"IT'S NOT FOR THE FAINT HEARTED": PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF THREE COMMUNITY DANCE PRACTITIONERS PROVIDING DANCE WITHIN PRISON ENVIRONMENTS IN NEW ZEALAND/AOTEAROA

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Abstract

This research explores three community dance practitioners' experiences of providing dance within prison environments in New Zealand/Aotearoa. The narratives of the community dance practitioners are drawn upon to uncover meanings and understandings around the challenges they faced when providing dance in prison environments. This article focusses on the community dance practitioners' perceptions and attitudes, particularly in relation to their perceived roles, feelings of nervousness and a need to emotionally detach from the prison environment. Exploring these themes provides insight into ways community dance practitioners might approach dance practice within prison environments.

Keywords

community dance; dance in prisons; dance pedagogy; prison environment

Biography

Kristie Mortimer is a doctoral candidate at the University of Auckland. Her teaching and research interests lie within dance education, community dance, and dance within diverse communities. Kristie completed her Masters in Dance Studies in 2014, which focused on dance education and community dance practice in prison environments. Her current doctoral studies research seeks to investigating how dance teachers in a rural New Zealand context are responding to cultural difference within their dance teaching practices. Kristie also graduated with her Postgraduate Diploma in Creative and Performing Arts (2013), and her Bachelor of Dance Studies (2012) at the University of Auckland

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Setting the Scene Behind Bars

The prison environment is a space where dance and art programmes are increasingly being provided for incarcerated participants. Dance and art in prisons has been and continues to be practiced and researched internationally by practitioners and scholars such as Geese Theatre Company (Baim, Brookes, & Mountford, 2002), Sara Houston (2009), Fleur Williams (2013), and Arts Access Aotearoa (2012a, 2017). Because the prison environment is a very different setting to the outside world (Cohen, 2005; Goffman, 1968; Leibling, 2007), practitioners can initially face challenges when providing dance within prisons.

This study was driven by the research question: How do three community dance practitioners negotiate the challenges of providing dance classes in a prison environment? In particular, this article discusses the key ideas that emerged around the community dance practitioners' perceptions and attitudes based on their experiences of providing dance in prison environments within New Zealand/Aotearoa.[1] Three key themes arose within the research: the community dance practitioners' differing perceptions of their roles, feelings of nervousness, and a need to emotionally detach. These three aspects informed the ways the community dance practitioners provided dance classes and assisted them in navigating the challenges they faced within the prison environment. This article does not seek to provide templates or solutions for teaching within a prison environment, but rather offers points for consideration and suggestions to support dance practitioners and educators. The findings may assist dance practitioners with navigating the challenges of teaching in an unfamiliar environment, and help make providing dance and arts programs in prisons less challenging and more accessible.

For the purposes of this research, 'community dance' is understood as a way of teaching that is guided by a set of values and principles. These values can include positive communication, engagement, inclusion, and self-development (Akroyd, Bartlett, Jasper, Peppiatt, & Thomson, 1996; Clarke, 1973). As Kuppers (2006) explains, "community dance's power rests in process rather than product: in the act of working and moving together, allowing different voices, bodies and experiences to emerge" (p.1). Community dance is also considered accessible and inclusive to people of any age, gender, ethnicity, and ability (Amans, 2008). Community dance practitioners draw on these values in their pedagogical approaches to dance. The term 'community dance practitioner' is used throughout the article, rather than titles such as teacher, facilitator or artist, as each community dance practitioner perceives their role and uses community dance pedagogy differently.

Within the context of this research, 'dance classes' refers to the activity of learning, creating and/or sharing movement, and is facilitated for participants by community dance practitioners. This understanding is shaped by the New Zealand/Aotearoa Ministry of Education's (2014) definition of dance as an "expressive movement that has intent, purpose and form" (para. 4). In considering the various genres of dance being taught by practitioners in prison environments, 'dance classes' also refers to any activity where creativity and expression through movement of the body is a primary focus. In this study, dance classes ranged from a formal dance class to classes where the medium of dance was improvised movement.

Lastly, the term 'prison environment' refers to various physical and social elements within a prison that construct an environment specific to prison contexts. As represented by Erving Goffman's (1968) "total institution" (p.11), the key elements of the prison environment are routine and control, strict schedules and enforced plans. French theorist Michel Foucault (1991) suggests these elements formulate a context of power, discipline, punishment, and hierarchy. Additionally, "deprivations of status, liberty, family contact and security" (Leibling, 2007, p. 433) within the prison environment contribute to the 'pains of imprisonment' for prisoners (Skyes, 1958), and the construction of prison cultures and subcultures (Cohen, 2005; Goffman, 1968). The hierarchy, power, confinement, and control endemic to the prison environment formulate the prison culture within which prisoners live, and amidst which staff and volunteers work. These characteristics of the prison environment can be very distinctive and unfamiliar in comparison to the outside world and, therefore, are experienced differently by prisoners, staff and volunteers. The narratives developed through this study are situated within three different but similar prison environments as experienced by the community dance practitioners, namely: a women's prison, a remand unit, and a youth residence. Hence, the narratives of the three community dance practitioners provide an insight into their experiences of providing dance within a unique environment.

This study is significant for the insights, awareness and knowledge generated for community dance and arts practitioners, prison staff, prisoners and dance researchers. This research can inform the practice of community dance and arts practitioners who work in the same or similar contexts. It could also be significant for prison staff and the prisoners themselves, as it provides a new perspective on the facilitation of dance in New Zealand/Aotearoa and may potentially stimulate or provoke interest in the value of dance in the prison environment. Finally, research on facilitating dance within New Zealand/Aotearoa prison environments is limited, thus this study also fills a gap in the literature.

Seeking Meanings Through Methodology

This research project explored meanings from the experiences of three community dance practitioners providing dance classes within a prison environment. In an interpretive inquiry, meaningful narratives were developed with the practitioners through interviews where they shared their experiences, thoughts and reflections. This qualitative approach gives value to the meanings and experiences of individuals (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ryan, 2006).

A post-positivist approach was used as the methodological framework. This approach recognises the potential to uncover multiple meanings and perspectives, with an emphasis on creating new knowledge (Green & Stinson, 1999; Ryan, 2006). In seeking this new knowledge, the research aimed to bring new understandings of providing dance classes within a prison environment and the ways challenges can be negotiated. It is also important to recognise the post-positivist perspective "that we construct reality according to how we are positioned in the world, and that how we see reality and truth is related to the perspective from which we are looking" (Green & Stinson, 1999, p. 93). The research findings are therefore shaped by the participants' and researcher's world views. Reflexivity helped manage the researcher's subjectivity through the data collection and analysis process (Madden, 2010). This involved managing my roles of both an insider and outsider researchers. In this case subjectivity was unavoidable (Green & Stinson, 1999), as the perspectives I aimed to present through my research were in some sense "informed by my own upbringing, education and history" (Madden, 2010, p.22). However, an outsider perspective relies on the researcher's ability to detach themselves from the prejudices of the group being studied (Kusow, 2003), and allows the researcher to at times step back and see what is going on (O'Reilly, 2005).

Through semi-structured interviews, I developed an understanding of how the practitioners negotiated challenges of the prison environment, whilst learning how they interpreted their experiences (O'Reilly, 2005; Weiss, 1994). The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview schedule with question topics, while still allowing room for spontaneous discussion. The practitioners were recruited through recommendations and word of mouth from colleagues. Each practitioner participated in two forty-minute interviews. The second interview provided the opportunity to reflect on, and come back to, issues and themes that arose within the first interview. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the anonymity of the participants, and to provide safety and privacy within the research (Scott & Garner, 2013). The practitioners' pseudonyms are Romarnie, Marie and Chris. Ethical approval for this research was gained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee before approaching the interviewees.

A thematic approach was utilised to analyse the data collected from the interviews. Various themes were identified within the data (Green & Stinson, 1999). These themes are analysed and discussed, drawing on the material gained from the interviews and the relevant literature. Additionally, Foucauldian and Freirean theories are drawn upon to assist with understanding the data. These are Michel Foucault's (1991) discipline and punishment, and power and hierarchy, and Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogical paradigms within oppressed communities. These theories help to develop a conceptual framework within which to analyse the research findings.

The experiences discussed are limited to three community dance practitioners within New Zealand/Aotearoa. The experiences of each practitioner were shaped by the specific prison contexts in which they facilitated dance. They worked in diverse prison environments with participants of various ages and genders, and provided varied types of dance classes. The different experiences of the practitioners mean the research does not provide generalisable ideas or one single truth (Creswell, 1998), and it was not the intention of the study to do so. Rather, these variables presented a breadth of practitioner experiences to explore, which while not generalisable, may be beneficial for those providing dance and other art programs through providing insight to the potential dynamics which may be experienced.

The interviews covered various topics, such as the ways the practitioners experienced the distinctiveness of the prison environment, how they interacted and built relationships with the imprisoned participants, and practical approaches to facilitating dance activities. However, this article focuses on findings relating to the practitioners' perceptions of the roles they held, feelings of nervousness, and a need to emotionally detach when facilitating dance in prison environments.

Introducing the Community Dance Practitioners

The practitioners vary in the genres of dance they teach, including free dance, Latin dance and Pacific Island cultural dances. As mentioned, this article does not intend to compare and contrast these distinct practices, but rather explores the community practitioners' various experiences in prison environments.

Romarnie taught dance in a women's prison once a week for six months in 2013. She entered the prison as an individual with curiosity and ambition, hoping to provide a positive experience for young women residing in the remand unit. She held no prior experience of teaching in a prison environment. Romarnie taught free dance throughout her visits. She established a structure for her classes where she would start with a

playlist of music chosen by herself, which participants would move to freely for approximately 20 minutes. Following this, the participants would then dance to music of their own choice. As explained by Romarnie, the focus was to be creative and play with a mix of moving and talking. Romarnie continues to teach free dance in many community settings, but no longer teaches within a prison context due to the complexities of being a volunteer whilst also managing work commitments.

Marie is a teacher, dancer and choreographer for a cultural dance company. Marie has had only a few experiences of providing cultural dance classes in a women's prison. As a volunteer, she provided six one-off workshops in 2012 and 2013 as part of a team with a well-established dance company. The class participants were low security female prisoners. The classes often had approximately 30 participants, ranging in age from 18 years to 40 years old. Marie taught in a team of three people with each lesson being one hour long. She taught Samoan dance for the first 30 minutes in each lesson, followed by her peers teaching for the second half of the lesson. Marie and the participants worked towards a performance, along with other dance pieces from her teaching team.

Lastly, Chris has worked in prisons for 30 years. He is a staff member at a youth prison, but prefers to refer to the facility a 'residential centre'. He holds numerous roles, such as mentor, facilitator, response team member, and security to name a few. The male youth offenders in the residential centre are aged 13 to 16 years and are placed under strict routines and surveillance. Chris expressed how within the residential centre, "Dance is a vehicle that we as staff can access". Part of Chris's role is to plan activities for the imprisoned youth. He aims to incorporate dance within activities relating to music, sports and television. This varies from team chants, to lessons in Latin dance, and cultural performances. Chris spoke about his experiences of working this way over a long period, rather than one-off dance workshops and classes.

In the following sections I, firstly, I discuss the practitioners' perceptions of their roles and how this has contributed to their dance teaching within the prison context. Secondly, I explore the feelings of nervousness discussed by the community dance practitioners and how they have negotiated these feelings to overcome the challenging complexities of the prison environment. Lastly, I raise the notion of 'emotional detachment' from prisons and discuss why the practitioners felt detachment is important when providing dance classes in these contexts.

The Practitioners' Perceived Roles: "You're expected to do your job"

The practitioners had differing perceptions of their roles in the prison environment. These differences pertained to their positions as volunteers or staff members and their roles during dance sessions, such as facilitator, teacher, or "all in one".

Marie and Romarnie entered the prisons as volunteers, whereas Chris is a staff member. Marie and Romarnie expressed value in being a volunteer. As Marie explained, "When you volunteer it means something different. You're putting in your own time and it's your own personal decision to go there." Romarnie also discussed the young women's "intrigue", as the class participants questioned, "Why would someone like you come back here each week?" While Marie and Romarnie felt their volunteer status was appreciated by the participants, the comment "someone like you" has an additional meaning. Romarnie explained that her participants perceived her as "old, white and skinny", which suggests they recognised she was different from them. As a staff member with several duties, Chris appeared to perceived his role in a slightly more complex way when he described it as "all in one".

A key difference between being a staff member and a volunteer is that staff are paid and have contractual obligations, while volunteers have more freedom to walk away from the prison context. The New Zealand/Aotearoa Department of Corrections (DOC) *Volunteer Handbook* (2013) suggests that volunteering in prisons is challenging, and the length of time volunteers choose to work in prisons can vary from a lifetime to much less. Due to their long-term role within a prison, dance programmes run by staff may be longer lasting, compared to one-off programmes by volunteers.

Romarnie and Marie did not seek payment for providing the dance classes. Marie's interest was in gaining experience of working in a new context and Romarnie was motivated by the potential rehabilitative benefits that dance could provide for the participants, such as "acceptance and inclusion" (Williams, 2013, p. 51). However, both suggested that being paid would make providing dance within prisons more achievable, especially when trying to manage other paid work. Romarnie commented that if she had been paid, "it would have been easier […] to keep going, it was just unsustainable for me in the end". Similarly, Marie suggested that payment would have meant she "had enough petrol money at the time". Most people providing programmes in prison do not do it for the money, and their motivations can vary (Flusfeder, 2004). Prison manager Ann Abraham (2012) has explained that she likes "jobs where [she] can make a difference and give back to the community in some form" (para.1). Former prison manager Agnes Robertson shared that volunteers "teach skills and provide experience

and life stories" (Robertson cited in Arts Access Aotearoa, 2012a, para.14) for the prisoner.

The ways the community dance practitioners became involved in facilitating dance within prisons also varied depending on their positions as volunteers or staff. Both Romarnie and Marie were invited to provide dance classes. Marie's dance company was approached by a prison programme coordinator and agreed to voluntarily offer dance classes. Similarly, Romarnie knew a staff member at a prison who connected her with a programme coordinator. However, Chris explained that, as a staff member, he could propose programmes and present them to the coordinator. The invitation and/or approval of dance classes suggests that the practitioners' presence within the prison and the aims of the dance classes were validated by prison staff. While Romarnie reflected that no one was "blatantly unsupportive there are questions around how extensive the support was, and whether artists who are not invited may face difficulties in providing classes. Additionally, this also raises questions regarding supporting volunteers to ensure the longevity of arts programmes.

When considering the ways they provided dance during the sessions, the practitioners perceived their roles slightly differently. Romarnie perceived herself as a facilitator, Marie, a teacher, and Chris, "all in one". Romarnie felt that, as a facilitator, it was her "responsibility to create a good learning and participation space". She explained,

> I went prepared, and I went anyway, even if I was the only one dancing sometimes, I moved, and if we were talking about things I might go 'I might move like this to this music, but how would you move?

Romarnie's facilitator approach involved tailoring the content and pedagogy to her participants; a contrast to the control and restrictions the participants would have likely experienced within the prison environment. When the doors inside the prison "are locked on the women at night, it's often the first time in their lives that women have been safe" (Abraham, 2012, para.14). It could be understood that elements of control and safety may be synonymous for prisoners. Community dance practitioners can present opportunities to facilitate safe spaces for participants to feel comfortable with creating and sharing movement within the dance class, while among the physical and social elements of a prison environment. In Romarnie's case, this may have been experienced by the participants through feelings of inclusivity, a sense of unity and a sense of significance (Buck & Barbour, 2007; Clarke, 1973; Williams, 2013). It is important to provide opportunities for participants to make choices within a class, rather than the dance practitioner answering questions and making decisions on the participants' behalf (Akroyd et al., 1996). This was seen through Romarnie's role as facilitator; she offered choices in music, allowing the participants' voices to be heard and their sense of

significance to be fostered through recognising and valuing the individuality of each participant (Clarke, 1973). Romarnie explained, "I was trying to achieve that they would have the opportunity to move and have an enjoyable experience of something that was personal to them".

Alternatively, Marie saw herself as the teacher and the participants as students. She stated that she transferred the way she teaches cultural dance from outside to inside the prison context. The decision to 'teach' rather than 'facilitate' was influenced by the limited class time with the participants. She would have liked to have had "time to split them in groups and do their own moves, but it was the time limits of the classes". Marie explained how she perceived her role as a teacher within the prison environment:

> They [the prisoners] would have wanted to learn something and that's why they had signed up for it. They're walking in with that expectation of me being the teacher and them being the student. So there's no other way to teach them something without putting those limits there. They're not your friend and you can't go in treating them as prisoners, because well you don't have the authority. You walk in there as a teacher, so that's how you're expected to do your job.

The role of 'teacher' can create a hierarchy within the classroom (Akroyd et al., 1996; Clarke, 1973); however, Marie tried to maintain a "light" approach to her teaching to ensure the participants felt comfortable to approach her and ask questions. Freire (1970) recommends "co-intentional education" (p.51), where teachers and students are "subjects" (p.51). In taking a "light" approach, Marie sought to establish a collaborative relationship between herself as the teacher and the participants as the students.

Chris shares aspects of both Romarnie and Marie's perceived roles. Chris perceives his role as not solely that of teacher or facilitator, but rather as "all in one". This includes providing opportunities for dance engagement by facilitating dance classes himself, as well as arranging for outside practitioners to come into the residence. Chris suggested that his "whole perception of dance has changed" through his experiences. He shared that "what [he] values about teaching dance with these kids is actually changing their behaviour". Chris saw changes in behaviour when supervising the participants daily and attributes these changes to participation in the dance classes. He further explained "we might run a program and before it there might be a kid who plays up and won't make his bed. But after we run a programme, he's excellent. The programme actually allowed him to make that change". As Chris was present in the young boys' lives nearly every day, this made his role more complex than simply being a volunteer. While navigating multiple roles can be challenging, Chris also has more opportunity to build positive relationships with his participants. As he explained, "I get to know them as much as I can, because you are dealing with them, you get a better result with dealing with them".

These relationships may shift the ways he facilitates dance and assisted with navigating the challenges of providing dance in a prison environment. The roles held by the community dance practitioners were perceived and experienced in different ways. The roles were not only understood differently in terms of volunteer or staff member status, but approaches also varied between that of facilitator, teacher and "all in one".

Nervousness: "You're never really too safe"

Nervousness has been defined and examined in various contexts. Psychologist James Russell (1991) defines the features of nervousness as "displeasure, high arousal and submissiveness" (p.238), and feelings of nervousness are suggested as arising due to personality traits, internal disposition and lack of confidence (Lamb, 1972; Page, 1985). Furthermore, in their exploration of anxiety, nervousness and fear within the dance industry, dance educators Susan Koff and Gianna Mistry (2012) link these feelings to insecurity, inadequacy and low confidence. In the prison context, staff and volunteers may experience stress, distrust and anxiety when working within the prison environment (Leibling, Price, & Shefer, 2011). It follows that these features and symptoms of nervousness may be experienced by community dance practitioners when entering the prison environment as "prison teaching is a "totally different" experience, and prison is a "foreign place"" (Wright, 2005, p. 19). Therefore, nervousness may be present when providing dance in prisons, and it is important to consider the ways this impacts the facilitation of dance.

The practitioners in this study each spoke of feeling nervous at some point, regardless of their perceived roles. Marie and Romarnie spoke of the nervousness they felt before, during and after their experiences of working within a prison environment. Romarnie shared:

> I was hoping I'd manage. You actually don't know until you go in. […] Sometimes I was just so distressed at witnessing these young women and hearing some of their stories – not that I showed that to them. But I'd been known to cry all my way home from the prison. […] It's not for the faint hearted.

Romarnie's comments imply that having a certain resilience can assist with feelings of nervousness when providing dance in this setting (Baim et al., 2002). Also speaking about her first time entering the prison, Marie explained:

My first experience was nerve racking, only because I just didn't know what to expect. A few weeks before going in we had a session of induction which made me feel really, really nervous – just hearing about what not to do, what you should do and what you shouldn't bring into the prison. […] You learned from induction that in some situations you're never really too safe in there.

Both Romarnie and Marie expressed that not knowing what to expect contributed to their feelings of nervousness. Marie's knowledge of prisons was also based on assumptions and preconceived ideas from television programmes, such as *Prison Break*, as well as resulting from the warnings given in the prison volunteer induction session. This left her feeling nervous about entering the prison for the first time: "I had a whole bunch of ideas in my head that made me nervous." Adding to the unfamiliarity of the prison environment, Marie did not know how the imprisoned participants would respond to her cultural dance classes, especially as she had not met the participants prior to the first class. Only seven of the 30 participants had the same cultural origins as the traditional dance that was taught by Marie, which raised doubts about whether the participants would appreciate the cultural dance. Marie was also worried that dance had been 'forced' on some of the participants, and they had only attending as an activity requirement. This created some uncertainty around how the participants would respond to her and enhanced her feelings of nervousness.

Similar to Marie and Romarnie, Chris described how working in prisons "can be a little bit daunting for most people". Chris found the environment daunting at first, but after a year he had adjusted and become familiar with the context. Chris recounted, "[there were] chairs thrown at me, swearing at me, but you just have to remember that they're just acting out". After being exposed to many situations throughout his 30 years of working within the prison, Chris no longer finds the prison environment a nerve wracking or daunting experience. He explained,

I think at the moment there's nothing that I haven't been exposed to. I've read their files and I've seen it all. There's nothing new. […] Mind you I have been there a while to be exposed to all these things. But it does take time.

Romarnie and Marie worked in the prison environment for only a very short time compared to Chris. However, Marie did get the opportunity to return a year later when she helped the same company provide another series of workshops at the same prison. Wright (2005) explains that while practitioners can initially experience culture shock, they do become acclimatised to the prison environment over time. Marie did not remember being nervous during her second delivery of workshops. She explained that she experienced initial nerves and then she was fine: "I kind of knew what to do. I kept in mind that there were protocols and things that I needed to be mindful of, and to not

forget that they were prisoners." Marie had also changed her teaching practice and her perception of the teaching role. She explained that the experience of teaching dance in the prison environment had given her "a heads up on a different way of teaching now", as she wouldn't normally "think too much about it". The practitioners' narratives illustrate how acclimatisation can occur through the length of time each practitioner was working within the prison environment. Acclimatisation appeared to happen through long-term engagement for Chris, and to a lesser extent for Marie. Through acclimatisation the practitioners' feelings of nervousness were reduced.

Despite their feelings of nervousness, Romarnie and Marie never actually felt threatened by the participants. Romarnie said, "I never had to use the panic button, and I never felt unsafe with the girls". Marie also shared that "there wasn't any point where I felt scared for my life or threatened". This may have been due to their position as volunteers entering the environment. Romarnie explained how the participants believed that if they "blew it" she would not be allowed to return to the prison to continue teaching dance. She explained,

> I used to take a note pad and pen in, and the girls wrote down what music they wanted. And one day one of the girls wrote down something else that she wanted me to take out, and I just ripped it up and put it in the bin. And I said to them several times […] "well if I let you do that, or if I bring stuff in, what's going to happen?". "Oh you'll get kicked out miss", and I went "yeah absolutely, I won't be allowed back in here again, so let's make a choice that means we can carry on".

The participants' awareness of the rules may have lessened any risks associated with participant behaviour during the dance classes. Alternatively, Romarnie's narrative may illustrate that the participant was willing to break the rules for a reward other than dance: moving something outside of the prison. This behaviour could also signify that the participants had not been invested in the dance class, found it unenjoyable, or saw it as a way to manipulate the system.

Overall, the prison environment caused nervousness in a variety of ways for the practitioners and this decreased over time. As previously discussed, the volunteer parameter may have contributed to the practitioners' feeling of safety, therefore reducing the nervousness felt by Romarnie and Marie. Although Chris found the experience of working within a prison daunting at first, his long-term position has allowed him to become familiar with the environment and, potentially, the imprisoned youth at the residence (Wright, 2005).

Emotional Detachment: "It could be any one of us"

The prison environment presents many complexities and challenges, such as feeling nervous. The practitioners suggested that emotionally detaching from certain elements can be a useful strategy in overcoming these challenges. Criminology researcher Elaine Crawley (2004) describes emotional detachment as a commonly employed strategy by people working in prisons, as emotions have the potential to overwhelm (Carr, 2001). Emotional detachment, also referred to as 'emotional distancing', is a strategy that "help people get through extremely stressful situations" (Stein, Leventhal, & Trabasso, 1990, p. 321).

The idea of emotional detachment was discussed by each of the practitioners, especially in relation to their feelings of nervousness. Romarnie, Marie and Chris spoke of having detached themselves from the emotions they had felt in association with their participants' position as prisoners and the crimes they had committed. Part of Chris's role requires him to read the prisoners' files, which include information about their crimes. However, as Chris explained,

> When I read a kid's file I don't really spend too much time reading in-depth, because it's really easy for you to get personal with the kids and what they've done. […] I've had kids who have done some pretty disgusting things. You just have to detach yourself from what they have done in order to work better and more effectively with them.

For dance practitioners working in prison environments, with knowledge that their participants have been sentenced for crimes, it would be very easy to allow personal opinions to influence interaction with the prisoner participants (Crawley, 2004; Houston, 2005). It could also lead to feelings of nervousness when teaching within the prison environment. Abraham (2012) argues that staff "must perform their duties regardless of the personal view or what they have had to put up with the day before" (para. 4). Similarly, the community dance approach encourages teaching without being influenced by personal views and emotions about participants (Houston, 2005). Community dance pedagogy supports the idea that dance is for anyone (Amans, 2008; Houston, 2005) and aims to provide a positive experience for facilitators and participants.

Neither Romarnie nor Marie knew what crimes the dance class participants had committed. While opportunities may have arisen to discuss this with participants, they decided not to learn this information because they wanted to provide a positive and non-judgmental experience in class. Like Chris, Marie also aimed to emotionally detach. She described trying to make sure she "didn't change the way that [she] saw [the participants] just because they were prisoners" by recognising that they were attending her dance class as participants. The idea of treating prisoners in class simply as

participants is further emphasised by Maud Clark, the artistic director of a theatre company working with female inmates: "people within the prisons are not monsters and they're not that different from us – it could be any one of us" (cited in Ross, 2013, para.9).

Romarnie and Chris also spoke of how they managed to see beyond the participants' as 'prisoners' (Arts Access Aotearoa, 2012b; Houston, 2005; Ross, 2013). Romarnie commented, "If you had met most of those girls, anywhere else but in the remand unit, you would have been struck by their energy, their attractiveness and their intelligence." Similarly, Chris also mentioned that when he sees the boys behaving well or dancing, he thinks, "Oh shucks", because he knows the boys have "been out there doing bad stuff, but then they're sitting in here with a big heart". Abraham (2012) shared the same thoughts about working with imprisoned participants: "Such amazing women come in through these doors. If they had been given a different place of birth and a different time, they could have lived very different lives" (Abraham cited in Arts Access Aotearoa, 2012b, para.2). These comments illustrate how Romarnie and Chris tried to avoid seeing their participants as 'prisoners', as reflected in their efforts to teach the imprisoned participants like they would teach participants outside the prison environment.

For the practitioners, detaching themselves from judging or viewing the participants as prisoners was a way to achieving this perspective. Chris explained,

> You have to think "this kid hasn't had the best chance in life. A lot of things would have affected him to do what he has done". And it's so easy to get personally involved, but that's not my job. That's for the courts and the social workers to decide what's best, and what's best might be that he goes to prison. There's nothing you can do about that. All you can do is do the best you can for him while he is in your care.

Applying context and consideration to the situations of the imprisoned participants allows Chris to detach himself from viewing the young boys as prisoners and experiencing his associated emotions. In their interview study with prison teachers, and in particular in relation to prisoners sharing their stories in creative writing, Michals and Kessler (2015) found that "learning about the crimes interferes with the teachers thinking about their students as just students" (Michals & Kessler, 2015, p. 54).

As Romarnie stated, "There is no value to the [prisoners] of going into the prison with big emotion." By not using the label of 'prisoner', the roles of facilitator and participant can be better managed within the dance class, thus allowing the participants to feel equal to the practitioner. Clark works creatively with participants when providing music and drama in prison. She maintains that working equally with the facilitator is the reason

why the arts classes are successful (Ross, 2013). This is important as many participants may never have had an equal meeting ground, and their background can seem insignificant when enjoying arts activities (Owen, 2014; Ross, 2013). Hierarchy can be lessened as "with the arts, it doesn't matter how rich you are, how poor you are, how educated you are… it's [about] being more of who you really are as human being, not the tag you're given as a prisoner" (Clark cited by Ross, 2013, para.6). This also applies to dance, which can allow an opportunity for positive experiences and relationships to develop through participation in dance classes (Amans, 2008; Houston, 2009; Williams, 2013). Freire (1970) acknowledges the struggle to be "more fully human" (p.29) among those who are oppressed. Expanding on this, Clark notes that "with the arts, it doesn't matter how rich you are, how poor you are, how educated you are… It's [about] being more of who you really are as a human being, not the tag you're given as a prisoner" (cited by Ross, 2013, para. 6). Thus, community dance practice, where pedagogy is "forged with, not for, the oppressed" (Freire, 1970, p. 30), may also assist with lessening the effects of the teacher-student hierarchy through the facilitation of dance classes in prison.

Emotional detachment appears to be a strategy that has been used by the community dance practitioners in this study to navigate the challenges of providing dance classes in the prison environment. Detaching helped them to navigate feelings of nervousness, to treat the prisoners as participants, and to reduce the hierarchy in the relationship.

Dancing Onward

In conclusion, this research explored three community dance practitioners' experiences of providing dance in a prison environment, focusing on their perceptions and attitudes. Differences and similarities were revealed in the community dance practitioners' experiences, as they had navigated the challenges of providing dance in prison environments in a variety of ways. Romarnie, Marie, and Chris perceived their roles as facilitator, teacher and "all in one". Their positions as volunteers or staff also influenced the ways they accessed and provided dance in the prison environment and their relationships with the participants. Additionally, the practitioners felt nervousness at some stage within their time in the prison environment. Although the nervousness was acknowledged as a potential challenge to providing dance, it was possible to acclimatise to the prison environment over time. Equally important, the practitioners did not feel threatened by the participants. However, they discussed the need to emotionally detach, which was helpful for decreasing their feelings of nervousness. It was recognised that being able to emotionally detach from the idea of teaching prisoners led to a certain resilience, which in turn assisted in treating the prisoners as participants and helped the overall facilitation of dance within prison.

The perceptions and attitudes shared by the community dance practitioners in this study contribute to a greater understanding of how other arts practitioners may experience and navigate the challenges of providing dance classes in prison environments. Returning to Romarnie's comment that providing dance in prison environments "is not for the faint hearted", establishing a clear understanding of the role, accepting that it takes time to adapt to the prison environment and feel less nervous, and emotionally detaching may assist in navigating the challenges of providing dance in a prison environment.

This article also highlights several areas for further research and discussion. The impacts of staff versus volunteer status needs to be explored as these positions influenced the ways the practitioners accessed and provided dance in the prison environment. How might dance and arts practitioners be better supported by prison staff when delivering dance and arts classes? How can volunteers be supported to ensure the longevity of arts programmes in prison contexts? Further investigation with dance and arts practitioners could also delve into both the short- and long-term effects of working within prison environments for the practitioners. Research in this area might reveal how practitioners can be acclimatised to the prison environment and how teaching practices might change because of teaching experiences in a prison context.

It is hoped that through establishing insights from the three community dance practitioners' diverse experiences, these findings might make dance and art programme delivery in prison environments more accessible for community dance practitioners in New Zealand/Aotearoa and further abroad.

Endnotes

1. Aotearoa is the Maori word for New Zealand. New Zealand/Aotearoa is a bi-cultural country and it is therefore relevant and appropriate to use Maori terminology (Chile, 2006; Orange, 1990).

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