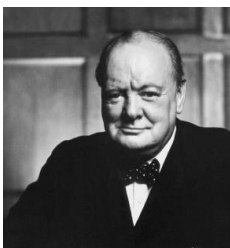


Research into different approaches to community dance with older adults – Australia and New Zealand



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Introduction

In November – December 2014 I visited New Zealand and Australia to carry out research into different approaches to dance with older people. As a community dance artist I work with older adults and lead courses for dance artists and activity leaders. I have carried out research in the UK and recently published a book on *Age and Dancing*.¹ Although, at conferences, I have had discussions with dance artists from overseas there has not been time to explore our practice in any depth. The Fellowship has given me the opportunity to make contact with dancers and community practitioners from Australia and New Zealand to compare leadership styles and choreographic approaches. It has also resulted in some unexpected outcomes that have taken my research into new directions.

Objectives / Purpose of the project

- Observe and reflect on different approaches to dance practices with older adults
- Gain new ideas for my choreographic projects
- Learn about attitudes to older people in other cultures
- Learn about the way services for older people are delivered in different countries
- Identify possible partners for international collaboration

Approach / Methods

During my Fellowship travels I took part in a range of research activities:

- Observing dance sessions
- Leading and participating in dance classes
- Observing rehearsals
- Attending performances by MADE' (Mature Artists' Dance Experience) in Tasmania
- Meeting choreographers, dance artists, academics, community staff, members of the public, dance managers and researchers
- Interviewing audience members, participants in classes, board members from dance companies, artist in residence / hospice volunteer, dancer with Alzheimer's
- Attending a Death Café meeting

Findings

The organisations I visited offered different perspectives on some significant aspects of my community dance practice together with much food for thought – often in unexpected areas. Key findings were in the following areas:

- Performance by older dancers
- Inclusive practice
- Training courses
- Dance and Dementia
- Dance and end of life care

Many of the above involved some tension lines, some of which I had already started to consider but discussions during and after my travels revealed new ways of looking at issues that have interested me for some time.

NEW ZEALAND

- ☐ Crow's Feet Dance Collective: observed rehearsal, met dancers and director
- ☐ Hip-operation Crew: interviewed dancers
- ☐ DANZ National Service Organisation for Dance: met executive director and regional manager
- ☐ Dance Mobility: took part in class, interviewed dancers and met Dance Mobility teachers
- ☐ University of Auckland: met psychology professor specializing in brain research

Crow's Feet Dance Collective

In New Zealand I visited Crow's Feet Dance Collective in Wellington. Founded in 1999 by director and choreographer Jan Bolwell, it is a dance group for 'mature women' – though its members are significantly younger than members of other groups of 'older dancers' (35 years plus). In many ways the group is similar to my group of mature dancers, Marple Movers in Stockport. There is a warm, friendly atmosphere and many of the dancers have been together for years.

Where the groups differ is in their focus and purpose.. Crow's Feet is very much a performance group whereas Marple Movers meet for a weekly class and perform occasionally at community events or conferences. Jan told me she is not interested in just having regular classes – she wants to make quality work and perform it. She also wants the dancers to have fun: "When it stops being fun, we'll stop doing it", says Jan. In this respect we are very much in tune. 'Fun' is an important element in my work, too. I believe it contributes to an enjoyable, inclusive experience.

Liz, a Crow's Feet member who gave me a lift home, told me Jan is very good at differentiating – she accommodates the less experienced participants so each person is given movement that they are capable of. The choreography is clearly quite varied so they are all playing to their strengths. Although Jan is clearly committed to inclusive practice there is an emphasis on technique and the dance is mainly created by the choreographer 'on' the dancers.

Adult ballet is very popular in NZ and Janet, a member of Crow's Feet Dance Collective does three ballet classes a week, together with two dance exercise classes. She took me to one of these classes, which run in termly blocks. No newcomers are admitted after the second week as participants learn routines for the term. Janet says " It's always set material - good job because I'm not creative".

Meeting with Tania Kopytko

Whilst in Wellington I also met with Tania Kopytko, Executive Director of DANZ (National Service Organisation for Dance). In her view technique training is important in order to avoid a 'mutton dressed as lamb' image of older people dancing.

"Whatever they do has got to be dignified – my job is to be the guardian of that."

Both Jan and Tania mentioned that, from time to time, they ask participants to make up their own moves but usually the content is created by the choreographer.

Tania told me that DANZ is finding it difficult to set up dance sessions in rest homes. They have 'diversionary therapists' but not dancers. She was one of a number of people I met who believe that 'older people dancing' is not as widespread in NZ as it is in the UK.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

During my travels I have observed art form centred practice where dancers perform set material that has been choreographed 'on' them – and they are enjoying themselves immensely. However, many of them have not experienced other ways of working – more creative approaches where the choreographer collaborates with the performers in devising movement material. I'm not suggesting community dance practice needs to be at one end of the continuum or the other but I think we should be aware whereabouts we are (between the two ends of the continuum) and prepared to shift around and embrace different approaches. I will continue to reflect and have ongoing dialogue with colleagues. These reflections offer rich material for the continuing professional development events I am involved in.



"Cara Bang Bang"



"Terri Two Cents"

Hip-operation Crew

Whilst in New Zealand I travelled to Waiheke Island to interview two members of the Hip-Operation Crew – a hip hop dance group consisting of senior citizens. "Terri Two Cents" (94) and "Cara Bang Bang" (95) showed me some of their dance moves and told me about their plans to perform in New York in 2015. They have already appeared at the world Hip Hop Championship finals in Las Vegas USA (2013) and to an audience of 16,000 in the Taipei Arena, Taiwan (2014). They are also featured in a new documentary film recently shown in cinemas in New Zealand.



Hip-Operation Crew

When I managed to track down Terri and Cara at their retirement village in Anzac Bay they were still buzzing from their Taiwan trip. They told me how the group had started off as a flash mob in various Auckland venues then it was so successful that Billie Jordan, the group's manager, and her friend Bev arranged for the group to join with young people from Otara and learn some hip hop moves. The motto of The Hip Op-eration Crew is 'Respect and Honour Youth'.

"The best part of the whole affair has been mixing with the young people"

"It's not that I like hip hop – it's what it's done for young people.....keeps them off the streets"

"You have to adapt the movements to what you can do...I can't jump and I can't run. I dance with a stick in my hand" (Kara)

I asked them if they would consider coming to the UK.

"Well next year we're probably going to the Bronx– so it would be a bit expensive to do two trips in the year.....maybe in 2016."

" Yes," agreed Terri "we could think about going to the UK in 2016"

I love it that a 95 year old is making plans for 2016 !!

These two were amazing; so bright and sparky. You would never think they were in their mid nineties.

Teenage Street Dancers, Auckland

A few days after meeting Terri and Cara I watched some young people doing hip hop dance in the street in Auckland. I asked them what music they were playing as I was mentally translating their moves for my seated group in Stockport. When they heard why I was interested they told me about the Hip-operation Crew on Waiheke Island. They spoke with great pride and respect when referring to these senior performers.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

In many ways the attitude of the young people towards the Hip-Operation crew was more positive than the attitude of some of the local adult dance professionals who were rather dismissive of them. One dance manager said "It's dreadful.....there's no content". I pointed out that they challenge stereotypes of older people. She agreed but clearly doesn't value what they do. She described it as gimmicky.



Street Dancers Queen St. Auckland 2014

Dance Mobility Class, Auckland

This was a small group of 5 women in the martial arts room at West Wave recreation centre. There was a gentle, seated warm up followed by a mixture of set and free moves. The leader, Kerry Ann, has an easy, natural style. There is not the same emphasis on technique as there was in Crow's Feet and the Wellington exercise session. I chatted to the women afterwards and they outlined various benefits they've noticed since taking part in the dance (better balance, less pain).

I arranged a follow up meeting with Kerry Ann and she talked me through the training course for Dance Mobility. This is a franchise run by dance practitioner Felicity Molloy. Kerry Ann showed me the handouts for the course. There is input on health and safety and a 4 step template for each session – intro / warm up / creative and choreography / cool down. In these respects their course is similar to my own training courses. However there were a few significant differences. The course notes said Dance Mobility is not for everyone (eg people with visual impairments may have difficulties with it and some people with hearing problems may not like loud music).

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

This was a one of a number of occasions when I noticed that, unlike community dance in the UK, there does not seem the same emphasis on inclusive practice. Rather than adapting sessions for people with visual and hearing impairments the Dance Mobility guidelines suggest that practitioners be clear about whom the sessions are for.

Meeting with Susan Jordan (Regional Manager for DANZ)

We discussed how Dance Mobility was set up and the difficulties of funding the work. Susan seed-funded a pilot project using Arts Council money and then passed it on to Felicity Molloy. My conversations with Susan highlighted another interesting difference from my experience in the UK – Susan only wants people who are over 50 to do the training and lead dance mobility sessions. She believes younger people do not have the appropriate experience. The training is run as a 2 day weekend course.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

It will be interesting to discuss this with colleagues in the UK. What do they feel about limiting training to people over 50?

Death Café

In addition to her dance work Kerry-Ann is a celebrant – leading secular weddings and funerals. She also facilitates a Death Café. We discussed our mutual interests in dance and in issues around death. I have attended events run by the UK organization ‘Dying Matters’ and was keen to attend the death café meeting which took place a few days after the Dance Mobility class.

The group meets in a lounge of a local small business. Kerri-Ann introduced the session by suggesting we said our names and what brings us to the group (something she had done some months previously but she repeated it as there were new people). Nora told everyone about her experience since being diagnosed with terminal cancer 2 years previously (she was not expected to survive longer than 8 weeks). She describes her feelings of desolation / anger / acceptance and then told how her family tease her “Mum – don’t play the cancer card...”. Her parents do not accept she’ll die before them. One of the group said that Nora had given her children a gift in that they have discussions about death.

Jane wanted to talk about euthanasia. Robert definitely wants the chance to die when he feels he has ‘had enough’. Issues arising from this were: How will you decide? What if you’ve lost the ability to make the decision / tell people you want to die? Nora said she’d been asked if she wants to be resuscitated. I raised the difference between DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) and do not make interventions to keep someone alive when you (and they) would rather allow nature to take its course. I have experienced this situation and in the UK you need a ‘living will’.² Most of the group were not familiar with a living will; they were interested to hear about this and the resources provided by the Dying Matters charity³.

We talked about types of funeral and no funeral. Who do you invite to a funeral for someone nobody knows – like a baby? Sara told of the death of her 5 week old baby. She was just going to hand her over for cremation before a doctor talked to her about having something to mark the occasion. She is glad she did. Pauline raised the issue of the cost of a coffin and said it would be good if you could just hire one. Kerri-Ann said you can. You can just have the lining and there are examples of people re-using a coffin. There is a rural community where the farmer stores the communal coffin in his barn until it is needed by a member of the village. Nora told of a funeral which was streamed live to people in other countries. Also a friend of hers was very ill and discharged to spend his last couple of weeks at home. His wife put a message on Facebook saying “My dear Sean has come home to die. We’re having ‘Open Home’ all week.” We all felt this was a good idea – more or less having a wake before you die. We talked about actual services – many people have a slide show as part of the service. Later Kerri-Ann and I talked about the difficulties, as a celebrant, when a family hasn’t booked a double slot and the funeral director is trying to hurry things along.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

My discussions with Kerry-Ann and the people at the death café reminded me of an inspiring course I once attended at Welfare State International. It was called ‘Marking the Occasion’ and we devised some delightful, creative approaches to funerals and other significant events.⁴ I will look into setting up a death café – and explore possibilities for including dance in funerals.

Meeting with Suzanne Purdy - University of Auckland

Before I began my travels I contacted Dr. Barbara Snook from the Dance Studies Department at the University of Auckland and she invited me to give a presentation to students and staff. Unfortunately she had to cancel this and, as an alternative, she arranged for me to meet with Suzanne Purdy from the Centre for Brain Research at Auckland University. This was a fascinating meeting; Suzanne described her research into the impact of music on people recovering from stroke.

Suzanne and I discussed technology for portable monitoring of EEG and how this might be used in measuring the impact of taking part in different types of dance activities. I plan to follow up the ideas we discussed and investigate possible funding sources for this research.

TASMANIA

- ☐ MADE (Mature Artists Dance Collective): Observed rehearsals, attended performances, interviewed dancers and other artists involved
- ☐ Meeting with Arts and Health Practitioners
- ☐ Hospice Project: Met community artist and dancers involved in MADE's hospice project
- ☐ Tasmania Performs: Met the producer of this arts organization

MADE

I attended the dress rehearsal and all 5 performances of MADE's 'Sing for Me' at Hobart's Theatre Royal.

MADE (Mature Artists Dance Experience) was founded in 2005 by Artistic Director Glen Murray. On MADE's website he describes the company's aims and purpose:

to provide mature adults with dance and theatre skills development opportunities as well as highly aesthetic contemporary dance theatre performance outcomes that offer audiences an alternative view of contemporary dance and of the mature body in a performance context.

The work of MADE is particularly timely and relevant in the context of a globally ageing population as it shifts the lens from a youth-centric culture to one that recognises and values the significant contribution mature adults make to our cultural identity.

MADE works ethically in a non-judgmental, supportive and encouraging environment facilitating revelatory and transformative experiences for its participants who discover that they are flourishing at a time when the dominant culture expects them to be withdrawing from active engagement.

Glen Murray MADE

I have been in contact with Glen Murray, since 2012 when he visited the UK for his Churchill Fellowship. He observed my group, Marple Movers, and we have had many conversations about dance and performance with older people.

Glen and I have very different approaches to our work with older people and I have been looking forward to exploring these differences in more depth. Glen's group, MADE, is purely a performance group and dancers meet for rehearsals, whereas Marple Movers meet for regular weekly sessions with occasional performances by some of the members. I was interested to meet the dancers and hear about their experiences in MADE

Dress Rehearsal – Meeting the Dancers

Glen introduced me to the dancers who had all turned up promptly for the 5-0 pm rehearsal that would go on till at least 9-30pm. They had been warned it might be 11-0pm before they were finished. They clearly take it very seriously and are totally committed and disciplined. Dances have been choreographed by Glen and there is an emphasis on technique. "We like the technique", says Annie, "we wouldn't come if it was improvisation". She is enthusiastic about the fact that Glen pushes them. "You've got to work hard on that stage", said another dancer, "there's something happens inside me when I get out there".

Many dancers are nervous – particularly those who are fairly new to the group – but there is an excitement and buzz which is almost palpable. Most dancers mention trusting Glen’s vision “...at some point I was thinking ‘how is all this going to come together. But it always does. We’ve just got to trust him...”

Throughout the rehearsal the dancers are totally engaged, marking it through, doing as they’re told. Glen is clear and focused but invites dancers to make suggestions if something needs adjustment.

Observations / Reflections / Food for thought

Glen has clearly developed the choreography to suit different abilities and experiences. This inclusive approach was rather unexpected – probably because he is fairly firm and sets very high standards. This delightfully quirky choreography would really suit some of the groups I work with in the UK and, although MADE dancers are much more technically able than Marple Movers, I think Glen’s approach would suit them.



Sing for Me MADE Performance at Theatre Royal, Hobart 2014

The performance by MADE was brilliant. It was based on a Karaoke format; audience members chose to sing a song and dancers performed to one of the 20 tracks they had rehearsed. (eg Bette Davies Eyes. Let’s Dance, Love Shack, Dancing Queen, My Way)

The show was hosted by Teresa, a new member of the group, who addressed the audience in Polish throughout. As people arrived dancers were already in the performance space, chatting to each other – looking magnificent in black tutus, fishnet tights, white dress shirts and bow ties. They were called to order by Teresa, who asked the audience to stand whilst the dancers all sang Advance Australia Fair (national anthem) in Polish!

The dancers then performed an introductory dance to a karaoke version of 'Time of My Life' – ending in an infectious giggle that spread throughout the group till they were all laughing at the audience. After this introduction members of the audience came forward to sing one of the songs from the list they had been given. Some of the dancers were in many of the pieces; others were only in one or two. The dances were very varied – from a provocative interpretation of 'Loveshack' to a very moving piece to 'Hello' performed by two dancers with their eyes closed.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

I was really impressed by Glen's choreography and the way he adjusts it to suit different abilities and also takes into account their availability for rehearsal. If they're only available one evening a week they can't have as big a part as people who can attend 2 or more. Glen was very encouraging when he was preparing them on the first night. "Remember – anything you do is much more than anyone out there can do."

The fact that MADE are performing in Hobart's well known Theatre Royal to a paying audience sets the event apart from many community dance performances in the UK. Although some community dance groups charge for their performances it is unusual for them to perform as part of a mainstream programme.

Meeting with Arts and Health Practitioners

Glen Murray introduced me to Jacquie Maginnis, Health Promotion Coordinator, who sent out an email inviting people to meet me. I gave a brief talk to 20 people working in Arts and Health – we then had chance to hear from each person there. There were some very interesting contacts for me – I learned that MADE have done some dance work with volunteers working in Hospices, using their stories to create performance. I followed this up with Glen and Shirley, one of the MADE dancers who attended the meeting. Jacquie received very positive feedback after the meeting and suggested it might be possible to arrange a training course in the future.

Dance and End of Life

During my time in Tasmania I met with several people involved in the 2010 MADE Hospice project. Representatives of Southern Hospice Care (Tasmania) approached MADE with the idea of doing a dance theatre work that they hoped would be the stimulus for members of the broader community to start to talk about death.

FAMILY was a two part work, a sound installation and a dance theatre work. The sound installation was constructed from interviews with people nearing their death and was a hallowed, reverent and completely exquisite experience. The dance theatre work was drawn from information that the hospice volunteers considered important to be addressed or communicated and the personal experiences of the participants who had either experienced recent bereavement or were preparing for bereavement or making preparations for their own death. A surprising, or perhaps not, fact was the amount of humour in the final performance work when considering the subject matter.

Glen Murray, Artistic Director MADE

Sara Wright is a Community Artist in residence at Royal Hobart Hospital Emergency Dept. She gave me information about how the project was set up. Hospice volunteers were involved in developing the piece, which used the stories of people who were dying. Sara explained how she met first with social workers to devise appropriate questions and make sure ethical issues were addressed to ensure interviews were handled sensitively. The interventions were informed by the dignity psychotherapy question protocol devised by Chochinov.⁵

Shirley, one of MADE dancers and a member of the board, described her role in FAMILY as 'rehearsal mistress' and 'dance captain'.

"...being involved in the hospice project made me much more comfortable about talking about dying..." She explained that some participants started but dropped out, finding it difficult.

Shirley told me about some of the dances in 'Family'. In one piece they all had to imagine they were speaking to someone they knew, who was now dead. They each had to address a member of the audience – checking to see if this was OK / not entirely unwelcome / uncomfortable.

In another piece they addressed the subject of death of a child. They pulled baby clothes / children's clothing out of a suitcase – all strung together as if on a clothes line.

This was clearly a deeply meaningful experience for many of the people involved.

The revelatory and transformational experiences of the hospice volunteers as they found their feet within the creative development process and the performances of FAMILY was not only joyous to witness, but for me in my capacity as choreographer and director of the project, one of the most personally and professionally instructive projects I have undertaken to date.

Glen Murray, Artistic Director MADE

Having listened to various accounts of this project I am inspired to follow this up and explore possible avenues for similar work in the UK.

Tasmania Performs

I met with Annette Downs, senior producer of *Tasmania Performs*, to talk about her plans for an international symposium in 2016. She wants a global gathering focusing on older dancers and requested that I help with contacts. I asked for the aims / purpose / outcomes.

- State government to understand the relevance of the work
- Glen's work would be profiled
- Health sector to be educated about potential of this work
- Dance teachers to see relevance of this work and see a possible area they could develop
- Site specific tour

We agreed that I would carry out research in early 2015 and send her suggestions for keynote speakers, performers, workshop leaders and people who could present a film or PechaKucha 20 x 20.¹ This has been a fascinating piece of work and is likely to result in some interesting ongoing collaborations.

¹ PechaKucha 20x20 is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and you talk along to the images.

AUSTRALIA

- Canberra: - Observed Dance for Parkinson's class at Belconnen Arts Centre
 - Took part in an open class for GOLD (Canberra's dancing elders)
 - Met with Liz Lea, artistic director Canberra Dance
- Brisbane: - Observed dance class at Judith Wright Centre
 - Led a weekend workshop for dance artists

Dance for Parkinson's

At Belconnen Arts Centre, Canberra, I observed a Dance for Parkinson's class run by Phillip Piggan, ACT Community Cultural Inclusion Officer. Phillip has been running the class for 6 terms and now includes guest teachers to lead part of the session (eg folk dance). The class is promoted through Parkinson's ACT (Australian Capital Territory) who have secured 12 months' funding from a bank (the bank has indicated they would welcome an application for funding a further 12 months).

It was interesting doing the sword dance in a small group – one of the participants, R, really found it difficult and I thought he would not be able to learn the steps. But slowly over the next 10 minutes or so he seemed to get the timing right and could perform the steps more or less perfectly. I made a note in my diary, afterwards: "Is this like the blocked motorway analogy? You get there in the end but it will take you longer if there is a diversion?"

After the session I talked through a range of issues with Jane Ingall (dance practitioner) and Phillip.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

- *There is an interesting challenge in evaluation / observation when facial expression is 'frozen'. Observed non-verbal communication has to be checked out by follow up discussion.*
- *Both Phillip and Jane are interested in my current areas of research: 'meaningful measurement' and 'person-centred choreography'. Jane offered to send me a copy of a qualitative evaluation she has done*
- *Person-centred practice has been a recurrent theme during this trip. With the exception of the 'Dance Mobility' class the majority of dance sessions I have visited have been very much focused on technique – 'getting it right'. The aim is to reproduce what the teacher is demonstrating.*

GOLD – Open class led by Jane Ingall, Canberra Dance

I enjoyed taking part in this open session for senior dancers. Jane's facilitation style is similar to mine; there were plenty of opportunities for participants to develop their own movement. There were some lovely ideas for warm up activities and it was good to revisit pat-a-cake polka again.

I led a short section with large elastic and feathers. Jane was thrilled with the feathers – in fact most of the participants were. I get the impression they don't do much with props.

GOLD – Rehearsal

The open class was followed by a rehearsal led by Charmaine Hallam. She's taken fragments of GOLD's previous choreography and put it together into a 6 minute piece danced to a David Hobson version of "Dance me to the end of love".

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

There was an interesting contrast between these two sessions. There is the process-product tension line. Inevitably the first was more process oriented and, in the second, the rehearsal had an emphasis on the performance 'product'. This impacted on the movement quality of the participants. Some of the dancers performed with confidence in both sessions. Others developed a rather anxious expression as they worked hard to remember the choreography.

More food for thought here as I reflect on what choreographers can do to develop confident embodied dancers.

Meeting with Liz Lea - Artistic Director of Canberra Dance

Met with Liz Lea and discussed her plans for a 2015 UK tour to include visiting Laban (London) and Kalasangam (Bradford). There will possibly be a performance in Liverpool or Manchester in September (Thurs 24 or Fri 25 or Sunday 27). We talked about the possibility of having a workshop hosted jointly by Merseyside Dance Initiative and Dance Manchester. This needs further discussion.

Next year there will be a Dance and Science Festival at Queensland University of Technology 20-22 August.

Brisbane

WAW Dance Class at Judith Wright Centre

I attended a dance class at Expressions Dance Studio, Judith Wright Centre. This was originally MADE (Mature Artists Dance Experience) Brisbane but there is insufficient funding for it to continue so they have formed WAW dance (Wendy and Wendy).

Sessions are led by either Wendy Wallace or Wendy McPhee.

I took part in the first hour, which was a technique class and then observed the 2nd hour during which time participants worked out duets using taught material together with movement they had devised themselves.

I had a long chat with Wendy McPhee and a shorter chat with Wendy Wallace. We discussed their approach to leading dance sessions (fairly directive with an emphasis on technique) and methods of evaluation (mainly done via the feedback session at the end of class.)

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

In observing this practice I am struck once again by the role played by the facilitator in eliciting feedback. In this session participants were complimented on their dancing and given tips for how they can improve (ie copy the demonstrated moves more accurately). I would have been really interested to know what the dancers felt / which parts they enjoyed / was there anything they would have liked to have changed. However I have to acknowledge my own particular bias towards collaborative practice and creative dance. Some of these dancers do not want to be involved in developing the choreography and feel it has not been a 'proper' dance session if technique has not been taught (see next section).

Dance and Dementia

I was asked to lead a workshop demonstrating how I involve people with dementia in dance sessions. This led to some very interesting discussions afterwards. Beverley Giles, who organised the workshop, is a dementia care consultant, educator and dance enthusiast. Participants included dance practitioners together with members of dance groups for mature people. There was also one participant with Alzheimer's together with her carer.

I led a creative workshop, which was something of a culture shock to some participants. One of them said "I've enjoyed myself – although we haven't done much dancing". She meant that I hadn't taught much technique.



Dance and Dementia Workshop Judith Wright Centre Brisbane 2014

I had some very interesting feedback from J, who has Alzheimer's. She said what she had got from the workshop was "achievement.....I can do it...in a creative sense... I could do it, yeah... The people running the session were firing the right questions at me". Her carer (husband) made particular reference to some of the props used. He felt that the large elastic gave a sense of connectedness and a security for anyone who worries about being able to follow others. He mentioned that the activity with feathers has a great playfulness about it. "It is all about playing, with no rules, there is no wrong way, just enjoy." J had enjoyed it because she was not worried about failing.

One thing J had been worried about before the session was whether she would be able to remember people's names. I'm reminded of what Rachel Rogers said in her Churchill report. She referred to the fact that I prefer not to use name badges. I have revised my views on this having met J and seen how name badges can help reduce anxiety.

Dancing with dementia – one size does not fit all. My conversations with J helped me understand her frustration when advocates speak on behalf of people living with Alzheimer's Disease. For example she feels that sometimes there is an unhelpful emphasis on negative aspects of the disease. J has discovered that dance offers opportunities for new learning and taking part in mainstream activities, rather than projects designed solely for people with dementia. The following day I had the opportunity to talk further with J and her husband as they took

Stradbroke Island Brisbane



me for a drive to show me some of their favourite beaches. We talked about the previous day's dance workshop where, at one point, she had stopped moving and seemed confused. When I showed her the move she remembered and told me she'd stopped because she couldn't see me and didn't know what to do.

Observations / Reflections / Food for Thought

This was fascinating feedback. It was a fairly simple 'follow me' warm up activity but it had completely thrown J because we did 2 steps to the left and 2 steps to the right. Up until then the group were all facing me. I did a quick demonstration but J's short-term memory problem meant that she could not retain that information and repeat it. This was a valuable lesson for me – I won't forget this conversation.

Conclusions

My Fellowship travels have provided me with opportunities to see a range of different approaches to dance practice with mature dancers and I have returned to the UK with a number of ideas for developing my practice. Observations of rehearsals and performances have given me practical ideas that I am keen to try out with my dance groups.

To complement this there have been detailed discussions with a fascinating range of people who have contributed to my understanding of attitudes to older people in other cultures. These include dance practitioners, older people, academics, service providers, artists, teenagers dancing in the street, Maori dancers in a museum performance, health promotion professionals, activity leaders, scientists, dancers from the Hip-operation crew, hospice volunteers, members of the Death Café and hosts in the various accommodation settings.

Naturally these conversations have resulted in a better understanding of the way services are delivered. There have also been some unexpected additional outcomes: unplanned meetings and contacts that raised new questions and led me to new avenues of research and practice.

Next steps and future plans

- The observations, reflections and food for thought arising from discussions with practitioners will be incorporated into my seminars, training and mentoring work throughout the UK and occasionally further afield (for example the annual community dance course run in Osaka, Japan).
- I am revising my textbook *An Introduction to Community Dance Practice* for a planned second edition. The findings from my WCMT travels will inform the updates in some sections of the book – particularly those dealing with leadership styles and choreographic practices.
- The conversations at the Death Café in Auckland and with hospice volunteers in Tasmania have re-ignited my interest in exploring ways in which dance might be part of end-of-life experiences. I have made contact with staff at my local hospital and arranged to visit them to discuss ways of being involved in end of life care.
- Following my observations of MADE's performance and subsequent discussions with practitioners (overseas and at home) I have set up a new company - *Laughing Knees Dance Company* – which will offer performance opportunities for older people and intergenerational groups. This will be separate from Marple Movers, my local group, which includes participants who do not want to perform. They just want to attend regular sessions. Laughing Knees Dance Company will offer two strands of performance work:– structured improvisation in informal settings and the occasional piece of set choreography.
- I have already made contact with a young dancer, Terry Kvasnik, who is

experienced in hip-hop and martial arts practice. We have had several meetings and are working on a film to challenge stereotypes of ageing. It is inspired by the Hip-Operation Crew in Waiheke Island and the hip-hop dancers on the streets in Auckland. We have run a weekend workshop in the UK , with senior dancers, in which we developed dance moves from Tai Chi and Qi Gong techniques. The results are being edited into a short film which will be shown at conferences, creative ageing events and professional development courses for dancers.

- I am exploring possible ways of securing funding in order to invite Glen Murray from Tasmania's MADE to devise a performance piece with a group of older dancers in the UK.
- Philip Piggin, Community Cultural Inclusion Officer and Dance for Parkinson's teacher will be visiting the UK in 2015. He will visit groups I am working with and I will put him in touch with dance practitioners who are leading Dance for Parkinson's sessions.
- I have carried out the research for the *Tasmania Performs* global gathering. This has been a fascinating piece of work and it is likely that I will have a role in delivering the event in October 2016.

Appendices

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