Community and Creativity in the Classroom: An Experiment in the Use of the Guest Interview, Focus Group Interviews and Learning Journals in the Teaching and Learning of the Anthropology of Modern Dance

Jonathan Skinner and Kirk Simpson

ABSTRACT: This article assesses the experimental teaching and learning of an anthropology module on ‘modern dance’. It reviews the teaching and learning of the modern dances (lecture, observation, embodied practice, guest interview), paying attention to the triangulation of investigation methods (learning journal, examination, self-esteem survey, focus group interview). Our findings suggest that—in keeping with contemporary participatory educational approaches—students prefer guest interviews and ‘performances of understanding’ for teaching and learning, and that focus groups and learning journals were the preferred research methods for illuminating the students’ teaching and learning experience.

KEYWORDS: dance, learning journal, focus group, teaching and learning, education

It is by dancing that one can fully understand dance (...) [Dancing] requires an observing participant rather than anthropology’s orthodox participant observer (Daniel 1995: 21, 22)

“The fact that I do anthropology and most of the time I go into a class and it’s—you’re getting talked to ‘about people’ and the way they act. And it’s never really in context. You never really see the people, how they’re acting, what the specific thing is, and—I know it’s not entirely feasible—but I think every module in some way in anthropology should be able to work in some way the students participating in what they are learning about because it’s what anthropology’s about. It’s crucial to the understanding. It makes it so much more clear when you’re actually experiencing it as well as learning about it—you have some sort of context in which to place it.”

(‘William’, third-year QUB anthropology student, focus group interviewee)

Introduction: Anthropology of ‘Dance Fever’

The School of Anthropological Studies at The Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) is progressive in its teaching and learning of anthropology. Lecturers have used learning journals with their students for courses on the ‘anthropology of emotions’, field trips for research methods students, drumming circles for ‘anthropology of performance’ students, tourist souvenirs for ‘anthropology of tourism’ students, flag making for ‘anthropology of art’ students, and gamelan and drumming ensembles for ethnomusicology
students within the School (see McIntosh, this issue). The School has had an ethnomusicology and performance tradition ever since its first Professor of Social Anthropology, John Blacking, founded the discipline; two of his legacies are a wooden-floored performance room and a music- and video-orientated ‘hypermedia’ room. It is the ideal environment for experiments in the teaching and learning of anthropology, and the new module ‘the anthropology of modern dance’ was the ideal module in which to carry out these experiments. This article is therefore about the construction, delivery, reception and assessment of ‘210ESA201 The Anthropology of Modern Dance’, delivered in 2004/2005 by Dr Jonathan Skinner, a new lecturer in the School.

One of Dr Skinner’s interests is in dance in the twentieth century, particularly social dance (hereafter referred to as ‘modern dance’ as opposed to ‘traditional dance’), its social function and meaning for participants, their use of body space and notions of risk and aesthetics, as well as the teaching and learning of dance. The intention behind ‘210ESA201 The Anthropology of Modern Dance’ was to convene a new module which reflected and overlapped with Skinner’s current research interests and writings, to teach and to test out research. With a generous teaching and learning grant of £5,000 from the university, Dr Skinner was given the opportunity to both teach and test out dance research, as well as to conduct some research into transferable skills and the processes of teaching and learning with students. Inspiration and enthusiasm for an applied module came from a number of sources, academic (C-SAP projects and Tim Ingold’s AHRB project in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, see below) and popular (the popularity of jive and salsa in Belfast, and the recent resurgent interest in dance from television contests such as Strictly Come Dancing and Strictly Dance Fever).

Following this introduction, this article considers the construction of the module, its conceptualisation and the educational theories that underpinned it. It then attends to module assessment and review (feedback): this section will look at the methodological advantages and disadvantages of the review techniques used (learning journal, examination, attendance and participation, evaluation questionnaire, self-esteem survey and focus-group interview). Finally, it comments and reflects upon this teaching and learning process and exercise, situating findings in the context of educational theory.

‘Conceptual Equivalence’:
The Module Structure and Delivery

Dr Skinner drew inspiration and encouragement from the following two modules and teaching and learning projects. First, Tim Ingold’s 2003/2004 module ‘The 4 A’s: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture’: this was an experimental, final-year undergraduate course seeking to develop new ways of knowing and understanding between the four disciplines. The module was run along the lines of interactive practicals, demonstrations and site visits and was a part of the wider project ‘Learning is Understanding in Practice: Exploring the Interrelations Between Perception, Creativity and Skill’ funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) and LTSN Centre for Learning and Teaching in Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP). Rather than present an anthropology of art or architecture to students, Ingold (2004) sought to examine the practices of artists and architects, calling for students to ‘engage’ with artefacts over the weeks of the module, to explore their composition and decomposition, their life histories and functions. In Ingold’s words, this teaching and learning project drew attention to the inconsistency between how theories of learning occur (knowledge is social, contained in skills, and conveyed and regenerated through the group (cf. Lave and Wenger 1991; Chaiklin and Lave 1996) and how they are taught and conveyed in the
traditional lecture-seminar (casting students as isolated and passive recipients in a process of knowledge transfer (Ingold 2005). Through teaching skills such as basket weaving (Palsson 1994; Ingold 2000; Ingold 2005), Ingold (2004) used techniques to make teaching and learning theories consonant with their everyday context: a particularly ‘vivid’ manner of learning according to student evaluation.

Second, in 2003/2004, Gillian Bentley (2004) ran an interactive teaching and learning module, ‘Evolutionary Medicine’, at University College London. The model used was ‘Oprah’-like, as distinguished evolutionary biologists were invited into class to discuss their work with students. Bentley was surprised by the results of her teaching and learning experiment, not expecting so many academics and practitioners to accept her invitations or her students to prefer this mode of teaching and learning more than any other (Figures 1 and 2). From a sample of approximately thirty-five undergraduate students, Bentley found that more than two-thirds of the class (69 percent) preferred the guest interview approach to the traditional lecture (see Figure 1), and that a similar proportion of the class preferred this mode of first-hand teaching and learning to interactive technological developments in the classroom such as PowerPoint and WebCT (see Figure 2).

Dr Skinner sought to deliver a module inspired by these two teaching and learning experiments, one composed of guest speakers, but also with the option of full, ‘enskilled’ participation for the students. He did not want, however, to make dancing a required activity in the module, nor for the module to be assessed in terms of the ability of students to dance or to improve in their dancing-embodied skill. The module descriptor for this module begins with the description that it ‘explores when, where, how, and why “modern” people dance’, and ends with the point that ‘[i]n all of these [workshops] the student can choose to watch and/or dance’. In other words, whilst it was acknowledged that the position of Daniel’s observing participant mentioned above is a useful one to take, it was considered to be more important that non-dancing students would not be at a disadvantage on this module. The dancing element to the module would thus not put off those interested in taking the module but who

![Figure 1: Student preference for lecture vs guest interview](source: Bentley 2004: 4)

![Figure 2: Student preferences for different teaching methods](source: Bentley 2004: 5)
did not want to dance or felt too embarrassed to dance. The dances featured (ballet, jive, hip-hop/breakdancing, salsa, tango, rueda, rave and modern African dance) would be treated as access points to topics such as modernity; expression, communication and meaning; gender, identity and subcultures. The dance demonstrations were not conceived as an end in themselves.

The dances and guest interviewees/performers were selected through dance networks established during Dr Skinner’s research and ‘hobby dancing’. They were invited to hold a two-hour ‘masterclass’ with the students and were paid £75 per hour, which is a rate above the customary visiting lecturer rate to acknowledge their physical and personal involvement in the masterclasses, as well as their part-time dance teaching activities (they were taking a number of hours out of their class schedules to come in to the university). The sessions were loosely structured for the visitors, who were nearly all non-academics. It was suggested that each visitor introduced themselves and talked about ‘how they got into dance’, during which they would invite student questions before moving on to demonstrate the dance to the students. There would then be an opportunity to learn the dance, led by the guest interviewee, and finally a period of time for final questions and answers.

With three visiting guest interviewees, there was the opportunity for the entire class to take them to a free lunch during which the students could talk more informally with the guest, as well as to get to know each other better—in other words to spur on the formation of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘community of learners’ in which learning and knowledge is best communicated and (re)generated.

The module as a whole was organised around these eight dance sessions. The remaining lecture workshops were used to ground the module in anthropological theory and ethnography. These four sessions were interspersed at the start, the end and the quarter-points through the weeks to act as ‘intellectual breathers’ and to hold the module together. After introducing the module and the modes of assessment (learning journal and exam, see below), Dr Skinner took the first masterclass, presenting jive to the students with his regular dance demonstrator, thereby giving the students a template to follow for other masterclasses. The classes then followed in quick succession, requiring a lot of coordination and logistics, but also involving students who videotaped classes, attended lunches and evening dances in Belfast for their learning journals, as well as a week-long visit by M40, a rueda dance team led by Ms Bea Prentiss and Mr Wyn Morris who also took the rueda masterclass (see Figures 3 and 4). Because the learning journals assessment featured the series of masterclasses—a 1,500-word learning journal submission addressing the questions, ‘How have the readings, performances and experiences on this module affected you in terms of teaching and learning?’—we will move directly on to the section reviewing the assessments.

Unfortunately, because of the submission date for the learning journals, the students did not have the opportunity to include accounts of their experience of the hiphop/breakdancing and modern African dance masterclasses.

Module Assessment

The ‘Anthropology of Modern Dance’ module was assessed as follows: learning journal (30 percent), two-hour examination (60 percent) and attendance and participation (10 percent). The examination was of a traditional format, and the attendance and participation marks were weighted at 5 percent each and allocated conceptually as per the QUB marking guidesheet—a grade lowered for every two sessions missed, and full marks for participation if students either danced or took notes. The learning journal was an academic diary which promoted long-term retention of concepts, reflexive and reflective learning, supported classroom learning, and promoted life-long learning. It was framed as a
personal space where lessons and lectures can be applied, questions asked and analytical capacities improved. Significantly, it was a semi-structured forum where students could relate academic experiences to personal experiences. The students were encouraged to be as creative and self-expressive as possible in their submissions and to use the first person, ‘I’, to write poems, thoughts, dialogues, reader response accounts or literature (b)logs, and to draw, paint or digitise pictures in their accounts. Below is a selection of the results.

Relating Readings to Masterclasses

These extracts from learning journals are grouped together because of their use of practical classroom and extracurricular engagement with the literature on the module. In these extracts, the students juxtapose events with readings, both of which work to illuminate one another. Here, Jaz links her understandings from masterclasses with Chris (salsa) and Jonathan Skinner and Helen (jive) to her interpretation of readings:

“[D]ance gesture is not a real gesture, but virtual” (Langer 1953: 178). I do not fully agree with this argument after speaking with Chris and also Helen who talk about what they feel and also from my own experience. As Wiescholek (2003) notes in her study of the salsa scene, dancers talk of a “mystical experience” and when felt it can be “really enchanting”. (Wiescholek 2003: 125)

This extract from a learning journal shows that the student is making connections between theory and practice: Jaz is using her experiences to engage with and critique the dance literature. It is this type of application of knowledge and experience that the module convenor has intended.

Writing in her learning journal about approaches to apprenticeship, Fay found similar connections and illumination between masterclass and module reading:

I witnessed the progression of my classmates ‘moving from peripheral to full participation in communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991: 71) on a smaller scale to the apprentice midwife but I felt it was relevant all the same. The community of practice mentioned in this case is the classroom setting with the students (apprentices) and the dancer (master).

Her comments become more reflexive as she marries theories that underpinned the module to observations she made from week to week in the performance room. They are more sophisticated than the following ungrounded or linked reflection about the module made by Jo:

“What I found from watching and participat-
ing in this partner dance was a connection in a rhythmic experience”.

Extending the Boundaries of the Learning Environment

One significant consequence of this experiment in teaching and learning was the increase in student involvement in the module’s subject matter. Not only did students participate in dances in the performance room, but they also voluntarily went out dancing, or watched dance on the television with the family, or watched boxing through a dancer’s lens, or dug into their memories of experiences relating to dance. These activities and thoughts were precisely the connections between theory and practice, reading and dancing, sought in the module’s aims and objectives as the students themselves extended the boundaries of the classroom-learning environment. The activities in the module were thus consonant with the teaching and learning aims established in the 2002 UK Anthropology Benchmark (QAA 2002: 9) statement where the notes under 5.7 read as follows:

5.7 Students themselves have also played an active part in the teaching and learning of anthropology. Many programmes now incorporate experiential learning of some kind in which the experience, values and biography of students are used to complement the more orthodox material that comprises the anthropological canon. A sense of reflexivity is also cultivated through encouraging students to work together and, in some respects, to create their own learning environment through discussion and engagement with one another. This community of learning may be further supported by electronic means such as email discussion groups.

The students in the ‘Anthropology of Modern Dance’ module became a community of active learners with a sensitivity towards embodied knowledge generated through movement and reading. Students drew not only upon their dance experiences for the duration of the module, but they also tapped into their memories. Below is a collection of their comments, again extracted from their learning journals:

Gemma—extracurricular dancing and reflections:

When I attended the Empire’s salsa night I felt much more able to understand the dichotomy involved with dancing at different times of the day, simply by relating the theory to my own feelings. In the club environment I felt more comfortable and free to move, and I think that the combination of feeling appropriately dressed, slightly drunk and, most importantly, amongst people who were there for the same purpose of enjoying the dance as either a participant or spectator equated to a wholly more enjoyable experience than that of the classroom. After my salsa club experience I was able to simultaneously experience and apply the theories I had learned about imagined community and liminality of dance and gain a deep insight into an area of dance that I had known nothing about, as well as the ability to articulate theories about the psychology of the dance that I had been unaware I was familiar with. Thus I learned on a number of different levels.

Mary—a mature student reflecting upon her son’s clubbing:

Clubbers have not only their own style of dress but also a different outlook to life in general and most importantly, their own mode of greeting and their own distinctive language. Clubbing therefore, as I see, is a weekend mode of life. I speak from experience on this subject as my son and his friends in their student days and before careers set in employed these strange weekend rituals. These involved serious showering and dressing with particular care and attention paid to hair grooming and gelling, all accompanied by music. Later several friends would arrive and from the bedroom could be heard the latest ‘mix’ from Pete Tong or some other deified disc jockey.

Tracey—using her memories to engage with dance theory:

As dances are often thought of as related to ethnic groups, people often think that certain people are naturally more gifted at certain ways of danc-
ing and, as Wieschiolek points out, people believe that people of a certain ethnicity have more authority to teach a certain dance (Wieschiolek 2003). Wieschiolek calls this ‘ethnic competence’ (p.22). I am familiar with this. A fine example happened last year when I studied in a historically black college in Alabama where there was a tiny white minority. I entered a hall with some friends and some hiphop was playing and I unconsciously started bobbing my head. One of my friends started giggling and I asked her why. “Girl, you almost dancing!” I asked her why this was funny even though I knew why. “You seen the movie White Men Can’t Jump?” I replied that I had and she explained joyfully, “Well, white women can’t dance!”

But this competence, which is often perceived racially, can be much more accurately viewed as a cultural, memetic entity. It is just exposure to the meme that makes it more likely for a Black American to be able to ‘bump ’n’ grind’, a Cuban to salsa, or an Irishman to ‘shoe the donkey’. These memes can and do cross ethnic boundaries, so that other people can learn to mimic and adapt these memes—Eminem can rap, Joss Stone can sing soul, and most of the world can beat England at cricket.

These three learning journal examples all feature personal memories. Gemma was inspired by the module to go out and to dance and to examine and reflect upon her actions in detail. For her, the readings assisted with her ‘everynight life’ (Delgado and Munoz 1997) just as much as the dancing at nighttime clarified her understanding of theories of liminality and community. For Mary, there was an ambivalence about the module in that she enjoyed watching dance and encouraged her son to dance, despite having been brought up to associate dance with ‘sinfulness’—an association which she now found to be ironic given that, for her son, dance evenings and preparations were rituals held to be more sacred than profane. And finally, Tracey drew upon her crosscultural/ethnic experiences of dance to support her interpretation of module readings. Her second paragraph is particularly rich in terms of connections made between dances and dancers, dance style and dance diffusion.

**Creative Engagements with the Anthropology of Modern Dance**

The three learning journal examples above all show how the module impacted upon the students’ lives. It changed the ways in which they saw themselves and others, especially when out dancing. The following two extracts from learning journals show how creative the students can be in this exercise. They ‘narrated’ their observations and reactions to the masterclasses, readings and their life experiences in new ways, regenerating anthropological knowledge as poetry (Brianna) and boxing as poetry in motion (Ruari). Brianna’s poem (Figure 5) is a parody of the module with references to the masterclasses (jive as Ceroc), readings and concepts (night- and daytime behaviour, Langer on dance as

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**The Dance**

Tick tick, tap tap
Is is house or is it rap?
No, its something called Ceroc
Does that mean I should wear a frock?
Will I not appear a tart
If I practise this plastic art.

In my virtual realm of power
I will blossom like a flower,
Others they may scorn and mock
But I’ll feel my whole being…like a cock
Hovering at the point of ejaculation
With my impressive gesticulation.

You may question the authenticity
Of my subjective reflexivity,
But ask the question, what does dance do?
It’s a different answer for me and you.
For both it is our drug of choice
It’s just so very hard to voice,
To articulate the anthropological notion
Of our dance world, made and unmade by motion.
Interpersonality reacts to light
Of the swirling couples in daytime and night.
Is it a form of catharsis Paul?
Or is Bourdieu right, its Habitus y’al!
Whatever the real explanation is
Dancing still makes my body fzzzzzzzzzzz!

**Figure 5:** ‘The Dance’, poem extract from Brianna’s learning journal
plastic arts, parodying Johnson’s connections between clubbing and ejaculation, Bourdieu on habitus). It is also a way of conveying her thoughts and reactions in a non-conventional student submission format. The poem is surrounded by learning journal text, and brings an additional dimension to her report. Through the poem, Brianna is transforming and regenerating anthropological knowledge gleaned from the readings and masterclasses. Her work is thus an example of deep learning with commentaries on plastic arts and aesthetics; dancing whilst on drugs and dance as a drug; subjectivity, authenticity and interpersonality.

Ruari’s extract from his learning journal is interesting because it comes from one of the few males taking the module (three out of nineteen). Furthermore, Ruari did not dance until the end of the module when the hiphop and breakdancing masterclasses were scheduled. Ruari, however, proved himself to be a most perceptive and analytic observer:

During this week it appeared to me that if we apply Dilley’s theory to dance, it argues that we must physically participate in the dance in order to grasp its cultural meaning. Therefore, Dilley argues that we must physically participate in order to learn.

However, during the module I did not jive, I did not salsa and I did not dance. Therefore, if we prescribe to Dilley’s argument, I mustn’t have learned an iota about dance because I didn’t physically perform the dances. In any event, I disagree entirely with this assumption. I argue that because I didn’t dance, I didn’t learn the moves or the style of the dance. In short, I simply didn’t learn how to dance. Therefore, throughout the module I set out to show how my observations of the informants within the dance arena could teach us more about the people’s attitudes towards dance.

In another learning journal entry, Ruari continues with observations which link with the readings, opening up the module in a direction that was not covered in the module content. Ruari was also the only person to pick up on the language used by the instructors and how it differed when addressing “males (an informal and clubbable ‘guys’) and “females (the more formal and honouring ‘ladies’).

I found that there were many more females than males today. Therefore, many females had to represent the other gender—the males. Same-sex partners were created among the women. From my observations I believed that the dance confused their gender. To me they were losing femininity and gaining masculinity while dancing. Therefore, in the dance arena they had a confused state of gender. I believed that they were in a liminal phase between femininity and masculinity while in the dance arena. But as they left the arena they immediately retrieved their femininity by, for example, meeting their boyfriend. It appeared to me, therefore, that the dance arena was a flexible environment where the dancer could play with his or her gender. This is also illustrated by Hieke Wieschiolek during her study of the Salsa culture in Germany.

Week three was entirely academic. However, relating to my own dance experience, I watched a recording of Mohammed Ali boxing during the 1960s. I thought how similar he was to a salsa or a tango performer on stage. He would move his feet, do an Ali shuffle and blind us with his speed. He was dancing. Dancing in the boxing ring.

Though perhaps not a dancer in the traditional sense of the term, Ruari has been struck by the module such that his notion of dance has been expanded to include movement patterns associated with his sporting activities—his boxing interest. Ruari finds that his critical eye has been attuned to now see patterns of dance where before he did not recognise them. This suggests that the module will have long-term after effects: Ruari will not be signing up for the dance classes which some of the students will be taking, but he will be looking at his boxing with a dancer’s eye.

Finally, besides these poetic extracts and creative connections, several of the learning journals were supplemented with videotapes. As masterclass followed masterclass on the module, the students grew accustomed to being videotaped alongside their guests. They were also aware that they were on an experimental module, largely due to the number of surveys
and questionnaires they were asked to carry out (see the following section). Two students took the structure of the module and the masterclass to their friends and videotaped some question and answer sessions with them. This initiative and additional feature in their learning journals is in the vein of video diaries—currently popular techniques to explore celebrity minds and nerves on television. They add to the above module assessment samples, creative, student-centred narrative reactions, students becoming creative and motivated self-learners.

**Triangulation and Module Review**

As mentioned above, this experimental module was closely observed. At the end of each masterclass, the students were given faculty teaching and learning questionnaires to fill in. They were asked to score fifteen questions between 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree). Questions ranged from ‘showed enthusiasm for the subject’ to ‘began punctually’ and ‘you would take another workshop by this instructor’. These student samples were useful in indicating generally which masterclasses they enjoyed the most (salsa) and which they enjoyed the least (tango). Yet, as questions, they were found to be more befitting the professional lecturer-instructor than the dance instructor. They also generated a large number of statistical information, an overload on the evaluators and on the students, who grew bored with the repetitive nature of the scaled exercise. All the module convenor was able to do with this information was to make a prioritised list of masterclasses for future academic years.

A second and more long-term sample consisted of a tailored version of the Rosenberg (1989) Self-Esteem Survey that was administered by email at the start and the end of the module. The survey was tailored to the module students by adding the following two extra questions to the end of the test: ‘I am comfortable around other people’ and ‘I am happy with my body’. Like all the other surveys, the information was anonymous and confidential, but because this survey was so personal and intimate, it was made optional. Ten students entered the survey, with only one student prepared to complete the survey at the start and at the end of the module (see Figure 6). These low response rates do not reflect a mismanagement of the survey, but indicate an oversampling as above, as well as a general sense that this type of survey was far more intrusive than the instructor satisfaction questionnaires. Whereas the majority of answers oscillated about the ‘Impartial’ midpoint, with agreement (2) and disagreement (3) about the positive and about the negative questions respectively, students did indicate final self-esteem scores which were highly positive as well as highly negative. In other words, students both comfortable and uncomfortable with themselves and with others, with both high and low self-esteem, did in fact opt for this module and did enjoy it. ‘210ESA201’ was not a module solely for the extrovert. Furthermore, quite significantly, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Survey revealed that non-dancing was in no way tied to low self-esteem. An assessment of the difference between the before and after Rosenberg surveys shows little overall change (a score of +1). Indeed, scrutiny of the scores that have changed shows that by the end of the module the student had become less satisfied with herself; believed more in herself and that she could do things as well as other people; felt more impartial to feeling that she was a failure, which she had previously disagreed with; was more positive towards herself; and was more comfortable around other people. Without interviewing the student, we cannot confirm that the final two changes were the result of this experimental module in teaching and learning, though the student did partake in group-learning dance exercises which might have had a direct or indirect influence upon these scores.

The final triangulation method deployed upon the students was a short, semistructured, focus group interview lasting approximately
fifteen to twenty minutes. For this, the module class was split into two groups who were subsequently questioned about the module and the nature of teaching and learning. The results of the interviews were interesting in that the two groups echoed one another. Students in both groups noted that they enjoyed the module and got a lot from it (“it was really exciting, you looked forward to the classes and left wanting to find out more”; “it took the boredom out of usual lectures, you really listened to the dancers who had come to speak and perform”; “it was the best organised module I’ve ever been on”). They felt particularly involved in the module, talking about the dance and teaching the dances to fellow students and their families, researching their interests and completing their learning journals with reflections on dance experiments in the masterclasses and in the local nightclubs. Perhaps the most striking finding from the focus group interviews was their agreement that the practical nature of the module had vastly facilitated not just interest in the subject matter of the module, but student learning and retention of that learning. The practical performance element—the doing, the apprenticeship, the skills side to the module—had radically enhanced the student learning experience:

“It has been more practical than anything and it makes you more aware of what you’re learning. It was more than just learning about dance, it was kind of learning about how you learn as well and it made me sort of aware of when I was watching dancers recreationally, you know, I think I’ve involved myself more in this module in my life, I think, outside of the classroom, than any other module before.”

“It’s practical. It’s like ethnomusicology, because you’re doing something practical, you’re learning to perform an instrument, you remember more than you would in just a lecture like in economics or something. You’re not going to sit and think ‘oh, I remember that lecture, it was really interesting!’ If you’re performing with other people, the fact that you’re doing something makes you remember it.”

These two student narratives demonstrate that the practical and embodied focus to the module added to the student learning experience, ‘deepening’ student memories, rather like the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Esteem Questions</th>
<th>Test 1</th>
<th>Test 2</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. On the whole I am satisfied with myself</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. At times I think I am no good at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel I have a number of good qualities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am able to do things as well as most other people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I certainly feel useless at times</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I wish I could have more respect for myself</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I take a positive attitude towards myself</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am comfortable around other people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am happy with my body</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**FIGURE 6** Comparison of ‘Before’ and ‘After’ Rosenberg Self-Esteem Surveys (with additional questions)
dancer’s muscle memory. The applied nature of this teaching and learning experiment involved the students more than usual. It prevented detachment from the subject under study. It became physically and mentally engrossing, like instrument playing—such as in a gamelan—for ethnomusicologists.

The masterclasses engaged and engrossed the students. They also encouraged them to continue with their learning experience outside of the boundaries of the performance room, in their evening activities in the pubs and nightclubs, in front of the television, and with the dance text that came to life in their hands.

“I think you remember it much more easily: something that you’ve actually seen. You learn more about the dance from talking to the dancers than actually reading about it.”

“(…) and then you do the reading and you think, oh yeah I remember seeing that.”

“It’s easier to understand if you’ve done it yourself.”

“I was surprised by how much I was able to engage with the readings.”

“I guess I learn more about something that was more interactive and physical, you know, rather than just sitting there, you know. I think I learnt quicker through this module than I did through just sitting down, like.”

“It [the masterclass] makes it so much more clear when you’re actually experiencing it as well as learning about it. You have some sense of context in which to place it.”

When the external examiner assessed the scripts and looked at the workings of the module, she complimented Dr Skinner on producing an ‘innovative course’ which ‘clearly makes good use of your and other people’s skills passion’. She was writing not only about the lecturer and dance instructors, but also about the students and their interest in the anthropology of modern dance. The module was seen to be an academic success, with 3 overall firsts, 13 two-ones, 4 two-twos and 2 incomplete. The large number of two-ones on the module—almost 70 percent of the students—reflected a positive skew to the traditional bell-curve of marks. Involved, encouraged and well motivated, the students on this module found that this experiment in teaching and learning was an acknowledged success. Its impact spilled out of the performance room and into other modules as well as into their real world employment prospects.

“It’s bringing it to real life in anthropology.”

“[I]f you go out into the work place what do you have to know about? You have to know about people and for me, that’s what anthropology is about.”

“I like understanding the theories about learning and understanding about how I learn and what the best way to learn is and I think that that stuff is applicable sort of to all the different modules.”

Education on the Floor

In spilling out of the performance room, this module became a meta-learning experience for anthropology students. This section will examine this module and its findings in light of trends in education theory, drawing at length upon the work of Jerome Bruner and Howard Gardner who have argued against the instrumental in favour of the innovative, who have shunned the traditional utilitarian and didactic teaching and learning format in their promotion of interactive and procedural approaches to learning. Both educationalists have been linked with an anti-behaviourist swing since the 1960s (vs B.F. Skinner’s [1988] Pavlovian psychology of reinforcement conditioning of the 1950s). Here anthropological thinking is consonant with education theory in terms of its critique of approaches to knowledge. In a rigidly ordered social system, it has often been the case that knowledge has been constructed in a hierarchical and essentially decontextualised fashion. It has been regarded as more important for students to
produce the ‘right’ answers, than to analyse or understand the concepts that underpinned the issues (Stoll and Fink 1996). Students—tertiary-level consumers—have been viewed as vessels into which government-approved knowledge could be poured. The progress of students in this process was determined by their ability to reproduce ‘correct’ answers within a range of standardised examinations (Gardner 1999). Anthropology, with its questioning and heuristic approach (see benchmark statement above), is not well suited to such exercises. It is an analytical and discursive discipline, experience-based and continually challenging to convention.

Ironically, with its practical participant (observation) roots, the discipline does thus lend itself to Rousseau’s heuristic methods of learning (Rusk 1967; Cohen 1969; Rousseau 1974)—education as a contextualised process of discovery. His ideas shaped John Dewey’s (1915) idea that self-activity and person-centred learning should be the cornerstone of the educational perspective. Dewey (1916) subsequently argued that someone had only arrived at a true understanding of a concept when it became congruent with a pattern of activity that he or she was familiar with: this is evinced in the QUB learning journal entries for the salsa readings and salsa masterclass, for example, and the students’ focus group comments that the masterclasses brought the readings to life.

Entwistle (1970: 143) has argued that implicit in the activity-based type of educational process that Piaget (1971) described was a recognition that a person ‘becomes the agent of his own education’. This was a further rejection of the rationale for an educational process that was founded entirely and exclusively on the transmission of knowledge. Piaget (1971: 69) argued that active teaching methods did not lead in any way to ‘anarchic individualism’, but instead trained students in voluntary effort. The changes to the QUB students’ approach to dance, the ways in which they viewed and interpreted it, the rituals surrounding it, and their extracurricular commitment to the module, all show that the students did become their own education agents. They asked the questions of the dance instructors. They decided to dance or to observe. They chose the style of learning-journal submission and whether they wanted to face an end-of-semester examination or extended essay. Cathy, for example, ended up experimenting upon herself, testing theories of participation and learning each week by involving herself in the masterclasses in different ways: ‘[a]fter reading the article by Dilley who stressed “the value of participation and human experience as a mode of learning” (Dilley: 32) I decided that I would dance some weeks and not others to see if this proved to be true’. It was not just lip service that the module descriptor (Skinner 2004: 2) contained a section on lecturer/student teaching and learning commitments inspired by Dewey:

The ‘informed guidance’ which I practice is one which hopefully instills a desire and a competency for ‘autonomous learning’ in my students by the time that they ‘graduate’. Then, to paraphrase John Dewey on how we think, my students are well versed in reflective practice and can plan and direct their work with a sense of intention and purpose.

In ‘Toward a Theory of Instruction’ (1966), the American psychologist and educationalist Jerome Bruner provided an outline of the key principles that he believed underpinned effective interactive teaching and learning. For Bruner, ‘instruction’ was in no way a process that involved the students being cast as passive receptors of knowledge. Rather, it was a paradigm of teaching and learning that was to be regarded as an active social process in which the students constructed new ideas or concepts based on their existing knowledge. The student was to be encouraged to develop the skills necessary to select information and originate hypotheses. It was the responsibility of the teacher to try and ensure that the students discovered principles for themselves, and that they engaged in meaningful and active dialogue with each other and with the teacher (see Skinner’s Editorial, this issue. Bruner’s approach created a key role for the
teacher in the heuristic learning environment. For Bruner, the ‘instructor’ was central to the creation of a teaching and learning methodology that was steeped in the idea of student–teacher partnership. The teacher was to encourage students to discover principles by themselves, but he or she should also have actively discussed issues and concepts with the students (Socratic learning).

It is not just the folk perceptions of the teachers, however, that present a potential barrier to the establishment of an innovative and effective teaching and learning environment. Often, the students begin by assuming that the teacher or lecturer is an authority figure, and that he or she is in possession of all of the relevant knowledge and will pass it on to the class (Bruner 1996). However, under what Bruner (1996: 52) describes as ‘appropriate conditions’, the students soon begin to realise that others within the class might have knowledge too, and that through a process of collaboration and interaction that knowledge can be shared. It is not enough for this knowledge to exist inertly in the group. Group participation can be utilised as a way of creating knowledge (Bruner 1996). For Bruner, to conceive of students as imitative learners is to fail to appreciate that there may be little distinction between ‘procedural knowledge’ (knowing how) and ‘propositional knowledge’ (knowing that) (Bruner 1996). Crucially, demonstrating ‘how to’ do something and providing an opportunity for practice to do so is, according to Bruner (1996: 54), not necessarily enough—there must be a productive interaction between conceptual understanding and situated actualisation: ‘studies of expertise have shown that merely learning how to perform skillfully does not get one to the same level of flexible skill as when one learns by a combination of practice and conceptual explanation’. It was this combination of practice and conceptual explanation that Dr Skinner sought in his module ‘The Anthropology of Modern Dance’. Gemma attests to the success of this interplay in the following extract from her learning journal:

It is a different method of teaching and learning to what I am normally used to but I did find it quite enjoyable and interesting. As I am an anthropology student, it is better to have a ‘hands on’ approach and to get more involved in the subject which I am studying. I was also able to relate the readings to the actual participation of the dances and draw better conclusions. For example I felt I could analyse Susanne Langer’s argument better after I had participated in the dances myself. I would sincerely advise these methods of teaching and learning to other modules wherever possible.

Gemma is that active learner which Bruner seeks to foster: Bruner (1996) has argued that didactic exposure—a method of teaching based on the idea that students are to be introduced to facts, principles and rules to be learned in quasi-rote fashion and then applied—is a mode of instruction premised on the negative assumption that the learner is ignorant of facts, rules or principles which can be communicated simply by telling. Within this process, there was the faulty belief that procedural knowledge and understanding would automatically follow the student ‘knowing’ facts and theories. Bruner (1996) argued that didacticism is the most adhered to of all of the ‘folk pedagogies’. Gemma’s learning through practice principles carried no such negative assumptions. Developing intersubjective interchange between learners, alternatively, is a teaching and learning methodology based on the idea that learners are not perceived as ignorant or unskilled but, instead, are people with the ability to reason, debate and get involved in dialogue, discourse and interaction. The beliefs of the learner about the world are brought into line with those of others not through imitation or didactic learning but rather through collaboration and negotiation: through participation in practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Knowledge thus comes to be regarded as what is shared or produced within participative, situated, and experiential learning. This paradigm of teaching and learning is dialectical (not didactic) and mutualist (not hierarchical), and concerns itself with fostering
interpretative and creative skills and understanding as opposed to cultivating an ability to recite or regurgitate facts. With a note of caution, however, it should be acknowledged that too much of an exclusive focus on the centrality of social discourse, participation and negotiation risks overemphasising the value of social exchange in the construction of knowledge. Further, there is the danger that lecturers can become over enthusiastic about the interactive experience in their modules and pathways with a large proportion of modules calling for reflexive learning journals regardless of their suitability (the use of learning journals in history tutorials is one example of this from QUB): students should not be overburdened with learning journal exercises for all modules, rather, their module pathways should be developed so as to explore a range of assessment techniques, and methods and degrees of module involvement.

Finally, it should be noted that Howard Gardner’s (1985) theory of ‘multiple intelligences’ has been tremendously valuable in relation to the development of new paradigms of student-centred heuristic teaching methodology and provides a future direction for the evolution of this module. Gardner’s work on the importance of the personal intelligences—‘inter’ and ‘intra’ personal intelligence, and kinesthetic intelligence—adds resonance to module convenors seeking to construct programmes of education based on student-centred learning, particularly at undergraduate level. Gardner (1985) defined intrapersonal intelligence as the capacity of a person to achieve genuine understanding of his or her own feelings, anxieties and motivations; it is ‘involved chiefly in an individual’s examination and knowledge of his own feelings’ (Gardner 1985: 241). This is very apparent in Ria’s learning journal:

Through completing this module, we are able to use our bodies to think, as well as act with. We are given an alternative and more comprehensive way in which learning is stimulated. (...) The mode of learning in this module most definitely promotes long-term retention of ideas, concepts and skills. The combination of readings, performances and hands-on apprenticeship makes critical anthropological ideas touch our senses in different ways.

And, to return to Gemma, we find a sophisticated appreciation of academic theory and practice, as well as an overarching and perspectival appreciation of the lecturer’s teaching and learning goals, in her learning journal:

This module has taught me on a number of different levels. Not only through my acquiring of new knowledge but also in the way that I view how I am taught. The very nature of this journal proves that learning is such a personal thing and that the only way to learn is through a willingness to be taught by yourself as well as others. I feel that whether or not I retain the theoretical content of this module I will definitely keep on board my learning about learning itself, and how it is both a formal and informal process that occurs both in and out of the classroom.

Gemma exudes that interpersonal intelligence where a person is sensitive to the detection, comprehension and appreciation of the motivations, anxieties and desires of other people. Interpersonal intelligence allows people to work effectively and constructively with others. It should be regarded as particularly important for educators. Gardner (1985: 241) argued that inter/intra personal and kinesthetic forms of intelligence were linked—that ‘these two forms of knowledge are intimately intermingled in any culture’. It is also vital for the student seeking their niche in the workplace. Brianna recognised this at the end of the focus group interviews:

But if you go out into the work place what do you have to know about? You have to know about people and, for me, that’s what anthropology is about: it’s about learning about the society I’m living in and about other societies so that I can go out there and be knowledgeable about other societies and to interact with them.

Gardner (1999) has cited the dancer’s conviction that everyone has the capacity ‘to apprehend directly’ the actions, feelings or dynamic...
abilities of other people, without help from words or pictures. Dancers and actors clearly draw on this ability. Students can learn much from interviewing and studying those with kinesthetic gifts. The obvious examples come from athletics, gymnastics and dance. One of the core elements of the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is the control of one’s bodily motions and capacity to handle objects skilfully. Gardner (1999) described this intelligence as including a sense of timing and a clear sense of the goal of a physical action, along with the ability to train responses so they become like reflexes. These abilities are often undervalued within the mainstream education system. Bodily intelligence is not widely appreciated in our culture. Calling it an ‘intelligence’ has often invited widespread contempt, although Gardner has called upon prominent athletes, actors, inventors and dancers to make the case for a bodily intelligence. Ingold (2004) and Palsson (1994) escape this contempt for the physical by attacking Cartesian dualism, and with the neat sidestep resulting from their attention to body dispositions framed under their use of the term ‘enskilment’.

**Conclusion**

This article has presented a detailed account of a successful teaching and learning experiment, namely the use of practical masterclasses and learning journals in a module on the anthropology of modern dance. Both the students in the classes and the authors of this article examined these activities and assessments. The students reported on their experiences in focus group interviews (learning, attention and motivation), the quality of instruction in questionnaires (immediate and captivating), and overall affect of the module upon the self in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Survey (self-perception and skills). The focus group interviews and learning journals have been shown to be the most useful triangulation of affect upon the students, narratives of learning, motivation and engagement. And the dangers of overkill, in terms of requesting students to undertake repeated surveys, have been highlighted.

These ‘performances of understanding’, as we should like to refer to our masterclasses, are a crucial aspect of this type of educational framework—the rationale being that understanding can be effectively demonstrated by students through performance and, as this article has shown, the observation of performance. According to Stone Wiske (1998), effective performances of understanding have to relate directly to understanding goals, assisting in both developing and applying genuine understanding through consistent practice. Effective performances of understanding also promote varied learning styles, encouraging students to engage reflectively in tasks that are both challenging and manageable, and affording them the opportunity to clearly demonstrate their understanding. The ‘Anthropology of Modern Dance’ module explored some different forms of assessment and encouraged the creative.

In relation to the assessment of these student ‘performances’, Perkins (1998) has argued that students require continuous feedback and plenty of opportunities for reflection (‘ongoing assessment’) throughout the entire course, as opposed to traditional forms of assessment that have taken place at the end of a tightly packed module or course. This assessment can take the form of feedback from the teacher or from peers, or self-evaluations. Whilst teachers can sometimes provide assessment criteria, Perkins (1998) argues that they should also enlist the assistance of the students in developing those criteria. Whilst this was not directly possible for the dance module other than to offer to read learning journal entries, future developments could be to access student-learning journals through the use of information technology such as Web Course Tools (WebCT). Importantly, the process of involving students in their own assessment and the assessment of their contemporaries constitutes a conceptual redefinition of the traditional roles in classrooms, and requires both teachers
and students to embrace new educational relationships (Stone Wiske 1998). Modules such as this necessitate the devolution of elements of control, teaching and learning: masterclasses to outside visitors, for instance, and to the students when they conducted interviews and videotaped the proceedings. Nevertheless, students respect such acts and in Skinner’s dance module assisted with the running of the masterclasses as fully involved, active agents. Let us end, then, with the words of one of those students; with a return to Ruari the non-dancer:

I found how the module had a strictly modern feel. I also believed that it transformed the traditional university structure. (...) I believe the module was a success because it enabled me to learn about myself—my likes, dislikes, my habits and beliefs. It extracted these aspects from my character in a way that I never thought possible.

Jonathan Skinner is a lecturer in Social Anthropology in the School of Anthropological Studies, The Queen’s University Belfast. His email is j.skinner@qub.ac.uk.

Kirk Simpson is a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Anthropological Studies, The Queen’s University Belfast. His email is k.simpson@qub.ac.uk.

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Disciplining Vision in Animal Biotechnology

*Cristina Grasseni*

**ABSTRACT:** In this article, skilled vision is presented as a capacity acquired in a community of practice that enables specific ways of knowing and acting in the world. The analysis of skilled vision is obtained through the ethnographic study of the artefacts and the routines that structure certain ecologies of practice. The example chosen is that of the skilled gaze of animal breeders, in particular of the children of dairy cow breeders who, by playing with relevant toys and emulating the adult world of cattle fairs and exhibitions, learn how to value certain criteria of animal beauty and to “discipline” their vision accordingly.

**KEYWORDS:** communities of practice, apprenticeship, skilled vision

**Introduction**

The focus of this article is the selective vision of breed experts in its relation to the practice of industrial dairy farming. The aim is to suggest that skilled vision informs an ‘ecology of practice’ that both instructs breeders as to how to look at cows, and literally shapes cows’ bodies. Drawing on the recent social history of science and on Latour’s (1994) actor-network theory, I focus on the artefacts that perform a ‘technical mediation’ of vision, in the world of animal husbandry and zoo-technology, wishing to show how the disciplining of the breeder’s vision is instrumental to the industrialisation of the animal body. The specificity of such skilled vision lies in its underlying agenda of translating the cow’s body into quantifiable units, and in the social context of heightened competition which surrounds this ‘scientific’ gaze.

The main ethnographic object here is hence the social and practical dimension of the ‘correct’ aesthetic perception in a community of practice. It is often assumed that reporting ethnographic material is a pre-theoretical step, where no categorisation occurs. Here I want to stress how my ethnography is theory-driven. The ethnographic material that I am rereading in the light of this literature is the apprenticeship of skilled vision amongst dairy breeders and breed experts in farming communities in northern Italy. In particular, I have been focusing on the regimentation of vision in the process of evaluating genetically selected cows at cattle fairs. The farmers I worked with identified their career and achievements by membership of a wider community, that of breeders of Brown Alpine cows. My initial interest in the topics stemmed from the observation that despite the brevity of their glances, both in formal and in informal contexts, the way that breeders look at cows is in no way casual or generic. For example, cattle fairs will be analysed not only as social occasions for the display of the skill of looking at cattle in a highly selective, disciplined and regimented way, but also as didactic exercises for the audience of breeders and farmers which socialise them into a ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991). In other words, the relationship between...
seeing and knowing is here investigated by taking up vision as a skill. The case study dwells on the selective vision of breed experts in relation to the practice of industrial dairy farming. I have argued elsewhere that the ‘correct’ appreciation of form and the corresponding social appreciation of breeding skill—i.e. the capacity to produce good shapes for performances and reproduction—go hand in hand: both require participation in a world-view that directs one’s attention and is informed by a standardised and disciplined vision (Grasseni, forthcoming).

Skilled vision is invariably the result of training, that is, of an ‘education of attention’ (Gibson 1979; Ingold 2000). Hence, specific ways of seeing represent the ethnographic way into a shared ‘inter-ocularity’ (Pinney 1997: 190; Ronzon 2002: 67). In other words, the shared materiality of a community of practice engenders skills and sensibilities that are largely social, tacit and implicit. I propose an ecological reading of skilled vision, practice and identity as an integrated whole. This way, what have been otherwise called ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger 1972) can be important tools to access values, interests and symbolic discourse.

The debate on practice theory and on communities of practice, which I draw from, lies at the intersection of two broad areas of investigation: in applied linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and semantics, communication has been investigated as a dynamic relation between concrete contexts on the one hand, and the activity of meaning-interpretation on the other—in both of which indexicality plays a fundamental part. According to this approach, speech is seen as one of many ways—perhaps one of the most sophisticated—of acting in the world, entailing multiple skills (participatory, perceptive, acting) in order to succeed. Amongst such skills we find the ‘professional vision’ that linguist Charles Goodwin has been recently investigating (1994). On the other hand, in psychology, cognitive studies, education studies and organisation and management studies, the debate on situated learning and on learning in doing has highlighted that learning is a social process of coparticipation as opposed to the individual acquisition of propositional or representational contents.

The first point I wish to make in this article is that the ‘professional vision’ (Goodwin 1994) of the breed expert is the result of a training of the eye, an acquired hands-on (or rather eyes-on) skill. In this sense, the skill to perform is acquired by engaging in a process, under the conditions of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in a ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991: 98):

>a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge... The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning.

Lave and Wenger insist that it is not a certain type of ‘know-that’, or a systematic and abstract corpus of specialist knowledge, that defines and maintains a community of practitioners, but rather certain social modes of coparticipation in which transmission of knowledge and reproduction of the community is embedded. They call such ways of engaging LPP (legitimate peripheral participation). This is a participation frame that allows an apprentice to engage simultaneously in several different roles (Lave and Wenger 1991: 23): hence it is not a structure but a way of engaging, a quality of the network of social relations that makes learning emerge and lets identity be constructed and dynamically transformed.

In the case of cattle breeders, these modes of coparticipation are various. An apprenticeship of the eye takes place mainly on the family farm from a young age. Learning to deal with cow’s shapes, to appropriate them visually in every detail and from every angle, requires a constant training of attention, which begins early on in life, as will be shown in an ethnographic example. Let me start by introducing you to some