

Dance

Dance investigations: an inquiry approach to dance history

The study of dance history within the new 7–10 Dance syllabus was discussed in a previous article in *Curriculum Support for Years 7–12 Creative Arts* (*Where's Martha?* Vol. 9, No. 1, 2004).

Dance history has a place in the new syllabus and can be incorporated into each of the practices of performing, composing and appreciating. The question to be posed is: what relevance does the history of dance have for students and how can we present this material in a way that addresses the dimensions and elements of *Quality teaching in NSW public schools*?

Dance history is a complex web of connections. While we study dance as an artform, we also need to understand other kinds of dance; ritual, social and commercial, to understand styles and influences on dance-as-art genres.

We need to think of dance history as connected: Works are an aggregate of past events.

Dance history is neither static nor linear. There is a continuum of events, which lead from the past to the present. If we apply this concept to most recent works, we can even look into the future.

We are not just digesting facts, we should be looking at dance history through multiple lenses, interpreting recordings of genres, styles, artists and works from different viewpoints.

Developing an inquiry

An inquiry into dance history can be integrated into any unit of work. For example, students can investigate aspects of style in relation to performance work or study how movement makes meaning in relation to composition work. An inquiry may provide the starting point for a unit of work that integrates all three practices of performing, composing and appreciating.

1. Decide on the theme, concept, or issue that you will investigate and give the inquiry a title. A catchy or provocative title should engage students in the investigation.
For example: *Prime time dance—what rates with audiences today?*
2. Develop the investigation:
 - What are the salient questions to ask about this topic?
 - For example: *What dance styles are currently in favour with audiences?*
 - *How does this compare to other eras/periods of dance history?*

- *Within genres, such as ballet, modern or jazz, what is valued?*
 - *Who or what influences community valuing of dance and how?*
3. Survey literature and other resources.
Go to a range of source material. For example: reviews, notations, journals, letters, magazines, newspapers, programs, advertisements, posters, autobiographies, live works, videotapes, photographs, set, prop and costume design, paintings, interviews, stories and anecdotes.
 4. Structure your investigation.
What are you setting out to achieve in your investigation? This will help determine the structure.
For example: analysis? comparison? critique? recount? interpretation? explanation? discussion?
 5. Decide on mode of presentation.
Your mode of presentation should be appropriate to the investigation. It may take electronic form e.g. *Word*, *PowerPoint*, web page (which would provide opportunity to incorporate ICT skills into teaching and learning), or it may take the form of reflective writing in dance journals, a written report or a visual essay. Students can include visual material as appropriate.

Sample inquiry: Prime time dance: what rates with audiences today?

This investigation seeks to find out what genres and styles of dance engage different audiences, and why. It asks students to study the diversity of contemporary dance styles and to question their own valuing of dance. Through research, interview and discussion, they can form opinions about how others value dance.

The title of the inquiry is deliberately provocative, equating the valuing of dance with the TV ratings race. Students can use prime time ratings as a metaphor for comparing how audiences value dance.

Students should make a list of dance genres and styles that are currently performed and viewed by audiences. They can include dance-as-art genres as well as social and commercial dance styles. In groups, students can frame questions that they might ask performers and audience members. Source material to use in the inquiry might include: videos of performances, dance reviews, advertisements, programs and interviews with a range of people including different ages, genders and dance experiences.

The structure of the investigation will include categorisation of dance genres and styles, comparison of opinions, values and attitudes and explanation of how and why different kinds of dance rate.

The presentation of findings of the inquiry could take the form of a news bulletin with the inquiry title as heading. Students could also project into the future

and write a news bulletin about how dance will rate in the year 2030.

Quality Teaching in an inquiry approach

Deep knowledge and deep understanding

This approach to studying dance history answers some of the important questions such as: *What do you want students to learn and why does that learning matter?*

We want students to learn about and value the diversity of dance, both now and in the past. We want students to understand the influences on the dance that they perform, and to have informed opinions about dance concepts, themes, styles and issues.

An inquiry approach identifies key concepts or big ideas and encourages students to connect knowledge.

An inquiry approach provides opportunities for students to demonstrate **deep understanding** by posing and answering probing questions and by presenting a reasoned argument or point of view, supported by evidence of research, in relation to a topic.

Problematic knowledge and substantive communication

Source material for the inquiry can be discussed to ensure students do not accept information as fact. Ask questions such as: what is this about? What does the author want us to know? Why is this so? Whose point of view is expressed? Whose knowledge is this? How has this view changed over time?

Both you and your students will generate questions about the topic for research and discussion and use these as the basis for the development of the inquiry. As students research and investigate the concept, theme or issue, there will be opportunities and structures for substantive communication, e.g. in pairs, small group discussion and cooperative learning activities. This will allow students to share substantive ideas about the lesson topic with each other and with you.

Metalanguage

Identify the everyday language that is essential for developing **deep understanding** of key concepts. Identify and discuss dance language (movement, symbol, image, non-verbal communication) and clarify meanings and definitions with students.

Higher order thinking

The structure of the inquiry is such that students must use higher-order thinking skills. Students will need to analyse, compare, contrast, organise, distinguish, examine, illustrate, point out, relate, explain, differentiate or evaluate. The topic chosen will determine the higher order thinking skills used.

Background knowledge and cultural knowledge

Student background knowledge can be used as a starting point for developing the inquiry. Students will use background knowledge to construct initial questions.

Using a range of sources for research and discussion will ensure students develop an understanding of diversity. Where appropriate, members of the community from diverse cultural backgrounds can be a valuable resource in lessons.

Knowledge integration

In an inquiry approach, explicit connections can be made to other subject areas, particularly Visual Arts, Music, Drama, History and Languages.

Narrative

Use multiple sources of stories, such as histories, biographies, autobiographies, documentaries and personal accounts. As a structuring device for the inquiry, students may construct a story, a reflective journal or a scenario.

Deidhre Wauchop

Senior Curriculum Adviser/Dance Consultant

Musica Viva In Schools - Australian Music Days!

Australian Music Days expose students to the art of composition through presentations by leading Australian Composers and are suitable for all elective music students!

Nigel Westlake on film music

Nigel Westlake, composer and clarinettist, has composed music for various film and television networks. His film work includes award winning scores for *Babe*, *Children of the Revolution*, as well as Imax (giant screen) movies such as *Antarctica*, *The edge* and *Solarmax*. Nigel will discuss the process of composing for film from the director's brief, initial composition ideas, producing an electronic soundtrack, and editing the soundtrack to final product.

Details:

Tuesday 26 July 10am – 1pm

Wednesday 27 July 9am – 12noon

Wednesday 27 July 12.30pm – 3.30pm

Sydney Church of England Grammar (SHORE)
Blue St, North Sydney. \$14 per student

To book phone: (02) 8394 6688.

Places are still available for the Musica Viva In Schools secondary program, which offers a range of highly talented groups to perform in your school. For more information visit

www.musicaviva.com.au

or phone (02) 8394 6688.