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NARRATIVE MAPPING: A METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING (DANCE)

Abstract

When exploring creative domains it is interesting to look at the myriad of possible mixing, morphing, amalgamation and intermingling of modes and student choices. These choices may be viewed as an open ended 'narrative' that flows between fixed points and can be documented through an ethnographic approach incorporating observations, collection of artifacts, video recordings and interviews. The significance of both the process (creation) and the final product (performance) is essential to this mapping process encompassing the impetus to creativity, working pathways, social interactions, agency and multiple stimuli. Narrative mapping checklists can incorporate tools for describing, analyzing, evaluating and contextualizing student work utilizing systems occurring in dance creative practice - these are time, weight, space and flow. The model also incorporates recent research into 'Memory Fields' (Burridge: 2004) and current CRPP project work on 'Creativity: Representational Practices in Artistic Domains'. (Wright, S., Matthews. Tan, A.G., Burridge, S.: 2004). A narrative map will indicate strengths/ weaknesses in performing arts projects and can demonstrate the links between school, community, national and international networks. It can stimulate new strategies for pedagogy at all levels and assist in the structuring of courses, modules and individual lessons. This model may also be applicable to many other subject areas and will be of interest to researchers, students, teachers, policy makers and arts practitioners.

Paper

Currently, Singapore is embracing rapid changes in education directions – part of this process is strategies for incorporating creative and critical thinking. Although some critics may suggest the drive is primarily economic rather than altruistic, the spin offs include among many, opportunities to promote citizenship, racial and religious harmony, the ability to work within diversity and above all, agency for personal expression through creative projects and independent learning. Incidents of imaginative projects exist, however curriculum changes and a pro-active commitment to arts education is not yet reflected in national curricula. Education policies, and the strategies to underpin such endeavors, lag behind. In this scenario multi-modal approaches to teaching and learning may partially fill the gap and be incorporated across multiple subject areas.

One research project currently underway at the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP) at the National Institute of Education in Singapore is the Multiliteracy group project titled, 'Creativity: Representational Practices in Artistic Domains'. (Wright, S.; Matthews; Tan, A G; Burr ridge, S, 2004). Although the project is in a pilot stage the team has formulated a trial coding system to collect data from observations in Singapore schools. The aim of the study will be to observe creativity, pedagogy that incorporates a multi-modal approach (either intuitively or overtly) and the relationships occurring between representational practices in the school, community and home. Part of this system includes what I term 'Narrative Mapping'. This tracks and records episodes, dynamics and flows of creativity and places them contextually as part of a whole. A Narrative Map, underpinned by its philosophical and pedagogy frameworks, can serve as a useful means of projecting, planning and mentoring creative projects in schools and assist in the structuring of courses, modules and individual lessons. Specifically in dance, it can be used to map a bridge between the school-based teacher and a visiting practitioner – this is an essential element of the idea outlined in this paper.

Dance is currently a non-curricular subject in Singapore and occurs randomly with variable resources, pedagogy, student outcomes and school objectives. A personal experience from dance educator Sondra Stamey Sluder corroborates this omission from her experience as a student in the United States:

*I was denied dance as a youth because it was not a part of the education system....
Children's minds are the focus of education, producing disconnected children and adults
as the body and spirit are left undeveloped. (Stamey Sluder 1998:113)*

An important point here about dance education is that word '*education*'. Any accredited dance education course (O and A levels in Australia, for example) must have three elements – creating, presenting and appraising. Dance education should not be exclusively about presenting. While performances for families and school competitions may be an important aspect of the overall dance program, typically they deny the students' opportunity for individual creativity, self-expression and personal development. I addressed this topic in a previous paper in relation to the phenomena of the national Rock Eisteddfod Challenge in Australia;

Schools spend increasingly large amounts of money to produce a 'professional' piece that is dance-based and incorporates other areas of the arts. The level of competition is often fierce and student participation in the production often gives way to 'professionalism' and a 'win at all costs' attitude for the kudos of the school. Rather than being involved in a regular dance program involving participation in a range of tasks incorporating individual expression and creative explorations, students become part of a large team being 'drilled' in set moves for up to a year prior to the competition. (Burridge 2002: 5)

In Singapore most of the energy, funding and resources for dance goes towards a similar competition, the Singapore Youth Festival for Primary and Secondary schools, held bi-annually for each sector. A brief outline of the current situation for dance in Singapore follows.

Early Childhood

From observations thus far in Singapore by the CRPP project team this age group appear to be well catered for in terms of the time and quality allocated to dance; typically delivered via a movement and music class. (This is also a course requirement in the Ministry of Education document for this sector.) There are numerous examples of rich cultural experiences where children learn traditional dances and songs, participate in games, creative movement explorations, music, and integrated activities – for example, language learning through action singing and much more. Although this is positive more can be done to assist the teachers with their programs- in many cases they depend heavily on their own cultural background in dance, their training experiences and personal interest.

Primary

Dance in primary schools is often part of an integrated platform occurring within a range of subject areas. Children may create some movement associated with an art, music or even a history class. Again this seems to be dependent on the teacher's confidence in teaching creative movement and the topics presented. Singapore Primary teachers have no curriculum directive to incorporate dance or movement into their program. At this level the PE teacher, for example, may give a dance lesson and many schools begin to have dance clubs providing opportunities for children to perform and represent their school at various events. One or two schools, for example Chinese Girls School, offer a comprehensive program of extra-curricular dance. The Ministry of Education encourages Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) dance groups to enter the bi-annual Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) where they can perform choreography in either the International, Chinese, Indian or Malay categories to attain a 'benchmark' standard for their school – these are gold, silver or bronze. Even at the primary level this event is seen as much more than a chance for participation. Awards are highly esteemed and the results posted on banners advertising the school's artistic profile to attract students and parents.

Secondary

Most secondary schools now have a dance club, usually as part of the CCA activities programs in schools. A teacher with some dance background often teaches this, however most schools employ a specialist dance teacher. For a large majority the focus is on the preparation and presentation of an item for the SYF run by the Ministry of Education – like the Primary section, Secondary schools are awarded a gold, silver or bronze. In 2005 there were over 370 entries in all the categories; 102 schools entered the 'International'

section and in this section alone over 2000 students participated in this three day event – it was also the first time a Gold with Honors category was implemented and 8 schools achieved this. Competition for a high standing is strong and this places undue pressure on the specialist dance teachers coming into the school who work with the students to choreograph their entry. Many are young dancers who are recent tertiary graduates with limited teaching experience or a pedagogy background. In this scenario there are few second chances if they do not succeed in achieving one of the higher awards and the turn around rate is high. Although this festival may be seen as a fairly one dimensional activity in an ideal dance education program, the huge support for the event, the number of schools and individuals participating, should not be ignored in the drive to promote more dance, and eventually dance curricula in schools. Singaporean students have demonstrated a passion for dance and it is intrinsically linked to the cultural groups and their communities.

In addition to the SYF and CCA programs, schools can participate in an Arts Enrichment Program (AEP) whereby professional local arts groups are funded by the National Arts Council to work with a school – this could take the form of a residency, workshops or a one-off performance by the company for students.

At present there are no O level dance courses offered in Singapore.

Junior Colleges

Australia, the UK and the United States have long offered dance as an A level subject – for some states in Australia it is one of the most popular courses and the fastest growing. An International Baccalaureate dance course exists and there are many examples of course documents that typically divide the subject into approximately 50% theory, 50% practical modules in a range of areas from dance choreography to criticism, aesthetics and dance history. This will inevitably come to Singapore at some point and already several schools are investigating options for such courses to offer at both A and O level. At the present time, like the Primary and Secondary schools, they have CCA dance clubs and they enter the SYF competition.

In the current situation in Singapore, the sectors that may need the most support are the Primary and Secondary sectors – the Narrative Map is aimed at these groups.

The Narrative Map

The Narrative Map principle can assist in ensuring a high quality dance experience that is realistically based on the resources and level of teacher training and skill. An exciting part of this process is recognizing the important relationships that exist between the classroom teacher, visiting specialist, and artist-in-resident or single session master teacher. By following common aims and objectives via a Narrative Map, all participants can work together utilizing their individual abilities to see an arts project come to fruition. Trajectories and surprises will occur if creativity is flourishing – they can be added and included in the map later.

As stated in the abstract of the paper, the map incorporates dance concepts that are used both as choreographic and organization tools in the creative process. Elements of time, weight, space and flow, (Laban, R. 1971) followed by some examples of representational forms (Hannah, J. 1979) are summarized below. These form part of the Narrative map and can assist teachers in varying their programs to maximize creative opportunities for the students. Generally where there are multiple representations occurring, creativity is thriving and the students are being challenged.

Time

This can include immediate time through to the full extent of a particular topic or activity, a school semester or a longitudinal study. All of these are important and become relevant to a study of the effects of creativity on learning. The tracking of time gives insights into the processes of problem solving, records 'eureka' moments where something becomes clear, the processing of thoughts and feelings, engagement, phrases or phases of artifacts that are made. The dance class itself is an allocation of time for individual and group creativity where something new is achieved and past discoveries consolidated - the process to

these points form an integral part of the Narrative Map. Longitudinal studies can chart the effect of learning through creative practice – the duality of the process/outcome equation has life long learning implications and can promote citizenship and enhance an individual's ability to be a creative thinker in the future.

In her recent address titled 'Fluid Culture: Frozen Art Education' at the InSEA World Arts Educators Congress, New York, 2002, Kapila Vatsyayan, spoke of this aspect citing her belief of;

...the possibility of 'community ritual' through involvement in the arts whereby shared beliefs, commitments and social vision can result in a 'mental map of peace.'

Time in dance choreography relates to the use of dynamics and energy in the choreography.

Weight

In dance, this refers to the emphasis given to particular moments of energy that can shape space, nuances and dynamics in choreography - the body responds via sensory perceptions to these factors in a complex of 'memory fields' that enable kinesthetic responses to stimuli. (Burridge, S. 2004). In the overall creative process it can be applied to the particular stress points of a lesson or a project and how these dynamics change. The dialogue between the participants, mentors, teachers and parents are also useful to record as they often encompass flows of engagement, inter-personal relationships and the student's generative ability within the context of the task/community.

Space

Here there are multiple spatiality's to consider with the body as the focus of encoding and decoding creative practice that predetermine creative activity (Parviainen, J.2002). Exploration of the personal kinesphere by individual students is fundamental to a creative movement session progressing to the use of space and floor patterns by the whole group. Here the layout of the class, the space available, the placement of the teacher, materials and so on are fundamental to the success of a dance class.

Flow

In all creativity a flow occurs between many elements. Blocks in a 'flow' are caused typically by interruption, intervention, lack of skills to realize a visualized outcome and many more factors. Here the Narrative Mapping methodology is useful as it follows these flows and gives an overall picture of learning that incorporates the many facets of creativity - it is underpinned by the fundamentals of arts praxis whereby the combination of skills and creativity are necessary to facilitate an outcome. Incorporated in this approach, some useful tools to describe representations through movement follow. These include factors that impinge on the creative theme including its philosophy and history. It is recognized that not all themes and dance forms, for example much of 'abstract' post-modern dance, lend themselves to creative responses and simply have a predominant 'muscle memory' function.

Representational Forms

Understanding and recording these elements form part of the analysis of the creative process. (Hanna: 1979) Apart from the descriptive element that is present throughout, other elements may be sporadic, sustained, recur or repeat. By recording these in the Narrative Map it is possible to situate predominant 'frames' at various points in the creative process. As a pedagogy tool, it may give clues as to how different thematic material is best presented when teaching. A brief summary of these terms with examples follow:

- ? Descriptive – literal actions and narratives; for example digging, lifting.
- ? Iconic – often associated with a 'universal' understanding of an image. Iconography can also refer to particular 'known' characters – for example, a Spiderman posture that is recognizable to a particular group.
- ? Stylized – the essentials of what is being depicted; for example, a group may dance in a wavy pathway to denote that they are a snake.
- ? Mimetic – from the word 'miming'; for example, acting, copying using gestures and actions.

- ? Metonymic – part of the body signifies the feeling or literal aspect of what is being represented; for example, the arm can move like a bird while the rest of the body can tell the story about the bird. Also something that stands for something else by suggestion; for example, ‘The White House has decided’.
- ? Symbolic – semiotic practices and symbol systems including marks, sounds, gestures, images to stand for another object or emotion. Here you may also observe the use of particular formations and pathways by the group (circles, lines, jagged pathways) that may take on meaning in a wider context. For example, walking in a circle repeatedly may denote being undecided.
- ? Metaphoric – likening one thing to another; for example ‘soar like a bird’.
- ? Transformation - occurs where the dancer becomes a character thereby going beyond the self. This may be used in higher order acting, trance and ritual and possibly not relevant to the study.

Application

In a Narrative Map, the classroom teacher’s contribution may include knowledge of the students, the school calendar of events, logistics, regulations and processes, other staff and parents’ interests and skills. In a concept/theme-based dance project they can link the ideas to other subject areas, suggest related resources, research topics and implement relationships within faculty. Similarly, the specialist artist can work creatively with the students utilizing their own working processes, inspire them with their dance skills and knowledge, translate concepts physically, direct rehearsals, production components and the like. Collaboration, co-operation and teamwork are the essentials of a Narrative Map. It clearly shows these relationships in a process whereby contributions are valued, necessary and ensure a satisfying sense of ownership of the project for all.

The students will gain confidence in their own creativity and skills and there is a possibility that a dance program may flourish beyond the time frame of a single activity. Without this relationship the program is reliant solely on the availability of the specialist dance teacher, the school budget and commitment to the dance program. The school-based teacher is not required to be a dance specialist but is able work artistically with the students and all will be involved in the outcome of the project.

A summary of a narrative map table may look like this:

NARRATIVE MAP	
CONCEPT	STRUCTURES
CONTENT/THEMES	MOVEMENT VOCABULARY
PHILOSOPHY	SPACE/TIME/WEIGHT DYNAMICS
SOCIAL INTERACTIVITY	LITERAL/ABSTRACT FORMS
MEANING	REPRESENTATIONAL FORMS PRESENT Descriptive, iconic, stylized, mimetic, metonymic, symbolic, metaphoric.
FLOWS	

Typically the components on the left will be weighted towards the involvement of the school-based teacher while those on the right are more geared to utilizing a specialist dance teacher. Depending on the project, the working processes and time allocations for the components of the project can be mapped. Shifts that occur in the creative process over time is embodied by the students and mapped as the flow between these components. For example, roles may change closer to a performance time when energy needs to be directed to rehearsal practice, consolidating production elements and logistics.

Case Studies

The following case studies give examples of dance projects that outline the essentials of a Narrative Map and its application to a dance project. Both projects have a complex of thematic material that could involve teachers from many areas for example, psychology, sociology, literature and performing arts. One is from

Singapore, the other Canberra, Australia. I have mentored both groups and in the Canberra case, worked closely with a psychology teacher.

1. Singapore

Performing arts students from LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts had an opportunity to join a Creative Laboratory group every Friday afternoon for a four hour session over a semester to explore their creativity. They received credit points for their participation but were free to develop whatever they choose during this time. (This period was later extended into many additional hours for rehearsals and performances.) Over the years work from such groups has included a devised TV game show, a Tamil version of 'Cinderella', and site specific performances. In 2003 the outcome was the creative process and performance of a work titled *Sensory Perceptions*.

The plan was to devise a performance piece using multiple creative elements based on the five senses; however by the second week participants already decided to include the sixth sense – imagination. The group comprised of 23 performers from 11 nationalities including those from Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, France, Myanmar, and Thailand among others. The age ranged from 17 – 28 years of age, 11 males and 12 females. Thai artist, Pinaree Sanpitak's 'Offering Vessels' provided a sculpture installation as the backdrop and it was decided that a group of musicians should also collaborate. Six weeks into the ten week process six musicians came to all sessions to work with the performers. A keyboard, cello, flute, Indian percussion and voice added to the eclectic mix of influences already present.

The concept for the work arose from using the five senses as inspiration in the creative process. The piece evolved through a series of images that reflected responses to these in various forms. Utilizing movement as the basis for most scenes, *Sensory Perceptions* included text (for example a scene from King Lear), poems, songs, dances, devised scenes, sign language, cooking and so on - all expressive of many moods and feelings evoked by the theme of 'senses'. The piece was textured and involved both the light and dark side of situations in the eyes of the participants. These 'sensory perceptions' gave a window to the 'soul' of the world revealing their spiritual 'journey' so far.

The development process involved explorations of ideas brought along to each session – sometimes this involved the whole group, small groups and several duos and sols. Sometimes movement was the form of expression, sometimes pre-existing or devised texts; most often there was a blend of many forms of expression. These episodes were linked into a loose narrative through movement, musical phrases and the lighting design. Thematically episodes ranged from quite abstract, sensory-based work through to stories of abuse, selling child brides, sign language, relationship stories, dreams, and pure dance.

A Narrative Map of *Sensory Perceptions* may look like this:

NARRATIVE MAP - <i>Sensory Perceptions</i> (2003)	
CONCEPT <i>Based on the five senses</i>	STRUCTURES <i>A series of images that reflected responses to the senses in various forms</i>
CONTENT/THEMES <i>Episodes ranged from quite abstract, sensory based work through to stories of abuse, selling child brides, sign language, relationship stories, dreams, and pure dance</i>	VOCABULARY <i>Text (for example a scene from King Lear), poems, songs, dances, devised scenes, sign language, cooking</i>
PHILOSOPHY <i>To explore ideas and create a blend of many forms of expression based on feelings.</i>	SPACE/TIME/WEIGHT DYNAMICS - <i>Textured and involves both the light and dark side of situations</i>
SOCIAL INTERACTIVITY <i>Mentor, Dr Stephanie Burridge 23 performers from 11 nationalities; age ranged from 17 – 28 years of age, 11 males and 12 females.</i>	LITERAL/ABSTRACT FORMS <i>An example – a poem about a nightmare leading to a group dance about falling, being chased, drowning and individual responses to dreams.</i>
MEANING <i>A window to the ‘soul’ of the world revealing a spiritual ‘journey’</i>	REPRESENTATIONAL FORMS PRESENT Descriptive, iconic, stylized, mimetic, metonymic, symbolic, metaphoric. <i>In summary, all representational forms were used extensively – however there was less emphasis on purely descriptive work, possibly due to both the multi-national cast and the desire to abstract the narrative.</i>
FLOWS - <i>linked into a loose narrative through movement, musical phrases and the lighting design</i>	

2. Canberra (Australia)

Each year in Canberra, AusDance ACT, (a peak dance organization) organizes a Youth Dance Festival. It began as a forum for groups of dancers from local high schools, but it now encompasses any group of young people who are willing to devise a five minute dance choreography based on the given theme – for the year, 2000, it was ‘The Colors of Life’.

I mentored a group of 12 young women who decided to create a piece on the 5 stages of grieving. They had recently read and studied the book of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, (1996) and thought this would be a strong basis for their idea – they chose to express each of these stages in different colors to focus the emotional impact of these. They created a pure dance work with video images projected on the cyclorama at the back of the stage – it was titled *The Colors of Life*

The group was between 15 and 17 years of age and most had dance training to a high level outside of school. They all did around 20 hours training a week at community dance schools and most went on to tertiary dance training institutions and professional careers. They saw the festival as a unique opportunity to come together and create their own piece – in their dance schools the focus was on exams, eisteddfod and concert performances.

The process involved making a series of short dances based on their perceptions of the moods and feelings of each stage of grieving. Although they utilized the stages as per the Kubler-Ross book, a major task was to decide to ‘color’ these. The choice of music, movement vocabulary, grouping and overall direction depended on these decisions. The dancers progressed through a period of intense discussion of personal histories, (grand parents, friends who had died), research into the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of

death and dying, and also a study of visual imagery, music and texts on the subject. In the overall 12 week frame allocated to this project more than half the time was spent in their ‘non-dance’ research and reflections. For this aspect they consulted with community groups and teachers in many of their other subject areas, in particular, the school psychology teacher.

Once clear in their minds about their colors and feelings, the choreography unfolded quite quickly with different individuals taking responsibility for creating and dancing sections – due to the small number there was a lot of overlapping of roles. They focused on interpretations of color to denote the feelings to create the movement– for example; white for despair (body slumped, inward, slow) and isolation, red for anger (aggressive, sharp, fractured), green for bargaining (reaching out then withdrawing), blue for depression (introspective, curved, falling to the floor); and yellow (upward, confident) for acceptance. In performance, they decided to add a projected video of a variety of images, some of colors (for example an open blue sky), some of friends talking about death and dying. The sound track also incorporated their voices mixed with a devised musical score.

A Narrative Map of *the Colors of Life* may look like this:

NARRATIVE MAP – <i>The Colors of Life</i> (2000)	
CONCEPT <i>Based on Elizabeth Kubler-Ross book, <u>On Death and Dying</u></i>	STRUCTURES <i>A series of short dances with projected video and soundtrack</i>
CONTENT/THEMES <i>Short dance episodes based on perceptions of the moods and feelings of each stage of grieving</i>	MOVEMENT VOCABULARY <i>Interpretations of color to denote feelings to create movement– for example; white for despair (body slumped, inward, slow) and isolation, red for anger (aggressive, sharp, fractured), green for bargaining (reaching out then withdrawing), blue for depression (introspective, curved, falling to the floor); and yellow (upward, confident) for acceptance.</i>
PHILOSOPHY <i>They had recently read and studied the book of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, <i>On Death and Dying</i>, (1996) and thought this would be a strong basis for their idea – they chose to express each of these stages in different colors to focus the emotional impact of these.</i>	SPACE/TIME/WEIGHT DYNAMICS <i>In the overall 12 week frame allocated to this project more than half the time was spent in ‘non-dance’ research and reflections.</i>
SOCIAL INTERACTIVITY <i>Mentor – Dr Stephanie Burridge 12 young women 15-17 yrs.</i>	LITERAL/ABSTRACT FORMS <i>Task was to utilize the stages as per the Kubler-Ross book (literal) then flow to abstraction through colors and dance.</i>
MEANING ? <i>Focused on interpretations of color to denote their feelings to create the movement.</i> ? <i>The physical, mental and spiritual aspects of death and dying.</i>	REPRESENTATIONAL FORMS PRESENT <i>Descriptive, iconic, stylized, mimetic, metonymic, symbolic, metaphoric.</i> <i>Complex use of abstraction through color (symbolic and iconic), body imagery for stages (metaphoric) and somatics – linking emotion to physicality.</i>
FLOWS - literal to abstract concept utilizing complex representations	

Some conclusions

The Narrative Maps and the descriptions of the processes in these examples demonstrate several important aspects of youth creativity and arts practice. These include diverse and complex working praxis with fluidity between multi-modal research and performance outcomes, high levels of self-motivation and belief, discipline, responsibility and group co-ordination. These elements sustained the groups over time and they all trusted that the project would come to fruition and reach a certain standard by the date that their performance was scheduled. All had high personal standards and goals that they wanted to achieve – they felt ownership over the project and were keen to do their best for the group as well as for themselves.

The relationship between other faculty and the community occurred naturally as they responded to the challenges of the thematic material. Students recognized and valued the skills of all involved in the project.

Dance not only has creative, social and health benefits for students, the body encapsulates important information on human behavior in a cultural context and is an expressive tool for learning. Despite such sentiments and substantial evidence of the importance of the arts in learning, personal development and so on, arts practitioners and advocates continually need to work within larger academic and political frameworks to implement change – dance in particular, continues to occupy the outer edge of the sphere of importance. In this scenario support for the value of engagement in the arts and its key role in learning through multi-modal, multiliteracy approaches can be pushed forward through other frames and agendas. A Narrative Mapping approach may assist in providing creative dance opportunities for a growing number of interested students while at the same time giving teachers more confidence as non-dancers to participate in this exciting field.

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