

Power, Service, and Reflexivity in a Community Dance Project

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Abstract:

This pilot qualitative research project investigated the meaning and value of a community-based dance education programme in the United States. The programme was designed to provide a targeted group of 'at-risk' children, ages 9–13, with the opportunity to participate in an intensive summer workshop in dance. Twenty-three young people participated in the programme. All participants were girls. The purpose of the programme was to involve the students in the study of dance, involving both the discipline of dance technique and the creative possibilities in choreography.

Diverse data sources included student and parent interviews, teacher/mentor journals, and researcher field notes. Two group interviews were conducted with five groups of two to five students. Interviews were also conducted with the mothers of six students and the mother and father of one student. Findings pointed to an increased interest in dance for the young people as well as an increased respect for their potential to accomplish goals through hard work and cooperation with others. However, a number of problems and issues surfaced. For example, flexibility was a particular concern when dealing with the difficult lives of the participants; students did not necessarily show up for class or attend to what was requested by their teacher/mentors (university students). There were more pressing survival issues in their lives. Power concerns became prominent as the programme facilitated a discussion of social issues and a challenge to think reflectively about whose needs the programme served. As a result, this investigation pointed to a call for multicultural learning by the directors of the programme and the university students, as well as the need for service to the community.

Article:

As dance education becomes more complex and attempts to serve the needs of diverse populations, many educators and performers have sought ways to provide those who are disenfranchised with arts services. By disenfranchised, I mean particular populations who are deprived of power and success due to a lack of access to educational opportunities. Recently, there has been a growing emphasis on community service learning programmes which seek to provide opportunities to those who most need services. Some of these programmes attempt to use choreography to reach members of the community; others adopt a more pedagogical focus. This trend is fertile ground for dance education programmes seeking to move beyond the studios and schools and into the communities in which people live.

This article presents the findings of a qualitative research study which investigated a community dance project conducted in the United States. The project intersects with a number of recent community initiatives both outside and inside the country.

The Community Dance Movement

Most often, the term 'community dance' has been associated with particular programmes that arose in places such as the United Kingdom and Australia during the 1970s. Although there were community dance initiatives prior to this period, I am particularly referring to what has become known as the 'community dance movement'. Some of these initial efforts were associated with youth projects and other community advocacy services, often in an attempt to elicit government funding (Butterworth, 1989; Thomson, 1989; Tolley, 1989).

Basically, this movement involves an emphasis on working with people from the community who may not see dance as a professional goal. The idea that everyone can dance is paramount, and many of these programmes attempt to serve the needs of the community. For this reason, community dance has often been linked with disenfranchised populations such as the elderly, inner city, those with special needs and physical disabilities, those with health needs and “at-risk”¹ children. Consequently, participation, belonging and ownership of the artistic process are valued. Community dance practitioners often attempt to ‘empower’ ‘non-dancers’ through artistic expression and provide a social advocacy role in their communities (Butterworth, 1989; Donald, 1997; Fensham, 1997; Thomson, 1989). Thomson, however, points out that the term ‘community dance’ may be problematic because it was not really conceived of as a general movement until recently, and it cannot be described in monolithic terms.

If what is now referred to as ‘community dance’ is not a homogeneous theoretical movement, there are, however, some characteristics that have been associated with the term as it has developed as an approach and dance education/performance initiative. For example, inclusiveness, as counter to selective professional training, has been a broad general theme. Rather than profess high arts standards, community dance advocates tend to believe in ‘offering dance to everyone in a given community, on the premise that dance is the birthright and the potential of all human beings’ (Thomson, 1989 p. 89). Accessibility, participation, and relevance to people in the community are highly valued (p. 90). According to Tolley, ‘the animateur {community dance facilitator} movement puts dance workers in to the community at a grass roots level, where they are able to respond to the real needs of the communities in which they work’ (1989, p. 107).

Often community projects are tied to the personal expression of social issues and problems (Butterworth, 1989; Donald, 1997; Fensham, 1997; Thomson, 1989). As Brinson suggests:

Its innovative nature extends not only to choreographic themes and creative work but also to organisation and socio-cultural impact; to its representative and democratic organisation, especially in developing a youth ‘voice’; to its educational function; to its challenge to many accepted practices in choreography and in the use of bodies; in its ability to offer refreshment and new motivation to ‘professionals’; and in its missionary influence in the cause of dance and mime. (Cited in Butterworth, 1989, pp. 22–23)

This is not to say that community arts programmes do not claim to work towards an aesthetic realisation through artistic means, but that ‘the nature of performance ... is to do more with the needs of each individual group and the quality of the dance experience, and less to do with the intention of a choreographer and the perception of an audience, but when the two become fully integrated the effect ... {can be} remarkable’ (Butterworth, 1989 p. 27). For this reason, many community dance programmes have embraced the notion of involvement and decision-making by the community members themselves (Cameron, 1997; Lanzi, 1997; Simmonds, 1997).

In the United States, the concept of community dance has been somewhat different in that it has often been the result of the individual interest of particular dancers and educators working with members of the community. For example, some known artists working in communities in the United States have included such choreographers as Anna Halprin, Liz Lerman, and Stuart Pimsler. Community dance programmes here have often been the result of artists working in alternative settings. This may partially be explained by the financial axe regarding grants to artists, but also to the need artists have felt to reach out to their communities. With the rise of social health problems such as AIDS, a number of artists have recently worked with patients in hospital settings as well as with patients suffering from other ailments (Dobbs Ariail, 1996; Hillman & Gaffney, 1996; McLeod, 1996; Perlstein, 1996; Pimsler, 1996). Other community dance activities in the United States have included work with parks and recreation centres, religious organisations, public housing authorities, juvenile probation programmes, alternative schools and correctional facilities (Hillman & Gaffney, 1996). Most of these initiatives, however, come from independent artists with diverse approaches to dance education and choreography. Although they generally attempt to engage and involve the participants within the creative process, they do so in a number of ways and styles.

This project, 'Summer Dance Connections', intersects with both community dance programmes in the United Kingdom and Australia, and alternative settings for artists in the United States. It is both an educational enterprise with the purpose of reaching a disenfranchised group and an attempt to reach the artistic needs of community children by providing both technical dance learning and participatory choreographic work. The programme also intersects with what has become known as service learning (see Zlotkowski, 1998), because it is a university programme that attempts to include community work as a way to help the university students understand significant social issues and address critical and reflective thinking.

Summer Dance Connections

Specifically, Summer Dance Connections is a community-based education programme, designed to provide a targeted group of 'at-risk' students, ages 9–13, with the opportunity to participate in an intense summer workshop in dance. I use the term 'at-risk' to describe those students identified for special services due to a lack of financial resources and access to social power. For example, middle and upper school children in the United States tend to have more access to schools with rich resources and arts programmes. Parents with financial resources can afford to pay for private studio classes.

The term 'at-risk' is used widely in service learning programmes in the United States. This programme attempted to reach students who may not have had the opportunity to learn to dance. The selection of students for Summer Dance Connections was conducted with these students in mind.

The purpose of Summer Dance Connections is to involve the students in the study of dance, involving both the discipline of modern dance technique and the creative possibilities in choreography. Choreographic experiences are focused around issues and concerns in the lives of the participants; the students actively engage in the creation of their culminating dances. Additionally, this project serves to enhance the teaching skills of beginning dance educators who serve as teacher–mentors during the project.

The initial project (1997), envisioned by Sue Stinson² and directed by Sue Stinson, Mary Alice Kurr-Murphy and myself, involved five students who were dance majors at a state university in the southeast, and 21 children from city recreation centres and the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs. Twenty-eight students originally signed up; however, some left the programme during its implementation. The university students rotated teaching a daily class in modern dance technique and improvisation for the entire group. Following a snack break, each university student worked with four or five of the children to create a piece of choreography based on their lives and/or interests. The five dances were performed in the university theatre. There were two performances. The first performance included an audience of young people from the various recreation centres in the city; the evening performance included family, friends and guests from the community.

Methodology

This pilot programme provided data for a qualitative investigation during the monthlong project and two day teacher/mentor training session. The study attempted to explore the meaning and value of such a collaborative community effort as well as address some of the issues that emerged from this social advocacy project. Additionally, there was an attempt to find ways to better serve the needs of the community, including the children and their families. The study served as a way to attempt to involve family participation in a collaborative and action-oriented way.

Students were selected through flyers and word of mouth, a 'snowball sampling process' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since a qualitative (postpositivist) research methodology was implemented, I was not interested in generalising findings to all programmes of this kind, but rather, to understand this particular context. Participants were recruited for their interest in dance as well as financial need. One of the directors, Mary Alice Kurr-Murphy of City Arts, a partially funded arts programme, recruited students at the centre. Other students were recruited from the Boys and Girls Club recreation centres by the directors of the Clubs. One local librarian recommended a few girls. Candidates were asked to submit two letters of reference in order to determine interest and enthusiasm. The directors were looking for children who were interested in dance and had some

financial need, although a number of middle class students were accepted in the programme because they heard about it and expressed a great desire to dance.

Out of the initial 28 children in the study, 27 were female and one was male. Of the 21 students who participated in the entire project, all were female. The intention was not to recruit all girls; however, many girls demonstrated interest in the programme. It may be interesting to go back and actually examine the recruitment process to see if the recreation centre directors approached girls more often than boys, assuming the boys would not be interested in dancing, or if the boys themselves may have perceived that this activity was meant for girls. Making assumptions from the names of the students, there were approximately 60% Caucasian participants, 35% African American participants, and 5% Vietnamese participants.

Diverse data collection methods included two group interviews with the children (at the start and end of the project), interviews with parents, and university student (teacher/mentor) journals. Additionally, the classes and final performances were videotaped for further analysis.

Participants in the programme were not required to engage in the accompanying investigation, although the students were reminded to remember to give the release forms to their parents so they might participate and the parents could be interviewed. The students were asked to sign the release forms if they wished to participate in the study; this was a way of ensuring that we had both the permission of the student and his or her parent(s). All the students opted to participate in the study.

Two to five students were in each interview group. The interviews were conducted by the university teacher/mentors who had worked with these groups daily. They were given interview guides, designed by myself. Group interviews were undertaken because the individual choreographic group environment was conducive to an interactive discussion format between the students and the teacher/mentor in each group. Thus, each teacher/mentor conducted the interviews with their group of students. Interviews were scheduled once, at the beginning of the project (during the second group meeting), and once at the end of the project (the day of the performances). Information from both interviews was used in the analysis.

Mary Alice Kurr-Murphy conducted further separate interviews with the mothers of five students and one interview with both parents of another student. In this way, another type of perspective was included. Since Ms Kurr-Murphy was in contact with the parents, and recruited many of the students, she made contact with them and set up the interviews. These interviews occurred throughout the programme. The parents were asked about their children's responses to the programme as well as the value of the dance experiences for their children.

The university teacher mentors were given the opportunity to keep a journal; however, they were informed that this was not a requirement for the position. They received a fee for their services whether or not they opted to keep a journal. They were asked to sign a consent form and were given a personal journal guide. Three of the university teacher mentors opted to keep journals.

Since a qualitative (postpositivist) research methodology was implemented, there was an interest in providing a validity component that would be appropriate for the study. For this reason, there was an interest in a broad range of data collected in order to provide triangulation of data and sources.³ Additionally, triangulation of theory was paramount. There was both an effort to seek disconfirming evidence (data that did not support initial researcher assumptions and theory) and an effort to look at the project from as many viewpoints as possible.⁴ Since I was acting as researcher and project director, I was playing a subjective role in the investigation. Thus, there was a particular need for researcher reflexivity.⁵

Data analysis included the 'cut-up-and-put-in-folders' approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). My graduate research assistant, Karen Mozingo (who also served as a teacher/mentor), transcribed all interview data. We both reviewed the data a number of times looking for general themes. After themes were established, we went through the data and placed a number next to each coded unit that corresponded to the number of the page it

was on, made copies of pages that had been multi-coded, labelled manilla folders with the coding numbers and corresponding phrases and placed them in a box. Finally we cut and filed them. I then generated properties and characteristics for each folder (category) and reviewed each folder for evidence of patterns, assertions and claims as well as discrepant cases.

Service and Support

There was much evidence from the data collection and analysis process to support the intentions and purposes of this project. Findings point to an increased interest in dance for the children as well as an appreciation of the opportunity to experience dance. For example, by the end of the project, the students overwhelmingly expressed the value of the programme. Sharee⁶ said, 'I like this dance {programme} because you get to learn how to dance more, meet people, and basically make up the dance. And you get to perform stuff.'

Most of the students said that the programme was fun and that they made many new friends, and some, like Ashley, said it was 'educational ... I learned a lot about different kinds of dancing.'

Shaneka professed, 'I liked it and think it was a good experience for the ones that haven't been into dance before.' Sharee said she liked the energy that everybody came in with.

All of the five sets of parents interviewed also overwhelmingly expressed the enthusiasm of their children. Further, they tended to point out that the programme was important because it addressed their children's needs. For example, one mother explained, 'It gave her something that was different and unique, and it gave her something to do this summer that was just her and her alone. That made her feel special.'

Other parents noted the attempt at inclusiveness during the project. One mother commented,

I think it benefits her {daughter} to have ... not necessarily individual attention, but to be able to be included in something. You know, she's a part of this dance thing, and she gets to leave every day to do this thing, and she's included as a part of something ... So there's something like this she can do. So that really makes her feel like she's important.

Probably one of the most important aspects of the programme, regarding the needs of the students, was the mentoring process. Many of the students came to the project with a number of emotional and family problems. Financial worries, divorce and custody matters were often addressed by the young people. For example, when asked to talk about themselves and the issues that faced their lives, during the first interview, a number of students pointed to their family and claimed they lived with one birth parent either alone or with a step-parent or step-siblings. Some students lived with their grandparents. One student expressed her concern about family problems. When asked what kind of problems families may have, she said, 'Like divorce or ... abuse. They can't open up to anyone like their parents. They're afraid to or they {sic} get beat. Like different cultures get beat. That's what happens to me. I mean, that's what happens to my friend Theresa ... I cried for her.' Another student shared, 'I'm pretty poor. I just have to go ahead and say that.'

Some students may have enjoyed the opportunity to talk and open up to an older adult figure. Some students seemed to take comfort in their relationship with their teacher/mentors. For example, Stacy recalled that one of the best parts of the programme was simply 'talking to the teachers.'

The benefits from the mentoring process may also be expressed from another perspective. For example, one of the teacher mentors addressed a special moment, in the dance when dance, support and mentoring came together. Before this entry she indicated that the two students in her group had just supported each other through their dancing and performed brilliantly for her. She went on to say,

{Dance} can be a fun, safe, and alive place to go when nothing else seems to hold you. And that it can be a building place, a nurturing place where you can discover pieces inside of you which you didn't know existed. That it doesn't have to be about appearances, or body size, or money. That all it takes is your body, your mind, and your emotions along with a willingness to be fully present. You don't need money and privilege to find that kind of safety. Anyway, I ran to them and slid next to them on the floor, spouting how

proud of them I felt. Joy slid up under my arm for a hug. Heather held out her hand and I twirled her around on the floor before giving her a big hug too. Then Joy looked at me and said, 'You know, it's really neat how I just felt that Heather could do a different movement and I could suddenly feel the dance differently. With the thunder and her movement the room even felt different to me.' That moment made the whole four weeks feel worth it to me. I felt like somehow I'd managed to guide them through the most special thing I know about dance and that they had not only experienced it, but had reached out and touched it and called it by name. And I know if they can hold onto that place, they can make it through any lack of money, attention, or care that they might experience.

Learning and Collaboration

The students often pointed to the benefit of learning to dance. Of course this meant different things to different students. Modern dance technique, improvisation, and creative dance were all taught in the programme. Within the first dance session students were taught technique, in an effort to provide a base for them and help them continue with dance if they desired. They were also offered a number of student centred explorations in an effort to help them take ownership of the dance experience and prepare them for the choreographic experience in the second session. The second session was devoted to the creation of a dance, structured and facilitated by the teacher mentors with ideas and materials by the students. We wanted to offer them the training that they may not be able to afford, yet provide an experience that was meaningful for them.

A few students came to the project with some experience in modern and/or African dance from the recreation centres and Boys and Girls Clubs. Some students took some ballet, tap and jazz. Most students defined their prior dance experiences as 'club dancing' or 'street dancing'. Thus, few students had much formal training in dance technique before entering the project. Most of the students were new to the modern dance technique and improvisational activities offered throughout the programme.

Although students learned some basics of dance technique, the findings suggest that there were other kinds of learning taking place. As a community dance programme, the directors intentionally emphasised collaboration and participation. Teacher/mentors were encouraged to facilitate the creative process in a way in which the students would take an active role, even if it meant that they brought their own popular dance movements into the choreography. The teacher/mentors helped them vary these movements but not necessarily change them or present a 'right' way to dance. Many students expressed the value of working collaboratively in their smaller groups. For example, Chanel talked about the benefit of learning to work as a team:

I liked it when ... we all got together. You {teacher/mentor} told us to put {in the dance} what we liked to do. We done it like on hands, and you made us do it in different body parts, like ... we got together as a team. We all figured out what we were going to do together ... We all got it done.

Further, Chanel addressed the democratic decision-making process attempted by the teacher/mentors. 'The best thing was that we kept on practicing and we kept on making decisions. If everybody didn't agree, we'd vote on it.'

One parent spoke of the excitement her child expressed due to 'being able to participate and contribute to the collaboration' of the community dance project. Further, she also remarked that,

The whole thing was very enriching for her { the child} and she was excited that, the fact that you supplied all the costumes, the small dance groups, the fact that you all picked the children up was a relief for me ... that she could be invited to something that I thought was so worthwhile, and it was no inconvenience to me as a parent, and I really liked that.

Learning and Social Change

Some of the responses moved learning into a social context. For example, Alexandria explained that she learned much about dance. However, she presented what she learned in relationship to a significant social issue, or how society perceives dance. She brought out a typical dance stereotype when she said,

It's {the programme} a little bit different than I thought it was. I didn't know in dance that you can be hyped and cool. I always thought that you had to be graceful and pretty and everything.

This provides some evidence that the participants were aware of an attempt to meet the needs of the community and address diversity concerns. The purpose of the programme was not to produce dancers who were necessarily adept at performing ‘graceful and pretty’ movements, but were able to express their ideas regarding who they were in their communities. Alexandria had taken some ballet as part of her extended day classes at her school prior to entering the programme. It was apparent, however, that she did not have the opportunity to see dance or learn it in a way that encompassed a more diverse and inclusive view of the field, a way that did not have to be graceful and pretty.

When asked about how their definitions of dance changed Alexandria answered that now, ‘dance is about different cultures and telling people how you are, and when you dance it expresses how you live.’ Further, Shanika addressed multicultural learning when she said, ‘I learned that there are many different kinds of dance; fast dance, slow dance, dances from China, from Spain and Africa.’ At the start of the programme, during the first group interviews, many of the students said that dance was about having fun; some asserted that ‘street dance’ and ‘rap’ and ‘club dance’ were their favourite kinds of dance. By the end of the project, many students seemed to understand the significance of a broader application to the meaning of dance.

Some of the parents also addressed the issue of diversity. One mother, for example, said, ‘Cassandra was very excited about the fact that not only did they get a chance to add to the production, but there were different types of dances being expressed about individual groups, and she thought that was pretty neat ... seeing the different dances and the different {kinds} of movements.’

And one mother simply said, ‘I think, probably something the girls came up with, is they made some friends from different places that they wouldn’t have contact with, and I think that is a major benefit, is getting to know kids from other places and other perspectives.’ Still another parent commented,

It was more than just learning steps ... She {daughter} learned the diversity of the group and to get along with other children. But she also learned that their input was valuable and that they could actually participate in dance, and I think learning to use their bodies and their mind along with it is the big thing ... It allowed them to be more independent.

Disrupting Prior Assumptions: Struggles and Problems

I am now going to turn away from a discussion about the benefits of the programme. Up until this point, it may seem that I am presenting this programme as a panacea for all the world’s social ills. Yes, the students and parents overwhelmingly responded positively and with enthusiasm. It is evident that the goals of participation, inclusiveness and social action were successfully met to at least some degree. However, sometimes it is necessary to dig beneath surface comments and seek out disconfirming evidence to reveal more of the whole story. As a postpositivist researcher, I am interested in disrupting prior assumptions. I am interested in presenting multiple perspectives and interpretations in an effort to displace my own sense of authority as researcher, author and programme director. In other words, by being reflexive and searching for struggle and problems, I hope to highlight some of the social issues that may be addressed, as I seek to improve the programme and better serve the needs of the community.

For these reasons, I have searched the data and found a number of problems and lessons learned. For example, although we were attempting to serve the needs of ‘at-risk’ students, many children from the recreation centres did not get their applications in on time. Some middle class neighbourhood children found out about the programme and applied; we therefore ended up with much less cultural diversity than intended.

Absenteeism was another major problem. Although we only selected students who would be able to participate for the entire programme, we soon found that many students were absent due to family vacations and field trips from the recreation centres. When asked whether they wanted to come back to the programme next year, Lauren, for example, said, ‘I don’t want to come back because we’re missing all kinds of field trips and stuff.’

At first this was irritating, but I soon realized what we were competing with. Some of these students have had very few opportunities to experience a water park or amusement park. I now see that it may have been arrogant to expect that they would want to dance when other activities were calling them.

Additionally, we were attempting to include students from nine recreation centres across the city as well as some from libraries and the City Arts programme. Transportation was a major logistical problem. After figuring out routes and hiring teacher/ mentors as van drivers, we learned that the vans would no longer be available. Luckily, volunteers from the recreation centres drove a number of car loads of students, but many of the students were arriving at odd hours.

Another issue that emerged from the study addresses the fact that not all the students enjoyed everything. While many students loved the technique classes and indicated that they learned much and became more technically proficient in dance, some participants preferred working in their individual groups. Part of the reason for this may be that they were not accustomed to repetitive dance movements and the discipline of dance training. For example, Nicole stated, ‘{There were} too many plie’s.’ Tish added, ‘I was tired.’ But perhaps, we were not aware of power issues regarding the imposition of a dance technique based on asking students to perform repetitive movements such as plie’s and other structured movement activities, particularly from students who may not have been exposed to such rote learning of movements in their own lives. Perhaps we did not consider enough that many had indicated that they were there to ‘have fun.’ Further, there may have been an innate function of technique that may be at odds with teaching dance to community children. We may have looked more thoroughly into the complexities of incorporating both a technical skills model and a student directed format. Although, I still feel that both are practically necessary in order to prepare students for further study in the profession but also to help students take ownership of the dance experience, it may be helpful to problematise such a marriage of style and approach so that we can strive to make community programmes more accessible in the future.

Moreover, as previously suggested, the students’ resonance with the group work may have been tied to the individual attention that they were receiving from their personal teacher/mentors. And of course, many of the students were arriving with different backgrounds in dance as well as cultural backgrounds and needs. Some students indicated that their favourite part of the programme was the snack break.

In this context, food, for some of the students, may have been more important than dance. To assume dance is most important may be elitist. Sometimes those of us in the dance world begin to believe that dance is the ultimate answer, a panacea to all the world’s problems. We tend to imagine that we are offering dance as a medicine to cure all the world’s woes. However, we often see ourselves at the centre of the world with a special task or gift, that everyone should be honoured to receive, without realising that dance may not be what everyone needs or wants. It may be a tool to help some people find meaning in their lives. However, these students raised awareness that there may be other interests or needs that supercede dance. Dance may be just one experience, an opportunity to discover one way that may express their needs and desires.

Thus, some students wanted more dancing, some students were happy to meet new friends, some students were happy to get fed, and some students craved the relationship between themselves and an older mentor. Extending the programme in a more social service-oriented way may have meant not being able to serve the needs of all the participants at all times.

Discussion: Looking Back Reflectively

Looking back reflectively, I realise that perhaps the most significant issue in attempting to provide such a community dance programme is a question of power or authority. Just because there are complications and problems does not mean we should abandon such vital community dance programmes. We are bound to help at least a few participants discover meaningful voids in their lives, or perhaps provide some sustenance in one way or another. However, assumptions such as this may also take us back a step. By presuming these students are ‘lacking’ we may not be helping them. We may be imposing our own perspective of the world, as we impose a

dance technique based on our own worlds. If we refuse to look at how we envision ourselves in the project we are bound to replicate offensive and patronising ways of presenting ourselves to the community. For instance, throughout the programme, I felt uneasy with the label 'at-risk students'. I found myself asking questions such as, 'Who am I to indicate that others are potentially in danger of particular fates or behaviours? By naming students "at-risk", am I not perpetuating the myth that they need special services because they are lacking in some way?' 'Does this term connote a superiority above those who we are "kind enough" to "help"?'

Chris Lomas (1994) addresses the traps of labels, particularly regarding disenfranchised groups. She asserts, 'We have to address for ourselves that which has shaped us, in particular in terms of our valuing systems' (p. 227). In other words, in order to facilitate a sense of community ownership of the dance project we may need to look at the ways we are complicit in disempowering marginalised groups. We may need to ask ourselves what personal needs we are fulfilling, for example, seeing ourselves as social helpers, as knowing what is good for the 'misfortunate others'. Lomas claims,

We have to address the disabling effect upon our own experiences of a world which devalues those who are defined as not having achieved, aspired to, or not capable of appropriate cultural behaviours ... Facilitation of community interaction is not something we should do to others; it is something we ought to recognize as a need in ourselves so that validation of ourselves in our actions and interactions is dependent upon an understanding of how our 'we' is clustered and demonstrated by my self, my family, my community, my state ... {The} label serves to support the labellers' power and superior value, and to control the actions of the labelled. (p. 227)

This may be why many African American parents have been sceptical of those who invade their communities in the name of good. Yes, community dance programmes such as Summer Dance Connections may be valuable, but perhaps not in the ways we intend. Perhaps in the end, they may teach us, the artists and educators, how we collude in the disempowerment of others. They may teach us how not be elitist, how not to lower others in order to raise ourselves, and how to move toward a future of true community collaboration. In addition, they may teach dance educators in the public schools, how to strive to reach a growing number of diverse and marginalised populations in our schools today.

Methodological Reflections

In closing, I feel that as there is a need to look reflexively at the programme and research, there is also a need to look at the methodology and investigative process. Since I was interested in providing findings from a number of viewpoints, I found that the use of a myriad of data collection methods worked in this case. Drawing from a number of sources, I was able to gain a global picture of the issues. For example, the students provided a birds-eye view of their experiences, while the parents addressed the need for such a service learning programme in their community. The university teacher/mentors were able to address the needs of their own multicultural experiences while endeavouring to teach a student population who may at first appear foreign to them. They were also able to step outside the world of dance and support student needs in a very different way.

Looking for ways to extend this research project, I realise that there are some things I would change. For example, although I had the advantage of collecting data from a number of different people who served as interviewers during the project, I might have received greater consistency in types of responses by providing a more rigorous interview schedule. For example, since the parents were interviewed at various times throughout the project, it was difficult to tell whether or not particular aspects of the programme affected their responses. Therefore, I would attempt to interview them at the same point in the process. Furthermore, I would like to be more active in all the interviews. Since I did not interview the parents or students, I was more removed from the data in these cases. Although each teacher/mentor did an excellent job referring to the interview guide, I may have ensured fuller responses had I also asked questions.

In spite of these considerations, I felt that I was able to collect some rich data from a number of perspectives and dimensions. By attempting to hear a variety of voices from the diverse groups of participants in the project through the triangulation process, I was more able to layer the experiences and issues that emerged from the

study. However, as with the research content itself, I will continue to ask questions and seek methods that allow me to look at how my ideas and assumptions may not be the only ones that exist; I will continue to look for ways that elicit multifaceted meanings and explore how my own perspectives colour the data.

This type of reflexive methodology may help provide community dance researchers, as well as dance education researchers, with a different context for looking at diverse populations. Hopefully it will lead to a research venue that helps us become more reflexive and multi-sited both as practitioners and scholars.

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I would like to thank Sue Stinson, who envisioned, inspired, and developed the Summer Dance Connections programme.

NOTES

1. I use terms such as 'at-risk', 'empower', and 'non-dancers' in parenthesis because, as I will explain, these terms are often problematic and may serve to actually disempower those whom we are seeking to help.
2. Sue Stinson is head of the Department of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA. She is a well-known dance educator, scholar, and curriculum theorist in the United States and abroad, known for her work with 'meaning' and dance education. Her ideas led to the development of this programme. She envisioned this programme as a way to reach community children and their families, provide dance experiences to the community and expose university students to populations of students who may come from different backgrounds. In an accompanying grant proposal to the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro (the project was supported by a grant from the foundation), Dr Stinson addressed the following needs in the community:
 - a. more opportunities to study and perform the arts for young people without the means to attend classes at private studios and other sites, where the average fee is \$7–10 per class;
 - b. mentoring and opportunities to become comfortable in a college environment, for young people who might not have imagined themselves as future college students; and
 - c. more opportunities for future dance teachers to develop skills in working with young people from socio-economic backgrounds different from their own and with racial minorities.

Since Dr Stinson was preparing for her leave to Australia during the first year of the programme, I served as the primary director from the university. However, we communicated often and discussed findings from the study.

3. See Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) for discussions about qualitative research validity concerns.
4. See Erickson (1986) and Kvale (1989) for discussions about theoretical questioning in qualitative research.
5. See Kvale (1983), Lather (1986) and Peshkin (1988) for discussions about researcher reflexivity and reflectivity.
6. The participants were offered an opportunity to select their own pseudonyms for this project. Some participants selected different names while a few chose to keep their given names.

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