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"I Am Because We Are" Dancing for Social Change!

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Abstract

In postapartheid South Africa, ideas of self, identity, and one's place in society pose a labyrinth of internal conflict and negotiation. In this article, we discuss the potential of a particular 7-week dance education course, offered to generalist preservice student teachers, as a possible location for self-transformation and, ultimately, social change. Our qualitative case study was rooted in symbolic interactionism, with social interactions becoming catalysts for transforming meanings of self in relation to the other. Participants, mostly nondancers, included 80 culturally diverse preservice student teachers (PSTs) enrolled in a first year bachelor's degree in education (BEd). Students shared personal reflections on their dance education experiences via open-ended questionnaires, focus group interviews, and reflective journals. Our data indicate that the students' dance education experiences generated transformative awareness of the self. This consciousness was primarily evoked by close interactions with diverse others through active, bodily involvement in dance education activities, which prompted more profound engagement with the self, stimulating discovery, liberation, affirmation and, ultimately, transformation of the self.

Keywords: multicultural education, social change, personal transformation, dance education, peace education

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Introduction

The South African Constitution (1996) values and promotes the recognition of dignity, equality, and authenticity for all South African citizens. The country's motto, "Unity in Diversity," reflects an ideology aimed at the unification of distinctly diverse groups of people, all living together in harmony without compromising their unique and distinctive identities. The reality, however, is that in postapartheid South Africa, predicaments of the self in terms of dignity, equality, recognition, uniqueness, authenticity, and identity still persist, impeding social change (Soudien, 2012). It is our proposition that these challenges can be addressed through education, with educational programmes focusing on recognition of sameness and difference, equality and social cohesion (Blum, 2014; Luong & Nieke, 2014).

In this article, we discuss the potential of a particular dance education course offered at a South African tertiary institution to generalist, preservice student teachers to promote social change in particular, with regards to transforming notions of self in a culturally and politically diverse postapartheid classroom.

Background

Rather than promoting unity amongst diverse groups, the previous South African apartheid government enforced and decreed segregation of groups according to culture, race, and ethnicity. This separation inadvertently influenced individuals' self-esteem, agency, and aspirations at personal as well as collective levels. It also informed personal and collective stereotypical perceptions of self and other reinforcing, for example, generalised assumptions of white Western supremacy, giving rise to discrimination against all "non-white" people, including indigenous African citizens. Today, many South African citizens, including those born after 1994, are still grappling with feelings of inferiority, anger, resentment, disillusionment, shame, and guilt. The reality is that acute awareness of apartheid-related injustices still prevails as "knowledge in the blood," in other words,

> *knowledge embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual, social, economic, political, and psychological lives of a community. . . . Knowledge in the blood is habitual, a knowledge that has long been routinized in how a second generation see the world and themselves, and how they understand others. (Jansen, 2009, p. 171)*

This discomforting "knowledge" inadvertently informs South Africans' perceptions of the self. In addition, the so-called "new" South Africa remains contaminated with racism, xenophobia, colonialism, imperialism, cultural disparity, and psychological despondence, which further diminishes and disrupts the individual's self-esteem as it chains the individual to the prison of stereotype. Awareness of adverse public generalisations and stereotypes of collective identities invoke a "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3), leaving individuals acutely vulnerable because it often manifests as internalised self-disgust, diminished self-esteem, or reluctance to identify the self with a particular ethnocultural collective (Smith & Riley, 2009). In this regard, Bell (2007) and Soudien (2008) held that continued experiences of discriminatory practices deprive individuals of reaching their full potential; they give rise to self-doubt and low self-esteem, inhibiting agency, aspirations, and self-determination.

Recent student protests at several South African universities, sparked inter alia by the #Rhodesmustfall[1], #Feesmustfall[2], and #OpenStellies[3] campaigns, confirmed innumerable unresolved social and political challenges experienced by students. South African educational institutions are indeed complex, multifaceted sites of paradoxes and challenges, with students often confronted by

[1] https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall
[2] https://www.facebook.com/nmmufmf/
[3] https://twitter.com/openstellies?lang=en

distorted and conflicted perceptions of self, other, and society, in particular with regard to notions of association, rights, and privilege (Luescher, 2016; Soudien, 2012). Negotiations and renegotiations of formerly held perceptions about self and other—as inhabitants of the African continent—are thus at present complex personal tasks, leaving many students angry, frustrated, confused, anxious, and despondent (Adams, van de Vijver, de Bruin, & Bueno Torres, 2014; Costandius & Bitzer, 2014). South African society is undeniably in dire need of more effective strategies to bring about social change, "heal the divisions of the past" (Constitution, 1996, p. 1243), and restore the dignity of all citizens.

In this regard, Delport (2009) emphasised that social change should be conceived as a complex, profound, and double-layered process, constituting transformation at two reciprocal levels, namely the *infrastructural* and the *superstructural*. The superstructure denotes the political sphere, evident in structural societal changes including new policies and legislations. The infrastructure, on the other hand, refers to the personal sphere, involving the pre-political dispositions of each individual citizen. Delport (2009, p. 158) explained:

> *At the core of the infrastructure are individuals' needs and happiness, their relationships and their ideas about life and development. At the core of infrastructural transformation are the conversions pertaining to these aspects. The infrastructure is more fundamental to social transformation than the superstructure, because to a large extent, the legitimacy and maintenance of the superstructure depends on the infrastructure.*

Hence, social change is not merely brought about by new, amended policies and legislation. In essence, sustainable social change implies transformation of the self, evident in attitudinal and behavioural changes leading to enhanced social interactions between diverse people. Such inner transformation however cannot be enforced from outside, but needs to be nurtured and cultivated within each individual (Delport, 2009; Oloyede, 2009). In this regard, it is generally accepted that the education domain constitutes the ideal artery for social change, because this is the primary space where ideas of self and other can be nurtured and inner, personal transformation engendered (Blum, 2014; Delport, 2009; Luong & Nieke, 2014).

Dance Education

Dance education is a compulsory component of the Creative Arts learning area currently implemented in South African primary schools. Hence, it is included as a stand-alone component in our preservice student teachers' course work. At this juncture, it is necessary to distinguish between *dance education* and *dance training*. According to Koff (2000), the primary aim of dance training is to equip an individual dancer with the necessary skills, control, and technique to master a performance. Dance training is therefore applied in relation to dance as performance art. The aim of dance education, on the other hand, is to enable *all* individuals to develop the skills necessary for personal expression through bodily movement in a nonverbal manner (Koff, 2000). Hence, whereas dance training is end-product orientated, dance education foregrounds the value of the creative processes involved during the dance-making process. It is aimed at fostering the general holistic development of an individual (Eddy, 2009). It goes without saying then, that dance education teaching strategies differ vastly from those of dance training, as further discussed in subsequent sections of this article.

Theoretical Underpinning: Symbolic Interactionism

This research study is primarily rooted in *symbolic interactionism* as proposed by George Herbert Mead (as cited in David, 2010), Plummer (2004), Herbert Blumer (1986), and Norman Kent Denzin (2009). As theoretical framework, symbolic interactionism served as a lens, in other words, an existing working theory and philosophy underpinning the manner in which we approached this study. Symbolic interactionism is premised on the assumption that human beings have the capacity to produce symbols of meaning, which enable the production of history, culture, and communication (Plummer, 2004).

Meaning here is viewed as *social products* formed through social interaction, hence created "in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer, 1986, p. 5). Human beings' reactions towards "objects" (which include people) depend on the meanings these objects hold for each individual.

Cooley (1907/2010) reminds us that a person's cognitive processes are connected to the thoughts of predecessors, companions, and the collective. An individual's interpretation of meaning is consequently related to these. Interpretation, however, requires more than mere application of conventional meanings. Rather, it requires a process by which meanings are reevaluated and adjusted as instruments for generation of action (Blumer, 1986). Of particular relevance for this study is Atkinson and Housley's (2003) assertion that meanings can be transformed in order to adjust reaction and social conduct towards objects (including people). This revision of meaning occurs during an inner dialogue through which the individual communicates and interacts with the self (Atkinson & Housley, 2003). It is through these interactions with the self that individuals are able to construct conscious action towards the other and the world, rather than responding through mere automation (Blumer, 1986).

Symbolic interactionism therefore focuses primarily on ideas of self, how the self adapts to others, how the self constructs order, and how the self constructs civilisation (Plummer, 2004). It therefore conceptualises society as "people engaged in living" (Blumer, 1986, p. 20). Life involves interactions with others, during which persons both designate and interpret meaning in order to develop and adapt to others and society. In other words, reciprocal interactions with others generate acts through which life and society are organised. As interactions with objects, the other and the self change over time and circumstance, meanings also evolve, adapt, and develop (Plummer, 2004). The self is thus viewed as social and subsequently inseparable from social life. In this regard, symbolic interactionism focuses not only on the self, but also on "collective behaviour" and "how people do things together" (Plummer, 2004, pp. 1105–1106). Denzin (1969/2010), accordingly, saw symbolic interactionism as predicated on the following methodological principles:

- Meaning is informed by social construction, which necessitates an investigation into both the meaning making system of individuals, and the implications of interactions between meaning making systems.
- Certain interpretations of meaning are implicit and others are negotiated.
- Meaning fluctuates during interaction, as interpretation of meaning is negotiated.
- The locality of interaction affects behaviour. This includes the specific people involved, the environment of the interaction, associated meanings during interaction, as well as the amount of time dedicated to interaction.

In essence, symbolic interactionism promotes social interaction as a platform where individuals can engage and interact not only with others, but also with the self during inner conversations with the self, in order to change meaning (Plummer, 2004). This study focuses primarily on transformed meanings of self. We argue that dance education can serve as a unique platform where profound interactions with the other (and the self) can promote transformations of the self, in a manner that ultimately can affect social change.

Contextualising this Study

This study focuses on a particular dance education course that forms part of a general teacher education programme for nondance specialist students aspiring to become generalist primary school teachers, teaching diverse South African learners in diverse schooling contexts. The dance education component constitutes one stand-alone section of a compulsory general arts education course. It

focuses on dance teaching and learning strategies aimed specifically at fostering general holistic development of culturally diverse young South African learners (Eddy, 2009; Koff, 2000). This particular course comprises only seven lectures. Each lecture lasts 75 minutes, resulting in approximately nine contact hours in total. Inadequate time allocation unfortunately hampers skill, aesthetic, technique, and pedagogic development, allowing only a brief overview of subject content material. The primary focus of this course is on practical and pedagogical aspects associated with facilitation of creative movement activities and ethnocultural dances, core components of dance education as described in the South African national school curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Creative movement in this context involves activities where participants explore and expand their repertoire of natural play movements in expressive and creative ways (Kauffman & Ellis, 2007). In this study, creative movement activities involved collaborative dance-making in small groups of approximately five student teachers each. Students were provided with a set of specific objectives and parameters in which to, collaboratively, create a dance. These objectives usually highlighted a specific formal dance element. Explorations of space, for example, were facilitated as: "Design a dance that includes three different formations plus an ending." Students were allowed approximately 15 to 20 minutes to design and practise the dance, after which they performed it to the class. After each group's performance, formative feedback was shared with all the students, emphasising basic aesthetic criteria for movement evaluation. These creative movement activities constituted the major component (90%) of each lecture session.

The remainder of the study was dedicated primarily to (attempted) Africanisation of dance education through the teaching of diverse ethnocultural dances. The term, ethnocultural dances, is used here to refer to "traditional" South African ethnocultural dances associated with for example Zulu, Afrikaner, and Xhosa cultures. The term also encompasses recently evolving contemporary dances associated with particular indigenous ethnocultural communities, such as the *Kaapse Klopse*—an integrated dance and music style associated with the Cape Malay (Bruinders, 2012)—and the *township jive*, which germinated from the *swing* in Sowetan canteens and social events, spreading to other townships during times of political oppression (Glasser, 2000). Due to limited time, the teaching of diverse ethnocultural dances was basic and rudimentary, with students mainly imitating and mastering movements demonstrated by Marelize, the dance education lecturer.

This dance education study therefore actively engaged students in collaborative dance-making processes and learning a variety of ethnocultural dances. Although collaborative dance-making resonates with African teaching and learning methods, and diverse ethnocultural dances are celebrated, we cannot rightfully claim this course as Africanised. From a critical stance, it is clear that certain colonial influences remain evident because of hegemonic practices. Both authors are white Afrikaners with solid Eurocentric, Western grounding in the arts. Application of a single set of aesthetic criteria—Eurocentric in this case—for this dance education study was inherently exclusionary.

Diverse ethnocultural groups often subscribe to diverse sets of aesthetic criteria that indicate so-called "good" dance practice and performance. In African dance, for example, a main indicator of good performance regards the extent to which the audience participates through verbal encouragement and clapping during the performance (Adinku, 2004; Edwards, 2010). Western traditions, however, require silence and restraint during performances. In a culturally diverse classroom, insistence on such a response during performances can be viewed as hegemonic because it not only gives preference to a Western aesthetic, but also literally and figuratively negates and silences the voice of the African aesthetic, and the African person, for the duration of the performance. Emphasis on a Western aesthetic thus deeply sustains a colonised curriculum. Also, if these dance education sessions result in students adopting a foreign aesthetic, a sense of belonging and identification with their own ethnocultural group gets disrupted, which could indeed inhibit intracultural sustainability, ultimately hampering intracultural cohesion (Rowe, 2008). In addition, such practices can inadvertently

destabilise and subvert notions of self, which can fuel innate perceptions of inferiority with students losing confidence in their unique cultural identities, their own authentic creative works and, subsequently, themselves.

The teaching of ethnocultural dances through demonstration, as was the case in this study, can also be problematised as hierarchical, reinforcing unequal power relations in the classroom (Rowe, 2008). Such dance movement demonstrations could be interpreted as inauthentic, necessarily influenced, informed, and affected by Marelize's own internalised, Western-based cultural and social orientations (Ashley, 2014; Bond, 2010; Rowe, Buck, & Martin, 2014). At a more practical level, we also admit that time constraints during lectures did not allow appropriate contextualisation of each ethnocultural dance, raising concerns regarding essentialism and exoticism (Ashley, 2014; Bond, 2010; Risner & Stinson, 2010). Simplistic and superficial teaching of ethnocultural dances potentially disregards the aesthetic value that the particular dance has for its members: the specific meaning that the dance holds for the particular ethnocultural group (Risner & Stinson, 2010). Such absence of contextualisation can devalue both the meaning of the dance and the worldview of the represented ethnocultural group (Ashley, 2014).

Mindful of the shortcomings of this particular course during the current Africanisation discourse, we now shift our focus to the impact of the dance education course on our student teachers—a group of culturally and politically diverse students in postapartheid South Africa. We however still contend that, despite the shortcomings of the course as explained above, participation in this particular dance education programme provided spaces for profound social interaction between culturally and politically diverse students. Every creative movement activity, for example, required all individuals to participate in social interactions, bodily interactions, verbal negotiations, bodily negotiations, and cooperation with the other in order to cocreate and perform a dance. In our study, through the lens of symbolic interactionism, we explored these profound interactions as potential catalysts for personal transformation, in particular, with regard to notions of self in relation to the other, in a post-conflict culturally diverse South African classroom.

Research Methodology

This research project was qualitative in nature and designed as a case study. Participants included 80 preservice student teachers (PSTs) enrolled in a first-year bachelor's degree in education (BEd) at a South African university, registered for a generic 7-week dance education course. Through open-ended questionnaires, focus group interviews, and reflective journals, students were encouraged to share personal reflections on their experiences in the dance education classroom by responding to the following prompts:

- Reflect on the dance education lectures and describe a meaningful experience you had. (You may describe more than one experience or event if you like.)
- Why was the experience meaningful?

In their reflective journals, students were prompted to reflect as follows:

- Today I felt . . .
- Today I thought . . .
- Today I noticed that . . .

Data were analysed by applying the open coding method (Schurink, Fouché, & de Vos, 2011). We attempted to overcome any bias through conscious application of the hermeneutic circle (Higgs & Smith, 2002), as well as by drawing on the assistance of an additional independent coder who analysed the data. Marelize, Aletta, and Mia, the independent coder, analysed the data separately, after which

final themes were determined during a consensus meeting. Each of us also kept the data sets produced by the different data generation methods separate for initial analysis and triangulation purposes. All three of us, however, concurred that these categories overlapped in a manner that would justify assimilation of the three data generation methods into one set of findings for the discussion.

Marelize's dual role as teacher-researcher posed various concerns with regard to ethics, bias, trustworthiness, and reliability (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). For example, her particular position of influence as lecturer, and her personal assumptions and propositions with regard to the impact of this particular dance education course, might have forcefully or subliminally influenced the students' responses and interfered with the neutrality and reliability of the data. In this regard, Marelize was meticulous with her verbal and nonverbal communication to participants. As sole dance education facilitator, she could determine activities and discussions in class, ensuring that students' responses were not influenced and contaminated by means of deliberate discussions related to cultural diversity, awareness of self, self-esteem, intrapersonal development, and so forth. Her role as teacher-researcher provided us with meticulous control over information provided to participants, reducing non-contamination of the data due to a third party involvement.

A limitation of this study, however, is the absent negative voices in the data, affecting credibility (Bazeley, 2013; Morse, 2015). Reanalysis of the data revealed limited incidents of negative experiences, and most of these were resolved constructively. We ascribe this to the absence of a strategic inquiry into the challenges experienced during these dance education sessions. That being said, it is our contention that this case study, despite its limitations, supports the proposition that dance education experiences can promote social change.

Discussion of the Findings

The primary theme emerging from the students' reflections was that this particular dance education programme generated "transformative awareness of the self." This consciousness was primarily evoked through close interactions with diverse others by means of active bodily involvement in dance education activities, which further prompted students to engage more profoundly with the self. These self-reflections stimulated affirmation, liberation and, ultimately, transformation of the self.

The following abbreviations qualify the source of each response: Q = questionnaire, J = journal, and FG = focus group interview. Each abbreviation is followed by the student's number. Focus group interviews indicate the number of the focus group before the student number, for example, FG3.4.X. Because this study concerns issues of social change in a culturally diverse classroom, we believe it is also relevant to indicate the ethnocultural affiliation of the students via symbol (X = Xhosa, C = coloured, I = Indian, Z = Zulu, E = white English-speaking, A = white Afrikaner).

Affirming the self

The data indicated that dance education interactions affirmed the participants' sense of self. Student FG6:2.A experienced dance education encounters as "some form of expression and reflection of who we are." During a focus group interview, student FG5:2.E asserted:

> *Because obviously if you're a young adult, you still don't fully know basically how to express yourself. You don't always have the best way expressing yourself. . . . So, it's an interesting thing to see for yourself, look here, if I do this movement I can express if I'm angry or if I'm happy, whatever . . .*

Many students referred to increased self-confidence and affirmed self-esteem. They described how they managed to overcome personal reservations, inhibitions, and reticence through involvement in the dance education activities. Student J10.X, for example, recorded in his personal journal:

> *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 2: Today I thought I did pretty well and . . . to improve. Today's performance has lifted me up and made me believe that I can be a good dancer.*
>
> *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.*

This student experienced increased self-confidence, not only in the lecture hall but also beyond (at church). Dance education experiences enhanced his interactions in the lived world, enabling him to develop voice and unearth his own potential as a human being. This awareness empowered him to transcend feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and incompetence. During one of the interviews, student FG2:1.X also referred to enhanced self-esteem:

> *It might be hard for me to do something or to say something to you in front of the whole class, but when I get a chance to work with my classmates [during creative movement] it kinda like becomes easier.*

Similarly, student J4.C mentioned in her journal that dance education "made me relaxed and I wasn't afraid to give my opinion [during group work]. . . . Now I'm confident." This was also evident in student J15.E's journal:

> *Weeks 1 and 2: I am also very shy to perform in front of my classmates. I felt uncomfortable and unhappy with the second activity when we had to make a dance in groups. . . . There was much difficulty in communicating with people in my group.*
>
> *Week 3: Even though I am very shy. . . . The group activities went well today. I felt that my group members communicated a lot better than usual and I was pleased when my suggestions were heard.*
>
> *Week 4: I also feel that I can participate in a group dance with more confidence . . . I feel confident that I will be able to teach dancing to Intermediate Phase learners.*
>
> *Week 5: I had so much fun and I felt confident.*

From the above it is clear that dance education experiences afforded students opportunities for self-affirmation. Since this happened in a culturally and politically diverse group, it subsequently affirmed

individuals' sense of dignity and equality. The data also indicated that students' sense of themselves as inherently creative individuals was affirmed (Keun & Hunt, 2006). They experienced "a sense of achievement" (FG5:4.E) "when you realise you're quite clever at thinking out these interesting ways [to move]" (FG5:2.E).

Co-participation in dance making during small group creative movement activities further enhanced individual self-esteem as it affirmed the self. Student FG3:2.E, for example, mentioned, "I feel worthy and useful during the creative movement activities." Similarly, student FG3:3.E observed that "everyone's ideas were relevant, and everyone could add [contribute]." In her journal, student J4.C wrote, "Today I felt that I mattered in dance class." Student J2.C believed that "it makes each individual feel special." Of particular significance for our study were responses indicating students' confidence expressing themselves in the presence of others: "As each lesson passed I became more comfortable in front of my fellow classmates" (Q16.A). Another student (Q27.E) reiterated in her questionnaire: "Dance helped us as a group to feel more comfortable in front of each other." The data thus also confirm Mans' (1994) assertion that active involvement in dance activities empowers participants, as it enhances the dancer's self-confidence and sense of self-worth. Dance activities "allowed everyone to let go of their fear and social awkwardness and to be in the moment of something new and exciting" (J19.X). Dance education experiences restored some students' confidence in their capacity to make a meaningful contribution in a culturally diverse environment. The awareness that "everyone's ideas are relevant" (FG3:3.E) concomitantly enhanced faith in their own as well as others' capabilities, thus affirming equality. Individual contributions were seen as unique, valuable, and acceptable to the other. In essence, the dance experiences restored and affirmed their sense of equality and dignity, unleashing their potential as active agents in a multicultural group (Bernard, 1999; Constitution, 1996; Soudien, 2012; Taylor, 1994).

The data also indicated that participation in their own ethnocultural dances enabled these students to experience a sense of pride and belonging to their affiliated ethnocultural group because it reaffirmed the value of their own ethnocultural identities in a multicultural context. A Zulu student (FG2:1.Z) observed during an interview:

> *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.*

Similarly, an Afrikaner student (J8.A) admitted that it "meant a lot" that all her classmates participated in "Afrikaners is plesierig," a *volkspele* [folk dance] associated with the Afrikaner culture. She explained, "it was so much fun because I am Afrikaans." Another Afrikaner student (Q3.A) concurred, admitting that it reinforced her own sense of affiliation, identification with and pride in her own ethnoculture:

> *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, that did not exist anymore, but I was wrong. I really learnt something about my culture.*

Ethnocultural identity is informed by the manner in which one makes meaning of one's ethnocultural heritage (Castells, 2006). In contemporary South Africa, reinforcement of Afrikaner identity within a multicultural environment is often frowned upon and interpreted as hegemonic, reinforcing unequal power relations associated with the previous regime. Student Q3.A appreciated the opportunity to celebrate her own ethnocultural identity alongside those of ethnocultural others, despite potential internalised feelings of white Afrikaner guilt. The data thus suggests that participation in ethnocultural dances encouraged the students to embrace their respective ethnocultural identities, regardless of the particular ethnocultural group's association with political history of the country. Embodied rituals, such

as ethnocultural dances, enable meaning making as it upholds and reestablishes the collective values of a particular ethnocultural group (Durkheim, 1915). Participation in one's own ethnocultural dance reinforces the values of one's ethnoculture and, in so doing, facilitates cultural sustainability (Oliveira et al., 2012).

In addition, the data confirmed that collective participation in ethnocultural dances also reestablishes ethnocultural identity when fellow dancers do not share the same ethnoculture. In the multicultural classroom, co-participation of diverse individuals realises the reestablishment of particular ethnocultural identities. It is therefore the other who, through co-participation in the ethnocultural dance, enables a particular individual to reaffirm and take pride in his or her own ethnocultural identity. As such, it is the other who assists the individual to restore the dignity of both the individual and the associated collective. Moreover, the other enables the restoration of the self's dignity. This is significant for negotiations of notions of self in a society formerly segregated on grounds of ethnicity because it indicates the possibility for restoration of dignity for both the former "oppressors" and "oppressed"—important landmarks on the journey of inner transformation (Delport, 2009; Jansen, 2009). Also, this is particularly significant through the lens of *ubuntu* [I am because we are]: my dignity has been restored because of the others' co-participation in my dance. The other enables me to "become human" (Mbiti, 1969).

The data thus suggests that students experienced dance education as a means to express and affirm the self in the presence of the other. Student Q18.A held that "dance is an individual's way of expressing themselves, their thoughts, their emotions and represent their culture." Dance education experiences provided students with an opportunity to recognise and embrace their own potential, affirming their personal, social, and ethnocultural identities (Taylor, 1994). In our study, active and interactive participation with culturally and politically diverse others clearly nurtured the students' inherent sense of dignity, cherishing their own potential and value as a unique human being (Taylor, 1994). Consequently, it enabled students to regard themselves as equal to others—a critical requisite for the restoration of dignity in a post-conflict, transforming society (Bernard, 1999; Green, Janmaat, & Han, 2009).

Liberating the self

The data clearly indicated that active engagement in these dance education activities abetted students to explore and unearth their innate personal potential. These encounters were inherently liberating because they empowered students "to be open and express ourselves" (FG4:1.C) so that "people will really see what type of person you are" (FG3:1.X). Dance education provided a nonjudgemental and nonconforming space, allowing and empowering students the freedom to express their selves to the outside world as active participants in a multicultural South African classroom, irrespective of individual differences, and without fear of condemnation or rejection.

Our data thus intertwine dance education experiences to experiences of freedom, in accord with Susan Stinson's (1997) postulation that dance education enables experiences of freedom. Students experienced dance education as "fun" and "enjoyable" because it made them feel "you're in a better mood, you are more free" (FG3:1.X). For student FG5:4.E, it was "like therapy." In a similar vein, student FG6:3.I experienced that "you generally feel better, it's a release." Student J4.C recorded in her journal: "When we did the traditional dances I felt great and free." Her view was confirmed by student FG5:1.C who mentioned, "It helped me just to free myself . . . just . . . let go and just try things, even if it doesn't work." The experience of freedom was articulated by students FG4:3.E and FG4:C who both expressed their sense of liberation as "everything sort of let go." Student FG6:3.I mentioned, "I don't have to worry about what others expect of me . . . I can just go and give whatever I have . . . it's like a sense of relief." As a result, the students were not inhibited by culturally diverse fellow students because they seemed to be "without the fear of being judged" (Q29.E). Student Q12.E, for example, believed that "because of dance we all began to loosen up and become less afraid of what

others thought of us." Another female student described her sense of liberation as follows: "It brings you out of your shell type of thing. . . . I'm a very shy person and for me to get up there and dance in front of people, is a big thing for me (FG5:2.E)."

Student FG2:3.X experienced dance as revitalising: "It like freshens up our minds and our thoughts." For student J8.A, dance "made me relax and I felt good the whole day," while student FG2:3.X specifically mentioned that dance education experiences enabled her to "free her mind" from her emotional stresses at home. This helped her to "think clearly" in order to make important decisions. Student FG1:1.A furthermore mentioned that, since creative movement activities compelled him to apply his imagination, it also enabled him to transcend the ordinary and mundane, allowing him to escape into an imaginary, "different world." This gave him the opportunity to engage more profoundly with himself as an autonomous human being, reevaluating the impact of others' opinions on his sense of self: "It took me out of my world, into some other reality. So, why care what people think."

These responses are particularly significant in postapartheid South Africa, a post-conflict society still grappling with social injustices such as prejudice, discrimination, disadvantage, and internalised feelings of inferiority, guilt, and shame. Mental stress associated with abject poverty (Department of Education, 2002), crime, domestic violence, child abuse, dysfunctional families (van Niekerk, 2008), and the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS (Wood, 2009) confront South African citizens on a daily basis. The responses indicated that dance education not only provided the participants with a channel for tension release, it also provided a mental space where they could escape the stark realities of everyday life, confirming dance's therapeutic value (Karkou & Sanderson, 2001).

Our data further indicated that these liberating experiences enabled students to uncover a hidden aspect of themselves, in particular, with regard to their creative capacities. "We did not know how we were going to do it but we ended up with something in the end" (FG5:4.E). In her reflective journal, student J2.C admitted, "When given the chance [we] can be far more creative than we think." The dance education sessions taught them that when they are placed "on the spot" (FG4:3.C), they can "think on their feet" (FG6:5.E). Student J4.C noted that dance education "just taught me to think fast and to respond quickly." The success experienced by the students confirms Keun and Hunt's (2006) notion that dance education activities can unleash personal creativity and problem solving abilities. In this regard, students also had to negotiate spaces of cooperation, encourage active participation, and manage diverse views and opinions of diverse others in order to cocreate the dance. "We all think differently so we must all come up with the dance routine we can all agree on" (Student J4.C). Dance education experiences subsequently also provided a space where individuals' creative capacity to solve problems, and their creative capacity to negotiate with the other, could be practised in a multicultural environment. This, in turn, increased the belief in the self to confidently voice opinion and "stand in front of many people" (J10.X). Thus, dance education experiences facilitated self-realisation, freeing the potential of the creative self to act as an able and active agent in a multicultural negotiation. Student FG4.3.E commented as follows:

> *That was really interesting to see when you've got like . . . all these different ideas coming through, it gave you such a good idea, to see that these people can have such different ideas and see how groups work so well together. That was really cool, for people who didn't know each other that well.*

In this regard, several students mentioned that group activities made them open and receptive to others' creative ideas. Diverse opinions and suggestions were consequently considered as valuable resources, providing innovative alternatives to normative ways of thinking.

Transforming the self

Engagement in this particular dance education programme also challenged the participants to revisit and transform previously held beliefs and perceptions. Responses indicated that interactions in the dance education classroom disrupted students' existing thinking, effecting perspective transformation and, ultimately, personal transformation. This happened through inner dialogues with the self (Atkinson & Housley, 2003). Student FG4:2, for example, recounted:

> *You've all got ideas about people, "ah, that's the girl that went to that school." But when you're in this little group and you have to work with them, you can just see that she's just being as silly as I am and it's nice.*

Dance education experiences enabled her to recognise a common, shared humanity that prompted her to transform her perspectives of her classmate. Reflections and inner dialogue with the self, brought about by interactions such as these, transformed interpretations of the world, ultimately altering behaviour towards others. Various students also reported transformed perceptions of peers after joint participation in dance activities. Student Q17.A referred to seeing "a new side" whereas Student FG3:10 alluded to experiencing a "different side" of peers.

Several responses indicated the students' transformed awareness of the class groups' sameness, despite its diverse composition in terms of ethnoculture. Dance education activities provided "a common ground" (FG1:6.E) where "the playing field is levelled" and where "everybody is exactly the same" (FG6:3.I). Student FG6:3.I explained, "We dance before we speak . . . I think there's an innate human need or want to express yourself through movement, and it happens so soon. . . . We learn it before language." During the same interview, an Afrikaner student mentioned that, "because dance is just like those universal languages that everyone . . . it doesn't matter what culture . . . we all can interpret, as some form of expression or some sort of reflection of who we are (FG6:2.A).

Similarly, student J12.E explained: "At first I felt a bit insecure to dance in front of everyone but then I realised that I'm sure most of the class felt the same." The students clearly perceived dance as a universal, shared form of communication and expression of the self, confirming the views of Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Kauffman and Ellis (2007), namely, that human beings share an inborn capacity for and desire to move. Student Q12.E stated: "I believe these dance lessons made us all realise that we are all similar in one way or another," whilst Student Q22.A observed that the dance education experiences "made me realise that everyone is just human." The data indicated that these students' notions of self in relation to the other were transformed, as they experienced a common humanity. An awareness of sameness amongst a group of culturally and politically diverse students, according to Taylor (1994), constitutes the foundation for human dignity, a key requisite for social change in post-conflict, postapartheid South Africa.

In the context of current Africanisation discourse in higher education, the potential of dance education to "unfreeze" old ways of thinking (O'Hara, 2003, p. 74) is significant. Individuals' revisions of their perceptions, as demonstrated above, stimulated amendments of individuals' disposition, orientation, and behaviour. In essence, these dance education interactions induced perspective transformation, provoking personal transformation resonating with the aspirations of social change envisioned for South Africa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we contend that the students who participated in this study's dance education sessions experienced a transformative awareness of the self in a manner that promoted the social change envisioned for South Africa. This awareness was essentially prompted during interactions with diverse others through active, bodily involvement in this course's dance education activities. These

interactions prompted students to engage more profoundly with the self in a manner that affirmed the self, particularly in relation to the other. It concomitantly emphasised sameness and difference, resonating with South Africa's motto of "Unity in Diversity." The dance education experiences seemed to liberate participants' ideas of self through enabling physical and mental experiences of freedom, and also by liberating the potential of the self as an active agent in a multicultural environment. Ultimately, dance education provided constructive spaces where students' awareness of themselves and of other participants was sharpened to the degree where they were prompted to revisit and transform their perspectives of the self in relation to the other. This sense making led to revalidations and transformations of personal meanings of self in relation to the other, ultimately affecting behaviour during social interactions and, in so doing, promoting social change. It is thus our contention that this particular dance education course, despite its shortcomings, provided interactive spaces conducive to social change. These interactive spaces, in accordance with symbolic interactionism, enabled alteration of perspectives with regard to the self, in relation to the other, and also in relation to society (Plummer, 2004).

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