

Dancing in the energy fields of light:

The release of cultural identity into modern contemporary dance

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My experiences of teaching dance have shown that choreographic vision is often shaped by a myriad of social structures embedded in lived experiences. Cultural understandings are similarly accessed from a matrix of customs, beliefs and values that are inherent in the essence of the culture (Salter, 2000). This paper describes how I devised a teaching approach to connect fibres and threads of cultural spirituality, physical energy, and emotional strength and how I wove these into a cloak of modern contemporary dance performance, enmeshed in the Māori culture of Aotearoa, New Zealand. This transformation transpired through a creative process that offered dancers authentic freedom to release their cultural identity into the dance experience. I based the creative process on Brennan's (1993) research on human energy fields, where creative energies of both dancer and choreographer work in different dimensions of spiritual energy and consciousness. Taking this stance also saw a new pedagogical style emerge, seemingly through the synergy formed by the depth of response of the dancers to the choreographer's movement ideas. Furthermore this paper helps to clarify and understand what meaning was uncovered through these sensory connections, by using a hermeneutic approach to allow the voice of the choreographer to interpret the dancers' response to the work.

INTRODUCTION

For the opening ceremony of a new Academy of Performing Arts at the University of Waikato, I was invited to choreograph an interdisciplinary live performance of modern contemporary dance accompanied by live voice and music of the Māori culture. I was motivated by, not only the powerful imagery of the sensory connections of dance and music this performance offered, but also by the opportunity to devise a new and innovative artistic pedagogical style for teaching dance.

My prior academic research had investigated both the external and intrinsic value of modern contemporary dance (Coe, 1998). Due to the sensory nature of the dance (Gray, 1989), my research discovered vital learning had occurred through unfolding dance educational experiences that saw student participants learn how to appreciate the uniqueness of personal artistic endeavour and in doing so, strengthen a sense of self. I had used flexible dance pedagogies based on reflective teaching practice to enhance artistic learning. The art of reflection not only kept my dance pedagogy dynamic but also created space for me to respond more effectively in meeting the diverse needs of my dancers (Coe, 1998).

SHAPING NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

I saw this new dance performance as an opportunity to expand the perimeters of this research and develop a new perspective in teaching interdisciplinary artistic experience. Before commencement I gave considerable thought to shaping both the research and the choreographic processes by considering:

What dance pedagogical style would be appropriate to transform choreographic vision, enmeshed in the indigenous Māori culture of Aotearoa, New Zealand, into an interwoven contemporary dance and musical performance?

For me, this question raised several perspectives: One of addressing the teaching or choreographic style; how to develop an effective creative process that valued the strengths of the dancers; and how to clarify my understanding of the Māori perspective of the dance.

I will now discuss these perspectives in further detail.

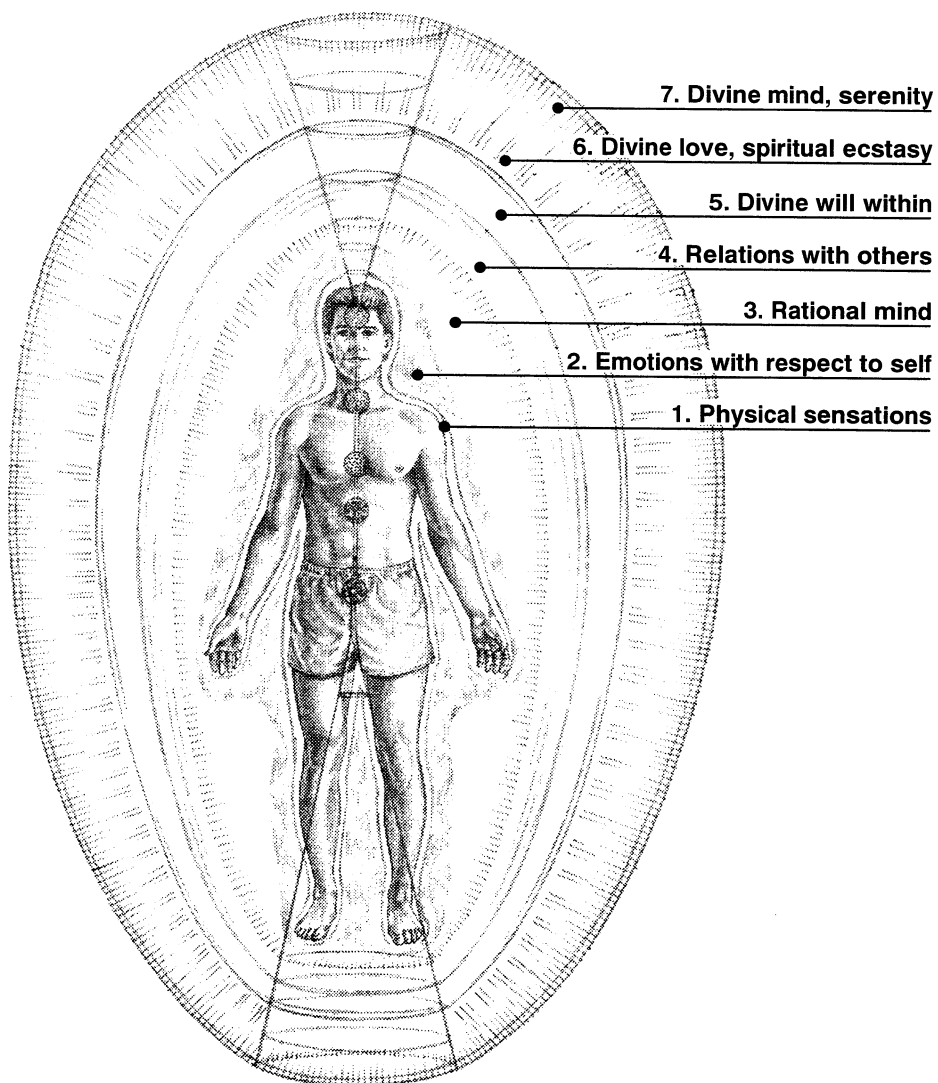
Firstly, I wanted to explore how to work in mutual collaboration with the dancers, empowering them to dance from their embodied selves. I knew we had to develop a trust in each other that we could bring this work to fruition. I knew I needed to be firm, yet inclusive, demanding yet sensitive, and empower the dancers to trust their own innate feelings, to allow their cultural identity to permeate the modern dance.

Secondly, I wanted to identify with Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) belief in the power of the creative process. He sees it is through the creative process that new combinations of dance ideas are strengthened, at an intersection where different cultures, beliefs, lifestyles and knowledge mingle. This perspective appealed to me due to my dance theme, thus providing me with a strong base on which to ground my pedagogical style. I also wanted to deepen my knowledge of the creative process so I chose to explore working in dimensions of consciousness of the human energy fields (Brennan, 1993). Brennan believes a creative consciousness from the core reaches the physical through the auric field so I wanted to explore these dimensions.

According to Brennan (1993), and seen in the following diagram (Fig. 1.0) the human energy field contains dimensions of consciousness that provide a vehicle for the creative process. The auric field is:

... composed of seven levels...each level penetrates through the body and extends **outward** from the skin. Each successive level is of a higher 'frequency' than the one before. Each level is different according to the makeup of energy consciousness in that level. (Brennan, 1993, pp. 19- 20)

Figure 1.0 - The Seven Levels of the Auric Field. (Brennan, 1993, p.21)



I wanted to strengthen my understanding of working in this auric field, as over years of teaching dance, I have developed strong perceptive skills of the diverse physical and spiritual nature of the human body. My choreographic intent for this piece was to connect the *inner* consciousness of the dancers to the *outer* vibration of energies that surrounded them.

My third consideration was to develop sensitivity to cultural protocols to be able to address the theme of this artistic intent. I saw it as important to clarify my understanding of Māori cultural identity. According to Durie (1998) "...there is no one Māori cultural stereotype, and being Māori can have quite different meanings for various individuals..."(cited in Salter, 2000, p.70). Being Māori is embedded in the sense Māori students use their lived experience and how they use "...the myriad of attitudes, beliefs, needs and values, customs and other concepts that are the essence of the culture itself" (Bevan–Brown, 1996, p. 97). Māori people can identify their cultural heritage by referring to their tribal affiliation. Salter (2000) illustrates this further :

There are many dialectical and historical nuances of difference between tribes, but there are also many similarities attached to cultural beliefs and values, which are enacted on a daily basis ...Tikanga (traditional values), whakapapa (genealogical descent), kaupapa (traditional protocols and agendas), and history itself are all tribally specific. (Salter,2000, p.69.)

Māori traditional cultural dance (*kapa haka*) displays these historical nuances of difference in cultural beliefs and values. These dance forms are mostly seen at traditional dance festivals and judged on how strongly pride and strength of identity is displayed through prescribed interpretation and demonstration of such skills as *haka*, (warrior dance of men); *poi* (women's graceful and rhythmical dance portraying subtle intricate wrist movements in swinging the short or long poi); *waiata* (song) and *waiata-a-ringā* (men and women's action songs) to name a few. Men and women fully immerse themselves in traditional dance at cultural festivals, exhibiting gender difference in body gesture, stance, formation and voices, which in turn demonstrate subtle differences in tribal heritage (Salter, 2000).

As my intention was to study new modern dance choreography that would retain these cultural connections, I chose qualitative research methods in the phenomenological genre for my study. Qualitative research methods include perspectives of a sensitive, intuitive nature (Moustakas, 1994). Fraleigh (2000) supports this stance, as "phenomenology seeks the intangible obvious, that which lies before our eyes and in our hearts, however obscured by habit..." (p.55). To me, the intangible obvious I was seeking was to be the essence of cultural identity within the dance experience.

I used the following research methods to capture language and behaviour befitting this study. I wrote detailed observation field notes, made a video-recording of one rehearsal and held a formal interview with both dancers at the completion of the work. The dancers also made records of our reflective discussion at the end of each rehearsal available to me.

INTRODUCING THE DANCE PERSPECTIVES

I was honoured to work with two Māori dancers, Tama and Waimarie, who were vital, athletic, and carried strong *mana* (presence). They had both received some modern dance training, but had never danced together before. Tama's career was in stunt work, in film and television, and Waimarie was a freelance dancer. Initially Tama admitted he was not feeling too self-assured in dance, as he had not danced recently. He immediately apologised for his inflexibility, but made it clear that he wished to offer perfection of image and movement. Waimarie was a confident dancer of a sensitive nature, but at the outset she too appeared a little nervous and shy, admitting a fear of not being good enough to meet her partner's expectations.

My basic understanding of dance knowledge as a choreographer is grounded in an understanding of Rudolf Laban's (1948) principles of movement. I have learned how to use these movement influences to understand dancers' abilities. Siegel (1998) highlights how Laban's influence draws "attention to dynamics, use of space and weight, to phrasing, transitions, the shape of the movement, parts of the body used, and not used, to a performer's sense of space through which he or she is moving" (p.94). I like to draw on this knowledge to try to understand the dance intention more from the perspective of the dancer, than of that of the choreographer.

By adding a feminist learner-centred perspective to my teaching, particularly from a sensitive, caring standpoint, I felt I could recognise and value my dancers as unique individuals, to help them overcome their admitted fears. I had already established that I wanted to work in mutual collaboration, to try to transform their dancing, because we all needed to 'earth' the dance to sense the dance "in the mind's body, in its bones and muscles" (McKechnie, 1999, p.6). I explained to the dancers how I wanted to develop connections of sensory image with the Māori language being sung. I also shared my belief, that these connections would only emerge if I allowed them authentic freedom for their personal movement interpretation to evolve from their cultural heritage and lived experiences.

I will now describe the choreographic process of this modern dance performance. I will discuss how I worked with the dancers through the first five levels of the human energy fields incorporating my observations, accompanied by the reflective words of the dancers, culminating in the song composer's response to our artistic creation.

DANCING IN THE ENERGY FIELDS OF LIGHT

Dancing in the light of the **first level** of the human energy field introduces the physical dimension, the level where all physical consciousness takes place (Brennan, 1993, p. 20).

I believe dancers have a heightened kinaesthetic awareness of bodily sensations, but the key to enhancing a consciousness at this level was the development of all forms of

sensory perception. Initially I noted both dancers were a little reticent at working together. They appeared to be quite overawed and nervous with each other. Their warm up began with stretching and releasing, but to stimulate more sensory connection I encouraged them to massage each other's back, neck, head and feet. I asked them to explore movements around and over their own upper body, close to the head, caressing the face.

I had prepared some 'stick-figure' diagrams of 'image sparks' of duo shapes and co-operative balances. These pictorial images promoted further movement improvisation. A flowing energy was triggered as they experimented with supportive movements, alternately taking the lead in improvisation, devising new supportive shapes. As I gave positive feedback, a new energetic order and flow of vitality emerged in their movements, as they gained more confidence. In new supportive contact work it can be quite invasive of personal space but both dancers steadily relaxed and although still nervous, tried very hard to work together.

Reflective discussion afterwards brought both dancers together to speak of a quiet confidence of their achievements, mainly in regard to the promising trust and belief in each other that was beginning to develop. Initially it was Waimarie who had admitted she was fearful of not meeting Tama's expectations, but after this first rehearsal the positions were reversed.

Tama's response...*I am in absolute awe of Waimarie's line, lightness, softness and fluidity of moving . I am too hard, too stilted... it feels good though, hope it looks as good.*

Waimarie's response ...*I feel already that I am moving in new territories. I get the feeling that Tama is nervous of expressing emotion...he does not want to admit he has any flaws, he's got to be the best...this is not surprising he has incredible power, wow...*

My reflective comment was in regard to the connection I was searching for. There appeared to be an entity missing between Māori being Māori, and Māori wanting to be modern. Was I being too ambitious in my expectation for this piece?

Dancing in the light of the **second level** of the human energy field introduces feelings and emotions with respect to oneself, more in regard to self consciousness (Brennan, 1993, p.22).

The next rehearsal followed a similar pattern, starting in the physical dimension and working in movement improvisation. At this early stage, I was really surprised as to how they suddenly began to criticise their own failings and weaknesses, never speaking of anything positive. To keep energies flowing, I encouraged more of this negativity to be expressed, but I maintained a stance of positive, constructive criticism. My perceptive observation noted that every movement and comment that was made was affected by the way they felt about themselves. I questioned them as to whether this was the way they always worked when choreographing dance. Tama's response was: *You just tell us what you want Dotti and we will do it, that is the way we work.* This was not at all what I had anticipated nor what I wanted.

I wanted to address their personal strengths but I was floundering. I decided to proceed with my ideas and pursue different vibrations of male and female energies from traditional Māori dance. By addressing areas of personal power I believed a new energy might permeate the rehearsal. I asked them to explore different traditional cultural dance elements appropriate to gender difference of facial and body gesture, stance, jumps, body and head alignment and footwork.

They were interested in pursuing this for a time, but we kept hitting blockages, as they were not really paying attention to this approach. Tama preferred to do gymnastic stunts instead of putting traditional cultural vibrations into the dance. Both dancers seemed more interested in sharing known modern dance moves. This shook my belief in what I had set out to accomplish.

At the end of this rehearsal I decided to video-record our progress. In the reflection discussion, on seeing this recording, there was an instant response from the dancers.

Tama was very negative...ugh...there was no evidence of feeling... I know I am starting to dig deeper, I know I want to look good but something's missing... possibly the gymnastic stunts were not appropriate?

Waimarie decided she was going to lose her 'homespun look', as she was tired of her appearance. ...my hips are so large, I look so stilted...oh goodness, I thought I looked better than that.

Their reflections were totally about themselves, how they felt, not the dance, so I was confident we were moving in an energy level of self - consciousness.

They left the rehearsal with their heads down, so I vowed not to bring out the video-camera again. I too, was pretty devastated with their response, as I had observed a growing understanding in the work. This made me question my teaching approach, was I expecting too much too soon?

Dancing in the light of the **third level** of the human energy field is associated with connecting mental processes, working through the rational mind (Brennan, 1993, p.22).

To stimulate more mental awareness I empowered the dancers to take more ownership of their moves. I now spoke of the mental imagery, rather than offering visual diagrammatic form. I wanted more harmony and balance in their mental support of each other and so I verbally challenged the purpose of each move. As they repeated choreographed work, I challenged them to develop a more sensory perspective in their moves, demanding more changes in the quality of their efforts by saying;

Soak in his strength...

The head is sacred, Tama, **soften** your touch...

Treasure her face...hold the look...

Absorb the forehead connection...

Extend into the space... fingers...**wiri, wiri** (cultural move)

Hear her timing...**listen** for his breath...

Through responding to these comments, their movements appeared to gain a new clarity. As I stimulated sensory connections, the dancers seemed to spontaneously release new aspects of cultural identity into their moves. This reaction seemed to suggest that inner thoughts and images were now beginning to drive the dance. I noted an increase in *mental perception* as their movements were becoming intuitively interwoven with each other and the spontaneity was extended into longer moments of improvisation.

Evidence of this started to emerge when they stopped and questioned why they made a certain move. Waimarie exclaimed... *I wonder why I did that? I really have to look inward and feel what I look like* (as we had no dance mirrors.) If they faltered, or lost their balance, they would stop and discuss the situation with me, they would reflect on why the energy seemed to be blocked. We would collaborate to re-adjust muscle tension and openly discuss and question new creative ideas. Tama made a huge breakthrough when he spontaneously released a very powerful jump, and landed in an amazing traditional stance of the Māori warrior. Waimarie was ecstatic in her response to this: Tama... *You are so amazing, your jump was fantastic, such amazing energy ! You keep lighting up !* Tama's response was equally surprising... *I don't know where that came from ? ...*

As they worked the dance, I observed them closely, as they forged a new interesting working relationship. If Tama criticised Waimarie she would question him. She would stop the dance, she would appeal to him, discuss the problem and then together they would work out the answer. However, if Waimarie criticised Tama, he would keep working until his moves were what she wanted, he tried harder, he took more risks, he strengthened his body line, re-addressed his body strength, he went deeper to the floor, jumped higher, at all times striving to be better than before.

Reflective discussion indicated that both dancers were still far more interested in how the movement looked than how it felt. However, as I questioned as to where the moves were initiated, Tama began to talk non-stop, and became positive about everything. *When you dance now, you only think of connection...awesome!! I've always wanted to dance with Waimarie, but I did not think it was going to be this good. I am blown away by her commitment to perfection... her focus is something else...*

Waimarie was quite embarrassed by this admission, and could not stop laughing. She added *that she could not get over how Tama kept forgetting the moves, and how he had to keep asking her what to do next...you never stopped talking Tama...I matched your every movement today Tama, and you were toast !*

From my perspective I was also extremely pleased as the dancers were now enjoying the experience. This was a relief for me as the choreographer, as I knew now we could move into finding the essence of the dance, as they were more open-minded and more responsive to each other.

Dancing in the light of the **fourth level** of the human energy field is associated with the need for loving interactions with friends and family (Brennan, 1993, p.23).

As the dancers reached the fourth level of the energy field the dance *contained all the love and the joy, as well as the struggle and pain of relationship* (Brennan, 1993, p. 23). Positive emotion and feeling started to enter rehearsals quite openly, as we all showed an appreciation of our efforts through the language of touch. We all hugged each other throughout rehearsals, when the dance work was both good and weak. I sensed more diffusion of energies in the movements and to ensure these were enhanced with new love and light I adjusted my vocabulary, and my tone of voice.

Reach out towards her...don't let go
Accept the floor...give into it...
 Maintain that lovely sense of **belonging...treasure it**
Release the spirit...**accept it**
Give into his strength...
Project your energy upwards...
 Do **you need** her?...show me...

This was not exactly dance technical language, but instead, words that emphasised greater sensory connection. Furthermore, my change of tone of voice, showed a more empathic sensitivity to exploring the effective movement that I could now see was beginning to emerge.

I sensed and noted the dancers were moving between alternate projective and receptive energy, as the flow between them appeared to melt into each other, seen in support or weight displacement or balance. As they went deeper into the floor or higher into the air I encouraged them to use their breath control to regulate and direct energy streams into spatial changes and rhythmic patterns, deliberately expelling breath in sound to assist each other with the timing of weight transference. Tama commented...*it's all those little moments that are so good...it's becoming so natural...*

Cultural vibrations and dance qualities spontaneously erupted into the dance choreography, surprising the dancers with a release of powerful emotion. I observed a new dynamic choreography evolving from the connections of vitality and natural rhythms.

Reflective discussion was now eagerly anticipated. Tama was adamant that...*without those connections there was no point in progressing, you have to have your heart in the work. It helps to get your attitude right... if there's no feeling of connection...well, you can still dance, but not with each other...* Waimarie agreed and added that *the dance was becoming really organic, it had a sense of being earthed, a great sense of belonging...*

When dancing in the light of the **fifth level** of the human energy field, it becomes the level of the divine will (Brennan, 1993, p.24)

Later the following week, we met our music composer and put the dance together with the live music. As we heard the strong Māori voice penetrate the hall, the evenness and mood of the music brought out a whole new stream of consciousness. As the dance connected to the music the dancers suddenly found their *turangawaewae*, 'their place to stand'.

Stronger cultural vibrations emerged as they synchronised their movement with the delicate nuances of sound changes. A calm serene strength appeared to affect the energy of this interwoven artistry, as it flowed in spiritual streams of consciousness. The dancers were alert, responsive, and never let go of each other's vision as they danced. There was connection of forehead, back of hand on face, hand on the back, the shoulder, expressive facial cultural gesture of eyes and smiles and they positively glowed, as they met and parted during the dance.

The composer was quite overcome by, not only the quality and standard of performance of the dance but also by the essence of Māori values in the movement and in the interpretation of his words and music. Apparently the choreography had interpreted the meaning of the song without us even knowing the translation of the language. Waimarie responded to his comment *...that that was probably why the spiritual connection became so strong between us. The dance has become so special for all of us, it is so incredibly emotional, and very deep rooted, we are so proud...*

Tama's response *.....I cannot believe how people can dance when they are so technique-driven...if there's no soul there's no connection of body and spirit...it's this connection ...wow, I'm saturated ...I feel amazing...*

Both dancers sat down and just hugged each other and wept.

MEANINGFUL TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS IN THE DANCE

In order to understand what meaning was uncovered through these textual connections in the dance experience, I will move into hermeneutics for the linguistic interpretation. Hermeneutic research is appropriate at this stage as the focus of the dance was on conscious experience, and taking this approach allows my voice, as the choreographer, to interpret the dancers' response to my work. Firstly, I will re-visit my intentions for this dance duet, and then discuss the outcomes in the light of current literature. Key aspects of my pedagogical style will emerge throughout the following discussion that can be transferred to other artistic work. Finally, I will conclude the paper with reflections of the full experience from the perception of the dancers.

My choreographic vision and powerful imagery did materialize into dance choreography enmeshed in the indigenous Māori culture. *How* we worked within the dimensions of consciousness, and what we paid attention to, within this collaborative frame of creative energies saw, I believe, an emergence of a true essence of the dance, a cultural consciousness. I noted, as the dancers progressed through the work, that the creative process became a transforming force within the artistic intent, releasing in completion, this sense of cultural identity.

Together we formulated an appropriate dance pedagogical style of mutual collaboration that initially emerged from a synergy formed from the depth of response of the dancers to my movement ideas. We also valued throughout, the strength of the creative process through which all our ideas and perceptions flowed. My teaching approach highlighted the use of my intuition and observational skills.

I found myself carefully studying the dancers' bodies; picking up the vibrations of physical energy; listening to the variations of stillness and effort; observing the mixture of expression, each aspect of joy, and each frown. Together we felt surprise; together we shared our doubts. Empowerment was reciprocated, as we each in turn respected each other's contribution to choreographic intent through acceptance or rejection of each other's opinions. As new movements evolved, I would encourage the dancers to 'hold' the work, and repeat it, until it became a consciously felt expression. The dance form took shape from my ability to connect fibres of cultural spirituality, physical energy, and emotional strength and weave these into a cloak of modern contemporary dance performance.

We had elusive creative problems, but these were mostly of an emotive content, as we shared moments of great joy mixed with moments of sheer despair. There were many times when we wanted to walk away from the dance and give up when frustrations in understanding each other, or ineptness at completing the moves, occurred. I now agree with Csikszentmihalyi (1996), that the most elusive creative problems generate the greatest changes in one's dimension of consciousness, but they are the most difficult ones to work on.

Throughout the creative process I connected my perceptive and creative gifts to the dynamic energies of my dancers, strengthening and enhancing the formatting of the dance. This connection is recognised by Chodorow (1991), as counter transference response, as both parties in the process learn how to use and combine their creative powers to empower bodily harmony. This response became the intersection where different beliefs, lifestyles and knowledge combine resulting in new dance ideas (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). I believe this counter transference response gave the **power** to the creative process, verifying my belief and understanding of the values of mutual collaboration.

Another perspective that had concerned me was fear of working in culturally inappropriate ways. These fears were dispelled as the dancers took ownership of the dance and valued their own interpretation of choreographic intent, dispelling my qualms of contravening cultural protocols.

No longer was priority of importance placed on the image of the dance, as Tama had intended. As ego boundaries appeared to be transcended, a cultural harmony integrated mind, body and spirit and an inner drive of energy was accessed. The phenomenon, the essence of cultural identity, was released into the dance from the embodied selves of the dancers. "Phenomenon brings to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself, the totality of what lies before us in the light of day" (Heidegger, cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

This sense of cultural identity was accessed, I believe, through combining dance ideas that gave the dancers a sense of knowing, of dancing with a particular image. This release, as Waimarie describes was... *a cultural consciousness of a motivating image of 'moving towards the light', of her own culture.* My observation saw the dancers shift from

dancing with this particular image of cultural consciousness to allowing them to be danced by it. Chodorow (1991) notes..."expressive actions that can be culturally 'read' do have their source in the cultural unconscious "(Chodorow, 1991, p.124).

Delving into a deeper level of consciousness within the flow of the dance saw this sense of cultural identity permeate the final performance, indicating what was stored in the dancers' 'collective memory' of cultural heritage. This 'collective memory' can be interpreted as trusting "our innate intelligence, as it speaks, or brings us images and feelings in unpredictable ways" (Fraleigh 2000,p.57). The dancers revealed this trust, as dance expression was expressed at an almost 'double consciousness' level. Waimarie saw this as... *consciously putting cultural moves onto a second consciousness of learned modern contemporary dance moves...*

I observed key moments in the dance when this cultural identity was released. The dancers suddenly found a flow of a higher level of consciousness and the movements of the dancers began to change. Waimarie spoke of this change herself as a flow of consciousness, being *...a rush of well-being, of happiness, of being fine tuned together...but above all consciously accepting each other and what we could offer each other in the dance.*

This flow of psychic and physical energies, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) believes, can only be felt in a state of higher consciousness, during the performance, and, as long as the thread of thought is not broken, can still be felt afterwards, in the memory of the experience. Cooper Albright (1997), adds support to this transformation,"...it is in the connectedness of identities that creates the transformative power of live performance." (p.27).

THE DANCERS' FINAL THOUGHTS OF THE MEMORY OF THE EXPERIENCE.

The value of the experience was certainly left in the memory for Tama as he describes the process...*it was so good to move like this...the technical side you do so automatically, but this was awesome.. I did not realise I was doing cultural moves I was so connected to the whole vibrancy of the piece...*

Waimarie too was thrilled, yet calmly philosophical... *When I have to perform cultural dance (as in the traditional form) I never feel that I am dancing from the right place, but with this dance I was...we felt really earthed ...it's great to use our modern dance training and infuse it with our own essence of being Māori ...what I found amazing was that an Englishwoman, from the other side of the world, comes over and makes such amazing connections to us ... I think it's because you do not carry any guilt about us as Māori, and you are not stereo-typed to just seeing us perform Māori culture...you saw something more...*In answer to Waimarie's comment I saw a transformation of two beautiful dancers working in different streams of consciousness, sourcing their identity, pursuing unique creative ideas and meanings, creating powerful meaning into dance performance.

Earlier I had addressed my intention to use a feminist learner-centred perspective to my teaching, particularly from a sensitive, caring standpoint, and the findings of my research celebrate this decision. A key component of working in this pedagogical style is

recognising and valuing the dancers or artists as unique individuals, allowing freedom to release their interpretation and all parties trusting in each other to bring to full potential, the artistic vision.

We worked in mutual collaboration, valuing the power of the creative process, to transform artistic intent, to sense the dance “in the mind’s body, in its bones and muscles” (Mckechnie, 1999, p. 6). We must never doubt the strength of sensory perception in artistic work. A flow of energy can be felt through the senses, of hearing, feeling and touching, both sensing and intuitive, ultimately becoming a direct knowing, as connections of sensory image are transported into compositional work.

The dancers connected to different levels of consciousness (Brennan, 1993), in human energy fields of light, embraced and enmeshed in a Māori sense of spirituality, because I offered the dancers authentic freedom for their personal movement interpretation to evolve, resulting in them dancing in a new pulsing energy of life. Their support for each other was seen through intuitive gesture of dance text, assisted by language and sound that enhanced the essence of Māori, indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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