

Sustaining Dance Education in New Zealand

Some issues facing pre-service, primary teacher educators

Sue Cheesman
University of Waikato

Introduction

In the area of Dance Education particularly in a primary education context there are several publications on how to teach dance from a variety of philosophical standpoints (Stinson, 1997; Gough, 1999; Autard-Smith, 2002; Cone and Cone, 2005; McCutchen, 2006). Recent research into dance pedagogy analysed the concepts and approaches to creativity by three specialist dance teachers within a primary context in the United Kingdom (Chappell, 2007). Several dance researchers in New Zealand (Bolwell, 1998; Hong, 2000; Renner, 2006; Buck, 2007) have focused on Dance Education within a primary school context from the following angles: developing dance literacy, primary teachers' voices in relation to teaching dance, approaches to curriculum dance, analysis of children's reflections to live dance performance, and dance and interdisciplinary arts. However the issue of sustainable dance education for pre-service primary educators has not been examined. This paper explores some of the challenges facing dance educators working with pre-service primary teachers in the New Zealand context and reports on a particular cohort of student viewpoints.

Background to the New Zealand context

The inclusion of dance under an arts umbrella within state primary school programs was mandated in 2004 as the result of a curriculum reform initiative begun in 1991, which led to the development of *The Arts in New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000) introduced in 2000. This meant that within the New Zealand curriculum framework the Arts became one of the Essential Learning Areas alongside Mathematics and Statistics, Science, Social Sciences, English, Technology, and Health and Physical Education.

The Arts document, as with the other curriculum documents, comprises eight levels. Each of the first five curriculum levels represents two years of compulsory primary schooling. Schools according to the Arts in New Zealand

Curriculum documents are required to provide opportunities for students from Years 1 to 8 to have access to all four disciplines, while Years 9 and 10 have the opportunity to study at least two. Curriculum levels 6 to 8 have optional courses in all four art forms at Years 11 to 13 in secondary schools, leading to the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)¹. A nationwide professional development programme for teachers, which accompanied the 2000 curriculum implementation along with some quality resources to support the teaching of dance within schools, is now coming to an end.

Furthermore the arts were the last curriculum area to be developed in this reform process, which saw Dance become a discipline in its own right in the Arts learning area alongside Visual Arts, Music and Drama. Curiously while the arts document and implementation were very new (nine months old), a curriculum stock take was already taking place. In 2007 a new, pared-down curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) was released into schools, which (like its predecessor) also included Dance as one of the four named disciplines under the Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Art). Within each discipline are four achievement objectives expressed at the eight curriculum levels.

In 2001 Tina Hong the National Coordinator for Dance suggested that Cinderella had finally arrived at the curriculum ball (Hong, 2001). Seven years on, I would agree that Cinderella had arrived at the curriculum ball but mainly as a wallflower with the odd soiree in the limelight. She was up against some serious curriculum aristocracy namely Numeracy and Literacy projects, which stole most of her thunder, as well as costume, coach and one slipper on many occasions.

Comparison of the two documents

Comparing the two national curriculum documents (2000, 2007) from a dance educator's perspective, gives some indications of the kinds of educational practice and the sort of dance teacher these documents appear to be encouraging.

In the 2000 New Zealand curriculum each learning area had a separate document (day-glow bright orange for the arts). Within this document Dance had a section of its own which included a statement defining dance as well as a statement that defined dance in the New Zealand curriculum. Each of the four Achievement Objectives (Practical Knowledge in Dance, Developing Ideas in Dance, Communicating and Interpreting in Dance, Understanding Dance in Context), had a summary statement of definitions and content. Each level had a page with the four Achievement Objectives targeting the particular skills, knowledge and understanding for this level. On these pages were also learning examples which acted as useful guides to help teachers interpret the Achievement Objectives. In addition, a page glossary of terms and a two-page chart of all the achievement objectives at Levels 1 to 8 proved a very useful view of the progression across the levels. All this, in my opinion, contained a considerable amount of discipline specific useful information and examples.

However, by 2007 *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13* produced a single document which describing all eight Learning Areas together. It has a large introductory section entitled 'A Direction for Learning' which includes: 'Vision, Values, Key Competencies, Principles and the Learning Areas' with Achievement Objectives for each.

Each of the eight Learning Areas including the Arts has one page with the following headings: *What are they about, why study them, how is the learning area structured* (MOE 2007, p. 20). There is considerably less detail than that provided in the 2000 document. However both documents give similar indications of what students of years 1-8 will learn in all four disciplines and in years 9-10 they will have opportunities to learn in two. Although this statement is positive it is important to note that no time allocation is assigned.

I will now focus specially on the dance statements. The definition of dance in education in the 2000 document reads as follows:

Education in dance is fundamental to the education of all students. Dance is a significant way of knowing, with a distinctive body of knowledge to be experienced, investigated, valued, and shared. Students become increasingly literate in dance as they engage in practical and theoretical investigations and explore dance forms, develop dance ideas, and articulate artistic and aesthetic understandings about dance works in various contexts.

Students learn in dance as they use its vocabularies and practices to interpret, communicate with, and respond to the world in their own ways. In learning about dance, students investigate the forms, purposes, and significance of dance in past and present times. Learning through dance enables them to appreciate that dance is a holistic experience that links the mind, body, and emotions.

Dance in the New Zealand Curriculum promotes the dance heritages of the diverse cultures within New Zealand's schools, communities, and multicultural society. In particular, all students should have opportunities to learn about the sources and vocabularies of contemporary and traditional Māori dance forms.

Education in dance promotes personal and social well-being by developing students' self-esteem, social interactions, and confidence in physical expression. It aims to foster their enthusiasm as participants, creators, viewers, and critical inquirers and to develop their lifelong interest in and appreciation of dance.

(MOE, 2000, p.19)

In contrast the 2007 version states that,

Dance is expressive movement that has intent, purpose, and form. In dance education, students 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. 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.

(MOE, 2007, p. 20)

I am not saying that quantity necessarily equals quality and I support statements being to the point and succinct. This 2007 statement seems to fulfill both needs. I would, however, suggest that it is far too pared down and economical. When compared to the statement of dance in 2000, the 2007 version is not only a reduction but in my opinion a devaluing of the nature of dance. The 2000 statement describes a richer experience using more discipline specific information. The clear indication that students should have the opportunity to learn contemporary and traditional Māori dance forms in the 2000 dance statement has been subsumed into the phrase cultural identities and in my opinion is far less specific. It may be argued that much of the information that is missing from the dance statement is covered in the general areas of the arts page. However I see it as my job to question such a reduction. If you extrapolate the reductionist tendency it leads to nothing so it is important to keep an eye on the dance provision in the New Zealand curriculum.

Changes and challenges

While the curriculum reform was taking place, systematic changes were occurring in the delivery of teaching education programs; changes which posed particular challenges for pre-service teacher education in the four Arts disciplines. During this time lecturers within teacher training institutions were battling hard to not only maintain the status quo but also to grow in order to support and increase student teacher knowledge in dance. Auckland College of Education developed a three year Bachelor of Education in 1996 that was subsequently approved by the MOE. 'Rising tuition fees and foregone income for a further year to achieve the same pay are powerful arguments for students deciding in which programme they will enroll' (Alcorn, 1999, p. 120). This meant that four-year degrees did not survive. Furthermore, as Alcorn (ibid.) stated: 'It is obvious that three year programs will allow less breath and depth of professional preparation than four year ones'. By 1999, the length of Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Waikato was three years. In 2006 the number of papers in a degree reduced from 21 to 20 papers. The graduate course for training primary teachers shrank from 18 months to one year. These changes had staffing implications, which had the flow on effect of huge time allocation shrinkage.

Furthermore, these changes occurred against a climate of competition between universities, reducing budgets, and the expectation that one person would deliver to large student numbers in huge lecture halls. Olssen (2001, p. 28) argues that the Green Paper of 1997 'was an attempt to increase participation in tertiary education while limiting and constraining costs' through 'increased monitoring and managing of tertiary funding.... a more even treatment of private and public providers, increased provider competition....' Amalgamation of colleges of education into university environments further compounded the situation.

Dance Education also faced the issue that the elder siblings of Visual Arts and Music (being more established subjects taught in schools), generally had greater time allocation within teacher education programs. Arts Educators were faced with the problem of how the time allocation was going to be divided up between all four disciplines.

At the time of writing a nationwide professional development program for teachers, which accompanied the new curriculum, is coming to an end. Kelvin Smythe (2008, p. 4) argues that the arts are now in a perilous situation. He points to the fact that there are less than a handful of arts education advisors out in the field and they are mainly focused on secondary education. In addition, he says

The curriculum area that did not get a fair go, and was not suited by the set-up, was the arts. At the very least throughout the document, the arts needed to be in the forefront of the dialogue - it needed to be explicitly mentioned.... It needed an inquiry model and evaluation process that suited; it needed to be made clear that the arts provided excellent opportunities for inquiry and problem-solving.

I agree with Smythe's sentiments and share his fears. Steve Maharey, Minister of Education, had this to say in his opening statement tucked into the inside cover of the 2007 New Zealand curriculum document.

This curriculum gives schools the flexibility to actively involve students in what they learn, how it is taught, and how the learning is assessed, and it invites schools to embrace the challenge of designing relevant and meaningful learning programmes that will motivate and engage students.

(In Ministry of Education, 2007)

This seems to be saying that teachers, parents and the whole community are invited to design their dance program which begs the following questions: How will they know what good dance practice is and where will they get their advice from? Clearly it seems that the thrust is for schools to develop their own programs, but my dilemma as an educator of pre-service primary trainees is how I equip them to do just that in dance in the twelve hours dance allocation, within this forty-eight hour compulsory arts course in the first year of a Bachelor of Teaching degree.

What do I cover, what do I leave out? For many, this will be their only exposure to dance pedagogy. At the University of Waikato we (the arts education staff) have tackled this by having all four disciplines in the one compulsory paper² with a focus on developing ideas. We have tried to make it a paper with a sense of wholeness rather than four separate disciplines gathered under a single paper title. My fellow arts educators and I have had many debates about this course and there appears to be no easy solution; we are all passionate about our own disciplines and fight hard to keep their integrity and discipline identity. We are, however, aware that we have to think smartly and try and make links wherever possible without falling into a weak and woolly arts paper which we might blithely call 'integration'.

Surveying student viewpoint

The arts paper is taught over one semester with two disciplines being covered each half semester. All four arts disciplines inclusive of dance have twelve hours face-to-face contact time. I wondered what my students' views were on dance, after having completed an introductory compulsory arts paper. A questionnaire was drafted in order to obtain evidence to show how the Semester A 2008 cohort of pre-service students at the University of Waikato viewed their current dance provision. The questionnaire went through several revisions in light of feedback from colleagues in the Department of Arts and Language. Subsequently ethical clearance was gained from the institution. The purpose of the questionnaire was explained to potential participants including that the answers were anonymous and that it was not compulsory to participate. The questionnaires were distributed and answered in tutor groups at the end of Semester A 2008. The majority of the students I teach in this paper volunteered to fill in the anonymous questionnaires.

They answered seven questions around the following topics: confidence to teach dance, sufficient time allocation, content satisfaction, application of teaching strategies and management techniques, advantages to dance being in with the other three arts, links across art forms, and future dance experiences. They were asked to give their responses related to a five-point scale ranging from at one end, definitely not, to the other, definitely. Students were also provided with the opportunity to comment below each question. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss responses to all seven questions in detail so I have chosen two of particular relevance relating to confidence and time allocation.

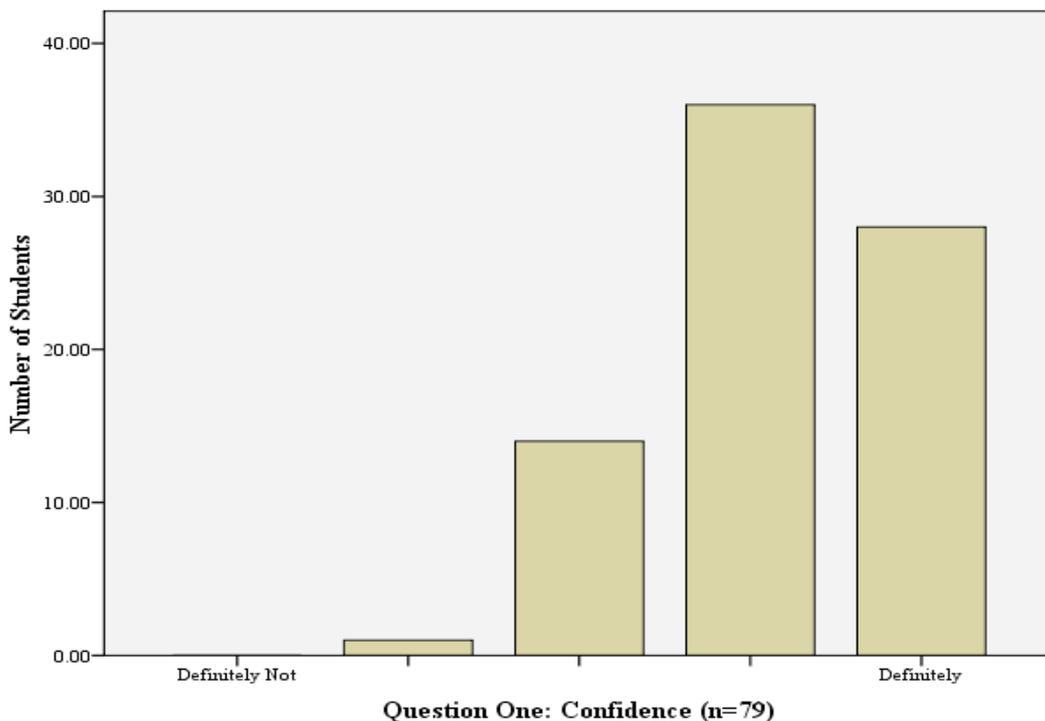


Figure 1. Confidence rating of students following an introductory dance education course

It seemed important at the end of this course to try and gauge the confidence level of the students for teaching this dance discipline in the future with this question: How confident do you feel after having taken this course in dance to teach this discipline in the future? The table above tends to suggest that the students, after a twelve-hour introductory dance exposure felt they could confidentially teach dance in a primary school. Many stated that their confidence had increased especially in relation to where they started from at the beginning of the course. Several students commented that with practice they could only get better, while others indicated that they were looking forward to teaching dance. Others with previous dance experience suggested that confidence was not an issue for them.

However, the informed dance educator in me is alarmed by the students' confidence on the basis of twelve hours training. Perhaps they do not use the same criteria to value dance as other curriculum areas? Would you expect someone to say, 'I have done twelve hours of literacy, therefore I can teach the English curriculum'? Nevertheless, I strongly believe that students who feel more confident, are much more likely to teach dance in the future. So it would seem that the results from this question would support the viewpoint that these students were more disposed to teach dance after this course than before.

The next question focused on a twelve-hour time allocation for dance within this introductory arts course. What is your response to the following statement: I consider that I have had sufficient time (12 hours contact time) to grasp the basics of dance education within the New Zealand curriculum.

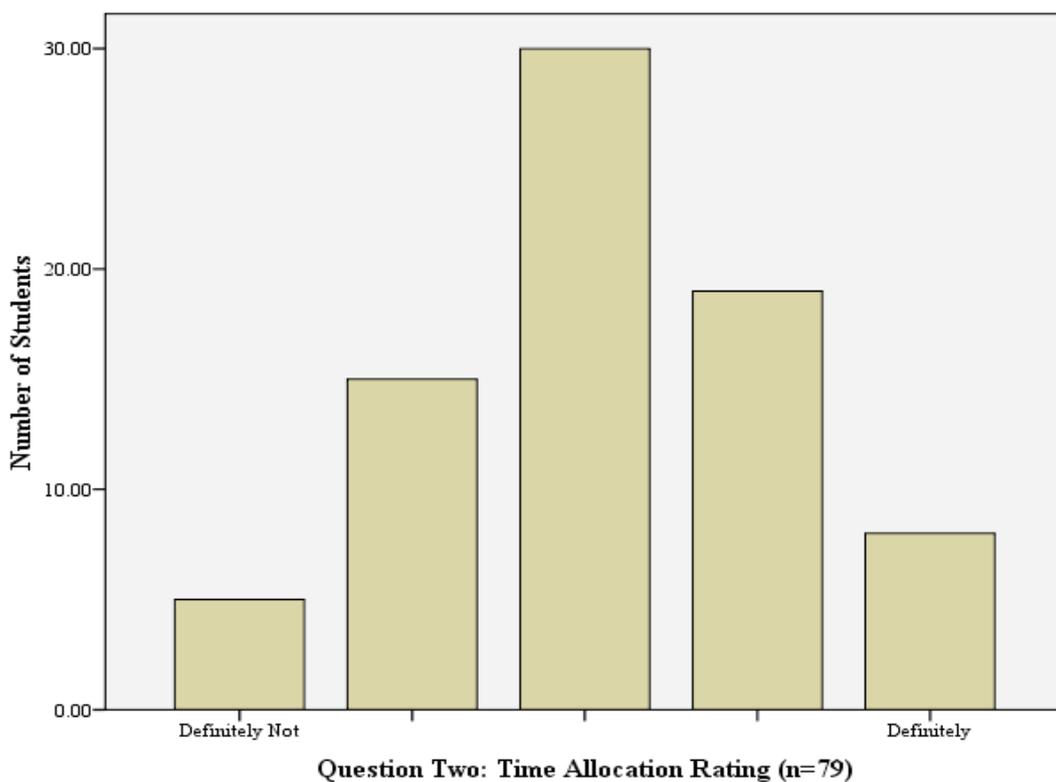


Figure 2. Students' perception of adequacy of time allocation

The results here spread right across the spectrum with the majority being in the middle. Many of the students commented that they had gained the basics; however, it was not long enough and suggested that they would have benefitted from more time. Some stated this strongly while others suggested that more time would be helpful. This spread of results raised a number of questions for me. Are some of the students saying that the quality of teaching the twelve hours was so excellent that only twelve hours was required? Do they think that a little dance education is better than none? (If so they are in very good company with most of the policy makers in New Zealand). However it is important to recognise that about half the respondents seemed to be indicating that more time was desirable.

For me the overriding question is how much awareness do they have of what they do not yet know after twelve hours?

Conclusions/implications

In order to rigorously foster, support and advance dance education in my institution, I believe there is a need to continue to support and find the connections between arts disciplines in the compulsory introductory arts paper. This includes supporting and continuing a brief teaching experience in local primary schools for all students across all four arts disciplines. There is a need to target students who show an interest and ability in dance curriculum and to encourage them to take further dance papers on offer. The arts team needs to continue the debates on interdisciplinary arts and to resist the political pressure for integration. It is important to continue the dialogue with the other arts disciplines even though this is not always comfortable and is full of challenges. I also want to continue to be proactive and look for opportunities for development. For example, even in this time of reduction we have managed to increase the undergraduate dance provision with a new second year course in dance education and a third year arts course adapted to having only a dance drama focus with links to post graduate study.

The good news is that dance is part of the New Zealand National Curriculum and I firmly believe that it is my job to try and keep it there by providing quality pre-service training in dance education.

Notes

¹ NCEAs are New Zealand's national qualifications for senior secondary students and are part of the National Qualifications Framework. These can be assessed internally within the school and/or as an external examination. NCEA is a standard based assessment qualification at Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3.

² In the New Zealand University system a paper is a short course of study and 20 papers constitute a degree.

References

- Autard-Smith, J. (2002). *The Art of Dance in Education*. London: A & C Black.
- Alcorn, N. (1999). Initial Teacher Education Since 1990: Funding and Supply as Determinants of Policy and Practice. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 34(1), 120-120.
- Bolwell, J. (1998). Into the light: An Expanding vision of dance education. In S. Shapiro (Ed.), *Dance, power and difference: Critical and feminist perspectives of dance education* (pp. 75-95). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Buck, R. (2007). International Commentary New Zealand. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (pp. 117-119). The Netherlands: Springer.
- Buck, R. (2007). Research on Dance Curriculum in Australia and New Zealand. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (pp. 261-262). The Netherlands: Springer.
- Chappell, K. (2007). Creativity in primary level dance education: moving beyond assumption. *Research in Dance Education*, 8(1), 27-52.
- Cone, T. P., & Cone, S. L. (2005). (2nd ed.). *Teaching children dance*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Gough, M. (1999). *Knowing dance: A guide for creative teaching*. London: Dance Books.
- Hong, T. (2000). Developing dance literacy in the post-modern: an approach to curriculum. Paper presented at Dancing in the Millennium Conference, Washington DC. (2000): Retrieved January 30, 2005, from <http://arts.unitec.ac.nz/professional/readings/Dance/>
- Hong, T. (2001). *Getting Cinders to the Ball*. *New Zealand Physical Educator*, 3(1), 4-6.
- McCutchen, B. P. (2006). *Teaching dance as art in education*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Ministry of Education. (2000). *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Olssen, M. (2001). The Neo-Liberal Appropriation of Tertiary Education Policy in New Zealand: Accountability, Research and Academic Freedom. *'State-of-the-Art' Monograph*, 8. Palmerston North: The New Zealand Association for Research in Education.
- Renner, S. (2006). Looking at Dance - An Exploration of Children's Reflections. In L. Wildshut (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Colouring Senses - daCi Conference*. The Hague July 2-8.

Smythe, K. (2008, May 19). The '07 Curriculum – Final verdict #3. *Eduvac*, p. 4.

Stinson, S. (1997). *Dance for Young Children*. Reston: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Dance.

Biographical statement

Sue Cheesman is a senior lecturer in Dance Education in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Previous experience includes adviser for research into developing ideas in dance and choreographer/educationalist for Touch Compass Dance Company. Her enthusiasm and passion for dance knows no bounds.