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Towards Vocational Training of the South African Dancer: Anxiety or Agency?

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Abstract

The dance world is dominated by instilling technique and discipline in the dance training. Technique and discipline have been inculcated through training regimes that are dogmatically transferred through the generations — from teacher to dancer — and who in turn perpetuate technique and discipline in their teaching. Within a multicultural setting, dancers are required to start afresh and to subscribe to a standardisation that is often unattainable due to gender, physique, and bias. The standardisation reinforces a coloniality of power. This article examines this phenomenon and serves to promote inclusive strategies towards training vocational dance. Theories of learning are explored that advocate towards a long-term transformation strategy that takes the notions of deficit dancers and the coloniality of power within the dance education system into account. Consideration is also afforded to Nakata's (1998) cultural interface theories, which incorporate these aspects with a strategy on dance vocational training — the constructs of a professional learning community (PLC) that may not be seamless in implementation. Through reflective and reflexive inquiry, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) somatic training modules are case studies for a gap analysis framing of such a strategy. By actively participating in co-creating new knowledge and futures, a sense of agency is afforded the individual student.

Keywords: dance; vocational training; somatics; coloniality of power; arts education

Introduction

It is widely accepted that vocational dance and physical theatre training is informed by history, beliefs, philosophy, culture, norms and standards, conventions, responsibilities, and attitude. Whether consciously or not, identity within teaching and learning is effected by these factors as it reciprocates through the teacher, the student, and the collective. However, dance pedagogy within education and practice is, often, perpetuated through authoritarianism. The implication is that successive students enter the profession with very little more than the ability to “teach how I was taught.”

Within the South African multicultural setting, dancers are expected to subscribe to a standardisation that is often unattainable once entering vocational training. The effect on creative processes of dance making, choreography, teaching, and production is often revealed in disrespectful borrowing of styles and steps, “fusions” and misappropriations.

Training therefore emerges as a disembodied¹ vocational training for the performing dance artist. The benchmarking of dance training is technical proficiency and standards that offer a limited and prescriptive variety of dance forms and styles. This reinforces a coloniality of power and a loss of identity due to gender, physique, and bias. Therefore, within vocational dance and physical theatre training in South Africa, the continuing perpetuation of coloniality of power in andragogic² practice has negatively affected the success of professional learning communities. Inherent somatic and identity is lost to conformity of industry requirements and performance norms and standards.

This article explores the current identity crises of the South African dance practitioner within vocational training and education. It provides a gap analysis towards formulating a strategy that embraces agency as a key variant for multicultural learning through investigating metacognition, coloniality and perpetuation of power plays within dance and physical theatre vocational training. The article further envisions this strategy towards training to incorporate individual contribution towards the collective learning experience that will translate anxiety to agency. By synthesising Nakata’s (1998) “cultural interface theory” with the professional learning community concept (DuFour 2004), this proposed strategy will serve to counteract deficit views of culture (Buxton,

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- 1 Disembodied dance training focuses on the “for the body” concept that does not integrate the mind in a holistic embodied manner of learning/application.
 - 2 Andragogy is synonymous with adult education. According to Malcolm Knowles (1984), andragogy is the art and science of adult learning, thus andragogy refers to any form of adult learning. For this article, the articulation towards andragogy is pertinent due to the specificity of vocational higher education training within a tertiary institution. These methods may be transferable back towards pedagogical practice. The use of pedagogy and andragogy is used interchangeably to denote that which is rooted in the teaching of children within the schooling developmental stages (pedagogy) and that which is acquired during/for adult education (andragogy).

2017) through the ability to implement critical reflective practices without losing individual cultural identity.

The South African Dance Student

The South African dance student has the following two options for continuing studies at tertiary level: dance programmes that include creative movement and dance techniques, or theatre programmes (offered within drama courses as physical theatre) that incorporate movement studies but are teaching dance technique. Specifically, the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) Department of Performing Arts (DPA) will be used as a case study analysis towards framing an alternative learning-centred strategy. The TUT DPA is unique as it is the only national higher education institution offering both dance as well as physical theatre within a performing arts qualification. The DPA programme offers both undergraduate and post-graduate opportunities in dance vocational training of styles, techniques, and affiliated practices. Also, the Theatre Arts & Design (TAD) stream offers an elective specialisation course in physical theatre at the graduate level that is fed by the undergraduate compulsory subjects of movement and embodiment training for actors.³

Most significant is the multicultural variety of students that is predominant within these courses. Such students possess inherent somatic skills and metacognitive dexterity yet are still prone to deficits. These elements need to be elaborated to determine a need for an altered strategy.

Inherent Somatics

For the multicultural African dancer, the mind and body are traditionally conceived as one and the same: “The peculiarity of the African tradition [*sic*] is that it ... gives primary importance to the body, the necessary intermediary without which spiritual life would be an abstraction” (Tierou 1992, 12). African dance has always been a part of the oral and kinetic traditions that are inherent to the African traditions where these modes are manifested as oral “text” presented as visual, kinetic, or sensory (Welsh-Asante 2000, 5). Chinyowa (2015, 15) asserts that “[African] dance should be regarded as an expression of desire to use the most immediate instrument, the physical body, to communicate needs and aspirations in ways that lie beyond ordinary speech.”

3 It is relevant to note that the physical theatre and movement modules offered within the TAD stream are unique compared to other similar national courses. These courses do not include dance technique as their foundation. The deviation from the norm came about specifically knowing that there is a dance qualification already offered in the faculty. Therefore, these movement and physical theatre courses are built around the body in space and time: physical storytelling, mimodrama, plastiques, masks and characterisation, composition, and expressionism, as well as alternative physical performance spaces and modes.

Thomas (2003, 82) states that the examination of dance from an ethnographic viewpoint involves “treating dance as a kind of cultural knowledge, a somatic mode of attention which incorporates mental and emotional aspects, elements of cultural history and belief systems.” Schipper (1986) affirms that within African dance there is a significance and continuity of tradition. Furthermore, Ajayi (1998, 185) states that the nature of African dance is both a sign and a vehicle of communication. It can express an action and an idea, as well as an emotion. To this end, “traditionalists describe the dancing body in Africa as a worshipping and worshiper body. It is a medium that embodies experiences of life, pleasure, enjoyment, and sensuality” (Mans 2004, 79).

Only through the examination of ritual practice and cultural performance can African dance be adequately understood. The difference found in Western theatre and African dance performance is that its main appeal is ritualistic, abstract, and physical, rather than verbal or textual. It could also be viewed in its power of the collaborative and collective because audience participation forms part of the performance. This then shows that African ritual dance performance is dynamic in nature and capable of uplifting the spirit of society through an inherent somatic understanding and application (Csordas 1993).

Metacognition towards Self-actualisation

To counter the continuation of disembodiment in the vocational training, Donald (2002, 270) advocates that “the dancer needs a substantial metacognitive, or self-evaluative, capacity.” Eddy (2009, 23) further encourages: “The dancer of the twenty-first century [should be] well poised to be creative, deeply conscious, and supportive of a creative, aware culture, and contribute generously to somatic scholarship.” These statements are highly compatible with a teaching and learning environment where pedagogical choice and practice support holistic dance training and embody the transformation of the individual and the collective.

This drive towards self-actualisation (Maslow 2000) is enabled through a sense of the realisation or fulfilment of one’s talents and capabilities. For the vocational student, the development of attributes to knowledge is imperative. Towards this development, the somatic training philosophy should incorporate a sense of creativity linked with metacognitive qualities including self-reflection, self-efficacy and resilience for the teacher and the dancer within vocational training.

Metacognition, or thinking about one’s thinking, is key to facilitating lasting learning experiences and developing life-long learning. Metacognitive knowledge (Flavell 1979) includes: person-knowledge or understanding one’s own capabilities; task-knowledge which relies on how difficult the individual perceives the task to be, as well as their self-confidence; and conditional-knowledge or one’s ability to use strategies to learn information. These metacognitive types are applicable within the training of dancers.

These qualities may be present in the vocational student when they register, however, they are not necessarily acknowledged or positively developed. Particularly in the TUT

arts environment, the students' sense of their creative abilities is prime, often in direct contrast to their sense of capabilities towards knowledge acquisition. The students have grown up "being different" within the schooling environment, whether this means being labelled the "difficult student" in the class for lack of concentration or interest in the subject matter, the "weak learner" or "learning challenged" as they do not conform to the prescriptive rigid cognitive learning styles. Instead, the students find solace in creative outlets and immerse themselves in these activities towards improving their skills, or merely being acknowledged for being accomplished within these spheres. Their sense of knowledge acquisition is weakened or broken down to the extent that they believe that they cannot or should not apply theoretical competence.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2008) define metacognition to include: reflection, or "thinking about what we know," and self-regulation, or "managing how we go about learning." Most specifically, the term self-regulation is delineated within academic self-regulation as the process through which "individuals become proactive seekers, generators, and processors of information, [and] is widely acknowledged as how students transform their mental abilities into academic skills" (Schunk and Zimmerman 1998, 1–2; 225).

These processes are applicable to both pedagogical and andragogical applications. Where research revealed that for a student to be successful, they displayed personal initiative and self-regulatory control regarding their sources of motivation, choice of learning methods, forms of behavioural performance, and use of social and physical environmental resources. Students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviourally active participants in their own learning (Bandura 1996; Zimmerman 1989).

Within TUT, students are found to display a strong sense of self-regulation towards their practical abilities and motivation towards improving these skills, especially within the discipline of somatics that feeds these inherent capabilities. This is directly proportional to their self-efficacy, which manifests as a "can do"-cognition that reflects a person's sense of control over their environment and an optimistic belief of being able to alter challenging environmental demands by means of their own behaviour (Burch et al. 2016). Perceived self-efficacy exerts its influence through four major processes (cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective processes) and operates at three different levels to contribute to academic development (student, teachers, and faculty) (Burch et al. 2016).

The TUT creative student unconsciously forgoes the theoretical knowledge acquisition in favour of understanding the principles associated with the improvement of the practical skills and technique. This is still cognitive, where the self-efficacy manifests in motivation towards the selective process of cognitive development. The segregation is further reinforced by the teachers, and practically favoured within vocational education and training. However, the students and teachers should perhaps be made conscious of these epistemological choices and encouraged to consider developing their

theoretical prowess for a holistic embodied approach. Innovation and development of creative somatic practice through self-efficacy will in turn give rise to agency.

Yet, students within the TUT environment are more prone to displaying a sense of resilience. While self-efficacy influences decision-making throughout the course of one's life, resilience is mainly defined by coping adaptively with traumatic stressors. Hence, it is closely linked to the occurrence of demanding situations that one must overcome (Schwarzer and Warner 2012, 140). Within the South African landscape, the reality remains that most citizens grow up in adversity, experiencing traumatic stressors daily, either directly or indirectly (Lockhat and van Niekerk 2000). This adversity manifests as "resilience" in coping mechanisms. Resilient persons bend without breaking, and they quickly rebound from adversity, and this is reflected in human adaptive systems (Masten 2001). Understanding the dynamics of resilience becomes more important as the necessity increases for learning ways to overcome the effects of difficult life experiences.

As TUT is a university of technology, pragmatic and experiential training is favoured. TUT accepts students with a lower APS score than that required for a "traditional university." Therefore, there is an opportunity for students to further their education, although they may to all intents and purposes have not been afforded such at a university that favours philosophical research. There is also an influx of students who are from previously marginalised communities and who may still live in adverse conditions such as child-headed households, or in impoverished districts. For these students, their sense of resilience is high.

Still, this resilience is not acknowledged, especially within dance training. Instead, the student is "broken down" even further within the training regime that is paradoxically attributed towards building resilience in physical dexterity and capabilities of a professional dancer. This often results in students dropping out, which in turn contributes to the attrition rates of the university.

The Deficit Student

Within the revised curriculum context of the South African education system, effort has been made to embrace the unique contribution of the individual to the teaching and learning environment by incorporating values of inclusivity, differentiation, and addressing barriers to teaching and learning within a decolonial approach to curriculum delivery and assessment practice (Nithi and Engelbrecht 2018; Walton 2018). The inclusivity relies on the student's prior knowledge and attitude that they bring with them into the learning environment (Landsberg, Kruger, and Swart 2019). Accordingly, the "ideal student" can be described as one who is supported and nurtured through the various phases of development, with valued demonstration of the characteristics and distinctions that make them unique, through contact with the "ideal teacher" who is well versed in and adept at recognising and embracing the whole individual within a successful learning community that acknowledges and welcomes the individual's

meaningful contribution to society. This is often achieved within the framework of competency in intelligence-biased testing or intelligence-biased teaching (Martschenko 2018) which determine deviations from a/the norm. The reality of implementing such an inclusive education in formative dance training presents a less-than-ideal conflict: the learner is measured against a/the predisposed norm. Within various communities, these deviations have different values. In one instance, an individual may be isolated, whereas in another, the same individual may be integrated. The various communal values inform the perceived identity of the individual.

Ultimately, the student is filtered through a conscious or unconscious non-compliance to a/the norm, according to standardised biases in the dance community. In turn, increased expectation, not inherent to the contribution, drives efforts towards compliance. One such example taken from the historical gap in South African education between the privileged minority groups and the marginalised majority still leaves most “underperforming” schools in the previously marginalised communities (Legotlo 2014). Labels such as “underperforming” further contribute greatly to the individual and collective capacity towards resilience (Naicker, Grant, and Pillay 2016).

Education simultaneously bases high expectations on bias and successful management of individual resilience. What becomes greatly evident in the biased analysis of the resilient student is the reinforcement of identity around personal deficit. Neither the metacognitive contribution to the community, which is systemically negated, nor the contribution of an inherent cultural contribution towards transformation in a constantly changing world, is recognised. The resultant anxiety-driven student is further encumbered by an unattainable standard demanded in the vocational dance-training environment through authoritarian and universalised teaching practices. And further dictatorial instruction justified by exultations of media examples in select Western and Eurocentric cultural expressions and dance styles. This is attributed to an accessible online or “smart” world which the teacher aims to contribute to through student-success strategy (Aguaded-Ramírez 2017), and the pedagogical choices made during instruction (Batson 2009; Dragon 2015). The student’s personal deficit is continuously magnified, often leading to resultant high attrition rates (Buxton 2017).

Therefore, it can be concluded that within the hugely varying and diverse global professional dance community, implicit norms, standards, and stereotypes are reinforced through Western and Eurocentric teaching and learning pedagogy void of metacognitive and self-actualisation mechanisms. It is upon presumed knowledge and awareness of these norms and standards into which a dance student enters a vocational training culture and is consequently measured accordingly. The student inevitably denounces inherent somatics to conform to this culture and succumbs to the boundaries imposed by the powers-that-be.

Coloniality of Power and Dance Education

In accordance with Quijano's (2000; Mignolo 2007) notion of "subjectivity and knowledge," this definitive aspect in the colonial matrix of power aims to control epistemology, education, and formation of subjectivity. Furthermore, "implanting the colonial matrix of power implies to dismantle ... existing forms of social organization and ways of life" (Mignolo 2007, 156–57).

Within an African context, this has bearing on colonisation across the continent (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Ndlovu-Gatsheni further articulates that what should be analysed is how through the colonial matrix of power, colonialism has continued to wreak havoc on the mind of the ex-colonised after the end of direct colonialism: "One of the enduring legacies of colonialism was its ability to universalize Western particularism" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 39). This has specific relevance to the South African context that was additionally marred by apartheid, yet continues the Western and European globalised functions. The resistance of any other identities and cultures is then presented as an "all-embracing ... struggle against the universality and particularisms — the notion that people without history expressing precisely their incapacity to represent the universal" (Laclau 1996, 24).

If we were to identify these notions of the coloniality of power on a more isolated condensed scale to that of the dance community, the resultant particularism and universality of the Western constructs would be as prolific: "Power relations ... underwrite the ability of certain perceptual sensibilities to function as universal and impersonal ... [Ballet] marks deeply not only the neuro-musculature, but also the perceptual disposition of the dancer" (Rothfield 2010, 314). The power matrix formation of subjectivity is aggravated with terms within the South African dance education such as "inclusivity" and "fusion," which are derogatory and further increase the lack of acknowledged identity, as are "underprivileged" and "underperforming" within the democratic society that has been liberated. Yet these myths of tradition are firmly entrenched in local discourse. Furthermore, they are further intensified by the exultation of idolised technique versus identity and indigeneity thereby ensuring that within the dance community in South Africa, most specifically, the notion of prescriptive subjectivity and knowledge is perpetuated through hegemony and the coloniality matrix of power.

Both the notions of a deficit student, due to culture and identity, as well as continued bias and particularisation, according to the accepted universal norms, are imposed. This matrix of power controlling epistemology and education is engrained in and through the teachers, therefore deficits of dance teaching also need to be exposed.

Power Play Perpetuated: The Deficit Teacher

If we recognise that kinaesthetic values are inherent in the exercise of somatic attention, then a question arises regarding the attribution of value to one form of perception over and above another, not reducible to matters of individual perception (that is, mere taste) but concerns the authorisation of certain forms of perception to formulate critical judgements. Who gets to decide what is good work, and on what basis? What conditions the perceptions of “expert” judges (Rothfield 2010, 314)?

It is upon the examination of the power plays within teaching praxis that the extent of Western influence becomes evident. The domination of cultural influence on cognitive knowledge separated from embodied knowledge with resultant mind-body distrust has presented several challenges within a somatic approach (Kerka 2002). According to Huddy and Stevens (2011), a divergence in cognition about body learning has produced distinct and divergent training pathways for educators: the cognitive andragogy pathway employs knowledge for applied activity involving tacit “learning about the body” as opposed to “learning with the body.” The resulting individual learns as an apprentice of observation. Whereas the somatic andragogy pathway employs methods for knowledge construction, awareness of the body experience prepares the individual to question dominant knowledge sources. The resulting individual is open to diversity of experience. Based on these two paths, dance- and movement-teacher training and development takes place producing either the traditional dance teacher or the dance artist who teaches (Huddy and Stevens 2011).

Many traditional dance teachers and the teaching dance artists are not trained in teaching or embodied learning. Rather, they focus their teaching effort on technical development, or in developing methods in achieving technical proficiency. Body knowledge within an environment where the teacher is the one with the knowledge and the student a “blank canvas” is merely a neutral subject of learning. Therefore, dance teaching remains prescriptive and authoritarian even in its attempt to “embrace the individual.” Swain (2013) advocates that dance-teacher training programmes that critically investigate the context of their students within their broader environments are needed to challenge trends of training teachers in dance technique alone.

Currently, the South African dance educational policy landscape is characterised by method-centric teacher development, curriculum standardisation, and lack of accountability towards educational value (Risner and Barr 2015). Additionally, dance pedagogy addressed in teacher training is viewed as understanding of the “what,” “how,” and “when” in teaching dance, while attempting to address deficiencies in content knowledge, lesson-planning skills, teacher–student rapport, and classroom management (Warburton 2008). The path of embodied or transformative learning is often not addressed. Furthermore, in an attempt to address the issue of authoritarian teaching practice, arguments arise that dance is inherently somatic, but differs in output where dance is either art or education.

Differing beliefs and practices in this regard present dualistic pedagogical paradigms of teaching and learning: student-centred and teacher-centred (Dragon 2015). Student-centred pedagogy, rooted in progressive, holistic, humanistic education, and constructivism produces performing artists where the teacher is more of a catalyst or guide when directing curriculum problem-solving towards a self-directed and self-motivated community of learners. Teacher-centred pedagogy, rooted in behaviourism and cognitivism, produces students who can achieve teacher objectives within the scope of teacher-determined responses towards compliance of the expert's process. Further division of dance teaching pedagogy is exacerbated by fragmentation within somatic education, what Johnson (1986) refers to as teaching principles versus teaching techniques.

Attempts at reconciling these pedagogical pathways in dance education have resulted in emergent themes in the various contexts of dance teaching. These themes indicate a tendency in dance-teacher education towards the student-centred holistic model. In effect, the role of the teacher appears to be changing within the vocational environment. The teacher no longer approaches dance as a teaching of steps but becomes an agent of leadership in a world of possibility and constant change. Dialogue, openness, and integration of multi-disciplinarity of focus informs the training of reflective, active participants and the development of background skills and competencies required for the dance profession.

The challenge of the 21st century dance teacher and educator in South Africa is fragmented and polarised resulting in curricula that offer dualistic paradigms. Although global trends are observed and present a unique opportunity for dance education and teacher training, much of the South African landscape remains austere and rooted in traditional pragmatic forms. Tertiary teacher training for dance is obsolete, where pedagogy is omitted from the revised curriculum.

The conflict between research, policy, and practice affects the professional learning community profoundly (Yoo, Carter, and Larking 2017). Accordingly, in the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011–2025, the proposed goal is to set up:

A long-term system that would provide accessible opportunities for practising teachers, both individually and collectively via their participation in professional learning communities (PLCs), to assess their curriculum knowledge, competence, and professional practice, in order to identify their development needs related to their specific teaching specialisation and other identified priorities that would be targeted over time. (Department of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training 2011, 79)

In as much as the deficit student enters tertiary training as anxious, uncertain, and full of potential, the teacher enters with a pedagogical deficit reinforced by irrelevant teacher qualifications towards building and perpetuating the deficit. The South African dance

teacher employed in education often becomes an agent of conformity to performative norms perpetuated by aesthetic aims and achievements, while struggling clumsily for understanding in these uncertain and changing pedagogical landscapes.

Strategy towards Vocational Training of the South African Dancer

To counter all the deficit aspects culminating in anxiety and loss of identity (of both dance teacher and student), this article envisions a strategy towards adult dance vocational training that incorporates individual contributions to the collective learning experience. The strategy will be to synthesise Nakata's (1998) cultural interface theories with the professional learning community concept (DuFour 2004).

The Cultural Interface

This article specifically focuses on Nakata's (1998) cultural interface theories, which emphasise the fact that "we cannot just 'do' Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum." Nakata explains that universities subscribe to the Western and scientific knowledge systems "mediated by the disciplinary organisation of knowledge and its discursive and textual practices" (Nakata 2007, 8). This contested space between the two knowledge systems — Indigenous and Western — is the space that Nakata defines as the cultural interface, where "things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western" (Nakata 2007, 9).

Negotiating between these is a transforming process of endless instances of learning and forgetting, of melding and keeping separate, of discarding and taking up, of continuity and discontinuity. We participate in these ways of viewing, being, and acting in the world, often in quite contradictory, ambiguous, or ambivalent ways. We subscribe with varying degrees of commitment, both in time and space, to various positions depending on the moment, depending on what experiences, capacities, resources, and discourses we must draw on, according to what is at stake for us, or our family, or our community, and so on, and according to past experiences, current realities, aspirations, and imagined futures (Nakata 2007, 10).

Nakata's work provides a framework for teachers to understand their role (both their potential and limitations) within the power relations that comprise the cultural interface. The three principles for an Indigenous standpoint theory towards ensuring that the knowledge space remains open and contested at the cultural interface are also relevant to the agency of a student. However, while this paper acknowledges the fact that Nakata's theory stems from the standpoint of Indigenous studies taught by non-Indigenous teachers, this work emerges from the experiential and the conceptual and from a commitment to a teaching and learning manner that may integrate the cultural interface into the notions of respectful teaching within a multicultural vocational context. It reflects on how dance teachers and academics can contribute to the development and application of the discipline while conscientising all within the dance community of their right to identity and agency.

With the understanding that “Indigenous people are entangled in a much contested knowledge space at the cultural interface” (Nakata 2007, 12), the three principles include:

1. an interested “knower” who should understand how they come to understand;
2. recognition of agency, through providing a means to see one’s position in relation with others, to maintain the knowledge of such positioning, and to defend the position if needs be;
3. informing and limiting the diversity and range of responses through the physical experience and the memory of encounters in the every day that inform the cultural-duality tensions, “to factor this tension in helps us to get beyond notions of structuralist power and the resultant causal analyses.”

These three principles allow us to see and act on things in these ways all the time, to take ownership of the fact that:

Although I have knowledge of my experience at the interface and can forge a critical standpoint, I am not out singularly to overturn the so-called dominant position through simplistic arguments of omission, exclusion, or misrepresentation, but rather out there to make better arguments in relation to my position within knowledge, and in relation to other communities of ‘knowers.’ We see and act on things in these ways all the time. (Nakata 2007, 12)

A Successful Learning Community

A vital feature found within adult education (that informs andragogy) includes self-regulation or self-directed learning (Knowles 1984) and is supportive of experiential and transformation learning as a catalyst towards co-creating new knowledge and improved futures (Burch et al. 2016). Further, to foster such an environment, student-centred teaching should be replaced with learning-centred teaching explorations and opportunities (Burch et al. 2016).

To incorporate these aspects towards a strategy on dance vocational training, the constructs of a professional learning community (PLC) by DuFour (2004) are proposed. PLC speaks both to a constructivist learning theory, as well as to non-Western preferences for communal learning. This view towards learning is echoed in African ubuntu that incorporates basic respect and compassion for others in society through spirituality, consensus building, and dialogue (Nafukho 2006).

Achieved by encouraging embodied experiential and co-operative learning environments, the six essential characteristics of PLC include (DuFour 2004, 1–6):

1. shared mission, vision, values, and goals
2. collaborative teams focused on learning

3. collective enquiry, that builds on shared inherent and inherited knowledge and reflective practice
4. action orientation and experimentation
5. commitment to continuous improvement through achieving mutual goals and accomplishing a fundamental purpose of learning for all, and as result-driven towards utilising the evidence of learning to inform and improve practice.

Implications of the Strategy

South Africa is rife with diversity, where 11 official languages designate as many cultural identities, and due to such occurrences as migration of rural populations to cities for work and prosperity, the concepts of intercultural and multicultural education pose the opportunity for learning-centred teaching. This opportunity promotes development of the individual, as well as the educational community in a meaningful way through treatment of cultural diversity as a value for personal and collective enrichment.

Aguaded-Ramírez (2017) emphasises that learning-centred teaching goes beyond inclusivity and introduces intercultural relations to eliminate prejudice and stereotypes, encouraging a just and tolerant society. It is not the adapting of teaching toward inclusivity, but inclusivity of teaching toward transformation (Aguaded-Ramírez 2017; Maguvhe 2015).

In South Africa, transformation of thinking and of educational culture is needed within vocational dance, physical theatre, and somatic training. Towards this intent, the strategy presented in this article asks to recognise the need for inclusion of the cultural interface within a successful PLC environment.

By building a holistically rounded performing arts practitioner identity around respectful recognition of the various contributions of the music arts, theatre-making, and dance experience promotes agency and cultivates a motivational climate. In this context, within a conscientised professional learning community, anxiety is diminished. Where identity of “being” and “becoming” is acknowledged, development of agency is enabled (Nakata 1998). Agency replaces anxiety. Teachers, students, and the collective learning community can become active, life-long learners as agents of change and innovation.

Nakata's (2007) standpoint on “who can know” rather than “what can be known” specifically needs to be examined to address the anxiety of the dance teacher. This will support the perspective on containing the politics surrounding identity and power that reinforce boundaries. The matrix of power and action should be contained to “recognition and location rather than redistribution and transformation” (Nakata 2007, 12).

This strategy requires academic and professional discourse and grappling from both an academic and a professional dance perspective. Focus on epistemological development is essential to the value of praxis for vocational performing arts training for the dancer. Furthering a development of multi-disciplinarity in dance curriculum will support the recognition of the uniqueness (through identity, metacognition, and agency) of the performing arts multidisciplinary contributions.

Conclusion

This article explored the current identity crises of the South African dance practitioner within vocational training and education. It provided a gap analysis towards formulating a strategy that embraces agency as a key variant for multicultural learning through investigating various identified mechanisms that impact thereupon within the vocational dance and physical theatre training environment. In a learning-centred teaching approach, deficits have potential to be transformed to become catalysts of innovation, moving from anxiety to agency.

South African policies and infrastructures within learning environments still pose a threat where conceptual and technical development dominate education. However, transference of vocational skills and competencies remain primary objectives. The enablement of reformed thinking about dance education, and implementation of curricular strategy and content itself, does not occur. Recognition of the metacognitive, cultural, and deficit factors that influence dance educational dialogue is also needed.

Therefore, this strategy for vocational training of the South African dance student requires obviating bias and standardisations, towards agency and change. By diminishing anxiety within vocational dance culture. Agency can be inculcated, which addresses deficit fragmentation across categories of differences (bias, stereotypes, techniques, and innate competencies which are applicable to both gender and culture).

Furthermore, this strategy aims to serve towards counteracting deficit views of culture and power through the ability to implement critical reflective practices without losing individual cultural identity, resulting in mutually beneficial communal learning at the cultural interface.

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