The potential of dance education to promote social cohesion

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What is dance education?

Dance education is not ballet
Dance education is not hip-hop
Dance education is not ballroom
Dance education is not about putting on a show

- Holistic development (Koff, 2000, McCutchen, 2006; Hanna, 2008)
- Creative exploration
- Movements used during child’s play
- Dance-making

+ ethno-cultural dances
Proposition: Dance education, as it pertains to this study, may have the potential to promote social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa.

What was the impact of this first year dance education course on a culturally and politically diverse group of students in post-apartheid South Africa?
Research design & methodology

- Qualitative Case Study / Interpretive paradigm
- First year B. Ed students (IP and FP)
- 7 week dance education course
- 80 participants volunteered

Data generation:

- Reflective journals
  - *Today I thought...*
  - *Today I felt...*
- Open-ended questionnaires
  - *Describe a meaningful experience you had*
  - *Why was it meaningful?*
- Focus group interviews
Symbolic interactionism:
George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) and Norman Kent Denzin (1941-)

Interactions as platform for the adjustment of meaning of the Self, the Other and society (Plummer, 2004)
Findings:

Self

- Expression
- Confidence
- Ethno-cultural identity
- Freedom
- Intellectual development

Other

- Sameness
- Difference
- Culture of Other
- Beliefs about Other
- Social conduct

Cohesion

- Interculturalism
- Active participation / cooperation
- Cohesion
Week 1: ‘Today I felt bad when I was on stage dancing with a partner... which made me to be interested to know dancing.’

Week 3: ‘Today I noticed that that I’m more comfortable and able to express myself when working in groups. I’m starting to be creative in my own dancing.’

Week 4: ‘I felt like I’m growing in confidence as I was in the first few days in the class very shy.’
Week 5: ‘My confidence grew more and more and I think this will eventually help me in the classroom as well as in church. Before these dance lessons I could not express myself the way I would. Many times I thought about something but was unable to say it. These dance lessons have increased my confidence.’

Week 6: ‘Today we were given an opportunity to teach our dance movements, which has added and increased my sense of belief that I can stand in front of many people.’

Week 7: ‘Group work has increased my communication skills. Also the ability to interact with others. My overall impression of the lesson is that: It was exciting, morale boosting, also playing a major role in building up my self-esteem.’
Ja... and we also did the gumboots one. That was fun because that one I’m familiar with. In my culture we do it. So... it was kind of like my culture also came in. I was not only being exposed to different cultures ... also something that I know, that I know, I got to express myself in it, so for me it was fun’ (FG2:2: Zulu-f).

‘I really loved to do that ... it was meaningful because I’m Afrikaans and I didn’t know how to dance it and thought it was a thing that grew out [sic], that did not exist anymore, but I was wrong. I really learnt something about my culture...’ (Student Q3: Afrikaner-f).
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‘Through dancing in different groups I also got to meet different people and make new friends with other people in my course’ (Q17)

‘You express yourself and find out how other people are. I made friends doing that (FG1:3)’

You ‘bond’ (FG3:10) and ‘connect’ (FG1:4; Q26; FG4:2) with each other as you ‘got to know’ (Q9, Q13, Q14, Q17) each other.

**Students experienced a sense of togetherness with a different ‘kind’ (FG3:10) of person: ‘I connected to people I never talked to before’ (Q26)**

Students engaged socially and emotionally with others to ‘form that relationship’ (FG4:1) and to discover ‘who they can connect with’ (FG1:3).

‘You make relationships with people you have never spoken to’... *in a multicultural inclusive environment* (FG6:1)
It enabled me to ‘get in touch with other cultures and how things are done, how they dance. It was really a good experience for me and I enjoyed it’ (FG2:1: Xhosa-f).

‘I found respect for gumboots dancers because it’s rather difficult and they do it so well because they practise so hard. I found it so much fun and interesting that I went to watch video clips of gumboot dances’ (Q7: Afrikaner-f)

About Volkspele ... ‘but actually to do it, was wonderful’ (FG2:3: Xhosa-f)
‘you learn my style and I learn your style’ (FG2:2. Xhosa)

Student: ‘We had the one girl showing us this move, and this ‘Coloured’ girl is like, ‘do this’, and we’re like, why, we can’t do that, we ‘Whities’ we can’t move like that. And it’s just cool with these different personalities’.

Interviewer: ‘Did you do it?’

Student: ‘No, we cut it from the dance ... there are parts of me that don’t shake.’

Interviewer: ‘How did she respond?’

Student: ‘She just laughed because she thought it’s so funny. She watched us and said, we don’t have to worry about it, it’s okay. It was just nice to see the different personalities ... so how they interpret a piece of music, how they interpret a move, will be different’.
‘It teaches you just how to conduct yourself, how to interact with other people’ (FG3:4.A-f)

‘what’s socially acceptable, [and] what’s not acceptable’ (FG4:4.C-f)

‘... social values, treating people with kindness, with everything ... that is just like good in the world, something like that. It’s weird ... it gets you engaged, involved, talking, moving, exercising, dancing. It’s an expression that everyone can benefit from’ (FG6:1.I-f).
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In all the other lectures, all the other modules we have all done all year, all day its multiculturalism uh ... inclusivity ... and how to attempt to try to teach in that way... and this is the only class where it is actually been practised.... Because of that, it makes this class much more ... I don’t know ... quite rewarding, something like that. You get something out of this class’ (FG6:1.I-f)

‘We were all holding hands. We had fun in this class in a multicultural, inclusive environment all the time ... and for that ... you make relationships with people you have never spoken to ... even though you are in the same class’ (FG6:1.I-f)
‘A lot of students struggle with citizenship. I think this class is one of those classes that you can actually practise strategies. You practise ... A lot of people struggle because they can’t bridge theory and practice and that’s why a lot of students struggle with citizenship’ (FG6:2.A-f).

It helps you with so many other things, like talking to other people, engaging in other people’s cultures. So you know what? I’m Muslim, she’s Catholic ... so maybe we do some sort of dance... whatever, we have to find out things about each other’s cultures. Now I know ... oh, you weren’t a weirdo after all, this is just what you do... because people are scared of things they don’t understand. People don’t like things they don’t understand. It’s uncomfortable. If you learn about it, you engage, you work with it, you work with each other and you come past that’ (FG6:1.I-f).
‘It’s that! How do you work as a society? You figure out very much... that you need to rely on every single person in that group, or you know it’s going to be a stuff-up. So, that whole dancing-together-thing ... really does work, in terms of getting them ready for society. What is your role going to be? Can you be dependable? All of those sort of things.... It’s a nation-building exercise ... that would be a nice way to put it’ (FG6:3.I-f).
‘I felt truly and proudly South African’ (J15.EW-f)

“... it’s learning stuff that you would never otherwise have the opportunity to learn and experience. Like even just the gumboot dancing ... I loved the gumboot dancing. It’s part of ... it’s not necessarily my culture, but its South African culture ... I mean, I don’t normally get to gumboot dance. You get to experience a part of your culture in a way, which is cool’ (FG3:3.EW-f).

Cultural dances bring in cultural understanding because a lot of people, if you’re born in a culture, you don’t really understand other people’s culture but if you can use that dance, we can use it as a link. We can start bridging those gaps between cultures and religions. Bridging the gap is not like you must accept everyone ... In a way that’s not forced on you ... You get to feel that culture, and get into it. That’s important especially in S.A. in our curriculum, we’ve got to keep it in mind...’ (FG4:10).
Cohesion

‘brings us together’ (Q17.A-f)
‘brings people together’ (J1.EW-f)
‘brought the class together’ (Q27.EW-f)

‘helped to bring all of us students together, to create in my opinion a stronger unit’ (Q12.EW-f)

‘It was really interesting to see how dance brought the class together... Everyone got along and some even became friends’ (Q27. EW-f)

‘there was a sense of unity amongst the class, when we all danced in a circle together’ (J15.EW-f)

‘It didn’t matter if we were born dancers. What mattered was that we learnt something new together and the new knowledge united us as a class’ (J19.X-f)

‘The class becomes a little kind of community’ (FG4:1.C-f).
Dance education sessions can promote social cohesion in a culturally and politically diverse South African University classroom.