions and promotes higher order thinking. Students who are able to express ideas and emotions during the creative process of dance making are also developing thinking and reasoning skills, as they question, analyse and evaluate (Giguere 2011).

The teachers were encouraged to utilise and value their pedagogical knowledge and use their curriculum strengths and interests to develop effective strategies for teaching dance, taking opportunities and negotiating barriers as they arose (Buck 2003). They recognised that children learn in different ways and that effective learning comes from challenge and a sense of freedom and discovery that fosters ownership (Sansom 2009). Although they had already established safe and trusting classroom environments where students were willing to participate and take risks in their learning, they each acknowledged the positive effects that dance experiences had on their students and their learning. They talked about enhanced relationships, with increased connectedness between the students, and with dance as a way of expressing their learning.

This case study adds to the body of knowledge about culturally responsive pedagogy and dance in the primary classroom and highlights possibilities for dance as an integral part of children's education and development. Research into student perceptions of how they make connections through dance learning would produce further insights. As Sansom (2009) reiterates, "Dance, as an embodied understanding of ourselves, can connect to a moral and ethical pedagogy that not only honours the life of the child but also makes possible a new way to envisage being human" (p. 161). When students are given rich learning opportunities to participate in dance in a positive and supportive environment, where they are encouraged to talk about their experiences and have choices within tasks, they are more likely to connect with dance as an important part of their learning (Renner 2007). Quality teachers are constantly searching for different ways to motivate and engage their students in learning and I hope more generalist primary teachers will be inspired to integrate dance into their students' learning.

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