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Removing the Mask: Community Dance Within a Correctional Facility

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Abstract

This article reflects upon the metaphor of masking our identities and what it means to ‘remove the mask’ within a community dance context. The research draws upon a case study where dance was taught weekly over eight weeks to low-risk male offenders in a New Zealand corrections facility. We focus upon the power of community dance to initiate change. A phenomenological critical praxis has been applied to help reflect upon the prisoners’ experiential world. The descriptions of others’ experiences have been drawn from the dance facilitator’s own stream of consciousness (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). An auto-ethnographic methodology allowed the researchers to locate the dance facilitator’s voice within the research. Careful descriptions have revealed that within this study, prisoners did relax, enjoy themselves, and remove their masks for the duration of each of the dance sessions.

Keywords: Community dance, emotional masks, correctional facility, inclusivity, dance fellowship.

Introduction

Participation in community dance can allow participants to feel safe, without judgement, and like all physical activity has the ability to release endorphins assisting people to engage in social bonding (Tarr et al., 2017). These were some of the reasons that Kristie Mortimer decided to apply for the Caroline Plummer Fellowship in Community Dance at the University of Otago, where she intended to work with low risk male prisoners at a New Zealand corrections facility. An auto-ethnographic approach has been drawn upon to place Kristie's work at the centre of the inquiry. Social research and reflexive discussions with experts in community dance, position the philosophy within a constructivist theory. Kristie's descriptions are placed alongside the theoretical discussions in order to provide a clear position for the analysis that focuses on the benefits of community dance, particularly how some prisoners were able to 'remove their masks.' Background information is provided, followed by a section on community dance, with both sections placing the study in context. The methodology is detailed, followed by a discussion regarding the wearing of emotional masks, both our own masks, and those worn by prisoners within a prison setting. Another section discusses the importance of time to adjust masks before leaving the dance sessions. Dancing in the prison provides the detail of Kristie's experience in her classes. The section moves between her first person accounts, and an analysis of the experience, with the conclusion summarising the main points of the study.

Background Information

The following background information provides a context for the research. As the Caroline Plummer Fellow in Community Dance for 2020, Kristie Mortimer's proposal was to deliver community dance classes for low-risk male prisoners at a New Zealand corrections facility. The fellowship is offered by the University of Otago, and is competed for annually by community dance practitioners throughout the world. Each year the successful Fellow offers a different project to the local Otago community. Kristie's interest in community dance in prisons was piqued during her undergraduate studies in dance, where she became intrigued about prisons as places where she could facilitate classes. She imagined herself making dance accessible for those who may have limited access, or barriers to participation. Her application for the fellowship was successful and the opportunity arose where she was able to pursue her dream.

Kristie approached the dance classes with values of inclusivity and participation at the forefront, with the intention to foster a safe space for men to learn, create and share dance with each other. She planned the lessons with a set structure that she intended to follow each week. Kristie believed that having a set structure would be significant as it can provide an element of safety for the men, in the sense that they would become familiar with what would be happening in the classes each week (Wooldredge, 2006). The structure of the classes consisted of individual introductions, a game, warm up, learning a movement routine, a creative movement activity, cool down, stretches and a closing discussion. Kristie chose to use a warmup that held a fitness and conditioning focus and a hip hop routine, based on assumptions that this is what the men would like to learn. As there were many unknowns around the men's dance experience and expectations for the classes, Kristie intended to be open and inclusive by adapting the classes each week depending on how the men responded to the activities. For example, after three weeks of a fitness and conditioning warm up, the men asked to skip the fitness warm up and get straight into the 'dance stuff.' In response, Kristie changed the warm up to one where they would stand in a circle and copy Kristie's simple movements to some music. The use of creative activities also varied depending on the time (often the classes started late), and the men's interests in the creative movement. The classes always began and finished sitting in a circle with the intent to include everyone's voices. The beginning introductions were brief and helped with learning names and setting up an

inclusive space. The closing discussions aimed to provide an opportunity to talk in small groups, reflect on the class activities, and for the men to share how they were finding the dance classes.

Initially, the classes were to be held weekly over five months, which could be considered a significantly long time for an arts programme to be run in a corrections facility. Issues around the sustainability of arts programmes has meant that voluntary arts programmes are usually offered for a short time, and are often limited to one prison and a small group of prisoners (Just Speak, 2014). The classes Kristie held were reduced to eight weeks due to the emergence of Covid-19. During this time and while community transmission was present in New Zealand, visitors/volunteers were not allowed into the prison and use of the gymnasium by prisoners was limited (Espiner, 2020). Kristie's time was limited to eight weeks of teaching, yet the fellowship was for six months. While Kristie had no access to the prison, she decided to work on a community dance resource, in the hope that it could assist staff and practitioners facilitate dance within the prison themselves. When community transmission of Covid-19 was eliminated, classes finally began, and were run for eight weeks. Unfortunately, the re-emergence of Covid-19 meant the classes were brought to an abrupt end. Nevertheless, the classes were successful and well received by the participants and gymnasium staff.

The researchers' understandings of community dance were tested within the prison context. It was likely that the men residing there already belonged to one or more communities within the institution. While the social system of a prison is not unlike the wider society from which prisoners are drawn, the individuals' experience, social and economic exclusion, create 'difference' (Phillips, 2007). Dervan (2011) describes a sense of difference as he entered a prison:

Regardless of the exact types of sounds and sensations that accompany one's transition into a prison, the noises indicate that the outside world is now a mere memory, and instead, one has entered a new community with its own rules, customs, values, social structures and consequences. (p. 415)

Kristie believed (and hoped) however, that a sense of community would be constructed within community dance classes within the prison, as imagined bonds among participants could be established and strengthened through shared participation in dance classes and the pedagogical approaches of the community dance practitioner (Buck & Barbour, 2007). The process in this instance was carefully tailored to meet the perceived needs of the participants and to help foster a sense of community.

The importance of the facilitator cannot be underestimated. Some practitioners will be more successful than others, and in this instance as the Caroline Plummer Fellow, Kristie felt some responsibility in ensuring the success of the project. Gillespie (2004) discusses the value of connection between teacher and participants where, "knowing, trust, respect and mutuality create a transformative space in which students are affirmed" (p. 211). In prison environments, the depth of the relationships between facilitator and participants is limited due to restrictions of the prison environment (Department of Corrections, 2013). Kristie was certainly hoping to establish a connection with the prisoners.

Kristie reflected upon the success of her project with her colleagues, Ralph Buck and Barb Snook, at the completion of the fellowship and this article has arisen out of those discussions. All three researchers reflect upon the transformational potential of community dance. Ralph and Barb are experienced community dance practitioners and their knowledge dovetails well with the focus of the article.

Community Dance

Community dance holds various meanings for different people, however, literature presents shared values that underpin community dance practice. Research places people at the centre of community dance as they seek a sense of community and belonging through the act of dancing together. Equality in diversity,

cooperation, communication and reflection are values common to the concept of community. Within a community dance class these values are heightened as participants also share physicality and mental agility without any sense of competition or technical pressures. The outcomes result in an experience of belonging (Amans, 2017; Buck and Snook, 2018; Clarke, 1973; Houston, 2009; Schaubert, 2002; Thomson, 2008; West & Williams, 2017). Community dance practice draws on these understandings to maintain values which are “concerned with accessibility, empowerment, diversity, personal development and social experience – providing people of any age, size, shape, or ability with the opportunity of ‘doing and seeing’ dance” (Scholey, 1998, p. 30). Amans (2017) summarizes community dance as having “a focus on participants, collaborative relationships, inclusive practice, opportunities for positive experiences, and celebration of diversity” (p. 9). Furthermore, an emphasis on a process rather than the end product is also valued within community dance (Amans, 2008). Akroyd et al., (1996) explain how an emphasis on process may be achieved, “by the conscious ‘tailoring’ of content and method to suit the specific context and needs of a group” (p. 17).

Buck and Meiners (2017) extend upon a concept first proposed by Clarke (1973) where he identified solidarity and significance as being present in community. They concur with Clarke’s assertion and propose that participants also gain a sense of security when participating in community dance. The dimension of security, allows participants to feel safe without judgement, allowing them to contribute and step out of their comfort zone. Judgement can often be present within a dance class with how well dancers perform as a generally accepted discussion point. Most people will have heard someone say, “Oh I’m not a dancer,” meaning, I can’t dance, I’ve never danced before, or I refuse to dance. Community dance doesn’t require an excellent technique borne of years of studio classes. Instead, participants can develop confidence in dance through a safe engagement without judgement.

It is well established that exercise and sport promotes mental and physical health. As Edwards, Edwards and Basson (2004) state, “The value of various forms of physical activity, exercise and sport for the promotion of mental health has been emphasised in recent research and intervention programmes” (p. 25). This is common knowledge and became obvious to many in times of COVID, when daily exercise became the tenuous link to maintaining mental health. Community dance, however, offers more than physical activity or exercise. Norfield and Nordin-Bates (2012) conducted a study grounded in a self-determination theory that determined positive outcomes when measured in relation to community dance. Buck & Snook (2020) explain how community dance can extend beyond the benefits of exercise and posit that community dance is a means for fostering resilience. They reinforced the facts that there are no requirements to be technically ‘good,’ although the participants may very well be, and that there is no competition. Competition is valuable for some members of the community, but not for all. Murphy and Waddington (1998) explain that while sport promotion is seen as a benefit to good health promotion, physical activity and sport are not the same. Their research states that, “many sports are mock battles in which aggression and the use of physical violence are central characteristics” (p. 193). They examine some of the health consequences and the social differences that emerge. While we are not suggesting that sport is without benefits and enjoyment, we suggest that it is not for everyone. Community Dance, however, is a social and physical activity where equality in diversity are strong factors.

It is important to acknowledge that communities within the context of community dance should be understood as socially constructed. Rather than a community being of a fixed physical space or geographical location shared by people, communities can be understood as “an imagined and socially constructed union” (Rowe, 2015, p. 57). Taking this perspective, Benedict Anderson (1991) posits that communities are ‘imagined,’ where “in the minds of each lives the image of communion” (p. 6).

Community dance may also fit within West and Williams’ (2017) concept of ‘learning communities,’ which can refer to a whole school or a small classroom. In examining the boundaries of learning communities, West and Williams (2017) discovered that boundaries were often defined by participants as, “shared access, relationships, vision, or function” (p. 1571). They cite Kensler, Casker, Barber, & White (2009) who make a

key point, that a learning community is identified by how close or connected the members feel to each other emotionally and whether they feel they can trust, depend on, share knowledge with, rely on, have fun with, and enjoy high quality relationships with each other (p. 1573).

It would seem that community dance can be defined within the context of learning communities. Whether viewed under a banner of community dance, community, or learning community, common values are shared. Within the context of this article, the values of community dance are significant, as safety, trust and relationships can be restricted within a prison context.

Methodology

This article draws on a qualitative framework and a constructivist paradigm whereby our knowledge and meanings are generated by our experiences. Constructivism offers a philosophical and methodological approach that enables an examination of people's individual meaning making around their experiences. As summarised by Savery and Duffy (1996), "constructivism is a philosophical view on how we come to understand or know" (p. 135). Constructivism has been grounded in educational theory as it recognises that learners have prior knowledge and experiences that have been constructed from their experiences and interactions (Seifert & Sutton, 2009). Our prior knowledge relates to community dance, and the focus of the study was on how community dance allowed a temporary removal of prisoners' masks. While people create meaning through their interactions, everyone brings meaning that is specific to them. Therefore, while we hold similar teaching ideologies, our meanings and understandings may vary, and so too will the experiences of the participants we work with (Savery & Duffy, 1996).

This research also draws on auto-ethnography "as a means of locating the researcher in [the] research" (du Preez, 2008, p. 509). Kristie's narrative draws upon her recent experience of facilitating community dance within a prison context and in discussion with her colleagues she engages in reflective practice. While research within a qualitative framework generally begins with a question, this research project produced material through a reflective narrative whereby outcomes were organically generated.

The reflections and key ideas discussed in this article were derived through a reflective narrative approach. We, the researchers, met several times in formal and informal settings to discuss community dance in a prison setting. The discussions were reflexive and served to highlight Kristie's work in the prison and place it at the centre of the inquiry.

Ethics approval was gained from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (20/039) and the ethics application and project description were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the Corrections Facility. A consent form was signed by the Regional Volunteer Coordinator at the Corrections Facility. The prisoners were offered the classes on an entirely voluntary basis, and only those wishing to avail themselves of the community dance classes attended. There were no incentives offered. While the researchers' names have been used in this research, all other names have been replaced with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. The focus was on the benefits of community dance within a prison situation, and the auto-ethnographic approach was acknowledged as a first person account of a subjective experience. The approach was tempered with social research and reflexivity through discussions with experts in community dance in order to construct meaning.

Our Own Masks

We questioned ourselves regarding the wearing of our own personal masks when facilitating or teaching dance and we concluded that we do. We agreed that we each intend to be our natural selves and maintain our integrity when teaching. Our masks therefore end up becoming an exaggerated bearing of who we think we are, as we bring our best selves to the teaching space. This in itself demonstrates the use of a mask through

performative behaviour, despite the fact that we bring our whole selves to the class, and attempt to avoid being someone who we think we are not. The mask is not a simple element however as we wear them as professionals, and they hold personal attitudes and beliefs (Lea & Griggs, 2005). Who we are in the classroom is also informed by who the students or participants think we are.

Kristie reflected on the mask she wore within the prison. She felt her mask was one of nervousness in the first session; she had no firm idea what to expect and was therefore unable to plan how she would be. Nervousness is considered to be a common feeling for people teaching in a prison context, as “prison teaching is a ‘totally different’ experience, and prison is a ‘foreign place’” (Wright, 2005, p. 19). If the session did not go well, would Kristie know how to react appropriately in a manner that would be tactful and diffuse a difficult situation? van Manen (2016) discusses an adult/child relationship that outlines clearly the same dilemma:

As a rule we do not have time to lean back in our chair and deliberately decide what to do in the situation. And even when there is time to reflect on what alternative actions are available and what best approach one should take, in the pedagogical moment, one must act immediately, even if that action may consist of holding back. (p. 18)

As the sessions evolved Kristie was able to relax, to be herself and act more naturally. This was perhaps due to becoming acclimatised to the prison environment (Wright, 2005). While the mask she was wearing was one that was influenced by her context, she was able to adopt her teacher persona in a way that felt comfortable to her. In this sense Kristie was using the same persona as she might in everyday communication, but within a community dance setting her mask was tailored and managed in response to the group.

In some respects our pedagogical approaches to teaching community dance require a sense of ‘being real,’ as such classes are facilitated rather than taught, and in order that the participants understand what is expected of them, the facilitator must be tuned in to who the participants are, what they need to understand and to offer support wherever necessary. Baim et al. (2002) suggest as facilitators

We must bear in mind the context of offending and never discount the importance of the wide range of factors and pressures confronting the participants. It means treating all participants individually, but within their social/historical context. (p.xiii)

Fitzgerald (2017) reflects on her community centred pedagogy, “I define a capable facilitator as someone who provides tools for creative exploration with the intention of allowing content to emerge from the participants’ shared experiences” (p. 2). Fitzgerald (2017) teaches the more formal aspects of dance technique within an institutional setting, and she believes that the “skills, knowledge and humanistic values shared by socially engaged arts practitioners can be cultivated very deliberately in the dance technique class” (p. 2). This is important to note, as Kristie’s planning included a high degree of sequence development, to meet her expectations of what she believed the men’s understanding of dance to be. She believed that to start off with creative activities in groups may have resulted in a negative response.

We noted that ‘fun’ is also an element of our pedagogical approaches when facilitating community dance. Fun is built into our masks and according to Francis (2012), “The use of fun in the classroom is not only a complement to learning, but according to Dornyei, the lack of fun may actually be a detriment” (p. 152). The use of fun as a pedagogical approach has developed naturally in our teaching as a successful tool in creating relationships and raising levels of motivation.

When reflecting upon our use of masks we noted that we all hold similar values including the intent to include fun, integrity, respect, humility and sincerity in our teaching. We also acknowledge that while this is

how we perceive ourselves in classroom situations, we will not be all of these things to all people, in fact depending on circumstances we will not meet all of our pedagogical goals at all times.

Mask Removal in a Prison Setting

Prisons have various physical and social elements that construct a unique prison environment, which differs from outside contexts. Prisons can be referred to as a “total institution” (Goffman, 1968, p. 11), where the control of activity, repetitive exercises, spatialisation and detailed hierarchies are all evident, formulating a context for power, discipline and punishment (Foucault, 1991). The hierarchy, power, confinement and control of the prison environment formulates a prison culture in which prisoners reside, with staff and volunteers visiting from the outside. While such elements of a prison environment are common in global prison contexts, the experiences can vary among different prisons, depending on the number of inmates collectively with the greatest crime experience displaying the most anti-social climates (Winfree, Newbold, & Tubb, 2002). Kristie’s experience was with low-risk prisoners, where the dance classes were offered to only one unit of men in the prison.

Additionally, prisons have “a distinct social organization that is often at odds with the outside world” (Gillespie, 2004, p. 66). The social dynamics of prison environments can contribute to prison culture and sub-cultures (Cohen, 2005; Goffman, 1968). Clemmer, as cited by Gillespie (2004), suggests that “the culture of a prison influences the people participating in it, in the same way as culture anywhere plays a part in shaping the lives of men” (p. 75). Sykes (1958) further elaborates on this, describing the ‘pains of imprisonment’ experienced by prisoners. This can include the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, autonomy, and the deprivation of security (Clemmer, 1950). As a result, a prison subculture can be constructed within the prison environment as a way for prisoners to ease the pains of imprisonment (Clemmer, 1950). The prison subculture involves an inmate code of conduct which consists of “schemes of power and interchange, expectations, values and behavioural outcomes” (Gillespie, 2004, p. 66).

In navigating and adapting to the prison environment and prison culture, prisoners may create “emotional ‘masks’ or ‘fronts’ of masculine bravado which hide their vulnerabilities and deter the aggression of their peers” (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 57). Literature variously discussed the ideology of wearing a mask in prisons suggesting that false toughened identities allow male prisoners to interact with others and manage the ‘pains of imprisonment’ (De Viggiani, 2012; Jewkes, 2002, 2005; Jones & Schmid, 2000). Jewkes (2005) states that “wearing a mask’ is arguably the most common strategy for coping with the rigors of imprisonment” (p. 52). Crewe et al. (2014) broadly define ‘masking’ as “requiring that one stifles or contains traces of fear, pain, weakness and vulnerability (anything that appears ‘feminine’)” (p. 64). Crewe et al. (2014) also draw upon this definition when referring to the masks that men in dance classes may wear and/or remove. Houston (2005) facilitated dance with male prisoners and suggested “that participation in dance was giving [the men] the confidence to step outside the personae they cultivated whilst ‘inside’” (p. 173). Given that dance is often perceived as a feminine activity, the complexities and significance of men removing their masks in community dance classes within the prison context are noteworthy.

Male prisoners who participate in dance could be viewed as weak or feminine which may cause tension or disruption within the prison sub-cultures. However, education and workshop spaces within a prison may be referred to as “marginal spaces or intermediate zones where many of the normal rules of the prisoner society [are] partially or temporarily suspended” (Crewe et al., 2014). Goffman (1968) also refers to education activities as “removal activities” which are sufficiently engrossing and exciting to lift the participant out of himself” (p. 68). It can be understood that activities, such as a dance class, may temporarily diminish elements related to the prison environment and provide the opportunity for emotions and personalities to be revealed through the removal of masks. While the removal of masks may be temporary in relation to the both the length of the class

and the overall programme, participation in dance activities within the prison can contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration through fostering positive communication, qualities of trust and empathy, and personal development (Arts Access Aotearoa, 2017; Baim et al., 2002; Houston, 2009). It would appear that frequent participation in community dance classes within the prison could be beneficial for male prisoners.

As community dance practitioners, we often use pedagogical approaches that are “full of dialogue, spoken and embodied; the interaction of ideas, the sharing of personalities” (Buck & Snook, 2018, p. 39). With a community dance pedagogy as a priority, these approaches include valuing the process and participation as clear expectations. Student-centred approaches create a safe space where facilitators can be themselves, holding particular values, and allowing mistakes to happen. Such approaches are used to facilitate an inclusive environment where the men can feel safe to remove their own personal masks.

It could also be assumed however, that further challenges may have been faced when Kristie, a young white female, entered the prison to facilitate community dance classes. The prison context is “a highly gendered space, where traditional notions of masculinity and femininity shape the perceptions and interactions among staff and prisoners alike, reproducing rather than challenging the gendered ideologies underpinning prison spaces” (Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020, p. 635). Being a female staff member or volunteer in a male prison can be considered both a liability (e.g., appearing vulnerable) and an asset (e.g., ability to use compassion). Kristie was asked to wear loose baggy clothing and little make-up. When conducting research about prison officers, Tracy (2004) described the need to appear nondescript when entering the prison environment. This would seem an obvious measure to take in ensuring the avoidance of heightened emotions. Kristie’s appearance added a further dimension to the mask she wore within a prison environment.

Dancing in the Prison

Over the eight weekly dance classes there were many critical moments which provided opportunities to unpack and develop meanings around how the participants wore and removed their masks. One critical moment in particular, was the very first minute of the very first class. In our discussions, we noted that the first moment of a dance class is crucial in setting up the remainder of the session. Kristie found this relevant in the prison, as she reflects on the first minute of the first prison class:

I was in the prison gymnasium with a student volunteer (Lily) and a prison guard (Mark). I’d put some hip hop music on in the background, and was talking with Lily and Mark. I was extremely nervous as it was the first time I’d ever taught men, let alone in a prison. The men began to enter from a door in the far corner of the gymnasium, and in that moment I didn’t know where to look – do you look at the men, or will they think you’re staring because they’re ‘prisoners’? Should I smile? Am I allowed to smile in the prison? I sort of looked at them and then looked away, but managed to maintain a smile. A couple of the men came over to introduce themselves, and that helped me to maintain an open attitude. I then called the men into a circle and asked everyone to take a seat, deliberately assuming a confident but not overbearing tone of voice.

This moment, although small, would have been enough time for the men participating to create an assumption or meaning around Kristie and the upcoming class. Although first impressions do count (Adey, 1997), the prisoners would be accustomed to activity providers appearing nervous on their first day, and Kristie was smiling. Baim et al. (2002) discuss the need for facilitators to portray confidence even when feeling nervous. They explain this means “paying attention to how we are coming across to the participants, how we are using our voice, our gestures and our body language as a whole” (Baim et al., 2002, p. 26). de Luse (2018) suggests also that flexible first day activities are important in establishing engagement and first impressions and

this is what Kristie went on to do through individual introductions and a game. We believed that had Kristie appeared overly confident, making strong eye contact with the prisoners, and then yelling at them to form a circle, this would have constructed a different space. Kristie's self-concept led her to seek sensitive and responsive outcomes (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2009) and this was achieved through authenticity.

Throughout the first and following classes in the prison, it could be perceived that the men were removing their masks. This could be evidenced by shifts from closed to open body language, through active participation and contribution from the men, through moments of banter, laughter and positive communication between each other. In one instance, during a feedback session at the conclusion of a class one prisoner stated, "In a prison, you have to wear a mask to protect yourself. I have found that in these classes, I can take it off and be myself." The fact that he felt safe to make such a statement in front of other prisoners indicated that Kristie had created a safe space in which masks could be removed. The prisoners' revelations became the starting point for the researchers' discussions around the use of masks.

As the researchers reflected upon the importance of tailoring and managing the way we wear our own masks, we discussed the importance of being able to make mistakes. There was a need to maintain our teaching masks with humility. Kristie recalled a mistake she made during one of the introductions:

I asked the men to share their names and "a hobby or something they like do." The men shared their names and their hobbies, which ranged from drawing, working out and watching television. Then one of the men shared his name and that he "likes to do drugs." There was a moment of silence within the group, as the mention of drugs was a sensitive topic within the prison environment, particularly as the men were also participating in drug rehabilitation programmes. I decided I needed to think more carefully about what the men are asked to share each week, as I realised in that moment that I hadn't thought about how the question is easily been answered by "doing drugs." This was a mistake on my part. I kept my smile and allowed the moment to play out. In doing so, the man laughed and then commented "I'm just being honest" as the rest of the group laughed. I joined in the laughter and lightly replied "fair enough," then gesturing to the next man in the group.

The way this moment was navigated was guided by the mask Kristie was wearing, particularly in relation to the values of sincerity and humility. Crewe et al. (2014) discuss the possibilities of men removing their masks and sharing emotions, noting that this requires "cultivation in order to be less prison-like...and create spaces that [are] as un-carceral as possible" (p. 69). As a facilitator, using these values and allowing mistakes to happen can help to construct a space where the men can feel safe to express these values too.

Kristie was advised by another arts practitioner volunteering at the prison that if she wanted effective participation, she should set some expectations at the beginning of the first class, such as, 'if anyone sits out they must leave the room.' Kristie felt however that this may come across as an authoritative pedagogical approach that maintained a hierarchy of teacher over the students or participants, and this approach conflicted with her own authenticity. Authoritarian pedagogy in dance education, sometimes also referred to as traditional or command style pedagogy, refers to the one-directional transfer of knowledge and technical skills from the teacher to the student (Dyer, 2009; Stinson, 2016). Here, the teacher holds power or authority while students follow demonstrations and corrections, often working towards an end product such as a performance (Shapiro, 1999; Stinson, 2016). The use of authoritarian pedagogy therefore constructs a power imbalance and hierarchy between the teacher and students (Smith, 1998). Kristie hoped to diminish some of the power dynamics present within both the prison environment and the dance classes. Instead Kristie suggested that her only expectation was that they gave everything a go, and not to worry about making mistakes. This was more aligned with Kristie's pedagogical values, and this meant that she was able to keep her mask on while teaching in the prison.

This expectation seemed to contribute to valuing participation and process over product and helped to create an inclusive space.

When reflecting on the dance content that was taught in the classes, there were a few moments where Kristie facilitated creative tasks with the men. She hoped that these tasks would provide the opportunity for the men to have greater agency and ownership in the class through sharing their ideas with each other. Engaging in creative tasks such as generating and sharing movement can require vulnerability and confidence from the participants (Conlon, 2020). Constructing a safe space for the men to comfortably remove their masks was important so they could fully engage in the activities. The creative tasks led by Kristie were received differently by the men throughout the eight weeks. Kristie reflected on the first creative task she facilitated:

In the third class after adding to the movement routine, I suggested to the men we would try something different. In the previous classes, we had run out of time to do any creative tasks, as the classes had started late. In this class I asked the men to come up with two moves each, teach them to a partner, then combine and add their movements to the end of the movement routine, and finally perform the new dance to each other. When leading this task, the men appeared to work well together, as the gymnasium filled with conversation and laughter. They each created unique movements and helped their partner to learn. The groups performed their dances to each other, and those watching clapped and supported each other. But, when we came together at the end for the closing discussion and I asked the men how they found the creative task, one of the men replied “Nah, didn’t like it.” Another man agreed and said “Yeah we’d rather you just tell us what to do.” I was surprised because the movements they came up with were really creative and they all worked well together, but I was happy to take on this feedback and find other ways to eventually provide creative tasks in the upcoming classes.

The above description of the men sharing their reflections and feedback is an example of the importance of fostering individuals’ sense of significance and agency within a community dance class. In ‘owning’ the lesson content, the participants may loosen their masks in respect to being a dancer, a male dancer, a male dancer in prison. For Kristie, her mask allowed her to confidently facilitate a creative task in the prison environment, but responsively reflect and adapt upon the class activity. The facilitation of a creative task was something she had led many times in contexts outside of prison contexts, and she was not sure how the men would respond. Upon reflection, this first creative task perhaps pushed the male prisoners further outside of their comfort zone. However, for the men, the removal of their masks provided an opportunity to openly engage in an activity that was outside of their comfort zone, work creatively with other men, and also share their thoughts and feedback. Crewe et al. (2014) acknowledge that creative activities in prisons “both encourage and require prisoners to put aside their normal postures and expose attitudes and emotions that are normally withheld” (p. 70). Taking on the men’s feedback, Kristie facilitated a different creative task in the sixth week of classes, this time asking the men to use two movements from the dance routine they had been working on, as well as making decisions around where they stood in relation to each other and the direction they faced. The men worked in small groups for the activity. This activity seemed to be more successful, perhaps because it involved creative decision making around space, rather than movement generation (Coe, 2003). Upon reflection, while it was important to listen to the feedback given, perhaps they would have become more confident had they engaged in creative tasks more often. The men also seemed to remove their mask when participating in this activity, particularly in the way some of the men helped new participants to learn their movements the following weeks. In this sense, the men were able to take the lead for a small part of the dance class, demonstrating a shift in power and ownership which is often restricted within the prison context.

Another critical moment from the prison classes was when one of the men did not appear to remove his mask. Kristie noted,

I saw one of the men walk away from the group choosing instead to use some of the gym equipment on the side of the room. Ben had been the most enthusiastic of the men participating in the classes and came every week. It was clear that something was wrong. When he arrived, instead of greeting me with a smile and wave, there was no smile. He also seemed reluctant to participate in the introduction and game, and overall seemed unhappy by the way he looked down at the ground a lot, spoke in short and quiet sentences, and distanced himself from others. This was emphasised by one moment when I pressed play for the music so we could go through the movement routine we had been learning. He turned his back and walked to the side of the room. In this moment, I noted what was happening and let him go, which helped to maintain the safe and fun space with the group. Ben needed his own space, so rather than demand he join in and/or leave the room, or push him too hard, I used compassion and respect to navigate the moment. This approach seemed to work well, as Ben came up to me at the end and said “I’m sorry, I will join in next week.” At the end of the class, the guards explained what was wrong. They told me that Ben was being teased by others in his unit because he was dancing. They explained that the guards in the unit asked Ben to show what he had been doing in the dance classes, and with enthusiasm, Ben was able to recall the whole movement routine we had been working on. Unfortunately, this led to some mean things being said about Ben, which made him upset, hence keeping his mask on during the class.

This response to dance from the other men in the prison reflects the stereotypes around men and dance as discussed. Interestingly, the idea of judgment around dance in a men’s prison came up within one of the group discussions where it was reflected that this judgment and stereotyping of men participating in dance existed, both among the prisoners, and the guards working in the Corrections Facility. The hyper-masculinity of the masks within a prison setting would not allow some individuals within a prison to admit to liking dance, stereotypically a feminine pursuit (Dolovich, 2018).

Another critical moment that demonstrated the feeling of safety and trust between Kristie and the men in prison occurred during one of the end-of-class discussions.

There were two men sitting to the left of me, and one of them (Liam) asked about an ankle injury and whether I knew of any exercises that could be done to help him. I recognised that this moment of the prisoner approaching me demonstrated that he held some value and trust in my advice. This trust had been built up over the previous weeks of classes. I shared some exercises to Liam, but also suggested he should ask the gymnasium staff. He told me the discussion we had in those few minutes was more helpful than the help he had received in his whole time in prison.

What may be interesting to question is whether he would have sought the same help at the beginning of the eight weeks of classes, or whether the environment created through the dance classes allowed him to do this with his mask removed. Reflecting on the moment, Kristie recalled feeling surprised that the man was comfortable enough to approach her and ask about his injury. The trust and respect experienced in this moment demonstrates a relationship and connection built within the community dance classes. However, due to the prison context, Kristie was cautious in the advice she gave. The New Zealand Department of Corrections (2013) provides a Code of Conduct for volunteers which provides suggestions of “Protect your personal information and that of others,” “Be careful of physical contact,” and “Be aware of con games” (p. 4). When Liam asked Kristie for advice, the Code of Conduct was at the forefront of her mind. In particular, Kristie had been warned by prison staff and other volunteers that although prisoners may be friendly, you have to remember “that some prisoners have spent most of their lives either deceiving people, or being deceived, [and] some may work on

your sympathy or guilt feelings to get what they want” (Department of Corrections, 2013, p. 4). While Kristie did not feel as though Liam was being manipulative, the need to consider her response was a reminder of the prison context in which she was teaching.

Also of interest was one of the prison guard’s ongoing participation in the classes, including the introductions and closing discussions. In the prison environment where guards hold power and control over men in prison, the guard’s involvement helped to shift the power dynamics within the class and build positive relationships (Gillespie, 2004; Goffman, 1968). This was evidenced by O’Connor and Mullen (2011), who described how young prisoners participating in an applied theatre project, “saw differently staff members who acted or sang or painted beside them” (p. 143). Former Arts in Corrections advisor Jacqui Moyes (cited in Art Access Aotearoa, 2014) emphasised the significance of staff involvement as she shared a quote from a prisoner who said “I felt like it was the first time the prison guards had seen me as a human being.” The prison guard’s participation seemed to contribute to the safe and inclusive feeling of the prison gymnasium as he too engaged in both the dance but also the moments of banter, laughter and group discussions.

Assisting a Transition Back to Old Masks

Equally important to removing the participants’ masks is the idea of needing to help them put the masks back on as they transitioned back to their wing. Ben’s experience of expressing his enthusiasm for dance outside of the safe dance space resulted in negative repercussions. Prisoners need to reconstruct their public/prison identity so that they can fit within the dominant culture and according to Jewkes (2005), “they must be able to simultaneously maintain and nurture a private, interior (and usually no-‘macho’) sense of self” (p. 46).

Kristie reflected that she had possibly assisted the replacement of old masks through the end of class discussions and reflections.

Within these discussions, the participants would be sitting in a circle and I would pose two or three questions – such as what worked well; what was challenging; what was a highlight/lowlight; what would they like to do more of? At times, this worked well as it helped to bring the group together and provided a space where shared ownership could occur through our shared voices. As an example, when asking what they would like to do more of, the men suggested they would like to learn some moves from music videos they saw on television in their unit. They suggested artists such as Khalid and Michael Jackson, and joked about learning Beyoncé and Lady Gaga movements. I made a suggestion that they could have a look at the videos on tv over the coming week and bring some movements the following week.

We acknowledge that popular music and video clips are useful pedagogical approaches when introducing community dance into a correctional environment. The ‘cool guy’ masking of emotions can be related to popular culture and creation of identity through music. The music that prisoners are drawn to can be the support that they need to perform dance movements, especially those that relate to their culture. Hanson (2018) discusses ‘Dance Kaiso’ where prisoners were taught Afro-Caribbean drumming and dance that became so comfortable that they were able to improvise in both the drumming and dancing.

The suggestions that were made by the prisoners were music choices that could encourage them to dance. Combining popular music with popular dance increased the benefits to the offenders through the programme. Baker & Homan ((2007) discuss the benefits they observed such as “fostering individual creativity, self-esteem and social communication” through a popular music programme with high risk youth offenders.

This time for discussion was useful in bringing the class to a close and providing an opportunity to reflect and process their experience before returning to their unit (Ifill, 2020). Because the men were quietly seated in a circle listening to others, they had the time and space to think about the transition back to their unit, whether consciously or unconsciously. Had they gone from vigorous dancing back to their units, it may not have been easy for them.

Alternatively, there was a critical moment where Kristie realised she did not help the men put their masks back on. This occurred at the end of one of the classes where the class finished fifteen minutes later than planned. The late finish was said to be okay by the guards as normally the men would use the fifteen minutes after the class as free time to use the gym equipment before returning to their unit.

After wrapping up the class, I heard one of the men ask the guard if they could stay to use the equipment, but the guard looked at the time and said 'no, it's time to go back to the unit.' The man looked disappointed, and seeing this I realised the significance of that last fifteen minutes for the men.

This 15-minute period had provided time and space for the men to transition from the fun and safe dance space to the reality of the prison environment where their masks are required. In taking away these fifteen minutes, Kristie realised that she had not provided that opportunity for the men. Finding strategies or space to allow the men to put their masks back on is an important aspect to consider in the planning and delivery of community dance classes in prisons.

Conclusion

In a prison you have to wear a mask to protect yourself. In this class, I can just be myself. (Prisoner)

Through the use of the community dance principles of inclusion and process over product to guide the classes, the sessions ran smoothly. There was no emphasis on perfecting movements or needing to work towards a performance. This approach was particularly significant given that the men who were participating in the dance class had very little dance experience. When questioned on their dance experience, most of the men referred to their dancing in night clubs, and no one had any formal or informal dance education experiences. Rather than requiring the men to perfect the movements being taught, such as in formal dance settings, the emphasis of the classes was participation. This approach was also significant given the challenges surrounding stereotypical views of men's participation in dance. Despite the presence of stereotypical views amongst the male prisoners and staff, the men who participated were able to temporarily remove their masks. The dance movements that were performed related to 'muscle and bone' conditioning and Hip Hop and required a degree of stamina and 'manliness'. The accompanying music was selected from a popular music vocabulary that would have increased the men's enjoyment. This was enough to ensure that the men kept attending the sessions, despite the stereotypical challenges.

Community dance prioritises the way a dance space is set up and constructed so that the participants feel they are in a safe environment. Strategies such as student-centred learning approaches, collaborative tasks, and sitting in a circle were used in the prison classes to help foster inclusion. Collaborative teaching approaches allow students to "potentially understand more about one another's different cultures and perspectives, which is necessary for life beyond the dance studio space that embraces differences in the world" (Ssebuuma & Martin, 2018, p. 22). The use of circular formations also allows for shared ownership where all students are seen, connected, and valued (Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Rowe, 2003). For Kristie, in her prison classes she always started and finished the classes sitting in a circle with the men (and often the prison guards). This approach helped the men 'be seen' in the classes, and every person's voice was included. The inclusion of the men's

voices was an important aspect of constructing a safe space, as it assisted in diminishing the hierarchy and power dynamics in the space whilst allowing the men to feel significant (Vandeyar, 2010).

Prisons have unique environments of control, confinement and power distinct to the outside world, meaning male prisoners wear masks to hide vulnerabilities and manage the pains of imprisonment. Community dance classes within the prison provide the opportunity for men to remove their masks. As community dance practitioners we maintain our own masks as an extraordinary bearing of ourselves, which are tailored in response to the group we are working with. The way community dance classes can remove men's masks despite the tensions of the prison environment and stereotypical views of dance can be significant for the rehabilitation and reintegration of men in Corrections Facilities. Participating in the dance classes provided an opportunity for the men to be themselves, engage positively with other men, and develop trust through learning, creating and sharing dance. However, it is noted that art programmes run by volunteers or small groups present issues of accessibility and sustainability. While it was possible to recognise a removal of prisons' masks with the short amount of time that these sessions were held, the benefits were unlikely to be ongoing. We posit that prisoners would benefit from ongoing, permanent community dance sessions. We did not seek to develop the research regarding the positive implications for prisoners beyond the removal of masks due to the limitations of the study. We suggest however that this research has opened the door for larger research projects involving community dance within prisons. An engagement in popular dance to popular music may lead to other areas of music and dance and see the men embrace their creative potential.

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