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Abstract

LINK Dance Company at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) offers postgraduate students the opportunity to bridge the gap between graduate level studies in dance and professional practice. Students gain company experience whilst being able to further their research interests in dance throughout their pre-professional year. LINK Dance Company also encourages students to contribute to the choreographic process where possible to enhance professional practice. Using the Company in 2017 for an exploratory case study, the aim of this research was to investigate the presence of creative awareness in the choreographic process between choreographers and dancers. The research methodology involved mixed qualitative methods of participatory observations and informal interviews with participants on secondment with a professional dance company during the making of a new contemporary dance work. Common themes and habitual negative tendencies were expressed by the dancers during interviews and compared to a developed set of indicators of creative awareness. Observations of the choreographic process between the choreographer and dancer relationship were used to determine one of three pathways supporting how choreography was generated and how dancers understand their responses to choreographic instructions. The rationale for this approach was to identify attributes of professional creative competency (*awareness*) and gain an insight into how such attributes could assist students in transitioning from trainee dancer to professional contemporary dancer. In the course of the research I found numerous instances of what I refer to as 'creative awareness'. I isolate the capacity to understand, demonstrate, produce and critically engage (or self-reflect) with important qualities, skills and techniques needed for a successful relationship between dancer and choreographer as pertaining to a creative awareness. I argue harnessing this awareness is necessary for a trainee dancer's readiness to transition to a professional dancer.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i. Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education,

ii. Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis, or

iii. Contain any defamatory material.

Signature …… Date: 7th November 2017

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To the Choreographers and Dancers (who remain anonymous for the purpose of this study), that were involved in sharing their experiences and knowledge with me to bring insight and light to my study, I would like to thank you sincerely also for your participatory support.

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Introduction

Study Interests at LINK in 2017

LINK Dance Company is based at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) at Edith Cowan University and offers postgraduate students the opportunity to bridge the gap between graduate studies in dance and professional practice (LINK Dance Company, 2015). The program provides a new selection of graduate dancers each year to complete further studies and experience a dance company environment in a conservatory setting (LINK Dance Company, 2015). Dancers participate in company classes, attend rehearsals, and travel (and are responsible for fundraising and self-managing) a national and international tour, which in its entirety is an enriching experience that you would expect to find belonging to a small contemporary dance company. Professional Australian and international choreographers are appointed during the year to create new works with the Company. From a curriculum respect it is also an honours year and students research a project of choice and write a thesis during the program.

My interest in the contemporary choreographic process is the collaborative relationship between a choreographer and dancer(s) and how this influences the final product of a dance work itself. My curiosity in this process initiated from reflective practice of my own uptake of choreography and experiences I encountered as an undergraduate dance student in the dance faculty at the Queensland University of Technology. After spending three years with the same students, teaching staff and environment, I realised that it had become a familiar safe haven with limiting challenges and pressure influencing creativity and exploration in developing movement. As a facilitator for teaching and making dance, recognising learning styles of students is an important attribute for developing both physically and intellectually as a dancer and to what innovations could be used to enhance this environment and creativity for all concerned. I realised that I could enhance my creative potential as a dancer in a new environment like LINK Dance Company in Western Australia and reflect on this for future teaching and performance making purposes.

My specific research interests in creativity in the choreographic partnership between the choreographer and dancer stem from Rachel Farrer (2014, p. 95) who suggests the dancer is often overlooked in the choreographic process, especially if they are young and have little or no awareness of their creative potential. Often the perception of a dance work is that the

choreography is generated purely by the choreographer; the reality is that it is often more of a collaborative approach with the help of dancers especially in the contemporary dance setting (Farrer, 2014, p. 95; Roche, 2011, p. 106). Farrer (2014, p. 95) goes as far to say that a choreographer's creativity is largely supported by the creativity of their dancers.

I suggest that in contemporary dance there tends to be three pathways in the choreographic process for dancers and choreographers to progress; the *Dancer's choice* pathway, the *Choreographer's choice* pathway or a combination of both. The *Choreographer's choice* pathway would indicate a less creative scenario whereas the *Dancer's choice* alternative would display the opposite, with a combination of both implying an enhanced collaborative relationship.

The principal aim of this study was to recognise the presence of creative awareness in the relationship between the choreographer and dancer, specifically focusing on the dancer. A secondary aim was to formulate a set of indicators for locating this creative awareness; as a way in which to identify themes and patterns from the participants' responses and to link this to my observations as a participant in LINK Dance Company. I have called this the *Indicators of Creative Awareness*. I did not set out to prove creative awareness was there, or even prove what creativity is, rather explore the level to which the participants engaged what I understand is a particular kind of *awareness.*

Defining Creativity

Creativity for this study is informed by the idea of changes or transformations produced from existing ideas or concepts to new products, and more specifically as any act or idea that when changed or transformed is considered innovative or new (California State University, Northridge, n.d; Candy and Bilda, 2009, p. 8). Further to this is the concept that the intentions and motivations behind such transformations have *value* (Sternberg, Grigorenko, Singer, 2004, p. 22-23). Creative individuals show a curiosity and actively apply their interpretive skills to form an original interpretation (Sternberg et al., 2004, p. 28). Robert Sternberg, Elena Grigorenko and Jerome Singer (2004, p. 33) in reference to identifying creativity in dance environments suggest that firstly the dancer understands that they are present in making something new and secondly, the observer is able to perceive innovation in context to the discipline.

Martine and Stephen Batchelor (2017) define creative awareness as an individual's capacity to reflect on and accept not only their own good qualities and skill usage but also their negative habitual patterns. The following conceptual framework between choreographer, dancer and creativity was presented in a Masters Research project by S.M Oetgens van Waveren Pancras Clifford (2013, p. 5).

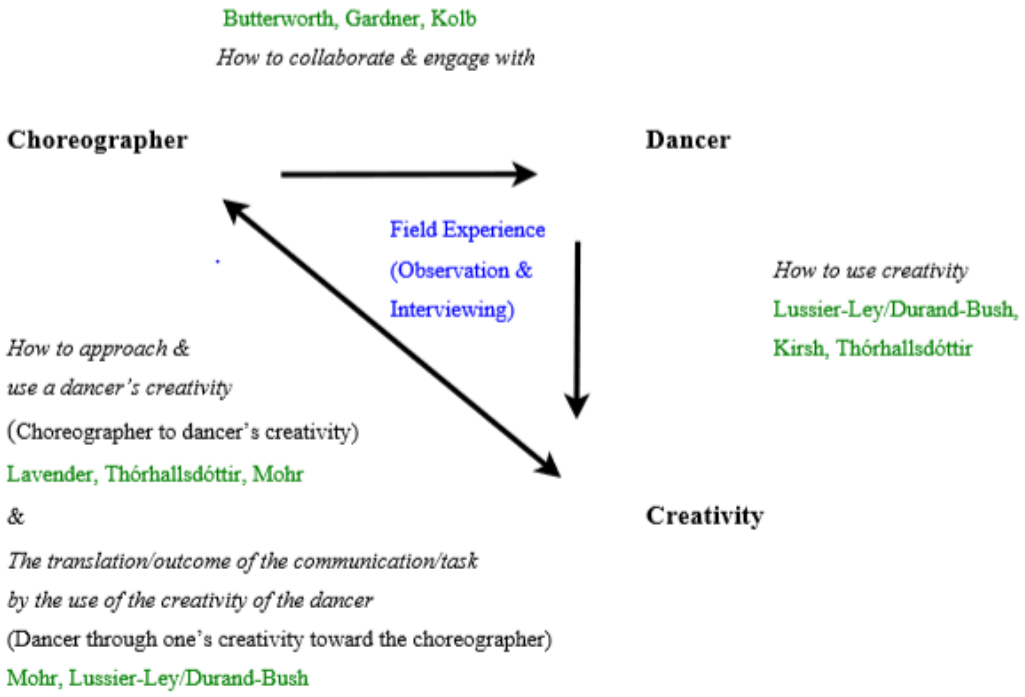

Figure 1: *Model 1: Research Overview* (Exception to Copyright: Section ss 40, 103C; Exception, Research or Study).

I thought the Model in Figure 1 served more than an overview of this candidate's research. I found the model spoke to the partnership between dancers and choreographers. I have enhanced the model in Figure 2 *Acceptance Model* to include (in blue) additional contributions for creativity awareness in this study, informed by Alma M. Hawkins (1991), Farrer (2014), Batchelor (2017) and Lindy Candy and Zafer Bilda (2009). The model highlights the dancer's creative contributions in the process; more specifically how creatively they interpret and embody the choreographic instructions given.

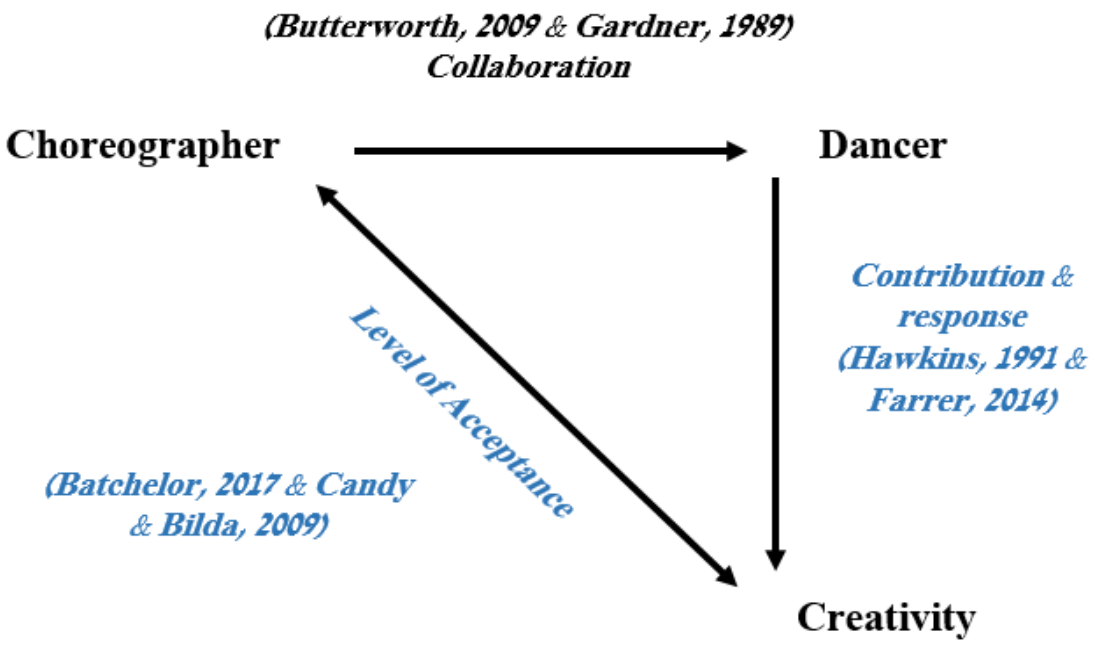

Figure 2: *Acceptance Model.*

The overview of the choreographic process depicted in Figure 2 illustrates the unidirectional line of instructions given by the choreographer for the dancer(s) to interpret and respond to. Also that it has an ongoing relationship, a loop if you like, which suggest that this relationship of contribution, response and acceptance, is ongoing. Creativity refers to the dancer's response as their contribution to the choreographic process and the *Level of Acceptance* is an indication of their level of *awareness* in response to instructions. The *Level of Acceptance* is multidirectional because the choreographer may choose to negotiate the creative response by the dancer to their instructions or even provide a completely new instruction, hence the on-going loop.

As previously suggested in contemporary dance there tends to be three pathways for dancer and choreographer to progress; *Dancer's choice*, *Choreographer choice* or a combination of both. The first of these as the *Dancer's choice* pathway indicates self-direction where dancers through tasking respond to a stimulus to generate their own movement. The second being a significantly more controlled scenario as the *Choreographer's choice* pathway where the choreographer instructs movement and limits consideration of the dancer's contribution to the choreography. The third pathway is a melding of the choreographer's vision with the dancers improvisatory input which includes attributes of sensing, feeling, imagining, transforming

and forming movement phrases and movement imagery (Hawkins, 1991, p. 15). In this research and across my practice, movement can at first appear to be unattached and perhaps abstract in the first response to an instruction. However, when coming from the *Dancer's choice* pathway, there is a sense of performer engagement, an awareness and connection of mind and body. This is often not as noticeable when they are taking on already determined phrases of movement, or in other words, through the *Choreographer's choice*.

The *Choreographer's choice* pathway may appear restricted when replicating movement and may require some intervention of thought, meaning and emotion to advance the movement beyond replication. In a collaborative environment where both the dancer and the choreographer have a choice you would expect to find the third pathway mentioned, where the dancer understands their creative capacity well and are able to offer constructive feedback to the choreographer and vice versa. Both making recommendations that ultimately benefit the making of the dance work. To a certain extent these ideas are reinforced in the research, both in participatory observations and the results of the interviews. This research is focused on unpacking these pathways in an attempt to make sense out of the complex idea of creative awareness.

Role of the Choreographer and Choreographic Process

Contemporary dance developed through contributions by choreographers challenging existing forms of dance; post-modern dance (1960s-1970s), modern dance (1920s-1960s) and classical ballet (Boughen, 2014). Pioneers of modern dance such as Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham and later Merce Cunningham set the scene for what is now understood as contemporary dance (Freeman et al., 2013). Allowing for future choreographers and dancers today to be able to express movement in dance with more freedom and fluidity than you would expect to find by comparison to classical ballet, even with the techniques and traditions associated with early modern dance (Freeman et al., 2013).

Contemporary dance has been described as an umbrella of dance melded from many styles and techniques and is shared and practiced amongst choreographers, dancers and the public alike. Whilst contemporary dance resists definitive categorisation there is an emphasis on a movement vocabulary that embraces the conceptual rather than the literal (Boughen, 2014). What contemporary dance also does is encourage the agency of the dancer. The dancer plays

an important role in interpreting the necessary aesthetic required by the choreographer, as well as contributing significantly overall to the choreographic process.

Unlike other genres, contemporary dance works are multilayered challenging viewers to find significance and meaning in the work for themselves (Au, 2002, p. 195). Common choreographic subject matter found in contemporary dance is a spectrum including an engagement with significant social and political issues and philosophical concerns including abstract thought (Freeman et al., 2013). The starting point for a choreographer to create a contemporary dance work is often initiated by a concept, from here form and content is explored (Freeman et al., 2013; Hawkins, 1991, p. 15). Contemporary dance overall encourages an audience to interact with the work, allowing for freedom of interpretation and meaning making derived from the choreographic composition (Freeman et al., 2013).

Choreographers and dance practitioners that specialise in the field of contemporary dance use numerous choreographic processes and methods together to form a new dance work. Larry Lavender (2009, p. 171) devised *IDEA*, a creative model of phases in the process that a choreographer might pass through during the making of a dance, namely improvisation, development, evaluation and assimilation. According to Lavender (2009, p. 171) the model helps choreographers to gain a better understanding of their own progress through the process and a better understanding of their regular and habitual ways of working. Improvisation is a fundamental building block for contemporary dance choreographers, which can be executed individually (on themselves) or with others and is used during choreographic processes to break expected patterns of movement, generate choreography itself and or be performed as a live work (Freeman et al., 2013).

Similar to Lavender (2009, p. 171), Dance scholar Jo Butterworth is cited in the thesis by Oetgens van Waveren Pancras Clifford (2013, p. 13), for formulating a series of useful stages evident in any choreographic process; intention (the idea behind the creation), dance content (understanding movement language), process (the method used to generate movement), dance content development (the progression of the movement), structure (formation of the dance work), rehearsals, performances and evaluation (critical judgment and reflection). These eight stages focus more specifically on the development of the choreographic process than just the end product. In the initial stages of the process, some choreographers may have a clear idea of what the final product of a dance should look like while others may be unsure of it and

turn to exploring their concepts, either way the basis of the process is the same (Hawkins, 1991, p. 15). Regardless of the methods used when developing a contemporary dance work the "choreographic provocation" (exploring multiple avenues of choreographic intentions and dance structures) is crucial (Lavender, 2009, p. 187). The methods used will depend on the choreographer's experiences, background and training and reflect on how they work and engage with their dancers.

In a dance training environment Hawkins (1991, p. 2) argues there is more to teaching young dance students than just choreographic composition, in that it is not only about the freedom for the generation of material but also allowing them to be autonomous in their approach to interpretation in creating a practical and artistic dance work. Hawkins (1991, p. 15) adds that sensing, feeling, imagining, transforming and forming are all key characteristics of the process and that it is beneficial for dancers in this case to experience an environment where self-directed learning is more desirable as it will enable exploration and creativity to flourish. I would suggest that this is not exclusive to the dance training environment. These characteristics, and the autonomy afforded to dancers, encourage participation in the choreographic process and crucial for developing creative choreography.

Shirley McKechnie (2007) states that if during the choreographic process choreographers create a collaborative environment and engage with their dancers through multiple ways of verbal and non-verbal communication, it is more likely that the dancers themselves will become more invested in the work. Positive verbal communication between choreographer and dancer is vital to the process as it facilitates a channel of reverberation between both parties and allows for questions and feedback to help the progression of the choreography. Verbal prompts can manipulate and enhance movement, activate creativity and provide feedback (Lavender, 2009, p. 180). Various research investigations into dance have concluded that elements that enhance an environment for the dancers to feel safe in thrive on elements like trust, respect, reflection and discussion (Barr, 2014). In many contemporary companies in Australia today these elements are clearly evident where Choreographers openly collaborate with their dancers to encourage such creative ability to flourish.

Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company (EDC) Natalie Weir, the flagship contemporary dance company in Queensland, works intuitively with her dancers and by this I mean she plays to their strengths, physicality and creative abilities. This requires a

considerable amount of trust from both parties, and according to McKechnie (2007) should include a safe environment where creativity can thrive. She allows her dancers to have a choreographic voice during the creative process and permits them to engage in recreating original works previously performed and develop new works through task working (generating, or manipulating choreography). In their professional environment there is freedom of creativity and open communication between choreographer and dancer.

Hawkins states (1991, p. 5) the success to enhancing creative potential depends on the environment or setting a dancer encounters. As individuals we are continually negotiating with our internal and external environments which determine our feelings towards the setting we find ourselves in. The engagement with the external world alone provides us with a significant amount of stimulus to react to and engage with our senses of vision, the tangible, audio and kinaesthetic and this in turn influences our inner world environment (Hawkins, 1991, p. 5). Such concerns are usually foremost in a choreographer's mindset in how they choose to engage with the dancer and their initial intentions behind the choreography can have a profound effect on a dancer's interpretation of instructions during all stages of the choreographic process.

Role of the Contemporary Dancer

A vital characteristic in a contemporary dancer is the ability to discover and understand the meaning of body awareness and creative ingenuity (and/or curiosity) when performing choreography. The body is made up of memories, sensations and life experiences that contribute significant factors for the development of bodily knowledge (Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009, p. 237). Dance works are pieced together in skilful ways and if the dancers performing the choreography do not have ownership of the movement, or harness this bodily knowledge, then the choreography itself risks being viewed as less aesthetically pleasing or meaningful (Hawkins, 1991, p. 2).

Dance is a performing art that is ephemeral (short-lived) (Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009, p. 235). In contemporary dance the subject matter is often complex and not presented in a narrative structure as is so often the case in other forms of dance such as ballet. Instead contemporary dance invites the audience to connect to the movement of the dancer and appreciate the performance on many levels (Hawkins, 1991, p. 2) regardless, or perhaps in spite of, its ephemerality. The authenticity presented by a dancer in a performance is

concerned with the level to which they are *present* in the performance, and according to Clare Dyson (2008) this may encourage an audience to respond to components of the dance as if they were therapeutic. A dancer that expresses such emotions and movement is considered to be talented and committed to the moment. Hawkins (1991, p. 14-15) describes this connectivity between emotion and movement as if it was an assembly between the dancer's internal and external worlds. According to Butterworth & Wildschut (2009, p. 235) the benefit of the end product or performance is that it allows those watching to feel physically and emotionally connected with the dancer.

Jenny Roche (2011, p.111), in reference to contemporary dance, suggests the dancer has their own signature way of moving which enhances the choreographic composition in the creative process. Adding that their signature way of moving is a collection of embodied experiences and reflections gained and influenced by working with choreographers. As a choreographer's training methods and style can influence a dancer's career and future engagements, Roche (2011, p. 105) further suggests that the role of a dancer is fluid (as with a mutable body) and being open to change, adding that this attribute reflects on the significance of the creative potential of a dancer and the impact they have on a choreographic process.

I would like to note the role of learning and metacognition (awareness of one's own thought processes) to understanding creativity, the choreographer and the dancer relationship. We all learn differently, hence we also pick up choreographic instructions differently. According to Jacquie Turnbull (2009, p. 26) metacognition is a useful way to understand higher order 'thinking' which involves both critical thinking and reflection. It is about 'thinking about thinking', knowing about what it is you know, and I suggest that recognising creative awareness goes hand in hand with metacognition. As described by Hawkins (1991, p. 15), when a dancer has a highly developed sense of their own creative capacity they are able to access a critical connection to their sensing, feeling, imagination, form and transformation inside the choreographic relationship.

Research Methodology

Research Overview

As an exploratory study, I investigated the presence of creative awareness in the choreographic process between the choreographer and dancer(s), principally focusing on the dancers themselves. The research question was how is the competency for creative awareness

understood in the dancer's uptake of choreographic instructions in the development of a new contemporary dance work? Key indicators of creativity – the *Indicators of Creative Awareness* – were developed from the literature in conjunction with my experience as a dance practitioner. The research methodology used qualitative research including participatory observations and informal interviews. The participants involved were 1) LINK Dance Company dancers, 2) two former LINK Company dancers in the employment of the Company as professional dance artists and 3) two choreographers that participants from groups 1 and 2 had worked with. In the final thesis outcome the focus is primarily on the dancers, with some findings reported on from the choreographers. Participant observation took place when the LINK dancers were on secondment with a professional contemporary dance company. In this thesis LINK Dance Company members are considered differently to the professional contemporary dance company they were on secondment with, which will only be named as the Company.

Participants

Twelve (12) LINK dancers participated in the research were on secondment with a professional contemporary dance company for five weeks during the development of a new contemporary dance work. Most of the time was spent in observation only. However, early in the secondment we, the LINK Dance Company, were involved in a task based process (dancers generate choreography) with the choreographer. In order to have sufficient information for this research project, when I interviewed the dancers I allowed them to reflect on choreographic experiences with another choreographer we all shared.

Two (2) additional dancer participants were past LINK Dance Company students and were invited to take part in this study as they were directly involved in producing the final product of the contemporary dance work. Finally, two (2) choreographers participated in this study, one that was involved in this choreographic process and the other worked with LINK Dance Company prior to this project.

Dancers were asked three (3) questions (p. 11) that prompted critical thinking and reflected on directly working with their choreographer, their own response to choreographic instructions and to what they had gained by being involved in this process. Choreographers were asked three (3) similar questions related to their involvement working with the dancers at LINK and if their instructions given to them were correctly understood. They were also

asked if the dancers' interpretations were considered appropriate and what were the necessary characteristics needed to generate movement based on this process. Responses to questions identified by choreographers were many aspects that principally put into context what was expected as necessary attributes for successful, productive and creative choreographic outcomes. The interview questions included the following:

Questions for the Dancers (10 dancers at LINK Dance Company and 2 former LINK Dance Company members)

1. How are you finding rehearsals and working with the choreographer?
2. How have you interpreted the choreographer's instructions?
3. What have you learnt from being involved in this collaboration?

Questions for the Choreographer

1. How have you found working with the dancers at LINK Dance Company?
2. Do you think your choreographic instructions have been clearly understood?
3. What do you think about the interpretations by dancers to your instructions?

Please note that because the tasking period within the secondment was short, LINK Dance Company reflected on their experiences with the choreographer from this period and from a previous experience with another choreographer, and so these questions naturally shifted accordingly.

All participants were de-identified once their data was collated and analysed before being presented anonymously in the study. All involved were informed of this procedure prior to participating and that the aim of the study was to gain an insight into the dancers understanding of their creative awareness. This was determined through self-reflective responses to interview questions and my observations of their responses to choreographic instructions given by the choreographer. Their respective abilities as dancers were not evaluated in any part of this study process. Common themes found in the data collection were compared to the formulated *Indicators of Creative Awareness* developed for this study and were critically analysed in relation to what I personally observed during the research period.

It was critical in undertaking this research that the participants, also my colleagues, never thought I was judging their performances or their contribution to the dance making process while we were on secondment. I was only interested in trying to locate and gain further insight into creative awareness in the collaboration process between dancer and choreographer. Early in the research I developed a set of indicators that I could use to 1) identify creative awareness in the moment and 2) code the responses to the interviews. At no time did I reveal these indicators to the participants. However, interestingly in one way or another they spoke about the indicators, thus reinforcing the relevance of them in locating creative awareness, and as such their significance in this research.

Indicators of Creative Awareness

Lindy Candy and Zafer Bilda (2009, p. 9) describe someone with creative awareness as understanding and demonstrating features of skills, knowledge and feeling. Not surprisingly this idea is similar to Hawkins' (1991, p. 2) understanding of the contributions by dancers in the choreographic process through sensing, feeling, imagining, transforming and forming. Candy and Bilda (2009, p.10) describe the scope for illustrating such abilities as "creator capability", adding that similar features are used by arts councils to determine whether applications for grant funding should be approved or rejected. I found it really useful to compose a set of indicators that were suggestive of creative awareness and I borrowed from Candy and Bilda's concepts of *good qualities, artistic skills and techniques* that specifically relate to a broad understanding of creativity. In this context a *good quality* is understood to be the individual traits, motivations, expectations, emotions and cognitive states found to be helpful for a dancer. *Skills and techniques* are concerned with the capability of the individual to let go of ego and to be completely present in the moment (Candy and Bilda 2009, p. 11). The one thing I find that crosses both *good quality* and *skills and techniques* is the idea of self-reflection. This is when a dancer is able to recognise for them self whether something worked or did not work and is not entirely reliant on external validation. So to have dancers that take initiative in interpreting choreographic instructions easily and quickly, whilst remaining cognitively open to clear verbal and non-verbal communication during the collaborative process, is to offer *creative awareness*. During the interviews I held these ideas in my mind as I took notes regarding the participant's responses. The participants were not made aware of these ideas or the *Indicators of Creative Awareness* at the time of the interview. It was merely something I held in my mind, and later, a coding device to assist in analysing the data. The indicators I created to locate creative awareness are as follows:

- **Understanding** subject matter of the dance work; this considers the range of *artistic skills and techniques* that demonstrate how dancer(s) engage with subject matter through memories, visualisation and other underlying techniques.
- **Demonstrate** an ability to create artistic outcomes; representing a *good quality* of expressiveness and embodiment in response to choreographic instructions and choreographer's vision.
- **Produce** exploratory movement; presenting experimental, explorative and investigate work with originality and artistic vision that is their own.
- **Critical thinking/self-reflection;** characteristics of *artistic skills and techniques* that the dancer critically engages with.

The interview responses were coded according to how I understand them to fit with the *Indicators of Creative Awareness*. For example, if a participant (dancer) mentioned that they felt supported by the Choreographer and knew how to respond to an instruction whilst maintaining their own creative ingenuity, I suggested they possessed a *Dancer's choice* pathway and the indicator that would apply in this circumstance would be that they **Demonstrate** ability to create artistic outcomes; representing a *good quality* of expressiveness and embodiment in response to choreographic instructions and choreographer's vision.

Pathways of Creativity

Participatory Observation

Before I discuss the observation of the participants I would like to share some observations of my time in the secondment. The LINK dancers did contribute to the development of the work in its initial stages of the process but mostly we observed the interaction between the Company dancers and the Choreographer, as we were on secondment primarily to experience the professional company environment. Choreographic direction in the process is unique in developing any new work and on this occasion this new dance work followed the unidirectional stages previously described (p. 4) as identified by Oetgens van Waveren Pancras Clifford (2013, p. 29). The content of the dance work developed also as previously described (p. 6) with the eight stages being recognised from intention (the idea behind the creation) through to the performances and evaluation stage (critical judgment and reflection). The development phase of this process required prompt attention to detail, which meant both

the choreographer and dancers had to find unity and work productively in a timely manner to produce the dance work ready for presentation.

The Company Choreographer stressed that it was important for the dancers to be able to generate most of the movement material required for the piece, which later could be taught to the whole ensemble or another dancer of the Company for a solo. It was also important that the material communicated the intended vision of the piece, or as the Choreographer remarked, the ‘essence’ of the piece. The Choreographer spoke of this period as needing efficient collaboration based in trust. Once the structure of the work was formed, principally by the Choreographer the dancers then needed to embody it. The Company Choreographer commented during my interview with them that they used this stage of the work to provide space for the Company dancers to find themselves in the work and take ownership of the choreography produced. In my observation, instead of the choreographer having to seek or probe a creative response out of the Company dancers, they had the initiative to quickly adapt to instruction, to develop movement material and to what they knew was needed to elevate the work to production standard. I concluded through observation that the Company was united in the collaborative approach (third (3) choreographic pathway, p. 4). This was also an important aspect of the process for current LINK Dance Company members to experience in observing a professional dance environment.

From my observations, the Choreographer connected with the Company collaboratively and relied on their imagination and capability in generating a wide range of movement material through task work by using imagery to conceptualise their responses to choreographic instruction. The two past LINK Dance Company members were directly involved with the making of the new contemporary dance work, whereas the current LINK dancers only had limited physical input in the initial stages of the task based work. LINK Dance Company had limited space to work in with the Company dancers because of an architectural structure in the dance piece. Yet when the opportunity arose, the dancers were enthusiastic to engage in the space provided and complete whatever tasks they were asked to do. The group responded openly when asked to make still images amongst the architecture itself. It was evident that the LINK Dance Company was provided with an opportunity to explore their choreographic task work and freedom to create movement.

Those participating in this case study defined the *Dancer's choice* pathway in their own terms during interviews as being given freedom to create and that the movement produced was less important than how it was found. The more choreographers control movement to choreographic instructions (*Choreographer's choice*) the less creative and the more restricted individual and group contributions become. The less a dancer attempted to pre-empt a response, the more inclined they were to explore a range of ideas that allowed for a more natural creative response to choreographic instructions to occur. I observed during the secondment that *Choreographer's choice* was significantly less expressed than the *Dancer's choice* characteristic as the Choreographer on secondment provided sufficient room for the more creative *Dancer's choice* pathway to prevail.

In my observations of Company dancers and the initial contribution of the LINK Dance Company dancers to the secondment, final decisions about movement would always be left to the choreographer to decide as to whether what had been created was interesting and appealing to their intentions for the work. This was also reinforced with the interview participants who in response to the fairly open questions would tend to elaborate by talking about their experiences with both pathways and that with the *Dancer's choice* the choreographer inevitably had control of final content. What I did find interesting, between interview and observation, was that the participants that fought strongly in their interview response for the benefit of the *Dancer's choice* pathway also had a clearer sense of identity in the studio, appeared to contribute more towards choreographic outcomes and less intimidated about issues in their response to interview questions. For example a LINK Dance Company dancer acknowledged that when they were asked to create movement, they responded by using a fusion of pedestrian movements, abstract images and improvisation, as a way in which to offer a process rather than a fully realised executed movement or phrase. This illustrates the capacity to **demonstrate** and to **produce**. This participant had a clear sense of individuality in response to their movement and thrived when given the option to follow the *Dancer's choice* pathway. They also evidenced a strong sense of critical thought, of self-reflection. They had a clear understanding of their identity as a dancer with their own particular style of moving and from observations appeared to thrive in response to choreographic instructions.

A minority of dancers interviewed indicated that they were more reliant or dependant on their choreographer for direction in constructing movement, as if needing constant validation when

generating movement that they hoped the choreographer would like. In this sense it was less what the choreographer set up and more what was needed by the dancers – the choreographer may have set up the 'room' to follow a *Dancer's choice* pathway but in fact the dancers choice was that the choreographer would choose and thus follow the *Choreographers choice* pathway. The collaborative process relies on trust between choreographer and dancer and is required from both parties. Choreographers provide this to encourage poetic licence in their dancers in the hope of producing authentic movement. Perhaps in this instance not only is it understandable that young dancers may be more inclined to ask for direction, or to favour the choreographer to tell them what to do, especially if this has largely been their experience in training (particularly if they have come from a balletic tradition) but also that choreographers need to be prepared to adapt the room to their dancers and to give helpful instructions that will encourage a sense of mutual trust.

Regardless of how well the two Choreographers knew the dancers involved in this study they permitted all of them to have considerable input in generating movement from task work. Logically not all movement generated would be used by the Choreographers in their final pieces and this would not be because of a lack of creativity itself or reluctance to use movement produced but more from a dramaturgical place where certain offers would speak more directly to a particular theme or choreographic intent than other offers. The final dance work also requires acceptance by its intended audience, and as one choreographer interviewed mentioned that choreographic movement needs to be read beyond the front lights of any intended stage setting. Meaning that no matter the dancer's proximity to the audience, they should be able to project their energy and intention to the back of the theatre. Bringing this back to both Hawkins (1991, p. 15) and Lavender (2009, p. 171) the final choreographic product would also need time to settle for review before the performance season had begun. As the individual preferences and influences between choreographers requires understanding of the capabilities of their dancers to acquire the specific intents of dance works being created.

All of the twelve (12) LINK Dance Company dancers interviewed mentioned that their respective relationships with the choreographer, the importance of open communication between them and the development of trust in the process for developing choreography from given instructions, was critical for them to consider themselves as successfully taking part in a creative process. The availability of a collaborative environment was also necessary to all

of the dancers and in more ways than one each participant spoke unprovoked of the need for self-reflection in their practice.

Common Themes Expressed

Common themes from the interviews with the dancers highlighted a strong sense of self-reflection and critical thinking when contemplating choreographic responses; this involved everything from identifying what techniques they should use in generating movement to what restrictive tendencies they could identify, eliminate and or change in their practice. These elements came about naturally in the dancer's response to the three (3) questions and was further reinforced when I coded the interviews and continued with my observation of the LINK Dance Company in secondment, especially observing the contributions of the two former LINK dancers who at the time of the secondment were employed as Company members. All participants reflected positively on their experiences with the Company and gave credit to the professional dancers during the interviews. Common conceptual techniques and themes used in the development of choreography by the participants in either this choreographic process or on a recent choreographic experience (at some stage over the year of 2017) involved imagery and visualisation, improvisation and exploration, senses (feeling and textures), aesthetics, imagination, embodiment (mind/body connection), critical thinking and problem solving. All of which were supported by Hawkins (1991, p. 15) as key characteristics (indicators) of creativity.

A significant theme across interviews was how the (dancer) participants responded to task work. Some indicated they responded by incorporating concepts of visualisation, imagery and feeling as prime motivators to help self-growth and development in an area they believed was lacking in their practice. One dancer mentioned they developed their practice by actively choosing to respond to task work from a literal sense, to incorporating abstract visualisation and images to alter the aesthetics in their movement. From examples like this, I was able to see a correlation between their responses and how it matched one or more of the four (4) indicators developed. For this example I identified a link to indicators of: **Demonstrate** an ability to create artistic outcomes – representing a *good quality* of expressiveness and embodiment in response to choreographic instructions and choreographer's vision; **Produce** exploratory movement – presenting experimental, explorative and investigate work with originality and artistic vision that is their own; and **Critical thinking/self-reflection** – characteristics of *skills and techniques* that the dancer critically engages with.

A majority of the dancers mentioned that they used techniques that allowed them to create and generate movement that was appealing and interesting to them. They also considered if the techniques that they used could be changed as a means of breaking habitual recurrences in practice. Dancers also spoke about following themes that dealt with imagining textures (or layers in movement) using their senses to deal with feelings and intrinsic sensations for abstract thought. These responses reminded me of Hawkins' (1991, p. 15) idea that sensing, feeling, imagining, transforming and forming are all key characteristics of the creative process.

A majority of LINK Dance Company participants felt that the studio for the secondment was a collaborative environment, where they could tap into their creative awareness and guide themselves through self-directed learning. Interestingly one choreographer remarked in an interview that it was an important quality for trainee dancers to take responsibility for their own self-directed learning and that this was an important characteristic of the professional dancer. The dancer participants reflected on, when faced with personal challenges, thinking critically about the circumstance enabled them to over-come these issues. Some dancers were able to associate thoughts and practice in the development of task work and recognised barriers that limited their creative potential. Others were able to characterise what they have learnt in the company environment and some of them solved their own problems identified during rehearsals. One of the LINK Dance Company dancers said they felt challenged by task work. They reflected that self-doubt and lack of confidence in their ability to produce something 'worthy' was inhibiting what they produced. Another participant dancer felt restricted when asked to complete their task work, which they overcame by incorporating the use of feeling and freedom in choice of movement. The dancers also felt a shared and collaborative environment without hierarchies (of soloists or principal dancers) was an important aspect to them in generating creativity to flow and flourish throughout the choreographic process.

Habitual Negative Tendencies and Limitations

Some dancers were able to identify at least one specific restriction in their practice, like not fully understanding the task or being trapped into responding literally to it, requiring the need for either validation from the choreographer or for more explicit direction to the task or instruction. Some participants suggested this could have been caused through poor communication on the choreographer's part, leading to movement becoming too broad in

scope or the opposite, a movement response that was too literal and not complex, or abstract, enough. The dancers periodically felt some external influence momentarily impeding their creative ability, or influenced by life issues outside the studio, or even, more specifically, were aware they had not had enough life experience to feel they could offer fully in developing movement. Many felt that they needed to enrich their lives to fully appreciate their creative potential in this art form, as if to gain a better balance between their external and internal influences as a contemporary dancer. Injury was another clearly defined limitation that influenced changes to movement in practice.

Connections with Indicators of Creative Awareness

Individual dancers were able to recognise their own *good qualities* and *artistic skills and techniques* described in this study and they were critically aware of negative tendencies and distractions that could hinder their creative potential for developing movement. When I reviewed each response I was able to find many common patterns and themes. So on one level a LINK Dance Company participant might have been talking about a work they did earlier in the year and their capacity to contribute to the development of the new work. However when I linked the dancers' responses from interviews and observations to the *Indicators of Creative Awareness,* I was able to identify good skills in critical thinking, and this happened in various ways across the groups. Of the four (4) indicators of creativity developed, **Critical thinking and self-reflection** continually surfaced during the research; when I observed the LINK Dance Company members and the Company dancers in practise, and in the interviews.

In response to the question 'How have you interpreted the choreographer's instructions', overwhelmingly the participants said that in the moment they over thought the instruction. Some were conscious of overthinking and launched straight into an improvisation while others felt overwhelmed by it and their movement generation suffered accordingly. But all of them evidenced an awareness that they did this. Some responses varied, some evidencing confidence when responding to choreographic instruction regardless of fear and others suggested that they had held back. All were critically engaging with who they were in that moment and how they tended to respond to instructions from each particular choreographer in question. One participant dancer expressed often feeling restricted in developing creative movement with self-doubt when responding to task work. Despite this, the dancer was able to critically think about their outcome, and to whether they possibly needed more time in

developing a confident approach to task work. Some of the LINK dancers described their movement as mechanically produced instead of truly responding to the choreographic task at hand. Apprehension and hesitation took hold of them in place of responding more spontaneously to choreographic instructions. Questioning the choreographer to recognise and validate their movement and overthinking the task/instruction were common restrictions in developing a successful creative outcome.

As Roche (2011, p. 111) highlights, a contemporary dancer does develop their own signature way of moving or generating material over time, yet in both cases the two choreographers had a specific intention they wanted the dancer to explore and create a phrase of movement stimulated by that intention. I observed in the secondment process that it is necessary for the dancer to explore and create movement through this realm first and then their signature way of moving is layered to add depth, integrity and a sense of individuality to the movement. I clearly viewed this with the more experienced professional Company members and to a certain extent the two past LINK Dance Company dancers. From this specific recognition I suggest that the current LINK Dance Company dancers not surprisingly lacked extensive capacity in being able to first explore and then secondly refine this exploration with their signature movement. I surmised this firstly to them not being overly involved in the development of the work and secondly, they may not have had the necessary life experience that helps to develop self-confidence and self-awareness to fully contribute to the task intention at hand.

The next most significant indicators identified were; 1) **Understanding** subject matter of the dance work and 2) **Producing** exploratory movement. The majority of the LINK Dance Company dancers interviewed said that they responded to the subject matter in task work 'literally'. Some described their response as being habitual, as if they had developed a standard practice and become used to it during their training. Only some dancers acknowledged they needed to focus on getting away from this distraction to improve this element about their practice and therefore change or transform their approach in developing new material. Hawkins (1991, p. 6) suggests that there is a technique described as 'feeling' and that this was an important and beneficial indicator of creativity. I understand this to mean, in this context, a dancer who is able to access emotively to movement creation in response to tasking. Participants indicated that in relation to their experiences of the choreographic relationship that it was critical to engage with the subject matter (the intention)

of a contemporary dance work (to **Understand** subject matter) and to **Produce** exploratory (through trial and error) in response to the subject and to the task, for a successful outcome. In my observations the dancers that were able to do this the best (to understand and to produce) did so with *feeling.*

Furthermore the third (3) indicator **Producing** exploratory movement proved to be a common point of discussion. The dancer participants understood exploration itself as involving the use of techniques like improvisation, imagination and abstract thought and playfulness in developing choreography. In addition, **critical thinking/self-reflection** is inter or overlayed. One participant dancer mentioned how they would create multiple versions of the one phrase of movement and constantly think about how the phrase could be more authentically refined. Their thoughts behind responding to a choreographic question (request from the choreographer) was like imitating ripples in water by movement and therefore the dancer would not only specifically concentrate on the question asked, but think in depth about how the ripples were formed and what had made the ripples in the first place. By the dancer using their imagination in this case it was clear that they were significantly invested in the meaning behind the movement and what drove them in their response to the task.

Interestingly **Demonstration** of ability to create artistic outcomes was the least significant identified indicator in this study. Whilst the participants did not directly speak to this point in the coding, I was not able to link their responses to the three (3) questions around their experiences of the choreographic relationship, as easily as the other indicators. I suspect this was mainly because of a lack of opportunity by the LINK Dance Company dancers to physically contribute much movement to the dance work being created. The particular choreography chosen for the dance work in question would ultimately be decided on by the Choreographer for the final product and the work offered by the Company (professional) dancers. The two (2) past LINK dancers were physically involved with the creation of the dance work itself and it was clear that they were able to communicate and embody their respective intention and meaning of the task work through their own movement. In the initial stages of the secondment we were tasked with instructions and made offers however, little was taken up and I wonder if this was partly to do with a lack of confidence and self-doubt preventing us from being overly inventive or curious in that early stage. When there were opportunities for the LINK dancers to shadow the Company's professional members, they were coherent in replicating movement in detail. Yet the essence and embodiment of the

required character of the movement was mimicked by them and lacked individual signature or flair. I also noted that spatial restrictions around us appeared to constrain us (including myself) from completing all of their movements, requiring improvisation to overcome the constraint. A choreographer might interpret us not overcoming the hindrance on this occasion as amateurish and a demonstration of what they might expect from trainee dancers. Almost all of the LINK dancers anyway recognised that each of the professionals had a particular style that was good at embodying movement and that this might be a way to help overcome such constraints.

Choreographers say

Each Choreographer agreed that the more collaborative an atmosphere the more productive physical and creative contributions dancers tended to make. Both choreographers suggested that trainee dancers needed to approach this process willingly with an open mind and place trust in their choreographers. Without having seen the four (4) indicators of creative awareness both choreographers pointed at different times to these as necessary attributes of a contemporary dancer. Both added that it was vital the dancers understand themselves when developing choreography, along with having important attributes like eagerness and honesty in conveying intention to produce authentic work. One Choreographer added that the harmony between these attributes was what they were looking for when employing company dancers.

Choreographers have the authority to direct the creation and development process of a dance work. Whether a collaborative approach or a more direct role was undertaken, it was still the responsibility of the dancers to have ownership of their learning and creative response to choreographic instruction at any stage of the process. This is recognised in the degree of tolerance of the choreographer, as if they themselves were the audience reviewing the work undertaken. The dancers acknowledged the significance of this authority and direction and that creativity in the process was present in this study as being a tangible and achievable aspiration. Yet they felt the need to constantly compare themselves and their abilities as creative dancers to the professional Company dancers, placing significant emphasis on their creative movement in comparison to their own. The dancers interviewed agreed that when comparing their own dance practice to that of the professional Company dancers, it was important for them to feel that they could generate their own movement and techniques without feeling apprehensive and intimidated.

Out of the three (3) pathways acknowledged in this study (*Choreographer's choice, Dancer's choice or a combination of both of these choices*) the third pathway being the combination of both choices was the most observed in the relationship between the Company dancers and the Choreographer. The LINK dancers expressed more of a *Dancer's choice* pathway, because of limited opportunities by the Choreographer to challenge their interpretations to choreographic instructions. I determined these choices by using the creative awareness significance expressed by dancers through observations and from common patterns identified through interview responses and also through the recognition of observations and responses to indicators developed in this study (p. 13). The more creative awareness acknowledge through the indicators, the greater assurance they contributed successfully to identifying the pathways chosen.

Identifying Creativity through Indicators

The presence of creative awareness was recognised in this exploratory case study and identified through participatory observations and responses by participants to interview questions. The four (4) indicators developed (p. 13) proved to be beneficial for acknowledging creativity in this process as tangible and achievable elements of artistic expression and the dancers understanding of their creative awareness. The manner in which indicators were mostly recognised was determined through identifying common themes expressed by the Dancers and Choreographers. From responses during interviews and participatory observations I made during the generation of choreography, and to which pathway of the three (3) determined was most relevant. Overall I linked my observations with the interview responses and found that the most common thread was **Critical thinking/self-reflection** – characteristics of *artistic skills and techniques* that the dancers critically engages with – followed by **Understanding** subject matter of the dance work and **Producing** exploratory movement. The least identified was **Demonstrating** ability to create artistic outcomes – representing a *good quality* of expressiveness and embodiment in response to choreographic instruction – and I suspect that this was largely to do with how limited the LINK Dance Company members were able to offer in the secondment, although they were asked to reflect more broadly on their choreographic experiences in 2017.

Common valued themes expressed in the choreographic process by the LINK dancers included the presence of a collaborative environment, which in affect encouraged creativity to thrive by providing a pleasant and positive atmosphere for choreographic movement to

develop. There was a desire by the dancer participants for clear communication of instructions by the choreographer for the development of concepts and themes of the dance work plus avoiding negative tendencies, habitual patterns and external (and internal) distractions that would hinder creative development output and creative potential.

Conclusion

Creative awareness was recognised in this exploratory case study in a choreographic process between choreographers and dancers from LINK Dance Company during a secondment in 2017 with a professional dance company. Dancer attributes of *good qualities* and *skills and techniques* and knowledge described in the literature were identified as relating to *Indicators of Creative Awareness* and these were linked to the interview responses and participant observations. The dancer participants identified negative tendencies and habitual patterns as a limiting factor and self-doubt or overthinking instruction as a hindrance to dancer creativity. Dancer autonomy and a collaborative approach between choreographer and dancer was considered to be the optimum environment for creativity by both dancer and choreographer and in my observations it was the dancers who were able to fully access the ideas of sensing, feeling, imagining, transforming and forming movement phrases and movement imagery (Hawkins, 1991, p. 15) that embodied a creative awareness the most. The recognition of developed indicators demonstrated that creative awareness could be identified and displayed by dancers transitioning from students to professional dancers, and possessing this awareness was critical for the trainee dancer to transition to professional contemporary dancer.

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