

## Embracing Change in Tezpur, India: ‘Dancing the talk’ Through a Community Dance pedagogy

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Citation: Buck, R., & Snook, B. (2024). Embracing change in Tezpur, India: ‘Dancing the talk’ through a community dance pedagogy. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 25(18). <http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea25n18>

### Abstract

This article reflects on a week-long staff professional development program at Tezpur University), Assam, India, conducted during mid-December 2023. As a focus of the professional development, staff from the Cultural Studies Department along with visiting academics and staff from other departments at Tezpur University learned how to teach community dance to their master’s students in 2024. Embedded into this learning was a transformational pedagogical approach to teaching that offered an alternative to direct knowledge transmission. Khedkar & Nair (2016) commented on the value of this pedagogical approach, noting,

Transformative pedagogy is defined as an activist pedagogy combining the elements of constructivist and critical pedagogy that empowers students to critically examine their beliefs, values, and knowledge with the goal of developing a reflective knowledge base, an appreciation for multiple perspectives, and a sense of critical consciousness and agency. (p.232).

Outcomes have been drawn from the participants' personal reflections. All the participants responded with enthusiasm to the new ideas and learning that came from the week of professional development. Enthusiastic engagement and enjoyment observed during the sessions suggest that their positive reflections were honest and

open according to the guidance they had been given. We reflect on the learning that emerged from this, both for the participants and the facilitator.

### **Introduction**

From 2016 to 2024 the Cultural Studies Department at the University of Tezpur, and the Dance Studies Department at the University of Auckland have fostered an international partnership located around a shared interest in community dance. In 2019 we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between our universities, aiming to build our partnership within community dance more broadly. The first outcome arising from the (MOU) was the publication of a book; *Reflections of Dance along the Brahmaputra: Celebrating dance in Northeast India*. The Cultural Studies staff at Tezpur University all submitted chapters along with other Indian academic colleagues and experts. Four chapters were written by New Zealand dance experts and the book was edited by Professor Debarshi Prasad Nath from Tezpur University along with Ralph Buck and Barbara Snook, (referred to as Barb in this article) from the University of Auckland. Curriculum development was listed amongst the many shared projects that were agreed to in the (MOU). It was under this banner that we began by offering Community Dance as an optional subject for Cultural Studies master's students at Tezpur University.

Community dance is a broad term used in this instance to describe dance outside of the professional realm, or in studios where students are trained to become good dancers. Dance education also sits outside of community dance. As suggested by its title, most community dance takes place within communities. Creative dance, dance activities, and dances of many genres are all community dance activities, but what we believe to be important in defining community dance, are the values that most facilitators employ in their pedagogical approaches to teaching in this field. There is a common thread weaving the multitude of community dance forms together, and that is, above all other aims for individual groups, that the participants enjoy themselves (Amans, 2017, Buck, 2019).

### ***Teaching Community Dance***

Community dance was first taught at Tezpur University in 2023 with most of the course being taught online. Barb travelled from Auckland, New Zealand to Tezpur, India for the final few weeks of the semester to work with the students face to face, reinforcing her belief that this was not a course that could be taught online. As a course which is highly practical, the misunderstandings that come with culture and language were exacerbated on an online platform. While we acknowledge research that supports international online teaching and learning (Titarenko & Little, 2017; Xu, 2014), the practical application of community dance

for a small class of students with varying degrees of internet connectivity did not lend itself to online learning in this instance. Following discussions with the then Tezpur University Head of Department, Professor Debarshi Nath, we decided to offer a professional development program that would empower the Tezpur University staff and allow them to teach the course themselves. We anticipated that not all participants would be required to teach Community Dance, particularly those who did not belong to the Cultural Studies Department of Tezpur University. While ‘Teaching Community Dance’ was the platform for the professional development, there was also an emphasis on communicating how to employ a transformational pedagogy (O’Riordan, 2018) rather than a direct transmission of knowledge approach as is a common teaching method in many Universities (Hosseini, 2011).

A direct transmission approach refers to traditional modes of teaching such as rote learning and lecturing, where knowledge is seen largely as content and the educator is in control .....In contrast, the transformational perspective emphasizes holistic and whole person learning, and includes practices such as critical dialogue and communities of practice (Winchester-Seeto, et. al. 2017, p.100).

Group work, questioning, problem-solving, and practical engagement are strong features of the transformative nature of a community dance pedagogy when taught to students in an academic institution. The actual ‘doing’ as in practical work, is able to be unpacked and examined to recognize the learning that is taking place. Community dance students are also expected to engage within different communities in and through dance, employing the specific strategies of engagement that they learn in class. This is often referred to as field work.

#### *Staff Professional Development Program in Community Dance*

The course was communicated as a staff professional development program to the wider Tezpur University staff and beyond. Two participants travelled from other Universities in Assam and stayed at the Guest House for the week. Tezpur University staff from Women’s Studies, Social Work, and Communications increased the numbers to 15 participants.

Svetlik and Lalic (2016) suggest that internationalisation for staff development “brings specific benefits that are reflected in their personal and professional development” (p. 365). They warned however that care needs to be taken as not all internationalisation activities contribute to positive staff development. Our planning was mindful of the knowledge we had gained through discourse over several years and we made meaning in relation to the positions that different people held within and beyond the University (Fairclough, 2001). To avoid a colonising attitude as collaborators from a western country, we wanted to approach the Tezpur University staff with respect ensuring that the interests served were those of the participants (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

This study is based on reflections of the success of the professional development sessions over one week. Success has been measured according to the enthusiasm with which the participants engaged in the sessions. What they learned and were able to apply to their own teaching will be evidenced in the fullness of time.

### ***Methodology***

Having been asked to conduct a professional development program at Tezpur University, we carefully planned and conducted the sessions. Reflections are important in teaching, especially when employing transformational pedagogies. In this instance, we felt it was important to reflect on how the sessions were being received, and therefore developed this study as a reflective inquiry to assist moving forward. This qualitative ethnographic research valued a social constructivist perspective (Kim, 2001) located within a specific geopolitical place (Reihana-Moranga, 2023), inclusive of diverse cultures with specific dances and social traditions. From the outset we acknowledged this diversity and cultural complexity, specifically valuing the leading voice of the professional development facilitator. The research narrative has been written with an auto-ethnographic focus. This methodological approach values the nature of an evocative auto-narrative that opens conversations and evokes emotional responses while welcoming the experience and critical reflection of both authors (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Hunt & Junco, 2006). Auto-ethnography provided an active role of “observing, watching, seeing, looking and scrutinizing” (Gobo & Marciniak, 2011, p.103), while making room for the authentic voices of the participants to be heard. Auto-ethnography is a practical approach that enriches the field of transformational learning (Qutoshi, 2015).

Data was gathered from auto-ethnographic observations (Alsop, 2005) and the participants’ written reflections on the teaching and learning at the end of each day. They were encouraged to write honestly about any aspects of the day’s events and were given questions to prompt their reflections should they need assistance in starting. Some key questions included:

- What was new – what did it teach and how?
- What confused you regarding teaching style? Why?
- How does this compare with your own pedagogical style?

Participants were also asked to provide general comments that supported understanding.

Prior to the commencement of the professional development program the participants were made aware of ethical processes and requirements in understanding the research project. They were given participant information sheets and consent forms and had the proposed journal article explained to them. Participants were provided with an opportunity to ask questions.

Ten of the fifteen participants provided their reflections, and it is from this information that data was collected. Participants' names have been anonymised to protect their identities.

*Understanding Community Dance: What Is It and What Can It Be?*

Although a small number of staff had been involved in aspects of the previous year's teaching of community dance, most of the participants had little understanding of what the course would entail. Ananya stated,

On the first day I was a bit skeptical about the new perspective and wondered about its feasibility as a part of the syllabus in a higher educational system. But by the end of the program my outlook on this particular perspective changed. My understanding of the community dance was totally different. According to me, community dance meant folk dance, with some styles and patterns of costumes.

Folk dance in north-east India takes place in a myriad of village communities throughout Assam (Nath & Snook 2023). It is easy to understand why the participants might imagine that they were going to learn folk dances. Folk dance is highly valued and forms an important role in Assamese rituals and festivals (Dutta, 2023). It is important to note here, that folk dance is a community dance, and aspects of folk dance were acknowledged and included in the week-long workshop. However, community dance in the context of a practical and academic study is much more than that, and the intention was to broaden the experience of community dance in India. Community dance in a western context is often misunderstood. Amans (2017) a leading community dance researcher and advocate stated,

Defining community dance has always been something of a challenge. Since the mid 1980s there has been critical debate about the purpose, practice and defining values of community dance (p. 3).

We acknowledge here that the following discussion of community dance is from a western insiders' perspective. Barb brought her years of experience in a western context to the Indian participants who were keen to engage in an academic study of community dance so that they could teach it to their students. Our intention was to weave western and eastern thought together in broadening our mutual understandings of community dance.

Amans (2017) surveyed community dance workers in 2006 and posed the question 'What is community dance?' There were different responses listed depending on the experience and focus of the dance worker. Even they had differing ideas of what community dance could be. While none of the responses were wrong, they tended to focus on a particular aspect of community dance that was familiar to them. Community dance in the context of this research

valued solidarity, significance, (Clarke, 1973) security, and pedagogy. According to Clarke (1973) community dance fosters a sense of solidarity amongst the participants where the group feels connected in their shared sense of process and product. Significance refers to each participant feeling that they have a unique contribution to make, and in contributing, they feel significant. Buck (2019) further adds that security refers to the importance of individuals feeling safe, where the participants feel that they have a sense of agency to contribute ideas without fear. Building a pedagogical environment that respects diverse participants ideas and outcomes lies at the heart of any community dance activity.

Most participants attending community dance sessions are there for ‘enjoyment, connection, and fitness’ (Buck & Snook, 2020, p. 291). There are no requirements for participants to be technically good or to compete (Buck & Snook, 2020). In some instances, steps may be taught while in other classes the focus is on creative movement activities that may often require the participants to work collaboratively with others. Descriptions of what was covered in the week-long professional development workshops may provide a further understanding of the nature of community dance.

#### *A Reflection on the First Day: What Took Place*

As a warm-up or ‘ice-breaker’ on the first day, we began with a game. While this might seem like a wasted opportunity to ‘teach,’ the value of a game goes way beyond having fun. Shatz & Loschiavon (2015) state that, “Games lighten the mood, and this facilitates greater creativity and boosts student morale and interest” (p. 66).

While there was much laughter, it took a while for the participants to realise the intent of the game, as they were unfamiliar with it and tended to jump ahead as they overthought the rules. This meant that it took longer than it should have, but we stayed with it until everyone had succeeded in realising and experiencing the intent. Bharat’s comments reflected those of the group. At this point on the first day, all participants were looking for meaning.

The relaying of “whoosh” and “zoom” made me feel that I am not only one part of a collective, but I do have an active presence in that collective. I have the capability to relay a “whoosh” and I also have the capability to reverse the flow at my will by giving it back to a person.

To maintain the energy that had been created and to bring some understanding to community dance, the participants engaged in another practical activity. They started by each person clapping the syllables of their name while voicing them aloud as we stood in a circle. They then worked with a partner to make a single movement for each syllable of both names. Once they had created a movement sequence, they joined with another pair and learned that

sequence too. By then they were ready to show their fully formed dance sequence to the group. Each group was given different music that they happily danced to, seemingly oblivious to the fact that for some of them, this was the first time that they had performed a dance in front of others. Bharat's comments again sought meaning in the activity.

It taught me new possibilities of exploring myself, my fellow beings, and the environment I am in. The breaking down of my name into its phonemes and uttering them with clapping in rhythm made me feel my identity, and conveying that identity to the others, in an entirely new way.

Kavita commented,

An individual who considers himself/herself as a non-dancer can move rhythmically and their actions/movements become dance. Rather than theoretical discussions, it is the practical activities that grow the sense of community among the learners.

Kavita's comments suggest that she was quick to pick up the importance of moving together in developing a sense of community, well before developing an understanding of how to teach community dance.

On this first day it was important to talk through the course outline both for the Community Dance course and for the week's professional development. Barb hoped that those who were unlikely to be teaching community dance the following year would find aspects of the course helpful in their own teaching, and that ideas to incorporate transformational pedagogical approaches would be helpful for all.

During the day participants worked together in groups or pairs to critically reflect on questions/provocations that would develop critical and creative thinking around a topic. When they had examined questions such as 'What constitutes a community,' each group provided feedback for the whole group, and from their answers, a further provocation was given. In this way they were gently led into recognising their own habitual ways of thinking and imagine new possibilities as they delved more deeply into the topic. While this pedagogical approach may take longer and reduce the amount of content able to be covered in a lesson, the depth of learning is much greater. The participants themselves form knowledge through the process of inquiry, action, or experimentation.

*Transformational pedagogies within the sessions* We note that relational learning is an important aspect of a transformational pedagogy within a constructivist framework and formed a large part of the professional development week. Morrison and Chorba (2015) state,

Relational learning is a way of being in the world from a social constructivist perspective where those involved in education, students, teachers, mentors, community members and professors – learn from each other through shared experiences and together create a desired learning and teaching world (p. 122).

Bhupinder admitted that although he wished to be more creative in his teaching, he tended to deliver lectures through direct transmission. This is not uncommon in tertiary education globally. Patfield, et. al. (2022) cite (Blackmore, 2009) when discussing how some Australian Universities offer ‘quality teaching courses’ to their staff with Blackmore (2009) proposing that such teaching development programs are often “routinised, non-reflective, and simply require a ‘tick in the box’ approach to satisfy quality assurance processes” (p. 2). What appears to be missing is information on ‘how’ teaching might genuinely be improved (Patfield, et.al. 2022).

Teachers tend to fall back, especially in times of stress, on pedagogical approaches that they themselves experienced as students (Snook, 2012). If it works, then why change it? Barb’s experience in teaching Masters students at Tezpur University in 2022 revealed that the students were able to recall all of what was spoken, yet when it came to critical reflection in groups, they struggled to understand what was required of them. This is more likely to be through a lack of experience rather than a lack of ability.

Within the present professional development workshop project and as a gentle entry into community dance, the participants were asked to work in small groups to discuss their own personal experiences. They then chose one dance and learned it together before performing it to the larger group. All the participants knew and understood folk dances from their local area or village, while some had experience in the classical dance forms of the region. This allowed the activity to be led by the participants, each group choosing their own music and introducing their dance. Ensuring that the activity is relevant to, and owned by the learners is a key characteristic of our transformative pedagogy approach within community dance courses.

*Weaving of theory and practice.* The practical activities were woven between discussions and short videos that answered questions such as, ‘community dance, what’s that?’ The final activity of the first day was a practical session led by Barb of ‘teaching community dance for older adults.’ The participants paired up, one person acting as a visiting student from Tezpur University and the other as an older adult. Stereotypical ideas of ‘older adults’ emerged from the suggestion that they went into role. It was a reminder to Barb that the participants were not highly trained drama teachers/students and following much laughter, they reverted to keeping in mind that they would be working with older adults in the field. Older adults as a group of 65+ are as varied as 35- to 65-year-old people. Some older adults would be capable of



engaging in a dance technique class, but our emphasis was on guiding the participants to understand how they could facilitate creativity and fun through movement. This class was designed more for older adults who did not usually dance and may or may not be living with dementia. We began with pairs walking and moving together in time to music. The participants were asked to improvise movements that possibly reflected the song lyrics as they moved together, but they were asked to continue moving. In this way, the student-in-role was able to gauge the physical competency of their partner and to get to know them by chatting as they moved together. The social aspect of community dance is highlighted here, indeed Amans (2017) and Buck (2019) comment that the social interaction fostered in about and through community dance is a distinguishing feature of community dance. During every activity that was conducted within the professional development week, there was much laughter. Community dance is taught with an aim to bring enjoyment to others, and this was the case for every participant who engaged in the week-long workshop.

We continued to the next activity which entailed the older adults sharing a memory from their past. Each couple created a movement sequence that told their story that was then performed to the group. This allowed the older adults to rest in-between as they watched others perform. There were several other short practical activities before we finished with everyone putting some wide elastic bands with buttons sewn on the underside, on their feet. Sitting down they were able to enjoy jazz music and follow along with Barb as they tapped in time to the music. The participants embraced all that they were given with enthusiasm despite most activities being new to them.

Each day contained a mix of practical activities and discussion. The second day, however, began with a book launch for 'Reflections of dance along the Brahmaputra: Celebrating dance in north-east India.' As most of the group had written chapters in this book, this interruption was welcomed by all participants. The group began preparing to go out in the field as it had been decided to travel to a school for blind students toward the end of the week. They had embraced many new activities and pedagogical approaches in the first few days and were excited to trial what they had learned.

*Field work at the school for the blind.* As previously mentioned, 'field work' is when the students go out of the University and into the community to engage with different residents in and through community dance. The group set out in a small bus, ready to travel one and a half hours to Barhampur, Nagaon where the Sri Manta Sankar Mission Blind School is situated. The group had been told that they would be working with approximately fifteen students which meant that they would be able to work one on one with the students. This was not the case and in fact there were over 30 students waiting in a room that was clearly too small for the workshop. The university participants were overwhelmed. Barb watched as she waited for

someone to start the day's activities. Nobody moved. As the session was conducted in Assamese, Barb was unable to step in and rescue the group. While it may have been only a few minutes of waiting, it seemed much longer, especially to Barb. Eventually Mohini stepped into the center of the circle and introduced the group, outlining the workshop. Her voice was clear and confident, and the session began. Each pair conducted their activity as planned and by the time the session was finished, everyone was beginning to show some degree of confidence. As the activities ended, one of the blind students gave a short talk thanking the group (in English). She then began singing a well-known song, again in English. The university group felt quite overwhelmed and then all the blind students responded by singing in Assamese, a group song that appeared to Barb to be patriotic. They then sang another song and it appeared that they did not want the group to leave. While the session had got off to a shaky start, it ended strongly, thanks to the blind students. They had joined in with much enthusiasm and made it possible for the participants from Tezpur University to facilitate their activities. It had not taken long for the University lecturers to bond with the blind students and in that time, friendships had been forged.

While the principal and teachers at the school for the blind did not appear overly interested when the group arrived, they had observed students engaging with Tezpur University staff in community dance and their attitudes changed. This meant returning to the principal's office and spending more time there. As they did not speak English, Barb could not be certain of what they were thinking, but many photos were taken, and the group eventually boarded the bus. The university participants were feeling emotional regarding their engagement with the blind students and all that they had learned.

While there was considerable value in having the participants facilitate community dance activities, there was even greater value in the breaking down of stereotypes that occurred. The participants engaged in reflection the following day as they sat in a circle and listened to each other. Bhupinder stated,

The experience in the school at Haibargaon where we interacted with the visually challenged kids was a big eye opener for me. I discovered that their world was as colourful as ours. They definitely do not need our pity. They were happy and took part in the activities with great zeal. They want to have a good time in good company like everybody else. It is a shame that just when they were opening up to us, it was time for us to leave. I will always cherish these memories.

However many of the participants revealed in the spoken reflection that they had been ashamed of their own attitudes toward the blind students. When planning the activities they had low expectations of what the students would be able to achieve and they could see when

they taught these activities that these young people were just the same as any other young people, with one difference, they could not see. They had been fearful of connecting with blind students and had harboured stereotypical attitudes toward them. The reflective discussion was valuable and an important aspect of the transformative pedagogical approach that underpins community dance activities and curriculum.

*Deepening understanding through a transformational pedagogy.* Pratibha commented in her written reflections that the “discussions following the visit to the blind students had been very enriching.” While community dance facilitators are rarely qualified dance therapists, many participants recognised the therapeutic aspects of joining together with others to move creatively. Kavita commented, “Dance is a therapy to heal mental and physical health. From the field visit and the practical activities, it shows that it has the capacity to release people from trauma.” Ananya reflected,

I feel the strong therapeutic value of dance. The rhythmic movements can play a very significant role in engaging members of society, giving them a strong bond, ensuring that they are part of that group. In fact, dance can create a community.

During the reflective discussion the question was asked, “But what happens when we leave?” All agreed that it was all very well to go out to the school for the blind, but could it do more harm than good if there is no follow up? The participants came up with many honest and challenging comments and questions, some of which appeared to require answers that were not easily available. There was no ‘banking of knowledge’ (Freire 1974) here, but this self-reflection (Khedkar & Nair, 2016) allowed the participants to develop a critical understanding of the situation. The participants were aware of their privileged position and it was from this perspective that they connected with a different social situation. Each person brought their own human experience to the discussion and added to the discourse without any prompt. We acknowledge that the participants were intelligent academics who have the ability to discuss difficult issues, but communicating consciously within a constructivist transformational framework (Eisner, 1990) allows ideas to form regarding personal teaching methods. By changing their approach, the teachers/lecturers could continue to facilitate students’ construction of knowledge through a student centered method that includes collaboration, experiential learning and problem-based learning.

Transformational teaching involves creating dynamic relationships between teachers, students and a shared body of knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 569).

Rather than students being passive learners, as can be the case in academic institutions, having students more actively involved in class and increasing students' academic self-efficacy will result in more learning, more conceptual understanding, superior class attendance greater persistence and increased engagement (Armbruster et al., 2009; Armstrong et al., 2007; Knight & Wood, 2005; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

By becoming involved in the 'doing' participants in this study were able to see how they might make changes. While there may have been some confusion about the inclusion of a transformational pedagogy within a course that was focussed on how to teach community dance, the participants appeared to find their own understanding. Purima did not elaborate, but wrote that the course helped her "develop understandings of different pedagogical techniques." As a lecturer who sometimes applied "pedagogical methods like skit and drama in spreading awareness of gender issues," she was able to appreciate creative methodologies and deepen her understanding.

Alpana's written reflections revealed a deep understanding of the pedagogical approach that had been incorporated into the session.

This Inter-faculty development program has opened up new vistas in thinking so that I consider teaching in a whole new way. Teaching is not about a free flow of knowledge transfer to the students. It's about participation, exploration of creativity and acceptance of each other. Knowledge is also about how we cooperate with our partners, how we get them to participate in our creative process and how we respond to them in the same process..... Everyone participates to share a common interest, observe each other's way of involvement and transfer of energies to lead growth....In the sharing of knowledge, the role shifts between students and teachers and teaching is no longer a one way process. It happens in a collective way between teachers and students.

However, Alpana did finish by questioning the fact that she deals with theoretical concepts in her teaching and was unsure of how she might incorporate this pedagogical style into her own teaching. What we do in community dance is to integrate the doing and practice such that the construction of meaning, based on constructivist pedagogy theory is enlivened by the actual experience of doing the theory. In supporting Alpana's question, we discussed the value of leading sessions with practical activities and then reflecting on what happened and why in terms of theory. We reflect on the fact that our pedagogical approach in community dance is entirely based around transformative and relational learning.

Pratibha commented, "The pedagogical style which we mostly follow are methods and practice of teaching with theoretical concepts. Here in the workshop the pedagogical style is

more of an engagement with creative thinking. This innovative pedagogy introduces new teaching strategies.” Pratibha is likely to be involved with the teaching of community dance, so for her there could be a direct transfer of learning across to the classroom. Will she see ways in which she can include some transformative pedagogies into her teaching in other areas? While a great deal was achieved in one short week, it seemed that the focus on how to teach community dance had obscured aspects of transformative pedagogies for the participants.

*Enthusiasm for embracing change.* Everyone who engaged in the professional development week had been engrossed in something new and completely outside of their previous experience. There were no instances of someone deciding to sit out or to engage with obvious discomfort. The smiles and enthusiasm were contagious and it was obvious that everyone in the room was enjoying themselves. Fun and enjoyment are usually discussed in relation to children learning, and very rarely related to adults. Lucardie (2014) conducted a study that related to the impact of fun and enjoyment on adults’ learning and the research indicated that, “fun and enjoyment could be as beneficial and important as it is currently considered in children’s learning” (p. 439). This was certainly the case in the Tezpur University professional development sessions. The participants were “encouraged and motivated to participate in learning with enthusiasm for the journey and optimism for the outcomes” (Lucardie, 2014, p. 439).

The participants’ desire to learn something new drove the professional development week and their engagement is evident from the following reflective examples,

Mohini

I automatically smile (as I write about my feelings). Such sessions where we are fully engaged both mentally and physically at all times, are really worth remembering. Even more, I feel inspired and creative....Even though I knew that team building is a crucial part of learning, I am truly experiencing it today.

Bharat

I feel that community dance helps in building new self-discoveries, articulating active senses of belonging to the immediate human environment. A good deal of reflective awareness also pops up during the process. It opens up my horizon of interaction with people, my understanding of pedagogy. Community dance can provide new ways of knowing and realising things about myself and my surroundings.

Bhupinder

I feel strongly that the activities and strategies we learned here can be meaningfully applied in all we teach. This workshop made me do things that I am not used to doing normally. Hopefully this will help me grow as a teacher. I am positive that it will help me build stronger bonds with the students. I hope that in times to come interactions with students will be much more free and open.

It would appear that when someone wants to learn something new, then anything is possible.

### **Conclusion**

The group dynamics worked for a number of reasons, but the participants were all known to each other and were therefore mutually supportive (Sweet & Michaelsen, 2007). With the title ‘Community Dance’ in the advertising of the Professional Development, it could be assumed that movement might be an expectation, and nobody ‘sat out’ of a practical activity. The participants allowed themselves to have fun and relax away from the end of year stress of exams and marking.

Influential leaders are an important factor in achieving success (Nawab, 2021), and the Head of Department at that time was Bhupinder who was enthusiastic in setting up the program and his daily engagement in all activities encouraged all staff to follow. Nawab (2021) cites He and Ho (2017, who state, “The fundamental quality of a leader who is more likely to contribute to the PD of their teachers is their commitment to change and improvement” (p. 286). A shared vision motivated those who enrolled to engage in the professional development week. The Cultural Studies staff were keen to understand ‘how’ to teach Community Dance, should they be called upon to do so and those from outside of Cultural Studies came with an interest in learning something new.

Over the past decade there has been a shift “toward an expanded view of teacher learning and practice” (Svendsen, 2016). Teachers at all levels will have read and understood the value of cooperative learning, problem solving, creative and critical thinking, under an umbrella of student centered learning. While research exists (Alghafri & Ismail, 2014; Birgili, 2015; Wechler, et.al 2018), it is more often about the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ is less visible. Cropley and Patston (2018) cite Cropley (2018) who reminds the reader,

that it is not enough to simply attempt to foster creativity in a general and diffuse manner. The development of creativity depends on a dynamic approach that accounts for the interaction of key components, - the person, the process and the environment (p.268).

This present professional development was focussed upon the ‘doing’ and specifically examples of ‘what’ to do when faced with a class of Cultural Studies Masters students

possibly expecting to engage in performing folk dance. While it was apparent that all participants enjoyed the activities and hoped to apply the learning to their own teaching practice, it would require constant and deliberate application in preparing and delivering classes to students. However, those who do teach community dance this year at the University of Tezpur, should be well prepared to step into their role with some degree of confidence.

As the facilitator of the professional development, Barb reflected on its success from her perspective and concluded that the split focus of community dance and transformational teaching may have caused some confusion. There was not enough time to go into any depth when discussing transformational pedagogical approaches, and while transformation was evident in the practical activities, those who would then go back to the lecture mode of lesson delivery, needed more help in creating different approaches.

Barb asked the participants to reflect on any difficulties. Bharat did comment that he found her speech difficult to understand. This could be a common problem with a foreign facilitator. There may have been others who were struggling to understand, but the group work that the participants were constantly engaged in meant that others could fill in any gaps in understanding. Barb was not aware of these difficulties as each activity resulted in a successful outcome. Overall, Barb felt that the enthusiasm of the group meant that a great deal was covered in a short time. The participants' written reflections were passionate and animated in the same way as they had practically participated throughout the week. The personal development that ensued was a worthwhile extra outcome. A 2024 professional development program could perhaps focus more on transformational pedagogies as we believe that once the staff of Cultural Studies have taught community dance for the first time, they will be ready to reflect and adapt and improve the program to suit their own situation in Tezpur, Assam, India. It is easy to recognise transformational and relational teaching within a community dance context in higher education. More work needs to be done in areas where the opportunities are not so obvious. Overall however, the commitment and enthusiasm of the group meant that they not only took everything that was offered, but worked at finding ways to take the learning further. What more could be asked for?

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Professor Ralph Buck is an award winning teacher and academic leader. Ralph's research has been featured at the UNESCO Second World Conference on Arts Education. He is on the International Editorial Boards of Research in Dance Education (RIDE) and Journal of Dance Education (JODE). He has collaborated with UNESCO in raising the profile in arts education around the world. He initiated, advocated for and planned UNESCO's International Arts Education Week. He is on the Council for the World Alliance for Arts Education. Ralph's research and publications focus upon dance teaching and learning and community dance.

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<http://IJEa.org>

ISSN: 1529-8094

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