

APPENDIX 2

My journal of learning moments and reflections while watching class videos.

Class 1

Before the course began I asked the teacher to tell the students that they could change into clothing which they felt comfortable in and that they did not have to wear their uniforms. I did this because I wanted them to feel relaxed and as comfortable as possible and I also wanted them to feel unique by expressing themselves through the way in which they dressed. They arrived to class having done exactly that. I am very aware of how clothing can and does influence the way in which we move. It also influences our sense of self and how relaxed or confident we feel. It is also an external statement of who we are and how we are feeling. I encourage dancers to dress in a way that they feel comfortable because of my value of individual expression and because I regard each dancer as unique. Flamenco is rooted in individual expression and how one is dressed either supports this idea or undermines it.

I waited for all to be seated in a group before I began my introduction activity. I introduced myself asked the dancers to address me as Linda. I feel more relaxed being introduced as “Linda” (my stage name is Linda Vargas) Being addressed as Ms Vargas only seems to enhance my position of power and this is not what I want. I want them to feel that we can all share in the sacredness of the moment (as well as the fun) as equals. By encouraging them to address me a Linda I am hoping to reduce my perceived position of power that being a teacher affords me. I do not view myself as more important by virtue of my role as teacher and prefer to be seen as a fellow traveller. This helps me feel more relaxed and hopefully allows the same for the students. I value each individual equally and do not want to be perceived of as any more important by virtue of how I am addressed.

I then began by asking each student to introduce themselves to me and to use one word to describe themselves. I explained that while I knew it was impossible to be summed up in one word that they were to try. They then each introduced themselves and gave one word to describe themselves. I have been using this introduction to a new class for some time now and I find it really helps me to express an interest in each learner individually as well as helping to “break the ice”. My personal interest in and value of each member of the class is grounded in my value of inclusion. I do not want anyone to feel uncomfortable or excluded but rather to feel that each one is to be valued and

respected for who they are in that moment. The descriptions of self were varied: some were vague generalisations some related to mood or to physique and some to perceptions of others. I was so thrilled when I heard them describe themselves in a positive terms such as “confident, crazy, fabulous, enthusiastic, active, the best, fun, no problems, excited, explosive, romantic, energetic, happy, friendly” etc. A few described themselves as “serious, shy, hyper, alien, guilty, moody” while others chose to describe themselves physically as “tall, short, blonde.” I used these descriptions of self as a fun way of identifying how they perceived themselves at that moment and where we were able to laugh together.

I did this because I value self knowledge and the ability to reflect on the self critically. When I am aware of how I am feeling and how my perceptions of self influence my dancing I am better able to moderate them. I also value fun in the learning environment and I encourage laughter to help break down tensions. I have found this introduction activity helpful as a means of encouraging self reflection which I try to continue to use throughout the classes. I tried to convey the message that it was completely acceptable to be honest even if their description had a slightly negative connotation. I do not regard “explosive, moody, and alien” in a negative way. My acceptance of their expression of how they felt at that moment was to suggest that in my class it was their truth and therefore to be respected. I did however find evidence of myself living in contradiction to my value of inclusion as I responded to two individual’s description of self as “guilty” and “hyper”. I tried to replace what I perceived as possibly another’s perception of self which may have been “adopted”.

I value perceptions of self as well as perceptions of others in order to arrive at a more balanced “truth” but my effort to make the distinction was at the expense of my value of inclusion. Perhaps I could have drawn their attention to this distinction without my own value judgements influencing their choice of description of self. This desire to arrive at a perception of self which is more “positive” is grounded in my belief that a positive self image is one that needs to be cultivated in dance. Where perceptions of self are “negative” they often hinder the expression of emotions which distinguish dance from mere physical motion.

The student who described himself as “guilty” came in late (possibly after having been found guilty of an offence). I tried to encourage him to see it as possibly a description

of self given by another person and to think of another description. He immediately replied “innocent”. I am not as accepting of all descriptions of self as I wish to be however I do value the development of the critical self. I value the individual’s ability to distinguish between perceptions of self and perceptions of others which they may have “adopted”. I felt that the student who described them self as “hyper” was more than likely using a description that had been assigned to them by another and I was thrilled when they promptly changed their description of self to “fun”. Yes my value of the critical self in that moment seemed to override my value of inclusion, but I had at least tried to draw their attention to the consideration of whether they had perceived themselves according to their own or someone else’s truth.

My obvious joy at descriptions of self which could be regarded as “positive” also suggests my value of a positive attitude towards self in a dance class. My encouragement of this positive attitude towards self is one I try to establish from the outset and is one which I continue to encourage wherever possible. I find that when there is a positive attitude towards self it is also more conducive to learning as well to the enjoyment of the class, both of which I value enormously.

A learning experience without the element of fun makes the experience similar to the experience of eating dry bread: yes it can be done but one may well prefer something that helps lubricate the process of ingestion. I try to encourage ‘work’ where it is disguised as ‘fun’ in order to engage the individual’s maximal effort. Young people are especially more inclined to fully engage in an activity if they perceive it as enjoyable or ‘fun’.

I concluded my introduction activity by asking them if they all knew how to count to six. I do this in order to introduce the intellectual demands I will be making on them during the course of the lesson. I presumed that most of them would be able to count to six but I asked the question merely to be able to remind them later, when they may be struggling to learn the rhythms that they had told me at the beginning that they could count to six. This is a humorous way to draw attention to the intellectual capacities that are being engaged. Thus I used my introduction activity to try and lay the foundation for the values and principles which I hoped to develop throughout the classes.

I chose to do my warm up exercises in a circle. In this way I tried to ensure that all could see me clearly and I could also see each dancer clearly. Because of the improvised nature of my warm ups it was essential that each dancer had unobstructed vision. I also stressed that I did not require perfection merely engagement. My warm ups were designed to be as inclusive as possible. I therefore choose movements that virtually anyone can do. I did not want anyone to feel alienated at the beginning of the class and tried to use basic movements that warm the muscles in a gentle yet fun way.

I told them to copy what I did and hoped that by not telling them what to expect I would engage their visual focus and concentration. I used a piece of 'bulerias' (a traditional piece of flamenco music) to introduce them to the flamenco musical style. I hoped hereby to encourage their listening capacities. I began with focusing on the breath because physical movements without the support of the breath tend to become tiring. I did this while crouching into the foetal position in order to narrow and draw the focus into the body and self. By making the movements as accessible and fun as possible I also hoped to engage maximum participation. I wanted my warm up to reflect my value of inclusion, visual and audio learning, and my desire to disguise work as fun.

I tried to keep in a state of "receptivity" where whatever came to mind or inspired was incorporated. This often becomes almost a meditative state similar to how I feel with doing a classical ballet "barre". There is always a variation but the basic repetitive nature helps to stabilise the body and mind. I am always a little surprised at what "comes" to mind in the moment. I did not intend introducing stamps into the warm-up but it came to mind and seemed to help activate the cardio vascular activity. This is always a good thing as fast flowing circulation helps with quick thinking and movement. My inclusion of stamps and claps also introduced a sense of fun and laughter and laid the groundwork for the skills I would be developing later.

Thus my warm up attempted to draw the awareness out of the head into the body and to prepare the muscles for work as well as to engage sufficient focus to ensure greater concentration for when the real learning began. It also allowed me to remain receptive to momentary inspiration which is something I feel is indispensable to my skill as a teacher. I consider myself as both teacher and learner simultaneously. Being receptive to momentary inspiration from whatever source, reminds me of my ability to learn as I teach. I do not regard this as exclusive to me. I also tried throughout the course to

encourage students to perceive themselves and one another in the same way. For me teaching and learning are one and the same process and trying to “box” them as two separate activities is virtually impossible for me. As I claim this for myself I simultaneously try to claim it for the whole class.

After the warm up I first explained verbally what I was going to do and then I asked all to watch and listen as I demonstrated what I wanted them to learn. I am aware of the multiple ways of in which learning takes place and tried to draw awareness to the visual, audio and intellectual aspects of learning in order to engage them. I also tried to provide learning opportunities for as many different types of learning as possible.

When I taught the first part of the dance I tried to draw attention to the fact that they needed to “look and listen”. This is normally the way in which the majority will learn a new step. If I find that some still need verbal explanations/ names/descriptions of movements then I will include these, however I prefer to develop the listening and watching skills first. The circle is a wonderful way of ensuring that all have equal opportunity to learn visually hence my use of it when teaching large groups.

After I demonstrated the steps I asked them to join in with me. I then alternated between numerous repetitions of the movement and re-demonstrated the correct way when necessary. I value repetition as a learning tool especially when learning new rhythms. Not only does it facilitate retention but it also gives me an opportunity to develop muscle strength and stamina in the dancer. In order to develop their skills of co-ordinating muscular activity with intellectual engagement I assisted them by using visual sign language to “show” how many movements have been completed. I used my hands and fingers to “visually count” how many steps they had completed. I have found that this helps them learn the skill of “counting” while they are moving. If I had tried to shout above the noise it would firstly have been very tiring for my vocal chords but it would also not have developed their visual skills which is always paramount in my teaching.

My use of “sign language” to conduct my lessons became more and more evident as my class continued. This is because I really value visual learning when studying flamenco. Dance requires the development of visual learning skills and the more they develop the easier learning becomes. I therefore encourage this development at every opportunity.

Once the sequence is learnt the more important aspect of dance as a form of communication of the individual's inner world can begin.

When learners were not able to count to seven I tried to introduce humour again as I reminded them that they had assured me at the beginning that they could count to six. I often find that young people do not want to be thought of as not being able to count to six so they endeavour to prove me incorrect. This often encourages their perseverance. I tried to do this in a humorous way as I value laughter as a means of releasing anxiety.

As we completed the learning of the first section I praised their efforts with as much enthusiasm as I could without sounding insincere. I did this because I value positive attitudes to self to contribute towards perseverance when learning may be perceived of as difficult. My praise of the group may not be an indication that they all knew the sequence well enough to do it solo but my use of repetition helped to ensure that the majority eventually "got it". This then allowed me to praise their efforts as a group even though some may not have been able to do it on the own yet. The confidence established while dancing in a group usually develops into confidence to dance in smaller and smaller groups and eventually solo. By praising the group I hoped to encourage self confidence and thereby to motivate further learning. This helped me to try and create a space where effort was acknowledged even before skill was achieved. For this reason I did not ask students to demonstrate learning solo until much later in the course. My value of inclusion, respect, and self confidence to ensure maximum learning are what underpin my choice to praise long before praise may be truly merited.

When it came to teaching the step that travelled sideways I found that the majority were not able to learn it successfully in a circle so I decided to put them in two parallel lines. I did this to assist the learning of the directional changes the step required. I found this more successful as all were able to face the same direction at the same time and those who were not able to grasp the directional changes quickly were able to benefit from being able to copy others until they could. In the early stages of learning I allow copying of each other to take place as this is when confidence is often the most fragile. This is because I wish to create a place where individual learning rates are accommodated without "exposing" the individual who may learn slower than others. Those who learn quickly benefit from the stamina and muscular development that repetition ensures and those who learn slower benefit from copying those who have

already learnt the movement. This supports my value of inclusion and a non threatening environment in which learning can take place.

Once I felt that that the majority had grasped the sequence I moved onto the next one. I then focused on audio learning when I asked them to continue doing the step while trying to work out the “counting”. I hoped hereby to provide an opportunity for “discovery” learning. When they were not able to figure it out I made the “discovery” more and more accessible by at first clapping the rhythm and then eventually slowing the clapping down sufficiently to ensure that someone would eventually figure it out. This is exactly what happened and once they had worked it out for them self it seemed to speed up their ability to do it correctly. I value discovery learning where I do not provide the answer but encourage the discovery thereof by the individual. This is often a powerful way of ensuring retention.

My attempts to include all and leave no-one behind in the learning process is what forces me to problem solve while teaching. When they were not observing which foot was initiating the movement I avoided using the terms “left foot” or “right foot”. I often find untrained dancers do not know which is which, when learning to dance. So I decided to ask them to watch me and see which foot I used. My encouragement of visual learning skills was rewarded as many more were then able to begin with the correct foot. If this had still left others behind I would probably have used the “words” to assist learning.

Because I believe that learning takes place in a multifaceted way I believe it is my responsibility as teacher to accommodate as well as develop as many learning styles as possible. I do not consider my work complete until I have embraced as many of these learning styles as possible in order to include and ensure success for as many as possible. For those who may have been at the point of getting bored I tried to introduce further challenges to keep their interest.

I added the use of the extension of one arm while doing the movement. This I know to be very demanding of co-ordination skills so I tried to introduce humour in order to ease the tension that may have been developing. By suggesting that when they learn to drive a motor car one day they don't try looking in one direction while travelling in another I had hoped to release some of their anxiety that may have been mounting

through the use of laughter. As I had suspected when I asked how they were going one did confirm my suspicion and replied that it was very confusing.

I am very aware of the challenges involved in the learning of flamenco. It can place extraordinary stress on individuals who are not anticipating it to be so complicated. The co-ordination it requires as well as the rhythmical skill combine and what appeared to be quite accessible is discovered to be just the opposite. It is for this reason I tried to 'ease' students over these hurdles in their learning by disguising their work as fun. I also did not allow too much time for reflection as I wanted them to be too busy working to notice how long the process was taking. I also tried to avoid exposing their 'slow' progress by working in and praising the group and to give slower learners the chance to catch up without losing confidence.

I chose to work with no music as I wanted them to hear the sounds they were making with greater clarity and to get a sense of working as a group. There is a powerful energy that comes from working as a group where everyone is doing the same thing at the same time at the same pace. I explained to dancers that I am not happy until they were able to 'sound like one person'. The reason for this is that it requires discipline and sensitivity to modify ones pace to the group. There are always those who like to move fast and those who like to move slowly. Having to conform to a group pace helps to establish a moderate tempo more conducive to learning.

It also gave an opportunity to 'sound' much louder than one does as an individual as well as to rely on others where there were still gaps in learning. The music is paced at the 'final product' and is often too fast for many in the early learning stages. Without music there is also the added incentive to accelerate learning in order not to be the one who makes a sound that is incorrect. Most students try and avoid 'group exposure' of their mistakes so when these mistakes are heard by all it can encourage the individual to focus with greater intensity in order not to expose their gaps in learning and to get it right as soon as possible. I anticipated these 'odd' sounds so when they did occur I tried to make light of them through laughter and encouraged them not to be 'caught out'. I hoped hereby to impose gentle peer pressure to encourage focus and learning.

I consider music as the inspiration that can be added once learning has taken place. The benefits of working without music should not be underestimated. There is tremendous

intellectual engagement in flamenco and often the music can be a distraction in the early stages of internalisation. I feel dancers benefit from finding their own rhythm (as a group and then as an individual) and that the added discipline of then following the pace of the music can and should be attempted later.

When students had grasped the mechanics of the sideways movement in the two lines I then went back to the circle to see if they would be able to make the directional changes necessary to transfer it to the circle again. There was improvement but I still felt that there were gaps in understanding. I was then 'inspired' to use a visual image of a 'fire' in the middle of the circle which I asked them to extend their arm towards as the travelled in the opposite direction. This was a great success as it gave visual focus to the step and seemed to speed up learning. It also gave me an opportunity to introduce the emotive elements of flamenco by being able to suggest that they also needed a 'fire' in their hearts.

Even though there were still some learners who had not internalised the sequence as well as others I did not draw attention to this. I know that everyone learns in different ways at different paces. I did not feel it necessary to expose these gaps in learning as I knew from experience that many of these are removed with sufficient repetition. It was at this point that I felt sufficient learning had taken place in order to take a 'break' or moment of reflection.

I have been using these informal moments of reflection in my teaching for many years now. Flamenco makes enormous demands on concentration physical co-ordination and intellectual engagement and is often therefore very tiring. I have found that in order to give student a 'break' without losing focus or letting the energy that has been established disperse, the sitting down for a moment of reflection can be enormously valuable. It allows the body to rest and the mind to find renewed inspiration.

I then asked the students to come and sit together in a group where we reflected on what they had just experienced. I asked if they were tired and their response was "no". I found this encouraging and decided to keep the time of this 'break' to a minimum. At this point I decided to narrow the focus to what they had found easy and then what they had found difficult. While some found the stamps and claps easy, there were more who identified their difficulties. As I suspected the step that travelled sideways was a

challenge for a lot of them. One mentioned that the ‘counting’ helped him learn the sequence while another identified the problem of “remembering” the sequence. It was at this point that I decided to use a comparison to the skill of “reading ahead” required for speed reading to introduce their focus to a skill of “thinking ahead” while dancing.

I tried to introduce a possible new skill (or as I mentioned to them, a skill that they probably had but were just not aware of) where they were to try and think of the next step while doing the previous one. This is extremely difficult for many people and is a skill which I tried to draw attention to and develop from the outset. It requires tremendous mental focus to think of the next step while doing the current one. The mind is often focused on the technical as well as intellectual demands of the current step and the ability to think of the next step as well takes time to develop. I do not consider it a ‘new’ skill that I was teaching them. It is a skill that I hoped to draw their attention to in order to engage it and develop it.

When I had done so I then took them back to the circle where we continued to engage in several repetitions of the sequence in order to use and develop our new skill of thinking ahead. I did this because I believe that the skills required for flamenco may not be immediately obvious to all and by drawing attention to them I would facilitate learning. Without music to rely on to be reminded of the next step tremendous emphasis can be placed on the intellectual engagement of the individual. By drawing their attention to this I am hoping to encourage self responsibility for their own learning. In order not to have to rely on the music or others to help recall, I tried to encourage and develop the skills that would lead to the individual responsibility necessary for their success.

When they went back to the circle the improvement was slow but steady. I ‘invented’ the use of the word ‘pause’ in order to draw their attention that they had still not mastered the skill of thinking ahead. By having to press ‘pause’ on the ‘video machine’ I hoped to draw their attention to the fact that I was still allowing them time to gather their thoughts before beginning the next step. I hoped to eventually be able to ‘run’ the sequence without having to pause to think what came next. This skill of speed recall in flamenco is often not easily assimilated and may require extensive repetition to support it. For this reason I was not alarmed at the ‘slow’ progress. This was only the first lesson.

I then decided to divide the class into two groups. I did this because I believe a tremendous amount of learning takes place while watching others. Having the time to rest and observe seems to help fill in many of the gaps in personal learning. I also use it as an opportunity to develop the individual's ability to think critically. I value the ability to be able to observe others and see what is 'working' and what is not. I value being able then to cross reflect and apply this knowledge to self. Engaging in mental dialogue with self where we ponder the relevance to our own performance is a skill I try to develop in all my students.

I did not at this point allow students to pass comment on one another's performance as I felt it may have been a bit too soon for them to withstand the harsh remarks that may have been given. I decided to rather lay the ground work and to introduce them slowly to the idea of being watched. I only allowed myself opportunity to comment on their efforts. I chose to praise rather than criticise at this point as I knew that those who were watching would see the flaws. I hoped to lead by example and chose to praise their effort rather than their performance. I hoped that those who were watching would possibly feel less intimidated to try when it was their turn. Seeing that I regarded a less than perfect performance as (a) 'fantastic' (effort) may have helped ease the anxiety that being 'watched' often induces.

When I divided them into the two groups not only was I asking them to get used to the idea of being watched but I was also asking them to make directional changes from the circle to facing the front. I chose not to draw their attention to this but merely to help them when I saw they were struggling. Thus I hoped to introduce directional changes under the guise of 'performance'.

Dance offers wonderful opportunities for the individual to develop the ability to think critically about own as well as others performance. For this reason later in the course I encouraged comments from those who were watching as well as those who were dancing. I tried to do so in a way that the individual was offered an opportunity to step back from their performance and engage in a process of critical analysis of the performance which would hopefully facilitate leaning and self knowledge. Being able to take and give constructive criticism is a skill I value enormously. For this reason I stressed the importance of not laughing AT one another. I tried rather to draw attention

to the value of critical thinking as a means of improving performance as well as seeing it as an opportunity to ‘help’ ones peers by offering them a different perspective of their own performance.

I value the perspective of self that is available to me when I balance it with the perspectives of others. However I believe the perspective of others can only be of value though when criticism is given with the motivation of ‘helping’ rather than ‘hurting’. I tried to encourage this from the early stages as it can and did provide wonderful opportunities for more balanced perspectives of self while developing abilities to think critically. I divided the class into two groups to allow time to rest but it was also to introduce the activity of learning to critically evaluate ones own as well as others performance.

I then decided to teach the technique of palmas (clapping). I had not planned to do so until the following lesson but I believe in the skill of ‘sensing’ when to make adjustments to plans. At this point I felt that this particular class were ready to learn the technique and I was reward for my choices. They in fact were more than ready. I chose to have them seated (and resting) while we engaged in a more intellectual learning activity. I taught the palmas technique by drawing on principles of science and music theory. I believe in the integration of learning areas and therefore chose to use theoretical principles from other learning areas to teach this new skill. I do not believe students should regard knowledge as ‘boxed’ but should be given every opportunity to view the world of knowledge as dynamic and interrelated.

I then gave them a new kind of ‘homework’ and introduced the idea that practicing a new skill at home can be fun. I always hope that all new learning will be regarded as fun and that I have given sufficient motivation to encourage individual practice. Learning to learn with passion and to transfer that passion into active self disciplined practice is a life skill which I try to encourage from the outset. I see it as my responsibility to motivate and inspire that passion and self discipline in others and to allow their passion to inspire me. For me this dynamic interchange of energy is what teaching and learning are.

I then concluded the class by going over the whole sequence, not in a circle any more, but this time with all of them facing the front. This was to consolidate learning and to allow them to finish the class dancing.

I was very pleased when I watched them to see how much learning had in fact taken place. I know I did not test individual learning but I hoped to use the feeling of confidence that dancing in a group affords to encourage and motivate further learning and practice. I also used my praise for their efforts to motivate them. When I concluded the class with a short group session I asked them for any comments. I had hoped that their comments would give me an indication of how they were feeling and how to approach the next class. I was busy with this class but already thinking ahead for the next one: using the self same skill of thinking ahead that I had tried to draw their attention to earlier.

I was rewarded by their honest comments: “thank you, wow, I can’t wait for Thursday, can we perform this dance?” The overall impressions were of enjoyment and a sense of ‘wow’ as one student described it. I reminded them of the importance of practice and that ‘the fun goes when you are not getting it right’. This reflects my value of a strong ‘work’ ethic on the road to success: natural ability without focus and discipline seldom lead to excellence.

The fact that one of them asked if they were going to be able to perform their dance for an audience was for me a clear indication that learning had taken place. Their confidence after one lesson showed me that at least one had learnt enough to want to show others what they had learnt. I then blew them a kiss and waved them goodbye. I left encouraged and motivated to begin their next lesson. Unfortunately we would need to wait two days.

Class 2

The second class was very enlightening for me. After the previous lesson when I reflected on the difficulty of teaching the stamp and half turn with two stamps, (a step which I have been teaching for many years) I tried to imagine how to convey to non dancers the concept of a half turn which keeps turning back on itself without too much technical information which often confuses them. I pondered this problem but did not

come up with anything that I have not tried before. The first lesson I tried teaching it in a circle but this is probably the most difficult way to try and learn it. My inspired use of the “visual aid” of a “fire” in the centre of the circle (something I have not used before) definitely helped them to know which arm to extend but the half turn still alluded many of them.

I began the lesson in the way I would continue throughout the entire course: with an informal greeting and chat. I asked if they were having a good day to which some replied: “yes”. I always try to begin my classes by asking students how they are feeling because I find if there are “issues” that can affect the class it is best to be aware of them. When emotional issues are brought to the class I prefer to know how to work with them and to be sensitive to them. I believe that dance offers release from emotional blockages and if I know what they are I can try to provide opportunities to allow for their positive expression and release.

My ‘greeting’ time at the beginning of the class was a time for any one to offer comments on the previous lesson. It was a time for students to share any thing they chose with me and the rest of the class. I found their comments very helpful to provide a guide for my focus in the lesson. If were problems that I was unaware of I tried to address them and if there was positive feedback I used it to build on. This particular lesson I was well rewarded for taking the time to find out how they were feeling.

The first comment came from a girl who I had not realised was dyslexic.

“I think I actually enjoyed it.... I actually learnt something”

I was about to leave it at that and then decided to ask her what she thought she had learnt. She replied:

“I learnt... as a dyslexic... to let go of my fear of dancing”.

I was so humbled by her honesty and extended my appreciation by replying: “good for you my darling”.

My desire to be inclusive had motivated me to design a course that enabled as many children as possible to participate. The value and extent of that participation would have eluded me if I had not chosen to follow up on the response given by this girl. Not only did I feel that she had made a significant personal breakthrough, but she had felt comfortable enough to tell me and the whole class. I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the potential of dance to shift perspectives, and this after only one lesson.

The next comment came from one of the boys who admitted:

“I didn’t actually care much about dancing but I actually enjoyed it”.

And the next comment from a girl who said:

“I thought I was good at dancing but I realised I have to think”.

I found all these comments very valuable as they showed me that at least three students had had a personal shift in perspective and that what I was doing was having a positive effect for them. I realised that even though time is always a factor and that I attempted to hear everyone’s comments in my ‘greeting’ time that I should at times ask learners to elaborate on their initial response. This was and can be very much more enlightening for me and others.

I thanked them for their honesty and asked them to continue to share their comments in this manner in the future. I reminded them that flamenco is an art form that required them to be honest and authentic. I asked them to continue to share their thoughts and feelings with the same honesty even if they thought it was something I may not like to hear. I did this because I believe in the power of critical thinking and the constructive sharing of criticism with others to help me do a better job. I hoped to show that if I asked them to do that it was because I was prepared to do the same myself. I did not expect students to do anything that I am not prepared to do myself. I strive to only “teach” /share what I have found valuable for myself.

In this second class warm-up I chose to play a piece of “tangos” that had flamenco singing as well. I hoped thereby to surprise them with rhythms and sounds that they may not be familiar with. Flamenco singing is something that many find difficult to relate to and it can be an ‘acquired taste’ for some. I tried therefore to allow the ear to customise to this style of singing while they were doing some thing else. I kept my warm-ups improvised in nature. I found that this encouraged them to focus from the beginning of the class because they did not know what I was going to do next.

The next part of my class I will call the ‘recall’ time. Immediately after the warm-up I asked them to show me the sequence that they had learnt the previous lesson. I did this before revising what I had done with them. The reason I have a recall time before revision is because I want to see what degree of learning has taken place without my

reminding them. It was very good to see how much had been 'absorbed' by the majority of them. I also used this recall period to expose the gaps in learning. I used this then to guide my focus in the revision. As I expected the gaps were found in the parts that had had the least repetition: the 'new' work.

Even though there were gaps in learning I chose to praise them for what they had remembered. I then reminded them that learning flamenco was similar to hammering a nail into a piece of wood: each time the hammer hits the nail goes in further. I likened myself to the hammer and told them that my lessons would hammer their memory until they had successfully learnt the sequence. I hoped hereby to introduce another of my values: the value of repetition. I hold to the age old adage 'repetition ensures learning, repetition ensures learning'. I therefore see it as my responsibility to ensure that what is repeated is worthy of learning. I realise this is framed by my own interpretation of what I consider to be worthy but I do try to remain open to change when the situation requires it.

I chose to do the movement myself and then asked students how many I had done. I did this in order to encourage their skills of observation and I was thrilled when many answered by giving me the correct answer. This proved to me that at least some were counting and focusing well. I then decided to ask them to do the sequence with no 'visual' clues from me. This is often quite challenging as there is no music, no drum or beat and no silent 'conducting' from me that they are able to follow. It requires great sensitivity to the group and modification of ones own rhythm to that of others. I was thrilled when they managed to do just that and I praised their work with great enthusiasm.

I drew their attention to the fact that they had just completed the sequence with no 'help' at all and that they should give themselves a good 'pat on the back'. I encouraged praise of self as I consider that when good results are achieved that praise and acknowledgement should come from self and others. In this way I hoped to draw their attention to learning to praise their own efforts. I hoped to encourage an awareness of own abilities and effort which could be then be balanced by what others say. Learning to praise one's own efforts is a useful tool to motivate work further especially when praise or encouragement from others is not forthcoming.

In this second lesson I focused on the emotive aspects of flamenco. The reason for this was that I believe dance, and in particular flamenco, offers unique opportunities to develop emotional expression through the body as well as empathy and emotional intelligence. I felt that it was important to introduce this aspect as early as possible in the course. Learning to consciously express one's emotion through movement and dance is often a slow process and I wanted them to benefit from developing this for the entire duration of the course. The expression of personal emotions often takes time to develop and an atmosphere of trust needs to be established from the outset.

I began the class with the assertion that "we are here to dance" but in actual fact this particular lesson had very little dancing. I value times of reflection to such an extent, that I sometimes forgot that the very muscles and bodies that were warmed up earlier were now getting cold. The fine balance between intellectual reflection and physical work is one that I should always be aware of.

While I tried to balance the hour class by allowing time for "rest" when learners sat and reflected on what had just taken place, I also used odd times during the execution of some sequence to reflect on the possible value of what we were trying to do and what our intentions were. These spontaneous times of reflection formed an integral part of my classes as I believe when dancers work 'intelligently' their work becomes that much more meaningful and skilled. The fact that a particular aspect under discussion may not have been relevant to all was not as important to me as the possibility that it may. I consider reflection to aid learning as invaluable.

So the first time of reflection in this class came immediately after the consolidation of what had been learnt in the previous lesson. We sat down and I then played them two examples of flamenco music: one that came from the 'jondo' (deep and melancholic) and one that was 'chico' (fun). I used their 'dance' that they had just learnt and I showed them how I would use their sequence to interpret the music. First I allowed them to listen to the 'jondo' piece and then asked for their comments. The responses were varied and I merely repeated them so that the whole class could hear. I did this as I did not want to respond to every comment. I wanted them to be able to say whatever they wished without the fear of my evaluation of their comment.

When I asked them to describe what they thought the singer was possibly feeling their responses were amazingly perceptive: "he was in pain....he was into what he was

doing”. I then demonstrated how I would use their steps to dance to that rhythm. When I had finished I asked them what I had done to their steps. Their observations were very accurate: “you made them slower....you used ‘base’ claps (knowledge learnt from the previous lesson)...depressing....like you were in pain”.

I then tried to draw their attention to the fact that in flamenco steps could be transformed by the emotions that inspired them. I asked if they had any personal experience of depression to which they responded: “no use for life...no reason for anything...what’s the point of being here...angry...fed up...the whole world is against you and life sucks”. This gave me a good indication that many had a sufficient understanding of the nature of depression and that I could then draw on this later in the class.

When I danced their steps to a happy and fun rhythm, “bulerias”, their response was spontaneous laughter smiles and applause. When I asked them to tell me what they had observed their responses were equally accurate: “faster....exciting...you put yourself into it....you enjoyed it”. I described what I had done to their steps as “turning them upside down”. When I asked what had enabled me to do this their response were: “the music...expression...the way you moved”. I then tried to sum up what I wanted to draw their attention to: “In dance if you don’t show how you are feeling nobody will know”.

I hoped that by observing me they would be able to learn from my expression the way in which emotion could influence my movement. This was so that I could lead them into the next activity where I would encourage them to do it themselves. I praised them for their comments and took them back to the circle.

I asked them to do the sequence they had learnt very slowly as if they were very sad and as if they ‘wished the world would end’. I then asked them to do the same sequence fast as if they were feeling happy. I did this as a brief introduction to two contrasting emotions and paces. By starting with sad and happy and slow and fast I hoped to be able to use the clear contrasts as a stepping stone to introduce others that were not as contrasting. I also wanted them to ‘experience’ for themselves how emotions and pace affected movements.

I noticed how they found it difficult to do the rhythm slowly and with the emotion of sadness. When it came to fast and happy most seemed to feel more comfortable. I then sat them down for a moment of reflection and asked them for their comments on how the experience had felt. Their comments for the slow and sad included: “bored... no feeling... lazy... no energy...taking your anger out on the ground...tired...time went slowly”. Their responses for the fast and happy included: “fantastic...nice...excited...fun...time was moving so fast... like to do it again and again...enthusiastic...very...very fast...your soul was empowered ... energetic ...hyperactive ...” When I asked what they found difficult about the slow and sad they replied: “keeping the pace slow”. And for the fast and happy: “the ‘fire’ step...trying to keep up”.

These resonated with my previous experiences of working with young people. I have found that generally young people enjoy moving ‘fast’ and ‘happy’ and therefore tend to feel more motivated to move in that way. They do not generally enjoy ‘slow’ and ‘sad’ and often find it difficult to do. For this reason when working with beginners I prefer to work with a faster happy approach to the sequence as this tends to help with motivation in the beginning stages. It also encourages speed thinking and recall which I consider valuable skills to develop from the outset.

My desire to keep the ‘fun’ also motivated me to work with them in the way that most of them enjoyed. I shared with them that it was my experience that most young people only move slowly when they are sick, tired or unmotivated and that we would work with the faster happier pace so that they would enjoy it more.

I also chose to do this exercise to show how any type of emotion was available to them to express in flamenco and to draw their attention to their own personal preference and pace of movement. In my experience I have found that there are always those who naturally move slowly and those that naturally move fast. I hoped to make them more aware of how they naturally move and to analyse how they preferred to move. If they were slow movers I encouraged them to develop the skill of speed as well. If they were fast movers I encouraged them to develop the skill of moving slowly. In this way I tried to broaden their range of movement capabilities and expression.

However with time being a factor for this course I chose to focus on what the majority did easily. I hoped that those who wanted to move slowly would be given the opportunity later in the course when I offered time for smaller groups and solos.

After reflection on the possibility of whether they were slow movers or fast movers I then got them up to continue learning the next step. This part of the sequence I had designed to allow them to begin to explore more fully their emotional world. It consisted of two walks and a pause in any position they chose. This was repeated three times concluding the fourth time with 5 stamps. I demonstrated the sequence first and then asked them if they had noticed how many times I had repeated it. They were able to give the correct answer. I then demonstrated it with clapping for them to figure out the counting or timing of the steps. I first demonstrated it fast and when they were not able to work out the timing I slowed the pace until they were able to do so. I did this to help increase their powers of observation.

When I asked if they had 'got it', one boy offered to show me that he had. As is often the case with learning flamenco he was not able to demonstrate it correctly doing it on his own. Some of the class began to laugh at him and I immediately silenced them. I allowed him to continue trying and then praised him for his effort. I then demonstrated the sequence slowly again and asked them again if they had worked out the counting yet. At this point someone was able to give the answer 12, which was correct. I then asked them to divide 12 into two equal parts and asked what we would get and they replied '6'. I did this to draw their attention to the mathematical skills that are required of them when dancing flamenco. I then began repeating the sequence counting it in groups of 6.

I have found that while some flamenco rhythms are counted in musical phrases of 12 it is easier to teach beginners breaking that up into smaller phrases of 6 as their counting skills need to be more developed before they are able to dance and count in phrases of 12 simultaneously.

We then repeated the sequence until I felt they could demonstrate and count the step correctly. Once this was the case I then asked them to 'add' their own personal emotional expression. I gave them permission to express any emotion they wished on the 'stop'. I demonstrated a couple of examples and included some that I thought they might enjoy doing. I hoped thereby to give my 'permission' for them to be as creative

as they wished. I told them that the only thing I required of them was that they ‘say’ something with their ‘pose’.

I hoped to encourage the development of their physical ‘voice’ where they were encourage to express through their body how they were feeling and to communicate it to others. They then repeated the sequence a few times and I then asked them if their ‘pose’ was always the same on each repeat. They then correctly replied ‘no’. I then asked them why they thought that was so. One then correctly observed: ‘different feelings’. I then confirmed that we are very creative and had many feelings which we could draw on each moment and that they are not always the same. I was so thrilled with how easily they shared their emotions and how easily they seemed to express it through their movement. I praised them with great enthusiasm.

We then repeated the sequence ‘from the top’ in order to consolidate learning. I then divided them into two groups where I encouraged them to watch one another again. I reminded them that they were not to think of sitting and ‘sleeping’ but that I required them to focus and observe in order for them to then offer constructive “helpful advice” to those they had been watching. I emphasised ‘constructive’ as I anticipated that there may be some individuals who at this stage were not able to do all I was requiring them to do. Those watching may have been tempted to be harsh with their criticism.

I reminded them that there was to be ‘no laughing’ because ‘everyone was trying’. I hoped thereby to establish an atmosphere of respect. I value effort and a positive self image and these are rooted in my value of respect on multiple levels. Respect for the art form, the self, the process of learning, our travelling companions, the dynamic nature of the relationship of teacher and learner, the special space that we create in our class. I continually encouraged the respect for self during my classes when I asked them to “stand tall”; “take your place in the universe”; “be proud of who you are”.

Respect for others was encouraged when I at this stage announced my only class rule: “no laughing AT one another”. I did this to support and encourage respect for the learning process as well as the intimate nature of the space that we were trying to create. Later I tried to draw attention to my value of the mutual respect of teacher and learner when I concluded each class by the exchange of a mutual bow and thanks. I felt

that this was yet another way of acknowledging the respect for one another as well as our shared experience.

I attempted to create an environment of respect for learners where they could feel free to 'experiment', to risk not looking 'right', to find ways of moving that may be unique to them, to find their physical 'voice'. I tried to emphasise the difference between laughing AT or WITH someone. Being laughed at by ones peers is often feared by learners. I therefore tried to set the tone from the outset by drawing their attention to the fact that all were trying their best and that no-one had the right to 'silence' another while they were still learning to 'speak'. Laughing WITH others is something I did and do all the time. I believe humour helps to create a more relaxed atmosphere so I didn't take myself too seriously and allowed others to do the same. This was however not to be at someone else's expense. This is something I tried to establish from the outset as I do not feel that meaningful authentic expression takes place in an environment of fear.

I then divided them into two groups where I told the group that was watching that they were not allowed to 'sleep' but that I expected them to focus in order to be able to offer the dancers "constructive helpful" advice. The first group then 'performed the sequence for the others and I helped them only when necessary. I then praised their efforts before asking the group that was watching to pass comment. Some of their responses included: "some people were too fast...awesome!!(to which the rest of the class responded with applause and shrieks of approval)...not thinking ahead."

I then asked them to swop over and reminded the group that was watching to give the same respect that they had just been given while the next group danced. I asked them to 'watch' and reminded them of the value of learning from what others were doing and that sometimes when they saw someone doing something that wasn't "quite right" that they could then use that as an opportunity to check that they were not doing the same. I believe that learning comes from watching the 'correct' as well as the 'incorrect' and that within the framework of trying to decide what is 'correct' and 'incorrect' lies the opportunity to develop individual preferences and authentic expression and creativity.

I did have to remind the second group to watch "quietly" as the performance of flamenco requires great concentration. One needs to be able to hear what other dancers

are doing in order to 'keep together' and in order to hear the external beat that is being given by another (in this case my claps).

During this course I invented the term "background noise" to describe insensitive 'noise' made by those watching. Flamenco does not require silence from its 'audience'. They come to form an integral part of the performance, and rather than remaining 'observers' they play a participatory role in the performance. They do however need to develop an understanding of what kind of noise is acceptable and when it is appropriate. This I only 'taught' in a later lesson but I had to lay the foundation for its introduction at this point.

The second groups comments included: "some of them don't know what's going on.....some didn't know what they were doing..... (I reminded them that at this stage of the learning process that that was normal and that "we all learn at different paces").....some are going a bit fast.....some forgot their steps.....didn't use expression..... needs energy (I reminded them that I did not want comments for specific individuals but rather general observations. The reason for this was that I have found when comments are given in a general way it is less threatening especially when still trying to establish a 'safe' space to be expressive. The individual could then decide if that comment was appropriate for them. I hoped hereby to encourage critical thinking and personal responsibility as well as analysis of performance without the often damaging effects of personal criticism which can 'paralyse' further attempts.)

I then said that I did not feel that their performance was "that bad". I then gave a personal account of my own experience as a performer where after what I felt had been a good performance someone would come to me after the performance and ask if I was having a 'bad day'. I then reminded them that sometimes what we think we are 'saying' in our performance is differently interpreted by others. There was also the possibility that what we thought we were expressing was perhaps not that accurately expressed.

This becomes the 'mystery' of interpretation, where 'miscommunication' or 'varied interpretations' come into play. I felt that it was important to draw their awareness to the skill needed to 'read' or understand another's body language as accurately as possible and that even if this was not always achieved it was worth developing. I feel that similar to the 'vocal voice' and the 'written voice', the 'physical voice' is another

way of expressing ones 'truth'. Just as we try to understand one another accurately when speaking or writing there are always those times when we misinterpret one another. So it is with 'body language', however I do often feel that 'body language' has a greater depth of 'truth' than the spoken or written word which can often be used in a contradictory manner.

I reminded them of the possibility that perhaps some of them thought they were expressing something when it didn't appear that way to others or perhaps it was because they were not being 'expressive enough'. By drawing their attention to the difficulties of communication, even with the body, I hoped to try throughout the course to develop a greater sensitivity and skilled use of the body as communicator of self.

We then ran out of time and I hastily introduced them to my 'bow' and moment of 'mutual thanks' and bid them farewell until the next class.

Class 3

At the beginning of class 3 as I was waiting for the class to filter in I asked for their comments on the previous lesson. I was thrilled to hear that the first comment was that they were surprised at how quickly they were learning the steps. What a relief I felt that at least someone was finding it easy and accessible. I then asked if there were others who felt the same and quite a few hands went up. This sort of feedback helped me keep in touch with the nature of their experience as it happened and influenced how I shaped the lesson.

I asked if there were any other comments and there were none. We then went straight to the warm-up. I chose a fun 'tangillo' for the music and tried to make it enjoyable as well as a little more intensive. I decided to speed up the initial bends to the floor to activate greater cardio vascular activity and I also added arm movements to the fast stamps. This required co-ordination and I tried to introduce it into each warm up so that by the time I came to needing it in the sequence this skill had been sufficiently developed.

I also used the warm-up to allow latecomers to join in as easily as possible. The fast squats that I used during today's warm-up were a good idea as it did help to warm

muscles up a little quicker. The fast stamps were a good idea as they also provided a sense of fun and many began to laugh through sheer exertion. I conclude the warm up with a fast 'crouch' to see if they were really concentrating and to surprise them. I noticed during the warm up that some of the boys didn't use their arms easily. At the conclusion I asked if their hearts were beating (in order to draw their attention to the fitness that was required), to which they replied: "yes!" I was satisfied that I had achieved what I wanted (at least with most of them).

I then prepared them for the "recall exercise" by asking them to "stand tall...be proud of who you are" and to draw their feet together as if they were "drawing their brain into focus." They remembered the steps perfectly without any visual clues from me. When I asked what they thought the value of repetition was, I realised that they had not seen its value in the dance context yet. They responded by saying that repetition gave "freedom of mind...practice...get the rhythm". These comments indicated to me that they possibly needed to experience the value of repetition personally in order to understand its value. I decided to ask them to think about it and to wait until later in the class, after my 'drilling session' to ask the question again.

During the 'drilling session' I required them to repeat the sequence numerous times as well as perfect certain movements that I thought were not skilled enough yet. I demonstrated that anyone could do these movements in a sloppy and undisciplined way and I reminded them of the need to 'think' while dancing. Loss of focus in flamenco, even for a moment, can be disastrous, especially when working as a group: the rhythm starts to 'splinter' and instead of rhythm one gets 'noise'. In this way I hoped to instil a strong 'work' ethic in the class where skill became the pursuit of all.

I then put them into two lines again to practice the sideways step which was still not good enough for me. In my desperation to get them to face the correct direction I had a moment of inspiration. I noticed the children's art work on the walls of the hall and decided to draw their attention to it while they were changing direction. I then demonstrated how at one point I was facing the 'fish' and at the next point I was facing the 'dolphins'. I then shouted out the rhythm using the 'visual clues' of 'dolphins...fish...fish...dolphins'. This proved to be a great success. They immediately started vocalising with me and we 'drilled' it until they had internalised the directional changes. Not only did they seem to find it fun (they got louder and louder culminating

in laughter) but they could then all do it correctly. I noticed that when they no longer needed it that the vocals reduced and finally disappeared quite naturally.

When I asked each line to perform the sequence for the other group I found that they began laughing at one another's attempts again. I reminded them of the one rule in my class. At his point one boy responded: "no laughing!" (at least one of them had remembered). When I asked them the possible reason for that rule one responded that "it doesn't make you feel good". I agreed and added that "all of us are trying" and indicated that that in its self deserved respect.

We then swopped over groups and they managed to do the sequence very well. I praised their efforts and we swopped groups again. We then went back to the circle where all had equal opportunity to see in order for me to teach the new step. I discovered while teaching the 'toe heel' action that if I described the quality of the movement it improved action. I used the word "punch" to describe the "toe" action and went to one of the boys where I made a sudden 'punching' movement towards him. I did this because I presumed they would then understand the amount of force required for a punch and would then apply it to the movement. The boys were able to identify with this and were then much more powerful in their attempts to do the step.

I only gave corrections when they were needed. I then asked my question again to see if they had discovered the value of repetition yet. One replied: "perfection" to which I responded: "skill!" I agreed that perfection may be one way of saying it but that I felt it was more to improve their 'skill'. I then added "and going over and over will also develop... (I paused)". One then replied: "Strength!" At this point I was happy that they had 'discovered' the value of repetition in a dance class (even if they had needed a little help.)

I then introduced the idea of doing two combinations slow and five fast. I then demonstrated it fast for them in order to show them the 'final product'. There were shrieks of delight which then helped motivate them to try and do it themselves. I reminded them that repetition builds skill and strength and we then began another 'drilling session'. This time it was not just mindless repetition but required them to count and vary the pace of the actions. When they were not able to stop at five I reminded them that at the beginning of the course they had assured me that they could

count to six and that I was only asking them to count to five. I did this to try and release their anxiety by thinking that all they needed to do was count to five.

I reminded them that I did not want to hear an 'echo' and that I would not be happy until they sounded like 'one person'. This was to set the goal. I then reminded them that I was not expecting them to get it right and perfect that day. I explained that in my class if we "didn't get it today we would get it.....tomorrow, and if we didn't get it tomorrow we would get it the next day, and if we didn't get it the next day we'd get it..... the next." I said this in order to try and ease the anxiety that may have been building with the slow learning of the new step. I told them not to be 'hard' on themselves and to keep trying. However I am sure that many may have remembered my goal of sounding like one person and that the drilling would continue until that was achieved.

I then introduced the idea of beginning the sequence with either the right or left foot. I felt that they were possibly ready to grasp this at this stage. I asked them to 'shake' their right foot in order to establish with great clarity which was their right foot. This may have helped because they managed very well to identify which was which. I then began another 'drilling session' beginning each repeat with either the left foot or the right. When I identified flaws in the technical aspect of the movements I slowed them down and went back to 'basics'. When an action was incorrectly executed I demonstrated the incorrect way for them in order to show them why it didn't work or look good and then showed the correct way. I hoped that by seeing the incorrect way they may be inspired to do it the correct way.

When I was happy with their progress I asked if they were tired. One mentioned that he was sweating to which I expressed my approval. For me this was an indication of work. It also indicated to me that cardio vascular activity was taking place. Even though they were nowhere near 'good' yet, I praised them once again for their effort rather than their skill. I did this to keep morale up.

I reminded them often to stand tall and strong before starting the sequence. I did this because I feel that conscious effort to hold ones body strongly encourages a positive attitude to self (even when this may not yet have been the case). By 'acting' in a certain

way I feel that I can ‘train’ that self confidence just through body posture. I feel this also helps to keep a positive attitude towards the learning process.

I then reminded them once more that I wanted their movements to convey to me how they were feeling. I did this in order to avoid the intellectual activity of learning overshadowing the expressive qualities of dance where movement becomes “mechanical”. I felt this required re-emphasis and I demonstrated a variety of possibilities in order to inspire them.

At this point I felt they needed a ‘rest’ so I divided them into two groups again. I asked them to ‘show’ me with their body posture that they were ready to begin. I asked them to put their feet together and ‘stand strong’. I was not prepared to begin until I could ‘see’ they were ready. I did this because it emphasised ‘body language’ again and also because I regard it as a sign of respect for what they were about to attempt. I reminded them again that neither I nor those watching expected perfection at this point and that we were merely “all working”. I assured them once more that repetition would help lead to success.

I then introduced a new skill of learning to provide the beat or rhythm for the dancers. Those who were watching were now given the added responsibility of providing the clapping for the dancers. I described it like being a drum. They were to provide a clear strong beat for the dancers to work to. This is not easy as it requires great empathy and sensitivity from those clapping. I told them that they needed to clap in unison and that they needed to sound like one person. A ‘splintered’ sound was not acceptable. I then made the comparison with how they clapped in assembly where no clear rhythm was evident. I thus tried to show them what I wanted by showing them what I did not want.

I then let them try to clap for the dancers and as I expected it wasn’t very good. They looked disheartened. One of the boys expressed his fear of doing the steps in two groups. I responded to his expressed anxiety by sharing my story. I did this in the hope of conveying to others who may have been feeling the same anxiety that I knew how they possibly felt. I hoped thereby to reduce their self imposed pressure to do well immediately. I tried to encourage them to be patient. I told them how it often took me six months to be able to perform a new dance. I then reminded them that this was only their third lesson and to “chill”.

When they swopped groups the second group was worse: the clapping had no ‘sensitivity’ or conscious awareness of the dancer. I had hoped that I would not have had to teach them to ‘follow’ the dancer and that it might come naturally. However this was not the case and I had to interrupt this group in order to explain how the clapping worked in flamenco. I gave them what I hoped would be good news: “in flamenco the dancer rules!” I then explained how the pace of the dance is determined by the dancer. Those clapping for the dancer (or in the instance of a musician, playing for the dancer) had to follow the pace of the dancer. The dancer was the leader and the clappers were the followers. I then told them that they would all get a chance to ‘lead’ and to ‘follow’.

Both first attempts to clap successfully for the dancer were weak but I did not interrupt their ‘poor’ performance as I wanted them to observe and analyse for themselves what was going wrong. I merely allowed them to struggle to the end and then sat them down for a moment of reflection. I hoped that they would then be able to identify and solve the problems themselves. When I asked for comments on what it was like to clap for a dancer they responded: “you get tired.....its confusing when you first start dancing and you hear the claps...and then you get used to it and it works its way out.... It needs you to look and see...your hands get tired...it’s difficult because you have to listen to yourself and the dancer.....you can’t just relax and enjoy it.” I thought these comments reflected their lived experience of trying to clap for a dancer and were worthy of attention. I then asked if knowing the dance helped them at all in their attempts to clap. When I asked for a show of hands to indicate who felt that it had helped them, the majority agreed that it had.

I then asked what it felt like to dance to the claps. One replied that he found it ‘hard’. When I asked ‘why’ they responded: “you get distracted....its confusing....its nice.... you’re tempted to clap with them while you dance.” I found all responses identified many of the difficulties and I hoped that their experiential learning had helped them to begin to try and address their difficulties. Sharing experiences also can help others to identify problems that they might not yet have been aware of. I therefore used the informal reflection time whenever the need arose.

I then asked if they would be comfortable if I divided them into smaller groups. I felt that I needed to ask them this in order to gauge their levels of confidence. If they had

not felt confident I would have waited until they were. I did not want to compromise the safe space that we had created and force them to perform in smaller groups until they were ready. This division into smaller groups should only happen when they feel confident. A smaller group means more eyes will be watching and therefore one has to be sure of what one is doing in order not to lose face. I therefore tried to introduce higher and higher levels of 'exposure' but only with their permission. This was my way of expressing respect for their learning and sensitivity to their levels of confidence.

I suggested six in a group and allowed them to decide on their own grouping. I felt that the experience may be more enjoyable if I allowed them to dance with their friends. As they began to group themselves I noticed that there were different size groups that emerged. I then allowed them not only to decide who but also how many they had in their group. Once the groups were established I asked if they were happy with their groupings. When all were happy I asked two groups to go and perform for the rest of the class.

I now had three groupings: one small group dancing, one small group clapping and the rest of the class observing. This introduced the idea that those who were clapping were in fact also 'working'. They needed to concentrate as much as the dancer and were not allowed to 'sleep' or lose focus. I then told those observing to watch both clappers and dancers in order to pass comments.

The first group of clappers did not concentrate and they made it very difficult for the others to dance to their 'splintered' rhythm. When they swapped over I made the same group that had just clapped experience what it was like to have those same people clap for them. In this way I hoped to draw their attention to their lack of focus. I remarked that they had been too busy having a "good time" and had not watched the dancers. I then pointed out that we would now see if they would be given the same treatment. I wanted to draw their attention to the fact that clapping is an unselfish activity. Clappers may not be noticed or appreciated as much as the dancer but they had a responsibility to the performance as a whole and to ensure that the dancers were successful.

I then let each group 'struggle' to clap and dance for one another in order to experience what it felt like when things were not working. Those watching were given opportunities to observe both activities and all had a chance to observe as well. I

emphasised that I wanted them to ‘think’ while they were observing what was working and what was not working....why some things were good and some not. In other words I wanted them to be engaged in critical analysis of what they were watching. As I expected most first attempts at accompanying dancers were not very successful.

I had to remind clappers to start at a medium pace and in the initial stages I had to help them keep a steady pace. When one of the groups was not able to find a common pace to clap at there was one boy who started to clap on his own and then told the others to join him. He had automatically appointed himself a leader of the group and that group were then very successful at keeping a steady pace. I praised them for managing to keep their rhythm and follow the dancer well.

After each group had had a turn I had another time of reflection. I always sat them down for this activity as it also gave their bodies’ time to rest. I deliberately repeated the comments made by students in order for the whole class to hear and to give time for them to individually contemplate whether the critique may possibly apply to them.

I explained why I continued to have these times of reflection in order to encourage them to be ‘intelligent’ dancers, to be someone who used their brain and not only their body. Success in any activity requires intelligent application of self. Those activities which focus on physical skill are no different: mindless physical exertion is extravagant use of energy.

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’.

I then came to the focus of this lesson: learning to be a 'leader' and a 'follower'. I asked them if they could identify when they clapped whether they were a leader or a follower. They unanimously agreed that they were a follower. 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. 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.

I decided to make the focus of this lesson 'leading' and 'following' as I believe flamenco offers unique opportunities to develop these skills. Equal opportunity to experience what 'leading' and 'following' require in flamenco can be given to everyone. This could then lead to further investigation in other learning areas. 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.

We then ran out of time and I concluded the class with a 'run through' of the dance 'from the top' in order to finish the class dancing. I then called them together for our mutual bow and thanks. As they were all exiting the little girl who was dyslexic came spontaneously to give me a hug. I was very touched by her open display of affection.

Class 4

As I was waiting for the class to enter one of the boys came in practicing his beats and he asked me for some help. With that others began practicing as well. I was thrilled as

this indicated to me that perhaps they had been practicing between lessons and I saw this as an indication that they were keen to get it correct. When all were ready I greeted them and told them that I was very happy to see them again to which one of the boys replied that they were happy to see me too. I took this as an indication that at least one was keen to be there. I then asked if they had been practicing and as I suspected the reply was a strong “yes!” I asked if their beat was fast now to which they also replied “yes!” One said: “not quite” so I reassured him that that was ok because that’s what we were there to do: “practice some more.”

We made a circle and I had chosen a ‘fun’ piece of rumba music for the warm up. I noticed that some were really quite slow in participating fully so I tried to make the movements a little more energetic to get them going. By the end of the warm up all were doing vigorous waist twists and were hopefully ready for work. The warm up ended with spontaneous laughter from the exertion. I then asked if their hearts were beating fast to which came the reply: “yes!”

I then asked them to do the recall exercise and sensed a mild uneasiness that maybe they would not be able to remember the sequence unaided. I assured them that they would be surprised at how much they would remember. I told them to put “feet together, stand strong, head up, be proud of who you are!” When we came to the new step I reminded them that we could press “pause’ on the video in order to get our thoughts and in order to slow the pace down. We shook our right foot so we were sure which it was and then began the beat slowly.

I felt the technique was not good enough yet so I reminded them that as with all things in life there is always a ‘technique’ involved. I then asked them what they thought technique meant and a reply came: “a way to do something....how to do it”. I agreed and said that once we know the ‘how’ we can do it better. I then told them in a generalised way that some of them still did not know the ‘how’ so we would go back to basics. I told them to look and watch how I was doing the step and to spot the difference in how they might be doing it. I reminded them of a game many play as children when they examine two pictures and look for details that are different. I used this comparison as both require intense observation skills and I wanted them to realise that it is in the details that the ‘how’ is revealed. Many were familiar with that game and so we then set about looking for details.

Some were not bending their knees enough, some lifting the foot between the toe and heel action and some were not using enough energy. I then demonstrated some beats where I did not use any energy and showed them that a “half hearted” attempt made no sound. I then demonstrated the beat with energy and told them that what they were missing was ‘power’! They responded by using wonderful energy as if to show me that they did indeed have power!

After drilling the action for some time I then went back to the ‘two slow and five quick combination’. We alternated feet to try and strengthen both sides of the body equally and had another drilling session. I then observed that some of them were cheating and in fact were not doing the movement correctly. This is easy to do in a big group where one relies on others to do the work and either tries to fool oneself or the teacher that one is doing it correctly. I wanted them to realise that I was aware of that and that I was not going to accept any one ‘riding’ on the efforts of others.

The group has enormous value when learning and building confidence but I knew that sometime later I was going to ask them to do it in smaller and smaller groups and that the moment of truth would arrive when they and others realised they couldn’t do it. In order to avoid that embarrassing experience I made every effort to ensure that each individual was making an effort and working at their maximum in order to avoid humiliation later. I have found that the group can give a false and inflated sense of ability especially for children who often have the tendency to over estimate their ability.

I then reminded them of what repetition does and asked the question once again. One replied: “skill!” I then asked: “and what else?” there was no response. I then asked them to consider the value of repetition to a dancer or even a sportsman. And after a while one replied: “you get stronger.” I agreed and gave a personal account of my own dance teacher’s words who had told us that muscles have no memory and need to be reminded every day. I do not fully agree with that as I believe we do have ‘muscle memory’ but perhaps it means more that muscle strength needs daily work and I used it in order to try and get them to work hard. We then did another drilling session.

I noticed that there was one particular boy who was making no or very little effort in the class and I was concerned with why. He seemed well and I could not understand why. I later asked the teacher and she told me that he was a ‘problem’ and described him as a ‘high risk’ child with the potential to go ‘off the rails’. I decided to keep an eye on him and to try and include and encourage him where I could.

During the drilling session I reminded them that none of us were born doing skilled work like we were attempting and that as babies we only “bob in our nappies”. I did this in order to draw their attention to the fact that most skills are acquired and take effort. I then remarked that we all seem to start out bobbing in our nappies or ‘dancing’ in our nappies and I remarked that I didn’t know what seemed to happen after that. This relates to my inherent belief that we all start out with the innate ability to ‘bob’ or ‘dance’ in our nappies and that some societies do not provide opportunities for that innate ability to continue developing. I believe that our ability to respond to rhythm is fundamental to the human being and that it merely needs opportunities to be provided to enable us to become aware of them and to develop them.

We then continued with the drilling session and when I observed poor execution I remarked that they looked like they were in nappies and that I required them to “get skilled”. I then reminded them that unless they were sweating they were not working. When we stopped after the drilling session some of them started to “flop” with exhaustion. I asked them what had happened to their power. I did this in order to draw attention away from the tiredness and to re focus on the next activity: the repeat of the whole sequence from the top.

I believe that the beginning of the class should focus on getting the body properly warm and that this can be achieved by “drilling” technical aspects that the learners may be having difficulty with. This is also a perfect time to work on the cardio vascular aspects of training as well as to help to develop strength and stamina. I place great emphasis on the value of repetition and try to get learners to appreciate how it is something that they can regard positively especially when they understand its results.

I find that if learners can really appreciate the need and reason to work hard they tend to work harder and with more focus. For this reason I tried to keep the ‘pace’ fast at the beginning and allowed no time to think or rest in an effort to build strength and skill.

By asking them what they saw as the value of repetition I hoped to see if they had worked sufficiently at this or any other similar activity to have begun to appreciate its value.

I reminded them of the skill of ‘thinking ahead’ and that while they were doing the walks they were to already be thinking of the beats that followed. I did this in order to remind them of skills which facilitate success in flamenco. The skill of thinking ahead has to be developed in order that the pace of a dance remains steady. If that pace is erratic those trying to clap or ‘back’ a dancer are unable to do their job successfully. They did the sequence very well and I praised their efforts enthusiastically.

I then divided them into two groups again and asked the clappers what their job was to do. They replied “clap..... and support”. I added and to “follow”. I reminded them that they were not ‘leading’ but ‘following’. I also reminded them that I expected them to also observe and suggest how to make improvements. Yet again I reminded them of my value of critical thinking that is shared in a constructive way and not a destructive one.

I believe opportunities that encourage learners to take constructive critique as well as give it are essential to success in dance. I tried to allow these sessions to remain “open” in the sense that when the critique was given, that if the person felt that it was valid they may accept it but if they felt it wasn’t they could leave it. I feel it should be up to the individual to decide what they wish to accept or reject regarding their progress.

I feel that understanding the difference between constructive and destructive criticism is absolutely vital to a dancer as they come across both throughout their dance studies and it is absolutely essential to their survival. If they do not understand the difference they could make themselves very vulnerable to destructive criticism which could erode self confidence to the point where they may feel that they should not continue dancing. This has been my own personal experience in the professional world of dance. Being able to take criticism and being able to distinguish between destructive or constructive is essential to survival in the dance world.

If some decide to become professional dancers (and I always try to remain aware that I may have future professionals in my class), I feel it is important that they learn this at an early age so that they become skilled at their own internal self evaluation and do not rely too heavily on the opinions of others for their survival. Newspaper critics are the

public expression of these criticisms and can be very destructive if sufficient balance and resilience has not been established in the performer. The ability to evaluate criticism is not only valuable to dancers: all could be encouraged to develop this skill so that they do not place themselves at the mercy of other people's opinions.

For this reason when an observation or critique is given I try to merely repeat what has been said and try to avoid passing comment too often. This repetition is to enable the whole class to hear what was said as well as to allow them to each consider for themselves what has been said and if they are in agreement.

I reminded them that as observers they were to offer 'helpful' critique. I did this because it requires more sensitivity and intellectual engagement. It is easier to just give a thoughtless emotive response to something than to consider our response in a more in depth way. The first group did the sequence very well and the first comment was: 'very good!' I however did not want to leave it there as I reminded them that there is always something that needs improving and to look for it. This was so that my desire for constructive critique was not reduced to insubstantial meaningless praise. I believe honest work always needs improvement and that continual praise without guidance for improvement can tend to undermine progress.

More substantial comments followed: "the last step needs more practice...poses were not too good". I then agreed and told them that they needed to hold their body like a "statue" on each pose. I then demonstrated what a sloppy pose was and what a controlled one was. I then made the same group go and do their poses again and to this time 'hold them still'. I then asked those observing to pick an individual to watch and to try and identify what they were "saying" on each pose. To recognise whether they were saying "I'm cross, I'm strong I'm mmmm, or whatever". I did this because I value skilled expression of authentic emotion in dance. I also think the accurate recognition of emotions in others is a valuable life skill worth developing in all.

When this group did their poses some were not able to stop still and the rest of the class began to laugh in much the same way as children do in a game of "statues". I allowed this laughter as it seemed to relax the atmosphere. The comments that followed included very accurate descriptions of emotions that they saw. These were confirmed

by us asking the dancer if the observation was correct. I praised their efforts to express and observe emotions accurately.

They then swapped groups and I had to remind the new group to 'show' me that they were ready and that I refused to clap for them until they did. This was a reminder of the need to focus and the respect for those who 'back' them. I then turned to the clappers and asked them to 'show' me that they were ready too by sitting up straight. I would not accept lack of focus and respect from them either. This group then performed the sequence. I noted that they did not have the control in their core muscles to be able to stop still without 'wobbling' on their poses. I then demonstrated what they looked like and then asked them what they thought the body needed to do in order to be able to stop still suddenly. I had to repeat the question as no one had an answer. One then responded that they "had to tighten their muscles". I then demonstrated the poses without control and with control. I then made them repeat the poses as some had been laughing while trying to dance. This may have been caused by embarrassment but I tried to quickly focus on the task and thereby reduce the self awareness that may have been causing the laughter.

The next observations were varied and some included accurate observation of emotions and some didn't. I decided to leave it at that and come to the focus of this lesson which was to introduce them to the skill of 'jaleo' (vocal calling during performance) in flamenco. I asked them if they were able to shout (knowing that this was a great probability). I then asked: "how loud?" to which they responded "very loud". (I hoped to engage their curiosity.) I then introduced them to three words which they could use while watching a dancer perform: 'vamos' 'ole' and 'bien'. I explained that 'vamos' meant "lets get going" and 'ole' meant the equivalent of 'wow' and 'bien' meant 'good'.

I allowed them to practice each word individually and they responded with great enthusiasm. At one point the shouting was pitched a little 'high' so I asked them not to sound like they were at the school swimming gala but to try and pitch their voices a little lower. In other words I wanted them to produce their voice correctly. I demonstrated the correct and incorrect pitch the voice. I then asked them when they thought they would be able to use these words. One responded: "when you're dancing". I then asked if they were going to shout while they were dancing. They responded "no".

One added: “you’re going to compliment them”. I then explained how ‘jaleo’ was used to encourage the dancer and in response to something they were enjoying.

I then sent the first set off to try dancing while the rest shouted ‘jaleo’ for them. I reminded the clappers that they had an added responsibility to shout and clap now. I reminded them of the need to eliminate ‘background noise’ (chatting). I only wanted to hear their claps and their ‘jaleo’. As I expected the shouting was excessive and sounded like the school gala. I swapped groups and the second group was no better. Both were examples of unskilled uncontrolled noise.

I then explained that I had been waiting for this to happen and that I would now explain to them how to ‘jaleo’ correctly. They had just witnessed how not to do it, I then showed them how to do it correctly. After I had given an example of how and when to ‘jaleo’ for a dancer I asked them to tell me if they had noticed when I chose to shout. Responses included: “every time they did another section.....in the gaps”. I then asked what happens when shouting happens continually. Responses included: “you get irritated...you get distracted and you forget your steps....its confusing...you can’t hear the claps”. All these responses were correct and I hoped that having experienced the problems for themselves they would try to be more sensitive in how they shouted for others. I then summed up that ‘jaleo’ was there to help and not to distract.

After both groups had done it I then got the whole class to dance the sequence while I shouted for them so that they could all experience the correct way. I then sat them down to reflect on how my shouting had felt while they were dancing. Responses included: “it helps you... it didn’t distract you.....it made you feel better”. I responded by saying that the main purpose of ‘jaleo’ was to make the dancer feel better and to encourage them. I then asked what was difficult about it. Responses included: “trying to find the gaps...you have to look and listen”. I then tried to ask how they would shout if I was not too sure of my steps. The response came: “when you need help”.

I asked these questions in order to draw their attention to the need to be sensitive to the dancer’s needs, to be able to observe body language accurately and to support one another’s performance. I then asked them to get into groups of three. I let three clap while three danced, and the rest watched. I was very pleased at how many felt confident enough to volunteer to go and perform in a small group. This meant greater exposure and many seemed to feel ready for it.

The first group of three did very well and received great applause from those watching. I asked spectators for comments on the clapping and the response came: “a bit splintered”. I asked the dancers for their comments on the clapping to which one replied that they were concentrating too much to notice. I then asked the clappers what they thought of their clapping to which one responded confidently: “excellent”. I then added my little bit and suggested that the clapping could have been a bit louder. All were responses to the same event but merely different perspectives. I felt all were valid and worthy of consideration. This confirms my belief that progress is accelerated when perspectives are given from multiple sources.

I then asked the same people to swop over so that those who had just clapped now danced and those who had just danced now clapped. The group who had just described their performance while clapping as “excellent”, soon discovered that the same description of confidence could not be applied to their performance as dancers. They began to possibly experience a bit of pressure and could not remember their steps. I immediately responded to their fears by sharing my own personal experience of ‘mental blocks’ in performance. I tried to reassure them that forgetting ones steps was ‘normal’. I then encouraged them that when they had a mental block again to just carry on and that it was highly unlikely that all three of them would forget the same step at the same time and to rely on one another.

I did this because the support of a group no matter how small often helps those who are not so confident or sure of their steps. That feeling of being able to rely on the person next to one is one of the advantages of group dancing. I told them to make full use of it. I was reassured once again that as teacher I needed to ‘trust the process’ at times. These three boys may have overestimated their ability to do the sequence unaided after their success at clapping. I allowed them to begin again. They then made a third attempt and I let them struggle to the end even though the timing was all out of sync. They finished to the applause of their friends who rewarded their perseverance.

The pressure to succeed immediately is often almost subconscious in many of us and can prevent us from allowing our selves and others to struggle for longer in order to build self confidence as well as a truer reflection of our ability in that moment. Those boys felt better and so did I that I had allowed them to complete the task instead of

stopping them at the first sign of a mistake. Perhaps the lesson for me was that if I give others the opportunity and permission to “test their wings” before they have learnt to fly, maybe they might give me the opportunity to do the same. This pursuit of perfection can be very debilitating if used as the standard of judgement in all assessment.

I then asked them if they were surprised at how much they were able to do when they “just chilled”. I asked how they might have felt if I had stopped them and told them that they weren’t able to do it and to just sit down. They responded that they would not have felt good. I asked if they felt better having tried to go further than they thought they could. The response was: “yes”. I then responded that that was my intention: that they try and see how far they got. I feel that a great deal is learnt in the ‘trying’ and I do not like to interfere with the learning that takes place when things do not go as expected.

For this reason I often let poor attempts stumble along without stopping them at the first sign of a mistake. By the time the third group came to do it they were able to do the sequence very well. They finished to a round of applause. The fourth set was also “fantastic” and I praised them all enthusiastically. I then asked them to try and analyse why their performance had been so good. One responded that: “they had learnt from the other groups mistakes”. That was exactly what I had hoped would happen.

I then asked them if they always learnt from people who “get it right”. There was no response. I then asked if they also learn from people who “get it wrong”. The response was a resounding “yes”. I had hoped to draw their attention to the value of mistakes in the learning environment. I feel that valuable learning can take place when one experiences personally the effects of mistakes or incorrect execution. I find it a great motivation to ‘get it right’ after experiencing ‘the wrong’. I therefore value mistakes in my classes and want students to not be afraid of trying and getting it wrong. In fact if they do make mistakes I want them to view them as opportunities to learn rather than view them as embarrassing. For this reason I feel it is essential to try and establish an environment in my classes that students are not afraid to try and make mistakes due to their fear of embarrassing themselves in front of their peers. I try to use the constructive feedback sessions to support that aim.

I then asked them to repeat the sequence one last time all together. I was so surprised and thrilled when they performed the sequence with tremendous speed and energy. I was overwhelmed by their confidence and ability. I praised them enthusiastically and we concluded with our bow and mutual thanks.

Class 5

This particular lesson had the focus of improvisation. Before the start I was feeling rather uneasy about the outcome of this lesson as I have found that improvised sessions can often be difficult. Creativity is not always available on demand. How could I ensure that they didn't lose interest? What could I do to ensure their success? How could I encourage creativity without some of them losing heart? How does the creative process work? Was it possible to be creative in a classroom/group situation? All these questions run through my head as I sat waiting for the class to enter. I noticed that they too were entering in rather slowly and seemed to be a bit lethargic. This did not help how I was feeling as I envisioned having to struggle to motivate them in the creative process.

Their teacher then informed me that they had been “moaned” at by their previous teacher, which then explained to me their sluggish down hearted body language. I then used this information to pace my class and to shift their energies. I cut the chat short and began by starting the warm up immediately. I told them to “hold their body straight, forget about anything else that had been happening in their day, and focus on what they were about to do.” I did this intentionally in order to bring their focus into the moment and leave their mental ‘baggage’ behind until later. This was my way of trying to take them out of the head and into the body.

I did a gentle yet relaxing warm up almost in sympathy with how they were possibly feeling. I remembered the two boys who were not fully engaged the previous lesson in the warm up and I made a conscious effort to watch them and try and draw them into the action. I decided to stand next to them and to focus on their movements trying to encourage them to “work”. I was happy to see that they responded. Their participation in the warm up seemed to become far more energised.

I then began the recall section immediately. I praised them and we then began the drilling session. I went back to basics with the technique of the beats as the recall

period had revealed flaws again. We began by shaking the right foot and then isolating each movement of the beat combination in order to isolate technical problems. I then insisted that they were not using enough energy and that I wanted more 'power'. One began yawning and I wondered if it was because they had begun to work. I then reminded them of the bodies need to have more oxygen when it started physical exertion and that they should focus on their breathing in order not to feel tired.

After drilling the technique of the beats I then told them to watch and learn as I demonstrated the new step: two 'pas de basque' steps. I likened this to being like an eagle hoping that this would inspire them. As they were trying to learn it in the circle I realised that some were having difficulty because they were facing a different direction to me. This was especially so when I started asking them to use their right or left foot. I then was 'inspired' to get them to face the front in a big semi circle. This was a great success as all were still able to see me but all could face the same direction as me. We then did numerous repetitions in this formation.

When some were still not having success I then added the counting as well as descriptive words. When the majority were able to do it I shouted: "excellent" to which one boy responded "ole". I was thrilled: he had grasped the appropriate time for 'jaleo' and was using it accordingly.

I then reminded them that in order to do a step twice, well, they needed to practice it a hundred and two times. We then continued our repetitions. I then asked them to do two and stop. This was not easy and many were not able to stop after two repeats. I then made them repeat it until the majority could do it. I then told them to watch and listen as I demonstrated the next part of the sequence: "clap, stamp, clap, stamp, stamp". I demonstrated it slowly at first. There were signs of nervous laughter as I then asked them to join me slowly. Once I saw they were grasping it I then shifted the 'goal post' and demonstrated it fast. They responded with shrieks of excitement. I was thrilled at their response and told them never to lose the excitement of learning something new. I told them how often that excitement is what motivates them to try when the task may seem far removed from them at that point.

We then did many repetitions as a big group. When I felt they were tired I then asked them to do it four at a time. I did this to increase the 'pressure to get it right' as well as

to give them time to rest. The focus of the whole class watching did help to increase their effort levels. Those who watched benefited from the time to learn while watching others. I believe repetition through doing it oneself as well as repetition through watching others are both valuable to learning. In this way I could continue the process of repetition (this time in the head) without tiring the body too much.

The first set was good. Then followed a set where some were not all sure of the combination. I made them repeat it three times and finally did it with them so that they did not get discouraged. The next four were excellent and I then went around the semi circle asking them to do it four at a time. Some were better than others but I always responded by saying 'better' or 'nearly' when they were not quite sure. I did this because I believe that just because learning has not been established at a certain point does not give me the right to discourage further efforts. For this reason I used these almost 'generic' terms when there was need of improvement. My response of "nearly" was used in order to encourage continued effort. I feel that once learners feel that there is no point to their effort they cease to try. My value of inclusion propels me to think of as many ways as possible to keep as many learners engaged for as long as possible especially when they may be tempted to think of giving up.

I asked each set to repeat it twice to ensure the first time was not just 'luck'. I noticed how the whole class watched intently. This demonstration of their learning in smaller groups helped me to identify common difficulties that needed further explanation from me. I realised that many were having difficulty with the transition from the 'old' step to the 'new' one. This I have found to be a common problem when learning new rhythms. I decided to do the old step and the first step of the new one and then stop. This was a great help as they were able to break the step down into a more manageable size and focus on the transition only.

I then asked them to watch and tell me the timing of the claps of the new step. It took a while but eventually they figured it out as 'one' and 'three'. I then explained why some of them may need the counts in order to understand the step correctly. I explained to them that some of them would be able to learn the step from just listening while others needed the counts and that that was because we all learn in different ways. This did not mean that one way was better than another but that both were acceptable yet different.

I asked them to repeat the sequence from the beginning and we repeated the last step numerous times at pace. We then sat down to rest and reflect on how the new step felt. Responses included: “confusing, (I commented that it was fine to be confused).....relaxing....easy....complicated”. I then asked if they were surprised at how they had managed to which one replied “yes”.

I decided at this point to introduce the focus of the lesson: improvisation. I asked them to work in twos or on their own and to then work out their own rhythm sequence. I hoped that at that point I had taught enough work for them to use as inspiration if they needed to. I used the comparison to a ‘rap’ singer and asked them to ‘write’ their own verse and put it to movement which also had a six beat rhythm. I did however say that they were allowed to be as creative as they wished and could use their voice in a rhythmical way or make noises with their hands and body as well. I told them they could express any emotions they wanted to: none were ‘off limits’. I then sent them off to “do and say what they liked”.

Immediately they began to form groups of different sizes. These varied from 8-6-4-3-2-1 in each group. I decided to allow them to work in any size group they wished. At this point I was interested to chat to the teacher when learners went off in their groups. She remarked that she was interested to see how learners chose to work: some alone some in pairs and some in larger groups. She also pointed out two particular boys: one who was often shunned by the other students as his speech capacity was slower than theirs and who was hard of hearing (I came to call this boy Mr Silence) and the other because he was very ‘mature’ for his age and often found his peers “immature”. He also excelled academically, (I came to call this boy Mr Einstein). The one had chosen to work alone and the other had been left to work alone.

I then intentionally went over to both of them to offer them help or merely to keep them company. Whether this was in fact necessary I will never know but I instinctively did not want them to feel isolated or to intensify any feelings of isolation that they may have already been experiencing. My desire for an inclusive classroom where no one felt excluded became almost instinctive. I offered to clap while they experimented with their creation.

I noticed that as the creative session continued large groups eventually broke up into smaller groups. Perhaps they had realised for themselves that rhythmic creativity can be tedious in a large group and they may have found that it was easier to work in smaller groups. I spent the time (fifteen minutes) walking from group to group offering my guidance or help if requested. I also realised during this time that my idea of fitting their rhythms to a six beat phrase was rather ambitious for most of them at this stage.

Most of them chose to ignore my request and simply began creating rhythms with little awareness of the counting. I decided to let them create without timing restrictions imposed by me. I did this because I believe the creative process is fragile and in the beginning stages this process should be allowed to take its own course. External impositions can block the flow of ideas or even serve to be de-motivating. I did not want this to happen.

I then called them together to perform their ‘creations’ to the rest of the class. Many hands went up when I asked for the first volunteers. I told them that what they were doing was like being a composer or a writer and that they were ‘writing’ an original work. I asked them if being original was always easy. They responded no. I asked this question in an attempt to prepare them for the possibility that their creations may not be as successful as they had hoped. I hoped to allow for the ‘messy’ nature of the creative process to become evident and to encourage support for all efforts.

The first group consisted of 6 girls. They performed their creation with numerous stops to discuss what came next. It consisted of rhythms and vocal accompaniment. The rest of the class sat quietly and waited as they did. When they finished the class gave a round of applause. I tried to hurry up the process a little as I feared the loss of concentration of those watching. The next group consisted of three boys. Their rhythms were excellent but they had not used any vocals. Then Mr. Einstein volunteered. I thought his work was of an exceptionally high quality. Not only was he able to combine the voice with rhythmic movement but he also used the opportunity to give a ‘message’ to his peers. His composition is worth quoting:

“They see me as this boring dude
They see me as this all time prude
Don’t they know I’m not that bad?
They can know I’m sometimes glad”

This was followed by a wonderful improvisation session of rhythmic stamping.

I responded by describing his work as “excellent”. The whole class gave enthusiastic applause. I then told him as well as the rest of the class why I felt his work was so good. I mentioned that he had done exactly as I had asked: he had ‘written’ his own verse and combined it to movement. I added that his creation was even more amazing in that he had done it in such a short space of time.

When the learner who was frequently shunned by the class (Mr Silence) chose to do his routine on his own I was aware that he might expose himself unwittingly to ridicule from his peers. I was aware of a couple of ‘sniggers’ during his piece. He chose to do a very ‘moving’ performance in virtual silence. He made big bold movements with his legs and explored body movements that a contemporary dancer might use. As he finished his routine I chose to acknowledge his courage rather than critique his work as I felt that even if some had not appreciated the nature of his creation they would possibly be able to appreciate his courage.

In my experience this takes great courage to stand up in front of ones peers and expose ones self to their opinions or criticisms. I am very aware of the possible damage that can be done to an individuals self esteem in circumstances like this so I am very careful to watch for negative comments and to negate them with positive affirmation in acknowledgement of courage and effort. I reminded them of how difficult it was to perform solo especially when one was not sure of how ones creation would work. I then praised his bravery and the class responded with applause.

The next set consisted of three boys. Their rhythm was excellent even though one of them had never attempted anything like this before. I felt his friends must have helped him. I was thrilled with their creations and praised them enthusiastically. I then asked the class to go home and try and work out a creation on their own. I then said that if they felt they would like to share it with the class they would be more than welcome to do so. If they did not wish to that that would also be fine. I wanted them to at least try though.

At this point I decided to show them the step that I was going to teach the following lesson. I did this because it may have helped them with their ‘homework’: their own

creation. I contained body percussion which I thought they might enjoy experimenting with. As I was demonstrating it to the class the teacher came over to me to draw my attention to one of the boys who had in fact been doing a similar thing in the improvisation session but who had not yet performed. It was the same boy I had noticed in previous lessons who did not seem to want to engage in the classes and the same one I had been drawn to encourage in this lesson's warm up session. I later came to name him "Mr. Rhythm".

He came forward with his partner and the teacher encouraged them to show me what they had done in their creation. His friend then demonstrated a complex rhythmical sequence but it was truly improvised and did not seem to have any obvious structure. I tried to clap the beat for him but was unable to do so because of its constant unpredictability. I encouraged him to go and continue developing it so that it had more structure and could be repeated. I wanted him to understand what he was creating.

Mr Rhythm then came forward and began his rhythmical sequence. I began to clap the beat for him as he continued and this made what he was doing sound even better. The whole class and I were astounded and gave him enthusiastic applause. Not only was his timing outstanding but his rhythms were astounding as well. I realised this was another example of 'natural' talent. The class had now experienced how the creative process is different for everyone. Some have inherent ability that is not learned and others have to work to develop their skills. The assumption that we as teachers know more than the student is challenged when we 'discover' our student's talents. I feel that we should realise that we need only provide opportunities to allow them to demonstrate or develop their authentic creativity.

I feel as teacher it is my obligation to be able to recognise the difference between natural talent and developed talent and to encourage both to develop a work ethic. The natural talent will only achieve a certain amount on its own. If there is no work ethic it will not reach its full potential. Those who do not have natural talent should also be encouraged to work at new learning as they may be surprised at how much they achieve if they really apply themselves to sustained effort. As teacher I see my responsibility to inspire effort and 'passion' and to encourage and support these when needed. By striving to do this I hope to raise the levels of ability for all.

I then demonstrated the new step for the class to briefly learn. I then concluded the class by calling Mr. Rhythm to perform his improvisation again for the class while I clapped the beat for him. It sounded so wonderful that I instinctively joined him by adding my own improvised rhythms to his. We were all inspired by the mini ‘jazz session’ we had just experienced and it ended in applause by all for what we had shared.

I then ended the class on this ‘high’ note and I called them together to tell all how I had “loved” what they had done. I encouraged them to continue the creative process at home and we concluded our class with our mutual bow and thanks. I felt so inspired by what I had been privileged to witness and share with these young folk.

This lesson had proved once again to contain the “X factor” and I was left feeling humbled once more by the process of creativity and how some of us already “know” before we are even “taught”. The learner who did not engage fully in the warm-ups was the self same learner who left the class in awe at his natural rhythmic ability. Perhaps he already knew his rhythmic capacity but if that was the case I hoped the affirmation he received from me and his peers would confirm and strengthen what he already ‘knew’.

Class 6

While students were arriving for the lesson I tried to use the time to catch up with individuals and to assess the general ‘energy levels’ that I was going to be working with. I tried to be aware of those individuals who may not have been keen to join in the lesson or who may have been experiencing difficulties. If I am aware of any problems I always try to be sensitive to those individuals and to help them through the lesson. I used body language as a strong indication of how an individual may have been feeling. I was always thrilled when I saw any of them arriving practicing their steps. There were a few boys, (including Mr. Rhythm) who arrived doing just that and I used that as an indication of enthusiasm and well being. I also tried to be aware of those who may not have been feeling well so as not to overexert them during the lesson.

When I asked them for comments on the previous lesson I used their responses as a guide for this lesson. These included “fun.... nice.....very hard..... fun but hard..... can’t wait.....want to learn more things”. I used these as an indication of their

enjoyment, perceptions and enthusiasm. One learner mentioned their desire to do the dance to music. I expected some students to ask for music as it helps to inspire and increases enjoyment. For this reason I chose music for the warm up that would help to energise and “lift” tired spirits especially because the rest of the class was unaccompanied. I tried to explain to them that it was very important in flamenco to be sure of the dance before working to recorded music or with a musician.

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. At the end of the warm up I reminded them of the use of ‘jaleo’ in flamenco and played a short piece of ‘bulerias’ which had good examples. I then encouraged them to clap the rhythm and hoped to show them how complex the rhythm is and how difficult it was to clap to let alone dance to. I did this to try and justify why I had not given them music to dance to yet.

We then began the recall exercise and 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. We then began practicing the ‘pas de basque’ step slowly. I then asked who had remembered the last step. One boy tried to show me but didn’t manage the whole thing. Then another boy who I came to call Mr. Persistent showed me the step perfectly. I had noticed him at the beginning of the course. He did not seem to have ‘natural’ ability, but he always tried his best. I was so surprised when he managed to do the step so well.

I then repeated the step numerous times with the class and began using vocal reinforcement of the rhythm. I was aware that many started to use their own voices as well. Perhaps it was fun or perhaps it helped them to memorise the rhythms.

I then asked them to link the two steps. I demonstrated it fast and then slowly when asked to do so. I reminded them that it was perfectly acceptable to ask me to repeat it slowly as learning was different for everyone. I explained that in my experience I had come to realise that students learn differently. Some often learnt quickly and forgot quickly while others learnt slowly and remembered for longer. I asked them to try and identify if they were either or whether they were perhaps a combination of both. I did

this because I feel that self knowledge is very powerful and that if they could understand their own learning they could take responsibility for it.

I do not regard this as a general rule. I mentioned this in order for them to become aware of what kind of learning process they may be using. This often brings greater patience for the slower learners and more focus with the faster learners. Trying to help them become aware of how they learn is important in flamenco where the learning processes are challenged on many levels.

I have found that flamenco requires great capacity for audio and visual learning and those with well developed rhythm and co- ordination are at an advantage and therefore often 'pick up' the steps with greater ease. A background in other dance training can also help to a certain extent but the skills required in flamenco are quite specific and even those with training in other dance forms still often struggle with the learning processes required in flamenco. Learning is very specific to each individual but I have found that by trying to become aware of these complex learning processes it often helps to reduce the stress of trying to keep up with the learning at another.

We repeated the transition from one step to the next very slowly until I felt it was understood. I used 'vocals' and 'counting' and reminded them of the skill of 'thinking ahead'. When I felt they had understood it sufficiently I asked if they felt they had "got it". There was a resounding "yes".

I then warned them that I was going to change the sequence of the dance and that I was going to include a new step in the middle. I demonstrated how the new sequence would go and added the new step at the same time. I then told them that the new step required emotive expression: "this is a movement. It's not a movement with any feeling unless you put it in". I wanted them to understand how the body can be used to express emotions and that this sometimes takes conscious awareness of the body as 'voice'. I demonstrated a couple of options for them "I'm strong, I'm angry, I'm depressed, I'm tired".

I demonstrated the new step slowly and they began to join me once they were ready to. Once I felt they were sure of the feet I added the arm movements. I had told them at the first demonstration that the new step would be repeated 4 times. At this point I asked

how many of them remembered the number of repetitions and they were able to tell me correctly. I asked them because I wanted to see whether they had been able to remember with only one instruction.

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.

I then told them that they would not have been able to do what they had just done if they did not have rhythm. “Sometimes our rhythm is just a bit underdeveloped. We’ve all got a heart going inside of us, we’ve all got rhythm there!” I said this to try and help those who may have been in doubt about their rhythmic capacity. I believe all of us have rhythm and that as with all skills it is either given opportunity to develop or it isn’t. I believe ‘natural rhythm’ is merely evidence of a more evolved skill and talent.

We then went back to repeating the ‘pas de basque’ and then the body percussion step. I tried to walk around and placed myself in different positions in the circle in order to communicate with those who may have needed individual help. Throughout the class I was very aware of how much I used ‘sign language’ or body movements to ‘conduct’ the timing and pace of the dance. I also used body language or ‘signs’ to give the class instructions such as “continue” “stop” “quiet” “sit down” or to ‘count’ the steps for them with visual cues etc. I did this when the noise levels were high and I didn’t want to have to try and shout above it.

After I was satisfied that there had been sufficient repetition to improve learning and skill I asked if they had managed to think of developing their improvisation. A few hands went up and I then asked if they would like a few more minutes to continue working on it. They answered “yes”. I decided to let them have this time in order to consolidate their practice. One boy came and asked me to help him and I put my arm around him to show that I was happy to do so. The next boy then came and asked me to help him by clapping the rhythm for him.

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.

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.

I also went to help when one of the girls came to call me for my assistance. I then went to chat to the teacher and later noticed that one boy was sitting on the bench doing nothing. I went to see if I could encourage his participation or to see if he had a problem. I asked if he was not feeling well to which he replied that he was not and I tried to reassure him that I understood. I then asked if he didn’t want to try and join one of the bigger groups of boys. I did this because I thought he may be able to ‘hide’ within the group and still participate in a small way.

After about 10 minutes I called them all together to show the class their progress. One asked me about my shoes to which I gave a brief explanation about the construction of a flamenco shoe or boot. 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 and more along the lines of oral-auditory text incorporating movement to reinforce what was expressed verbally.

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. This sort of vocal rhythm is often used in traditional African dance and she may have had experience of this before and was therefore able to use it with what appeared to be such ease.

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. 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.

At this point Mr Rhythm asked if he could go and practice his moves before performing them. I agreed to let him as I wanted them to realise I did not expect perfection and that we were there to practice not be perfect. My continual desire to try and make learners relax and feel that they are in a safe space where they are free to be a “work in progress” rather than achieve immediate perfection may have encouraged them to participate in the way that they did. Virtually all of them were keen to show their work this time. I was also pleased to see how they were able to develop their ideas from the previous lesson.

The next to volunteer was another boy who went solo and he received applause for his short yet brave attempt. A group of girls came next and wanted to practice first. The class and I waited until they were ready. Some used the time to practice as well. I then asked how many of them enjoyed improvising. I know this is not always an activity that every one enjoys so I wanted to assess who was enjoying it. About 10 put their hand up. I asked why some did not enjoy it. Responses included: “because last minute you cant think about it.....some people like to go with what they have planned and don’t like improvising because it will ruin it”. I then asked if they agreed that improvisation “ruins it”. Some responded “no”. I then responded by suggesting that perhaps like all skills it would improve with practice.

At this point Mr. Rhythm volunteered to perform and he went to the stage with another boy to ‘back’ him with clapping. The clapper started before the class were quiet and I then asked him to stop and wait for the class to show respect by not making ‘back ground noise’ while they were trying to perform. The class quickly quietened down and

they began. His rhythms were more developed and the accuracy and complexity were enjoyed by all. They finished to wonderful applause.

I asked the class why the clapper had been so good too. Responses included: “he watched him...he followed the rhythm.” And I added that he had kept his timing steady which is not always easy to do while listening to complex rhythms. I told him that if he was able to clap like that that he too had good rhythm. We then concluded the class by doing the class dance once more.

I had intended continuing this into a mini improvisation session where each could come into the centre of the circle to improvise. I began asking the class to keep a steady beat by ‘clapping like one person’ but soon saw that perhaps the group was too big for that. I also realised that it may have been too soon to ask them to perform solo. If individuals are confident enough to perform solo they can be allowed to do so but I did not think it was necessary to do so at this early stage of learning. I did not want to destroy the growth in confidence that has been established. I believe individual self belief and a sense of security are critical in the early stages of flamenco learning.

I then decided to rather teach them to contra clap. I went around the circle allowing each to individually try to clap contra to my claps. As I expected some had ‘natural’ ability and some did not. When I came to Mr. Rhythm I clapped faster as I knew he would be able to do it at speed. I was correct and I ‘rubbed’ his head in approval of his skill. When I called him to the centre of the circle to clap for me so that I could demonstrate contra clapping at speed, I did this to try and show the class how wonderful it sounds and to encourage them to practice. Also by inviting Mr. Rhythm to clap for me I had hoped to affirm his talent to him and the rest of the class.

The focus of this class had intended to be to develop creativity. It had also become an opportunity to ‘discover’ and ‘showcase’ talent. It gave me an indication that this sort of activity could be developed if I had had more time. It could possibly even have led to a class choreography where all could contribute their step and teach it to the class. This class choreography could then have been showcased for the rest of the school in some sort of performance. The time constraints were not going to allow this but it is certainly something to consider developing with more time.

We concluded our class with our mutual bow and thanks.

Class 7

As I waited for the class to enter I found myself wondering if what I had put together for this course had in fact achieved what I had hoped. Those nagging doubts that often plague me: should I be doing something else with my life? Did I hurt someone through a thoughtless word or action? Were the lessons of any value to anyone other than myself? Were they “educational”? My role as teacher seems like a two edged sword where I need to cut through all that would seek to entangle me within a jungle of information, theories and rules while simultaneously guarding that I do not injure or harm that which should be protected. I had shared my journey with others and perhaps that is why I also kept asking my companions how they were doing at the start of each lesson? I started this class with that very question: “How are you all doing today? Anyone not feeling good?” I felt an obligation to know how the lessons were being experienced and if anyone was not up to what I may have been about to demand of them.

When replies indicated that a learner was not feeling well I tried to be aware of this and not expect them to participate to the same extent as the rest. If they began to feel inspired as the lesson progressed that was up to them but I tried not to make the same demands on them, especially physical ones, as I did on the rest of the class.

I also needed the feedback that learners were prepared to give me on how they felt after the previous lesson. Their comments were used to guide me in how I approached the lesson. If they were not enjoying it I would try to bring more enjoyment. If they were finding it difficult I will try to find out in what way and would try to help make it easier. If there was a feeling of discouragement I would try to encourage. If there was a feeling of apathy I will try to inspire. If there was a feeling of “heaviness” due to exhaustion I will try to energise or allow time for rest.

Today’s comments on the previous lesson ranged from “fun (the little girl who was dyslexic)..... getting harder and harder....more complicated as you go.” When I asked if the “getting harder and harder” worried them the response was “No! We just keep trying.” I then assumed that while I was challenging them it did not seem to be

affecting their enjoyment or making them feel discouraged. When I asked them what they may have learnt about themselves or others the replies were much as I have come to expect:

“Some find it hard to learn others don’t”

“Everyone has rhythm in them”

“People have learnt that they didn’t know that they can do it and they learnt they can”

“Some, who are as stiff as sticks, can actually move”

“Developed new talents” (I responded that perhaps they had always had it but didn’t know).

I asked them to put their hand up if they didn’t think they were able to do this before and have now managed to do it. The little girl who was dyslexic as well as 5 others put their hands up. The rest of the class felt that they could do it. I then asked what their feelings were before the course had started and what they were feeling then. Responses included:

“I thought it was going to be hard but it’s easy”

“I thought it was going to be boring just using your arms but its nice”

“I was quite scarred in the beginning but now I feel confident”

“I can dance” I asked how many others thought they couldn’t dance before but now thought they could. Another 4 hands went up. At this point I felt they had had enough reflection and were getting tired of it so I stopped and said: “ok, let’s dance”.

As I listened to their responses and I tried to make sense of them in order to use them to guide me during the lesson. I sensed a general “heaviness” in the class. Was it the pressure of exams that loomed ahead or were they tired from studying or was it that they had had enough of the lessons and were no longer enjoying them? Once again doubts flooded my mind. I decided to begin the warm up grateful that I had once again chosen a piece of music that was fun (a ‘tangillo’) and would hopefully help to inspire a sense of fun and energy. As the music started I saw a couple of them begin dancing. I felt a sense of relief that at least some were ready to dance and that the music may have been an inspiration.

When I watched the video of the warm up I was aware of others who felt the same lack of enthusiasm that I was feeling. One little boy in front of the camera barely moved until I noticed him towards the end and tried to encourage him to join in. He later told

me that he was not feeling well. Thank goodness for a warm up – it really does help to gently nudge the mind body and soul to try and engage before the real work begins. It was also a time of connection where I tried to assess how I was feeling and how my companions may have been feeling.

The recall period revealed the gaps in learning and I was once again drawn to repeat the basics in order to improve technical skill. I noticed that as we all got down to repeating those movements that required it “again” and “again” the bodies and minds started to become more fully engaged. By the time I was ready to teach the new step there appeared to be a general sense of “readiness”. For this reason I do not teach new work until I feel the mind and body are ready. I noticed how I asked them to merely watch me and do what I was doing and I was so thrilled to see how so many of them were able to pick up the step by doing just that. Had their visual learning skills become sharpened?

I noticed that when I asked them to use the head and turn it to the “right” and “left” that those on the opposite side of the circle were not able to do it. They simply copied me without reversing the direction. So I decided to do what I had done earlier in the course and put them all in a semi circle in order to see clearly as well as face the same direction as me. This proved to be a great success again and the step was learnt very well and very quickly. After numerous repetitions I asked them to do only six. I introduced the children’s game of ‘statues’ and repeated the sequence until the whole class were able to stop after 6 repetitions with no one moving. I did this to encourage the counting and to make sure everyone was counting. It also introduced a sense of urgency and fun to not be the one caught ‘out’.

I then divided them into groups of 6 and went around the semi circle to watch them in smaller groups. I did this for me to see each of them more clearly as well as to give those watching the opportunity to learn from watching others while they rested.

I then taught the new ‘step’ where they had to do a ‘spin’ followed by two stamps. On the two stamps they had to raise their arms and lower them while simultaneously raising the head up and lowering it. The use of the head was challenging for them so I used cue words (“down up”) to help learning. I introduced this step as I knew from experience that most children like to ‘spin’. I noticed that some of them were also very stiff so I tried to ‘loosen’ them up a bit. This was a great success as it really challenged

some of them and yet they seemed to be having fun as well. I anticipated that some of them would turn ‘easily’ hence my initial instruction to do 2 turns if they were a “good spinner” and 1 if they were not.

I did this to enable those who were fearful of turning the choice of doing one. I used the word “spin” and not “turn” as in my experience most children know how to ‘spin’ and often try to turn with less fear perhaps recalling the fun of ‘spinning’ as a small child. To my delight I saw how some of them did in fact try 2 “spins”. Many trained dancers fear turns especially multiple turns. I did not want them to fear turns so I hoped by merely calling it a “spin” they would try with more spontaneity and less fear.

When I added the head movement to the 2 last stamps I did not draw attention to the fact that this is quite a difficult exercise in co-ordination. I merely used repetition and vocals to assist the problems they were encountering. “Spin, down, up” became part of the external/internal instructions of learning where the movements were named according to the action of the difficult movements. For most it is natural for the head to ‘follow’ the direction of the arms so when I asked them to look down as their arms went up while simultaneously doing 2 stamps the demands on their co-ordination became more complex. When they heard me vocalising the instruction many of them chose to do the same. It must have helped them in some way.

When I divided them into groups of 7 to perform the new sequence it was interesting to see how attentive they were of one another’s efforts. In my experience this attentiveness of the other is a valuable learning tool. As they focused on someone else doing what they themselves were attempting to do they seemed drawn to mentally reinforce their own memory as well as self correct through watching what works and what doesn’t in others. During this session I noticed the same little boy who had not been participating in the warm up as he was still not doing very much. I went over to him and put my arm around him and asked if he was not well to which he replied he was not. I then expressed my concern and left him to participate as best he could.

When I then decided to divide them up into smaller groups I realised that the whole class “backing” was too loud for the smaller group of dancers and so I decided to use only 7 dancers and 14 clappers. This was a good idea, as when the sounds made by the dancer are inaudible because the “backing” is too loud this balance needs to be

adjusted. This also enabled the clappers to have a rest as one of them mentioned that they found clapping very tiring. I used this as an opportunity to tell them just how important it was to clap well and that in flamenco there are professional clappers whose full time job is to clap for and 'back' others. They found this very surprising. When I reduced the number of people clapping it also enabled some of them to watch and observe.

Some of them expressed their nervousness at doing the sequence in a smaller group. The teacher then reminded them that they were not being given a mark and that they were to just enjoy themselves. Had their joy of learning been affected by the constant threat of assessment and evaluation which they had come to expect? Did her words serve as a reminder to all that while marks were a part of their lives they should not be seen as all of it? I began to question whether the rewards of individual satisfaction of participation and skill acquisition had not become lost in the continual practice of marks and assessing?

When I watched the video I was also aware that as we progressed through the groups that each group was better than the last. Was this 'progress' due to the fact that the latter groups had benefitted by watching the previous groups? Later when I asked for comments one of them mentioned how they had learnt from watching the others in the class. The first groups were very unsure and this may have been because they were the first ones to do the sequence but it may also have been the fear of being 'marked'. There is also the possibility that they simply did not have the benefit of watching others to reinforce their own learning. I merely reassured them once more not to worry and that they were here to learn and that in actual fact I thought they were doing very well.

I often had to remind the clappers to watch the dancers "speed ups" and "slow downs". I used my usual "sign language" by pointing to my eyes as the noise levels were too high to shout above. I also realised that it was important to start the clapping first and to then cue the dancers so that there was some sort of co-ordinated start. When the clapping started to dominate I reminded the dancers to identify the problem and why they were battling to dance to their backing. One managed to do so when they replied that the backing was "too fast!" This suggested that the clappers were 'leading' instead of 'following'.

I also noticed that very often I would allow a group to continue for as long as possible before stopping them. The reason I did this was that I only really wanted to stop them when it was virtually impossible to continue. If the 'flow' of recall is constantly interrupted it seems to 'fall apart' and slow progress and learning. When it was absolutely necessary I danced with them in order to keep the 'flow'.

I was also pleased to note that many learners had really grasped the concept of sensitive use of 'jaleo' and that they were not afraid to experiment or use it. In fact it seemed to come quite naturally to them. I reminded the second group to not worry if they got it wrong and I praised the previous groups clapping. The fourth group were "fantastic" and the fifth group were "perfect". While I gave such enthusiastic praise I was fully aware that I had perhaps been too generous with my praise, but I feel I would rather give too much praise than too little.

When I asked for comments after this session I was not surprised to hear the following:

"It was great it felt nice"

"I liked the new steps"

"It was very difficult and confusing"

"Your arms get sore from clapping"

"You learn from watching others mistakes" (I responded that they learn from others mistakes and that's why I encouraged them to watch one another.)

"Enlivening"

These seemed to cover a wide range of experiences. I asked if they had experienced any difficulties and they responded:

"Nothing"

"The clapping"

"Remembering the steps"

"It was hard to turn after the other steps as you are still recovering"

"The up down is confusing"

"Remembering is hard but some people are really doing it well"

It was interesting to note how comments now included experience of technical difficulties. Had the technical aspect now become more demanding or were they now becoming more fully aware of them?

After their comments one of the boys (Mr Einstein) asked if the video camera had been there the whole time and that he had only just noticed it, I was happy to hear that he had not noticed and then reassured him that the video was purely for my own learning. I told him it was not 'important' and that it was purely for me to look at to see what they did in order for me to learn. I then described the ways in which I would be learning by asking myself "what am I learning from watching these guys? What did I do that I could have done better?" I then told them that "I'm not looking at what you could have done better but more what I could have done better." The teacher then intervened and reminded them that we all learn from one another and that age makes no difference. I then continued by saying that I was learning from them all the time and that I was merely questioning what this learning was as I worked with them. I reminded them that the focus was my learning in relation to them. "Oh, I could have done that better, oh, that didn't work, oh, they weren't into that or they didn't enjoy that or get that. How can I be a better teacher, that's basically the thing." He then asked me if I was going to make a DVD to then sell it. I then laughed and assured him that I wouldn't. Another learner then asked me if they really liked this dancing how they could continue doing it? How could they have more lessons?

When I asked them if they would like to do the sequence one by one, they elected to do it two by two. Perhaps they were not quite ready to have the intense exposure that comes from performing solo? We had graduated from performing as a whole group to two big groups then groups of 7 and now in pairs. I wondered if perhaps next lesson they may be ready to try alone.

When some of them chose to do it on the stage the video camera did not follow them so I had the opportunity of observing the intense concentration of the spectators. I wondered if their focus was due to the fact that they knew what was coming and wanted to see how successful their peers were in performing it correctly.

I then gave them a brief history of flamenco and I was aware of how well they paid attention. I did not use notes or teaching aids as I hoped my direct eye contact and informal delivery would ensure their attention. I was pleased that I did not give this lesson earlier. I think it was more fun not knowing what to expect than giving them the specific context and origins before we began. This may then have led to preconceived ideas of how to respond to the classes and I did not want that.

I reminded them in the 'history lesson' that my aim was to allow them to interpret the steps in their own way without having to 'conform' to a specific ideal.

"I don't want to teach it how they do it there I want to teach it how we want to do it here".

One then asked again about dancing to music and I said I would think about it. I reminded them that I wanted them to show me that they were sure of their steps before I considered it. I then asked if we should do the sequence a few more times to which they agreed. As we were preparing to do this a couple of them decided to 'perform' for the camera. This was the first time it had happened until now. Perhaps Mr. Einstein had drawn their attention to the camera and they were now more aware of it.

We repeated the sequence slowly and finished to shrieks of delight as they were so happy with their ability to do it. They eventually managed to do the whole sequence very fast and very well. I then asked if there was anyone who wanted to do it solo. I hoped that at this point there may be one or two who might want to. The bell then rang but they did not want to leave so we watched two groups of two, (no one was ready for solo just yet). The first two rushed to the stage and did it perfectly. They finished to a round of applause and shouts of "bravo, ole, ole, ole". I too praised them enthusiastically. The second group of two then went up but unfortunately the tape ran out at this stage.

Class 8

I began lesson 8 with a brief enquiry of how everyone was feeling. The response was "fine" so I decided to begin the lesson straight away. I did not want to waste too much time as I was aware of what had to be accomplished in one lesson. The focus of this lesson was on 'performance'. The reason I included a class focused on performance in my course was because I felt that it offered valuable opportunities for lessons in self knowledge and understanding of the other. It also allowed me to better assess the quality of learning that had taken place. I see 'performance' as another opportunity to learn. In the 'private performance' skills can be tested and gaps in learning identified before the option of 'public performance' is considered.

By 'private performance' I mean performance which takes place within the group for the group. 'Public performance' is when outsiders are invited to come and watch. The value of the 'private performance' lies in its learning opportunities still within a 'safe space'. This type of performance allows for feedback from others who have shared the learning experience and are often therefore more informed of the difficulties and challenges involved. The opportunities for a more empathetic and informed response are often more available as those who are offering critical feedback have experiential learning which can inform their responses.

The reason I try to encourage 'solo' performance is that when this happens the individual is given the opportunity to develop skills that do not develop when performing in a group. Solo performance requires high levels of confidence and skill. Qualities of 'leadership' are also encouraged to develop. The focus on self is undivided and the 'pressure' to succeed is intensified. The individual has no one to 'blame' and nowhere to 'hide' if performance fails.

From a positive perspective the feedback given is exclusive to the individual and the self realisation of gaps in learning is also specific to them. Often when performing in a group the individual is unaware of these gaps in learning until required to 'think for them self'. Sometimes it is not that there are gaps in learning but rather that the 'pressure' of performing solo affects memory. I understand these 'pressures' from my own personal experience and therefore try to allow every possible opportunity for students to 'succeed' and continue to be motivated.

This lesson I decided to place the camera at the back of the hall as I wanted to be able to capture all that could possibly happen during the lesson. I knew from previous lessons that the class would probably want to perform on the stage and I would not be able to capture that in the previous position of the camera in front of the hall. I was however worried that I would not be able to hear or see everything due to the lack of light on stage as well as the distance of the camera from the action. I did manage to get most of what happened in the hall but as I suspected the light on stage was not good enough to really see as clearly as I would have liked to. The camera was also far away from the stage but I did not want to risk drawing attention to it by moving it closer. I decided that the compromise I had had to make was worth it in order to keep the performance as 'private' as possible.

While I tried to keep similar movements in the warm ups I still kept a spirit of ‘improvisation’ where I allowed the music to inspire and my body to guide my choice and speed of movements. Because I am aware of my own body feeling different every time I warm up I assumed that this may be the case for others. For this reason I did not require that learners fully engage in all movements. This was the time for them to begin an ‘internal dialogue’ with their body to see how it was feeling and how they were going to be able to work together. I did not expect learners to do all the movements “full out” but allowed them to use the time to make a personal connection with their body and mind and soul while at the same time becoming aware of others doing the same. I chose a piece of ‘modern’ flamenco music for the warm up. I tried to give students exposure to a variety of styles of flamenco music. It takes time to develop an understanding of this musical form and I wanted to show how varied it is.

We began the ‘recall’ exercise straight away in order not to waste too much time. I reminded them to “put your feet together...hold yourself tall and strong”. I tried to keep the tempo slower as I noticed that not all had fully warmed up yet so I allowed the ‘recall’ to double up as ‘warm up’ and ‘recall’. Their recall showed improvement every lesson and today they were almost perfect. They concluded the exercise with shrieks of delight at their own ‘successes’. As always it also revealed the gaps in learning and skills development. We then focused on the steps that needed clarity or greater technical skill.

I decided to take them back to basics and to “shake their right foot” in order to begin the ‘drilling’ session. I noticed that some were not keen to ‘work’ and were putting minimum effort into their movements. I reminded them that some of them were not using any “power”. It was a hot day and I acknowledged that I knew it was hot but that I still required them to put effort into their movements. I told them that the ‘fans’ were on and tried to encourage them to continue to work. I reminded them of how I like to ‘work’ at the beginning of the lesson as it “gets your heart going”. The activation of the cardio vascular is essential to ensure an ‘energised’ performance later.

I then repeated all steps that I felt needed technical improvement. I reminded them of the ‘details’ that I had asked them to include. I clarified the movements of the head, arms and even eye movements. ‘Counting’ and ‘sequence’ were clarified as well. I

asked how many of them had decided that they were a good ‘spinner’ and that they could spin twice if they felt confident. As I suspected Mr. Rhythm was also a good spinner and managed two fast spins with ease. In general the boys really seemed to enjoy the ‘spins’ and seemed to approach them with great enthusiasm. I was also thrilled to see how many of them could “spin” so well.

I had to give a gentle reminder to them not to laugh at one another’s attempts to spin even though they did look funny at times. I decided to take them in smaller sets to see how they were doing the spin because they were bumping into one another and I was not able to see how well they could do them. This was a good idea as it gave them space and me more of a chance of correcting any problems. I was also interested to see how so many of them latched onto my “phonics” when I reinforced the head movement with the sounds “pah pah”. Perhaps they had found it helped in their learning process or perhaps it was just fun to do.

Once the ‘drilling’ was over and I was satisfied that there had been sufficient repetition to ensure success I repeated the sequence ‘from the top’ once more for consolidation. I reminded them that they would soon be able to see the “fruits” of their “labour”. I told them how we were going to perform the sequence 2 by 2 or solo in order to see how much they had learnt and how they had improved.

I then sat them all down to enjoy the “fruits of their labour”. I had decided before the class that I would allow them to do their sequence in pairs or one by one but when we finally sat down to decide, 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 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. At this stage none of us knew what was about to happen, including me.

I asked who would like to go 'solo' first. Mr. Einstein volunteered but I soon realised that some of them were not ready to perform solo. When I agreed to allow different groupings they responded with shrieks of joy and applause. I then said we would begin with those wanting to go 4/4. I did this to enable those who were going to go 'solo' more time to prepare themselves.

The first group was a group of four girls and the next group of four girls went to clap for them. The rest of the class were allowed to watch and 'jaleo'. I reminded them that there was to be no "background noise" as it was "unfair". I did this to encourage an atmosphere of mutual respect for one another and the act of performance.

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' in all the appropriate places. This particular group being the first was not the best. When they finished I asked the class 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!"

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.

When they swapped 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.

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.

I noticed in all the groups that it was a good idea to allow them to have a ‘leader’ in the group of dancers as well as clappers in order for some sort of unison start to be achieved. While some of the observations were being given I noted a lack of attention from some learners so I quickly reminded them to listen to one another’s comments as they could learn from one another.

Mr. Silence came up to ask me privately if he could do his own creation once more. I told him that he could if time allowed. 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. 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.

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 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.

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!" 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! "

In one moment what could have been embarrassing 'exposure' of lack of skill had transformed into an expression of profound empathy for the other. I was speechless. I had restrained my impulse to help but others had not! Instead of possibly laughing at them those boys had chosen to help with such sincerity and genuine caring.

This was a turning point in the class and a turning point in my perspective of the potential of the course. I had thought that this course would be all about giving a series of dance classes which could possibly help to inspire teachers to include more dance classes into their learning programmes. What it had evolved into was a mutual discovery that this was about so much more than the exploration of the skills in dance. This was also about the potential of developing a sense of empathy which goes beyond the mere transference and development of dance skills.

But this was only the beginning. 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.

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 wrong 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.

And so it continued. 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” 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 as I witnessed this power in operation. I felt overwhelmed to the point of tears. So this is what it was all about.

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.

I was so thrilled when the next learner to volunteer to go solo was a girl. Perhaps this time had been a time for the boys to empower themselves but I was none the less delighted when one of the girls expressed her desire to go solo. What a beautiful girl she was too, not only in her outward appearance but also her inner beauty which she radiated as she moved. She seemed born to perform solo: she danced with skill and the rhythmic accuracy of a musician, as well as an innate ability to perform and express through her entire body. She was a sheer joy to watch and finished the 'performances' on a note of excellence.

She was one of those who expressed an interest in continuing dance classes and asked for more information. I felt that more of the class would have liked to have performed solo but time did not allow it and I still wanted to sit them down for their last comments on what they had just experienced. The class wanted me to dance and I probably would have if it wasn't for the lack of time.

I then managed to get them to all sit down for our last reflection together but before we began I felt impelled to thank them:

“Before we go any further I just want to thank you sooo much. It’s been the most fun I have had in ages. I have just LOVED working with you....I’m sorry its gone so quickly, because it has, and can I ask you one last time for comments?”

This is what followed (the responses were often quite ‘soft’ so I repeated them for the class to hear. I was astounded at how generous they were with sharing their thoughts.) I have written responses in a way that approximates what was said:

“This has been the ‘best practice’ you’ve ever had.”

Mr Persistent felt that he had really improved. I responded by saying: “You know what I’ve just said that to Mr Spiteri. 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. 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”

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".

Then more learners followed with further comments which I repeated for all to hear.

"It's a memory that you grade sevens will never forget... I'm SO happy! It's a nice way to finish your year in primary school and I wish you so much success and happiness not only next year in high school but in your life. Take the little spirit that you might have got here and confidence and the joy and just make it grow. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do because you can".

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.

Then there were further comments.

"Together we can achieve more."

"People who didn't speak much spoke through their dance....Isn't that beautiful! Yes I agree. You know you guys are unbelievably perceptive. Do you know what perceptive is? In other words you know and you can see things below the surface. You are very intelligent and perceptive. You can see more than most people would imagine."

At this point Mr Silence asked me if he could perform his creation for the class to which I responded:

"He's been asking from the beginning if he can do his own dance. Shall we let him do that?" "Yes!" came the reply. I then ask him where he wanted to perform it.

"Do you want us to make a circle here or do you want to go on the stage?...on the stage. Ok." To which the class applauded.

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.

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.

When he stopped at one point because his ‘backing’ did not have the rhythmical accuracy that he wanted I decided to offer him assistance. He then went on to complete the most amazingly complicated rhythmical sequence with such accurate rhythm. I immediately felt that this was the sort of talent that could and should be developed. I believe that if talent is left to its own devices only a certain level of proficiency will develop. All skills or talents need ‘nurturing’ and encouragement to ‘grow’ and develop into excellence.

As we sat down again after watching his performance one of his peers made this astounding observation which I repeated for the class to all hear:

“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.” I was astounded to hear this.

I responded: “I’m so happy to hear that. I promise you that’s what happens when you are dancing you learn to focus well and then don’t let anybody tell you can’t focus, because if you can learn what you’ve learnt in eight lessons you can all focus.”

I believe dancing offers wonderful opportunities to develop ‘focus.’

Here seemed to be ‘proof’ that what I had always believed was in fact true at least for Mr. Rhythm. Flamenco in particular requires tremendous concentration due to its use of the body as both medium for emotive expression or ‘voice’ as well as its use of the body as ‘musical instrument’. These physical emotional and rhythmical demands are woven almost seamlessly into an activity that embraces the whole being. These complex demands on the performer require intense focus and I have found that these skills can often become transferable to other activities. It certainly had seemed so to one of Mr. Rhythms peers.

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.

This study had an originally been intended to arrive at another 'destination' but we had been 'led' along another path. It took us into completely unexplored and unexpected territory and for a 'moment' we shared an experience of profound 'connection' which it seemed none of us would forget.

Was this the "chemical change" that we had spoken of in our study group on Fridays: when different chemicals are forever changed as they come into contact with certain other chemicals? Is 'living theory' self study the recording of that change? I know I will never view my teaching in the same way ever again. 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.

I was left after this lesson with a profound sense of awe and humility. I had been privileged to witness individuals make personal leaps of faith beyond their expectations and I can only express my deepest gratitude for this.