

CHAPTER 3

Teaching Techniques

3.1 Warm-up, Circle

I used the circle formation to ensure that all could see clearly. My warm-ups were improvised and it was essential that each dancer had unobstructed vision. I emphasised that I did not require perfection merely participation. My warm-ups were designed to be as inclusive as possible and I chose movements that I felt virtually anyone could do. I used basic movements that warm the muscles in a gentle yet fun way.

The circle shape supported my epistemological values of equal visibility as well as my ontological value of equal opportunity to participate. It enabled me to position myself alongside students giving the ‘visual message’ that all of us had equal access to new learning and all were valued equally, including me. This supported my subject centred approach where teacher and student place the subject at the centre of the circle (Palmer, 1998, p. 89). I also used the circle as a ‘leveller’ for those who may have had previous dance experience (including myself). By positioning everyone equally in the circle, I hoped those with dance experience were less likely to ‘dominate’ the class with their expertise and less likely to intimidate those with no dance experience.

(Appendix 5, Video 22 - class 5)

Lancos describes the impetus of all modern dance as nurturing the individualism of a “democratic philosophy”(Lancos, 2004, p. 142).

This focus on individualism in modern dance often forms the basis of Western educational approaches to dance where modern dance is perceived as more accessible, and suited to the individualistic majority. This is not however the perspective of all cultures or dance educators. From my experience of indigenous dance, the circle is often the heartbeat of the dance, playing a significant role in unification and bonding within the group. In the origins of flamenco the individual was part of a group and the circle or semi-circle intrinsic to performance. I chose the circle and rejected the linear formations of many Western dance classes because lines all too easily form ‘boxes’ which exclude and separate whereas the circle supports my values of equal participation, inclusion and group solidarity.

In Action Research workshops, Kelley sees opportunity for individuals to work together towards a common goal as a means to achieve commonality and to reduce the basic loneliness of individuals (Kelley, 1951). Dancing in the circle helped me to include those who may have felt excluded from the group. “Moving with others helps to give ... a sense of belonging, of security” in the group (R. L. Murray, 1963, p. 19). By placing us all on the circumference, we were able to embrace the ‘emptiness’ of the centre, where none of us were able to ‘see’ the outcome of the lesson at its inception. Here ‘surprise’ and unexpected discovery learning became possible and a sense of comfort was gained by standing shoulder to shoulder, as we began to ‘bond’.

During the first classes I did at times place myself in the centre of the circle when I wanted to draw everyone’s focus. The improvised nature of my warm-up also required that all could see clearly. By sometimes placing myself in the centre I gave a visual focal point, but as learning progressed I was able to join in the circle leaving the centre open to possibility.

I began each warm-up by focusing on the breath, because physical movements without the support of the breath tend to become tiring. The drawing of the breath into my body became my ‘inhalation’ of inspiration. The boundaries between ‘mind-body’ seemed to become less defined. “... the human heart and the capacity to breathe are indivisible, and it is the oxygenated heart that energises the performance of the living ...”(Conolly, 2002, p. 12). By focusing on the breath I was energising my ‘whole being’.

I began crouching into a ‘foetal’ position in order to draw the mental focus ‘into’ the body and into a ‘ball’ allowing me to almost ‘rebirth’ myself in that moment. It helped my body and mind to align, and facilitate their communion. The boundaries between the ‘mind box’ and ‘body box’ seemed to dissolve with the narrowing of my focus from the external world to my internal world. I may have encouraged the same in students but it did help me to ‘centre’ the mental and physical energy of the class.

“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.”(Appendix 2, class 1)

I tried to remain receptive to ideas using what came to mind to inspire.

“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.” (Appendix 2, class 1)

As I reflected I began to realise how important that first five minute warm-up in my class was. It gave latecomers easy access to the class and allowed all to prepare for work. I gave students the choice to engage at their own pace by not giving ‘corrections’ during the warm-up. If some chose to do the movements ‘half heartedly’ I allowed that to happen. I noticed that individual ‘disengagement’ was not constant and that those who showed enthusiasm seemed to ‘draw’ in, those who showed less. Perhaps by not ‘correcting’ or expecting full and equal participation from each student, I gave them the choice to participate at whatever level they wished to. I did not ‘force’ participation: I wanted voluntary participation. My warm-up sought to entice the majority in unity of purpose with voluntary participants rather than unwilling slaves. This video shows some students as unwilling to participate and me trying to encourage their voluntary participation.

(Appendix 5, Video 23 - class 7)

3.2 Inspiration

As I watched the videos I observed how I was guided by intuition when student’s didn’t ‘get it’ and where I sensed possible exclusion. With intuition “I bring energy that flows from outside the social through the cosmos into my educational relationships” (Whitehead, 2009c, p. 109). In class 1,

“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.” (Appendix 2, class 1)

Here the circle had limitations. I had to come up with a solution in the ‘moment.’ The parallel lines assisted many more students to grasp the concept of a ‘half-turn’ and also gave others opportunity to ‘see’ and copy one another. The blatant, visual, obviousness of facing the ‘wrong way’ when others were facing another direction seemed to help. Later in the same class when I asked the students to extend one arm in the opposite direction to the way they were travelling I encountered further learning difficulties. Many were not able to look in the opposite direction and extend their arm while moving in another direction. Yet again the size of the class and the circle were problematic. This time I intuitively used ‘visualisation.’

“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 they 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.”(Appendix 2, class 1)

(Appendix 5, Video 24 - class 1)

I now realise that this mental image of a ‘fire’ in the centre of the circle was extremely effective on two levels. Not only did it seem to assist many with directional and co-ordination challenges but it also introduced opportunity for powerful passionate expression of emotion. I had planned on introducing the emotive elements in the second lesson but this situation called for its early introduction. When directional difficulties persisted,

“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.”

(Appendix 2 class 3)

(Appendix 5, Video 25 – class 3)

(Appendix 5, Video 26 – class 3)

I now realise that what began as an experiment was in fact an effective way to learn directional changes. “Reflection-in-action necessarily involves experiment” (Schon, 1983, p. 141). This time it wasn’t the use of visualisation but the actual physical images of artwork on the wall which I was inspired to use. This became the final piece of the puzzle for those who were still battling to grasp the directional changes. I used parallel lines, the mental image of a fire, the physical images of artwork on the wall and ‘vocals’ in order for the majority of students to grasp the step. This suggested to me the importance of using various approaches and how I relied on momentary inspiration for this. I had not previously used ‘vocals’ to aid learning but it certainly seemed to help.

... competent practitioners usually know more than they can say ... practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice (Schon, 1983, p. preface viii).

I now realise that

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our pattern of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action (Schon, 1983, p. 49).

I realise my ‘knowledge’ is unique and that much of my ‘knowing’ is revealed in my action and this ‘knowledge’ continually transforms. Not only did the vocals seem to assist learning but they provided another opportunity to have fun. I had intuitively added vocals to my “repertoire” of teaching aids (Schon, 1983, p. 140) and would certainly use it again.

Reflection-in-action in a unique case may be generalised to other cases, not by giving rise to general principles, but by contributing to the practitioner’s repertoire of exemplary themes from which, in the subsequent cases of his practice, he may compose new variations (Schon, 1983, p. 140).

I have always believed in the fluid boundaries between learning areas in education but I am now more aware of the enormous importance of improving my ability to flow effortlessly from one learning style to the next in order to reach as many pupils as possible in my classes. I now feel that becoming more aware of and skilled in teaching multiple learning styles would increase opportunities for success into my lessons. Where I lack theoretical knowledge I rely on inspiration to guide me. I realised that each individual learns in unique ways and at unique paces, which are not constant.

In the first class I observed how I used various techniques to avoid student discouragement when the pace of learning seemed slow and tried to make learning fun.

“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” (Appendix 2, class 1)

The teacher also observed the learning challenges and the importance of fun to assist these challenges:

“It was interesting to note how some children battled with the clapping of hands and at the same time tapping their feet - but they soon managed to master this skill. When they managed to master the skill, their faces broke out in huge grins. What a boost to self esteem! This indicates that this type of dancing is so beneficial to help develop coordination.

The enjoyment was clearly visible on their faces and they were soon allowing their bodies to move with the music. I was also taken aback by the sheer concentration and focus of the children - they were totally swept off their feet!

They did not realize how hard they were actually working because they were having so much fun! They all mentioned how they looked forward to their next session and this enthusiasm was clearly shown at the next session when they had remembered the steps and some had reported that they had practiced on their own! That is definite proof of enjoyment!”

(Appendix 3, week 1)

Because I know that learning flamenco is challenging I continue to seek new and fun ways to keep morale up for as many as possible.

In class 4, I intuitively introduced the children's game of 'statues'. I wanted to encourage them to count to six and be able to hold the body still for another six counts. By making it a game it introduced a sense of fun while encouraging a sense of urgency to not be 'caught out'.

(Appendix 5, Video 27 - class 4)

In class 5, I saw "doing and thinking are complimentary" (Schon, 1983, p. 280) as old problems required new solutions.

"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."(Appendix 2, class 5)

(Appendix 5, Video 28 – class 5)

(Appendix 5, Video 29 – class 5)

(Appendix 5, Video 30 - class 5)

'Inspiration' led to a solution: the semi circle. It allowed full visibility while simultaneously enabled me to demonstrate the correct use of foot. This was a huge break through for me and resulted in the speedy learning of students. I realise I was not satisfied until everyone showed signs of mastery. I also used an 'intellectual' approach of counting the steps as well. When I sensed that this had been achieved I was not alone. One of the boys perhaps sensed it as well. His shout of "ole" not only served to indicate resonance but also that he had learnt to use 'jaleo' correctly and at the appropriate time. This encouraged me to continue using inspiration when seeking new solutions to familiar problems.

3.3 Reflection and Critique

Truth is an external conversation about things that matter; conducted with passion and discipline ... the dynamic conversation of a community that keeps testing old conclusions and coming to new ones (Palmer, 1998, p. 104).

I devised 'times of reflection' to inspire excellence and authenticity and critical thinking. Preparation for performance depends on constructive critique. I tried "... to go further than simply advocating tolerance or celebrating diversity and to involve students in critical and creative engagement" (K. Pithouse, 2007, p. 89). I sought to improve practice by using action reflection cycles and validation groups (Whitehead, 2009c) Because I believe "we are all living with the capacity to express and develop a relationally-dynamic awareness of space and boundaries with life-affirming energy and value"(Whitehead, 2009c, p. 113) I encouraged constructive critique to inspire personal best. From my own experience, I believe individual reasoning balanced with and constructive critique gained from multiple sources, can assist preparation for performance. I began encouraging reflexive critique from the first lesson.

The teacher remarked,

"I am amazed to hear their input and thoughts about the dancing - they are so open about their feelings."(Appendix 3, week 2)

In class 4 I reminded them again to engage in constructive and not destructive critique and to remain 'open' when accepting or rejecting critique. In this way I encouraged personal responsibility for performance. Professional dancers require this and I always try to remain aware that I may have future professionals in my class. I feel this 'skill' can also benefit other children. In our 'times of reflection', I tried to merely repeat what had been said and to avoid passing comment where possible. My repetition enabled the whole class to hear what had been said, as each considered for themselves, without the influence of my opinion, if they were in agreement. I also discouraged meaningless praise.

"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” (Appendix 2, class 4).

In the following clips I have smaller groups being watched and the ‘pressure’ of performance is evident in some of them. I therefore encouraged a balance between my comments and praise and that of peers.

(Appendix 5, Video 31 - class 4)

(Appendix 5, Video 32 - class 4)

(Appendix 5, Video 33 - class 4)

As a professional dancer and teacher I have endured extensive and unnecessary emotional pain in coming to understand the difference between critique and criticism. I have often wished I had been guided from an early age to differentiate between the two. I believe “...inclusive and constructive group talk involves providing frequent opportunities for each member of the group to speak and be heard” (K. Pithouse, 2007, p. 81) and I encouraged individuals to think independently within the group.

“Dancers and children setting their own goals and evaluating their own progress are self regulating their efforts, meaning that the learner’s achievement and motivation is internal, valued and independent from the teacher” (van Staden, et al., 2004, p. 129). I sought ‘balance’ in self knowledge through reflective practice in community.

This community can never offer us ultimate certainty-not because its process is flawed but because certainty is beyond the grasp of finite hearts and minds. Yet this community can do much to rescue us from ignorance, bias, and self-deception if we are willing to submit our assumptions, our observations, our theories-indeed ourselves- to its scrutiny (Palmer, 1998, p. 104).

I believe multiple perspectives help broaden individual perspectives thereby resisting the loneliness and perils of narcissism.

3.4 Body Language

Body language is more reliable for me than speech and I use it as a powerful teaching aid as well. In class 1, I became aware of how often I use ‘sign language’ to give instructions to students.

“... 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 ... If I had tried to shout above the noise it would firstly have been very tiring for my vocal chords ...

My use of ‘sign language’ to conduct my lessons became more and more evident as my class continued.” (Appendix 2, class 1)

While watching the videos I became aware of my use of ‘visual’ instructions to quieten the class or get their attention and to prompt memory. The children seemed to become aware of my ‘body language’ and I was able to control the noise levels and focus whenever I wished without raising my voice to excessive levels. This had already been observed by the teacher in my pilot study: *“I never once heard Linda raise her voice and yet the children followed instructions respectfully and with great joy”* (Appendix 1). I used ‘sign language’ to encourage visual and audio learning.

(Appendix 5, Video 34 - class 1)

I became aware of my use of ‘body language’ during my pilot study and I continued almost subconsciously to increase my ‘vocabulary’ during my field work. I used my body and my speech almost interchangeably and I realised I could not separate and ‘box’ them.

3.5 Repetition, Enjoyment

*“We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then is not an act
but a habit.” (Aristotle 384-322BC)*

I believe repetition in flamenco builds muscle strength and skill and facilitates memorisation. “Memorization that endures demands re-memorization repeated

tirelessly” (Jousse, et al., 1997, p. 665). I used repetition to encourage maximum participation and because

The student of movement may find one sort of rhythm more difficult to perform than another. He might discover that he has preference for particular rhythms or rhythmic habits. Rhythmic deficiency of any kind can be corrected by training, by accustoming oneself through repetitive exercise to produce those forms of rhythm which at first are found difficult (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 137).

I used ‘recall’ time at the beginning of class to reveal gaps in memory. I asked students to just do what they remembered without reminding them. This informed what I focused on in repetition sessions. I believe in the age old adage ‘repetition ensures learning, repetition ensures learning’ and

“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.” (Appendix 2 class 2)

I began to look for evidence of what I consider to be worth repeating and learning. I observed the following:

- I repeatedly emphasised the importance of correct technical execution and body alignment.
- I used repetition to engage the cardio vascular until students showed signs of sufficient effort to have ‘worked’ the muscles enough to deserve a ‘break’.
- Repetition often took place in the circle where all were able to be aware of the effort of others to inspire own. Group repetition supported individual motivation.

(Appendix 5, Video 35 - class 3)

In class 4, I began observing that “boys like to do anything that is vigorous and challenging, and dance can be both”(R. L. Murray, 1963, p. 11) and I saw how some boys were practicing on their own.

“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. ...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.”(Appendix 2, class 4)

The teacher later commented on their levels of enthusiasm and I began to realise that their enjoyment was fundamental to motivate them to practice (repeat) their steps.

You can see by the way the children rush to the hall that they are enjoying the lessons. When they do their dancing, I feel as though I am being drawn into their dance just by their involvement, enthusiasm and movement. (Appendix 3, Week 2)

(Appendix 5, Video 36 - class 4)

(Appendix 5, Video 37 - class 6)

Here I noted how repetition was enjoyed. I consider practice/repetition outside of the class as fundamental to progress. Here was evidence of one boy having practiced. This prompted me to enquire if others had been practicing. When there was overwhelming affirmation of ‘yes’ I use ‘recall time’ to confirm if this was true.

I “...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.” (Appendix 2, class 4)

(Appendix 5, Video 38 – class 4)

My ‘recall time’ was fundamental to guiding our repetition. Here was evidence of progress but ...

“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." (Appendix 2, class 4)

In my experience children often resist repetition and going back to the basics. I sensed this so I decided to try to make it fun.

"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!"(Appendix 2, class 4)

By getting them to focus on 'spotting the difference' I tried to encourage visual focus and attention to detail and to thereby encourage correct technique and skill.

(Appendix 5, Video 39 – class 4)

My session of repetition could have ended up being a very boring and tiring activity but by introducing the idea of it being a game, it seemed to encourage participation. I realised the power of work disguised as 'fun' to motivate effort and here I used 'repetition' for improved technique and to avoid later individual humiliation. 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 can rely on others to prompt memory. 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. I wanted them to understand the value of repetition.

“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 ... We then did another drilling session.”(Appendix 2, class 4)

I didn't feel at this stage that they fully appreciated the value of repetition in dance or understood 'skilled performance', so I reminded them that none of us were born doing skilled dancers and that as babies we only “*bob in our nappies*” (Appendix 2, class 4). I drew their attention to the fact that skill required effort and repetition. Murray observes that children possess a “natural love for rhythmic movement” and that for a child “movement is both an organic need and a constant delight ... dancing to him is good for its own sake, often without meaning or purpose” (R. L. Murray, 1963, p. 11). I realised I wanted them to realise that it takes effort to move beyond this child like approach. While I agree that dance is a “... continuation of what the children have been doing ever since they were born, namely exploring their physical powers” (Jordan, 1966, p. 8), I believe this should be developed. Jousse speaks of the need to provide children with an education which “gives the child awareness of self and a realization of his or her innate capacities” (Jousse, 2005, p. 176). I used repetition to encourage basic capacity to become more skilled.

“... 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 by ‘drilling’ technical aspects ... to develop strength and stamina

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.”(appendix 2, class 4)

During the repetition session in class 6, I used repeated vocals to support learning.

“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 ...

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”. (Appendix 2, class 6)

In this clip I used repetition until they ‘got it’.

(Appendix 5, Video 40 - class 6)

I also became aware of how I was using different forms of repetition simultaneously to assist learning. The successful use of ‘vocals’ to facilitate learning is what Jousse refers to as ‘Rhythmo-vocalism’ and ‘Rhythmo- energy’ facilitating learning (Conolly, 2002). I continued testing its efficacy in class 7.

(Appendix 5, Video 41, time -5.30 to end - class 7)

“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 ...” I called out “Spin, down, up When they heard me vocalising the instruction many of them chose to do the same.” (Appendix 2, class 7)

I found repeated vocalisation very useful to assist learning and will continue to use it.

3.6 Assessment

Fears of assessment became evident in class 7. I reflected,

“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?” (Appendix 2, class 7)

I reflected on why I had chosen to provide opportunity for peer assessment combined with own and teacher assessment. I have observed how when assessment is the sole responsibility of teachers (who often cannot avoid being subjective) there is often fear and mistrust. This may not be the case with subjects where only one answer is required, but in dance there is always teacher subjectivity. This is where I believe peer assessment grounded in personal experience can become a compass to navigate such subjective waters.

My experience dance examinations, has led me to realise that students often modify performance according to ‘who’ the examiner will be. If the anticipated results were not achieved then it was because “the examiner didn’t like me” or “the examiner was looking for X and I did Y.” I realise that excellent critique can come from ‘expert examiners’ but ‘internal novices’ can provide wonderful insights as well. I believe the ‘truth’ lies somewhere between the observations of the ‘expert’ and the personal experience of the ‘novice’ which the individual then balances with their own knowledge. This becomes a form of triangulation to assess validity where multiple perspectives provide balance. I have much experience of damaging ‘expert’ subjective assessment and believe in a more balanced approach.

Discussing the challenges of standards in dance assessment in education, van Papendorp identifies the inequality of standards between dance styles as related to their historical contexts. “Contemporary dance and African dance have never had an examination system, so what is the standard required of these dance forms and how do

they compare to Ballet, Spanish or Indian Dance and their well defined examination systems? ... It may well be that we need to rethink what we mean by a standard” (van Papendorp, 2004, p. 141).

Only some dancers will become professional. “It should be noted that the development of dance performers is only one of many possible career options. In the same way that not everyone who studies history becomes a historian, not everyone who studies dance will necessarily end up working in the dance industry” (van Papendorp, 2004, p. 143). I would argue that mainstream dance education should not use the same assessment standards for all, nor use the assessment standards of other learning areas. Few who study dance ever become professional, but that does not mean that the standards used to measure the progress of a professional should be imposed on all children. Similarly I believe, the positivist approach to dance assessment, where a ‘number’ is equated with performance, should be avoided. “The visible patterns of dance can be described in words, but its deeper meaning is inexpressible verbally” (Laban & Ullmann, 1971, p. 25) and I would add even more inexpressible numerically. For this reason “Teachers need to be equipped to use a wide range of instructional strategies and to facilitate a range of assessment strategies in which learners can demonstrate their knowledge” (van Papendorp, 2004, p. 145).

Alianza Flamenca assessments have no mark allocation (Alianza Flamenca). A comprehensive report comments on technique, expressiveness, and rhythmic ability and suggestions for improvement are given. This system of assessment allows a student of limited ability to be assessed alongside one with exceptional ability. Progress to the next level is at the discretion of teacher and assessor who are encouraged to hold the best interests of the student in mind. This may seem to undermine the ‘standards’ of those engaged in the training of ‘professionals’, but in fact, we as assessors have found just the opposite. We are content with the standard of work that is emerging which includes and respects varied ability. I believe when dance assessment “has no dependable standard and therefore no recognisable value” (van Papendorp, 2004, p. 143) peer assessment can help to balance ‘expert’ assessment.

My assessment and critique in class was based on skill, effort and authenticity. I did not encourage or expect flamenco style. I only gave a ‘history’ lesson of flamenco in class 7, in order not to impose stylistic boundaries, or build up cultural resistance, to a dance

form that they may have perceived of as belonging to someone else. I wanted them to experience and experiment with own interpretations of movements, and I only used the 'history' lesson to traverse boundaries in learning areas. My approach to assessment was a form of triangulation which was grounded in my faith in "the teacher within" (Palmer, 1998, p. 29) which "reminds me of my truth" (Palmer, 1998, p. 31). Through critical reflection with self and others students conversed with their own 'inner teacher' in order to find validity.

If "authority is granted to people who are perceived as *authoring* their own words, their own actions their own lives rather than playing a scripted role at great remove from their own hearts" (Palmer, 1998, p. 33) then I believe being able to 'author' ones own dance supports this. Finding personal validity in assessment through critical reflection with self and others, seems to me to be fundamental to this 'authoring'