

CHAPTER 5

Development of Individual Ability

5.1 Individual Affirmation, Body Language

At the beginning of class 6, some of the boys came in practicing, including Mr. Rhythm. I wanted to encourage him. After our greeting,

“As the warm up began I put my arm around Mr. Rhythm. I felt drawn to express my joy at what he had shared with us the previous lesson and wanted to encourage his continued participation.”(Appendix 2, class 6)

As I now consider the implications of my action I realise that by putting my arm around this boy I was using my most natural and comfortable form of expression: body language. Words did not seem adequate to express just how much I wanted the continued participation and inclusion of this young man. I’m not even sure if words would have conveyed much at all. At the time I did not even consider the educational stance that suggests that touching a learner under any circumstance is unacceptable. The debates on this issue I know will continue. I am very aware of the abuses of body language in education but this was an instance when I felt it was not only appropriate but perhaps necessary. Freire suggests that,

Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by generosity, because it interferes with the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human ... Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognise others as persons- not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognised. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves (Freire, 1970, p. 37).

My instinctive decision to put my arm around Mr. Rhythm was not intended to exploit or oppress, it was to include and affirm. To do this I had used my most trustworthy means of communication: the body.

(Appendix 5, Video 56 – class 6)

As I watched the videos again I became aware of just how often I indeed to ‘put my arm’ around a student to express my desire to include or affirm. One such example was to ‘include’ Mr. Silence.

(Appendix 5, Video 54 – class 6)

Later in class 6 Mr. Rhythm started to really participate enthusiastically.

“We then began the recall exercise and I reminded them that they needed to be sure of their steps in order not to “make a mess”. They did the sequence very well and I was thrilled. They were equally thrilled. Mr. Rhythm was fully engaged and concluded with a big smile.” (Appendix 2, class 6)

In the following clip Mr. Rhythm is the smaller boy with his back to the camera.

(Appendix 5, Video 57 – class 6)

I realise that the boundary between the ‘boxes’ of appropriate and inappropriate body language should be clear in the classroom but I also realise that their exact point of intersection is almost impossible to define. This ‘boundary’ is fluid and is observed differently from individual to individual and from culture to culture. Complete concurrence seems impossible and I rely in my intuition to guide my responses.

As class 6 progressed I became aware of the tremendous progress that was being made, including Mr. Rhythm:

“We then repeated the sequence from the top and I gave them the challenge to see who would manage to do it successfully. They performed it fast and very well. I was thrilled. They began to shriek with the excitement of success and burst into smiles and jumps of joy. Mr. Rhythm jumped and spun with elation. I responded by saying: please tell me if you have rhythm, put your hand up if you think you’ve got rhythm!” Mr. Rhythm could hardly contain himself as he put his hand up enthusiastically along with about 12 other students.”

(Appendix 2, class 6)

In this clip Mr. Rhythm has his back to the camera and is wearing a green jacket.

(Appendix 5, Video 58 - class 6)

I began to consider how my ‘belief’ in their rhythmical capacity influenced the way I approached my classes. If I believed that they had rhythmic capacity, did this account for my insistence that all could participate? I realised my natural inclination was to hold no expectations regarding individual ability. Perhaps this is because I have too often made predictions about a student’s ability (prior to the evidence) only to be proven incorrect at a later stage. Here I saw the majority developing their rhythmic capacity, including Mr Rhythm and I was delighted.

This fuelled my resolve to continue developing it. I sent them off to work on their improvisations.

“I then called Mr. Rhythm over as he was just sitting waiting and did not seem to be developing his ideas. He wanted to merely repeat what he had done the previous lesson almost as if he did not see himself capable of doing another one. I then encouraged him to develop what he had done. I clapped the rhythm for him and allowed him to hear how interesting his rhythms sounded to ‘backing’. He managed to improvise for quite some time.” (Appendix 2, class 6)

(Appendix 5, Video 59 – class 6)

It surprised me that Mr. Rhythm did not think he was capable of more than he had shown me the previous day. Here was a boy with outstanding rhythm not knowing what to do with it. Perhaps his self esteem needed to improve to support the development of his talent. I began to realise the absolute necessity of providing opportunity and encouragement because left to its own devices his talent remained static. The teacher commented,

One boy really attracted my attention (Mr. Rhythm). [He] does not always feature academically and his physical build restricts his success on the sports field. He then tries to seek attention in other ways normally in a negative way and is therefore in trouble. During the free creative period, he focused and was doing some amazing steps with arm movements as well. He has a natural way in his dancing. When asked to show his steps his grin stretched from ear to ear – what a positive boost to his self esteem! (Appendix 3, Week 3)

Was he “the student from hell” (Palmer, 1998, p. 41) who had been misdiagnosed?

As I watched the end of this clip I saw him run off with a great smile and enthusiasm to continue ‘working’. “Becoming aware of our gifts can help us teach more consistently from our identity and integrity.”(Palmer, 1998, p. 69) Here Palmer refers to a talent as a

gift while Whitehead sees teachers using their ‘talents’ to produce ‘gifts’ which are shared with others (Whitehead, 2008). I believe the criteria to determine whether the ‘talent’ should be shared or ‘given’ should be whether it evokes a “life-affirming energy” (Whitehead, 2009a line 595) or not. As teacher I seek to develop my talents as well as the talents of my students which through their expression of ‘life-affirming energy’ can become ‘gifts’ for others.

By affirming Mr. Rhythm’s talent I hoped to develop it. I realised how I value affirmation to encourage progress. As teacher I too depend on affirmations from my students and I often become aware of them during ‘time of reflection’. Against this background of our strengths we are able to face our failings leading to better understandings of self (Palmer, 1998, p. 70).

If children reared in an atmosphere of lovelessness and oppression, children whose potency has been frustrated, do not manage during their youth to take the path of authentic rebellion, they will either drift into total indifference, alienated from reality by the authorities and the myths the latter have used to ‘shape’ them; or they may engage in forms of destructive action ...The atmosphere of the home is prolonged in the school, where the students soon discover that (as in the home) in order to achieve some satisfaction they must adapt to the precepts which have been set from above. One of these precepts is not to think (Freire, 1970, p. 136).

I believe Mr. Rhythm had found himself in a place where his talent was not catered for and consequently his self esteem was poor. His ‘rebellion’ had taken the form of resistance and deviant behaviour where he seemed to refuse to ‘think’, at least not in the ways that were required of him. His refusal to ‘think’ was even evident in something he could do well. My intervention at this stage seems timorous.

“Later I noticed how he called one of the other boys to come and accompany him with clapping so that he could develop his ideas even further. I was so thrilled. Not only had he seemed to realise his natural talent and rhythmic ability but he had also discovered that if he had rhythmic ‘backing’ his rhythms were enhanced. This then gave a wonderful opportunity for another boy to discover that he had the ability to ‘follow’ a dancer with such accuracy.”
(Appendix 2, class 6)

Here was a wonderful example of the discovery and development of one individual’s talent leading to the discovery and development of another. The young boy who Mr. Rhythm recruited to clap for him became his permanent ‘backer’ and he too realised

that he had natural ability to ‘follow’ a dancer. I can only imagine what may have resulted if this team were given the opportunity to develop this.

I also had to encourage Mr. Einstein to develop his ‘talent’.

“After I had given enough time to this I asked who would like to volunteer to do their ‘improvisation’ first. Mr Einstein jumped up enthusiastically. After my encouragement to develop his creation he composed another verse.

*“They see me as this all boring dude
They see me as this all time prude
Don’t they know I’m not that bad?
Don’t they know I’m sometimes glad? Glad.
(Does improvisational stamps)
I’m glad until they see me as
This Einstein that they think I am
I know I may not be that cool
But I just want to rule!”*

(He finished with a series of improvisational stamps and a very strong stamp at the end as if to reinforce what he has just done.)

I was so happy to see him do this as it gave an indication of how this activity could be developed into a creative ‘writing’ exercise without the use of written text.” (Appendix 2, class 6)

This clip shows his ‘developed creation’.

(Appendix 5, Video 60 – class 6)

Mr. Einstein used his creation to draw attention to correct where he felt misunderstood. As the class continued I began ‘blending in’ as I increasingly began taking my place in the group to observe what was developing. I no longer felt my expertise was necessary as I began to witness the creativity of others.

When Mr. Silence performed in class 6 instead of being sniggered at he was encouraged by his peers. Whitehead suggests that in order to overcome difficulties a

“spiritual resilience” is required and “a connection with a loving energy to move beyond the difficulties” (Whitehead, 2009b, p. 116). I saw evidence of this here.

“At this point the class decided to encourage Mr. Silence to do his dance. He was cheered and applauded as he went to perform. He then performed a true improvisation. He seemed to flow silently from one movement to the next as he was inspired to do so. It was far more complex than his previous one and seemed to ‘draw the whole class in’ as he focused with such intensity on using his body to ‘speak’. He finished to enthusiastic applause and shouts of ‘ole’. I then applauded him and thanked him. I asked the class why his performance had been so lovely. I did this to see if any were able to identify from watching what had made his creation so unique. Responses included:

*“it was different ...
it was silent...”*

I then remarked on how lovely that ‘silence’ had been. I asked them if they had noticed how he seemed to be “really into what he was doing” and the class replied “yes”. I then tried to draw to their attention the importance of that as a means to draws others in to share our experience. I did this in order to try and make them aware of how powerful performance can encourage empathy. I also mentioned how he had used his whole body as instrument of communication and not just his hands and feet and how lovely his ‘extensions’ were. I felt he had managed to use his body to draw the class into his silent world rather than trying to be heard in their world of sound. I applauded his courage and success.” (Appendix 2, class 6)

I ‘felt’ Mr. Silence’s courage to be authentic: his ‘spiritual resilience’. I ‘felt’ he was connecting with a ‘loving energy’ which seemed beyond his ‘boundaries’ and that others were also ‘connecting’ with the same ‘loving energy’ in support of this (Whitehead, 2009c). Whitehead suggests that “we can all help each other, whatever age, to create our own living educational theories in which we account to ourselves for living our values and understandings as fully as we can” (Whitehead, 2009c, p. 118). I felt that this young man was accounting for himself through his understanding of communication and that he was sharing it with us. His courage to use his talent became his ‘gift’. He demonstrated that all dance does not *need* music. His body became the

expression of his authentic communion with ‘his entire being’ and the silence seemed to enhance it. His ‘knowing’ extended our ‘knowing’.

Flamencos use the term ‘duende’ (Webster, 2003) to describe a performance that is infused with the power of the spirit. I felt as if I had just witnessed this duende in silence. Adendorff speaks of the “sacred landscape” which requires a form of ‘transformation’ of the dancer where we go

beyond ourselves while on stage ... so many of us are not in our bodies. We live in our heads, in our memories, in our longings ... it is time to put ... the human body back into the ‘Sacred Landscape’.... When soul and spirit dance dancers become instruments not slaves (Adendorff, 2001, p. 9).

Here Mr. Silence had done so immediately. His communion with self reached beyond to include us as well. I ‘felt’ his spirit as well as ‘saw’ his body dancing. “To me all true dance is both sensual and spiritual. There needs be no separation or duality here” (Adendorff, 2001, p. 9). Mr. Silence showed us in silence that

To dance fully is not to withhold ... thinking and being become one when I dance. No longer are there the distinctions of mind and body. There is instead only being. When I am dancing nothing else exists for me. Space, time and energy ... are made concrete by my body ... (Shapiro, 2004, p. 18).

and how “... to become one with yourself.” (Fernandez, Appendix 4)

(Appendix 5, Video 54 – class 6)

The Individual in the Empathetic Group

Whitehead describes one of his challenges as “remaining open to the flow of loving energy” (Whitehead, 2009c, p. 118). I would suggest that this is the challenge which we as human beings all share. Throughout my classes I tried many ways to encourage us all to remain open to this ‘flow of loving energy’ by encouraging group work which developed empathetic awareness of the others experience. Class 8 revealed that empathy within the flamenco group can be experienced.

“The ‘solos’ followed and Mr. Einstein volunteered to go first as he had chosen to do the sequence alone and not in a group. He began with great enthusiasm but soon discovered the ‘pressure’ that came with performing alone. Many went up on stage ready to clap for the solos. He managed to get as far as the

end of the claps and then had a mental 'blank'. When they saw his struggle to continue the entire class decided to clap for him. He seemed to become overwhelmed by the focus on him and the pressure to succeed. (After all he was the 'clever' one and surely he would excel at all he attempted?) He put his hands to his face almost in embarrassment and asked if he could begin again.

I then reminded the class of how "nerve racking" it was to perform on ones own and I praised his efforts and encouraged him to "keep going". We pressed 'pause' on the 'video' and allowed him to begin again. The whole class began to clap and he managed to slow them down to the pace at which he was happy to dance at. He was truly 'leading' them.

The second time he realised that he had begun the dance too far forward on the stage and ran out of space half way through. The class by this stage had become totally supportive of his efforts. This was the self same boy who the teacher had told me the class had often shunned because of his 'intelligence'. Perhaps now they had begun to see him in another light. Here was the so called 'genius' struggling to remember the steps and to complete the dance. The whole class immediately began clapping in support of him as if their clapping would give him the courage to continue.

He then struggled to complete the sequence on his third attempt. His timing was erratic but the clappers followed him and shouted encouragement. I wondered if the entire classes' immediate rally to support him had assisted him to successfully complete the dance. Had their perceptions of him and his of them shifted? Had this so called "fun" environment of dance turned into an opportunity to provide new perspectives of one another? It certainly looked so to me! He completed the dance to their roars of approval and appreciation and applause."(Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 61 – class 8)

This 'moment' cannot be examined in isolation: everything that had taken place during the course seemed to me to be influencing this experience. This was the boy who had been regarded as the 'clever one' and here he was struggling to complete what he had

volunteered to do. In this situation of extreme vulnerability, he was given the opportunity to show another perspective of himself to himself and others. Perhaps he did not realise the pressure that comes with 'solo' dance. Intellectual engagement is only part of the requirements in dance; the physical and emotional are equal participants. Here I 'saw' and 'felt' the group supporting Mr. Einstein to persevere.

What would have happened if I had intervened, to avoid further embarrassment, and allowed him to 'give-up'? I know that he would have missed an opportunity to experience what it felt like to be enthusiastically encouraged and praised by his peers. His intellectual ability had gone 'blank' at a crucial time, but he had the opportunity to rely on others to assist him in his moment of vulnerability. This phenomenon of going 'blank' happens frequently in flamenco. I believe personal experience of it can develop humility in performance and can also provide opportunity to allow 'sensitive others' to come to assistance. Persistence in dance is fundamental to progress and the empathetic group can support this. I refer now to another boy who showed such persistence.

"The next boy to volunteer was Mr. Persistent. He had already danced in a group but perhaps he had found courage from the support that the class had given Mr. Einstein which then enabled him to volunteer to do the dance solo. This was a boy who I had noticed from the beginning as having very little co-ordination and limited rhythmic ability. I had watched him struggle to assimilate what I gave them each class. I assumed he would just 'blend in' as one of those learners who had limited ability but that at least he was 'trying'. Well was I about to be proved incorrect again. Here in this environment he seemed to feel empowered and safe enough to 'risk all' as he attempted to 'go solo'.

At this point there was a mad dash by the majority (approximately 18) to go up onto the stage to clap for him. I heard one shout aloud: "were supporting you!" as they rushed to support his efforts. I then echoed this shout of encouragement by repeating that we were indeed supporting him. It was wonderful to watch.

This could have been the point at which he may have regretted ever having volunteered as the reality of the situation of going solo sank in and he may have had an overwhelming desire to run and escape. I imagined this as a possibility as this is often how I feel before a performance. I immediately sensed his

courage and wanted to support him as well. The vocal support from the whole class was astounding. He must have 'felt' it and his sheer delight at managing to complete the dance with their overwhelming support was beyond description. He finished to shrieks of approval and applause.”(Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 62 – class 8)

The mutual interdependence of group and individual became apparent. He needed the group to follow him and support him and they needed him to lead and succeed. I also realised with this boy how easy it is for me as a teacher to make assumptions about student ability only to be proved incorrect. I had assumed he had limited ability and did not place any expectations on him. He took the initiative and in so doing was able to demonstrate his ability. I realise now how important it is for me to provide opportunity for my assumptions (which in many ways are unavoidable) to be proved or disproved. The next opportunity for group empathy came when Mr. Silence was encouraged to dance the class choreography.

“The class then began to shout for Mr. Silence to dance. Here was the self same ‘isolated, shunned’ boy being encouraged by his class mates to do the dance alone. One boy went to take him by the hand to lead him to the stage. I too went to him and spoke privately to him to see if he was ready for what they were asking him to do. He asked me if he could do his own dance and I said he may but after doing the class sequence first. I did this because I felt that sufficient ‘support’ was evident to risk him trying.

He started slowly and may have been feeling fearful of attempting something he was not sure he wanted to do. As he got to the section where he could walk and make a ‘pose’ the class began calling his name in unison followed by ‘vamos’(Let’s go! Let’s go!) as they saw him struggling to complete the dance. This seemed to give him courage and his poses became more and more confident. He extended his arm above his head in a ‘fist’ of ‘power’. He managed to complete the dance far better than I had ever imagined he was capable of. I too had learnt never to underestimate how much can be achieved in an environment of support.

Unfortunately the video is quite dark and it does not show the expressions of support and empathy all over their faces. He did not show the same degree of skill or speed recall that many others did but his face showed his absolute delight as he felt the power of their 'inclusion' propelling him to exceed his and others expectations. Words cannot describe how I felt. I was overwhelmed to the point of tears ...

I began to realise the impact that this boy had had on all of us. The confidence that he seemed to have begun to experience due to being 'included' and 'accepted' seemed beyond belief while his courage to be different was an inspiration to watch. This was the self same class who at the beginning of the course had sat and 'sniggered' at his first attempts to dance for them. I began to wonder if they had come to the realisation that being different was 'ok' and in fact something to support not shun." (Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 63 – class 8)

I now realise that here too was another situation that could have ended in a disaster. I had relied on my 'gut instinct' that there would be sufficient 'support' to embrace the vulnerabilities of this boy, but it could have been the reverse. I am now trying to consider the deeper implications of these 'risks' that I take every lesson. I could have just let him dance in silence again. Why did I choose to insist that he dance the group dance? Did I subconsciously want him to experience the feeling of that group support that was waiting to include him? He had previously given us the opportunity to experience a different way of 'knowing' now the group was waiting to give him an opportunity for inclusion.

Conolly discusses this immediacy of the performing mode influencing the spontaneity of the performance:

... the performer can adjust his/her performance immediately according to his/her own responses with him/herself simultaneously with the responses from the audience ... each performance is the unique product of the interactions within the performer and audience, and is therefore the product of simultaneous personal introspection and group authorship (Conolly, 2002, p. 6).

This is further explained by Laban,

What really happens in the theatre does not occur only on the stage or in the audience, but within the magnetic current between both these poles (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 6).

I ‘felt’ connected to the ‘magnetic current’ between Mr. Silence and us and I was not alone. I believe this profound and immediate ‘connection’ between Mr. Silence and the group is what made the ‘live performance’ so powerful. No video or recording can replicate the almost cellular response that ‘live’ experience affords where the energy of the individual is ‘felt’. This interaction between the individual and the group was unique: the experience was not replicable. I ‘felt’ we had all shared in an experience where the boundaries between self and other had dissolved. I believe the power of this experience resided in the actual physical proximity of the individual to the group and ‘energy-fields’: no video or description can replicate that.

The Non-participant

After many years of teaching and performing I know that

To become a better teacher, I must nurture a sense of self that both does *and* does not depend on the response of others- and that is a true paradox. To learn that lesson well I must take a solitary journey into my own nature *and* seek the help of others in seeing myself as I am ... (Palmer, 1998, p. 74).

I am aware that there are always those individuals who will choose non-participation for various reasons but I rely on my intuition to know when to encourage participation. In previous lessons, I became aware of Mr. Under-the-Radar, but in class 8 where the focus was on performance, he was drawn to my full attention by the class.

“One of the learners then pointed out that Mr. Under-the-Radar (a name I had given to a little boy who always seemed to ‘escape’ having to dance and who the class said had not danced at all.) I responded: “some people are just not confident enough and that’s ok. When you plant your seeds in the garden do all the flowers come up at the same time?” “No!” “No. some people come up a bit later than others [some never]. The seeds are planted. When they’re ready to bloom they will.”

I said this because I believe that everyone should be allowed to participate voluntarily in my dance class. I do not believe in ‘forcing’ but rather in ‘encouraging’. I see my responsibility as teacher to provide every opportunity

for talents to develop and grow. This requires me to ‘water’ and ‘feed’ the soil in which these talents are expected to grow. This ‘nurturing’ is my responsibility when teaching and as ‘gardener’ I do not expect the same results from all ‘seeds sown’. I trust that when and if individuals are ready they will take ‘root’.

I had chosen to allow Mr. Under-the-Radar to ‘escape’. I did not feel that eight lessons was sufficient for me to delve into the possible reasons why he had not wished to participate but I ‘felt’ that I should not ‘force’ him. I myself had been “Ms. Under-the-Radar” at school when it came to P.E lessons or extra mural sport. I had no desire to participate no matter how often I was encouraged. I believe there will always be those who do not want to participate. As far as I was concerned he was still witnessing and watching others and in his observation was also ‘learning’.

He had watched and participated in groups and that was enough for me.”(Appendix 2, class 8)

As I reflected on this decision of mine to allow a student to slip ‘under the radar’ I began to consider the implications of such a decision in the long term. I realise that if I had continued working with these children, that I may have been impelled eventually to find out the reasons for his non participation. My intuition combined with the possibility that he was ‘just like me,’ seemed to influence my actions. I did not want him to suffer as I had. Now I realise there may have been other reasons for his non-participation which I was unaware of, but because of the short duration of my course I felt it was unnecessary to ‘force’ his participation. I found solace in the advice of Murray,

The act of dancing, particularly dancing with others, implies voluntary participation on the part on the dancer. Other performances involving human movement, for good or ill, can be imposed on the participant against his will, and the result of his engaging in them will be much the same as though he had willed it. He can be forced to march, dig lift, carry on complicated movement patterns under sufficient pressure, but to dance, no! in dance something of the self must be given out, not held back or repressed; otherwise the spark that makes it exhilarating, dynamic, and vital is extinguished (R. L. Murray, 1963, p. 17).

At this point I became aware of the fact that “re-creation ... is one of flamenco’s defining characteristics ... it is a solo art, always – even when several are performing

together” (Totton, 2003, p. 19). This boy had perhaps sensed that even group performance involved a certain amount of individual ‘exposure’. My decision to keep participation voluntary placed increased demands on me as the teacher: I had to simultaneously guard our ‘atmosphere of trust’ and inspire willing participation. Murray suggests that in an atmosphere of “... fear, suppression or imposition, dancing emerges as no more than a series of wooden mimetics” (R. L. Murray, 1963, p. 17). I realise that I was not about to force anyone to perform ‘wooden’ ‘mechanical’ movements in order to achieve total participation. “One’s heart must be in it if what emerges from the act is a genuine dance experience for both dancer and observer”(R. L. Murray, 1963, p. 18).

Learning to dance from the ‘heart’ is fundamental to authenticity and this cannot happen when participation is ‘forced’. My own personal experience of ‘painful participation’ caused me to find myself finely balanced on the edge of indecision. I do know that many students are in fact slipping ‘under the radar’ in the educational system and that I as teacher should be very aware of those who may be doing so when under my care. However, I rely on my intuition to assist me with such decisions. I had been reading Mr. Under-the-Radar’s body language which conveyed to me that he was unwilling: every time a new group went to perform he would lower his body closer to the ground and literally crawl to another spot to hide. I rely on body language more than words for momentary truth. If I had had more time I would have investigated further and possibly encouraged even his limited participation.

5.2 Authenticity in the Group

In class 8, Mr. Silence insisted on dancing ‘his way’ and asked me if he could perform his creation for the class. I intuitively felt his ‘need’ to dance ‘his way’.

“He then proceeded to go on stage dance another new creation of his own in total silence. I, the class, his teacher and the headmaster sat in silence as we witnessed this boy ‘speaking’ with his body. I felt it was a privilege to watch. He held us all completely transfixed with what I felt was a performance that was both astounding and profoundly moving. At the end of the class one girl said that what she felt they had learnt was that even though some people “don’t speak much” they can “speak with their body”. I was amazed at her depth of perception: who dares to say that learners are empty vessels which we are there

to be filled? My response was to thank Mr. Silence with all the sincerity I could express.”(Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 64 – class 8)

Laban suggests that

Movement-thinking does not, as thinking in words does, serve orientation in the external world, but rather it perfects man’s orientation in his inner world in which impulses surge and seek an outlet in doing, acting and dancing (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 17).

I wonder whether perhaps Mr. Silence had used movement to assist him to orientate himself in his inner world, and had found an outlet for this inner world in dance which other forms of communication did not afford him.

Whilst animals’ movements are instinctive and mainly done in response to external stimuli, those of man are charged with human qualities and he expresses himself and communicates through his movements something of his inner being (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 75).

Many of us “have lost this language of the body (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 91). I felt that Mr. Silence had re-discovered it for himself and was sharing his discovery with us. He had taken us into “The world too deep for speech, ” (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 95), into “... the silent world of ideas and inner stirrings” which lie “ brooding within ... actions” (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 97).

The student must realise that there exists no right or wrong forms of an interpretation. It is for the artistic temperament and taste to find out which interpretation is preferred ... [and]to risk the acceptance or non acceptance of his interpretation (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 138).

With children I believe this ‘risk’ should be a calculated one in which the teacher stands vigilant guard over an atmosphere of trust and respect. This young mans insistence on performing solo in silence confirmed to me my need to remain ‘open to possibility’. I had tried to include him in the group by encouraging him to do the class choreography and here he seemed to be insisting that even though he had done that, he in fact wanted to express himself ‘differently’. He reminded me that ‘different’ can share the ‘same’ space. I felt his insistence on his own authentic way of expressing himself became opportunity for others to do the same.

“At this point Mr. Rhythm asked if he too could show his ‘new creation’ to the class. He had continued developing it even when I had not asked him to do so. I was thrilled. He jumped up with his ‘company’ of two clappers to back him. He organised them to sit on chairs and give him rhythmic backing for his dance. I was so impressed with his innovation. I could hardly believe the level of initiative I was seeing him express.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

Mr. Rhythm’s ‘difference’ was inherent rhythmic talent which found opportunity to be revealed and progress during the course. Was this enough? Perhaps the discovery of his talent had another hidden purpose? Later one of his peers observed,

“The focus that he’s putting into his dancing he’s also focusing in his class. So it’s kind of gone from the dancing to the classroom.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

The teacher confirmed this.

This session was the cherry on top of the cake for me! The children are so much more confident. They come out after a dancing period oozing confidence and as one learner mentioned, this confidence has overflowed into other lessons.”(Appendix 3, week 4)

After 4 lessons, the teacher also remarked on the ‘differences’ which she observed in her students:

“I am so amazed to see how some of the learners who have experienced learning a difficulty in class but here in dancing, have actually excelled! Wow what a boost to their self-esteem!”(Appendix 3, week 2)

In Mr. Rhythm’s case, having encountered rejection in many instances in the school environment, perhaps the discovery of his ability may have provided him with the necessary boost to his self esteem to motivate his engagement in other activities in which he did not normally excel or wish to engage. Howard Gardner in discussing multiple intelligences suggests that “individual profiles must be considered in the light of goals pursued by the wider society” (Lee, 1990, p. 11).

If this is so I would argue that students like Mr. Rhythm whose “kinaesthetic intelligence” (Lee, 1990, p. 10) was only revealed in the dance class, need opportunity to develop this further. Discussing the behavioural approach to the classroom Kevin Wheldall and Frank Merrett in Lee state:

The main assumption is that children's behaviour is primarily learned and maintained as a result of their interactions with their environment, which includes other children and teachers. Consequently, children's behaviour can be changed by altering certain features of that environment (Lee, 1990, p. 15).

Here they suggest that rewards and consequences are needed to modify children's behaviour. I do not however believe that "... teaching is about changing children's behaviour" (Lee, 1990, p. 15). This seems to me to suggest a linear process where teachers become responsible for how students behave. I rather believe that teaching is about providing opportunity for children to discover and develop their talents. Teachers can support this quest by broadening the range of opportunity available to children for this to happen, in order to nurture self esteem. Perhaps in this way many behavioural problems in school could be averted. I believe affirmation is a powerful motivator and opportunities to be affirmed in school should be varied and numerous.

In Mr. Rythm's case he had come to 're-member' himself 'whole' (Lussier-Ley, 2010) and in so doing seemed to be able to 'modify' his behaviour without an external process of rewards and consequences which had quite clearly not served him to this point. He merely needed opportunity to discover his 'intelligence' in one aspect of his being in order for it to have an influence on 'the whole' of his being. The 'external' was not 'consequences' attempting to modify his behaviour, but 'opportunity' to 're-member' and be affirmed. In Mr. Rhythm's case the effect was visible after five lessons.

Leading and Following in the Group

I used the group to introduce qualities of 'leader' and 'follower' in flamenco. In class 3,

"We sat down to reflect on why the clapping had sometimes not worked. The responses included "they weren't following the dancer or they weren't together... the clappers were not concentrating on the dancers ... some started before others". When I asked what it was like to dance to poor clapping responses included "you can't dance to it ... its frustrating ... its annoying and confusing". These were observations I was hoping for. I feel that if dancers had personal experience of trying to dance to poor clapping they may be more inclined to make an effort to clap properly for others. For this reason I always insisted the same group that had just danced were made to clap for the same group.

I hoped to encourage the empathy and sensitivity that being a good 'background worker' often requires. They did not have the focus or accolades but their work was vital for the success of the whole. Learning to give without expecting to receive is part of being a good 'backer'. ” (Appendix 2, class 3)

Here I used “group talk” (Loughran, 2004, p. 835) combined with personal experience to become aware of the importance of sensitive ‘backing’ for a flamenco dancer. After reflection I felt I needed to demonstrate the body language that communicates leadership in flamenco.

“I then asked what a good leader should do. They responded: “Lead!” I then asked how they do this in the dance context. One responded by saying “by dancing.” I felt this was insufficient and decided to ‘show’ them what I would do if I was leading badly.”(Appendix 2, class 3)

Words were insufficient to convey what a good leader ‘moved’ like in flamenco: I needed to use my body to do this. “... man expresses himself splendidly whilst not bringing the tongue into play” (Jousse, et al., 1997, p. 668).

I used my example to encourage focus on the body language of leadership. First I demonstrated ‘bad’ leadership and then ‘good’. Reflections were very accurate.

“Their descriptions of my ‘leading’ included: “not putting enough effort into it ... not loud enough ... you don’t look like you want to do it ... you’re not moving ... It doesn’t look like you are dancing.” I then reminded that to be a good leader as a dancer required them to be strong and clear and to not be afraid to “take charge”. I then demonstrated how shuffling movements of the feet were not easy to clap for. In other words when the dancer doesn’t lead well it is difficult to be a good follower or clapper.”(Appendix 2, class 3)

Later I reflected how understanding of this may benefit children.

“I believe that life is constantly presenting opportunities to ‘lead’ and ‘follow’ and that as a society we should give our children opportunities to identify the skills needed for both. Personal experience of both is even better. Just as I believe teaching is so inextricably linked to learning so is ‘leading’ to ‘following’. Life is a constant vacillation between the two where the distinctions are often not easily ‘boxed’ as separate activities. Giving children opportunities

to experience both in flamenco provides an opportunity to develop these skills where the body is used as medium of communication.”(Appendix 2, class 3)

Can we be leaders and followers simultaneously and should circumstance not dictate which is required? I started to imagine the educational implications of allowing students to experience the ‘body language’ of being a ‘leader’ and a ‘follower’. From my own experience it seems to me that a society that is constantly promoting qualities of leadership in children to the exclusion of those qualities required of a good follower seems to be suggesting that leaders are more important than followers. There would be no-one to lead if there were no followers. I believe poor leadership often fails to recognise and acquaint itself with the experience of the follower and equally good followers need experiential knowledge of the challenges of leadership. I used flamenco to explore these ideas of being ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ through corporeal and audio communication.

In the following two clips I introduce these ideas to the class and I always used the same group to ‘back’ after having danced. In this way I tried to encourage them to clap properly, as the same people who they were clapping for, would clap for them.

(Appendix 5, Video 65 – class 3)

(Appendix 5, Video 66 – class 3)

In flamenco ‘leading’ and ‘following’ are mutually inter-dependant. I believe this has broader social implications and resonates with Freire,

If true commitment to the people, involving the transformation of the reality by which they are oppressed, requires a theory of transforming action, this theory cannot fail to assign the people a fundamental role in the transformation process (Freire, 1970, p. 107).

I would argue that we cannot fully understand what good ‘leading’ or ‘following’ requires in flamenco until we have had experience of both. I believe life provides us with opportunities to be ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ and children can benefit from opportunities to explore both through movement, without resorting to theoretical jargon. Acquaintance with the experience of others is liberating. Those who “are truly committed to liberation, their action and reflection cannot proceed without the action

and reflection of others” (Freire, 1970, p. 107). I used personal experience of being a leader and follower combined with observation and reflection to that end.

In the following clips the mutual interdependence of leader and follower are explored and experienced personally.

(Appendix 5, Video 67 – class 7)

(Appendix 5, Video 68 – class 7)

Perhaps opportunities to communicate multiple perspectives of an experience could help to modify tyrannical tendencies in leadership and unquestioning subservience from followers. Awareness of relationships which are mutually dependant for success I believe, require frequent and meaningful communication. It should matter to one what the other is experiencing. Times of reflection were used to communicate ‘problems’ with performance.

I did not exclude myself in this matter. I was supposedly the leader on most occasions but there were times when I allowed the children to influence my decisions. It mattered to me how they were feeling and I used reflection, communication and intuition to guide my decisions. In class 8 I initially asked the class to divide up into groups of two (hoping to graduate to solo). I soon realised that many were not ready for this,

“... many asked if they could go in threes and fours as well. I realised that while some enjoyed the ‘group feeling’ possibly some were not ready for the ‘high exposure’ of duo or solo performances. My decision was based on my instinct not on my lesson plan. I think in retrospect this was a good idea because it allowed for different groupings. Those who preferred to have the comfort and safety of the group could have it. Those who may not have been included in a group were also able to perform without feelings of ‘being left out’ which may have intensified their sense of isolation. It felt better to allow them to enjoy their final day in the way that they felt ready for or comfortable with.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

Perhaps my intuitive decision to allow freedom of choice in groupings was more important than I realised at the time. I think it may have allowed students to ‘take charge’ of their conditions of performance and perhaps that encouraged the high levels

of motivation I observed. Palmer believes that teachers should be able to take criticism from their learners and not only their peers. If students are not given opportunity to critique those who profess to 'know' they may not "become producers of knowledge and discerning consumers of what other people claim to know" (Palmer, 1998, p. 94).

I knew solo work was beneficial but they knew that they were not ready for it yet. I resisted adopting the position that I was always in control and correct and welcomed them challenging the status quo. Even though I began with big groups in the earlier classes and progressed to smaller groups and solo work as confidence increased, I still allowed them, even in the last class, to take charge of their conditions of performance when necessary.

5.3 Observation, Reflection, Progressive Learning in the Group

I used group work to encourage observation, reflection and progressive learning. I observed how I used the 'good' and 'bad' examples to encourage children to critique one another. In class 8,

"I began by asking the clappers to start clapping. I did this because they needed to establish a unity in sound and it also then gave the dancers the opportunity to 'lead' by deciding if the clapping was too slow or fast for them and to 'lead'. I was thrilled when the dancers did just that. As they began the audience began to 'jaleo' (shout words of encouragement) in all the appropriate places. This particular group being the first was not the best. When they finished I asked the others for comments on the clapping. I did this because I felt that the clappers had not been able to keep a steady rhythm throughout and that this had led to the 'break down' in performance.

I knew this to be the problem but by asking the class to problem solve I was hoping to see if they were able to and also felt that if the correction came from their peers it may have been more meaningful. One observed that "they started off good but then they went down". I was satisfied with this response and asked the groups to swop over.

The next group of four girls started well and really 'led' the clappers. They performed wonderfully. I responded with "fantastic!" I asked the class for comments on the clappers. The response came: "they were very good". I

repeated their observation in agreement. I then asked what they thought of the dancers to which they replied: “very good”. For me this is what I call ‘informed praise’ which is rooted in personal experience. I then confirmed their praise by adding mine: “excellent!””(Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 69 – class 8)

With these two groups I saw evidence of progress and learning. Each successive group seemed to benefit from observing and reflecting on the previous one. The ‘informed praise’ which was given by peers as well as me, seemed to leave them feeling satisfied. When someone who has experienced similar struggles to my own, praises my efforts, I feel much more affirmed than if the same praise comes from someone who has limited experience of what I have just achieved. For this reason whenever I divided the groups up, I insisted that the same group who had just given critique were now critiqued. In this way I tried to encourage sensitivity to the others experience. I felt that the praise or critique which was given would therefore be more meaningful. I also encouraged respectful focus on performers.

“At this the third set ran up eagerly and began clapping. It consisted of four boys clapping and three dancing. I had to remind the audience that the performers deserved their respect by not making “back ground noise” and I reminded the performers to wait for that respect. I asked for the audience responses to the dancers. This comment was forwarded: “good but they looked nervous”. I then asked about the clapping: “the clapping could have been louder”. Both these comments were very valid.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

By asking performers to wait for evidence of respect I was insisting on their respectful attention to encourage constructive critique and meaningful praise. I later encouraged performers to include critique of their own work,

“When they swopped over the next set of clappers described them self as “confused” as they went a “bit wrong”. The clappers expressed their difficulty in following the dancers because they didn’t know which person to ‘follow’ as they were all different. I then pointed out how difficult it was to clap for a group of dancers when they didn’t ‘keep together’. I asked the dancers what they thought and they told me that they “forgot”. The reason I asked for comments from different perspectives was to encourage awareness of self and sensitivity to

the other. I also hoped to encourage continued focus on multiple levels.”(Appendix 2, class 8)

The ability to focus on multiple levels I believe is assisted by the ability to critique self, together with openness to critique from multiple sources. I observed how each group presented new opportunities to learn from the experience of others without having to necessarily have had first hand experience. By witnessing the problems of others, each group had opportunity to avoid similar ones when it came to their turn. The next group were even better. This progressive learning was organic, where each groups experience potentially helped to influence the learning of others. In this ‘organic’ progressive learning I observed my role as leader becoming superfluous as children began self correcting without my or peer assistance.

“After this group of boys there seemed greater enthusiasm to participate and there were more volunteers to go and clap for the dancers. I got a sense that they were enjoying themselves and ‘nerves’ seemed to diminish. The fourth set of boys was not that sure of their steps. I watched from the side and decided to refrain from “helping”. I then became aware of a small group of boys who were watching deciding to clap for them.

At the end I asked the performers to identify their own problems. The audience probably saw them too but I was more concerned that the performers themselves were aware of what went wrong in order to encourage them to identify their own problems. I went over to one dancer and asked how he felt to which he responded “confused”. I then assured him that I did not think he was ‘alone’ in that sentiment. Another said: “I forgot my steps”. I then asked the clappers what they thought of their own performance and the spontaneous response came: “perfect!” I decided to leave them on a positive note.”(Appendix 2, class 8)

This clip shows the children taking more and more control of their performances and how they seem to learn from each others performances.

(Appendix 5, Video 70 – class 8)

I observed here how I was aware that not all experiences were ‘good’ and how I consoled a learner when the reality of own performance seemed hard to bare. I empathised by sharing my experiences with them. Perhaps these boys had gained their confidence from watching others (where performance often looks easier than it is) and then when it actually came to doing it, the realisation of the difficulties became apparent. My choice to allow them to perceive their less than perfect performance as ‘perfect’ may be considered incorrect. I however feel that my intuitive decision was based on my desire to encourage self confidence together with skill. I reasoned that if motivation was lost through lack of self confidence, how would skill or confidence ever get a chance to improve?

“The next set of six girls danced at a tremendous pace. I asked them at the end to comment on their own performance. The response came: “we were too fast”. I agreed that they were too fast for on another.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 71 – class 8)

Later Mr. Rhythm and his group danced.

“The next set was Mr. Rhythm and his clappers. He provided the solid leadership that his two friends needed in order to successfully perform the entire sequence faultlessly and at pace. When I asked for comments the response was “Fantastic!” which indeed they were. One’s natural skill had assisted two others to achieve at his side what they might not have achieved alone. The spontaneous grins on their faces were evidence of a sharp rise in self esteem and pride. When asked how they would comment on their performance they replied “excellent!”

I asked the three clappers (Mr. Rhythm and his clappers) to comment on their own performance to which they replied confidently: “We were too good!” I allowed their self confidence to remain unchallenged. All these responses were wonderful as I saw them as an indication of their ability to identify problems through observation and to learn from watching others as well as an indication of a rise in levels of confidence.

I found it wonderful how so many young folk were able to praise their own performance with such ease. I began to question what happens to so many when

this confidence in own ability often diminishes with maturity. Even the headmaster (who had come to watch the performances) laughed in response to their confident self appraisal. The clappers also described their performance as “very good”. I left it there as I was enjoying their youthful confidence. I noticed how many of them volunteered to clap over and over and how many requested to perform again. I saw this as an indication of their enthusiasm and enjoyment.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 72 – class 8)

I noticed how this rise in confidence seemed to progress in spite of the critique that was being given. I was delighted with the quality of critique but even more so with the enthusiasm to participate. I realised that without participation there can be no opportunity to progress. Their enthusiasm seemed to peak at this point. I saw progressive evidence of enjoyment, participation, self esteem, skills development and critique energising participation. When all seemed to be going along as ‘planned’ along came the ‘unplanned’.

Empathetic Group, Suspended Teacher Intervention

Class 8 continued,

“The next set of four girls was very weak. The shock of the contrast was evident within moments of their beginning and there was an awkward silence as this realisation began to dawn on the class. It was at this point that the lesson transformed from performance and critical evaluation to something far more profound.

This set of girls was the last group remaining to perform. They were the ones who I had noticed throughout the course as ‘struggling’ with learning the steps and to keep up with the pace of the majority of the other learners. I had anticipated that some learners would struggle with certain movements or with co-ordination and speed recall of steps. However I know from experience, that sometimes the learners who may not seem to have natural ability when given more time or encouragement often go further than expected. When they ended up being the last group I was not surprised. Perhaps they felt they needed as much time as possible before trying.

They seemed to start well but not long into the routine they started to flounder as they battled to remember and perform the steps at speed. I decided to let them continue 'trying' for as long as possible with out my assistance. Up until this point they only had a group of volunteers to clap behind them. However as they began to struggle to continue despite my verbal encouragement the rest of the class who were sitting watching them spontaneously 'sensed' their need of 'support'. As they struggled to continue a small group of boys sitting on the side began to clap in unison and shouts of "bien! bien!"(good! good!) broke the awkward 'silence'. I was completely astounded at their sensitivity and immediate response to these girls 'cries' for 'help'.

These girls managed to complete the sequence with their support and encouragement and finished to enthusiastic applause from the whole class. I responded by expressing my approval and acknowledgement of their sensitivity: "how sweet of you to clap for them ... well done to the dancers too. I know you didn't find it easy. Well done!" (Appendix 2, class 8)

In one moment what could have been embarrassing 'exposure' of lack of learning or skill had transformed into an expression of empathy for the other. I was speechless. "... the most deeply moving moments of our lives usually leave us speechless and in such moments our body carriage may well be able to express what otherwise would be inexpressible" (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 95). I had resisted my impulse to help.

If the educator should ever believe that for the sake of education he has to practise selection and arrangement, then he will be guided by another criterion than that of inclination, however legitimate this may be in its own sphere; he will be guided by the recognition of values which is in his glance as an educator. But even then his selection remains suspended, under constant correction by the special humility of the educator for whom the life and particular being of all his pupils is the decisive factor to which his 'hierarchical' recognition is subordinated (Buber, 1947, p. 122).

By resisting my impulse to intervene and allowing these girls to continue, I created a 'space' for others to do so. Instead of possibly laughing at them, these boys chose to 'help' by clapping to show their sincere and genuine support for these girls. This empathetic resonance was 'felt' as well as 'seen'.

(Appendix 5, Video 73 - class 8)

The teacher reflected:

One good aspect that has definitely developed is the support for one another. This support was visibly shown when the group of girls, who battle to remember the full routine, performed. At one stage they had lost the sequence and at that moment the group of boys sitting on the side joined in with the clappers, and this encouraged the girls to continue and they were able to complete the dance. This spontaneous action brought a lump into my throat - I was really touched. (Appendix 3, week 4)

This experience transformed me and my perspective of my course. My original intention had been to give a series of classes which could possibly help to inspire teachers to include similar into their learning programmes, but I realised here *“the potential of developing a sense of empathy which goes beyond the mere transference and development of dance skills.”* (Appendix 2, class 8)

I too was learning from ‘the incorrect’/ ‘the unplanned’. It became the secret ingredient which transformed my understanding into something new. I observed the girls who thought that they would not manage having the opportunity to realise, that with the support of others, they were able to do more than they anticipated. Their fearful situation became an opportunity to succeed. For the boys who encouraged them it was an opportunity to assist others and empathise with another’s plight. For those observing, it became an indirect opportunity to learn from the experiences of others. For the teacher it became opportunity to feel touched by the capacity of the children to support one another. For me it was the opportunity to experience and ‘feel’ the deeper implications of the empathetic resonance I had observed.

Why this situation had not ended in a disaster? Had we established an atmosphere of sufficient trust for me to be able to resist my impulse to influence without compromising it? Was my influence no longer vital to its continuance? This I cannot say with certainty. What I can say with certainty is that in that moment I ‘felt’ the urge to withhold my influence. I believe this intuitive decision to resist assisting those girls gave others the opportunity to do so. Why I did not assist them remains a mystery to me. I just ‘felt’ I should, even though my normal instinct would have been to avoid any compromise of self esteem. What could have been a painful experience in fact wasn’t.

In that moment I felt as if I was not in control and had merely played my part as directed.

5.4 Learning through Reflection in the Empathetic Group

At the end of class 8 our 'time of reflection' evidenced learning on multiple levels. The responses were often quite soft so I repeated them for the class to hear and have written them in a way that approximates what was said:

"This has been the 'best practice' you've ever had."

Mr. Persistent (the young boy who I recognised as slow to learn, but never gave up trying) felt that he had really improved. I responded by saying: "You know what? I've just said that to Mr. Spiteri (the headmaster). You have really improved, and I'm so proud of you for being able to go from being a little insecure, to doing it on your own (solo) Wow!"

"It really helped you learn as a team- aah I'm so happy to hear that."

"You want me to carry on doing it because it brings the peoples inside out"

(Ms. Differently-Abled) The little dyslexic girl said she was "very sad" that it was over.

"We've learnt to set aside our differences and we've learnt to support one another and to clap for one another and we want to thank you for that." (Whole class burst into applause.) I respond: "Thank you SO much! That's what dancing should be. We should all get together and have fun."

"We really found we started to work as a team"- "I'm happy you saw that and it is such fun."

I then turned to include the headmaster who I had noticed slowly coming closer and closer until he finally ended up sitting on the floor with us.

"Don't you agree with that?" I asked him.

This is what he replied:

“I think there’s things that they understand that they don’t even understand that they’re understanding ... they don’t even realise they’re understanding, today that I saw that you saw ... there were people dancing today that you clapped for that as a team people were dancing that slowed down and I watched people dancing and while clapping you actually slowed the clapping down to follow them without ever looking at them and that’s a connection that you’ve developed over these weeks with the people who were dancing without even realising it. That’s an empathy. Do you know what an empathy is? It’s a connection that you developed with the dancers, such a close connection that you were able to follow them and not be involved in yourself while you were clapping but be involved with the dancer and follow them for their sake not your sake.”

I then agreed that it was about “caring”.” (Appendix 2, class 8)

(Appendix 5, Video 74 – class 8)

For Laban

Some people who by-pass their fellow men, ignoring their struggles, sufferings and joys, miss a great deal of the meaning of life and what it offers. They miss the opportunity to experience what is hidden below the surface of existence, and they tend to ignore the theatre where the depths are revealed. They lack the sense of the significance of persons and situations, and the world appears to them, more often than not, an accumulation of meaningless happenings.....a person who has no interest in his fellow men’s striving is not an actor, hardly is he a human being. The emptiness of life resulting from such a lack of interest and sympathy spells blindness towards the most important values of human existence (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 107).

These reflections revealed deeper life lessons which emerged in the ‘empathetic group’.

Pithouse suggests that

interactive learning through whole class discussion is supported by the growth of a sense of self-assurance for each learner and of an associated atmosphere of mutual trust, support, and empathy within each class (K. Pithouse, 2007, p. 84).

I realise that each child would have had a unique focus in their learning, but when one remarked on ‘learning to set aside their differences’ which resulted in the whole class bursting into applause, I became aware that the whole class felt the same.

(Appendix 5, Video 74 time: 1.43-1.53 - class 8)

Here the group and the individual united in applause. The teacher reflected:

The comments from the children show how much they have learnt and gained. The comment - "the dancing has allowed the inner person to come out" really sums up the true value of the lessons. (Appendix 3, week 4)

Her observation of the ‘inner person’ ‘coming out’ made me reflect on how important an atmosphere of trust in the ‘empathetic group’ may be in this regard. She later expressed her gratitude for what she felt had been the main value in the classes:

A big thank you to you Linda for your perseverance and determination - you have brought into the Grade 7's fun enjoyment and most important factor - you can work hard and still have fun!" (Appendix 3, week 4)

I regard her reflections as evidence of my values of work and fun in my practice. The ability to focus on the needs of others is one of the inherent qualities of being a ‘backer’ in flamenco. It requires individual commitment to group experience, even when one is not ‘centre stage’. Here I observed that this shared goal could be perceived of as ‘fun’. I was surprised at how many of them expressed high levels of enjoyment, even though I had expected them to work so hard irrespective of whether they were ‘following’ or ‘leading’: the boundary between ‘work’ and ‘fun’ seemed to me to dissolve.

In this video I saw children enjoying having worked hard and learnt well.

(Appendix 5, Video 75 – class 7)

In the final reflections in class 8, when one spoke on behalf of the class, it suggested to me that she felt others shared her sentiments,

“It’s a memory that you grade sevens will never forget ...”

(Appendix 2, class 8)

Further comments included,

“Together we can achieve more.”

“People who didn’t speak much spoke through their dance.”

(Appendix 2, class 8)

This first comment suggested to me that one of them had come to understand that ‘more’ is achieved when the group and the individual are in symbiotic relationship. The second comment suggested to me that another had become aware of the body as communicator and that it was possible to ‘speak’ through movement. In this final class I saw evidence of the influence of my values of work, fun, authenticity, respect, empathy, organic experience in the learning of others. I became

aware that for me to understand my educational influence in the learning of the other I must see that what I have done has been mediated in the other’s learning with values to which I subscribe (Whitehead, 2009a lines 689-691).

At the conclusion of the class I reflected:

“What an amazing day it had been. It had once more confirmed that while I as teacher will continue to plan for my lessons with as much vigour as I can, there will always be unexpected ‘detours’ which I must be prepared for and willing to take. Often my greatest ‘discoveries’ and my most meaningful learning take place at these times.

... I thought I was there to teach dance when in fact I was there to let dance teach me and others. Perhaps dancing and learning are one. As I dance I learn and as I learn I dance” (Appendix 2, class 8).

Here I saw boundaries between ‘boxes’ as existing only in my consciousness. I became more aware of my ‘whole being knowledge’ having transformed and “ I find myself dancing in the *spaces in between* what I know and what I am discovering” (Lussier-Ley, 2010, p. 212).

5.5 The Group as Community of Truth

Palmer suggests that “to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced” (Palmer, 1998, p. 90)

This community is recognised when reality is viewed as “a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality only by being in community with it” (Palmer, 1998, p. 95).

He suggests that:

The community of truth is an image of knowing that embraces both the great web of being on which all things depend and the fact that our knowing of those things is helped, not hindered, by our being enmeshed in that web (Palmer, 1998, p. 99).

I observed my desire to ‘blending in’ where I literally placed myself physically in amongst students, resulted from a subconscious realisation that I was part of a ‘web’ of learning and knowing. Feelings of superiority or inferiority dissolved in an awareness of others authenticity. Class 6 showed an amazing display of creativity and escalating self esteem while I merely observed.

“One of the little girls was also amazing when she naturally used percussive sounds to add another rhythmic dynamic to her sequence and she managed to do this while she was dancing ... One group of two decided to rush up onto the stage to make use of the wooden floor to ‘amplify’ their footwork. They had probably heard how loud my beats sounded on the stage and decided that they wanted to do the same. Their beats were wonderfully clear and consequently the next group also decided to utilise the sound of a wooden floor. Then another boy decided to dance solo. His rhythm was wonderful and he received enthusiastic applause.

I then encouraged a bigger group of six boys to go and dance. They formed a circle and did two wonderful combinations which they repeated in unison. Then came two girls and they used complex floor patterns and choreography together with the voice. They received enthusiastic applause.”(Appendix 2, class 6)

(Appendix 5, Video 76 - class 6)

(Appendix 5, Video 77- class 6)

According to Palmer:

... competition is the antithesis of community, an acid that can dissolve the fabric or relationships whereas conflict is the dynamic by which we test ideas in the open, in a communal effort to stretch each other and make better sense of the world (Palmer, 1998, p. 103).

I felt at this point all had a contribution to make to this ‘community of truth’ and these contributions were not in competition with one another in an ‘either-or’ but rather a ‘both-and’ holistic relationship. The atmosphere in which this was happening became filled with excitement and passion. I understood that:

truth is an external conversation about things that matter; conducted with passion and discipline ... the dynamic conversation of a community that keeps testing old conclusions and coming to new ones to be in truth we must know how to observe and reflect and listen, with passion and with discipline, in the circle around a given subject (Palmer, 1998, p. 104).

I felt I had at this point taken my place in the ‘circle around the subject’ and

... my gift as a teacher is the ability to dance with my students, to co-create with them in a context in which all of us can teach and learn, and that this gift works as long as I stay open and trusting and hopeful about who my students are (Palmer, 1998, p. 72).

I began to realise that if I assume that I as dance teacher am the ‘all knowing being’ I will more than likely never experience the joy that comes from witnessing the ‘knowing’ of others. I realised the enormous potential of creative opportunities to inspire the learning as well as the teaching processes. This was truly witnessing the subject at the centre of the circle with all taking their turn to jump into the middle to experience it up close.

The ‘unknown destination’ of creativity and authenticity continues to encourage me to remain receptive to new learning and allow the ‘subject’ to teach me. Palmer quotes the poet Robert Frost to make this point: “We dance around a ring and suppose, /But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 105)

I believe that we all have access to the “secret” and that at any given opportunity it may reveal itself to us. What I as teacher strive to do is keep that circle ‘open’ to opportunity.