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## Integrating Dance and Language Education: A Pedagogical Epiphany

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## Integrating Dance and Language Education: A Pedagogical Epiphany

### Abstract

Dance fulfils several educational purposes, particularly in the context of second language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, challenges to implementing dance as an approach to teach and learn a second language do exist. For teachers, it is essential to develop varied pedagogical approaches to suit different student cohorts. But it is not reasonable to expect that every language teacher is a born expert and connoisseur of dance or every dance teacher a born expert and connoisseur of the target language. Moreover, we have not seen studies focus on the development of the pedagogy of using dance as an approach for teaching and learning a second language. In this article, we assembled autoethnography and educational connoisseurship and criticism to investigate Nan's experience through the process of generating descriptive narration, interrogating reflective analysis, evaluating understandings, and discerning themes. The themes discussed were communicative and intercultural competence, language acquisition and immersion, cognitive learning transfer, and multiple accesses. This study offers empirical evidence for the benefits that dance activities can make to students' second language competence development and affords pedagogical insights for teachers who want to employ dance as an approach to teach a second language.

### Keywords

autoethnography, educational connoisseurship and criticism, movement, Chinese cultural dance, second language education

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## **Integrating Dance and Language Education: A Pedagogical Epiphany**

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Dance fulfils several educational purposes, particularly in the context of second language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, challenges to implementing dance as an approach to teach and learn a second language do exist. For teachers, it is essential to develop varied pedagogical approaches to suit different student cohorts. But it is not reasonable to expect that every language teacher is a born expert and connoisseur of dance or every dance teacher a born expert and connoisseur of the target language. Moreover, we have not seen studies focus on the development of the pedagogy of using dance as an approach for teaching and learning a second language. In this article, we assembled autoethnography and educational connoisseurship and criticism to investigate Nan's experience through the process of generating descriptive narration, interrogating reflective analysis, evaluating understandings, and discerning themes. The themes discussed were communicative and intercultural competence, language acquisition and immersion, cognitive learning transfer, and multiple accesses. This study offers empirical evidence for the benefits that dance activities can make to students' second language competence development and affords pedagogical insights for teachers who want to employ dance as an approach to teach a second language.

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### **Introduction**

Nan is a dancer, teacher, and researcher originally from China, now living in Melbourne, Australia. In this autoethnography, Nan offers four stories about herself as a teacher, first of dance, second of language, third of occasional language immersion, and fourth of intentional language immersion. Nan's depictions are detailed, taking the reader into the world she inhabits and revealing the benefits of dance as an approach to develop students' second language competence. We then interpret and evaluate Nan's lessons, providing empirical pedagogic insights for teachers who are willing to employ this approach. When we use first person singular pronouns, it is the voice of Nan; when we use plural pronouns, we refer to our shared research endeavour.

### **Autoethnography**

This article adopts an autoethnographic approach concerning Nan's time teaching dance and/or language in Beijing and Melbourne. We saw this constructivist study as a social phenomenon rooted in lived experiences. Consequently, we assembled autoethnography and educational connoisseurship and criticism as a means (Southcott & Crawford, 2018) to investigate Nan's experience through the process of generating descriptive narration, interrogating reflective analysis, evaluating understandings, and discerning themes. If

autoethnography offered a route into us and contributed to our understandings about teaching and teacher education (Hamilton et al., 2008), then educational connoisseurship and criticism afforded us a rigorous well-structured framework to evaluate what we found (Vars, 2002).

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology in which the writers describe, interpret, and systematically analyse their personal lived experiences to make meaning of certain aspects of the culture that those experiences link to (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnographers seek to share their lived experiences, embrace self-reflection (Dhokai, 2012; Duncan, 2004; Ellis, 2009), and report evocatively on the understandings to provide opportunities for themselves to reshape the envisaged futures (Custer, 2014). Readers are afforded the opportunity to synthesize and find resonance with aspects of the study and new meanings of the phenomena (Chang, 2016; Ellis, 2004). Epiphanic moments of the writer's life are valued in autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographic reflection of personal experience, professional practice and educational processes has the potential to uncover the writers' perspectives, hypotheses, and beliefs (Chang, 2016; de Bruin, 2016; Hamilton et al., 2008). Addressing our own educational experiences enabled us to interrogate what we have understood about Nan and her students as she merged dance and second language teaching and learning (Karpiak, 2010).

### ***Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism***

Driven by the autoethnographic praxis, we applied educational connoisseurship and criticism to dig into Nan's experience of using dance as an approach for second language teaching and learning which simultaneously led us to reflect, interpret and report new understandings (Kramer, 2015). Through this process, we developed "rich nuanced feeling for and understanding of" (Hansen, 2017, p. 9) the captured educational phenomena. Educational connoisseurship is "the art of appreciation" of educational phenomena (Eisner, 1976, p. 141) and helps connoisseurs to see more and think about more of the qualities of educational phenomena. Being artistic, idiographic, and context-determined, educational connoisseurship can encompass a diversity of beliefs, values, interests, and abilities (Moroye et al., 2014), which accords with the tenets of autoethnography. Educational connoisseurs are expected to be aware and foster understandings of the complex engagements that occur in teaching and learning, and the subtleties of certain educational experiences others may overlook (Eisner, 1976; Eisner, 2002). Such appreciation, including awareness and understanding, underpins educational criticism (Conrad & Wilson, 1985; Eisner, 1976; Eisner, 1985).

Educational connoisseurs' awareness and perception alone have little use in the education context; they need to be illuminated and critiqued (Moroye et al., 2014). Educational criticism is "the art of disclosure" (Eisner, 1976, p. 141) of the teaching and learning phenomena. In educational criticism, connoisseurs describe, interpret, evaluate, or appraise what they see, and discern themes (Eisner, 1976). They firstly identify, characterise and portray the relevant educational qualities using "literary vignettes" (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009). Interpretation is an empathic journey into the life of others with others to understand the significance that certain actions have for people in certain contexts (Eisner, 1976). The evaluative aspect of educational criticism is to make judgements about what occurs with respect to educational significance (Moroye et al., 2014). This requires the connoisseurs' rich knowledge and experience to reveal the values implicit in the situated activities (Eisner, 1976). Through the development of themes, educational criticism leads to constructive results (Eisner, 1998) that potentially reveal lessons to be learned (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009) and guide inquiry and understandings in other contexts (Moroye et al., 2014; Southcott & Crawford, 2018).

Between us, we bring the knowledge to support educational connoisseurship and criticism. As a Chinese dance practitioner, researcher and educator who has also been smitten with second language teaching and learning, Nan has been actively engaging with Chinese language practitioners and learners in Melbourne, Australia for a few years. Jane is an expert music educator and Maria is an expert language educator. Both are also expert autoethnographers, educators and researchers. Nan offers four stories of her teaching in her first-person authorial voice. Data were collected from both Nan's past and present experiences. For the first three stories, Nan used her personal memories as the primary source to gather data. She created a list of previous events happened in her life relevant to the topic of this study (Chang, 2016). We then selected the most typical three. Following this, Nan screened through her memories and expanded the database, creating literary vignettes of the three events (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009). Whereas the research process had already started when the fourth story happened, Nan mainly employed Chang's (2016) strategy of Interactive Self-observation to capture factual data as they occur. Nan took notes immediately after the classes, recording herself, students, as well as the interactions between Nan and the students. Nan wrote reflective dairies of all the four lessons, which involved introspection and self-analysis. We then brought together our understandings in the process of interpretation, evaluation, and construction of themes. This process was focused on the five major dimensions of schooling: the intentional, the structural, the curricular, the pedagogical and the evaluative (Eisner, 1998; Moroye et al., 2014). All data describing others were deidentified.

In qualitative study, it is always necessary for researchers to address the issue of trustworthiness, which involves multiple aspects including but not limited to "selection and deployment of the multiple and often conflicting data collection/generation techniques and analytical procedures undertaken, the connection of empirical material to larger theories and discourses, and the ways in which these aspects of the research are interwoven with one another" (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 4). In this study, different data sources, such as personal memories, field notes, field diaries, old photos, lesson plans, emails of communication with teachers and schools, and program information packages, were used to ensure comprehensiveness and consistency of the database. The rich, thick description of the four stories increased both researchers' sense of embeddedness, awareness and understanding, as well as readers' sense of realism and empathy of those educational phenomena (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Data were first analysed by a single researcher after team discussion and were then supported and reviewed by the other two researchers. We incorporated multiple theories when analysing data. These procedures increased the trustworthiness of analysis (Campbell et al., 2013; Denzin, 1978). Increased attention to providing anticipatory, pervasive themes offered possibilities to guide inquiry and understanding in other similar educational contexts and thus supported catalytic validity of the study (Moroye et al., 2014; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Meanwhile, regular, video-recorded team meetings were conducted to maintain effective communication between researchers (Creswell, 2014; Saldana, 2013).

In this article, we explored how dance might be practised in second language settings. We examined the potential efficacy of using dance to teach and learn a second language. We explored how dance as an approach can be put into practice to better facilitate second language teaching and learning. Our research question was, how can an expert teacher integrate dance and language education?

## Nan's Experience

### *Story 1: Teaching Dance in Beijing*

At the age of 23, I had already been taught varied types of dances, including classical Chinese dance, folk Chinese dance, ballet and modern dance at Beijing Dance Academy, Beijing, China. I continued to practice and research dance by doing a master's degree there. When I was studying at the Beijing Dance Academy, I chose a teacher-training course in the electives. After completing the course and passing the examination, I got the qualification, and I was excited to be one of the lucky ones chosen by the Beijing Dance Academy to be a teacher of its weekly extra-curricular Chinese dance program. The program was developed to encourage, engage, and reward students aged four and above based on thirteen grades of increasing difficulty and each grade includes about ten dances. Overall, this syllabus is a progressive structure for dance teaching, learning and achievement. The syllabi consist of three dance disciplines: movement and song – movement combination with accompanying recitative or nursery rhyme; classical dance – a dance genre underpinned by traditional Chinese aesthetics, the foundation, and the most important part of the syllabus; folk dance – the theatrical presentation of national dance using original ethnic dance and music. The program has been popular — initially no online registration was offered, we could always see numbers of eager and excited parents queued up overnight outside of the office to get a spot for their children.

This is one of the busiest Saturdays of my graduate school life. I have been teaching in this program for almost two years and already know what I am doing. I wake up at 7am. It is indeed difficult to get out of the bed so early on a Saturday morning, but things are different if what wakes you up is your passion, even if you have not yet realised it. After quickly tidying myself up and getting ready for a whole day's dance teaching, I rush out of my dormitory and head next door to the office to sign in. Then I walk towards the teaching building in which there are a variety of different professional studios ideal for different types of dances. The first class will start at 8.30am. Although it is a 4-year-old beginner class, I know I need to control the learning outcomes as I am teaching an examination-led syllabus and every parent looks forward to seeing their child getting a certificate at the end of the school year. At the same time, I do not want to achieve this goal by being like some teachers I observed when I was a pre-service teacher in the program. Those very traditional teachers were extremely strict, just making the students repeat the movement combinations again and again, whether the students enjoy it or not. On the contrary, I would like to teach like some other teachers I observed who taught in a more inspiring and pleasant way. They were a bit more flexible and accommodating. They smiled at the students very often. Even if they were aware that some students needed to work harder, they patiently encouraged those students.

Consciously, I slow down my pace as I approach my studio in case that my students get anxious by encountering a teacher who appears slapdash. Passing the back door, I glimpse some early birds already running around in the studio. Having the dances to teach in my body and mind for quite a long time, I can focus more on their living bodies from the moment I glimpse the first student or the parent, or even when I hear the first squeals of excitement from the very end of the corridor. I can have one less thing to worry about at the same time while I am smiling, observing, thinking, responding, and adjusting the strategies accordingly.

I become a hybrid of dancer and teacher. I step into the studio through the front door elegantly with a nice smile on my face. Walking across the studio towards the audio system, some students stop running and say good morning to me. I stop and respond with caring eye contact and greetings. Meanwhile, more students troop into the studio one after another. After putting my props, notebook, and water bottle there, and pairing my mobile phone with the

system to make sure it is ready to play the music for the first warm-up, I go back to the side of the front door and stand beside the piano. We are in a spacious and bright studio about 200 square meters with a high ceiling. There are big windows on both sides of the wall and full-length mirrors at the front. The fixed wooden barres are all around and the floor is professional with a beautiful non-slip finishing layer. There are about 25 children in the class today. Only two of them are boys, the others are all girls. Some are already in their position waiting for me to start the class. Some are still running, wriggling, lying on the floor, and laughing. Some are practising the dances we had learnt previously with the help of their parents. Most are energetic but a few look fixedly and vacantly at me with their eyes wide open. A few just arrive and do not want their parents to leave and begin to cry. Immersed in the dance of sounds and actions of dozens of living bodies, I observe, I listen, I feel, and I react. Everything that happens in this 90-minute dance must be improvised around a clear plan in my head. I perform and adjust my part to support, stimulate and coordinate with the other parts, making all of us into a pleasing whole and walking them by the hand towards the learning and teaching goal. Improvisation in this dance does not mean that I have nothing in my mind and body and suddenly can do anything I want. I already have a goal that is the teaching and learning outcome, and I then dance together with my partners which are my students and their parents, to find and/or build the pathway towards that goal.

As the class is about to begin, I wave to the parents who are still hanging around the doors reassuring them that their children are all good with me and they can leave. Then the pre-service teacher who assists this class helps to close the doors. I turn on the music. The radio system is good enough to let even the most excited child hear the music so that I do not need to shout in a large space. I just stand there looking at them and smile. The students know what this means because I start every class like this. The inharmonious sounds gradually disappear. Once the students are all in their position, we begin to do the first warm-up and greeting dance. After we finish three or four more dances, it is the time for the first break. They hydrate themselves and go to the toilet. When the class resumes, I begin to introduce today's new dance. I use a lot of metaphors to describe and explain the movements that I am demonstrating. Then single movements are concatenated into a story which I made up earlier. A few repetitions later, I gradually stop the kinaesthetic demonstration and just tell the story verbally as a cue. Most of the students can do the movements on their own. As my students in this class are just four years old, they need another break for water and toilets. And after that, we focus on the details of skills that today's new dance requires. This is the most difficult part in terms of engagement in a dance class as it requires some kinaesthetic repetition to build up the children's bodies. As is my usual practice, I create varied games to incorporate different movements. While in movement games, the students get excited again, practising, moving, running, laughing, and sweating. In the excitement of the game, they forget they are building muscle memory and adding a new skill to their repertoire. The 90 minutes pass quickly. The students reluctantly go back to their position, and we do the final cool-down and reverence. I end the class here, full of pleasure. Packing up all my gear, I must leave, and another four 90-minute classes await me that day.

I have chosen to talk about this lesson because I had been doing this for about two years, I was experienced in teaching this program and I knew what I was doing. This specific lesson was in the middle of the learning year, and I wanted to capture what happened in the studio and what became our routine way of learning and teaching. There was always a formula in the class. We started with some warm-up. Then I needed to do something to remind and get the students back into what we were doing last week because I taught once a week and it had been seven days since the last class. Then we did something new, and I try to practice new things in different ways with the students. At last, we did some stretches and cool-down. This is how I spent my Saturdays of graduate school life. This is my first job as a teacher and I just would

not want to stop it, even though I was sacrificing my Saturdays. I kept teaching for this program until I left Beijing and moved to Melbourne about five years ago.

### ***Story 2: Teaching Chinese Language in Melbourne***

Not too long after I arrived in Melbourne, I found myself a job at a Chinese community language school — also as a teacher, but a Chinese language teacher this time. Prior to my commencement, I was sent a detailed lesson plan for each week of the following two terms. The lesson plans outlined what activities I needed to do and what contents of the textbook I needed to cover in every class. To some degree, I could still decide how to teach, but I had plan of what I would teach.

Once again, on a Saturday morning, I step into the classroom and meet my year-two students (aged 6-7 years). The classroom is filled up with desks and chairs. The 28 students in my class are from varied backgrounds and possess different Chinese language abilities. The class comprises three 50-minute sessions. The first session starts at 9:30 am. We review the vocabularies and sentence structures that we learned last Saturday and do a dictation exercise in order to test and develop the ability of students to hear and write correctly. Engrossed in the activity, we are interrupted when a whistle indicates a 10-minute outdoor break. Another whistle and the children stride back to the classroom, I begin to introduce the new contents from the textbook. In the last session, the students do exercises on a worksheet which the school provides for them to practice and enhance today's learning. Over the first thirty minutes, as each student finishes, I check their work and make comments. After that, I spend twenty minutes, talking to all the students in the class and giving the correct answers and explanations.

With hindsight, I think I endeavoured to apply all the teaching strategies I learned and developed during my time teaching at the Beijing Dance Academy to my Chinese language class. But I still felt that I could not completely let my energy out and pass on what all I have and what I will have onto the students. Simultaneously, I knew the degree to which I expected to use my dance advantage would not be encouraged in the language school. I left the community language school and started to teach in a private dance studio in Melbourne.

### ***Story 3: Teaching Dance and Language in a Melbourne Dance Studio***

In this private dance studio, I could decide on both what and how to teach the programs that I ran. The students aged between 3 and 11 were grouped into different classes according to students' ability to dance, as well as parents' and students' attitudes to learning dance. Most of the students have a Chinese background. Some of them were born in China, some of them were born in Australia. They all have at least one parent born in China. They were all attending English mainstream schools. I spoke both Chinese and English with their parents, depending on their preferences. I taught the classes in Chinese, except when I needed to introduce specific ballet terminologies. In every 90-minute class, I taught both Chinese dance and ballet, hoping that my classes can offer students insights into both Chinese and local culture. In term three and term four, we also learned a dance to perform at the end of the year. Sometimes it was a Chinese dance and sometimes we did ballet.

This year we choose a Mongolian dance, a regional Chinese folk dance. The accompanying song is in the Mongolian language. Twenty students from two different classes are going to perform this dance together. They have practised several times separately, and today is their only chance to rehearse together in the studio before they go up to the stage and perform. The song offers a vision of Mongolia. The first rays of sunlight filter through the summer green leaves and pour into the windows of the studio. The students are already in their beginning position, leaning and squinting as if they are still in a sweet dream. The sun rises,



the river sings, and the little dancers wake up like golden morning sunshine, drawing us into the vast Mongolian grassland. The music is on, the children's choir begins to sing the Mongolian lyrics. "Hang on, is it from the music player or my students?" I cannot believe what is happening and I ask myself. Finally, they surprised me with not only dancing but also singing along with the music in Mongolian all the way to the end. "Oh, what did I do with them? Is what they participated in a dance class or a language class?" I did not teach any Mongolian words. In fact, I know nothing about the Mongolian language (even though I am Mongolian) and neither do their parents. But if you had closed your eyes at that moment, you would swear that the students were learning a language.

That moment was a marvellous epiphany for me where all my experiences brought something more than themselves and led to my further practice and research in dance and language education.

#### ***Story 4: Teaching Dance and Language in a Melbourne Primary School***

Set in well-resourced grounds, with plenty of green spaces, this primary state school in suburban Melbourne, Australia offers Mandarin Chinese as its additional language course. There were two Chinese language teachers in the school and a volunteer Chinese teacher from the Confucius Institute<sup>1</sup> who had been working with them for a year. The school decided to hold a celebratory Chinese Culture Day as the extended component of their Chinese language class in which an atmosphere full of Chinese culture was expected. The school's inclusion of dance in its program concurs with the Australian and Victorian curricula (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2020b; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2019) that include the teaching and learning of dance from a range of world cultures.

I was invited to prepare a 50-minute lesson to teach each of the four classes in year one (students aged 5-6 years) a Chinese Dance and make some of the students perform it at the end-of-day assembly. Although Chinese culture is usually understood as the Han culture, there are different ethnic communities living in China and there are different cultures that exist in those communities. Although most familiar, Lion Dance and Dragon Dance are only part of the rich traditions of Chinese Dance that include classical dance and cultural dances from different communities in China. I knew what the school expected a performance to be, but what I planned to do was much more than that. I chose a peacock dance from the Dai community to form the basis of the lesson.

I was excited to utilise dance activities to achieve the goal of immersing students in Chinese, both the language and the culture. I expected to engage the students and see them acquiring the language through dancing and discussing. I was eager to reflect on how the students might explore and make meaning of the dance and the connection among dance, language, and culture.

On 29 November 2019, I visited the school. Everyone in the school is wearing some so-called Chinese red — a red T-shirt, a pair of red shoes or a red ribbon in the hair. I walk into the Chinese language classroom where the teachers are already there waiting for me. One of them walks me through the other door of the classroom into a hall. This is where I am expected to have four lessons with the year one students. The hall is empty, only a few chairs and a whiteboard inside, as I required.

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<sup>1</sup> The Confucius Institute in Melbourne supports the work of Chinese language teachers, Chinese language competitions, and cultural arts programs for Victorian schools.

It is almost time to start class. An apparently multicultural mix of approximately 20 students gather in after their room teacher into the hall. The room teacher introduces me to the students, “Ms Zhang will teach you a Chinese dance today, be quiet, concentrate, and be good, OK?” This is the first time I meet these students. Sensing their unease, I relax myself and try to behave naturally. Appearing excited, I tell them, “Oh, actually what I am going to do is to play with you, we are going to have some fun today!” Simultaneously the students bounce up and down excitedly. I sit down on the floor, and they copy me. I ask them to share what they know about China. As I anticipated, they give me names of food (dumplings and noodles) and the iconic panda. I seize this opportunity to utilise and promote intercultural capability with their enthusiasm, “Similar to Australia, lots of different people live in China. They created different foods, songs, and dances. China encompasses at least 56 community groups; Dai is one of them. Dai community originally mainly lives in Yunnan Province in the southeast of China, very close to Thailand.” I showed them on the map. I continued, “You may find their cultures are very similar, the food and the dance for example. Just like Australians love koala, the peacock is important for the Dai community in China, although for different reasons. Peacock symbolises happiness and auspiciousness. Peacock dance is very popular in Dai community.” The ten-minute talk is long enough for some year-one children to lose their patience, I can see some of them starting to wriggle on the floor. I have a picture of a peacock ready to show them, but I decide to do something different.

Abruptly, I stand up. With my knees bend repeatedly I count, “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight; two, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight...” Some of the students follow me immediately. When all the other students join us, I continue to lead the movement but begin to count in Chinese. Gradually, the hall has become suffused with the voices of children counting numbers in Chinese. Similarly, I incorporate the Chinese words of “left,” “right,” “quick,” and “slow” while we are learning the other movements of the legs, knees, and feet of the Dai peacock dance. Beads of sweat are dripping down the students’ faces.

I stop moving, ask whether they have ever seen a real peacock and ask them to describe it. I appreciate all the students’ statements but highlight those who give answers of “a sharp, pointing peak,” and “beautiful feathers on top of the head.” Then I invite some representatives to come up to the front and draw a peacock on the whiteboard. Again, I am positive about all their pictures but highlight those with a sharp peak and feathers on top of the head. Then I ask, “How many ways can you make a peacock with your hands?” After the students twist and play with their hands for a while, I demonstrate the important gesture with my thumb and index finger together like a pointing peak and the other three fingers separate like the feathers on a peacock head. This is a meaningful gesture for the Dai community, but I decide not to explain it to the students this time, because I believe it is too much for those year-one students who learn Chinese as a second language. When the students are trying to imitate, I announce, “I would like to perform a peacock dance for you. Please tell me how many peacocks there are in total.” I feel all the students are watching me dancing silently with rapt attention. After students give me different answers, I dance one more time and simultaneously sing a song, in which I created the lyrics and fitted into a western melody, “One little peacock, two little peacocks, four little peacocks, six little peacocks.” Then I repeat the dance and song and more and more students join me spontaneously, both singing and dancing. Without so much as a pause, I begin to sing the song in Chinese with the same melody. Just after a few seconds of silence, they restart to sing and try to mimic. “OK, who is smart enough to tell me what do I mean by ‘一只小孔雀?’” A girl shouts out the correct answer in English excitedly, “one little peacock!”. Another boy asks hurriedly, “Is ‘四只小孔雀’ means four little peacocks?” I confirmed the boy’s answer. “I know six little peacocks in Chinese is 六只小孔雀!” says another student, although not a hundred percent phonetically accurate. The students cannot wait to dance again. Some are dancing and singing by themselves already. I turn on the traditional Dai music and

start dance and singing, all of us merge into one. As the students' request, we do the whole dance and song with the accompanying music for one more time. Then there is not enough time left for us to dance more. I ask what Chinese words they have learned today. And we end the class with students scrambling to say "one," "two," "three," "four," "five," "six," "seven," "eight," "left," "right," "slow," "quick," "little," and "peacock" in Chinese.

Most of the students were so passionate, active, and engaged. They were keen to dance and sing with me, answer my questions, and participate in the discussions. Everything went smoothly during the lessons. The students were happy, and they were able to dance and match the specific Chinese words with meaning and/or English promptly and spontaneously. Among the approximately eighty students in year one, only one student from the last class I think was not engaged. Some of the students said they would miss me and wanted to see me again.

It is indeed easier to include younger students to learn movements and acquire movement-related vocabulary. Younger students also need things that are more cultural, and they need to be cultivated, though this is not easy to accomplish. When teachers attempt to promote students' intercultural capability, they need to be very carefully, fully prepared, and flexible. They need to introduce the culture via dance at appropriate points and in ways that younger students would recognise and interested.

## **The Study**

In this increasingly interdependent global world, the learning and maintenance of diverse languages is becoming more and more important (Lo Bianco, 2014; Ludi, 2010; Zeszotarski, 2001). Nevertheless, research shows that challenges for languages programs do exist. For example, a significant number of students give up before moving onto higher levels of second language learning and proficiency (Norton, 2013). As generations pass, there is also an increased challenge for the speakers of many immigrant languages to assist children to acquire their heritage, cultural, and intercultural understanding (Fishman, 2001). Supported by the literature, we recognised the potential that dance could contribute to address those issues in second language teaching and learning (Ashley, 2002; Hanna, 2008; Maxwell, 2001). It is always seen as a desired educational accomplishment to build links between theoretical understanding and practice (Vars, 2002). Nevertheless, challenges to implementing dance as an approach to teach and learn a second language do exist. For teachers, it is essential to develop varied pedagogical approaches to suit different student cohorts. But it is not reasonable to expect every language teacher is a born expert and connoisseur of dance or every dance teacher a born expert and connoisseur of the target language. Moreover, we have not seen studies focus on the development of the pedagogy of using dance as an approach for teaching and learning a second language. This study accordingly offers empirical evidence for the benefits that dance activities can make to students' second language competence development. We offered pedagogical insights for teachers who want to employ dance as an approach to teach the second language.

## **Discussion**

These four autobiographical stories addressed Nan's teaching of Chinese dance and Chinese language in different educational settings and offer ways in which second language teaching and learning can be enriched by dance and movement. The first story was not about teaching Chinese language but teaching Chinese dance, and the second story offered an example of teaching a second language without dance. The third story reveals Nan's epiphany, that during dance activity, a second language can be acquired in an immersive context, revealed

through happenstance. The fourth story proves Nan's realisation, that dance can be an effective way to support second language acquisition.

### ***Communicative and Intercultural Competence***

Every human being can acquire one or more languages at almost any time across the life span (Wode, 1981). The demands for second language teaching and learning are driven by social context, political policy, economic imperatives, and the phenomenon of globalisation (Byram & Hu, 2013). With the increasing emphasis on multiculturalism across the globe, second language theory has mainly focused on three approaches – second language acquisition; interlanguage – which is viewed “as a continuum which learners move along as they progress from knowing only L1 [first language] to gaining more skills in L2 [second language]” (Byram & Hu, 2013, p. 356); and then verbal interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers in the second language. Nan's three stories situated in Australia encompassed all these but particularly in the last she describes verbal interactions between native and non-native speakers in Chinese language. Admittedly this was limited but the children were young, and Nan only had a short time with each group.

Byram and Hu (2013) insisted that:

It is necessary to study second language acquisition as a social and cultural activity. It is appropriate to think of the acquisition of a second language as a social accomplishment, keeping the point of view of learners who have to be conceived as social actors. The relationships between the learner and the social have to be conceived in terms of relations of power, of identity negotiation and of communities of practice. (p. 612)

This captures what Nan sought to do, integrating Chinese language, dance, and cultural context. In the last recounted lesson attention was paid to promoting communicative competence which relied on developing model phrases learned through imitation and/or building certain utterances serving specific functions in specific contexts (Byram & Hu, 2013). This lesson offers a way in which a teacher can focus on learners' intercultural competence: the ability to use the utterances and speech patterns of the target language to communicate, negotiate and interact with their interlocutors from the target language-related culture (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2020a). Even though a very simple exchange, there was the germ of some intercultural competence and if the opportunity had been there, it would have been a basis for establishing “fluid relationships at the interstices of different and multiply-determined identities whilst having a purpose or task in mind” (Byram & Hu, 2013, p. 346). Intercultural competence of the second language “combines notions of communication and interaction across languages and cultures” (Byram & Hu, 2013, p. 346).

### ***Language Acquisition and Immersion***

Ultimately, there were two distinct ways of developing second language competence in Nan's third and fourth stories: language acquisition and language learning (Krashen, 1982). Language acquisition is a subconscious process like the way children develop ability in their first language. Other ways of describing acquisition include implicit learning, informal learning, natural learning and picking-up language. The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language learning. It refers to conscious knowledge of a second language, explicitly learning the rules and grammar. To enact this approach, language immersion programs have been proved successful (Maxwell, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1982).

Its success stems from the fact that immersion programs, in many aspects, parallel first language acquisition (Maxwell, 2001). Nan's third and fourth lessons were based on dance(content)-led activities that focus on the message and meaning, thus large amounts of input that students receive are comprehensible, then the acquisition of the second language occurred naturally (Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

### *Cognitive Learning Transfer*

Engagement in the arts is an effective modality of learning that engenders important learning outcomes (Eisner, 2002; Fiske, 2000; Fleming, 2008; Sinclair et al., 2009; Wright, 2012). Encompassing space, time (Cunningham, 1992), force and flow (Laban, 1963), dance is an art form rich in kinaesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 2004; Hanna, 2001). Dance can be powerful nonverbal communication which has a vocabulary (e.g., steps and gestures), grammar (e.g., justifying how one movement follows another), and meaning (Hanna, 2001). Dance is rich in culture, it is not one, it is geographically dispersed and aesthetically distributed (Kowal et al., 2017).

Many prominent dance scholars illuminated a wide range of values of learning through dance, including but not limited in physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and aesthetic skill development (Ashley, 2002; Bond & Deans, 1997; Bond & Stinson, 2007; Davies, 2003; Hanna, 2015). Few consider the connections between second language learning and dance. Dance leads to embodied thinking, stress-free and creative problem solving, and aesthetic decision making while developing self and relational sensibilities (Deans, 2016). Dance is not merely an independent domain but can afford cognitive learning transfer that enabled Nan's students to "learn dance, learn about dance," acquire and reinforce the second language "through dance" (Hanna, 2001, p. 24). Dance as a form of nonverbal communication integrates mind, body, emotion and cognition, the incorporation of dance thus contributed to students' intellectual growth in the second language subject and Nan's educational goal achievement in second language education contexts (Hanna, 2001).

### *Multiple Accesses*

Dance as a kinaesthetically rich art form also has the power to activate other existing intelligences and allow new intelligences to emerge (Gardner, 1999, 2003). Integrating dance into the second language education context allowed Nan to provide opportunities not only for students with highly developed linguistic intelligence but also for those who are advanced in kinaesthetic and other kinds of intelligence. Multiple accesses were offered to develop the competence of the second language. For example, by encouraging students to draw what they would dance later the whiteboard in the fourth story, dance activities allowed Nan to motivate students linguistic, kinaesthetic, visual, spatial, and interpersonal intelligence.

In second language education, it is reasonable to regard linguistic, communicative, and intercultural competence as complementary, they enable learners "to understand what they need to understand and to say what they want to say in certain situations in relation to specific topics" (Byram & Hu, 2013, p. 48). Dance encompasses movement (kinaesthetic aspect) and culture (cognitive aspect; Gardner, 2004; Hanna, 2001). The kinaesthetic and the cultural work together allowing the development of linguistic, communicative, intercultural competence of a second language. Practitioners who use this approach to teach a second language should consider both the movement and culture aspects of dance, rather than only movement, to enrich students learning experience and ensure more satisfactory learning outcomes. Cultural aspects should be introduced progressively and gently, in an age-appropriate manner that permit connections to be made and curiosity ignited.

What a child does from the very first moment is to breathe the air. Gradually more and more movements come. Movement is basic to children's functioning. When they start to receive formal schooling, they can already move and speak. They enter school with repertoire, with established neural pathways for both systems, and with vocabularies extensive of movement. By the intentional teaching of dance to support language acquisition, we are connecting neural pathways. For some young learners, their kinaesthetic intelligence may develop ahead of second language learning, thus using dance to teach culture and language takes advantage of different learning abilities. Teachers should take the opportunity to harness movement as a foundational manner of child engagement.

One limitation of this study is that not all teachers are confident dancer users who can implement dance as an approach to teach languages immediately although most of them can move and many can dance. With opportunity and commitment, teachers can acquire dance, culture and language skills, so that they too could implement dance-based cultural and language teaching and hopefully become themselves connoisseurs and critics. Future classroom-based research in this area is of great value for improving second language education outcomes and developing a better understanding of how and why dance can contribute to the development of competence in a second language.

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