THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata

Waikato Journal of Education
Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

Volume 19, Issue 2: 2014

Special Edition:
Emergent learning and threshold concepts in tertiary education

Waikato Journal of Education
Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

The *Waikato Journal of Education* is a peer refereed journal, published twice a year. This journal takes an eclectic approach to the broad field of education. It embraces creative, qualitative and quantitative methods and topics. The editorial board is currently exploring options for online publication formats to further increase authorial options.

The Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), which is part of the Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, publishes the journal.

There are two major submission deadline dates: December 1 (for publication the following year in May); June 1 (for publication in the same year in November). Please submit your article or abstract on the website http://wje.org.nz/index.php/WJE or email wmier@waikato.ac,nz.

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Publisher: Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato
Cover design: Donn Ratana
ISSN: 2382-0373

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Volume 19, Issue 2, 2014

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Dancing onto the page: Crossing an academic borderland

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Abstract

The transition of performing artists into academia has become an increasingly popular yet fraught migration, as higher learning in artistic disciplines increasingly requires teachers with an applied practical knowledge, a capacity to undertake research, and to articulate the value of performing arts knowledge within scholarly discourse (Elkins, 2009). Transitioning dancers can be expected to sort through their embodied knowledge and transferable skill-sets in order to maintain a sense of identity and autonomy within the new academic terrain (Molloy, 2013). At the same time they are required to adopt new dispositions of enquiry and approaches to knowledge production in order to thrive within the new environment of the tertiary education sector. So how might postgraduate coursework be designed to support experienced practitioners across such an academic borderland, and into the formal research culture of higher education? When we consider how enriched higher education might become through the successful immigration of experienced professional practitioners, such postgraduate course design becomes a salient educational issue.

Our own journeys across this borderland have subsequently informed our co-design and implementation of Dance 724, a postgraduate course in qualitative research methods and academic writing that prepares students for independent research projects within honours, masters and doctoral degrees in dance studies. In this article we write reflectively on how Threshold Concept Theory (TCT) has guided our curricula design and pedagogic practices in this lynchpin paper. We also discuss six key thresholds that can restrain dance practitioners as they enter academia. While the focus here is on dance practitioners entering postgraduate dance studies, we suggest that the transition across an academic borderland for professional practitioners from diverse disciplines may be supported by a threshold concepts approach to postgraduate curricula design.

Keywords

Postgraduate research, dance, studio pedagogy, threshold concepts, conceptual thresholds, academic identity, academic borderland.

An overture: Artists in the academy

> I sat in the research methodologies class feeling bewildered. The woman sitting next to me responded to the lecturer's queries with a series of words that I had never encountered before that formed a sentence that I did not understand. I felt stupid. Was I just a 'dumb ballet dancer'? I looked at my notebook and my hand that was furiously scribbling down the words my classmate was saying. (Rosemary)

> "It sounds a bit like re-inventing the wheel," she said, glancing across at her colleague patiently, "There is so much literature that has considered these sorts of approaches." I had just presented some writing on my experiences of dance teaching in Palestinian refugee camps, to two community dance academics at a renowned dance institute in London. My hands crossed my lap, I sucked my lower lip and stared at the doorframe at the edge of the office. I did not know what all the 'literature' was that she mentioned, but could it really encapsulate the last 14 years of my life? (Nicholas)

These two memories are drawn from our own winding journeys into dance academia, from careers as professional dancers. The separate moments illustrate what is perhaps a common sense of despair for practitioners entering the academy: our professional experiences, knowledge and identities appeared generally irrelevant and did not provide much that could be transferred into higher learning. While we may question the pedagogic strategies and academic responses that we encountered during our initiation into academia, underlying these were our own assumptions about what it meant to be an academic. These assumptions formed a threshold, or mental barrier to our understanding, which restrained both of us on our separate pathways into postgraduate research. The 'threshold concepts' that subsequently liberated us from this mental barrier established a pathway that was rooted in our own professional histories and emboldened our research adventures into the mountainous terrain of arts scholarship. In this article we consider the relevance of threshold concept learning (Land, Meyer, & Smith 2008) for artists transitioning into the academy.

Like many dance artists, our formative training in dance took place within conservatory environments, in our cases the New Zealand School of Dance (Rosemary) and the Australian Ballet School (Nicholas). This education, and our subsequent dance careers, filled us with much conceptual and embodied knowledge and ways of seeing and being in the world. Again like many dancers, a point came when we decided to transition out of careers as performers and creators within the dance industry and into teaching, where we felt we could extend the influences we had gained from our experiences in dance. As government-funding priorities have increased the integration of performing arts conservatories into degree-based programmes (Seaman, 2006), we found that our interest in developing a career as teachers of our art form inevitably led us to universities. While we felt confident that we had much to share inside an institute of higher learning as practitioner scholars (Benham, 1996), we recognised that in undertaking this journey towards a fulltime career in academia, completing a postgraduate research degree has become an essential first step (Jackson, Peters, Andrews, Salamonson, & Halcomb, 2011; Nerad & Heggelund, 2008).

Similarly, dance studies academia has recognised the benefits of the research insights that dance practitioners can bring (Phillips, Stock & Vincs, 2009). Engaging their embodied and experiential knowledge, dance practitioners can extend research into:

- creative and performance practices (e.g., by investigating their own choreographic process within a new production);
- specific dance cultures (e.g., by investigating the histories and practices of hip-hop in a particular city); and
- the applied use of dance knowledge within other fields such as health and education (e.g., by investigating relationships between regular dance classes for the elderly and the delayed onset of Alzheimer's disease).

Bringing embodied knowledge and experiences into such research can lead to insights that are particularly distinct and significant. The successful transition of dance practitioners into the largely

disembodied sphere of academia can, therefore, do much to transform Cartesian assumptions about how new knowledge is formed and passed on (Lelwica, 2009).

For this reason, postgraduate degrees that can support the transition of artists into the academy might be considered a salient issue. Postgraduate degrees in the performing arts can, however, appear designed to further prepare undergraduate students for professional practice, rather than help transition experienced practitioners into postgraduate research. For professional practitioners navigating such a curriculum design, the learning activities and examination procedures can assume much prior knowledge of academic protocols, while there appears to be a pointless recycling of skills and concepts already gained from professional practice.

Because of the challenges that we have both faced when transitioning into research degrees from the profession, we have focused our pedagogic research on how postgraduate coursework may support such journeys into academia from the outside. This has involved both auto-narrative reflections on the challenges that we faced (Mitchell, O'Reilly-Scanlon, & Weber, 2005), and action research cycles (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) that have critically reflected on the design and redesign of postgraduate coursework over a six-year period from 2009–2014. This action research cycle has been informed by formal processes of student-, peer- and self-review, through student quantitative and qualitative course evaluations, peer-teaching observations and annual performance reviews. It has also been informed by more informal discussions held with students, academic peers and each other, driven by queries over how different teaching, assessment and course design practices can affect learning.

In this article we reflect upon our course design and pedagogy of *Dance 724: Dance Research and Writing*, a qualitative research methods and academic writing course designed to prepare students for honours, masters and doctoral research projects. In particular, we focus on what we consider to be key conceptual thresholds (Land, Meyer, & Smith, 2008) faced by mature students on this course who are transitioning from careers as professional practitioners into higher education. While the focus here is on dance studies, the issues discussed may be common amongst professional practitioners from diverse fields who are transitioning into academic study. These issues extend beyond disciplinary knowledge, and reach into concepts of professional identity. For this reason, we position the conceptual thresholds faced within *Dance 724* within wider theories associated with academic identity.

The curtain rises, the stage is set: Dance 724 aims, pedagogy and assessment

Dance 724: Dance writing and research methods represents one third of the compulsory postgraduate course work within our one-year Honours degree in Dance Studies and Postgraduate Diploma in Dance Studies. It is a core paper requiring four hours a week of student-teacher contact, and is taught alongside two similar sized papers in Choreographic Research, and Dance in Community and Education. For this reason, *Dance 724* focuses on institutional requirements of postgraduate scholarship, extending students' skills in academic literacy, critical discourse and formal research practices. In this sense, *Dance 724* is a lynchpin course for those transitioning from professional practice into the formal research culture of academia.

The central aim of *Dance 724* is to develop an advanced understanding of qualitative, post-positivist research methods associated with Dance Studies. The course further aims to enhance student confidence, creativity and flexibility in the written articulation of evidenced-based arguments, so that new knowledge in dance might be revealed, validated and shared through text in accessible and innovative ways. Successful graduates of *Dance 724* should acquire a clear sense of how qualitative research might be engaged within honours, masters and doctoral research projects. This aligns well with the core qualities expressed within the University of Auckland postgraduate research graduate attributes: a capacity to lead research that is original, informed, critical, ethical, methodical and accessible to others beyond the discipline (University of Auckland, 2009).

Within our Dance Studies Programme, this transition has further inter-cultural significance, as the course is regularly used within partnership programmes with leading tertiary dance institutes in Fiji and China. Our student cohorts come with very diverse cultural histories, educational experiences and

dance knowledge, which we seek to extend and validate through research practices that celebrate diversity and complexity. This advancement of cultural diversity and valuing of knowledge from diverse sources aligns with the Freirian pedagogical philosophy underpinning our Dance Studies Programme (Rowe, Buck, Martin, & Lee, 2014), and addresses our shared concerns over dance education as a location for cultural hegemony (Khoury, Martin, & Rowe, 2012). Such hegemony may be inadvertent, and so identifying it can require a proactive receptivity to student feedback, in a way that clearly suspends any judgment of artistic and cultural mores.

Balancing the institutional requirements for research with the ever-diversifying research interests of our students is therefore not straightforward and requires continuous cycles of reflection on the strategic alignment (Biggs, 1996) of our learning activities, assessment practices and graduate outcomes. As a community of scholars, the staff of our programme have engaged in reflective research into dance pedagogy (Buck, 2011; Longley & Buck, 2011; Martin, 2013b), curricula design (Buck & Rowe, In press) and examination practices for creative-practice research projects (Rowe & Buck, 2013). Central to our explorations into inclusive pedagogy and curricula design are inquiries into who our learners are, what they are bringing with them, and what they want to release.

Enter stage right, slightly bewildered: Academic identity, transformation and community

Dance 724 might be considered an *academic borderland* (Carter, 2011; Carter & Rowe, 2014): a location at the edge of a philosophic migration, in which undergraduates and practitioner migrants are deciding what they wish to carry of their 'old selves' into the new world of postgraduate research and into their new identities as academic leaders. As they extend their 'selves' and begin to construct these new academic identities, students consider what their history has been, what their core values are, and where their aspirations are leading them. This reflective process can ultimately involve a compromise between idealism and pragmatism, as the institutionalised research environment inevitably has its own demands and limitations (Archer, 2008; Billot, 2010).

We, therefore, share with our students an anxiety over what might be considered essential 'gear' for the journey ahead, and what might be considered 'excess baggage' and left behind. Acknowledging the potential of such essential gear (the students' own valuable knowledge) supports our constructivist pedagogic philosophy (Dewey, 1920, 1929; Eisner, 1998, 2002; Freire, 1970), and subsequently provokes us to embark together with our students into very new research journeys across unexplored terrains. Recognising that the students are also engaged in a process of leaving behind excess baggage (a letting-go of ways-of-being that feel deeply personal) keeps us sensitive to the disturbing impact of *Dance 724*. Central amongst our concerns is a consideration of how the disciplinary boundaries of our subject area and institutional environment may render students less empowered, less proactive and subsequently less capable of leading research into new directions (Grant, 1997).

To address these concerns over student agency, throughout each learning session we dedicate a substantial period of time to polylogues amongst the students. These multi-faceted small and large group discussions integrate physical, verbal and textual communication. Such polylogues can prompt diverse interpretations of writing and research to emerge, while de-privatising the learning journey (Servage, 2009) across the academic borderland. This sharing of the learning journey subsequently allows for a de-privatising of students' personal practices associated with research and writing. The social construction of meaning in these polylogues thus provides a crucial stepping-stone into guided activities in constructive peer-review (Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena, & Struyven, 2010).

Formal student feedback from annual student evaluations, and informal commentary from students, has strongly indicated that the polylogues and peer-review practices were very useful learning tools and central to the students' sense of belonging within a Dance Studies postgraduate research community. The students have expressed that their adoption within a community-of-peers fosters within them a sense of autonomy and an agency to lead independent research projects. This agency can only emerge however, if those entering the learning space bring with them a particular aptitude. At the very edge of the academic borderland, *Dance 724* identifies that students are expected to enter the

course as highly motivated, self-directed learners (Kop & Fournier, 2011) who are willing to independently source information relevant to their research interests. It is further assumed that such learners are willing to reflect critically on their learning needs, proactively engage in diagnostic and formative assessment procedures for themselves and their peers, and critically consider how the summative assessment that they receive may contribute to their future research and writing activities (Rowe & Martin, 2014).

The music begins: Conceptual thresholds and dance research

In acknowledgment of our students' intrinsic motivation to learn, our teaching roles and examination strategies are less guided by a need to provide extrinsic motivation to absorb specific content knowledge. Instead we focus on how transformative learning experiences might shift student conceptions of academic research and writing, and provide assessment goalposts that allow them to design their own research projects and directions. In order to maintain a scaffolded structure for this learning, we are guided by our growing understandings (shared with those traversing the academic borderland) of some of the conceptual thresholds of qualitative research and scholarly discourse.

From our own journeys, we recognised that the most difficult transitions into qualitative research and academic writing did not involve the consumption of new theoretical matter. Google Scholar, the information age and basic skills in reading and critical analysis provided us with the tools we needed in this regard. The greater challenges were in conceptualising what qualitative research and scholarly discourse could mean, what it can require, and how we might personally contribute to research and education in ways that extended the previous experiences of our lives.

For this reason, we have constructed the *Dance 724* course as a series of conceptual portals that transition students past particular thresholds associated with qualitative research and scholarly writing in dance studies. Following Land, Meyer and Smith (2008), we consider these thresholds as bordered by the restrictive assumptions that students maintain in relation to dance scholarship. These assumptions form barriers that make the conceptual territory beyond the thresholds appear troublesome. Traversing these thresholds requires a conceptual shift that is transformative, irreversible and can allow ideas beyond the threshold to be further integrated with the students' existing knowledge and research aspirations.

Below we discuss six key conceptual thresholds that can restrain dance practitioners as they enter academia. Three of these thresholds are formed by problematic assumptions associated with research; that research is inherently a process of deductive, reductive and quantitative analysis. Three other thresholds are formed by problematic assumptions associated with academic writing: that academic writing is inexorably tied to a particular identity, a product and a private practice. We contend that beyond these thresholds lie vast expanses, in which meaningful and significant knowledge can be revealed and celebrated, in ways that extend and clarify the emerging academic identities of those crossing the academic borderland.

Moving into the spotlight: Troublesome assumptions about research

Research is led by deductive hypotheses. From our observation of successive student cohorts, a noteworthy assumption for some of those entering postgraduate studies from practice is that research is simply a euphemism for 'testing a hypothesis'. This can lead them to frame deductive research pathways (Gray, 2013) that are often *advocacy led*: the research goal emerges from a practitioner's desire to effectively evidence and rationalise a strongly-held belief or opinion that they have gained from years of experience in the field. This expectation that research is always deductive might also be seen as an extension of learning habits that students develop from years of content-focused examinations in school; an obligation to re-state (in their own words and from their own observations) a commonly-held, authoritative perspective. Wherever it comes from, the assumption that 'research means deduction' can place an incredible burden on the budding researcher's shoulders: an

expectation to authoritatively pose an original hypothesis (in what they soon realise is usually complex and well-traversed theoretical territory).

The (liberating) notion that new ideas and authority might emerge from the actual research *process*, rather than precede it, can therefore be troublesome knowledge. To address this conceptual threshold, we seek to provide a research playground in which students can release the 'baggage' of having to prove their strongly-held opinions and beliefs: instead they can experience the childlike wonder of an *inductive* research process (Charmaz, 2014). Such an inductive approach might be considered as *curiosity-led*: it allows the researcher to consider something that they had not previously formed an opinion on, which may then lead them to discover original ideas. To help students to construct their own portal through this threshold, we provoke each student to explore something that they can openly admit that they do not understand, but would really like to. This inevitably leads to multiple portals through the threshold of deductive research, as students are led by their very personal curiosities and tastes to travel in myriad directions across the terrain of inductive research.

Research results in reductive axioms. Another assumption that practitioners can bring into the academic borderland is that the purpose of research is to prove universal truths. This positivist approach to research can involve a reductive analysis of the phenomenon researched, in order to construct metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984) and axiomatic principles (Pickard, 2013). Such positivist, reductivist research can be enabling within science and humanities, as the metanarratives and axioms developed can underpin ideas and models that provide simple, singular answers to complex problems. This simplification can, however, conflict with the postmodern, multicultural philosophies and practices that pervade our students' lives. The idea that a complex phenomenon like dance might be reduced to a singular truth or dogma can appear to limit their creative imaginings. Practitioners hovering near the academic borderland have expressed this to us as a reason for remaining suspicious of research methodologies and academic scholarship on the whole.

Challenging this paradigm, *Dance 724* emphasises the subjectivity, cultural relativity and social construction of knowledge (Brey, 2007; Code, 2012; Watson, 2014). We provoke students onto messy, post-positivist research journeys that challenge reductivist thinking (Groff, 2004), asking that they reveal the complexity of whatever it is that they are curious about, rather than seek a summative conclusion on the topic. Through interpretive research activities that involve creative embodiment (Barrett & Bolt, 2010; Candy, 2006; Thomson, 2003), we highlight how the messy diversification of interpretive knowledge extends on from similar creative practices that they engaged in as artists. Crossing this threshold they can begin to validate such discoveries as significant, without feeling bound by the need to construct a reductive axiom or a specific model for practice.

Size matters. Following on from the above two conceptual thresholds, a less overt assumption amongst those in the academic borderland can be an expectation that knowledge is valued when it is measured. Throughout an artists' professional training, information can be emphasised as significant and worthy of repetition as a result of quantitative terms such as least, most, best, worst, always, never, common and rare. Qualitative research, with its recognition of the peculiar and not just the extreme (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), provides students with a new way of conceiving the significance of the realisations they have on their diverse research journeys. It also allows budding practitioner-scholars to realise that they have been engaged in research practices already throughout their professional careers, as their curiosity driven artistic explorations have led them to valuable (if not measurable) revelations.

Transitioning these discoveries into an academic context, *Dance 724* engages students in qualitative research activities that critically reflect on how new knowledge might be revealed through embodied practices (Madhavan & Grover, 1998; Pakes, 2003), autonarration (Dyson, 2007; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008), verbal discourse (Kearsley, 1976; Van Dijk, 2011) and acts of creation, performance and pedagogy (Perry & Medina, 2011). These diverse and very sensual practices challenge dogmatic discourses within academia that argue that practice-led arts research is incommensurable with research in other disciplines (see for example, Haseman, 2006). The passage of dance practitioners across the academic borderland can thus involve the realisation that academic cultures are pluralistic, and not as monolithic and foreign as they might first appear.

While students may easily pass through this threshold and recognise that qualitative research methods can reveal significant dance knowledge, the student's habitual language patterns may continue to hide the significance of this new knowledge. As Land, Meyer, & Smith (2008) suggest, the crossing of a threshold involves much oscillation. Some of this oscillation might be seen as a reconciling of the new conceptual territory with an effective means of confidently articulating the new concepts. When academic migrants can simultaneously investigate *what* they are re-conceiving with *how* they might verbally and textually share these new concepts with others, they may more confidently move from a passive to a proactive engagement with knowledge beyond the conceptual threshold (Perkins, 2008). For this reason, *Dance 724* employs social learning activities and assessments that entwine explorations in scholarly discourse together with explorations in research methods.

Leaving footprints on the stage: Troublesome assumptions of academic writing

I am not a writer. The assumption that writing is a particular identity, rather than an evolving practice, can present a significant conceptual threshold for those entering academia from artistic practice. We have heard the assumption that "artists don't *write*, they *do*" presented by those crossing the academic border from professional practice, and by those within the academy who would seek to excuse practitioners from engaging in rigorous scholarly discourse (Stout, 1999). Consolidating the walls of this threshold, further theories suggest that academic discourse in a particular discipline should adopt a particular vocabulary and reference particular theorists who have been identified as relevant to that discipline (Gadsden, 2008). This can construct a forbidding threshold, which suggests that to be a writer, a practitioner must not only learn a new language to express the ideas that they are already familiar with from practical experience, but also comfortably identify how these ideas have been previously expressed by particular theorists.

This particular conceptual threshold sits within a wider academic tug-of-war, between a philosophic honouring of the discipline-specific scholarship that has gone before, and a social constructivist approach that allows ideas to be expressed in ways that reflect diverse new histories and lingos. We do not see these two ideals as incompatible, and recognise how knowledge has, throughout the ages, been advanced by those who could speak of their own histories alongside the histories of others. At the academic borderland however, we recognise that the requirement to adopt a new vocabulary can inevitably lead to resentment amongst practitioners, and consolidating the assumption that theorizing dance is a quality that belongs to others.

In addressing this assumption, *Dance 724* facilitates physical activities, written tasks and reflective discussions that explore how all mediums (whether written, spoken or embodied) can carry descriptive, contextual, analytical and judgmental information, and contribute to the substantive content (definition, rationalisation, evidence) of an original piece of empirical research (Archer, 2006). We ask the students to reveal the substance of their critical discoveries, while temporarily suspending judgment on how effectively they express these ideas in text. Through such activities students unpack the diverse ways that they see, hear, feel, read and respond to each other's a) definitions of an idea, b) rationalisations of its significance and c) evidence of its existence in the world. Making space in the class for diverse expressions to come forward can allow students to acknowledge that there is no singular perfect 'academic' way to vocally, textually or physically define evidence and rationalise the significance of a discovery. This can allow academic migrants to recognise that they have always been 'writers', and that the diverse ways that they construct and communicate ideas can be viable and valuable within academic discourse.

Writing is a product. When the time comes to actually document ideas through text, students can assume that all of their ideas need to be neatly arranged in their mind before tumbling out sequentially into a document. This inevitably presents unrealistic expectations over how a complex, concise and refined philosophical argument might manifest into existence (Flaherty, 2005). As much of their previous experience in writing has involved a singular linear process that results in an immediate written product, the idea that writing may take different pathways can appear as troublesome knowledge.

In addressing this assumption, *Dance 724* seeks to distinguish writing as a final *product* from writing as a *process* of realisation (Murray, 1972). Through tasks in which students repeatedly approach particular paragraphs that they have written from different angles and with different intentions, we explore how the actual process of writing is a research activity that can help reveal new ideas. This resonates with many dance practitioners, as they can align writing practices with choreographic and rehearsal processes of reflection and refinement, and not expect themselves to ever 'get it right' the first time they put an idea into text (Sturm, 2013). As they engage in a critical dialogue with their own writing, students can consider and distinguish the substance of their ideas from the mechanics (Boice, 1987; Carter, 2009) and style (Sword, 2009, 2012) of those written ideas. Such writing as a process of enquiry rather than a conclusive declaration (Holliday, 2007) further supports their ability to conceive of research as a phenomenon that is emerging from curious questioning, rather than affirming an hypothesis.

Writing is a private matter. Written tasks and assessments within primary, secondary and tertiary education can reinforce the notion that writing is a private practice. While it may result in public products, the actual process of writing can appear to be something that is too personal to share with anyone other than a professional teacher (Hunt & Sampson, 1998). For practitioners such as dancers, who are often transitioning into academia from a very social creative and performative environment, writing can suddenly appear to be a very lonely and alienating experience. This can further impede journeys across the academic borderland, as entering academia can feel like leaving a wild party for a hermit's cabin.

As with other aspects of the learning process, *Dance 724* places a heavy emphasis on de-privatising writing. This can appear as troublesome, and yet passing beyond this conceptual threshold can liberate students to engage in shared and open practices of research writing. When positioned beside the very social practices of creating and performing dance, the idea of co-constructing a text with others can appear as natural as sharing physical ideas within a choreographic practice.

Passing this conceptual threshold allows our students to become comfortable sharing their research and writing *processes* with peers, and not just their final, documented, researched *products*. The capacity to effectively engage in constructive peer-review, in both classroom activity and in the development of work for examination, inevitably impacts on the students' growing a sense that they belong to a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 2010). Such a research and writing environment prompts community members to co-construct, and not simply defend, their discoveries and modes of expression. This in turn might be seen as essential to the sustainability of dance studies as an academic discipline, particularly within some of the more academically isolated cultural contexts and geographic locations to which our graduates return (Martin, 2012, 2013a). The de-privatisation of writing might therefore be seen as a crucial conceptual threshold that allows students to not only cross the academic borderland, but join with others to actively redefine academia wherever they might find it.

The curtain falls: … in conclusion

As two academics who have effectively transitioned from professional careers in dance to careers in tertiary education, we value the opportunity that postgraduate research degrees have provided us to reflect and determine how we might reveal and share knowledge associated with dance. From our own journeys and the journeys of some of our students, it is apparent that crossing this academic borderland from professional practice can involve more than just a disembodied learning of new skills. Transition into academia can feel like a complete letting-go of all personal experiences and knowledge, and the adoption of an alien identity. By drawing attention to particular conceptual thresholds that are involved in this transition, we hope that those crossing the academic borderland might more purposefully deliberate on what they can bring with them, and perhaps feel a greater sense of agency within this transformation.

By reflecting on past experiences as we co-construct conceptual portals through these thresholds, we have sought to help students re-orient themselves in the new terrain beyond the threshold. In the case of our discipline, this involved reflection on how processes of creating, rehearsing and performing

dance can leave practitioners with very transferable skills. We have further sought to foster polylogues that de-privatise learning, research and writing.

From reflections on our course *Dance 724: Dance Research Methods and Writing*, we have identified six particular threshold concepts that are worthy of further consideration, perhaps in other disciplines. These conceptual thresholds can cause much hesitation for practitioners approaching academia, limiting their research imaginings to deductive, positivist and quantitative constructions of knowledge, and their writing practices to lonely attempts to parrot others and declare conclusive axioms. Identifying these thresholds has provided us with a platform from which we try to scaffold learning towards the graduate attributes of research degrees in our university, and support practitioners into academic careers.

In constructing pathways through these thresholds into social, curiosity-led research journeys, our pedagogic approaches have largely been informed by a social constructivist philosophy, and a post-hegemonic desire to help students construct new academic identities that extend their former professional practices and modes of expression. There are, inevitably, many more conceptual thresholds that practitioners have encountered within their own journeys across the academic borderland, and many diverse pedagogic approaches that might support them. This leads to further queries about how diverse the experiences may be for practitioners entering scholarship, how social constructivism, academic identity and threshold concept theory may further inform each other, and how such curricula design may be applied within other disciplinary (and cross-disciplinary) locations.

As we continue to explore these theoretical questions, we inevitably seek ways for these inquiries to manifest in very tangible, social and transformative classroom experiences. We end with one such experience below, in an episode that is, for some, a significant departure point on a journey across the academic borderland.

> We began the class with a game, moving around the dance studio at various paces, weaving between and skimming around bodies. On the signal call "And go!" all the students raced to either the left or the right of another person. Those positioned to the left of someone ask something that they would want to learn from that specific person, and those positioned to the right of someone express something that that they might be able to teach to that specific person. The room buzzed as random subjects tumbled forth, from cooking meringue and global warming to hip-hop moves. There were wild arm gestures, laughter, and frantic chatter as people shared ideas, listened intently or asked questions. The game continued and faces became excited as everyone discovered something new, or discovered that they knew something that someone else might want to know. As they began to share their knowledge through teaching, clusters of people were drawn into also wanting to learn. The idea that we all had something to teach each other and that we all had something to learn from each other was being realised through the game, and even as the game concluded conversations about teaching and learning continued, faces animated and energy high. (Rosemary and Nicholas)

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